



THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT of JUSTICE

United States Attorney's Office
District of Oregon

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California Man Pleads Guilty for Role in Scheme to Smuggle Endangered and Vulnerable Turtles from the U.S. to China

EUGENE, Ore.— A Chinese national residing in Los Angeles pleaded guilty today for his role in a scheme to purchase hundreds of endangered and vulnerable turtles in the U.S. and smuggle them via U.S. mail and commercial airline flights to China.

Yuan Xie, 30, pleaded guilty today to one count of conspiring to smuggle goods from the U.S.

According to court documents, beginning in at least May 2017 and continuing until October 2018, Xie conspired with another Chinese national, Xiao Dong Qin, 35, of Shanghai, China, to purchase more than 769 live turtles from reptile dealers in Alabama, California, Florida, Kentucky, Michigan, New Jersey, Nevada, North Carolina, and South Carolina. All of the turtles purchased and smuggled by Xie are protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

A two-year investigation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) revealed that in an 18-month period, Xie facilitated the purchase and transportation of approximately 134 Florida box turtles, 178 eastern box turtles, 127 North American wood turtles, 220 spotted turtles, 77 diamondback terrapins, 25 three-toed box turtles, seven yellow-blotched map turtles, and one Blanding's turtle from his former residence in Eugene, Oregon. USFWS investigators determined the cost of the turtles involved in this investigation exceeded \$150,000 and estimated the market value was more than double that amount in the Chinese pet trade.

In November 2018, Xie was arrested by USFWS agents at his residence in Los Angeles.

Xie faces a maximum sentence of ten years in prison, a \$250,000 fine and three years of supervised release. He will be sentenced on August 12, 2021 before U.S. District Court Judge Michael J. McShane.

As part of the plea agreement, Xie has agreed to pay \$2,233 in restitution to a rehabilitation facility near Chicago and The Turtle Conservancy near Los Angeles for costs associated with the care of turtles intercepted by law enforcement.

Qin was sentenced on February 27, 2020 to two years' probation and paid nearly \$8,000 in restitution.

This case was investigated by USFWS with assistance from the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. It is being prosecuted by Pamela Paaso, Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Oregon.

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