



NEWS RELEASE

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‘OPERATION SPIDERMAN’ LEADS TO ARREST OF GERMAN MAN ON FEDERAL CHARGES OF SMUGGLING TARANTULAS INTO THE U.S.

LOS ANGELES – A German national has been arrested on federal animal smuggling charges after he allegedly used the U.S. Mail to illegally import hundreds of tarantulas, some of which are protected under international law.

Sven Koppler, 37, a German citizen who is believed to reside in Wachtberg, Germany, was arrested without incident late yesterday afternoon by special agents with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and United States Postal Inspectors. Koppler was arrested soon after arriving in Los Angeles to meet with an associate.

Koppler is charged in a criminal complaint that alleges one count of illegally importing wildlife into the United States, a smuggling offense that carries a statutory maximum penalty of 20 years in federal prison and a \$250,000 fine.

The investigation into Koppler began in March, when a routine search of an international package revealed approximately 300 live tarantulas that were being shipped to Los Angeles. As part of the investigation, Fish and Wildlife agents obtained information about an additional shipment of live tarantulas from Germany via the United States Postal Service. Fish and Wildlife agents intercepted a second package that contained nearly 250 live tarantulas wrapped in colored plastic straws. The second package contained 22 Mexican red-kneed (*Brachypelma smithi*) tarantulas, a species that is protected under an international treaty.

During a subsequent undercover investigation detailed in the criminal complaint, Fish and Wildlife agents ordered additional tarantulas from Koppler who then sent the

tarantulas from Germany to the agents in the United States. The agents received a package in April that included about 70 live (and one dead) tarantulas, and four other packages last month that included several dozen live and dead tarantulas. The undercover buys involved protected *Brachypelma* tarantulas.

The entire *Brachypelma* genus is protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) because it is being threatened by international trade, and specimens can only be legally traded if CITES permits first are obtained from the exporting country.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife reviewed records that indicate Koppler has received approximately \$300,000 as a result of tarantula sales to individuals in dozens of countries throughout the world, including approximately nine people in the United States.

Koppler is expected to make his initial court appearance in United States District Court this afternoon.

A criminal complaint contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed to be innocent until and unless proven guilty in court.

Operation Spiderman was conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which received substantial assistance from the United States Postal Inspection Service, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

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