

TIGERS, BEARS AMONG SMUGGLED WILDLIFE SEIZED IN THAILAND

The Jakarta Post .com *Latest News* October 29, 2003

BANGKOK (AFP): An array of live tigers, bears and reptiles smuggled into Thailand from Indonesia have been spared from China's cooking pots after being seized by police, a senior officer said on Wednesday.

Forest police and wildlife conservation officials raided a home in Nonthaburi province outside Bangkok and seized six tigers, three black bears, 24 pythons, three king cobras and a civet among many other animals, Forest Police Commander Sawek Pinsinchai told reporters.

They also found 48 kilograms of fresh and dried tiger bones, 22 kilograms of tiger meat and two tiger skulls.

"The animals were smuggled in from (Indonesia's) Sumatra to Thailand before and were to be sent out to restaurants in China via Laos," Sawek said, adding that the haul had a street value of about 2.6 million baht (US\$65,000).

One man has been arrested and charged with wildlife possession and trade without authorization, for which he faces a four-year jail sentence and a fine of 40,000 baht on each count.

The suspect told police that five other illegal shipments of animals to China had already taken place, Sawek said, adding that an arrest warrant for the house owners, who were on the run, had also been issued.

Sawek also vowed to crack down on the wildlife trade at Bangkok's famed Chatuchak weekend market.

"Chatuchak is the biggest place we know of for wildlife trade. We will wipe it out within three months," he said.