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THE DIVERSITY AND UTILISATION OF LAND TORTOISES IN TROPICAL AS

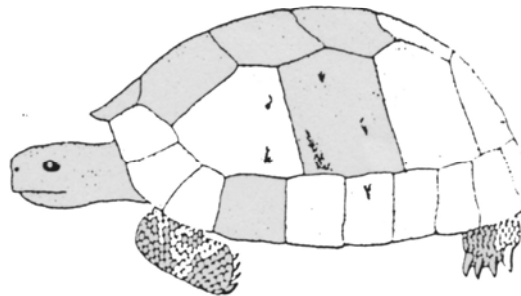*by Indraneil Das*

Introduction

Tropical Asia is the home of seven species of tortoises (family Testudinidae). These include the Central Asian tortoise *(Testudo horsfieldi)*, the Indian star tortoise *(Geochelone elegans)*, the Burmese star tortoise *(Geochelone platynota)*, the Elongated tortoise *(Indotestudo elongata)*, the Travancore *(Manouria emys)*, and the Impressed tortoise *(Manouria impressa)*. Almost all of these species are utilised by man in one form or another, especially the larger and more attractive ones, which may have high commercial value. Land tortoises are important in the diet of a large number hunter—gatherers in the region. Because of their inoffensive nature and slow gait, land tortoises can be easily captured. However, perhaps a more serious threat is the loss of habitat, as the tropical moist forests of south and southeast Asia, home to most of the species, continue to shrink, and more and more areas are being colonised by settlers.

Diversity and Utilisation

Central Asian tortoise *(Testudo horsfieldi)*

This is a far—ranging species which has been recorded from the northeast shores of the Caspian

Sea, and eastwards to Pakistan, where it is kn from northern and western Baluchistan. It is suspected to occur within Indian limits, but sightings have been recorded as yet (J.G. Fraz pers. comm.). Minton (1966) reported the spe to be an inhabitat of altitudes between 5,000–7,0 feet, and especially abundant near grassy patches the vicinity of springs or small streams in hilly ar of Pakistan. Roberts (1975) also reported that considered the Central Asian tortoise to be 'fai plentiful' in Baluchistan (Pakistan). However, status in other countries of West Asia, from wh

Central Asian tortoise (Testudo horsfieldi)

tortoise (Indotestudo forstenii), the Asian brown tortoise