

Man jailed for smuggling live endangered turtles and lizards (with photo)

A man who smuggled 18 live endangered turtles and three live endangered lizards into Hong Kong was convicted and sentenced to 30 months' imprisonment today (December 27) for violating the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586) and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance (Cap. 169).

A spokesman for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) said, "Customs officers intercepted a 27-year-old male passenger who arrived in Hong Kong from Bangkok, Thailand, at Hong Kong International Airport on May 14. Upon inspection, 18 live endangered turtles (including 12 Burmese starred tortoises, a radiated tortoise and five Asian leaf turtles) and three live endangered lizards (black tree monitors) were found packed around his outer thighs. The man was subsequently arrested. After investigation, an AFCD veterinary officer found that the animals were subjected to unnecessary suffering and their health and welfare had been neglected during the transportation."

Charges were laid against the man for breaching the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance, and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance, by illegally importing species listed under Appendix I and Appendix II of the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Burmese starred tortoise and radiated tortoise are listed in Appendix I while Asian leaf turtle and black tree monitor are listed in Appendix II) and animal cruelty. He pleaded guilty earlier and was convicted at the District Court today. The starting points for sentencing for the charges under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance were 36 months' and 12 months' imprisonment respectively. A one-third reduction was given for his guilty plea. The court ordered partly consecutive sentences of imprisonment for a total of 30 months behind bars.

According to the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance, any person importing, exporting or possessing specimens of endangered species not in accordance with the Ordinance commits an offence and will be liable to a maximum fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years upon conviction with the specimens forfeited.

Also, according to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance, any person by wantonly or unreasonably doing or omitting to do any act, causes any unnecessary suffering to any animal commits an offence and will be liable to a maximum fine of \$200,000 and imprisonment for three years upon conviction.

The spokesman stressed, "The Government is committed to protecting

endangered species and safeguarding animal welfare. The AFCD will remain vigilant and continue to monitor and combat illegal activities involving endangered species and animal cruelty."

Members of the public may call 1823 to report any suspected irregularities to the AFCD and visit the AFCD website: www.cites.hk regarding the control of endangered species in Hong Kong.

