

Woman sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment for illegally importing and cruelty to endangered turtles (with photos)

A 45-year-old Chinese woman who smuggled 64 endangered turtles into Hong Kong was convicted and sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment today (September 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).

On January 27, Customs officers intercepted a Chinese female passenger who arrived in Hong Kong from Tokyo at Hong Kong International Airport. Upon inspection, 64 turtles were found in her suitcase. Thirty-seven turtles were wrapped in socks and the remaining 27 were packed into two small plastic boxes. An officer of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) attended the scene and confirmed that all turtles (including 61 box turtles (*Terrapene* spp.) and three spotted turtles (*Clemmys guttata*)) were Appendix II species listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, and are regulated locally under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance. The woman was arrested at the scene.

Charges were laid against the woman for breaching the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance for illegally importing species listed under Appendix II of the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance and animal cruelty. She pleaded guilty and was convicted today at the District Court, which meted out a sentence of a total of 18 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 who, 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.

A spokesman for the AFCD 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.

