

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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CROCODILE SHOES FORFEITED TO U.S. GOVERNMENT

Two New England shoe importers have transferred to the United States their ownership interest in over 390 pairs of imported, men's crocodile shoes, having a retail value estimated by the importers at approximately \$35,000, Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today.

This action was taken in settlement of an administrative civil penalty action initiated against the firms by the Fish and Wildlife Service, under authority of the Endangered Species Conservation Act of 1969. Both the 1969 Act and a successor law passed in 1973 prohibit the importation of any species on the list of endangered species maintained by the Secretary of the Interior. The firms were charged with importing shoes made from the Nile crocodile, which is listed as an endangered species.

"Scores of skins of the Nile crocodile were needed to manufacture these shoes," Greenwalt said. "This reptile, which can grow to lengths of 16-18 feet, has been hunted to the brink of extinction throughout Africa because its hide is particularly suited to the manufacture of shoes and other accessories. It has less bony material in its belly scales than most other crocodilians of that area. Those are the only parts used for manufacturing. Moreover, hunters have concentrated on taking younger Nile crocodiles of six to nine feet in length before the scales grow too large.

"The crocodile fills an ecological niche as the major predator of waters it inhabits," Greenwalt said. "Its removal from an area greatly disturbs the balance of life. In areas of Africa where the Nile crocodile no longer ranges, for example, the yield of food fish for human consumption has gone down dramatically because the slower swimming, rough, or bottom-

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feeding fish that were the main diet of the crocodile have multiplied to the point of forcing more desirable fish out of those waters. The Nile crocodile once ranged over the southern two-thirds of Africa, including Madagascar. It is restricted today primarily to the Nile River drainage system because man has moved into much of its former range."

The shoe dealers involved are Palladio, Ltd. of Brockton, Massachusetts, and E. E. Taylor, Inc. of Augusta, Maine. The shipments were seized by Special Agents of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a civil penalty action was initiated. After a detailed examination of the shoes, wildlife biologists Dr. Wayne King of the Bronx Zoo, Dr. Alan Greer of Harvard University, and Dr. Howard Campbell of the Fish and Wildlife Service, arrived at the opinion that the forfeited shoes were made from the endangered Nile crocodile. The species was identified by hide texture, the presence or absence of bone material in the scales, the number and size of the scales, and by comparison with museum specimens.

The forfeited shoes were destined for retail outlets in the United States with an average price tag estimated by the importers of \$90 a pair. The shoes will be temporarily placed in one of a number of government warehouses storing thousands of other forfeited wildlife products which have been illegally imported into this country by commercial firms, tourists, and hunters. Most are made from endangered species and cannot be sold. The Fish and Wildlife Service is developing an appropriate disposition policy for these items.

There are 27 species and subspecies of crocodiles in the world. Six are named on the Secretary of the Interior's List of Endangered Species, which also includes the American alligator. A profitable world trade in crocodile hides flourishes in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. A large percentage of these hides funnel from hunters on these three continents through wholesale export firms to tanning firms in such countries as France, which process, dye, and burnish the hides. The hides are then shipped to Italian manufacturers for the world shoe, belt, handbag, watchband, golf bag, briefcase, and luggage market. Commercial processing of these hides is legal in Europe. Some countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia have recently outlawed or limited commercial harvest of crocodilians. Others are investigating regulating the harvest.

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