

Almost 500 protected turtles found in Thai airport bags

November 7 2013



A Thai official displays seized Black Pond turtles after they were discovered in suitcases at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport on November 8.

Thai customs have found over a thousand turtles and tortoises in airport luggage in a week, including a haul of 470 creatures Friday as conservationists warn of "skyrocketing" smuggling for the pet trade.

Officials at Suvarnabhumi Airport said a 25-year-old Pakistani man had been arrested on suspicion of wildlife trafficking after four suitcases on a flight from Lahore were found to contain the protected black pond turtles.

The discovery came after authorities found 423 protected tortoises and 52 black pond turtles stashed in unclaimed bags on a carousel on Wednesday after arriving on a flight from Bangladesh.

On Sunday, customs at the same airport found 80 more protected turtles on luggage also from Bangladesh.

"It does seem that the number of turtles and tortoises coming out of South Asia is skyrocketing, especially with regards to the black pond turtle," said Chris Shepherd of Wildlife trade protection group Traffic.

The rare black pond turtle originates in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal. International trade of the creatures is forbidden.

Shepherd said Thailand was a "globally significant trade hub" for turtles and tortoises and urged authorities to do more to find and prosecute high level smugglers.

"Few, if any, significant traders or kingpins in the tortoise and turtle racket have been penalised," he told AFP.

Thailand, seen as a hub for traffickers of many endangered species, came under pressure over the rampant smuggling of ivory through its territory during Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) talks in Bangkok this year.

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