

Cambodia rescues half a tonne of smuggled tortoises, pythons

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Cambodian authorities take pictures of smuggled elongated tortoises after the animals were confiscated in Kandal province on March 29, 2016

Cambodian authorities rescued more than half a tonne of live tortoises and pythons stolen by smugglers, a forestry official said Tuesday, the latest haul in a country with a thriving illegal wildlife trade.

The animals—102 elongated [tortoises](#) and 17 pythons—weighed a total

of 570 kilos.

They were confiscated Monday afternoon from a cargo truck in Cambodia's Kandal province, forestry official Y Sophy told AFP.

"They were being transported to Phnom Penh where they would then be smuggled to Vietnam," he said, adding the creatures were scooped up from Cambodia's Battambang province.

No arrests were made as the truck's driver fled after being pulled over, the official said.

The rescued tortoises and pythons are now with a conservation group that will release them back into the wild.

The elongated tortoise is listed as an endangered species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

It faces dire over-harvesting for food and Asia's animal trade, which fuels a regional demand for exotic pets and traditional medicine.

Cambodia's [black market](#) for trafficked wildlife is enabled by corrupt authorities and weak legislation in a country rich with biodiversity.

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