The Moscow Times
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Kazakh Bus Driver Caught Smuggling 2,700 Rare Tortoises

By The Moscow Times

May 29, 2013



The smuggled tortoises were from an endangered species.

A bus driver illegally transporting almost 3,000 rare tortoises was apprehended on his way from Kazakhstan to Altai region this week.

The 43-year-old Kazakh citizen was bringing workers over from Kazakhstan to Russia when he was stopped at a check point, according to the Siberian customs website.

During the routine check, border guards discovered boxes containing 2,709 small tortoises that belong to a rare Central Asian species.

The batch is estimated to be worth 1.15 million rubles ($50,000).

The tortoises are 13 to 25 centimeters in length, can live up to 75 years, and are popular pets. Their owners frequently leave notes about them in their wills.

However, the species is declining in number and is listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species as well as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

Russian law prohibits the import of these tortoises without proper documentation, which is in line with the international convention. The bus driver did not have these documents and is now facing criminal charges of smuggling important goods and resources. He faces three to seven years in prison plus a fine of 1 million rubles if found guilty.

Original url:
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