

U.S. v. Anson Wong, et al.

International Wildlife Smuggling

- 3-year undercover investigation by Special Operations Branch of USFWS
- Over a dozen illegal shipments with over 300 animals smuggled in airline baggage, FedEx shipments and commercial shipments documented
- 9 targets identified; investigation supervised by ECS Wildlife Crime attorneys (no USAO involvement until indictment stage)

Komodo Dragon



Ploughshare Tortoise



Chinese Alligators



Surveillance photograph



Wong Arrest Strategy

- Indicted in San Francisco in 9/98 on conspiracy, smuggling, Lacey Act, money laundering charges; indictment sealed.
- BUT: U.S. had no extradition treaty with Malaysia
- Wong told undercover agent that he would never come to the United States out of fear we would be arrested on charges filed earlier in Florida in a different case
- Decision was taken to lure Wong to Canada where he could be arrested and extradited



HAWK STATION

9/98:Wong lured to Mexico City when Canadian trip fell apart



Mexico

Reptile smugglers snared, U.S. says

'Operation Chameleon' nets arrests in alleged smuggling ring in which rare creatures fetch as much as \$30,000

By Traci Watson
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Keng Liang "Anson" Wong is a Malaysian national known, in some circles, as a lover of reptiles and other animals, so much that he maintains a private zoo near his home in Penang.

Lawyers for the U.S. Department of Justice, who gleefully announced his arrest Tuesday, say he's much more. They say he's one of the world's most brazen reptile smugglers and that he and his confederates smuggled more than 300 reptiles worth a half-million dollars into the USA from January 1986 to Aug. 15 this year.

Komodo dragons

Officials say the reptiles included exceedingly rare creatures such as the Indonesia's Komodo dragon and Madagascar's ploughshare tortoise, both heavily protected by international law and coveted by unscrupulous reptile fanciers.

Wong, 40, was arrested in Mexico City Monday night on charges stemming from a five-year federal investigation, which officials said included establishing a sham animal trading company to lure him.

Investigators say two of Wong's alleged confederates also were arrested Monday: Peter Lewis, 28, of Yucca Valley, Ariz., was accused of illegally buying animals from Wong, then smuggling them to the USA to sell to collectors. James Burroughs, 47, of San Francisco was accused of acting as a courier to smuggle Wong's reptiles into America. Both were arrested in their home states.

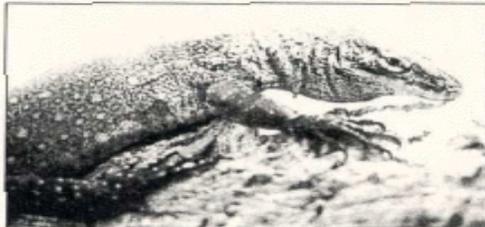
A third confederate, Yuk Wah Shiu of Hong Kong, remains at large, investigators said.

The smuggling of wildlife



(Photo by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service)

Highly endangered: Ploughshare tortoise, above, lives only in Madagascar; the reptiles' future was threatened when 70 were stolen recently from a breeding site. Left, the Komodo dragon lives only in a small area of Indonesia; this youngster could grow up to be 10 feet long.



products and live wildlife is a widespread and lucrative enterprise, with total revenue of \$6 billion per year, Justice Department officials say.

Collectors will pay \$30,000 for a live Komodo dragon, a ploughshare tortoise or a tuatara, a rare and ancient lizard-like animal from New Zealand.

Wildlife trade experts say yesterday's arrests, combined with the August arrest of U.S. reptile kingpin Jimmy Crutchfield, will have an enormous impact on the illicit trade in rare reptiles.

"The illegal reptile trade community has taken a couple of hard hits," says Craig Hoover



Chinese alligators: Rare animals live in the lower reaches of China's Yangtze River.

USA, where he has faced arrest on charges since 1982 for conspiracy and violations of federal wildlife trade laws. To snare Wong and other alleged smugglers, agents of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service mounted a sting known as Operation Chameleon.

As part of the operation, agents opened a false business called PacRim Import/Export Company. It imported and sold many of the 300 reptiles cited in the indictment. When Wong was arrested in Mexico, he was on his way to meet a person he thought was another reptile dealer — but who was actually an undercover agent.

'A daily business'

Smuggling experts say Wong's arrest marks the end, for now, of one of the world's wildest and most successful reptile-smuggling careers. Experts say Wong has traded in the rarest of reptiles for years, experts say. "It was a daily business for him to smuggle wildlife into Malaysia and out of Malaysia," Hoover says. "This [arrest] will put out business someone who would've traded thousands of animals if he'd been allowed to continue."

This Wong did with ease, Hoover says. His statements to undercover agents hint that he employed couriers and corrupt officials to run his business.

The indictment against the four men charges them with conspiracy, smuggling, money laundering and violations of wildlife laws. The maximum penalty for money laundering is 20 years in prison and a \$500,000 fine.

The reptiles collected by the government as part of the sting are being held as evidence. They will eventually be donated to zoos and scientific institutions, investigators say.

of TRAFFIC, a wildlife trade program of the World Wildlife Fund. "I'm sure they're stepping back and evaluating what they're doing."

According to the indictment, the four defendants smuggled reptiles from throughout Asia into the USA. Some animals were stowed in luggage carried by Burroughs, who was named as the courier. Others were hidden in shipments of legally imported animals.

The extensive investigation was necessary, officials say, because Wong has been careful to avoid travel in countries that would extradite him to the

8/02: Wong ends extradition fight and transported to San Francisco



Wong prosecution:

- Wong pleaded guilty to 40 felonies; sentenced to 72 months in prison, \$60,000 in fines
- Got credit against U.S. sentence for time served in Mexican jail
- Eight other individuals convicted of over 30 additional felonies; sentenced to over 6 years of imprisonment and over \$100,000 in fines