

Japanese man held for wildlife smuggling in Indonesia

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An Indonesian customs officer displays a reptile after authorities arrested a suspected wildlife smuggler from Japan

A Japanese man has been arrested in Indonesia for allegedly trying to smuggle hundreds of reptiles out of the archipelago, including snakes, lizards and turtles, authorities and environmentalists said Friday.

Katsuhide Naito, believed to be a major player in the wildlife-smuggling trade, was detained at Jakarta's main airport as he was about to board a flight to Tokyo with over 250 animals hidden in his bags.

"Officials became suspicious seeing him with so many suitcases," Tisna Nando, spokeswoman for NGO the Wildlife Conservation Society, which was involved in the investigation, told AFP.

"After they were opened, we found hundreds of reptiles, most of them were alive."

The reptiles were stuffed into four suitcases and one box and four were dead, said Nando.

Ruchyana, an official from the airport operator who like many Indonesians goes by one name, said the 51-year-old was caught late Monday carrying protected species including green tree pythons, lizards from Borneo island and pig-nosed turtles.

Before arriving in Jakarta, Naito had been in Medan, on the jungle-clad Indonesian island of Sumatra. He could face up to three years in prison if found guilty of breaking Indonesian wildlife laws.

The Wildlife Conservation Society believes Naito was part of a larger wildlife-smuggling syndicate.

"We believe he is a big player and part of a syndicate which has been active in wildlife trading for more than 12 years," Nando said.

He was arrested in 2005 in Australia for attempting to smuggle reptiles into the country from Southeast Asia, she said.

Indonesia is home to vast rainforests and a kaleidoscope of exotic

animals. But [wildlife](#) smuggling is common, with environmentalists saying a lack of resources and corruption are undermining law enforcement efforts.

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