

Endangered Species Advisory Committee

**Summary Progress Report of CITES Work
1/10/2023 – 30/9/2024**

Purpose

This paper is to give a summary progress report on the implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) from 1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024 for the information of members.

Enforcement

2. The table below shows the number of inspections and enforcement actions taken during the reporting period:

Comparison with the previous reporting period

	1/10/2022 – 30/9/2023	1/10/2023 – 30/9/2024	Variation
Consignment inspection (import, export, transit)	20 465	21 880	+6.9%
Local inspection	1 809	1 475	-18.5%
No. of investigation	500	562	+12.4%
No. of seizure	427	511	+19.7%
No. of prosecution	66	38	-42.4%

3. Apart from our routine inspection and investigation, we also assisted the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) in the inspection of high risk consignments suspected to involve scheduled species. In the period of 1 Oct 2023 to 30 Sep 2024, 119 of such inspections were carried out.

4. The majority of cases involved illegal import of endangered species. The major cases are summarised below:

Case No.	Description	CITES document available	Date of Incident	Results/Remarks
492/2023	Suspected illegal import of 492 heads of red-headed Amazon river turtle <i>Podocnemis erythrocephala</i> (App. II) from Peru	Yes	11/12/2023	Shipment arrived by air with CITES permits covering 13,779 heads of <i>Podocnemis unifilis</i> and 500 heads of <i>Chelus fimbriata</i> . Upon inspection, 492 heads of live <i>Podocnemis erythrocephala</i> not covered by the permit were detected. The specimens were seized and legal advice is being sought on this case.
209/2024	Suspected illegal import of European eels (<i>Anguilla anguilla</i> ; App. II) from Mauritania	No	12/03/2024	Shipment declared as 353 kg gross weight of <i>Anguilla mossambica</i> arrived by air in 30 styrofoam boxes. Samples were taken from the shipment and the European eel was detected in 10 of the boxes. The 10 boxes containing 53 kg net weight of eel fry were seized for further investigation.
463/2023 466/2023	Illegal import of shark fins (Appendix II)	No	23/11/2023 24/11/2023	Two similar cases involving incoming travellers from Brazil carrying over 450 kg of shark fins in 15 carton boxes. All boxes contained a mix of fins of scheduled and non-scheduled species. The cases were heard at the District Court. Both offenders pleaded guilty and were sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment.

Case No.	Description	CITES document available	Date of Incident	Results/Remarks
193/2024	Suspected illegal import of 187 parrot eggs of Appendix I and Appendix II species from Thailand	No	01/03/2024	A passenger arriving from Thailand was intercepted by the Customs at the airport. 188 suspected parrot eggs were found in his carry-on baggage. Upon further testing, 187 of the eggs were confirmed to be of a mix of Appendix I and Appendix II parrot species, such as the African grey parrot, the salmon-crested cockatoo, the blue-and-yellow macaw and the yellow-crowned amazon. The case has been brought to the District Court and adjourned to May 2025 for plea.
51/2024	Illegal import of 64 heads of Appendix II turtles from Japan and cruelty to animals	No	27/01/2024	A passenger arriving from Tokyo was intercepted by the Customs at the airport. 64 suspected endangered turtles were found in her check-in baggage. Half of the turtles were wrapped individually in a sock and the other half was packed into two small plastic boxes. The turtles were later confirmed to be 61 heads of the box turtles (<i>Terrapene</i> spp.) and 3 heads of the spotted turtles (<i>Clemmys guttata</i>). The offender was prosecuted for illegal import of 64 heads of Appendix II turtles and cruelty to animals. The case was heard at the District Court on 27 September 2024. The offender pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment.

Case No.	Description	CITES document available	Date of Incident	Results/Remarks
340/2024	Suspected illegal possession of 4 pots of <i>Paphiopedilum</i> spp. (Appendix I)	No	17/06/2024	Acting on complaint, an investigation was lodged against a person allegedly selling Appendix I orchids on the Internet. In an enforcement operation, 4 pots of Appendix I orchids were seized for further investigation.

5. In addition, some cases that had been effected in previous reporting periods were concluded in the current reporting period. Some of the notable sentences include:

Case No.	Description	Date of Incident	Date of adjudication	Results/Remarks
93/2023 108/2023	Attempt to export agarwood (App. II)	12/03/2023 13/03/2023	08/02/2024 02/02/2024	<p>Two similar cases involving out-going travellers intercepted by the Customs at Shenzhen Bay Control Point carrying 4.2 kg and 9 kg of agarwood, respectively.</p> <p>In both cases, the court adopted a starting point of 36-month imprisonment and application made by the AFCD under the Organized and Serious Crime Ordinance (Cap. 455) for an enhanced sentence was accepted by the Court.</p> <p>After deduction for guilty plea, both offenders were sentenced to 30 months' imprisonment.</p>

204/2023	Illegal import of 21 heads of live reptiles of scheduled species (App. I & App. II) from Thailand and cruelty to animals	14/05/2023	27/12/2023	<p>An incoming Thai male passenger from Bangkok, Thailand, was intercepted by the Customs at the Hong Kong International Airport carrying 13 heads of Appendix I reptiles and 8 heads of Appendix II reptiles on his body.</p> <p>The offender pleaded guilty at the District Court and was sentenced to a total of 30 months' imprisonment.</p>
391/2020	Illegal possession of 23 turtles of scheduled species (App. I & App. II), and offer for sale and possession of protected wild animals	17/05/2022	20/09/2024	<p>A joint-operation was mounted with the police against an alleged poacher and online turtle trader. The offender was prosecuted with 5 charges under the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170) and the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586) (the Ordinance) with respect to 23 endangered turtles.</p> <p>The offender pleaded guilty at the District Court and was sentenced to a total of 15 months' imprisonment.</p>

6. On top of our prosecution cases, the AFCD also proceeded with three forfeiture cases, two of which were concluded in the reporting period.

Licensing

7. The number of licences and certificates issued during the reporting period is tabulated below:

Comparison with the last reporting period

	1/10/2022 – 30/9/2023	1/10/2023 – 30/9/2024	Variation
Import Licence	218	216	–0.9%
Export/Re-export Licence	13 141	12 776	–2.8%
Possession Licence	53	45	–15.1%
Re-export Certificate	455	414	–9.0%
Special Export/Import Licence	3	9	+200.0%

Disposal of seized specimens

8. The Department endeavours to maximise uses of seized specimens for conservation, education or scientific purposes according to the guidelines of CITES. The following items were disposed of during the reporting period following the above principle:

(a) Local schools/institutes

A total of 16 local schools have received specimens confiscated from enforcement operations, including 8 pieces of stony coral, 4 pieces of blue coral necklace, 22 pieces of agarwood, 15 pieces of python skin or product, 10 pieces of lizard skin or product, 1 sea turtle stuffed specimen, 251 pieces of sea turtle scale, 21 pieces of crocodylian skin or product, 10 pieces of turtle plastron, 6 pieces of Malagasy rosewood, 1 piece of ivory tusk, 37 pieces of worked ivory, 1 piece of tiger paw, 4 pieces of feline fur specimen, 7.8 kg of dried seahorse, 2 pieces of hippopotamus teeth, 34 pieces of Indian peafowl feather, 1 piece of fox fur, 2 pieces of mounted pangolin specimen, 0.92 kg pangolin scale, 1.38 kg of dried orchid stem, 1.275 kg of American ginseng, 3 pieces of Red sandalwood, 1 piece of rhino horn, 4 pieces of helmeted hornbill beak, 26 pieces of saiga horn, 6 pieces of totoaba fish maw and 10 pairs of giant clam shell.

(b) Other local organisations and government departments

Live specimens donated to other local organizations and government departments included 2 heads of humphead wrasse, 1 head of monitor lizard, 8 heads of python, 9 heads of box turtle, 1 head of Chinese box turtle, 2 heads of Chinese stripe-necked turtle, 1 head of leopard tortoise, 2 heads of Malaysian box turtle, 2 heads of yellow pond turtle, 6 heads of African grey parrot, 1 head of black-capped conure, 2 heads of blue-and-yellow macaw, 2 heads of celestial parrotlet, 2 heads of eclectus parrot, 3 heads

of Fischer's lovebird, 7 heads of green-cheeked conure, 2 heads of hawk-headed parrot, 1 head of mealy amazon, 2 heads of Moluccan cockatoo, 6 heads of monk parakeet, 4 heads of rainbow lorikeet, 1 head of red-and-green macaw, 3 heads of sun conure, 1 head of turquoise-fronted parrot and 3 heads of yellow-crowned amazon.

Publicity and Education

9. As the number of travellers between Hong Kong and the Mainland remained high, we carried out promotion campaigns to enhance travellers' awareness on the relevant control of popular items (e.g. American ginseng, dendrobium, dried seahorse, gastrodia and fins of endangered shark species etc.) through leaflet distribution at boundary control points before Lunar New Year and before long Labour Day holidays in the Mainland, short video and poster advertisement on LED/TV panels at control points, advertisements on bus bodies, TV Panels in MTR trains and Facebook posts.

10. The Endangered Species Resource Centre (ESRC) received 8 767 visitors in 246 tours and 51 Open Days from October 2023 to September 2024. We delivered 46 education talks on endangered species protection for students, elderly citizens and local organisations. A total of 8 exhibitions were held at schools and public venues.

11. To enhance the awareness and vigilance of the public about the licensing control over the import, export, re-export and possession of endangered species, we continued to make use of the Department's Facebook page and mass media to provide updates on recent cases, remind the public of relevant issues and our legislative control, and encourage the public to report suspected illegal trade in endangered species. A total of 18 Facebook posts and 12 press releases were issued during the reporting period.

12. To inform the public and traders about the legislative amendment of the Ordinance which came into effect on 15 December 2023, a series of publicity work had been completed to publicise the amendments. Commencing in October 2023 after the publication of the amendment order in the gazette, several publicity strategies were used to disseminate information about the amendments, including circular letters, Facebook posts, press release, posters, trader seminars, broadcasting in Hong Kong International Airport and advertisements across websites, mobile applications and roadside bus stops.

International and Local Liaison and Meeting

13. We endeavour to maintain close contact with other CITES Parties and international organisations. During the reporting period, we participated in the 33rd meeting of the CITES Animals Committee and the 27th meeting of the CITES Plants Committee.

14. To convey our commitment in combatting illegal wildlife trade, and to maintain and extend our network with other enforcement agencies for information exchange and potential collaboration, we participated in regular international enforcement meetings including the 7th Wildlife Inter-Regional Enforcement meeting led by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the 34th Wildlife Crime Working Group Meeting and a subsequent inter-sessional meeting led by INTERPOL. Through these connections, we hosted an ad-hoc case coordination meeting led by the UNODC.

Training

15. The Department places great emphasis on providing adequate training to frontline enforcement staff to ensure that the legislative control of the Ordinance is duly implemented. We organised training courses regarding the legislative amendments to the Ordinance following the 19th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CITES in December 2023 and arranged training workshops on identification of endangered shark and ray species in June 2024 to frontline staff of the Department and the C&ED.

16. As part of our capacity-building effort, we also arranged a case investigation and criminal evidence course and a data management training for our frontline officers.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
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