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United States Attorney's Office
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News Release

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2 east metro women sentenced for smuggling wildlife

Two women from the eastern Twin Cities metropolitan area were sentenced today in federal court to smuggling protected wildlife into the United States for financial gain.

On Jan. 13 in Minneapolis, United States District Court Judge Joan Ericksen sentenced Pa Lor, unknown age, Oakdale, to two years probation and Tia Yang, 36, Lake Elmo, to two years probation and a \$9,000 fine each on one count of conspiracy to smuggle wildlife. Both women were indicted on May 12, 2008, and both pleaded guilty in July 2008.

“These women knowingly exploited endangered and other protected wildlife purely for personal profit,” said Gregory Jackson, Midwest Region Special Agent in Charge for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “Illegal wildlife trafficking is the primary threat to many endangered species worldwide. Driving a species to extinction is a serious matter, and I want to thank the U.S. Attorney’s Office for prosecuting this case with that in mind. I hope this sends the message to others who may be exploiting wildlife that they will be caught and prosecuted.”

“The populations of these endangered and threatened wildlife species have been significantly impacted by the smuggling efforts of these defendants,” said U.S. Attorney Frank J. Magill. “This prosecution should send a message that this type of crime will not be tolerated.”

According to their respective plea agreements, Yang leased a booth at the International Market Place, located in St. Paul. The booth was managed by Lor, and both defendants had an agreement to smuggle wildlife into the U.S. from Laos in order to sell the items at the booth starting as early as October 2005 and continuing through at least August 2006.

Lor was stopped by law enforcement on Oct. 23, 2005, at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport with more than 1,300 pieces of illegally smuggled wildlife in her possession. Lor had intentionally concealed the wildlife pieces in her luggage in order to avoid detection.

The U.S. is a signatory to an international treaty aimed at protecting certain species of fish and wildlife against over-exploitation. The treaty classifies wildlife based in part on the current threat to the wildlife population. According to the treaty, some protected species can be imported into the U.S. with a valid importation permit. The defendants did not have any permits, and in fact, permits would not be issued for many of the wildlife parts the defendants possessed because of their endangered status.

The pieces of wildlife seized during the investigation included animals listed as the most threatened including, Asian elephant, serow, douc langur, spotted linsang, red- or rusty-spotted cats, gibbons, tapirs, clouded leopards and leopard cats.

Yang admitted that she knew Lor was smuggling wildlife and provided financial support to further the smuggling, and allowed packages of wildlife to be shipped to her from Laos for sale at the marketplace booth.

This case was the result of an investigation by the U.S. Department of the Interior-Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney LeeAnn K. Bell.

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For more information and photos on the animals involved, visit www.fws.gov/midwest/LawEnforcement/traffic.html or contact Chuck Traxler, Outreach Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, at 612-713-5313 or charles_traxler@fws.gov.