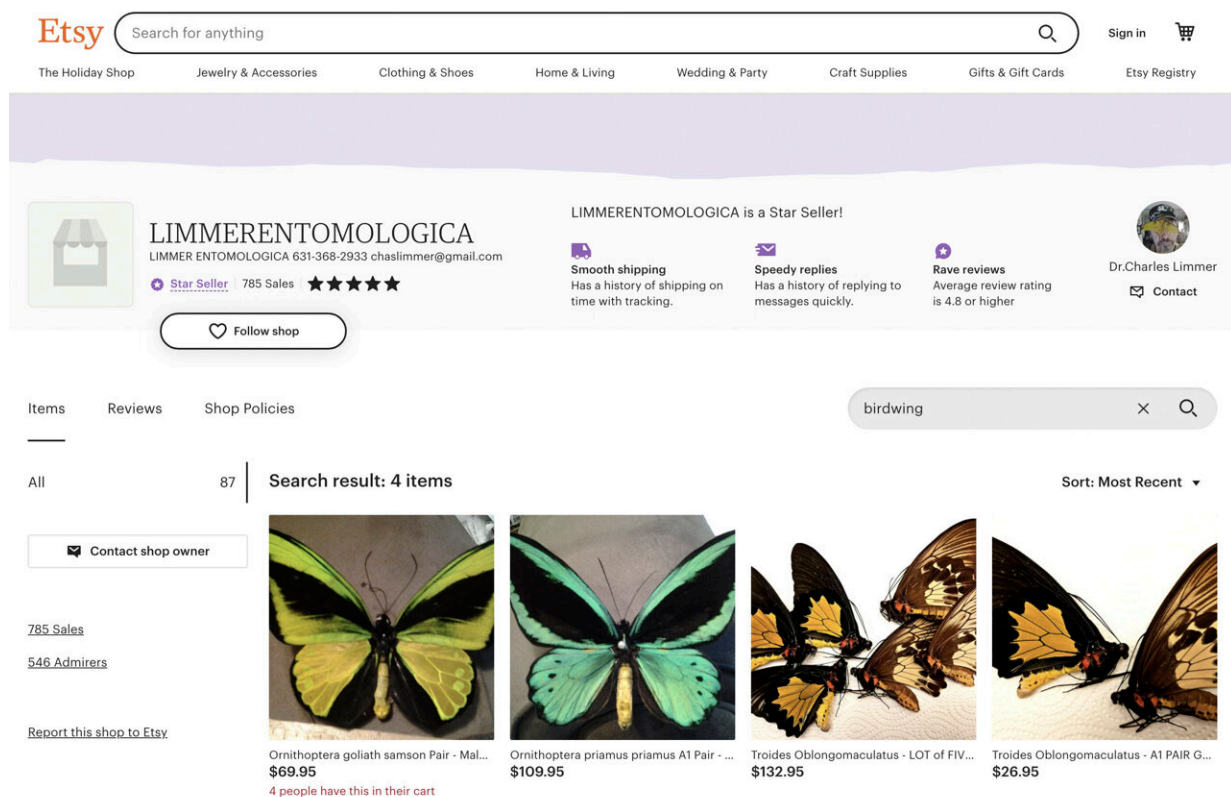


Rare birdwing butterflies star in federal case against NY man accused of trafficking insects

October 11 2023, by Bobby Caina Calvan



This screengrab of the Etsy page of a seller going by “LIMMERENTOMOLOGICA” shows four birdwing specimens currently on sale online. The U.S. Attorney's Office in Brooklyn said Tuesday, Oct. 10, 2023, that Charles Limmer made tens of thousands of dollars over the past year by illegally trafficking scores of flying insects, including endangered birdwings — whose numbers have fallen because of diminishing habitat and illegal poaching. The six-count indictment against Limmer, 75, accuses him of working with

overseas collaborators to smuggle some 1,000 lepidoptera, including some of the rarest and most endangered moths and butterflies in the world. Credit: Etsy via AP

Birdwing butterflies are among the rarest and largest to grace the planet, their 10-inch (25.4-centimeter) wingspans flapping through the rainforests of Southeast Asia and Australia. Their sheer size can make them hard to miss.

But the U.S. attorney's office in Brooklyn says Charles Limmer made tens of thousands of dollars over the past year by illegally trafficking flying insects, including endangered birdwings—whose numbers have fallen because of diminishing habitat and illegal poaching.

Trafficking of wildlife collectibles has become a serious and lucrative enterprise, despite a worldwide crackdown.

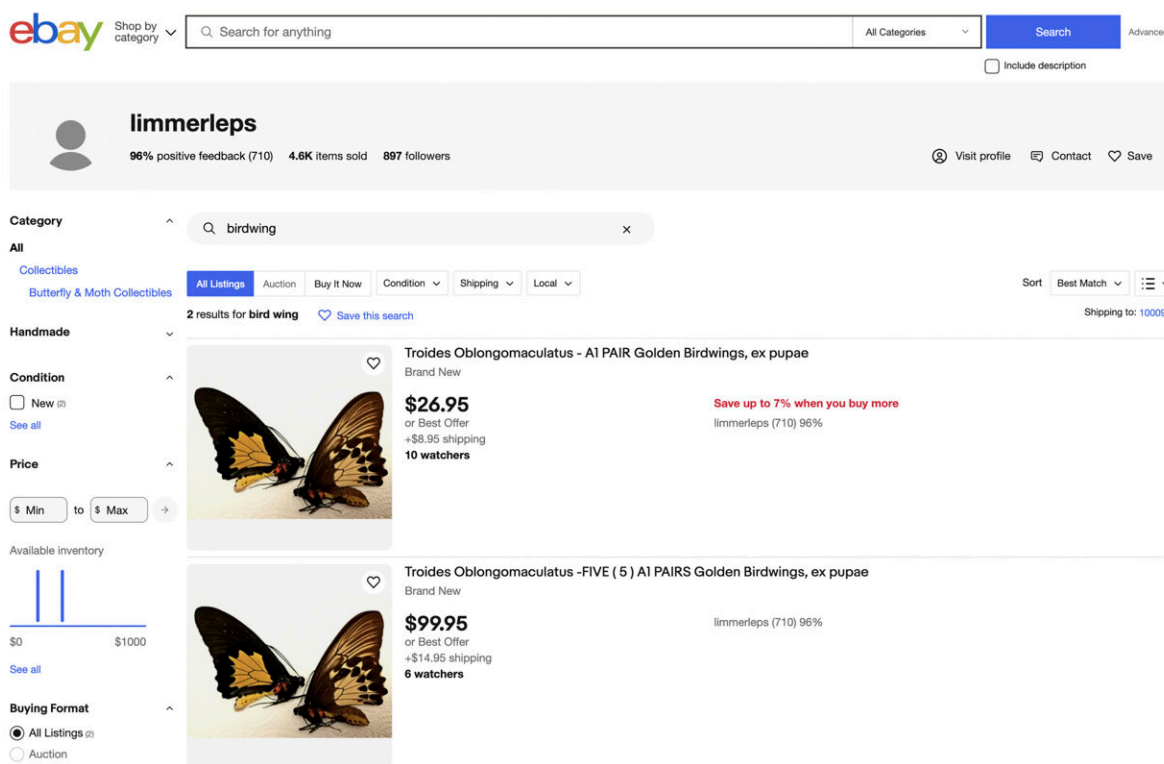
On Wednesday, the same federal authorities in Brooklyn announced six-count indictments against two people, one from Alabama and the other from Georgia, for importing, transporting and possessing \$1.2 million in taxidermized birds and eggs. Federal prosecutors say the collection includes nearly 800 birds and about 2,600 eggs.

The two are accused of using sites such as eBay and Etsy to buy the mounted birds from around the world, including from Germany to South Africa and Uruguay. The collection of birds included protected species of canaries, falcons and woodpeckers.

U.S. Attorney Breon Peace said in a statement that it was "in our national and global interest to enforce federal laws and treaties" to protect endangered wildlife "from the harm of alleged profiteers."

The six-count indictment against Limmer, a 75-year-old butterfly aficionado from Commack, New York, accuses him of working with overseas collaborators to smuggle some 1,000 lepidoptera, including some of the rarest and most endangered moths and butterflies in the world.

Federal authorities in New York say the Long Island man smuggled dried specimens of the species, circumventing U.S. laws by labeling shipments as "decorative wall coverings," "origami paper craft" and "wall decorations."



This screengrab of the eBay page of a seller going by “limmerleps” shows two birdwing specimens currently on sale online. The U.S. Attorney's Office in Brooklyn said Tuesday, Oct. 10, 2023, that Charles Limmer made tens of thousands of dollars over the past year by illegally trafficking scores of flying insects, including endangered birdwings — whose numbers have fallen because

of diminishing habitat and illegal poaching. The six-count indictment against Limmer, 75, accuses him of working with overseas collaborators to smuggle some 1,000 lepidoptera, including some of the rarest and most endangered moths and butterflies in the world. Credit: eBay via AP

Attempts to reach Limmer by phone and email were unsuccessful.

Federal law prohibits the commercial export or import of wildlife without permission from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Additional authorization would need to be secured for endangered species, as part of an international partnership to protect wildlife from trafficking.

Limmer previously had a federal license to import and export wildlife, but it was suspended in October 2022.

Since then, the indictment alleges, Limmer illegally imported and exported more than \$200,000 worth of shipments.

An eBay page of a seller going by "limmerleps" shows the account had made more than 4,600 sales on the shopping platform, many of the most recent sales were moths and butterflies. There were two birdwing specimens currently on sale and two were sold over the past year, according to the website.

An Etsy page connected to a seller going by the name "Limmer" had four ads for birdwings still advertised on Wednesday, including featuring a collection of five specimens with an asking price of \$133. The seller's listed address coincides with Limmer's.

The indictment also seeks to force Limmer to give up his collection of some 1,000 butterflies, moths and other insects prosecutors say he

illegally procured from overseas.

If convicted, the three men face up to 20 years in prison.

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