

Pig-nosed Turtles Destined for Japan Nabbed at Jakarta Airport

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Airport officials at Soekarno Hatta Jakarta International Airport confiscated five shipments of pig-nosed turtles (*Carettochelys insculpta*) during the last 10 months. All of the shipments were on their way to Japan where juveniles of the species are prized as pets. Since the first trade seizure at the airport in August 2003, more than 1,400 juvenile pig-nosed turtles have been confiscated by the authorities.

The turtles were smuggled in boxes hidden beneath bags of frozen fish, said Rodrigo Vazquez, an expert on Indonesian turtles working with turtles at the Cikananga Wildlife Rescue Center in West Java. Most of the young turtles perished in the shipments, reports Vazquez. The remaining survivors were transferred to the rescue center where they are being maintained in tanks that were specifically built for the turtles following a string of trade seizures in February 2004.

Around 2 million pig-nosed turtle eggs are reportedly harvested each year in Irian Jaya, the only part of Indonesia where pig-nosed turtles can be found. The eggs are transported to large hatcheries in Surabaya in East Java. After hatching, the young turtles are illegally exported mainly to Japan, but also to Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Taiwan, China, Europe and the United States.



The pig-nosed turtle. Juveniles of the species are popular in the international pet trade. Most are reportedly exported to Japan.

Notes about pig-nosed turtles

- The pig-nosed turtle is an entirely aquatic species living in freshwater, with small flipper-like front limbs, not unlike those of marine turtles. The species is also referred to as the Fly River turtle, named after a river in Irian Jaya where the turtle can be found.
- Scientists believe that the pig-nosed turtle may require between 14 to 16 years to mature.
- Scientists believe that harvest levels of reportedly 2 million eggs annually can not possibly be sustained in nature, and that future generations of turtles may be lost as fewer young turtles are produced and survive to become breeding adults.
- The pig-nosed turtle is legally protected in Indonesia.



A picture of carnage. Hundreds of dead pig-nosed turtles recovered from crates bound for Japan.

Rodrigo Vazquez and ATCN staff correspondent