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Wildlife group urges stronger sentence against man who illegally kept wildlife



SINGAPORE — The Agri-food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) will look into the call by a wildlife advocacy group to appeal against the sentence handed out last week to a man who illegally kept 32 wild animals, some of which are endangered.

BY NEO CHAI CHIN - FEBRUARY 13

SINGAPORE — The Agri-food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) will look into the call by a wildlife advocacy group to appeal against the sentence handed out last week to a man who illegally kept 32 wild animals, some of which are endangered.

Urging the AVA to appeal against the S\$41,000 fine imposed on Ong Ming Shiang, 33, the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES) today (Feb 13) said the sentence was low given the circumstances, and inadequate as a general deterrent.

Global trends and public policy also demand the imposition of stricter penalties, said ACRES, noting that the fine was less than 10 per cent of the maximum Ong was facing. He was also facing up to two years' jail but was not given a custodial sentence, ACRES added.

"We hope that AVA will file an appeal," said ACRES chief executive Louis Ng.

Singapore is often labelled an illegal wildlife trading hub, and "we must send out a strong message that Singapore is committed and serious in combating this illegal trade and ensure individuals involved in this trade are not only caught but given effective deterrent sentences," he added.

ACRES sent a letter dated today to the AVA containing detailed information that it said could be used to file an appeal against Ong's sentence.

A copy was also provided to the Attorney-General. Among other points, ACRES noted that there was evidence to suggest Ong kept the animals not just as pets, but for sale as well. It also cited a previous case in which illegal animals had been kept as pets but a jail term was imposed.

Responding to media queries, the AVA said it has received ACRES' letter and will be looking into the request.

Ong's fine is the highest penalty imposed on a private individual for possessing illegal wildlife. He had kept 32 animals including three ball pythons, a Sunda slow loris, two Indian star tortoises and three leopard tortoises in a Toa Payoh North flat. Nineteen of the animals were endangered. The animals had been brought in without permits, and the AVA had inspected the flat after a tip-off and seized the animals in June last year.

He was sentenced last Thursday under the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act and the Wild Animals and Birds Act.

ACRES' call came a day after it was alerted to a Bengal slow loris abandoned in Bedok reservoir by a member of the public. The creature, a critically endangered species not native to Singapore, was found severely dehydrated, and later died at ACRES' wildlife rescue centre despite critical care and efforts to re-hydrate it.

The AVA said it will be investigating the case.

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