

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Friday, May 29, 1998

**SMUGGLERS OF PROTECTED WILDLIFE
ARE ARRESTED BY U.S. CUSTOMS AND FISH & WILDLIFE AGENTS**

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS -- "OPERATION JUNGLE TRADE" WAS DESCRIBED BY CUSTOMS SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE LEONARD LINDHEIM TODAY IN A PRESS CONFERENCE HELD AT THE SAN ANTONIO ZOO. LINDHEIM WAS JOINED BY FRANK SHOEMAKER, SPECIAL AGENT IN CHARGE FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE, AND STEPHEN MCCUSKER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE SAN ANTONIO ZOO.

JUNGLE TRADE WAS A THREE-YEAR UNDERCOVER OPERATION WORLDWIDE IN SCOPE, INVOLVING SOME 40 INVESTIGATIONS AND THE SEIZURE OF MORE THAN 640 INTERNATIONALLY PROTECTED FOWL AND ANIMALS. U.S. CUSTOMS AGENTS LED THE INVESTIGATION AND WERE ASSISTED BY FISH & WILDLIFE AGENTS.

TWO PEOPLE WERE ARRESTED IN SAN ANTONIO THURSDAY, MAY 28 AS PART OF THE MOST RECENT ROUNDUP OF EIGHT INDIVIDUALS ALLEGED TO BE INVOLVED IN THE SMUGGLING OF PRECIOUS BIRDS AND OTHER WILDLIFE. ARREST WARRANTS OR SUMMONS WERE ALSO SERVED IN PUEBLO, CO, ST. LOUIS, MO, AND NASHVILLE, TN. YESTERDAY.

AGENTS HAD ARRESTED 29 PERSONS; SEIZED MORE THAN 640 EXOTIC, THREATENED OR PROTECTED ANIMALS AND BIRDS; SEIZED \$65,186 IN CASH AND SEIZED VEHICLES AND OTHER

ASSETS DIRECTLY LINKED TO THE SMUGGLING RING DURING THE INVESTIGATION THAT BEGAN IN 1995. THE DOMESTIC VALUE OF THE BIRDS ALONE IS PLACED AT \$600,000 PLUS.

JUNGLE TRADE UNCOVERED AN ELABORATE SMUGGLING NETWORK WHICH OPERATED ACROSS THE U.S. MEXICO BORDER.

THE SMUGGLERS SOLD THE ANIMALS AND BIRDS IN NINE STATES AS WELL AS THE COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO AND THE COUNTRIES OF AUSTRALIA, SOUTH AFRICA, NEW ZEALAND, BRAZIL, GHANA, EGYPT, PANAMA, HONDURAS, BELIZE, AND COSTA RICA.

"SHIPMENTS OF SMUGGLED BIRDS AND OTHER ANIMALS WERE STARTLING DUE TO THE DELICATE ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS WITHIN WHICH PROTECTED WILDLIFE SHOULD BE HANDLED," SAID LINDHEIM. "SOME BIRDS , SUCH AS THE PSITTACINE BIRDS, CAN CARRY DISEASES AND SHOULD BE QUARANTINED UPON ENTRY INTO THE UNITED STATES," HE SAID. TWO LOADS OF DISEASED BIRDS WERE INTERCEPTED BY THE JUNGLE TRADE AGENTS.

THE INVESTIGATION FOCUSED ON SUPPLIERS AND SMUGGLERS LOCATED IN MEXICO, GUATEMALA, UNITED STATES AND OTHER COUNTRIES AND THE BUYERS AND DISTRIBUTORS OF THE SMUGGLED WILDLIFE. THE U.S. ATTORNEY FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS WILL PROSECUTE THE DEFENDANTS NAMED IN SEVEN INDICTMENTS.

THREE INDICTMENTS WERE RETURNED IN BROWNSVILLE FROM FEBRUARY THROUGH APRIL 1998. THE FOURTH INDICTMENT WAS RETURNED IN HOUSTON ON MAY 26 AND UNSEALED TODAY. (SEE THE ATTACHED DETAILED LIST OF DEFENDANTS AND CHARGES FILED AGAINST THEM.)

"NOT ONLY HAS THIS BEEN A HUGELY SATISFYING INVESTIGATION WHICH HAS BROKEN UP A MAJOR SMUGGLING RING, BUT ANOTHER REWARD OF THE CASE IS THAT WILDLIFE IS PUT INTO DESIRABLE CAPTIVITY THROUGH THE DONATION OF THEM TO WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ENTITIES, SUCH AS THE SAN ANTONIO ZOO," SAID LINDHEIM. "CHILDREN AND ADULTS ALIKE CAN ENJOY THE BEAUTY OF TOUCANS, FOR EXAMPLE, HERE AT THIS ZOO, KNOWING THEY WERE TAKEN OUT OF HARMS WAY," HE CONTINUED.

A VARIETY OF MACAWS AND PARROTS AS WELL AS SPIDER MONKEYS AND A MOUNTAIN LION WERE DONATED TO THREE DIFFERENT WILDLIFE REFUGES. A SECOND TEXAS ZOO, THE GLADYS PORTER ZOO AT BROWNSVILLE, ALSO PROVIDED HABITATS FOR SOME OF THE SEIZED ANIMALS.

"THIS MOST RECENT ANIMAL ACQUISITION CONTINUES THE LONG STANDING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SAN ANTONIO ZOO AND THE U.S. CUSTOMS SERVICE," SAID SAN ANTONIO ZOO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, J. STEPHEN MCCUSKER. "WE ARE PLEASED TO FACILITATE THIS IMPORTANT WORK BY PROVIDING A REFUGE FOR THESE INTERNATIONALLY PROTECTED BIRDS."

WILDLIFE LAWS AND REGULATIONS WERE PASSED TO PROTECT ENDANGERED AND THREATENED SPECIES FROM OVER EXPLOITATION AND EXTINCTION. THE LAWS ARE DESIGNED TO

ALSO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF DISEASE FROM UNQUARANTINED NON-HUMAN PRIMATES AND BIRDS TO THE HUMAN POPULATION IN MEXICO AND CENTRAL AMERICA TO THE DOMESTIC POULTRY POPULATION IN THE UNITED STATES.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN PROTECTED SPECIES OF WILDLIFE IS REGULATED BY THE CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA (CITES).

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