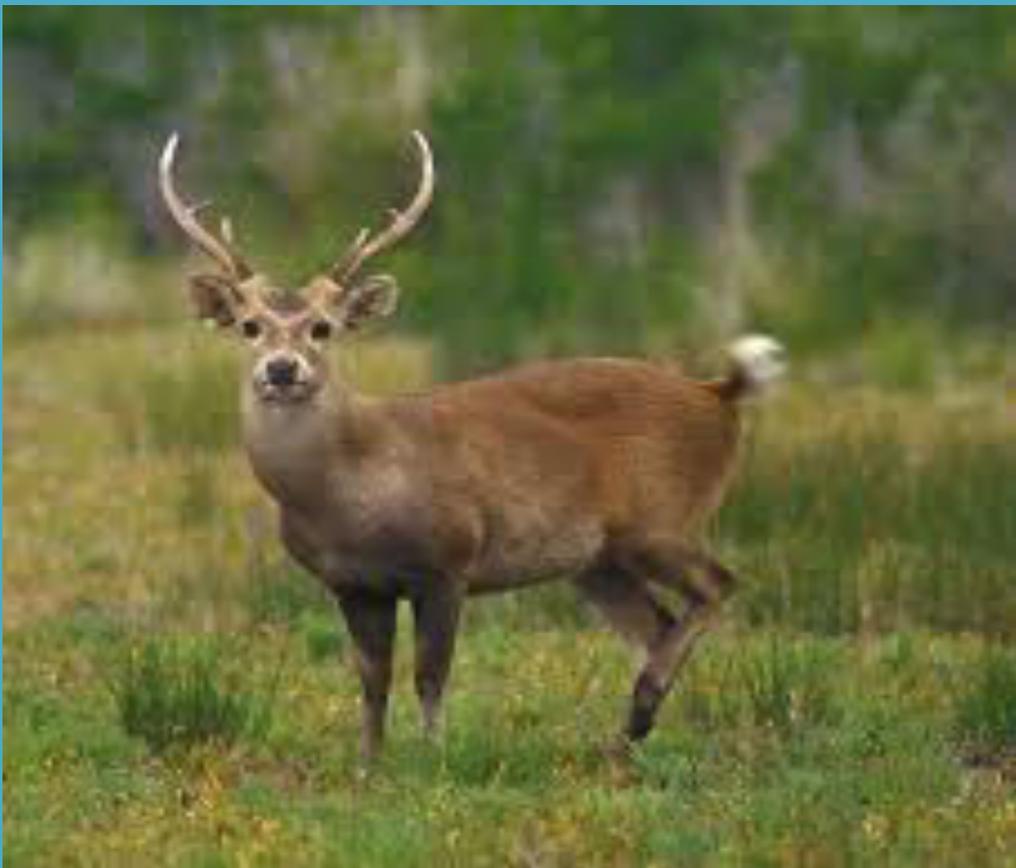


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SANGAT DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

Bid to smuggle 'largest' turtle parts shipment foiled

FAIZA ILYAS —

KARACHI: A Hong Kong-bound consignment of over 4,000 dried body parts of freshwater turtles, a protected species in the country, was confiscated last week by the customs authorities at Karachi port, it emerged on Thursday.

The dried body parts were identified as those of Indian narrow-headed softshell turtles, a critically endangered and protected reptile in the country.

“This is the largest seizure involving turtles in the country’s history that might involve militant organisations.”

This information was shared with journalists at a press conference jointly addressed by a customs official and a Sindh wildlife conservator at the Pakistan International Container Terminal on Thursday.

“The value of a turtle is over Rs150,000 (in the black market). Investigations are under way to uncover more links in the case while an FIR has already been registered (against the proprietor) with the customs judge,” said additional collector of customs Irfan Javed, recalling that a consignment of turtle meat was seized back in 2005.

The consignment of 4,342 dried turtles weighing about 1.90 tonnes, he said, belonged to the M/S Hongda Trading Company (with National Tax Number 4130559) that had a registered DHA (Phase-V) address. The goods had been declared as dried fish maw (dried form of fish air bladder) and dried fish skin

and were destined for Cheong House, 139-Des Voeux, West Hong Kong, China.



“A thorough examination, however, raised the suspicion that the consignment consisted of turtle meat, bones and skulls. This was verified by the Sindh wildlife department staff that inspected the consignment on our request.

“We were told that the consignment contained dried turtle shells, plastrons, fringes of freshwater turtles that are protected under international and national laws and exist in the entire Indus river system,” he explained.

During the question-answer session, it was pointed out most of these turtles might have been caught at the Taunsa barrage and Kalabagh areas that had a good population of turtles, though the Indian narrow-headed softshell turtles were also found in Sindh.

“There is a dire need to create awareness of the species’ importance and make laws stringent enough to discourage turtle smuggling,” said Sindh wildlife conservator Javed Ahmed Mahar.

The smuggling of turtles or any wildlife species, he said, might seem a soft crime but its financial implications were huge.

“All over the world, wildlife smuggling is now being linked to terror outfits. People have no idea how much money one could make from

smuggling of wildlife species. I believe that militant organisations are involved in turtle smuggling,” he said.

Four species of freshwater turtles, he said, were found in Pakistan and they all occurred in Sindh, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

“Saving the turtles is like saving our children, our people. Because they clean the water we drink so you can imagine how critical turtles are for public health and the entire ecosystem. This message must be conveyed and understood at all levels,” he said.

About turtle population, he said that though there had been no census, their number had reduced greatly in Sindh as there were now hardly seen along canals and river banks.

Turtles had a huge market in the South East Asian countries where they were considered a delicacy.

According to Mahar, the four species of freshwater turtles found in Pakistan are globally threatened and listed in the Appendices I & II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora and their import and export without a legal permit is prohibited.

Their catching, trapping, netting, using as a part or whole or derivatives, trading, transport and export were strictly prohibited as per provisions of the Sindh Wildlife Protection Ordinance 1972 and the Sindh Turtle and Tortoises Protection, Conservation and Compounding Rules, 2014, he said.

More than 200 black pond turtles, a freshwater species, were confiscated by the customs officials at Karachi airport last year. The turtles found in suitcases were destined for Bangkok.

The same year, 200 black pond turtles smuggled from Pakistan to China were repatriated. The turtles captured from Sindh were later released into the Indus River.

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Rare whale caught off Karachi coast dies

FAIZA ILYAS —

KARACHI: A rare species of whale was recently caught by fishermen, who were searching for tuna about 120 nautical miles south-west of Karachi.

It was identified as a pygmy sperm whale (*Kogia breviceps*) about 8.2 feet long, weighing about 400kg.

The specific species is of the smallest whales found at the outer continental shelf and is one of the three species of toothed whale in the sperm whale family.

The marine mammal was later discarded by fishermen led by Saeed Zaman, captain of the fishing boat Al-Fahim.

“It got entangled in a gillnet and died before fishermen could make any effort to rescue it,” said World Wide Fund for Nature-Pakistan’s technical adviser on marine fisheries Mohammad Moazzam Khan.

The species known from the Indian, Pacific and Atlantic oceans was mostly observed through stranding on beaches from different parts of the world, he added.

According to Mr Khan, it’s the first authentic record of the specific whale in Pakistan’s waters as the past two records of its occurrence based

on stranding at Sonmiani beach and near Churna Island were unconfirmed.



“Whales and dolphins are sensitive animals and they often die when they get entangled in fishing nets as they cannot come to the surface for breathing. The pygmy sperm whale feeds on deep-sea squids and crabs,” he pointed out.

Ten whales (three baleen whales and seven toothed whales), nine marine dolphins and one freshwater dolphin have been reported from Pakistan, he said.

The WWF-P is currently running a voluntary observer programme under which new records of whales and dolphins are being documented. It’s also training fishermen on how to rescue and release accidentally caught endangered marine species.

So far, 15 whale sharks, three manta rays, two sunfish and one longman’s beaked whale, an extremely rare species, were rescued and released over the past six months.

The pygmy sperm whale is listed in the Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora that means its trade is allowed only through a special permission given by the international organisation.

“Kogia breviceps is rarely seen at sea; it tends to live a long distance from shore and has inconspicuous habits.

There is considerable uncertainty about the status of this species, which may span a range from Least Concern to a Threatened category. There is no information on abundance or on trends in global abundance. As a relatively uncommon species it is potentially vulnerable to low-level threats and a 30pc global reduction over three generations cannot be ruled out,” says the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species website.

Published in Dawn March 7th, 2015

No check on illegal hunting of migratory birds

TARIQ SAEED BIRMANI —
DERA GHAZI KHAN: The Wildlife Department has failed to stop extensive shooting of migratory birds alongside banks of Indus River in the Dera Ghazi Khan division.

Graphic images of killing of a large number of migratory birds appeared on social media have raised a question mark on hunting ethics, flaws in the Wildlife Act and performance of the department.

Hunters have been violating the bag limit set by the Wildlife Department since long putting migratory birds near to a position of being wiped out. One hunter can shoot four to seven birds on the recommended day according to set rules.

Scores of groups of hunters in Dera Ghazi Khan, Muzaffargarh, Layyah and Rajanpur are engaged in killing of birds well in excess of their quota, sources alleged.

Khursheed Alim, the divisional in-charge of the Dera's Wildlife department, said that shooting of migratory birds beyond the quota was prohibited.

Commenting on the graphic image of hunted migratory birds, he said it was illegal and violation of hunting ethics as well as rules and regulations of the Wildlife Department. He said the act was a punishable offense.

Mr Alim said that game watchers were unarmed and were unable to stop influential people from illegal hunting.

He said it was unlawful to hunt in a party of more than three guns while hunting was allowed only on Sundays during the season.

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Turtle meat case: offenders released in violation of rules

FAIZA ILYAS —

KARACHI: The two men recently arrested with turtle meat in Thatta district were released after being made to pay a small fine of Rs25,000 in violation of the Sindh Turtles and Tortoises Protection, Conservation and Compensation Rules, 2014, it emerged on Monday.

While sources in the wildlife department confirmed to Dawn that the offenders were released, a Sindh wildlife conservator denied the development that has taken place at a time when the seizure of a Hong Kong-bound consignment containing over 4,000 dried parts of freshwater turtles is being investigated.

The sources said that a wildlife official had arrested Allah Dino and Majeed Jogi in Makli

some two days ago for carrying two kilograms of turtle meat.

They were released after they paid the fine of Rs25,000, a source added.

“The men told us that they intended to take the turtle meat to Karachi from where it is taken to other countries,” said a wildlife official in Thatta. He said his superior officers told him that the men were released after they had paid Rs25,000.

The sources, however, pointed out that the staff didn't carry out any exercise to determine the severity of the crime in accordance with the Sindh Turtles and Tortoises Protection, Conservation and Compensation Rules, 2014.

Poaching, catching, trapping, netting of turtles and tortoises and using them as whole parts, products or derivatives for any purpose is prohibited under the turtles and tortoises law as well as the Sindh Protection Ordinance, 1972. The rules also ban transportation, petting, caging and export of turtles and tortoise as live or dead, as a whole, parts, products and derivatives.

The rules impose a heavy fine on the offender as each head of turtle and tortoise is to be treated as a separate offence. For instance, according to Clause 9 (i), the value of a turtle and tortoise confiscated as dead and the one that dies during inquiry is fixed as Rs20,000 per head and shall be recovered from the offender in addition to fine and compensation, while compounding the offence under provisions of the ordinance. An investigating team, the sources said, also raided the company addresses mentioned in its papers but they were found fake. “We are actively pursuing this case and taking help of all relevant agencies including the police and the wildlife department and hoping to making a breakthrough soon,” claimed additional collector customs Irfan Javed.

The Clause 9 (ii) says: “The parts, products and the derivatives of turtles and tortoises recovered and confiscated shall be determined in terms of ‘heads’ of turtles exploited and used and the value shall be charged as Rs20,000 per head.”

According to wildlife officials, the offender is also bound to pay a fine for Rs12,000 per head of turtle and tortoise for preventing the species from rendering their ecosystem services and causing them shock by withdrawing them from their habitat. “The cost incurred for holding of turtles and tortoise outside habitat and its feeding during inquiry, its transportation and repatriation shall be recovered from the offender on actual basis while compounding the offence or Rs1,000 shall be recovered in lump-sum for each head of animal,” Clause 10 of the rules says.

According to these rules, the provision of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1871 shall inter alia be applicable for causing cruelty to turtles and tortoises. The offender can get one-year imprisonment.

Upon contact, Sindh wildlife conservator Javed Mahar initially expressed ignorance about the incident and said he would talk to the relevant officials and then respond.

Later, Mr Mahar said: “My staff have told me that the matter is under investigation and the arrested men haven’t been released.” He, however, could neither tell about the police station where the arrested men were being kept nor could he provide details of an first offence report.

Only last week a Hong Kong-bound consignment containing over 4,000 dried parts of freshwater turtles was confiscated by the customs authorities at the Karachi port. Sources said the case was registered with the customs judge on March 3 under section 154

of the criminal procedure code against the proprietor of M/S Hongda Trading Company, Ali Ahmed, and the interior ministry had been requested to place his name on the Exit Control List.

Published in Dawn March 10th, 2015

Slaughtered hog deer seized, suspect fined

THE NEWSPAPER'S STAFF REPORTER — KARACHI: Sindh wildlife department staff arrested a man and confiscated a slaughtered hog deer and 41 partridges (black and grey) in Dadu on Wednesday.

A first-offence report was registered and the man identified as Ali Sher Laghari was fined Rs100,000.

“He had been into this business for more than a decade. The animals were purchased from keepers of private game reserves in Dadu,” said deputy wildlife conservator of Hyderabad Ghulam Mohammed Gadani while sharing the information received during the investigation.

The hog deer (*Axis porcinus*) and partridges are both protected under the Sindh Wildlife Protection Ordinance, 1972. In Pakistan, the hog deer is distributed in the Indus River forest reserves of Sindh and the Protected Area of Taunsa Barrage Wildlife Sanctuary.

According to the World Wide Fund for Nature-Pakistan website, numbers of hog deer have greatly decreased and ruthless behaviour of humans has threatened their survival. Hunting, habitat loss due to settlements and encroachments for agricultural use are the main threats to the species. Similar threats are faced by partridge population in the country.

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