

PUBLISHED MAY 7, 2015, 7:21 AM SGT

AVA rescues monkey, civet caged at workshop

A MONKEY and civet kept illegally at a car workshop were yesterday seized by the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) and taken to the Singapore Zoo, following a tip-off from a local wildlife rescue group.

The pig-tailed macaque and common palm civet were found in two cages at the back of the Hougang workshop.

When The Straits Times visited SMC Auto Engineering Works in Defu Lane 9 during the AVA raid yesterday, the macaque was swinging around the cage and had a thick metal chain around its neck. The civet, which is native to Singapore and usually found in trees and high places, was curled up motionless in a corner.

Both cages were about thigh high and an arm's length wide.

Mr Louis Ng, chief executive of the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres), the group that alerted the authorities, said both animals were kept under poor conditions.

Civets are nocturnal creatures, so keeping one where there is a lot of noise and light is cruel, while confining the macaque to a small cage is a form of abuse, he said.

Acres took cheek swabs from the macaque, which is not native to Singapore. The DNA collected could reveal where it came from, and can hopefully be returned to.

The group has successfully returned monkeys to India and Africa in the past. Mr Ng believes the macaque is likely to have been secured through the illegal wildlife trade, which animal groups say is thriving here, given Singapore's status as a global port.

Nanyang Technological University Assistant Professor Michael Gumert, who studies macaque behaviour, said: "Monkeys learn socially, and without experience with a troop, they would be unable to learn how to navigate, find food, or detect dangers in the wild."

A check with the Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority listed SMC Auto's owner as Mr Low Eng Pau, who could not be reached. Those working at nearby firms said they did not know about the animals. Mr George Tan, the owner of recycling firm Fook Seng Fatt across the road, said SMC Auto had moved there about three months ago.

People cannot keep, trap or kill wild animals here without a licence. Those found guilty under the Wild Animals and Birds Act face a maximum fine of \$1,000 per animal.

The pig-tailed macaque is a protected species. Those found with such a species can be charged under the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act, which carries a maximum penalty of a \$50,000 fine per specimen and a two-year jail term.

An AVA spokesman warned: "Wild animals are not suitable pets as some may transmit zoonotic diseases to humans. Wild animals that are non-native to Singapore may also be a threat to our biodiversity if released into the environment."

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