

Twenty-nine specimens of endangered turtles seized in joint operation by AFCD and Police (with photos)

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) conducted a joint operation with the Police on July 19. Twenty-nine specimens of endangered turtles, seven suspected turtle eggs and some tools suspected for hunting purposes were seized on some premises in Tai Po and a male suspect was arrested.

A spokesman for the AFCD said, "The Police received a complaint last October regarding suspected illegal hunting of wild turtles. After investigation and intelligence collection, the Police and the AFCD mounted a joint operation. Twenty-nine specimens, including 14 big-headed turtles (*Platysternon megacephalum*), which are listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Appendix I; two yellow-margined box turtles (*Cuora flavomarginata*), four Southeast Asian box turtles (*Cuora amboinensis*), two Giant Asian pond turtles (*Heosemys grandis*) and four wattle-necked softshell turtles (*Palea steindachneri*), which are listed in CITES Appendix II; and three Reeve's turtles (*Mauremys reevesii*), which are listed in CITES Appendix III, were found on the premises of a male suspect in Tai Po. All the turtles are listed as Endangered or Critically Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species, and regulated under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586). Furthermore, seven suspected turtle eggs and some tools suspected for hunting purposes were also seized. The investigation is still under way."

The spokesman went on that there are wild populations of big-headed turtles and Reeve's turtles in Hong Kong. All local wild chelonians are protected by the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170). Since the suspect has indicated in a group chat of a messaging application that turtles were available for sale but did not reveal the sources of the turtles, the AFCD is also investigating along the direction of whether illegal hunting and possession of protected wild animals stipulated under the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170) is involved.

The spokesman added, "Illegal possession of endangered species is a serious offence. Any person contravening the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586) will be liable to a maximum fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years upon conviction. The specimens will also be forfeited. In addition, the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170) 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 that the Government is committed to combatting illegal hunting of and trading in wild animals to protect local wild species and endangered species. The AFCD will continue to remain vigilant and monitor various platforms and social media, and proactively take action to deter illegal trade in wild fauna and flora species.

The AFCD appeals to members of the public to call 2150 6978 or email espint@afcd.gov.hk to report any suspected illegal trading of endangered species.

