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Department
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State of Hawaii

NEWS RELEASE

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Piranha turned in under Amnesty Program

A six-inch piranha was turned into the State Department of Agriculture's Plant Quarantine Station. An anonymous local male walked into the Station at about 8:35, this morning, relinquishing the illegal animal to authorities.

Under the Department's Amnesty Program there are no penalties assessed against individuals who voluntarily turn in any illegal animal to the State Department of Agriculture Plant Quarantine Offices, or alternative sites such as Humane Societies and municipal zoos, statewide. The Amnesty Program is available to encourage owners of illegal pets to turn them in, rather than releasing them into the wild where they can do much damage. However, once an investigation is launched and a person is caught for possessing an illegal animal the penalties can be quite severe.

Perpetrators caught harboring and raising illegal animals are subject to stiff penalties with a minimum fine of \$5,000, and a maximum of \$200,000 and up to three years in jail. Again, individuals with illegal pets are encouraged to turn them into the Department under the State's Amnesty Program which grants immunity to those who voluntarily come forward. Anyone with information or knowledge about piranhas and other illegal animals is asked to call the Department's PEST Hotline at 586-PEST (7378).

This species of piranha, *Serrasalmus nattereri*, is commonly referred to as the red-bellied piranha. It is by far the most common species found in the pet trade. This species is very aggressive and is known for its attack on humans. Other piranhas that have been turned in or seized in Hawaii, have been of this same variety. Red-bellied piranhas are widely distributed throughout the Amazon and Orinoco regions, the Guianas, and the Rio Paraguay and Rio Parana. Adults can range between 7 to 10 inches long.

Photo opportunities of the piranha will be available until 4:30 this afternoon at the State's Plant Quarantine Station located at 701 Ilalo Street. The Department will safeguard the animal until a suitable home is found.

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