

PRESS RELEASE



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UNDERCOVER INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE IN SINGAPORE

SINGAPORE 22 July - The Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres) today released the results of their undercover investigations into the illegal wildlife trade in Singapore. An alarmingly high number of illegal animals were found being traded openly. In total, 111 animals were recorded, mostly of species which face a high risk of extinction in the wild according to the World Conservation Union (IUCN).

Most wild animals are prohibited as pets in Singapore. The list of prohibited species includes primates, amphibians, reptiles (except the red-eared slider), many species of birds and some types of fish. It is illegal to import, export, or introduce these species without a permit. The sale or even display of these animals is an offence under Singapore law.

From June until July 2005, Acres surveyed a total of 100 pet shops throughout Singapore, of which 20 per cent were found with illegal animals on sale. A total of five species of non-native animals were found traded, in contravention of local laws and international agreement. The Chinese softshell turtle (*Pelodiscus sinensis*), the Chinese stripe-necked turtle (*Ocadia sinensis*), the pig-nosed turtle (*Carettochelys insculpta*), the Australian snake-necked turtle (*Chelodina longicollis*) and an unidentified species of turtle were found on sale in pet shops.

Pet shops in possession of the above species contravene the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act, the Wild Animals and Bird Act and the Birds and Animals Act. The Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act is our national legislation that gives effect to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), to control import and export of endangered species in Singapore.

The Chinese stripe-necked turtle is a species not before encountered by Acres in the illegal trade. This species is listed as endangered on the IUCN redlist and face a very high risk of extinction in the wild but was, however, found openly on sale in Singapore. The Chinese softshell turtle and the pig-nosed turtle similarly face a high risk of extinction in the wild.

On 27 June 2005, officers from the Acres Wildlife Rescue Team and the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) raided three pet shops found selling illegal animals. A total of forty seven animals were confiscated.

Globally, the illegal trading in wildlife, timber and other natural resources is now surpassed only by the trafficking in drugs and weapons. The ongoing illegal pet trade has severe consequences for the survival of every species involved. More than half of the smuggled animals die, and the surviving animals mostly end up living in bad conditions or are mistreated.

Acres is calling for stricter enforcement in Singapore as well as the amendment of the Endangered Species Act, to eradicate the loopholes and increase the penalties. It is clear that the current penalties do not act as a deterrent against the trafficking of protected species. Acres believes that the main loophole in this Act is that it is based on a per species basis. As such, all a trafficker has to do is traffic only one species at a time and the penalties would be minimal. Acres proposes the amendment of this Act to a per animal basis and for wildlife parts, a per kilogram basis.

The amendment of the law will send a strong message that the Government takes a serious view on the illegal trade.

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Notes to editors

1. The following areas in Singapore were covered during the undercover surveys: Alexandra, Ang Mo Kio, Bedok, Bukit Merah, Bukit Timah, Buona Vista, Chinese Garden, Clementi, Eunos, Geylang, Hougang, Jurong East, Jurong West, Khatib, Little India, Orchard, Pasir Ris, Sembawang, Siglap, Tampines, Tanjong Katong, Tengah, Toa Payoh, Toh Tuck, Upper Serangoon, Yio Chu Kang and Yishun
2. Founded by a group of Singaporeans in 2001, Acres is a local charity aimed at fostering respect and compassion for all animals. Acres's approach to raising animal welfare issue is to focus on education and back up our advocacy with scientific clarity accrued through research. Using our findings, we will inform the public and work towards synergistic partnerships with the authorities and related parties to improve animal welfare.
3. To date, the work of Acres has led to the confiscation of more than 100 animals from the illegal wildlife trade. Animals confiscated include primates, reptiles and spiders.