

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release August 8, 1977

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## TWO-YEAR PROBE LED TO INDICTMENTS OF 12 WILD ANIMAL DEALERS

The indictment of 12 wild animal dealers August 4 by a Philadelphia grand jury exposed one of the largest operations of illegal trade in reptiles ever uncovered.

The case involves violations of wildlife laws in Switzerland, Australia, Papua, New Guinea, Singapore, the Philippines, Fiji, and Ceylon in addition to the United States, according to Director Lynn A. Greenwalt of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

He said the case is perhaps the most complex of its kind ever encountered. The indictments cap a 2-year investigation by the U.S. Customs Service of the Treasury Department, the Justice Department, and special agents of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

No zoo personnel were indicted. Whether any zoos or their personnel will eventually be proceeded against is still being considered by the Department of Justice. Eight zoos were mentioned in the indictments as having received the reptiles. These were the National Zoological Park, Washington, D.C., the Philadelphia Zoo, St. Louis Zoo, the Overton Park Zoo in Memphis, Tenn., Sacramento Zoo, Knoxville Zoo, Dallas Zoo, and the Seneca Park Zoo in Rochester, N.Y.

The indictments charge violations of the Lacey Act, certain sections of the Endangered Species Act, as well as U.S. Customs laws, including:

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--transporting in foreign commerce wildlife taken and transported in violation of foreign law;

--selling in interstate and foreign commerce wildlife taken and transported in violation of foreign law;

--aiding and abetting and smuggling;

--conspiracy to violate U.S. Customs law, the Endangered Species Act, and the Lacey Act.

Based upon reports, agents discovered approximately 75 Australian and New Guinean lizards, tortoises, and snakes buried near Medford, New Jersey, in May of 1975. This triggered a worldwide investigation into the unlawful transportation of reptiles which turned up a myriad of Lacey Act and Customs law violations in the reptile trade. The Lacey Act prohibits traffic in wildlife involved in violations of foreign or State laws.

Literally thousands of documents were obtained from zoos and wildlife dealers indicating that during 1973 and 1974 several United States and foreign dealers had illegally imported, transported, and sold wildlife to United States zoos. The reptiles included crocodylians, lizards, snakes, and tortoises, many of which are listed on Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. There was also one Nile crocodile, which is on the U.S. endangered species list.

Indicted were: Henry A. Molt, Jr., Pennsylvania, 54 counts; David Christiensen, Pennsylvania, 1 count; Edward B. Allen, Pennsylvania, 17 counts; Steven Neil Levy, Pennsylvania, 17 counts; Y. L. Koh, Singapore, 1 count; Robert A. Udell, Pennsylvania, 6 counts; Christopher Wee, also known as Wee Boon Keng, Singapore, 4 counts; Jonathan Leakey, Republic of Kenya, 1 count; Maurice Van Derhaege, France, 1 count; Alvin Weinberg, Pennsylvania, 2 counts; Rudolf Komarik, New Jersey, 1 count; and Walter Zinneker, Switzerland, 1 count.