

Thai Airways Started Embargo in February of Wildlife or Wildlife Parts From Malaysia, Except For Turtles.

By Elizabeth John, Malaysia New Straits Times, 9/29/04

Thai Airways will no longer carry cargoes of wildlife or wildlife parts from Malaysia. The airline imposed the embargo in February, said the airline's secretary of Cargo and Mail Sales, Buranee Boonyatap.

She said the embargo was enforced after Thai authorities seized hundreds of pangolins from Malaysia at the Don Muang International Airport last November. The 509 pangolins packed in 102 crates were in transit in Thailand when they were discovered.

According to news reports, the boxes from Malaysia were destined for Laos, from where they would be sent to China.

Just a week earlier, Thai authorities had seized another 288 pangolins from Malaysia, believed to be bound for China, at the same airport's cargo terminal.

Asian pangolins are listed on Appendix II of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which ordinarily means they can be traded to limits that will not affect the survival of wild populations.

However, high volumes of largely unregulated trade, including illegal shipments in the 1990s, led all CITES parties to adopt a "zero quota" on Asian pangolins, which in effect banned all international trade.

Thus, all trade in Asian pangolins has been illegal since 2000.

In Malaysia, pangolins are a totally protected species under the Protection of Wildlife Act 1972. Buranee, who confirmed the Thai Airways decision in a telephone interview from Bangkok, also said that the only wildlife excluded from the embargo were turtles.

She said the airline had regularly carried cargoes of wildlife from Malaysia before the embargo but could not confirm the quantity or species of wildlife.

In an immediate response, National Parks and Wildlife Department enforcement director Mislihah Mohamad Bashir said that she would raise the issue at a meeting of all enforcement agencies stationed at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport on Thursday.

Mislihah said the department was aware of attempts to smuggle pangolins and was working to curb the problem.

Yesterday, the department raided a slaughterhouse in Padang Serai in Kedah and found 800 pangolins, most of them dead, ready for shipment.

Pangolin meat, scales and blood are in high demand for use in Chinese traditional medicines. The meat can be sold for RM50-RM60 per kg.

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