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NEWS RELEASE

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Second Piranha turned in under Amnesty Program

Yesterday afternoon, an anonymous person turned over an eight-inch piranha to the Honolulu Zoo. The animal was collected by State Department of Agriculture officials and is now being safeguarded at the Department's Plant Quarantine Station.

This is the second piranha to be turned in within a week. This past Wednesday, a six-inch piranha was voluntarily turned in to authorities at the Plant Quarantine Station. The Department would like to thank the media that covered the story, which probably contributed to yesterday's turn-in.

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).

Both piranhas were of the same species, *Serrasalmus nattereri*, commonly referred to as the red-bellied piranha. It is by far the most common species found in the pet trade. Known for its attack on humans, this species is very aggressive with adults growing up to 10 inches in length. Red-bellied piranhas are widely distributed throughout the Amazon and Orinoco regions, the Guianas, and the Rio Paraguay and Rio Parana.

Photo opportunities of both piranhas will be available between 2:30 and 3:30 this afternoon at the State's Plant Quarantine Station located at 701 Ilalo Street. Both animals will be held at the station, until suitable homes can be found.

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