

# Tortoise comes out of her shell

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Staff Reporter

A LARGE leopard tortoise, found walking in the middle of a road in Constantia, has a new home at a top city hotel.

The light brown female tortoise, which weighs a hefty 50kg and is believed to be about 100 years old, is living at the Vineyard Hotel & Spa in Newlands until her owner is found.

The tortoise was picked up by motorist Peter Judge earlier this week in Alphen Drive, Constantia.

Judge said he tried several times to move the tortoise to the side of the road.

"But she kept following me. I then thought of putting her in my boot to transport her up the mountain, but that, too, proved unsuccessful."

Judge said he doubted the tortoise was wild, as she appeared to have escaped from her home and become lost. He finally took the tortoise to the Blue Cross veterinary hospital in Newlands.

Veterinary nurse Janet



**BASKING IN THE LIMELIGHT:** This tortoise, which is about 100 years old, enjoys her new home at the Vineyard Hotel & Spa in Newlands, where she has become the main attraction among the guests.

PICTURE: MATTHEW JORDAAN

Maccallum said it was extremely difficult to tell the age of a tortoise accurately.

"If tortoises' shells becomes less distinct, it means they are quite old. We can also tell by the number of rings on their shells and the strength of the shell."

It has not yet been deter-

mined whether the tortoise has an owner or a name.

Maccallum agreed it was tame.

"This tortoise does not pull its head in when strangers try to touch her, but rather moves closer to them. This is very uncommon for a wild tortoise."

At the hotel the tortoise is sharing six acres of wilderness with six leopard tortoises.

She feeds on grass and succulent plants.

A sustainability manager at the hotel, Chris van Zyl, said the tortoise was extremely energetic, curious, lively, and loved being surrounded by a

crowd of people.

"We find that children love coming here just to play with the tortoises. But this tortoise, that recently became part of the family, has been our main attraction. She does not stop walking," he said.

But Van Zyl said the hotel would love to see the tortoise

reunited with her owner.

Meanwhile, the tortoise will remain at the hotel and will be checked regularly by the Blue Cross staff.

● Anyone with information about the owner of the tortoise should call the hotel at 021 657 4500.

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## LOST HER WAY...

■ On Monday Peter Judge found a large tortoise at the top of Alphin Drive in Constantia. He took the tortoise to the Blue Cross Veterinary in Newlands, who identified it as a female mountain tortoise, approximately 100 years old. The tortoise is now at the Vineyard Hotel & Spa and they are hoping to return her to the owner. The tortoise is very inquisitive and not afraid or shy of people, so Chris van Zyl, the hotel's group environmental manager and horticulturist, thinks she must come from somebody's garden. If you know who owns the tortoise, call Mr Van Zyl on 021 657 4500.

