

# Man sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment for illegal possession of regulated turtles

A man was found illegally possessing local wild and endangered turtles and sentenced to imprisonment for 15 months by the District Court today (September 20).

A spokesman for the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) noted that the 37-year old man offered regulated species for sale on his online social media platforms and instant messenger groups. AFCD staff disguised as clients and mounted an enforcement operation against the man with a big-headed turtle seized in April 2022. However, the man did not stop his illegal acts afterwards. The AFCD thus mounted a joint operation with the Police in May 2022 and seized 31 specimens of endangered turtles of unknown sources on a premises in Yau Tsim Mong District. All turtles concerned are species listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species as Endangered or Critically Endangered, as well as the Appendices to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and regulated under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586). These turtles include big-headed turtles (*Platysternon megacephalum*) and radiated tortoise (*Astrochelys radiata*), which are listed in CITES Appendix I, and Chinese three-striped box turtles (*Cuora trifasciata*, commonly known as golden coin turtle), Beale's eyed turtles (*Sacalia bealei*), yellow-margined box turtles (*Cuora flavomarginata*) and wattle-necked softshell turtle (*Palea steindachneri*), listed in CITES Appendix II. There are wild populations of big-headed turtles, Chinese three-striped box turtles and Beale's eyed turtles in Hong Kong and these species are protected under the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170). Upon scientific testing, all seized big-headed turtles and Beale's eyed turtles, as well as some of the Chinese three-striped box turtles were proven to be taken from the wild locally.

The man was prosecuted under five charges for illegal possession of endangered species, illegal sale of protected wild animal taken in Hong Kong and illegal possession of live protected wild animals taken in Hong Kong. The offender was convicted today at the District Court and sentenced to imprisonment for 15 months.

Any person contravening the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance will be liable to a maximum fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years upon conviction with the specimens forfeited. In addition, the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance also stipulates that unless otherwise permitted, no one shall hunt, wilfully disturb, buy, sell, export, offer for sale or export, possess or control protected wild animals (including all wild chelonians). Offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$100,000 and imprisonment for one year upon conviction.

The spokesman said, "This case involved the largest quantity of local specimens among all convicted cases of illegal possession of regulated species since the enhanced penalties under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance came into effect in 2018. Illegal possession of endangered species is a serious crime. Members of the public should not defy the law. The Government is committed to combating illegal hunting of and trading in wild animals to protect local wild species and endangered species. The AFCD will remain vigilant and continue monitoring various platforms and social media, and will proactively take action to deter illegal acts."

The AFCD encourages members of the public to call 1823 to report any suspected irregularities.