



Aussie Notes



Wildlife Smuggling in Western Australia

by Clayton Roberts.

For most Australians the term 'smuggling' is associated with drugs, weapons, illicit grog and undeclared goods. In recent times 'smuggling' has also become synonymous with the illegal import and export of native animals and plants.

Wildlife smuggling has become a multimillion dollar trade, threatening Australia's delicate ecosystem. According to Saturday 10 August 1996, issue of *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), among the Australian animals which fetch exorbitant prices overseas are black cockatoos (which sell for up to \$40,000 each), princess parrots (\$45,000 a pair), red-tailed black cockatoos (\$40,000 a pair), major mitchell cockatoos (\$17,000 a pair), rarer breeds of python (up to \$18,000 each), shingleback lizards (\$1500 each) and bearded dragons (\$500 each). Evidence points to the involvement of highly organized syndicates; and given the huge profits involved, wildlife smuggling has become a lucrative alternative to drugs.

Cruel and bizarre means are employed to smuggle wildlife. Reptiles and birds are drugged and taped; only a percentage are expected to reach their destination alive. Birds are stuffed into wire cages and wicker baskets. One Perth woman returning from a holiday in Malaysia smuggled in a baby monkey between her breasts.

A sharp increase in wildlife smuggling was evident in Western Australia in the 1990s, and highlighted the risk to rare and endangered species. About 20 people have been convicted since 1989 on scores of fauna and flora smuggling charges. Species involved included snakes, fish, turtles, lizards, sea shells, native plants, live birds and birds' eggs. Traffickers are now switching to eggs, which are easier to conceal.

Birds eggs: A growing demand for Australian birds overseas began to make itself manifest in Western Australia in the

1980s. In 1988, following a combined operation by Customs, State Police, National Parks & Wildlife Service and officers of Conservation and Land Management (CALM), a 27 year old Swiss national, Daniel Bottlang, was fined \$3,500. He was arrested on 7 October 1988 for the attempted export of eight live birds' eggs of various parrot species, and pleaded guilty to four charges of possessing and attempting to export cockatoo and galah eggs. Authorities were alerted by members of the public, after Bottlang and his younger brother had been seen in the Three Springs area removing birds' eggs and packing them into specially built incubators. These he later attempted to airfreight to Zurich. Wildlife officers kept the pair under surveillance until Bottlang's apprehension by Customs officers. The overseas value of the parrots was assessed as around \$40,000.

Then on 25 May 1990, officers arrested a man boarding a flight to Singapore with three native birds hidden in his coat pocket. The two-day old birds, believed to be cockatoos, were found when the man was searched just before 3pm. John Stewart Leleu later faced charges under the *Wildlife Protection Act*. Leleu, who may have been part of a world-wide bird-exporting gang, pleaded guilty to a charge of attempting to export the cockatoos. He was fined \$1,500 on the wildlife charge.

A major seizure of birds eggs occurred at Perth airport on October 1994. Customs staff seized 29 eggs found sewn into a singlet worn by Welshman Christopher Owen. A total of 91 eggs were seized, the remainder being found at the house of William Grumball, 27 of them in a singlet similar to the one worn by Owen. Grumball pleaded guilty to two charges of conspiracy to illegally export native birds and was jailed for 18 months. The value of the eggs was around \$1.5 million. His co-conspirators, New Zealander Michael Graves and Christopher Owen, both received jail sentences. A number of people were also arrested in the United

Kingdom and New Zealand.

Recently, in October 1997, two Malaysians involved in a plot to smuggle fertile emu eggs out of WA were fined \$1500 each after they were caught by Customs officers. Tiong Wei Wei, 24, and brother, Tiong "Samuel" Guan King, 21, pleaded guilty in Joondalup Magistrate's Court on 17 October 1997 to exporting the eggs contrary to the *Wildlife Protection Act*.

Ms Tong was arrested at Perth international Airport by Customs officers after an X-ray of her hold baggage showed one of her suitcases contained what appeared to be big eggs. A search of her suitcase revealed six fertile emu eggs.

Pythons: Fauna trafficking has not been confined to birds. In 1990, quick thinking by a Wildlife officer and vigilant Australia Post staff enabled Customs officers to prevent three pythons from being sent to the United States in a Post Pak. It also led to the arrest of United States national Casey Lazik of Seattle, who pleaded guilty to charges of trying to export protected wildlife in March 1990 and was fined \$6,000. The snakes are believed to have come from near Goldsworthy in the Pilbara, where local police had warned Customs officers about a man acting suspiciously in the area. One of the reptiles, a Woma python, is listed as rare and endangered and can fetch up to \$US5,000 on the illegal market. The others, a pygmy Children's Python and a Black-Headed Python can sell for \$US3,000.

Lizards: Then on 23 January, 1996, a 28 year old German biology student named Peter Stoldt, was arrested at Perth Domestic Airport for attempting to smuggle 38 live geckos and four snakes out of Australia. His arrest was the culmination of a week-long surveillance operation by Customs officers in the Pilbara, Gascoyne and Murchison area.

Outside the court, officials said that Stoldt had entered Australia through Sydney, then flown to Western Australia. After tip-offs from suspicious members of the public, he was trailed for a week through the Pilbara and watched while he allegedly collected 38 geckos and four snakes. At night the creatures were allegedly



hidden in roadside culverts, in margarine boxes, socks and bags. After pleading guilty, Stoldt was fined a total of \$15,500 under Commonwealth and State wildlife laws on Friday 15, March 1996.

The case of two Japanese tourists who were fined \$12,000 on 13 November 1997, highlighted the ease with which smuggling activity takes place. Pet shop owner Shuji Katahira, 31, and nurse Noriku Otsuka, 29, were arrested by Customs officers while waiting to board a flight to Tokyo on 7 November 97 after collecting an assortment of animals and insects on a six day 4WD tour of WA.

The wildlife found in the pair's hand luggage and suitcases included lizards, snakes, frogs, a tortoise, a salamander, centipedes and a variety of other insects. Some of the animals were dead.

Turtles: Following a tip-off from a commercial source, an attempt to illegally export 23 Western Long Neck Turtles hidden in crates was foiled at Perth airport in April 1994. A US citizen, named Matthew Schramm, was arrested and after pleading guilty was fined \$14,600 under Commonwealth and State wildlife laws. The turtles' feet were bound with multiple layers of black adhesive tape, and they were inside sealed calico bags.

Native plants : Smugglers are not content to just plunder fauna. In a first for Customs in Western Australia, a Dutch national was fined \$6,000 in 1995 after pleading guilty to attempting to illegally smuggle rare and endangered plants out of the country. Sentencing Theodorus Pulles, the magistrate said that flowers were for everyone and not here to be stolen by people who came for a visit : 'If all visitors did that, we wouldn't have a wildflower show. We would have a barren waste and we have enough of that in Australia', he said.

Recently, a retired German chemist was fined \$10,000 in the Perth Law Courts on Friday 7 November 97 after attempting to smuggle more than 100 specimens of WA native plants out of the country. He was fined \$2,000 for contravening federal customs laws and a total of \$8,000 for breaches of the *WA Wildlife Conservation Act*.

While Australia's *Wildlife Protection Act*

provides stiff maximum penalties for smuggling native flora and fauna - 10 years' jail and a \$100,000 fine for an individual and \$500,000 for a corporation - courts rarely impose full penalties.

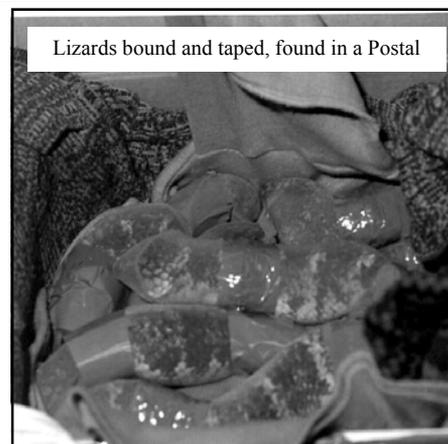
Due to lack of manpower, the Customs Service cannot adequately monitor Australia's 37,000 kilometer coastline. Members of the public are urged to report any unusual or suspicious activities such as wildlife poaching or drug smuggling to the 24-hour toll free Customs Watch number on 1800 06 1800.

Sources: *The West Australian newspaper* and *Australian Customs Services records*.

Anglo-Indians fight racial discrimination

A disturbing report in *The Weekend Australian* (30 August 1997), described the discrimination faced by Anglo-Indian Mr. Ian Creed in the Public Service. The article stated that derogatory Christmas cards, anti-Asian remarks and gifts of dog faeces wrapped in foil were, according to Mr. Creed, all a part of daily life in the Public Service leading to a successful claim for compensation in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

Meanwhile further afield, the October 14, 1997 issue of *International Express* reported that Lambeth Council in London was ordered to make the record payment of £350,000 to 62-year-old Donald D'Souza for racial discrimination and unfair dismissal. Mr. D'Souza claimed he was the victim of racist insults at work and a manager had consistently given him unfair reports.



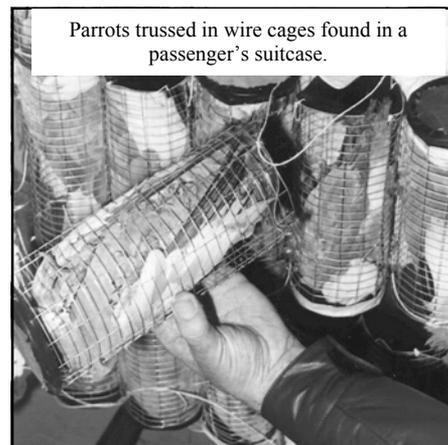
Lizards bound and taped, found in a Postal



Turtles found dead in a Postal package.



Turtles removed dead from a calico bag.



Parrots trussed in wire cages found in a passenger's suitcase.

Reflections of a child.
The earth is like my mum. Each time we mess it up, we get punished. That's why they call it 'Mother Earth'