

Philippine police arrest rare sea turtle poachers

July 7 2017



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Philippine police said Friday they had seized 70 dead hawksbill marine turtles, a critically endangered species illegally trafficked for its prized shell, and arrested two suspects.

Hawksbills face an extremely high risk of extinction according to Swiss-

based International Union for Conservation of Nature as their shell is used for making jewellery and hair ornaments.

Two local men were arrested Thursday while transporting the dead hawksbills by boat off the coast of Dumarán town on Palawan island, [police](#) chief Arnel Bagona told AFP.

"We suspect that these two are dealing with Chinese [poachers](#)," Bagona said by telephone.

The marine turtles, who roam the tropical and subtropical waters of the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans, are typically found around coastal reefs, estuaries and lagoons.

Philippine conservation law prohibits their collection and trade.

Palawan, an archipelago of more than 1,700 [islands](#) in the South China Sea, is famous for its abundant marine life that are targeted by poachers.

Chief Inspector Bagona said poachers usually bought the hawksbills and other rare Palawan-based species from locals.

Hawksbills retailed for at least 3,500 pesos (\$69) each in the black market, he added.



Hawksbills face an extremely high risk of extinction in the immediate future according to Swiss-based International Union for Conservation of Nature due to trafficking in their shell used for making jewellery and hair ornaments.

He said police asked prosecutors Friday to file charges against the suspects for taking endangered species, punishable by up to 20 years in prison and fines of up to five million pesos (about \$99,000).

The suspects told police they planned to deliver the dead sea turtles to the island of Balabac, about 400 kilometres (249 miles) south of Dumarán, he said.

Bagona said the remote island is infamous as a trading place for wildlife poachers.

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Citation: Philippine police arrest rare sea turtle poachers (2017, July 7) retrieved 20 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-07-philippine-police-rare-sea-turtle.html>

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