

Singapore

What happens to illegal live animals seized in Singapore?

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Apart from locally rescued animals, confiscated animals, those coming out of the illegal trade, are also brought to Wildlife Reserves Singapore by the AVA.



SINGAPORE: The Singapore Zoo is home to more than 300 species of animals, and more than 20 per cent of them are considered endangered. It also takes in animals that were victims of the illegal wildlife trade.

"Wildlife Reserves Singapore is actually the designated rescue centre of Singapore," said Dr Sonja Luz, director of conservation and research at Wildlife Reserves Singapore (WRS).

According to her, this means that apart from locally rescued animals, confiscated animals, those coming out of the illegal trade, will also be brought to WRS by the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA).

Some of the animals placed in the zoo include the Indian Star Tortoise, which was illegally trafficked.

Most of the animals confiscated and handed over to Wildlife Reserves Singapore are turtles and tortoises, as they are usually taped tightly and packed into suitcases.

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Singapore ranks among the world's top 10 hubs for illegal wildlife trade, ironically due to its "clean reputation and efficient port", the World Wildlife Fund said.

From the start of the year until May, the AVA reported that it has dealt with 21 cases, involving illegal live animals being seized, compared with a total of 25 confiscations the whole of last year.



WRS' 'You Buy They Die' anti-wildlife crime campaign. (Screengrab of WRS website)

WRS also said it is using gory images to get people to say no to the illegal wildlife trade. Said Dr Luz: "One of the major campaigns we've done recently is the 'You Buy They Die' campaign, started last year. It was a first for us, because we've been very bold in the way we designed the campaign.

"Usually as a zoo, we want to give people a nice experience when they come to us and have fun and learn about nature, and often the reality of conservation and illegal trade in particular is very dark and very brutal."

While the response so far has been encouraging, the demand for exotic animals is still high.

Wildlife rescue group Animal Concerns Research & Education Society (ACRES) said it typically rescues one to two per month, and even up to six reptiles that were most probably kept as pets, before being abandoned in places like parks, dustbins and void decks.

Ms Anbarasi Boopal, Deputy Chief Executive of ACRES, said: "There is still a continued demand for keeping these exotic animals as pets here in Singapore, that is why we still rescue some of the animals that are really small.

"Most of them come in in very bad conditions. These are wild animals, so to meet their needs in captivity is almost impossible. They come in with shell deformities, injured and run over on the roads because of the unsuitable environment which they are released into, and they come in with vitamin deficiencies, sometimes even turning the situation into a fatal condition."

Although close to 200 rescued reptiles are being cared for at ACRES, the wildlife rescue centre said it is fast running out of space.

The cost of running the facility is also high, at about S\$50,000 a month, and it depends solely on donations. The plan is to keep the animals until they can be repatriated back to their countries of origin.

But so far, there has been no success. "Unlike the animals that are confiscated at our ports and airports, these animals were found already in Singapore where the origin of these animals are unknown," Ms Boopal said.

"So, that's the biggest challenge, where we're trying to find out where they're from - even using DNA studies - and find a suitable habitat for release, because it needs to be a protected area, so these animals do not end up in the wildlife trade again."

ACRES said its aim is for Singapore to not need a wildlife rescue centre, as this would mean that the country has successfully put an end to illegal wildlife trade.