

Man sentenced to 30 months' imprisonment for illegally importing and causing cruelty to endangered turtles (with photos)

A 38-year-old Filipino man who smuggled 63 endangered turtles into Hong Kong was convicted and sentenced to 30 months' imprisonment today (March 28) for violating the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586) and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance (Cap. 169).

The male traveller transiting to the Philippines arrived at Hong Kong International Airport from Malaysia on March 31 last year. During transit, Customs found 63 live suspected scheduled endangered turtles in his three pieces of check-in baggage. Officers of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) were summoned to the scene and found that all the turtles had been wrapped with a layer of cloth and then a layer of transparent plastic wrap, or wrapped directly with a transparent plastic wrap, rendering them unable to freely stretch and move their limbs. There was also no food, water or moisturising materials in the baggage.

Upon inspection, the turtles were identified as 49 radiated tortoises (*Astrochelys radiata*) and 14 batagurs (*Batagur baska*), which are endangered species listed in Appendix I and Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, respectively, and regulated locally under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance. Both species are listed as Critically Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species.

The man was charged with illegal import of an Appendix I species, illegal import of an Appendix II species and cruelty to animals. He was convicted at the District Court and was sentenced to 30 months behind bars today.

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 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.

