

H.K. to return over 100 rare reptiles to Philippines

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Scores of endangered reptiles, such as this Mindanao water monitor lizard, which were smuggled into Hong Kong will be returned to their native Philippines on Wednesday, officials said.

Scores of endangered reptiles including turtles and a python that were smuggled into Hong Kong will be returned to their native Philippines on Wednesday, officials said.

A 22-year-old man is serving a six-week prison sentence for smuggling the 105 reptiles into the city packed in plastic containers inside his checked-in luggage on June 14, the officials said.

The 39 Philippine pond turtles, 46 Southeast Asian box turtles, 19 Mindanao water monitor lizards and one [reticulated python](#) required [specialist care](#) before they could be shipped home.

"It was difficult for them to breathe," Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden head of fauna conservation Gary Ades said.



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"Many of the animals when they arrived were underweight and dehydrated and so they required treatment," Ades said, adding most of them had recovered.

Trade in the reptiles is restricted under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of [Wild Fauna](#) and Flora (CITES), although it is legal to keep them as pets in Hong Kong.

"By returning these reptiles to their native range, we can sustain populations in the wild," Kadoorie Farm conservation officer Paul Crow said.

Hong Kong endangered species protection officer Alfred Wong said the [reptiles](#) most likely would have entered the pet market.

Customs officials arrested the same man in February for smuggling 36 live turtles from the Philippines into Hong Kong. He was fined HK\$8,000 (\$1,000) for that offence.

Trafficking in pond turtles is punishable by a six-year [prison term](#) and a million-peso (\$23,000) fine in the Philippines, but authorities say they lack resources to properly enforce the law.

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