

INTERPOL

Working Group on Wildlife Crime

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Synopses

1. Unprecedented Brazilian operation supported by INTERPOL breaks up wildlife smuggling network – IPSG media release: Brazil's largest-ever nationwide operation against the illegal hunting and trade in wildlife, led by the Brazilian Federal Police in co-operation with INTERPOL's Environmental Crime Programme, has to date resulted in 72 arrests and the seizure of thousands of illegally-held wildlife specimens.

2. Man who put Anson Wong behind bars – Nice article from a Malaysian newspaper about Bob Anderson, Secretary of our Wildlife Crimes Group!

3. Endangered reptiles saved by Customs and Border Protection – Australian Customs arrests reptile smuggler at Sydney International Airport.

4. Zambia: Two Cops Nabbed Over K1 Billion Ivory – ZAWA arrests four, including two police officers, charged with trafficking in 72 elephant tusks and five rhinoceros horns.

5. Tigers get a stimulus plan – The World Bank and Global Environment Facility commit \$2.8 million toward tiger conservation, including: "strengthen efforts to reduce poaching and illegal trade while creating new funding mechanisms for conservation efforts." I've made inquiries into this, but have been asked to contact other persons who don't respond to their emails!

6. Three Czechs arrested in Guiana over alleged animal smuggling – French authorities arrest middle-aged "animal study" specialists charged with smuggling endangered species. The risk six month sentences and fines.

7. Undercover pinch puts bite on illegal rattlesnake sales – U.S. & Canadian "Operation Shellshock" arrests 20 persons charged with trafficking in poisonous reptiles. The article has interesting insights into this illegal trade, and also notes the use of Internet to facilitate trafficking.

8. German Customs seize 164 tarantulas – Customs also found 45 buckets filled with cockroaches (to feed the spiders!). Swiss subject had been caught doing precisely the same thing at precisely the same border crossing two years previously.

8.a - 164 mygales trouvées dans une voiture à la frontière allemande – version français.

9. Five years imprisonment for 17 people in lion poaching case – Indian court sentences persons convicted of killing four lions in the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary during 2007.

10. Navy Seizes Thousands of Endangered Turtle Eggs in Colombia – 3,000 eggs seized, boatman arrested, eggs returned for natural hatching.

11. Malaysian judiciary brush up on wildlife crime and punishment -- The ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) and the Federal Courts of Malaysia organized judiciary workshop on wildlife crime and prosecution. Bob Anderson is a featured lecturer!

12. Wildlife poachers, traders to face stiffer penalties -- Malaysia tables proposal to amend wildlife legislation, raising fines between 10 and 30 times and imprisonment to ten years.

13. Indonesia arrests Saudis with rare birds – Three arrested and charged with attempted smuggling of 33 protected birds “stuffed in hidden compartments in their luggage.”

14. Airport staff take on traffickers – 250 staff at Bangkok’s Suvarnabhumi Airport staff undergo two days of intensive training to target wildlife traffickers. Article quotes ASEAN-WEN as reporting 23,375 live animals rescued and more 14.6 tonnes of dead animals recovered in the region during the second six months of 2008.

15. Poaching surge imperils South Africa’s rhinos – Experts alarmed by dramatic increase in rhinoceros poaching.

16. Tigers rescued from Chinese medicine farm – Inspectors rescue eight tigers hidden in a dog kennel in northern Italy.

17. United States v. Gunther Wenzek, No. 3:08-CR-00377 (D. Ore.), ECS Senior Trial Attorney Ron Sutcliffe (208) 334-9124 and AUSA Dwight Holton (503) 727-1128. – U.S. arrests German national on nine-point indictment charging smuggling of coral from The Philippines.

18. Two tons of shark fins on Taiwanese boat – South Africa seizes Taiwanese fishing vessel with two tons of contraband shark fin and lodges criminal charges against 26 crew members.

19. New Enforcement Legislation Cracks Down on Environmental Offenders – Canadian House of Commons receives bill to raise maximum fines and, for the first time, impose minimum fines, for environmental offenses (including wildlife). Enforcement officers to get new powers!

20. Heavy consignment of Afghan tortoises recovered – Tip leads Pakistan wildlife authorities to recover 550 tortoises in railroad shipment and arrest one person.

21. Police chasing traders of endangered species – Indonesian police deploy their rapid reaction brigade in pursuit of criminal syndicate members engaged in illegal wildlife trade.

22. Box turtles knocked out by excessive trade – TRAFFIC report estimates “unregulated” trade in Southeast Asian box turtles to be 10 to 100 times legal levels.

23. United States v. Max Moghaddam et al., No. 1:08-CR-20365 (S.D. Fla.), AUSA Tom Watts-FitzGerald (305) 961-9413. – U.S. court sentences convicted fish roe (caviar substitute) trafficker to 18 months in prison and large fines

24. United States v. Steve Popovich, No. 1:08-CR-00810 (N.D. Ill.), ECS Trial Attorney Jim Nelson (202) 305-0423 and AUSA Tim Chapman (312) 353-1925. U.S. court sentences leopard trophy smuggler to a fine and a suspended prison sentence.

25. Smyrna man fined \$15,000 for wildlife violation – U.S. collector convicted after purchasing snow leopard carcass from undercover U.S. F&WS agent. Search of his premises revealed a collection of 45 wild animal skulls.

26. US Attorney - Honduran Seafood Dealer Convicted in International Smuggling Operation – U.S. Court convicts Honduran national of conspiracy to smuggle 57 tons of queen conch via Colombia to the U.S. and Canada.

27. Thousands of pig-nosed turtles released -- More than 10,000 turtles, seized from smugglers by Indonesian authorities, are released back into their natural habitat.

28. DNA tests underway to identify origin of smuggled orang-utans – Thai authorities use DNA tests to determine origin of eleven smuggled orangutans seized in Phuket.

29. Roscommon butterfly collector pleads to violating Endangered Species Act – U.S. insect collector likely will go to prison, and pay fine, after illegally importing butterflies after he had been advised it was illegal by U.S. F&WS. Investigation revealed he had made more than 1,000 successful bids for eBay items.

30. Man charged over attempt to smuggle pythons – West Australia authorities intercept man trying to smuggle 12 pythons.

31. Seizure of smoked boas and porcupines – French Customs seize 33 smoked animal carcasses (including boas and monkeys) on Swiss border, destined for a restaurant in Geneva!

31.a. Version francais.

32. United States v. Garrett Smith, No. 2:07-CR-00573 (E.D. Calif.), AUSA Robert Tice-Raskin (916) 554-2700. -- Subject pleads guilty to conspiracy to smuggle wildlife, originally was charged along with an unknown international co-conspirator, known as "Turtle Man," with a variety of wildlife smuggling violations. Case involved Internet transactions.

33. Six raptors seized – Russian authorities seize six gyrfalcons at a military airport near Moscow.

34. Nicaragua seizes eggs, turtles and iguanas – 7,000 iguana eggs, 597 freshwater turtles and 232 iguanas that is. Authorities believe all were destined to cook pots during Lent.

Articles

INTERPOL media release
13 March 2009

1. Unprecedented Brazilian operation supported by INTERPOL breaks up wildlife smuggling network

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil – Brazil’s largest-ever nationwide operation against the illegal hunting and trade in wildlife, led by the Brazilian Federal Police in co-operation with [INTERPOL’s Environmental Crime Programme](#), has to date resulted in 72 arrests and the seizure of thousands of illegally-held wildlife specimens.



Some of the wildlife specimens recovered during Brazil's Operation Oxossi.

Spanning nine Brazilian states and involving 450 Federal Police Officers, with police teams still on the streets conducting arrests and seizures, Operation Oxossi – which was launched on 11 March – has so far resulted in 102 arrest warrants being issued and 140 search warrants served, as well as more than 3,500 wildlife specimens seized.

At the request of Brazilian authorities, [Red Notices](#) for internationally wanted persons have also been issued by INTERPOL for six individuals.

INTERPOL’s secure [I-24/7 global police communications system](#) and its ability to facilitate multi-country law enforcement co-operation proved invaluable to the Brazilian officers conducting the investigation. The co-operation between the Brazilian Federal Police and the Czech Environmental Inspectorate - which was an important part of the Operation following the reported involvement of Czech nationals in the illegal trade - was facilitated by the INTERPOL General Secretariat and its National Central Bureau (NCB) in Prague.

An agent from the Czech Environmental Inspectorate was also assigned to work with the Brazilian Federal Police and played a vital role in transcribing and evaluating evidence.

“Operation Oxossi has helped turn the hunters into the hunted, and this is down to close police co-operation between Brazilian police authorities, INTERPOL’s National Central Bureau in Prague and the INTERPOL General Secretariat,” said Brazilian Federal Police Commissioner Jorge Barbosa Pontes, the head of INTERPOL’s National Central Bureau in Brasilia.

With current investigations unveiling an international smuggling network transporting wildlife from Brazil to a number of European countries, David Higgins of INTERPOL’s Environmental Crime Programme said that the Operation demonstrated that the fight against environmental and wildlife crime was not just a national concern but an international issue too.

“Environmental crime is clearly an international problem which calls for international law enforcement co-operation. The success of Operation Oxossi in Brazil demonstrates the results that can be obtained when the fight against wildlife and environmental crime

is taken to the frontline as part of concerted international action using global law enforcement networks and resources," he said.

"We must all strive to ensure that any failure to act today does not result in the loss of a species or an environment tomorrow," Mr Higgins warned.

Police said that the gang specialized in trafficking blue macaws, a critically endangered species that might have disappeared from the wild in a short time, had the group's activities continued. Profits from this illegal trade are high, with a single egg of a blue macaw fetching up to EUR 3,000 on the European market.

INTERPOL's Environmental Crime Programme was launched in 1992 and has grown significantly since, expanding areas of co-operation with many national, international and non-governmental agencies across its [187 member countries](#).

2009/03/22

2. Man who put Anson Wong behind bars

By : Chai Mei Ling

He has prosecuted dozens of the world's most notorious wildlife crimes, including one which involved a Malaysian mastermind. But US attorney Robert Anderson tells CHAI MEI LING he is far from being a celebrated environmental figure.

ASKED about his fame in Malaysia as the man who put Anson Wong behind bars, Robert Anderson drew into a retreat of silence.

The lawyer's gaze was piercing -- an indication, perhaps, of how he found hardly endearing his somewhat celebrated status here, both within the judicial system and the wildlife conservation community.

The hype took hold early this month when Anderson flew into town for a national judiciary workshop.

As the prosecutor handling Wong's case 10 years ago, the American was revered by some local and international quarters for bringing to book the big-time smuggler.

Penang-based Wong was thrown into the limelight last year, having been described in a non-fiction as one of the two men who controlled the live reptile trade out of Southeast Asia.

The Lizard King said Wong had international links that could supply him with almost any species, from the Indonesian frilled dragons and Philippine Gray's monitors to the endangered Madagascan radiated tortoise.

The book went on to describe Wong's invincibility in Malaysia.

But after years of undercover investigative work by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Wong was lured out of Malaysia into Mexico City, where he was arrested and later charged and sentenced in the US.

In Malaysia for the first time, Anderson, 54, was musing over the famous tag.

In the end, he offered: "In my opinion, Anson Wong put himself behind bars. He committed actions that led to the charges and he admitted to the crimes."

The case, Anderson recalled, involved hundreds of audio recordings of conversations and dozens of illegal shipments as evidence, and many defendants.

"We had to strategise how to end the undercover investigation to maximise the likelihood that we would be able to arrest and bring into custody all those people at the same time.

"It was complicated in size and strategy but it wasn't difficult in terms of proof.

"The case certainly comes to mind as one I would consider to be important in the last 10 years because it involved very endangered species, like the plowshare tortoises and Komodo dragons."

From someone who did not know that a job such as his existed, Anderson has over the years become an experienced attorney, having travelled to more than 20 countries to work with law enforcement systems that are struggling to appropriately address a growing global illegal wildlife threat.

"That has been hugely eye-opening for me. It made me approach my job with more humility and a greater understanding of the culture of differences involved in the wildlife trade.

"There's a broad continuum of conduct within the term 'wildlife crime', from a crime that may be committed by someone poor on a subsistence level, to someone who is trafficking for profit and in doing so, help speed the extinction of a rare species.

"This certainly has helped me when I'm standing in the courtroom in the US, in front of the judge or jury, trying to explain why they should take a charge that I brought to them seriously."

Anderson, who also supervises long-term undercover transnational investigations, shared with local magistrates some of the things he has learnt in his 18 years of handling environmental crimes during the workshop in Kuala Lumpur.

Organised by the Asean Wildlife Enforcement Network (Asean-wen) and the Federal Courts of Malaysia, the two-day event was part of the judiciary's commitment to tackle organised poaching and trafficking of wild animals and plants in the country and region.

Anderson talked about the unique issues in wildlife cases as opposed to other criminal cases, how to evaluate what makes a wildlife case a strong one, and how to assess appropriate sentences.

"Wildlife crime is real crime. It involves fraud and harm. Harm to both wildlife and to humans and to future generations in the case of rare animals.

"Some animals are threatened to extinction primarily by trade," he said, citing the caviar trade as an example.

In the 1990s, unregulated capturing of sturgeons by countries bordering the Caspian Sea for the international caviar trade was so rampant that it threatened the survival of the sturgeon population.

Since then, the species has been placed on Appendix 2 of the Convention on International Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora (Cites) and the trade is now more regulated.

The advent of technology, said Anderson, has spurred the exponential growth in wildlife trade and changed wildlife crime into a borderless one.

"Things get bought and sold on the Internet at lightning speed, in a reasonably undetectable way. And shipments go across borders without ever passing the Customs.

"There are so many ways of sending an item from one country to another that the trade has become much faster and harder to detect."

This led to the need for international partnerships to detect, deter, prevent and punish these crimes, said Anderson, who is on the executive committee of Interpol's Wildlife Crime Working Group.

"Partnerships are very important in this business, and this is the primary reason why I come halfway around the world to attend a two-day workshop.

"We can't address serious wildlife crime unless non-governmental organisations like Traffic, the Malaysian government, our government and Asean-Wen deal with wildlife trade work together."

Till this day, Anderson is still intrigued by his job as the issues that come up are often different.

He has handled interstate cactus smuggling, walrus killing for their ivory tusks in Alaska, sea turtle parts trafficking from China and Mexico into the US, and the only shatoosh case in the country, where shatoosh shawls made from endangered Tibetan antelopes were imported to be sold at charity functions.

One unforgettable case involved Australian cockatoos, said Anderson.

For a few years, a syndicate had been travelling Down Under to national parks every nesting season to collect rare cockatoo eggs from the nests.

A mule hid 45 fertile eggs under his vest as he boarded a plane to the US, where the resulting chicks could fetch US\$10,000 (RM36,500) each.

Should any of the egg hatch on the flight, the mule flushed the chirping chick down the toilet.

"When that testimony came out in the courtroom, I could have sat down for the rest of the trial. The jury was so angry. That was an interesting case to prosecute."

Despite having handled several high-profile cases, Anderson never once considered himself a public figure.

"I try to do my talking in court. I'm not interested in being seen as a crusader."

http://www.nst.com.my/Current_News/NST/Sunday/National/2510610/Article/index.html

23 February 2009

3. Endangered reptiles saved by Customs and Border Protection

Customs and Border Protection has continued its crackdown on wildlife smuggling by arresting a 24-year-old Sydney man for allegedly attempting to smuggle 44 native reptiles out of Australia through Sydney International Airport.

Included in the seizure was one Albino Carpet Python, an extremely endangered species with numbers estimated to be as low as 100, and worth approximately \$20,000.

The reptiles were detected in the man's checked bags during x-ray screening of outgoing passenger luggage by airport security staff after the man checked in for a flight to Bangkok on Friday.

Customs and Border Protection officers attended and opened the man's bags and found a number of live reptiles concealed in socks and cloth bags.

The bags were unpacked and allegedly found to contain 24 Shingleback Lizards, 16 Bluetongue Lizards and four snakes. The snakes have been identified as three Black Headed Pythons and one Albino Carpet Python, both endangered species.

Customs and Border Protection investigators responded and removed the man from the aircraft and subsequently arrested and charged him with attempting to export native species without a permit.

The reptiles in the smuggling attempt are estimated to be worth between \$160,000 and \$200,000 on the black market. The reptiles have been transferred to Sydney Wildlife World where they have undergone health checks and are being cared for.

Customs and Border Protection National Manager Investigations, Richard Janeczko, said wildlife smuggling is a serious crime.

“Customs and Border Protection continues to prevent, investigate and prosecute wildlife smuggling attempts into and out of Australia in a bid to end this cruel practice,” Mr Janeczko said.

Mr Janeczko urged members of the public to report any suspicious or unusual activity in their local area to the Customs and Border Protection Hotline on 1900 06 1800.

The man, from Bonnet Bay in Sydney, has been granted conditional bail and is due to appear in the Downing Centre Local Court on 24 March 2009.

The man will face court on charges relating to the export of native species without a permit under section 303DD(1) of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

The maximum penalty for illegal importing or exporting wildlife under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* is \$110,000 and/or 10 years jail.

4. Zambia: Two Cops Nabbed Over K1 Billion Ivory

2 March 2009

ZAMBIA Wildlife Authority (Zawa) yesterday arrested four people, including two police officers, in Kafue for trafficking in ivory and rhino horns worth more than K1 billion.

Zawa director general, Lewis Saiwana said in Lusaka yesterday that the suspects were arrested for trafficking in 72 pieces of elephant ivory and five pieces of rhino horns.

Dr Saiwana named the two police officers as detective sub-inspector Mutakatala Mwiya of House No 42/20 and Soviet Munsanje, 34, of House number G352 both of Lusaka' Old Kanyama Township.

He was speaking to journalists at Zawa Chilanga head office when he inspected the confiscated ivory packed together with pieces of amethyst gemstones concealed in six trunks.

For such huge ivory, Dr Saiwana said the poachers killed 36 elephants but, however, said it was suspected that the animals were killed from neighbouring countries and not in Zambia.

He said the four suspects were arrested by Zawa and Zambia police Chilanga traffic officers after a tip-off from members of the public in Kafue who quickly alerted Zawa yesterday.

"In our continued effort to clamp down on the scourge and illegal trafficking of wildlife products, Zawa stepped up its operations to arrest the situation.

"This was in an operation conducted early this morning (yesterday) in the Kafue District, and we managed to arrest two police officers and two

other civilians," Dr Saiwana said.

The suspects loaded the contraband into a private Toyota minibus that was also seized by the officers and is currently parked at Zawa offices in Chilanga.

Dr Saiwana, however, said all Zambian rhinoceros were safe and not endangered because of the stringent 24-hour security services provided by Zawa.

"In Mosi-oa-Tunya national park, all the five rhinos are very protected and the other 23 black rhinoceros in North Luangwa national park are safe," he said.

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200903021407.html>

5. Tigers get a stimulus plan

NEW YORK (February 26, 2009) The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), together with the World Bank and Global Environment Facility (GEF), announced today a commitment of \$2.8 million toward tiger conservation across its range. WCS will lead a new project, Tiger Futures, in partnership with other conservation organizations with long-term field experience in tiger conservation throughout countries spanning the big cat's geographical range in Asia.

The Tiger Futures project will provide initial support and early action under the Global Tiger Initiative announced last June by Robert B. Zoellick, President of the World Bank Group. The Global Tiger Initiative (GTI) includes plans to support country dialogues in tiger range states, a review of World Bank projects in areas where tigers occur and initiatives to develop new models for tiger conservation. The GTI will also strengthen efforts to reduce poaching and illegal trade while creating new funding mechanisms for conservation efforts. As part of the initiative, the World Bank has offered to host a meeting of tiger experts from around the world for a Year of the Tiger Summit in 2010.

The Tiger Futures project will complement Bank initiatives to involve all tiger range states in high-level discussions for tiger conservation, and will support a broad participation of other conservation organizations including TRAFFIC, WWF, and IUCN as lead partners. Other project activities include working closely with local governments in China and Vietnam to reduce illegal wildlife trade—one of the main threats facing wild tigers.

"This agreement marks a unique partnership among the World Bank, GEF, and the conservation community to work with range states to save one of the world's most beloved animals, the tiger," said WCS President and CEO Dr Steven Sanderson. "This project is extremely timely since the plight of the tiger in the wild is dire, and urgent actions on many fronts are needed to protect remaining populations."

The survival of many tiger populations depends on the countries where tigers occur acting in concert. Building consensus is an essential ingredient in securing a sustainable, long-term future for tigers.

"We welcome the launch of the Tiger Futures project as a first step in building consensus and early action for tiger conservation," said Robert B. Zoellick, President of the World Bank Group. "The project recognizes that conservation organizations need to act in concert. We also understand that the survival of many tiger populations will depend on actions taken by the governments of the countries where tigers live."

"The struggle to prevent tigers from going extinct is emblematic of the monumental crisis facing biodiversity globally. We are determined to contribute to the protection of the tigers with this new initiative, but we will also start looking at the whole range of threatened species and the ecosystems they depend. Healthy ecosystems, in turn, provide for livelihoods and safety nets for rural people across the developing world. Therefore, starting with threatened species, we can trigger positive outcomes much beyond the reach of the original investments," said Monique Barbut, CEO and Chairperson of the GEF.

Today's announcement was made at New York's Rockefeller University at a symposium celebrating the career of renowned WCS conservationist George Schaller, who pioneered studies of tigers in India in the 1960s.

Tigers originally ranged over most of Asia, from the Caspian Sea in central Asia through Java and the Russian Far East. Tigers are now estimated to occupy about seven percent of their former historical range. They now only occur in relatively fragmented areas in South and Southeast Asia, with a few small populations in the Russian Far East and northeastern China. Within this reduced range, tiger populations with reasonable reproduction rates probably occupy only about 10 percent of the remaining available habitat, mainly in strictly protected reserves. Any surplus animals moving beyond such areas are likely to perish rapidly due to lack of prey or direct hunting.

The main threats to tigers are loss and degradation of their forest habitats, legal and illegal hunting of tiger prey, and direct killing of tigers either due to conflicts with humans, or commercial poaching for their fur and other body parts, including for traditional Asian medicines.

There are no exact numbers for wild tiger populations, both historical and current. But two hundred years ago the total number of wild tigers was likely to have been between 100,000 to 500,000 compared to today's total of around about 5,000 tigers, including 2,300 breeding adults. Tigers are listed by IUCN as endangered.

http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2009-02/wcs-tga022609.php

6. Three Czechs arrested in Guiana over alleged animal smuggling

23 February 2009

Paris, Feb 20 (CTK) - Three Czechs were detained in French Guiana for alleged smuggling of protected animals that are among endangered species, they were released from the custody prison after two days and will face a trial, the Czech consulate confirmed to CTK Friday.

The three middle-aged men who specialise in animal study may end up in prison for up to six months and pay a fine of 9000 euros if found guilty.

French authorities say the three men violated the law on environment protection and Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

No further information on the charges have been released so far.

Last year, two Czech entomologists were detained and charged with illegal collection of insects in India's Singalia park.

Academic institutions from all over the world called on Indian authorities to release the men who said they had never entered the Singalia park. The charges seemed fabricated and may have been politically motivated.

One of the Czech entomologists was acquitted of charges, while the other escaped from India during seemingly endless court proceedings.

<http://praguemonitor.com/2009/02/23/three-czechs-arrested-guiana-over-alleged-animal-smuggling>

7. Undercover pinch puts bite on illegal rattlesnake sales

By Dan Herbeck

- Emanuele "Manny" Tesoro was an Ontario prison guard with an unusual side job. Police say he collected and traded rattlesnakes.

He drove from his home near Hamilton, Ont., last October, and crossed the border to Niagara Falls for what he thought was a secret meeting with another snake trader in a shopping mall parking lot.

Tesoro traded 33 Eastern Massasauga rattlesnakes — which he had in pillowcases — and in return got five Timber rattlesnakes and \$1,100 cash. But shortly after that meeting, Tesoro was arrested.

The prison guard was one of about 20 individuals targeted in a lengthy state and federal investigation into the illegal sales of venomous snakes, turtles and other less-than-glamorous creatures.

"Some people are as attracted to venomous snakes as other people are attracted to Labrador retrievers," said Lt. Richard Thomas, who worked

undercover on the case.

Details of the two-year investigation, dubbed “Operation Shellshocked,” are expected to be made public today by the state Department of Environmental Conservation, the state attorney general’s office, the U. S. attorney’s office, the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Canadian agencies.

Investigators who worked on the case said they encountered the following people:

- A man in Newburgh who kept 111 poisonous snakes in his home, where he lived with his wife and their baby.
- A Fishkill man who kept about a dozen venomous tree vipers in his bedroom, although he had been bitten before.
- A Long Island man who allegedly told an investigator he wanted to buy 50,000 snapping turtle hatchlings and sell them to people in China for food.

Why would anyone want to own a deadly poisonous snake?

“I’ve spoken to hundreds of these people. For some of them, it was almost like being in a cult. Some people are just fascinated by venomous snakes,” said Daniel W. Sullivan, an investigator who went undercover for the DEC. “I spoke to one guy who lost a couple of fingers from being bitten, but he still had an affinity for snakes.”

DEC agents who went undercover in the probe found a surprisingly active black market for poisonous snakes, various species of turtles and other protected species.

Law enforcement officials said they found Web sites and blogs where people make arrangements to buy and sell venomous snakes, sometimes for thousands of dollars. The illegal snake trade can be as lucrative as drug-dealing, but without the risk of going to prison for 10 or 15 years, investigators said.

At least two people from Western New York are charged in the case, authorities said. People from several other states are also charged, and a number of people are being targeted in ongoing investigations.

Several reptile and amphibian species could disappear in New York State if commercial trafficking is not stopped, according to Thomas and Capt. Michael Van Durme.

“This illegal trafficking has really increased in the past few years, in New York and other states, with the help of the Internet,” Thomas said. “One of the intents of this investigation was to bring public awareness to the issue that some of these species are in danger of disappearing from our state.”

Some snakes can be legally sold and traded on the Internet or at “herp

shows” — similar to gun shows — held across the country, authorities said.

But others—such as the rattlers traded by Tesoro to an undercover DEC agent — are protected and cannot be trafficked.

Tesoro faces both state and federal charges, accused of trafficking in endangered species. Ontario police have also charged Tesoro.

According to court papers, the Tesoro investigation began in February 2008 when Sullivan spotted an ad on a Web site seeking “trustworthy Americans” willing to send venomous snakes to Ontario.

Acting undercover, Sullivan contacted Tesoro, 42, who had placed the ad. Tesoro told the undercover officer that he worked as a corrections officer and also “sells snakes on the side,” police said.

Tesoro allegedly told Sullivan he is aware that some of the snakes are endangered species and there could be “huge fines” if he was caught.

Sullivan arranged a trade of several rattlers with Tesoro in Niagara Falls May 28. He was not arrested until the October incident, when he allegedly arrived with 33 rattlesnakes.

“He pleaded not guilty. None of the animals in this case died. He took good care of them,” said one of Tesoro’s attorneys, Kimberly A. Schechter of the federal public defenders office.

Charges against Tesoro are still pending in federal court, state court and Ontario’s courts. Prosecutors are Paul F. McCarthy, an assistant state attorney general, and MaryEllen Kresse of the U. S. attorney’s office.

dherbeck@buffnews.com

<http://www.buffalonews.com/cityregion/story/612320.html>

French-Press Agency – 16 March 2009

8. German Customs seize 164 tarantulas

German Customs found 164 Tarantulas in the car of a Swizz national who was attempting to cross the border illicitly, according to the Customs authorities in Lörrach.

Among these spiders – most of which as large as the hand – were a total of 44 specimens of protected species. These were automatically seized as the owner did not have any legal authorisation for this, according to the Customs spokesman, Mr Markus Ückert.

The tarantulas were enclosed in boxes and in plastics bags. The Swizz national was planning on selling them at a fair in Germany.

In the car, which was intercepted at the border post in Inzlingen, near Bâle, were also some 45 buckets filled with cockroaches – the purpose of which was to feed the arachnids.

It is not the first time that this offender has been apprehended – authorities already arrested him in 2007, exactly at the same spot. In this instance, Customs officers found a total of 945 tarantulas in his car and in the vehicle of his German accomplice.

A complaint for fiscal fraud and law infringement has been lodged against the Swiss recidivist.

8.a - 164 mygales trouvées dans une voiture à la frontière allemande

Les douaniers allemands ont découvert 164 mygales dans la voiture d'un Suisse qui tentait de leur faire franchir en fraude la frontière, ont indiqué à l'AFP les douaniers de Lörrach.

Parmi ces araignées, «grandes comme la main» pour la plupart, se trouvaient 44 spécimens d'espèces protégées, qui ont été aussitôt saisis parce que leur propriétaire ne possédait aucune autorisation légale, a précisé le porte-parole des douanes, Markus Ückert.

Les mygales étaient enfermées dans des boîtes et dans des sachets en plastique. Le Suisse comptait les vendre lors d'une foire en Allemagne.

«Bien sûr, les douaniers n'ont rien ouvert, ils ont tout de suite compris de quoi il retournait», a dit M. Ückert.

Dans la voiture interceptée au poste-frontière d'Inzlingen, près de Bâle, se trouvaient aussi 45 seaux remplis de cafards, en guise de nourriture pour les arachnides velus.

Le Suisse n'en était pas à son coup d'essai, il avait déjà été interpellé en 2007, exactement au même endroit. A l'époque, les douaniers avaient découvert un total de 945 mygales dans sa voiture et dans celle d'un complice allemand.

Une plainte pour fraude fiscale et infraction à la loi sur la protection de la nature a été déposée contre le Suisse récidiviste.

9. Five years imprisonment for 17 people in lion poaching case

Ahmedabad (PTI): A Bhavnagar court on Thursday sentenced 17 people to five years of imprisonment for killing four lions from Gir wildlife sanctuary in 2007.

Chief Judicial Magistrate A I Sheikh convicted 17 people including one wildlife goods trader Prabhakar Keshav Gajakosh from Karnataka for killing four lions, and imposed a fine of Rs 2,000 each.

Three cases were registered, two in Junagadh district and one in Bhavnagar for the killing of ten lions in 2007. This is third conviction for poaching lions. In October last year, 20 people were convicted in the Junagad cases.

In 2007, the forest department officials had found ten lions killed in

areas surrounding Gir wildlife sanctuary, which is the last abode of Asiatic Lions.

After an uproar on poaching incidents the State, Gujarat government had handed over the inquiry to state CID (Crime). The CID (Crime) in its inquiry found out that members of Bahelia tribe from Katni district of Madhya Pradesh were involved in killing of lions in Gir.

10. Navy Seizes Thousands of Endangered Turtle Eggs in Colombia March 13,2009

BOGOTA – The Colombian navy said it seized a shipment of 3,000 endangered turtle eggs in the northeastern province of Arauca.

The eggs of the endangered Yellow Spotted River Turtle were found in a small boat traveling along the Meta River in Arauca, an area near the border with Venezuela and some 500 kilometers (310 miles) northeast of Bogota, the navy said.

Authorities arrested the driver of the boat carrying bags filled with the eggs, which were placed on the banks of the Meta – a major river in the Orinoco Basin – to help facilitate hatching.

Yellow Spotted River Turtles, which are native to the Orinoco River that traverses Venezuela and part of Colombia, lay about 20 eggs a year. Only half of them hatch and merely a few baby turtles survive, since many fall victim to natural predators or human beings. EFE

<http://www.laht.com/article.asp?ArticleId=329513&CategoryId=12393>

11. Malaysian judiciary brush up on wildlife crime and punishment

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 3 March 2009—The ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) and the Federal Courts of Malaysia have organized a national judiciary workshop on wildlife crime and prosecution being held in Kuala Lumpur on March 3 and 4, 2009.

The workshop is co-sponsored by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and supported by the Federal Courts of Malaysia.

This is the fifth such workshop to be held in an ASEAN-WEN member country, following the success of similar events in Thailand and Viet Nam last year, Philippines and Indonesia in 2007. The next Judiciary workshop is planned in Cambodia later in 2009.

Representatives from the Malaysian Magistrates Courts and observers from ASEAN region will participate in discussions on mutual legal assistance, enforcement and the prosecution of wildlife crimes, as part of the judiciary's commitment to tackle organized poaching and trafficking of wild animals and plants in Malaysia and Southeast Asia.

Mr Robert Anderson, a U.S. Department of Justice environmental crimes attorney, will conduct sessions on the investigations, prosecutions and sentencing of wildlife crimes.

The illegal trade of wildlife is a major threat to Southeast Asia's biodiversity. The criminal nature of the trade not only contributes to the extinction of internationally protected species, but has further repercussions for Malaysia's international stature.

Illegal trade in wildlife impacts a wide variety of species of animals and plants, from those which are little known to the public to those with the highest profile such as the tiger, the emblem of Malaysia.

Illegal trade in wildlife benefits only a few individuals, but the loss of biodiversity which results from this will leave future generations of Malaysians with a country that will never be quite the same as that which their parents and grandparents knew.

Deputy Chief of Mission of the U.S. Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, Robert G. Rapson, has remarked that the ASEAN-WEN Support Project is unique because it is one of the few regional projects focused on enhancing capacity to increase transnational law enforcement.

"This is a necessary step for any country to be able to apprehend and convict serious offenders in the illegal trade of wildlife."

He added that "the United States is committed to increase information sharing and capacity-building between ASEAN-WEN and the United States to stop East-West wildlife crime."

Senior Officer of the Program Coordination Unit of ASEAN-WEN Dr Chumphon Sukkaseam said concerted and coordinated actions were needed to address the illegal exploitation and trade in CITES-listed species within the ASEAN region which was a hotspot in the global illegal wildlife trade.

"Sharing information and technical expertise within ASEAN, and cooperation with the United States are vital to this effort," he said.

Workshop participants will benefit from presentations by the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP), the Royal Malaysian Police, the Royal Malaysian Customs and a Special Prosecutor from the U.S. Department of Justice. The CITES Management and Scientific Authority in Malaysia will also participate.

TRAFFIC and Freeland Foundation, via a cooperative partnership with USAID, are providing technical assistance to the government agencies implementing ASEAN-WEN. The U.S. Department of Justice provides legal training on case scenarios and prosecution best practices.

<http://www.traffic.org/home/2009/3/3/malaysian-judiciary-brush-up-on-wildlife-crime-and-punishmen.html>

2009/03/04

12. Wildlife poachers, traders to face stiffer penalties

KUALA LUMPUR: Heavier penalties, including a maximum fine of RM500,000, will be slapped upon wildlife poachers and traders when amendments to the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 are approved in June. The amendments include raising fines by between 10 and 30 times the current fines and imprisonment of up to 10 years.

Natural Resources and Environment Ministry secretary-general Datuk Zoal Azha Yusof said the amendments would be tabled in the next session of Parliament.

This is good news for non-governmental organisations such as the Malaysian Nature Society, TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, Wildlife Conservation Society and WWF Malaysia, which have been calling for amendments for many years.

Zoal said: "The ministry is aware of the loopholes in the existing act so the amendments will not only focus on penalty but also on the coverage of protected species."

He was speaking after the launch of the Judiciary Workshop on Wildlife Crime and Prosecution for Malaysia yesterday.

Zoal said those found guilty of wildlife trafficking would be penalised based on the number of animals seized. Imprisonment will be mandatory for offences involving totally protected animals.

He said the ministry would strengthen wildlife enforcement activities at the country's borders and enhance information-sharing among Asean countries.

Last year, more than 8,800 clouded monitor lizards and 329 pangolins were seized before they could be smuggled out.

Zoal said there were 45 cases of wildlife crimes last year, with nine cases still pending in court.

Deputy chief of mission of the United States Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, Robert G. Rapson, said according to a 2008 US Congressional Report, global trade in wildlife was worth at least US\$5 billion (RM18.68 billion) and potentially in excess of US\$20 billion annually.

He said a partnership between the US and Asean nations in fighting the menace was important as much of the wildlife smuggled out of Asean nations ended up in the US.

The two-day workshop, organised by the Asean Wildlife Enforcement Network and the Federal Courts of Malaysia, was aimed at reducing illegal wildlife trade in the region.

It was co-sponsored by the US Agency for International Development.

http://www.nst.com.my/Current_News/NST/Wednesday/National/2495489/Article/index.html

13. Indonesia arrests Saudis with rare birds

12 Mar 2009, 1620 hrs IST, AFP

JAKARTA: Three Saudi nationals have been arrested in Indonesia for allegedly trying to smuggle dozens of rare and endangered birds out of the country, a report said.

The unidentified suspects were arrested at Jakarta's Soekarno-Hatta International Airport on March 8 with 33 birds stuffed in hidden compartments in their luggage, the Antara news agency reported.

Wildlife Conservation Society activist Dwi Nugroho said the arrests proved that the illegal trade in vulnerable and endangered Indonesian wildlife was rampant.

"They had modified the structure of their bags in such a way that they were able to put the birds in the bags and carry them as any ordinary baggage for air travel," he was quoted as saying.

The rare and endangered birds the three Saudis had tried to take out of the country included a Moluccan cockatoo, a Goffin's cockatoo, an umbrella cockatoo and a blackcapped lory parrot from New Guinea.

Three slow lorises, a threatened species of primate, were also allegedly found in the suspects' baggage.

<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/Flora--Fauna/Indonesia-arrests-Saudis-with-rare-birds/articleshow/4256112.cms>

14. Airport staff take on traffickers

By: LAMPHAI INTATHEP

Published: 10/03/2009 at 12:00 AM

Hundreds of Suvarnabhumi airport staff will undergo intensive training in an effort to halt illegal wildlife trafficking under the "Wildlife Trafficking Stops Here" campaign.

Airports of Thailand Plc and the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry launch the "Wildlife Trafficking Stops Here" campaign at Suvarnabhumi airport yesterday.

Jointly organised by the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry and Airports of Thailand (AoT), the campaign is aimed at stopping the growing problem of wildlife trafficking through the airport.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Suwit Khunkitti said long term public awareness of nature crimes was needed among passengers who are being urged not to buy protected species.

Part of the campaign will involve projecting anti-trafficking messages on TV monitors and posting placards throughout the airport, particularly at immigration gates and check-in booths in the departure hall. A two-day wildlife trade regulation course will be organised for hundreds of airport staff.

Suvarnabhumi airport is one of Asia's busiest transport hubs, serving more than 30 million passengers a year. It was also known as a major conduit for illegal wildlife trafficking, Mr Suwit said.

US ambassador to Thailand Eric John, who is involved in the campaign, said thousands of wild animals flowed through trafficking hotspots such as the airport every day to destinations around the world.

More than 30,000 species of wild plants and animals were on the international endangered list with many already on the brink of extinction, he said.

Mr John said the two-day wildlife trade regulation course, supported by the US government and the Asean Wildlife Enforcement Network (Asean-WEN), would teach staff how to identify and handle the smuggling of protected wildlife products, and gain knowledge on national and international wildlife trade laws.

"They will be trained to prevent illegal wildlife trafficking at the airport in order to make Suvarnabhumi an international environmental model for other airports to emulate," Mr John said.

About 250 airport staff were expected to attend.

In order to avoid detection, the traffickers hide various creatures as cargo or treat them as baggage.

In January last year, 1.4 tonnes of live snakes were discovered in Hanoi on a Vietnam Airlines flight from Suvarnabhumi airport and in June more than 1,000 snakes and rare turtles were found at the airport.

Records kept by Asean-WEN show that from mid-July to December last year, 23,375 live animals were rescued and more 14.6 tonnes of dead animals were recovered in the region.

If the wildlife trafficking continued, anywhere between 13% and 42% of Southeast Asia's animal and plant species could be wiped out within this century.

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/local/13066/airport-staff-take-on-traffickers>

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February 22, 2009

15. Poaching surge imperils South Africa's rhinos

RW Johnson in Johannesburg

WILDLIFE experts are alarmed at a dramatic upsurge in rhino poaching in South Africa's game reserves that may threaten the survival of the creature in one of its last redoubts.

Just 10 rhinos were poached in the whole of 2007, but last year the number reached 100. On Christmas Day alone, 13 rhinos were killed by poachers.

"We've always had subsistence poaching," said George Hughes, a former head of the KwaZulu-Natal Parks Board. "But serious poaching for large game by professionals selling rhino horn or ivory to Far Eastern syndicates is far more alarming."

In order to steal the lucrative horn, the poachers hack at the rhino's skull with pangas, the African machete, causing horrendous injuries.

"It's a terrible thing to come across the poachers' handiwork," said Frank Reardon, a wildlife enthusiast. "To see one lying dead with the carrion feasting off it is an awful sight."

Former army professionals with modern weapons are thought to be involved. Recently, a Vietnamese diplomat was caught on camera taking delivery of contraband rhino horn outside the Vietnamese embassy in Pretoria.

Elephant and rhino poaching are endemic in the game reserves of Tanzania, Kenya and Zambia. In Zimbabwe, President Robert Mugabe's "land reform" has seen a wildlife holocaust since 2000. The only supposedly secure reserves left are in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa.

Only 3,500 black rhinos are left in the world and 3,000 of them are in South Africa.

"The rhino is actually a gentle and friendly animal," said Hughes. "They are vegetarians, not predators, and only man preys on them."

For Hughes, the fatal step was the international ban on rhino horn sales in 1977. "It was like prohibition. Prices shot up and so did poaching."

In Botswana, where they once flourished, there are only about five white rhinos left. Poaching has now reached South Africa's Hluhluwe-Umfolozi game reserve – in Gaisford's words, "the holy ground of the rhino". Although it still has 1,600 white rhinos, black rhino numbers are down to 300.

The golden era of the giant state reserves, like the 5m-acre Kruger National Park, may be over. Not only is much of their land under claim by local peasants, but the scale makes the parks difficult to guard.

David Cummings, a Zimbabwean wildlife expert, said private reserves held the best hope of survival for many species but they face government opposition. "Many African regimes don't like the idea of losing monopoly control of their wildlife," he said.

"Corrupt game rangers are also a problem. In Zimbabwe, we've seen rangers caught poaching rhino allowed to go scot-free, despite a mandatory 25-year sentence."

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/africa/article5780439.ece>

24. 02. 09. - 09:00

16. Tigers rescued from Chinese medicine farm

Animal inspectors have rescued eight tigers who were due to be slaughtered for the illegal Far East medical black market.

The five fully grown tigers and three cubs were found stashed at a dog kennels in Somma Lombardo, in northern Italy, after a tip off to police.

Investigators believe the animals were due to be used in traditional Chinese medicines where healers claim that illnesses can be cured by digesting parts of powerful animals like tigers. Now animal welfare experts have moved the big cats to a nearby wildlife park.

"They were living in small cages in terrible conditions and they are lucky to be alive. Sadly they have been so badly treated there is no chance of returning them to the wild," said one.

<http://www.croatiantimes.com/index.php?id=2862>

17. United States v. Gunther Wenzek, No. 3:08-CR-00377 (D. Ore.), ECS Senior Trial Attorney Ron Sutcliffe (208) 334-9124 and AUSA Dwight Holton (503) 727-1128.

On February 11, 2009, Gunther Wenzek, a German national, was arrested on a nine-count indictment charging him with three felony violations of smuggling protected coral into the United States via the port of Portland, Oregon. He was further charged with three felony Lacey Act and three misdemeanor violations of the Endangered Species Act.

A grand jury in Portland indicted Wenzek in July 2008. The indictment had been sealed pending Wenzek's scheduled appearance at the Global Pet Exposition in Orlando, Florida. Law enforcement officials arrested Wenzek as he entered the United States at Dulles Airport en route to the exposition.

According to the indictment, Wenzek owns a company named CoraPet, based in Essen, Germany, and has sold various coral products to retailers in the United States. An investigation was launched in 2007 after Wenzek attempted to ship a container loaded with fragments of endangered coral from reefs off the Philippine coast to Portland. After this initial shipment, agents subsequently seized two full containers of

endangered coral shipped by Wenzek to a customer in Portland. These two shipments made up a total of over 40 tons of coral.

The seized corals have been identified as belonging to the scientific order *Scleractinia*, genera *Porites*, *Acropora*, and *Pocillopora*, which is common to Philippine reefs. Due to the threat of extinction, stony corals, such as those seized in this case are protected by international law. Philippine law specifically forbids exports of all coral. CITES further prohibits importation of this coral to customers in the United States, without a permit.

This case was investigated by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the National Marine Fisheries Service.

18. Two tons of shark fins on Taiwanese boat

Helen Bamford

March 15 2009 at 02:40PM

* Skipper 'gave false information'

A Taiwanese fishing vessel with nearly two tons of dried shark fins on board was seized at Cape Town harbour on Saturday.

The fins were confiscated by Department of Environmental Affairs inspectors and the skipper and crew of 26 face criminal charges for providing false information about their catch.

Carol Moses, spokesperson for Marine and Coastal Management (MCM), said it was clear the foreign-flagged vessel, the Chien Jui 102, had been finning. This practice involves hacking fins off live sharks and throwing them back into the sea where they either bleed to death or become prey for other sharks.

The organisation World Conservation estimates that finning causes the death of tens of millions of sharks worldwide each year.

The demand for shark fins is mostly to supply the East with shark fin soup, where it is regarded as a delicacy. Blacktip, silky and blue sharks are among those targeted.

Moses said that in terms of international regulations, the number of shark fins landed must correspond with the number of shark trunks on board.

She said that both the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission and the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas prescribed that the weight of the fins should not be more than 5% of the shark trunk.

Moses said the Chien Jui 102's permit had indicated they had 100kg of shark fin, 2,2 tons of shark trunk and 2 945kg of tuna on board.

But what they, in fact, had was nearly two tons of dried shark fins, which meant they should have had about 30 tons of shark trunk.

Moses said the vessel would be blacklisted for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and would remain in the harbour until the case had been finalised.

She said the Marine Living Resources Act made provision for a fine of up to R2 million and up to five years' imprisonment. She said the charges were still being formulated.

Moses said the vessel had been at sea since December, fishing off-shore on the high seas but had applied for an exclusive economic zone permit to enter South African waters.

"If they want to come into our waters to offload or do repairs they have to apply for a permit and provide details of their catch and the type of fishing gear they have on board."

The vessel was granted a permit on March 4 and two days later MCM inspectors boarded it at the harbour to do a spot check.

She said that should the skipper and crew be found guilty, MCM would sell the fish and the proceeds would go into the Marine Living Resources fund.

http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=14&art_id=vn20090315062359249C428822

19. New Enforcement Legislation Cracks Down on Environmental Offenders

updated 4:46 p.m. ET, Wed., March. 4, 2009

OTTAWA, ONTARIO - Cracking down on polluters, poachers and wildlife smugglers through increased fines and new enforcement tools are the main elements of the Environmental Enforcement Bill introduced in the House of Commons today by Environment Minister Jim Prentice.

A key provision of the new bill is that it raises maximum fines and introduces minimum fines for the first time. Under the proposed bill, fines for individuals who commit serious offences would be between \$5,000 and \$1 million, while fines for corporations would be between \$25,000 and \$6 million. The bill also gives enforcement officers new powers to investigate cases and grants courts new sentencing authorities that ensure penalties reflect the seriousness of the pollution and wildlife offences.

"In the election campaign, our government committed to bolster the protection of our water, air and land through tougher environmental enforcement that holds polluters accountable. Today we delivered," said Minister Prentice. "This bill, together with funding commitments of \$43 million from Budgets 2007 and 2008 to hire more enforcement officers and to implement the new measures, will provide a comprehensive, modern and

effective enforcement regime for Canada."

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/29514929/>

20. Heavy consignment of Afghan tortoises recovered

Thursday, March 05, 2009

Photos and text by Amar Guriro

KARACHI: Sindh Wildlife Department officials recovered a heavy consignment of around 550 Afghan tortoises or horsefield tortoises from a railway cargo compartment of Quetta-Karachi bound train, the Bolan Mail.

Pakistan Railways had officially registered the wooden boxes carrying these tortoises as normal cargo. The wildlife game party also arrested Daulat Khan for carrying these tortoises. Game Inspector Bashir Ahmed Sheikh said that his team received information that a person is carrying a heavy consignment of tortoises, so they raided and recovered the tortoises kept in two wooden boxes. "These tortoises were caught from the apple orchards and grape orchards of Quetta, Naushaki and other districts of Balochistan and were brought to Karachi through a train and were supposed to be sold in the local market," he said.

Game Officer Adnan Ahmed said that, in the local market, a single Afghan tortoise is sold for Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,200 and based on these figures, the total cost of the tortoise consignment comes to around Rs 0.6 million.

Interestingly, the Pakistan Railways officially registered these animals as normal cargo. The records state that the cargo department of Pakistan Railways, Quetta officially registered the two wooden boxes under the registry No QA/KL/7285/2. "The Pakistan Railways must check before registering any cargo or box to see what it holds," said Sindh Wildlife Conservator Hussain Bux Bhaagat.

The Afghan tortoises are also known as horsefield tortoise, as they have designs that look like horse hoof marks on their shells. The tortoises are found in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and some parts of China and another species of these tortoises are also found in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. The Afghan Tortoise is round and small in size and their colour ranges from dull ochre to black. It is also known as the 'Four-toed Tortoise' because it has four toes on every foot.

Bhaagat said that traders are involved in collecting these tortoises in Balochistan and then bringing them to Karachi to sell in the local market. "In Karachi, fish aquariums have started keeping Afghan tortoises as showpieces while people also buy them as pets. Thus, slowly the market value of these tortoises is rising in the city," he said. Another wildlife official said that these tortoises will be released in their natural habitat, however, the department's high-ups have yet to decide the time and venue.

The trader, Daulat Khan, reveals another story that the recent worsening situation in Balochistan has put the endangered wildlife on risk. "I will never ever prefer to trade these innocent animals but what else can I do; I am educated but I am not getting any government job and, on the other hand, the price hike is increasing in the country, so I recently started trading these tortoises," he said.

It is a universal fact that in any area affected by war, worsening law and order and an economic crisis, the environment and wildlife are the first sectors that are affected. In Baluchistan, the recent worsening law and order situation has badly affected the citizens there. Thousands of youngsters are unable to get government jobs and they resort to trading such endangered wildlife. "I would never ever prefer to catch and sell these tortoises if I get a job," said Daulat Khan.

The Wildlife Department seized the tortoises and fined Daulat Khan Rs 2,000 for trading the animals and forced him to sign an agreement that he will quit capturing and trading tortoises and if he is caught again, he will pay Rs 0.5 million as a fine.

In another train raid, the wildlife department has recovered a sealed sack of around 17 kgs of dry endangered freshwater turtle meat that was brought from Balochistan to Karachi and was supposed to be exported.

Interestingly, no one was arrested during the raid. In the international market, a kilogram of freshwater turtle meat is sold at around Rs 25,000. "It is illegally exported; we conducted a raid and seized a sack full of the meat," Bhaagat said, adding that the meat is usually exported to Thailand, China and other countries.

http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2009\03\05\story_5-3-2009_pg12_6

21. Police chasing traders of endangered species

Wahyoe Boediwardhana, THE JAKARTA POST, MALANG

The National Police have deployed their rapid reaction brigade (SPORC) to hunt down members of syndicates involved in the trade and collection of endangered species in the country, following the arrests in Jakarta last week of five such traders.

The raids, launched at ports and airports in major cities and habitats of the protected species, have gained the full support of the Forum for Jakarta Wildlife (FSLJ), the Wildlife Conservation Society's Indonesian Program, the Jakarta Animal Aid Network, International Animal Rescue and ProFauna, which are providing information on the syndicates and wildlife collectors in the country.

"The raids are being conducted at certain locations that we cannot name because they are still ongoing," ProFauna executive director Rosek Nursahid told The Jakarta Post on Tuesday.

Last week, the police caught red-handed five traders offering the pelts of Sumatran tigers, leopards and sun bears, at Rawabening Market in Jakarta.

Rosek accused buyers and collectors, mostly businesspeople, of contributing to the decimation of numerous protected species in the country, saying the increasing demand had encouraged the poaching and illegal trade in the wildlife.

"Law enforcers should impose harsh penalties on those collecting the endangered species," he said.

The FSLJ said the poaching of sun bears was widespread in Sumatra, where they were traded in Aceh, Medan, Padang, Bengkulu and Jambi, while leopards were hunted in East Java and traded in Surabaya, Jakarta and Bali.

A tiger pelt can sell for up to Rp 10 million, and that of a sun bear for around Rp 15 million.

Rosek said most traders supplied their goods directly to their selected buyers to avoid arrest, with the transactions normally conducted underground.

He added many traders paid villagers to poach the wildlife by launching fear campaigns among villagers that the wildlife was a common enemy that had to be killed before it could kill villagers or damage crops.

ProFauna campaign officer R. Tri Prayudhi said his side had identified 10 cities where wildlife, mainly tigers and elephants, were illegally traded.

<http://old.thejakartapost.com/detailnational.asp?fileid=20090304.H32&irec=9>

Report:

http://www.traffic.org/species-reports/traffic_species_reptiles19.pdf

22. Box turtles knocked out by excessive trade

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 23 February 2009—Unregulated trade—at 10 to 100 times legal levels—has caused Southeast Asian Box Turtles almost to vanish from parts of Indonesia, where once they were common, according to a new report by TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network.

The turtles are used for meat and in Traditional Chinese Medicine, with major markets in Hong Kong, China, Singapore and Malaysia, mostly supplied from Indonesia. Animals are also exported as pets, mainly to the US, Europe and Japan.

The study found at least 18 traders operating in Java, Sulawesi, Sumatra and Kalimantan dealing illegally in Southeast Asian Box Turtles.

Each trader handled an average of just under 2,230 turtles a week,

adding up to a combined total of 2.1 million Southeast Asian Box Turtles per year. The vast majority is destined for export, although Indonesia's official annual export quota for this species is just 18,000 turtles—a figure set without a scientific basis.

“The number of Southeast Asian Box Turtles currently traded is certainly ten times the official export quota, and probably nearer 100 times it,” said Dr Sabine Schoppe, author of the new report, Status, trade dynamics and management of the Southeast Asian Box Turtle *Cuora amboinensis* in Indonesia (PDF, 2.4 MB)

Thirteen of the 18 traders investigated were registered for some trade in reptiles, but not in box turtles, with the provincial offices of the Government's Directorate General of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation (PHKA), which is required to inspect such businesses regularly. TRAFFIC has previously presented the results of the study to PHKA.

Collectors in Riau and Sulawesi reported huge falls in Southeast Asian Box Turtle numbers in the wild, and registered pet traders said they had experienced difficulties in obtaining turtles compared to a decade ago.

“The current level of illegal exploitation will result in Southeast Asian Box Turtles being systematically wiped out across Indonesia, indications of which are already obvious at collection and trade centres,” said Schoppe.

In 2000, the Southeast Asian Box Turtle was listed in Appendix II of CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), a measure intended to regulate its international trade. However, the report found that following CITES-listing, trade in the box turtles had increased, with the largest numbers being smuggled through the ports of Makassar, Medan, Pekanbaru, Tembilahan and Banjarmasin.

“Authorities should concentrate on eradicating illegal trade, and in setting realistic limits on what numbers can safely be harvested,” said Chris R. Shepherd, Senior Programme Officer with TRAFFIC Southeast Asia.

Weak enforcement of existing laws is a key problem, caused through a combination of factors including non-inspection of shipments, falsification of CITES export permits, and lack of training amongst enforcement officers.

The report recommends better training and more co-operation between Indonesian enforcement authorities and those in importing countries to tackle illegal wildlife trade, for example through initiatives like the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN), and research into populations of box turtles.

<http://www.traffic.org/home/2009/2/23/box-turtles-knocked-out-by-excessive-trade.html>

23. United States v. Max Moghaddam et al., No. 1:08-CR-20365 (S.D. Fla.), AUSA Tom Watts-FitzGerald (305) 961-9413.

On February 24, 2009, Max Moghaddam and Bemka Corporation, d/b/a Bemka Corporation House of Caviar and Fine Foods, were sentenced for their involvement in the illegal export of internationally protected fish roe (eggs) from July 2005 through April 2007.

Moghaddam, who was remanded into custody, was sentenced to serve 18 months' incarceration followed by three years' of supervised release. He was further ordered to pay a \$100,000 fine. Bemka was sentenced to pay a \$200,000 fine and will serve a four year term of probation. The roe, valued at approximately \$122,000 was forfeited to the government in connection with this matter.

The defendants were convicted by a jury in December of last year of conspiring to violate the Lacey Act, a Lacey Act false labeling violation, and an Endangered Species Act export violation. Over a 21-month period, the defendants exported numerous shipments labeled as containing bowfin roe, which is often used as a caviar substitute, when in fact they contained paddlefish roe. The American paddlefish is native to the Mississippi River drainage system and is harvested for both its meat and roe. The paddlefish is a close relative of the sturgeons from which most commonly known caviars come and paddlefish roe has qualities similar to sturgeon caviars.

Once common throughout the Midwest, over-fishing and habitat changes have caused major population declines and the American Paddlefish is now listed as an endangered species. With diminishing world sturgeon populations and increased international protection for declining stocks, American paddlefish roe has become a substitute for sturgeon caviar and, as such, has become quite valuable.

This case was investigated by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

24. United States v. Steve Popovich, No. 1:08-CR-00810 (N.D. Ill.), ECS Trial Attorney Jim Nelson (202) 305-0423 and AUSA Tim Chapman (312) 353-1925.

On February 12, 2009, Steve Popovich was sentenced to pay a \$5,000 fine and serve 18 months' probation. He also must make an additional \$5,000 community service payment to National Fish and Wildlife Fund. Popovich pleaded guilty in November of last year to a single felony Lacey Act violation for acquiring the hide of a leopard in violation of CITES in November 2004.

In August 2001, the defendant traveled to South Africa to hunt a leopard. After killing one he found he did not have the proper documentation to ship the hide back to the U.S. He subsequently was introduced to Jan Swart who helped Popovich smuggle the hide from Zimbabwe to Colorado with falsified export documents. Swart is currently serving an eighteen-month prison sentence for smuggling violations.

This case was investigated by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

25. Smyrna man fined \$15,000 for wildlife violation

He bought now leopard carcass, other endangered animal skulls

By MIKE MORRIS
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
Wednesday, February 25, 2009

A Smyrna man with an unusual hobby of collecting the skulls of

endangered birds was sentenced in federal court Tuesday on multiple misdemeanor charges.

Toru Shimoji, 49, also had bought a snow leopard carcass, authorities said.

He was ordered to pay a \$15,000 fine and was placed on probation for two years, said a spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta.

"This defendant was a collector and had acquired a number of illegal skulls of birds and the carcass of a snow leopard, all of which are endangered and therefore protected by federal wildlife law," U.S. Attorney David E. Nahmias said in a press release.

"Unfortunately, there continues to be a market for such illegal activity and collectors should be on notice that they take a chance on being convicted on federal charges," Nahmias said.

Nahmias said that in December, 2007, Shimoji purchased the leopard carcass from an undercover U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service special agent. Less than a week later, during a search of Shimoji's Smyrna home, agents discovered over 45 skulls of endangered and other protected animals in his private collection, Nahmias said.

http://www.ajc.com/metro/content/metro/cobb/stories/2009/02/25/smyrna_leopard_wildlife_violation.html

26. US Attorney - Honduran Seafood Dealer Convicted in International Smuggling Operation

Posted on Thursday, March 05, 2009

R. Alexander Acosta, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, Eddie McKissick, Resident Agent in Charge, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and H. Jeff Radonski, Assistant Special Agent in Charge, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Office For Law Enforcement, announced that Edward Saul Arias Ducker, 40, a Honduran national, has been convicted on his plea to charges in a criminal Indictment in connection with a conspiracy to smuggle large quantities of queen conch taken from Honduran waters and laundered through Columbia to customers throughout Canada and the United States in violation of the laws, treaties, and regulations of the United States, contrary to the Lacey Act, Title 16, United States Code, Sections 3372(a)(1) and 3373(d)(1)(A), all in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 371.

The charges in the Indictment carry a possible sentence of up to five years of imprisonment, three years of supervised release, and a criminal fine of the greater of \$250,000, or twice the intended gain from the relevant conduct. Arias entered his guilty plea in Miami before United States District Court Judge Patricia A. Seitz, who set sentencing in the matter for May 15, 2009 at 8:30 am.

According to a Joint Factual Statement signed by the parties, and other

Court documents, from about May 2004 through November 2006, the defendant Arias, and other co-conspirators, including the owners of Caribbean Conch, Inc., and Placeres & Sons Seafood, Inc., companies located in Hialeah, Florida engaged in the business of selling seafood products, caused the shipment of more than 115,000 pounds of queen conch from Honduras and Columbia to Canada and the United States without proper permits. Arias's role included arranging for vessels under his control, on two separate occasions, to transfer Queen conch, harvested in Honduran waters, to Colombian vessels at sea, for landing and processing in Columbia.

The co-conspirators' activities were detected in March 2006 when a shipment of 2,100 pounds of queen conch, falsely labeled as "Frozen Whelk meat, product of Canada" was intercepted by a Fish & Wildlife Service Inspector at the Peace River bridge in Buffalo, New York, consigned to Caribbean Conch, Inc., in Hialeah. The Fish & Wildlife Service's National Forensic Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon conducted DNA analysis of the seafood product and confirmed it was queen conch, and not whelk as indicated on the shipping documents.

Investigative efforts by Canadian and American enforcement authorities led to the simultaneous execution of search warrants in both countries and the seizure of more than 63,000 pounds of illegally traded queen conch, all of which had originated with defendant Arias. According to Court records, the retail value of the smuggled queen conch was over \$1.725 million

Mr. Acosta commended the coordinated investigative efforts of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, NOAA Office For Law Enforcement, and Wildlife Officers of Environment Canada's Wildlife Enforcement Division, in Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver who brought the case to a successful conclusion. The case is being handled by AUSA Thomas Watts-FitzGerald.

A copy of this press release may be found on the website of the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida at www.usdoj.gov/usao/fls. Related court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Southern District of Florida at www.flsd.uscourts.gov or on <http://pacer.flsd.uscourts.gov>. Related information regarding the investigation by Environment Canada may be found on www.ec.gc.ca.

27. Thousands of pig-nosed turtles released

Markus Makur , The Jakarta Post , Timika | Fri, 03/06/2009 1:53 PM
| The Archipelago

The Papua Natural Resources Conservation Center (BKSDA) recently re-released over 10,000 pig-nosed turtles, an endemic species of the province, in to the Otakwa River in the Lorentz National Park.

The turtles were seized by the Mimika Police and members of the BKSDA team in Timika on Feb. 12. They were poached in East Mimika district in Asmat regency and were to be smuggled out of the province.

The pig-nosed turtles (*Carettochelys insculpta*) are protected under Law No. 7/1999 on preserved plant and animal species, local BKSDA head Prianto said in Timika recently.

Prianto said police had handed over the turtles to the BKSDA to save the animals. It later coordinated with PT Freeport Indonesia to place them temporarily under its care before they were released into the wild, as it lacked the necessary holding facilities.

"The turtles were kept temporarily at the reclamation pool area at Mile 21, thanks to PT Freeport Indonesia's environmental division," Prianto said.

Prianto said the protected turtles could only be found in areas around Timika and the southern parts of Papua. A local syndicate had intended to smuggle them to Taiwan and Thailand, where they are eaten.

He added that poaching was rampant in the southern parts of Papua, including in Merauke, Asmat and Mappi regencies, due to the high price pig-nosed turtles can fetch on the black market overseas.

"We believe they would be shipped to Java before being smuggled out of the country. Police have arrested three people who were transporting the turtles to Timika without proper documents," he said.

Prianto said his office lacked the means to return the turtles to the Lorentz National Park so it had coordinated with the company's environmental division to assist it in transporting and releasing them back in to the wild.

Manager of PT Freeport Indonesia's environmental division Andi Mukhsia told reporters that the initiative to release the turtles into their habitat was part of a cooperation agreement between the Papua BKSDA, the Lorentz National Park, the local forestry office, the police and the company.

"We responded seriously to the request by the BKSDA to temporarily keep the turtles for the sake of saving the endemic species of Papua. We are always committed to protecting and helping the government in rescuing rare and protected species in Papua. We are also committed to conserving Papua's endemic wildlife species," Mukhsia said.

He added that PT Freeport Indonesia had released as many as 3,000 pig-nosed turtles, returned from Java, to their natural habitat in Omawita and Fanamo villages in Far East Mimika district in 2006, which have since multiplied successfully thanks to routine care.

In 2007, PT Freeport Indonesia also returned a group of ground kangaroos to the Wasur National Park in Merauke regency.

"We are seriously committed to working together with the government to save rare species of Papua. We have also conducted a survey of various species of butterflies and birds in Mimika and will soon launch a book on crabs in Mimika," Mukhsia said.

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/03/06/thousands-pignosed-turtles-released.html>

28. DNA tests underway to identify origin of smuggled orang-utans

Recently, eleven smuggled orang-utans were seized by Thai officials in the southern province of Phuket. DNA tests are being conducted in a bid to help the apes be returned to their place of origin.

It was a chaotic scene as wildlife officials and veterinarians helped each other separate the orangutans from the cages for medical check-ups and blood tests for DNA identification.

The primates are seven times stronger than humans and more than five people were required to overpower just one orang-utan. Chloroform was needed for the bigger apes to reduce their pain and stress.

The DNA identification process will take at least one month to identify the orang-utans' origins. It will help determine whether the apes are native to Indonesia's Sumatra island or to Borneo, an island shared by Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia.

"Orang-utans are a protected animal in Indonesia and Malaysia. So it is illegal to import such an animal into Thailand," said Pornchai Patumrattanathan, Chief of Khao Prathap Chang Wildlife Breeding Research Station.

In all, 12 orang-utans underwent DNA testing, the 11 dumped on Phuket by the smugglers in fear of being caught and 1 confiscated at a resort in southern Chumphon province.

"Once we have the orang-utans' blood, we'll extract their DNA. We'll then multiply the DNA to decode the genetics. Then, we will find out whether or not they are of Borneo or Sumatra breed, so we can return them to their home of origin," Asso Prof Theerapol Sirinarumitr, a Forensic Veterinary Expert from Kasetsart University.

The confiscated orang-utans are between 4 to 8 years old. Normally, their life span is around 40 years in the wild and 50 years in captivity.

All the 12 orang-utans are currently at Khao Prathap Chang Wildlife Breeding Research Station in Thailand's central province of Ratchaburi, until the case is concluded.

Features : Last Update : 08:31:11 6 March 2009 (GMT+7:00)

<http://enews.mcot.net/view.php?id=8906>

29. Roscommon butterfly collector pleads to violating Endangered Species Act

by Dean Bohn | The Saginaw News
Friday March 06, 2009, 7:47 AM

BAY CITY -- A Roscommon dentist has pleaded guilty to charges of violating the Endangered Species Act -- by receiving illegal shipments of dried butterflies from overseas.

Kevin Rucinski, 49, on Wednesday pleaded guilty before federal District Court Judge Thomas L. Ludington.

Rucinski will pay a \$15,000 fine, \$5,000 in restitution and give up the insects, mostly butterflies.

He also faces a maximum sentence of a year behind bars.

"His sentence very likely will include a term of imprisonment," the plea deal says.

Court records show Rucinski received a package in January 2006 that was sent from Hong Kong. A label on the package stated the contents were stationery.

Officers with the federal Fish and Wildlife Service inspected the package to find dried butterflies.

An agent contacted Rucinski, telling him the action was illegal and directed him to a Web site that explained the laws of the Endangered Species Act.

Rucinski paid the fine and federal officials kept the intercepted package.

However, Rucinski continued to buy and import dried insects, including butterflies listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna or Flora -- as well as spiders, beetles and mollusk shells.

Court records say he made more than 1,000 successful bids for items on eBay between October 2005 and November 2006, mostly from sellers outside the United States.

Shipments to his home were weekly, court records say, detailing how Rucinski spent more than \$15,000 for the shipments, and avoided paying the \$55 importation fee per package and the then \$100 license fee -- totaling \$5,000 in payments to the federal government.

Records say he bought lots of up to 600 butterflies, and other times,

paid as much as \$150 for one butterfly.

A sentencing date has not yet been set.

http://www.mlive.com/news/saginaw/index.ssf/2009/03/roscommon_butterfly_collector.html

30. Man charged over attempt to smuggle pythons

5th March 2009, 12:30 WST

A man has been charged over an alleged attempt to smuggle 12 pythons out of WA.

The reptiles were discovered by police inside cloth bags in a vehicle that was stopped on the Eyre Highway in Eucla yesterday.

The driver, a 27-year-old man from New South Wales, is due to appear in the Kalgoorlie Magistrate's Court on charges relating to the export of fauna without a licence and the unlawful possession of protected fauna.

Department of Environment and Conservation senior investigator Rick Dawson said wildlife smuggling was an ongoing problem, with some pythons fetching up to \$1500 each on the black market.

"We take the unlawful possession of protected reptiles and reptile trafficking very seriously and will investigate and prosecute the capture and trafficking of wildlife in WA in a bid to end this cruel practice," Mr Dawson said.

"Unfortunately it is unlikely that these pythons can be released back into the wild due to the risk of introducing disease to wild populations but we will ensure they are well looked after."

The seizure included six children's pythons, four stimson's pythons, an olive python and a black-headed python.

The pythons are being transferred to Perth where they will undergo health checks.

PERTH
JAYNE RICKARD

<http://www.thewest.com.au/default.aspx?MenuID=77&ContentID=128345>

31. Seizure of smoked boas and porcupines

Some of the 33 smoked animal carcasses seized in Viry were destined for a restaurant in "les Pâquis" (Geneva).

Marie Prieur | 14.02.2009

During a road control in Viry, in Haute-Savoie (Eastern France) on 20 January 2009 at 13.30, French Customs officers stopped a vehicle with a '74' registration number driving towards Geneva. In the boot of the car, they discovered travel bags filled with - not hunting trophies as alleged by the driver - but smoked animal carcasses (on other words, smoked meat).

Amongst the 33 pieces found were three boas and three monkeys, but also 22 porcupines, all protected under the Convention of Washington. According to the person apprehended, these goods, having originated from Central Africa, came in through Roissy Airport (Paris) and were to be re-sold for consumption.

Some of the goods were destined for France, and the other part was to be sent to a restaurant in "the Pâquis" (Geneva, Switzerland). All goods were seized and the case has been passed on to the Prosecutor's Office.

31. a Saisie de boas et de porcs-épics fumés

INSOLITE | Une partie des 33 carcasses d'animaux boucanés saisies à Viry était destinée à un restaurant des Pâquis.

<http://www.tdg.ch:80/geneve/actu/saisie-boas-porcs-epics-fumes-2009-02-13>

Marie Prieur | 14.02.2009 | 00:00

La saisie n'est pas banale. Lors d'un contrôle routier à Viry, en Haute-Savoie, le 20 janvier à 13 h 30, les douaniers français arrêtent un véhicule immatriculé 74 et roulant en direction de Genève. Dans le coffre, ils découvrent des sacs de voyage remplis, non pas de trophées de chasse, comme le déclare l'automobiliste, mais de carcasses d'animaux boucanés, soit de la viande fumée.

Sur les 33 pièces, on dénombre trois boas, 3 singes mais aussi 22 porcs-épics. Or, tous ces animaux sont protégés par la Convention de Washington, chargée de sauvegarder les espèces animales menacées d'extinction en réglementant leur commerce international. Ce document stipule que pour les boas et les primates, une autorisation de certificat d'importation est obligatoire. Quant aux porcs-épics, leur importation est totalement interdite.

Selon les déclarations de l'intéressé, ces marchandises, originaires de Centrafrique, avaient transité par Roissy et étaient destinées à la revente à des fins de consommation. Une partie était réservée à la France et l'autre devait agrémenter la carte d'un restaurant situé aux Pâquis. Le tout a été saisi et le dossier a été transmis au Parquet.

32. United States v. Garrett Smith, No. 2:07-CR-00573 (E.D. Calif.), AUSA Robert Tice-Raskin (916) 554-2700.

On February 10, 2009, Garrett Smith pleaded guilty to conspiracy to smuggle wildlife. Smith originally was charged along with an unknown international co-conspirator, known as "Turtle Man," with a variety of wildlife smuggling violations. The 21-count indictment charged both defendants with conspiracy, smuggling protected tortoises, false labeling of wildlife, unlawful sale of wildlife, and money laundering. Smith was further charged with one count of destruction or removal of property to prevent seizure during execution of a search warrant.

According to the indictment, Smith, working with the "Turtle Man" (who is believed to reside in Singapore), engaged in a conspiracy to illegally smuggle wild tortoises into the United States for sale. The overseas conspirator and others acting at his direction obtained Burmese Star Tortoises and Indian Star Tortoises in Asia and sold them to Smith via e-mail transactions. The tortoises, illegally imported into this country

using misleading labels and without proper documentation, then were sold to distributors and customers across the United States. Approximately 30 protected Indian Star Tortoises and five protected Burmese Star Tortoises were imported illegally. Burmese Star adults can sell on the black market for up to \$7,000 each, with juveniles and sub-adults selling for approximately \$3,750. Sentencing is scheduled for April 21, 2009.

This case was investigated by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.
Rare Birds Confiscated in Russia

33. Six raptors seized

MOSCOW, March 19 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW - www.ifaw.org) announced today that 6 highly-endangered Gyrfalcons were confiscated by Russian authorities at a military airport near Moscow during an attempted smuggling operation. The Russian environmental watchdog Rosprirodnadzor (Russian Federal Agency for Nature Resources Supervision) has handed over the birds to IFAW and Moscow-based Wild Animal Rescue Center (WARC) for rehabilitation and possible release back to the wild. Gyrfalcons are prized by falconers and can fetch anywhere from \$10,000 to \$100,000 on the black market.

At the moment all 6 birds are alive and receiving veterinary care. The birds were discovered packed tightly in a cardboard box and in very poor condition. Only 1 of 6 birds has begun to eat on its own while the rest depend on force-feeds to survive.

As few as 2,000 Gyrfalcons remain in the wild in Russia. Their main habitat is above the Polar Circle, from the Kola Peninsula to Chukotka. Smugglers target female falcons due to their larger size, superior hunting skills, and higher prices. The demand for Gyrfalcons threatens the population with extinction.

"Immediately after the seizure, one of the birds became very weak and we were concerned that she would not make it through the first night. Gyrfalcons are listed in the Russia Red Book as critically endangered and completely banned for trade and export under CITES. Although the capture of this species in Russia is illegal, dozens of these wild birds are seized by customs, police or special service in Moscow airports annually," said IFAW's Grigory Tsidulko.

The birds will be treated and monitored for the next week. Once nursed back to health they will be flown 6,800 miles (11,000 km) to Kamchatka for release back to their original habitat.

<http://news.prnewswire.com/DisplayReleaseContent.aspx?ACCT=104&STORY=/www/story/03-19-2009/0004991520&EDATE=>

34. Nicaragua seizes eggs, turtles and iguanas

Police in Nicaragua seize 7,000 iguana eggs, 597 freshwater turtles and 232 iguanas. These animals are in demand for consumption during Lent (many traditional Catholics in the region don't eat "red meat" during this time so reptiles are targeted). River boats are being targeted for enforcement. Complete article in Spanish below.

19 March 2009

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Policia desarrolla operativos contra tráfico y comercialización de iguanas e hicoteas

**policia.jpgJUDICIALES
CON OCACION A LA SEMANA SANTA**

En los operativos se han incautado siete mil huevos de iguana, 597 hicoteas y 232 iguanas que son apetecidas para la preparación de platos típicos en varias ciudades de la región caribe en esta temporada.

Unidades adscritas a la Policía Nacional pertenecientes a la especialidad de Policía Ambiental y Ecológica en el Departamento de Bolívar, realizan operativos contra el tráfico indiscriminado de hicoteas e iguanas las cuales son apetecidas por las personas para la preparación de platos típicos en esta temporada religiosa.

Con relación a lo anterior los uniformados han incautado de 597 icoteas, 232 iguanas y siete mil 600 huevos de esta especie animal.

Las actividades se llevan a cabo en puestos de control fluviales a embarcaciones que se desplazan sobre los ríos y sus afluentes que atraviesan al departamento;

También se ejerce control sobre la vía Troncal de Occidente a vehículos de servicio público y particular para evitar el transporte de animales en vía de extinción, inmediatamente los policiales aprovechan el momento para entregar a los conductores mensajes de sensibilización para contribuir a la preservación de los animales silvestres.

Los animales fueron puestos a disposición de la Corporación Autónoma Regional del Canal del Dique Cardique y posteriormente regresarlos a su hábitad natural.

El Comandante del Departamento de Policía Bolívar Coronel Crisanto Álvarez Rojas, afirmó que los planes operativos se intensificarán en el departamento de Bolívar, con el fin de reducir al máximo la comercialización ilegal de fauna y flora silvestre en vía de extinción.

Actividad que causa daños irreparables al desarrollo natural del medio ambiente. Por lo anterior recomienda a la ciudadanía en general, abstenerse de comercializar con especies como Hicoteas, Boas, Babillas y huevos de iguanas, debido a la extinción acelerada este tipo de fauna, la cual es producida por la forma brutal en que la mano del hombre se aprovecha de ellas. Por su parte también invita a la comunidad en general a denunciar oportunamente las manifestaciones delictivas que afecten la seguridad ciudadana.

<http://maganguehoy.com/index.php?accion=leermas&Ed=2918-3>