TRAFFICKED ANIMALS: 
THE ROUGH ROAD TO 
RECOVERY AND 
REHABILITATION IN THE 
UNITED STATES

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Kate Welch
Stetson University College of Law
Gulfport, Florida
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ROADMAP

- Catching animal smugglers at ports
- Scale of confiscations
- Short-term care
- Permanent placement
- Challenges to placement
SMUGGLING OF LIVE ANIMALS

- Shipped through the mail (DHL, UPS, FedEx)
- Checked baggage
- Cargo
- Airline Passengers (on-person)
SNAKES IN STEREOS
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Credit: USFWS
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PORTS OF ENTRY INSPECTIONS

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)
- 123 Wildlife Inspectors
- 77 Ports of Entry
- 7 Canine Teams
- X-rays
- Viewing Tubes

Credit: USFWS
From January 1999—February 2019:

- Approx. 407,500 illegally trafficked individual animals seized
- Approx. 6,600 animals dead on arrival
- Approx. 40% of live animal seizures are corals
- Frequent seizures in Florida ports, especially Miami
INITIAL DETERMINATION

• Refused Shipments
• To Seize or Not to Seize
• Importer Care
• Injurious Species:

deemed to be harmful “to human beings, to the interests of agriculture, horticulture, forestry, or to wildlife or the wildlife resources of the United States.”

Source: Lacey Act (U.S. Federal Statute)
SHORT-TERM CARE DURING PROSECUTION

- Fish and Wildlife (FWS) Vendors
- Charged Per Animal Per Day
- Large quantities of animals
- 60-Day Evidence Hold
- Length of Litigation
PERMANENT HOMES

- Vendors
- AZA-Accredited Zoos and Aquariums
- Educational Outreach Programs
- Conservation Missions
- Repatriation or Release (Rare)

Credit: U.S. Customs and Border Protection
CHALLENGES TO PLACEMENT

• Species Too Common
• No Chain of Custody Info
• Large Number of Animals in Shipment
• No Money in Budget for Care
• Time for recovery
• Sad State of Animal
AFTER DONATION

- Quarantine
- Possible Transfer and Restrictions
- Cost of long-term care
- Proof of Death

Corals in Quarantine
Credit: Florida Aquarium
AFTER DONATION—SHEDD AQUARIUM, CHICAGO

Arapaima

Thai Catfish

Credit: ©Shedd Aquarium/Brenna Hernandez

Credit: Animal Planet

Credit: Mega Fishing Thailand
TAKE-AWAYS

• High Death Rates

• No Resources for Long-Term Care

• Common animals hard to find homes for

• Animals Rarely Freed
FLORIDA SUCCESS STORY

• More than 600 turtles returned to the wild
• 300 of those freed turtles now part of long-term monitoring & research project
• Two dozen more turtles released after quarantine for illness
• Small number of non-native turtles retained by captive wildlife licensee
THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING EXPERT SOURCES:

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