



Geometric Tortoise, by Ryan van Huyssteen/Wikimedia/CC

Expand Protection for South Africa's Rarest Tortoise

The Critically Endangered Geometric Tortoise has lost over 95% of its limited-range habitat in South Africa's Western Cape to destruction from vineyards, ranches, wildfires, and urbanization from nearby Cape Town. This strikingly beautiful turtle—with a distinctive yellow radial pattern repeating across its black carapace that camouflages it against predators—is also “portable” at only 6 inches long, making it a prime target for the illegal exotic pet trade. The Geometric Tortoise has been pushed to the brink of extinction, with only an estimated 800 individuals surviving in the wild.

The Geometric Tortoise is endemic to fynbos habitat in South Africa's Western Cape—an increasingly threatened shrubland ecoregion with exceptional diversity of native flora. Recognizing the risk of extinction for this species and its habitat, Rainforest Trust and our local partner, South Africa Tortoise Conservation Trust, created the Breede River Valley Fynbos Preserve in 2015 to safeguard 40% of the species' population. As outside threats continue to grow, we have worked together to expand the preserve, which now covers 1,080 acres of its only viable habitat.

We now have the opportunity to fulfill our long-term vision of further expanding the Breede River Valley Fynbos Preserve with our local partner by raising \$218,000 to purchase 194.7 acres of native fynbos habitat adjacent to the existing preserve. This property represents one of the final acquisitions needed to complete that vision and safeguard this important remaining population of the Geometric Tortoise. We must move forward while the seller is willing.

HELP PREVENT THE EXTINCTION OF RARE WESTERN CAPE SHRUBLANDS AND SPECIES

The proposed preserve expansion will allow the species to maintain a stable, self-sustaining population. The additional acres will also enhance habitat connectivity across the preserved spaces, and support biodiversity within the endangered fynbos ecosystem.

In addition to the Geometric Tortoise, many other species benefit from this protection, such as Black Harriers (EN), Martial Eagles (EN), and Secretary Birds (EN).

The fynbos ecosystem of the Western Cape that is being plowed under for human use is part of the Cape Floral Kingdom, which is rich with an estimated 9,000 plant species—making it more botanically diverse than even the rainforests of South America. At least 8,550 of these species are found in the Western Cape and over 6,000 are endemic to the region.



194.7
ACRES

\$218,000
PROJECT COST

\$1,119.67
COST PER ACRE

7,650 mT
CO₂ EQUIVALENTS
STORED

KEY SPECIES:

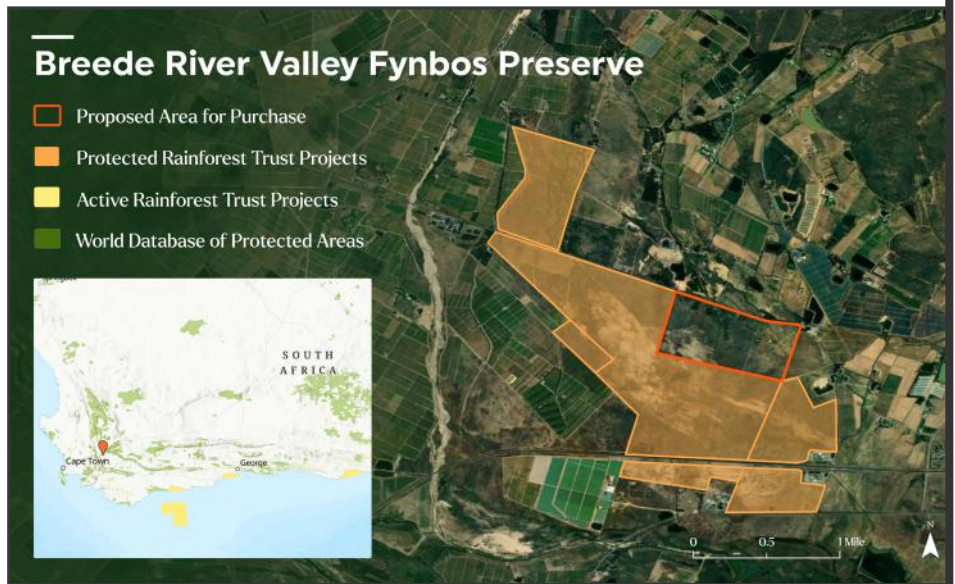
Geometric Tortoise (CR),
Black Harrier (EN),
Martial Eagle (EN),
Secretary Bird (EN)



BRING HOPE FOR THE GEOMETRIC TURTLE'S SURVIVAL

Our local partner has demonstrated success in managing the existing preserve and holding land titles securely. Other experienced local partners, including CapeNature, the Mapula Foundation, and the Endangered Wildlife Trust, provide technical expertise and operational support for the project. Tortoise populations are monitored to maintain an up-to-date record of the species' status and develop strategies to best protect it.

This project will secure a site for new infrastructure to support conservation management activities, including invasive species control, fire prevention, restoration, and a tortoise head-starting program—a conservation technique whereby tortoise hatchlings are raised in a protected, captive environment until they are large enough to survive in the wild. Funding will also support a new educational outreach facility for community education.



The landscape of the Geometric Turtle project area, courtesy South Africa Tortoise Conservation Trust

