

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

Alan Levitt 202/343-5634

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UNDERCOVER INVESTIGATION LEADS TO SEIZURE OF HUNDREDS OF RARE BIRDS FROM TAXIDERMISTS

The carcasses, skins, and mounted specimens of hundreds of protected birds--including peregrine falcons, eagles, hawks, owls, waterfowl, song-birds, and a number of exotic species--have been seized from a Michigan jewelry store and a Colorado taxidermist by special agents of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Some of the more than 500 birds seized are thought to have been stolen from the University of Michigan's Ornithology Department.

The seizures on May 7 and 9 climaxed a 10-month undercover investigation that began last July in Detroit. On May 7, agents searched the Gold Anvil, a Detroit area jewelry shop which also ran a lucrative taxidermy operation. The search resulted in two arrests and the seizure under a warrant of over 250 protected native and foreign birds.

The store, which is located in Franklin, Michigan, an affluent suburb of Detroit, allegedly possessed and sold large numbers of federally protected birds, the arresting agents said. Most of the birds in the shop were raptors--hawks and owls--and sold for about \$90 to \$100 each, with some bird mounts, such as an eagle, selling for as much as \$500. The birds were purchased by a variety of customers for use in interior decorating and as gifts and novelties.

Marcus Conrad Spoutz, owner of the store, and Wayne Miller, a taxidermist for the shop, were arrested. They have been charged with multiple violations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, a Federal law protecting most wild birds in the United States. Under the Act, commercial activity as well as possession of migratory birds is illegal.

One of the Gold Anvil's sources for the bird market was traced to the University of Michigan's Department of Ornithology where preliminary estimates indicate that more than 300 birds may have been stolen, the agents reported. University of Michigan authorities are now investigating to determine the exact number and species missing.

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