



Department of Justice

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WALNUT, CALIFORNIA RESIDENT INDICTED FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMES

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Andrew Anhh Nguyen, a Walnut, California resident, was charged by a federal grand jury in Los Angeles, California with conspiring to import plant specimens protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Department of Justice announced today. Nguyen, who was allegedly conspiring to import into the United States, specimens of cycads—which resemble palms or tree ferns—was also charged with eight counts of customs offenses, including smuggling and importing cycads by means of false declarations and statements, and one count of violating the Endangered Species Act.

“We are serious about enforcing the laws that protect rare plants and wildlife from exploitation and possible extinction,” said David M. Uhlmann, Chief of the Environmental Crimes Section for the Justice Department’s Environment and Natural Resources Division. “Today’s indictment demonstrates our commitment to prosecuting those individuals who threaten valuable and rare protected species.”

The indictment describes Nguyen’s agreement in April 2001 to purchase some 51 protected *Encephalartos* plants from a co-conspirator for approximately \$26,000. The plants were allegedly shipped to Nguyen from Zimbabwe by a second co-conspirator. The specimens were labeled with numbers rather than species names and Nguyen was provided a key showing which numbers corresponded to which species. The permit accompanying the shipment did not authorize the shipment of any of the species actually in the shipment. The indictment goes on to describe Nguyen’s efforts to illegally import and sell approximately 800 cycad seeds.

Cycads are a small group of primitive-looking plants, belonging to the genera *Encephalartos* and *Cycas*, whose ancestors date back more than 200 million years. Certain cycad species face threats in the wild from habitat loss and over-collection. Cycads are protected under CITES, a treaty through which the United States and more than 150 other countries protect certain species of fish, wildlife and plants against over-exploitation by regulating trade in the species. Protected species are listed in appendices to CITES. Species listed in Appendix I, the most protected designation, are those threatened with extinction. Appendix I species may be traded only in exceptional circumstances, and then only with and pursuant to the terms of required permits. All species of *Encephalartos* are listed in Appendix I. All species of *Cycas* are listed in Appendix II, meaning they may become threatened with extinction if trade in the specimens is not carefully regulated.

The United States implements CITES through the Endangered Species Act, which prohibits trade in specimens contrary to CITES as well as possession of specimens that have been traded contrary to CITES.

The investigation of this case was led by Special Agents of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The case is being prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of California and the Environmental Crimes Section of the Department of Justice.

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