

Public reminded not to bring in endangered species without required licence (with photos)

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the Hong Kong Customs today (January 17) reminded travellers not to bring endangered species into Hong Kong without a required licence when returning from visits to other places.

Under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586), the import, export, re-export or possession of endangered animals and plants, including their parts and/or derivatives, are subject to control under a licensing system.

An AFCD spokesman noted that more than 700 seizures were made at customs checkpoints in 2019. Some commonly encountered examples are American ginseng, orchids (including artificially propagated species such as the moth orchid), ivory, live reptiles, pangolin scales and dried seahorses.

The spokesman stressed that as some plant and animal species are facing the threat of extinction due to over-exploitation, the import and export of such species are regulated under an international convention. The penalties under the Ordinance have been increased since May 2018 to provide a stronger deterrent. Any person found guilty of contravening the licensing requirements, even for non-commercial purposes, is liable to a maximum fine of \$10,000,000 and imprisonment for 10 years. The specimens will also be forfeited upon conviction. The AFCD and Customs will continue to work closely and step up their enforcement work in combating the illegal trade in endangered species.

As the Chinese New Year is drawing near, the AFCD appeals to travellers to pay more attention when buying plant and animal products as souvenirs abroad. "Since the new penalties came into effect, penalties laid by the court were significantly increased and we have observed a considerable number of imprisonment sentences. For example, a traveller was sentenced to an imprisonment of two weeks for illegal import of an ivory bracelet into Hong Kong while another traveller was sentenced to four weeks' imprisonment for illegal import of 30 grams of sea turtle accessories. As it might not be easy to know which wildlife souvenirs are from endangered species, travellers are advised not to buy such items if they are not sure if the items are subject to control," said the spokesman.

For details of the controls on endangered species, please call 1823 or visit the website www.cites.hk.

