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St. Petersburg Man Jailed for Rare Mammal Skull Theft

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Skulls of clouded leopards, orangutans, sloths and other mammal skulls of "high historical, scientific and commercial value" had gone missing from the Russian Academy of Sciences' Zoological Institute.
Moscow Museum

A St. Petersburg man has been detained and charged for stealing 50 rare animal skulls from the Russian Academy of Sciences, Interfax reported Friday, citing an anonymous source.

The Russian Academy of Sciences' Zoological Institute in St. Petersburg said Thursday that skulls of clouded leopards, orangutans, sloths and other mammal skulls of "high historical, scientific and commercial value" had gone missing from its laboratory.

The 50-year-old unnamed carpenter who worked at the Zoological Institute is accused of stealing 3.5 million rubles ($471,800) worth of skulls between August 2020 and January 2021.

Law enforcement found 28 of the skulls in the man's apartment and said he sold the rest to a 10th-grade student. St. Petersburg police reportedly questioned the high school student in front of his mother.

According to Interfax, the man has been criminally charged with large-scale theft. He had previously been convicted of malicious hooliganism and traffic rule violations causing grievous bodily harm.

It's still unclear why he stole the skulls — or how a 10th-grader would have the money to buy them. But not all mysteries can be solved.

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