

# Hong Kong to return rare Philippine turtles

April 25 2012

---



File photo shows a Philippine pond turtle at the Manila Zoo. Thirty-six turtles seized from smugglers, including 20 of one of the world's rarest species, are to be returned from Hong Kong to the Philippines, an official said Wednesday.

Thirty-six live turtles seized from a smuggler, including 20 of one of the world's rarest species, are to be returned from Hong Kong to the Philippines, officials said on Wednesday.

It will mark the first time a protected Philippine species seized from the [illegal wildlife trade](#) abroad has been returned, Luz Corpuz, deputy wildlife chief of the environment department told AFP.

Hong Kong will hand the 20 pond [turtles](#) and 16 South Asian box turtles to Philippine enforcement officers on Friday, Corpuz and a spokeswoman for Hong Kong's agriculture, fisheries and conservation department both said.

"They are Philippine species, and returning them back to their natural habitat is a big accomplishment for our [conservation efforts](#)," Corpuz said of the Philippine pond turtles, which are found only in the island of Palawan.

"In the past we had routinely allowed protected wildlife confiscated abroad to be turned over to their local shelters because we do not have money.

"This time we're lucky because we have a little money left and we would like to enhance our enforcement activities."

Swiss-based International Union for the [Conservation of Nature](#) lists the 21-centimetre (8.3-inch) pond turtle, *Siebenrockiella leytensis*, as "critically endangered" and "one of the rarest and least known turtles in the world".

The 20-centimetre box turtle, *Cuora amboinensis*, is listed as "vulnerable" in the Philippines, though it is also found in other [tropical countries](#) of Southeast Asia.

The Hong Kong spokeswoman said a [Chinese man](#) was arrested at the Hong Kong International Airport on February 8 after the turtles were seized from his luggage.

He was charged and fined HK\$8,000 (\$1,031) under local laws aimed at protecting endangered [species](#) of animals and plants.

The turtles will be released back into the wild in Palawan, Corpuz said.

Trafficking in pond turtles is punishable by a six-year prison term and a million-peso (\$23,447) fine in the Philippines, but Corpuz admitted the government did not have enough resources to enforce the law.

"We don't know who were responsible for smuggling them to Hong Kong, but the turtles could have most likely ended up as medicine, as pets, or as food in Chinese restaurants," she said.

(c) 2012 AFP

Citation: Hong Kong to return rare Philippine turtles (2012, April 25) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-04-hong-kong-rare-philippine-turtles.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.