

My Paper

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Animal-parts smuggling on the rise

By David Lim

THE authorities here are seeing more cases of exotic animal parts seized at land, sea and air checkpoints.

A check with the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority (AVA) revealed that 14 seizures were made this year up to last month, compared with 11 in the whole of last year. There were only two such cases in 2008.

Smugglers usually attempt to bring in parts such as **reptile** skin, sea-turtle eggs and coral skeletons.

An AVA spokesman told *my paper* that exotic animal parts may be used to produce luxury leather goods, collectors' items and medicine. They could also be meant for consumption.

For example, the authorities seized 6.6kg of water monitor- lizard meat in August at Changi Airport. The meat was brought in for consumption.

And in September, a man was caught illegally importing 40 sea-turtle eggs for consumption. They were brought in from Indonesia by sea, said the AVA spokesman.

Live animals have also been seized. Last August, the authorities found 50 Oriental white-eye songbirds – known as *mata puteh* in Malay – hidden under trays of *otak-otak*. They were being smuggled in by an Indonesian man caught at Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal.

Two Singaporeans were nabbed overseas last Saturday for allegedly smuggling 92kg of raw **ivory** from Kenya to Thailand.

Singapore is not known to be a market for raw ivory as it does not have a carving industry, said the AVA spokesman, who added that the trafficking of raw ivory is a lucrative global business – 1kg of ivory can fetch between US\$1,500 (S\$1,950) and US\$2,000.

Mr Louis Ng, executive director of Animal Concerns Research and Education Society, said the amount of seized contraband represents “just the tip of the iceberg”.

“I sense that a lot more are going through undetected,” he said. “We’re no longer talking about small-time dealers. Smugglers are becoming more daring.” **Confiscated** animal parts are usually donated to the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research at the National University of Singapore. The AVA may also keep the parts for educational purposes.

Under the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act, the import, export or re-export of endangered species – whether dead or alive, and including their eggs – is illegal in Singapore without an AVA permit.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) of Wild Fauna and Flora subjects international trade of about 5,000 species of animals and 28,000 species of plants to certain controls.

Singapore is a **signatory** of Cites.

Those convicted of smuggling protected flora or fauna here face a maximum fine of \$50,000 for each species, up to a maximum total of \$500,000, or up to two years' jail, or both.

Mr Ng proposed the use of sniffer dogs at checkpoints to discourage would-be smugglers, as the dogs are “almost 100 percent” effective.

“Coupled with the current heavy penalties, we can ultimately wipe out this trade,” he said.