

Wildlife Trafficking Investigations 2006-2010 Highlights

Elephant Ivory

- Service special agents and the Thai Royal Police worked together to secure a U.S. indictment of two businessmen and 4 arrests in Thailand in a case that exposed transcontinental trafficking in elephant ivory. The ivory was smuggled from Africa into Thailand by Thai operatives who then sold it to clients in the United States and other countries.
- A Canadian citizen with ties to Cameroon was sent to prison for five years and fined \$100,000 for smuggling ivory from that country to the United States. This woman ran a sophisticated smuggling operation that utilized local artists and craftsmen in Cameroon, operatives within international shipping companies, contacts in the illegal ivory trade, her business in Canada, and partners in three countries.
- Six subjects were arrested for conspiring to smuggle large quantities of African elephant ivory from Ivory Coast, Cameroon, and Uganda into the United States via New York. These individuals shipped ivory that was declared as, and had been coated to look like, wooden statues, wooden musical instruments, and wooden snake handicrafts. Seized ivory from just one shipment alone was appraised at a market value of \$165,000.
- A Cameroon national arrested for smuggling 36 elephant ivory carvings in his baggage pleaded guilty to felony charges. He was sentenced to 16 months in prison and fined \$5,000.
- A man who traded African elephant ivory on the internet was sentenced to 10 months in prison in the United Kingdom after a cooperative U.S./U.K. investigation uncovered his online wildlife trafficking operation.

Marine Resources

- Seven individuals arrested after a Service undercover investigation exposed large-scale trafficking in sea turtle shell and shell products from China and sea turtle skins and leather goods from Mexico were successfully prosecuted. Prison sentences, which ranged from time served to two years, totaled nine years. More than a dozen additional defendants were also charged in the case.
- Operation Shell Game (a joint U.S./Canada investigation of illegal queen conch meat trade) secured the multiple prosecutions in both countries. Penalties included more than \$158,000 in fines and the forfeiture of some 80,000 pounds of queen conch meat. The smuggling involved nine companies in the United States, Canada, Haiti, Honduras, and Colombia.
- A joint Service/NOAA-Fisheries investigation secured guilty pleas from a Florida man and his two seafood companies for illegally importing queen conch and spiny lobster from the Bahamas that had been harvested and exported in violation of that country's wildlife laws. The defendant was fined \$75,000 and must forfeit \$13,930 worth of seized seafood and the \$300,000 sport fishing vessel used to transport the smuggled goods.
- Two Taiwanese nationals pleaded guilty in Federal court in the U.S. Virgin Islands in connection with a conspiracy to smuggle internationally protected black coral to the United

States from mainland China. The subjects will serve prison terms of 30 and 20 months; each also faces a \$12,500 fine and a three-year ban on shipping wildlife to the United States.

- A German national indicted for smuggling more than 40 tons of CITES-protected coral rock from the Philippines was arrested and successfully prosecuted in the United States. After pleading guilty to Federal charges, he was fined \$35,000.
- A Miami businessman who illegally imported seven commercial shipments of CITES-protected live corals from Indonesia without permits paid a \$49,400 penalty.
- A Houston businessman who illegally imported commercial quantities of coral merchandise from China paid a \$10,000 penalty and forfeited 1,383 strands of coral beads.

Leopard Trophies & Skins

- A Service investigation exposed guides and hunters who smuggled leopard trophies out of South Africa through Zimbabwe to the United States using fraudulent CITES permits. Eight individuals (including two South African guides, five U.S. hunters, and an American taxidermist) were successfully prosecuted. One guide served 18 months in prison; together the other seven defendants paid more \$85,000 in fines and restitution.
- A Nigerian resident who smuggled four leopard skins into San Francisco by sewing them into three bags and was later caught smuggling numerous big cat teeth in his underwear pleaded guilty to felony charges. He was sent to prison for six months and paid \$10,000 in restitution.
- An Atlanta resident pleaded guilty and was fined \$20,000 for importing a leopard skin and skull from South Africa with false CITES permits; he must also forfeit the trophy.
- A woman in Oregon was successfully prosecuted for importing three leopard skins.

Marine Mammals

- A multi-year Service/NOAA-Fisheries investigation exposed the smuggling of hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of sperm whale ivory from the United Kingdom and Ukraine along with illegal interstate sale and purchase by both dealers and end-users in the United States. To date, the case has secured the successful prosecution of five individuals in the United States (including a Massachusetts scrimshaw artist), the conviction of an ivory supplier in the United Kingdom, and the U.S. indictment of a Ukrainian national.
- A joint Service/Environment Canada investigation of the unlawful importation of walrus trophies taken in Canada resulted in the collection of more than \$13,000 in fines and the recovery of walrus parts from hunters in California, Texas, and Montana.

Birds

- A California man who smuggled live eagle owl eggs from Austria pleaded guilty to smuggling and was sentenced to 21 months in prison and fined \$5,000.
- Two men who smuggled CITES-protected live birds from Vietnam to Los Angeles face criminal prosecution on multiple felony counts.
- A smuggler who was caught with 95 live conures in his vehicle after crossing the U.S.-Mexico border pleaded guilty to smuggling charges.

Reptiles

- A reptile smuggler based in Washington State was sent to prison for two years for the unlawful importation of more than 230 reptiles from Thailand; the shipments, valued at over \$30,000, entered the United States in falsely labeled express mail packages.
- A Virginia man who pleaded guilty to illegally importing CITES-listed tortoises was fined \$15,000.
- A California man was convicted for his role in an international conspiracy to smuggle wild-caught protected Burmese and Indian star tortoises from Singapore for distribution in the United States.
- A cooperative U.S./Canadian undercover investigation exposed the smuggling of protected reptiles from Canada to dealers and collectors in the United States.

Butterflies

- A Japanese butterfly smuggler who tried to sell a Service undercover agent more than \$294,000 worth of rare butterflies was sent to prison for 21 months and fined \$30,000.
- A Michigan businessman who smuggled thousands of CITES-protected butterflies into the United States from Canada pleaded guilty to violating U.S. wildlife laws; he must pay \$20,000 in fines and restitution and forfeit approximately \$18,000 worth of wildlife.

Endangered Species Parts, Products, and “Art”

- A mother and daughter from St. Paul, Minnesota, pleaded guilty to smuggling CITES protected wildlife parts and products (including Asian elephant and leopard cat) from Southeast Asia. The mother ran a retail sales booth at an international market where she sold smuggled wildlife for medicinal use while the daughter financed several of her mother’s smuggling trips to Laos. Penalties included a \$9,000 fine and community service.
- Another Minnesota woman pleaded guilty to Federal felony charges, admitting that she smuggled Asian elephant parts and dead exotic birds into the United States.
- The owners of a Chicago art gallery pleaded guilty to smuggling and selling more than \$250,000 worth elephant ivory carvings and other items made from protected species.
- An Ontario resident charged in both the United States and Canada for wildlife smuggling via the internet was fined \$10,000 after pleading guilty to one U.S. felony count; his transactions involved items made from protected species.
- A Philadelphia storeowner who smuggled and sold items made from endangered species (including ivory tusks and a gorilla skull) pleaded guilty to a 10-count indictment.

Other Wildlife

- A Russian immigrant in Minnesota whose internet business acted as a go-between for caviar from former Soviet countries being smuggled through Asia and on to U.S. buyers pleaded guilty to felony charges and was fined \$30,000.
- A New York resident pleaded guilty to smuggling in connection with the illegal importation of bushmeat from Guinea; contraband included baboon and green monkey parts.

- Two Washington State women who conspired to smuggle a live rhesus macaque monkey from Thailand were found guilty at trial and sentenced to serve prison terms and pay \$4,500 in restitution.

Plants

- A business and its chief executive officer pleaded guilty to smuggling 350 CITES-protected orchids into the United States; fines and restitution total more than \$30,000.
- A well-known Miami orchid expert pleaded guilty to Federal charges in connection with the unlawful importation of over 1,400 orchid plants from the Philippines. CITES documents and other materials presented on import falsely identified the orchids as artificially propagated when in fact they had been collected from the wild.
- An Arizona man who smuggled 14 CITES Appendix I orchids into the United States from Indonesia by mail was ordered to pay \$10,000 in fines and restitution.
- A Los Angeles resident who pleaded guilty to three felony counts in connection with illegal trafficking in CITES-protected cycads from Zimbabwe was fined \$7,500.