An Undercover Initiative by The Division of Law Enforcement of The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

**GOAL**
To identify and address the illegal collecting, possession, and Black Market Trade in New York’s Native Reptiles and Amphibians
Why “Herps?”

• New York States Reptiles and Amphibians are considered “indicator” species. With tremendous sensitivity to pollution, they tell us, through disappearance, disease, and deformities, when things are not right with the environment. Overall, their existence is directly related to public health and safety. And, they significantly contribute to the quality of life.
…is the variety of all things living on earth. It is a life system that we as humans are part of. Biodiversity is fundamental to our existence.

Wildlife such as reptiles and amphibians that you may have considered slimy, frightful and ugly, are creatures we can’t live without.

This was not just about laws…
The Threats To The Resource

Habitat Loss and Fragmentation
Disease
Pollution
Invasive Species
Climate Change
and...
Illegal collecting and commercialization

With all the other threats putting so much pressure on species, illegal collecting and the black market act as a final “Nail In The Coffin.”
So what Herps are we protecting?

- The New York Native Species are:
  - 18 species of salamanders
  - 14 species of frogs
  - 17 species of turtles
  - 3 species of lizards and skinks
  - 17 species of snakes
Shellshock’s Objectives

• Identify illegal markets for native reptiles and amphibians
• Identify weaknesses in our laws
• Identify illegal cross border trade in New York’s Reptiles and Amphibians
• Identify violators through covert means and develop cases for prosecution
• “Follow through” with enforcement training and public education to promote better protection and stewardship
• Develop a database of intelligence to formulate patrol objectives and situational response to better protect indicator species
The Timing Was Right

Administration open to the task at hand

Increased complaints regarding illegal Herp activity

Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission poised to run parallel operation with NY

Increased public support for reptile and amphibian protection

Increased enforcement authority through more comprehensive laws
Our Targets?......NO!!!
Wildlife Crimes are committed by people with...

Knowledge of the laws and...

Intent to break them, usually for possession or monetary gain.
The Legal Toolbox

- All Native New York Reptiles and Amphibians are now protected by law
- Many listed as “game” species with no season
- Some given additional protection as Endangered and Threatened Species
- Change in wording of regulations to protect “all life forms” (eggs)
- Federal statutes, such as the Lacy Act
Sec. 11-0107. Application of Fish and Wildlife Law.

1. No person shall take…

2. No person shall, at any time of the year, buy, sell, offer or expose for sale, transport, or have in his possession any fish protected by law, game, protected wildlife, shellfish, harbor seals, crustacea protected by law, or part thereof, or protected insect, whether taken within the state or coming from without the state, except as permitted by the Fish and Wildlife Law.
Sec. 71-0924. Illegal commercialization of fish, shellfish, crustaceans, and wildlife.

when a violation involves the sale, trade or barter of fish, shellfish, crustaceans, wildlife, or parts thereof, the sale, trade or barter of which is prohibited by the fish and wildlife Law…

$0-250.00 violation
$251-1499.00 misdemeanor
$1500 and up felony
Bog Turtle $2,000
E. Massasauga “Priceless”
Spotted Turtle  $125-$400
Timber Rattlesnake  $175-$300
Common Snapping Turtle
$1.25-2.50/lb. live weight
Large reptile shows were identified as sites of illegal transactions
Natives and Endangered Exotics
Sold under the Table
And others...
Wildlife for sale at Herp shows
The Internet

The majority of classified ads are legal. Illegal ads are disguised with deceptive information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Ad Description</th>
<th>Seller Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>03/21/08</td>
<td>Baby New Guinea Snapping Turtle</td>
<td>Quality First Pets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Los Fresnos, Texas 78566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/21/08</td>
<td>Captive Bred Baby Red Ear Sliders</td>
<td>Exotic Pets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Las Vegas, NV-wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/21/08</td>
<td>Snake Neck Turtles (C. Siebenrocki)</td>
<td>Reptiles of Distinction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anywhere in the US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/20/08</td>
<td>TUBERCULATE TOAD HEADED TURTLES - BATRACHEMYS TUBERCULATUS</td>
<td>Turtles and Tortoises Inc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/20/08</td>
<td>EASTERN BOX TURTLES - cbb 2007! sweet!</td>
<td>Amazon Reptile Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>=WORLDWIDE=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>=FROM==</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>=MONTCLAIR=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>=CALIFORNIA=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/20/08</td>
<td>Baby common snapping turtles - 1000</td>
<td>Adam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/20/08</td>
<td>STRIPENECK MUSK (STERNOTHERUS MINOR PELTIFER)</td>
<td>Michael</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>WORLDWIDE SHIPPING</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LARGE TURTLES FOR ADOPTION

LARGE
EASTERN PAINTED
TURTLES FOR SALE
(4 TO 6 INCHES )
GREAT FOR PONDS AND AS PETS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item: #450</th>
<th>Price: $$$</th>
<th>Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 EASTERN PAINTED</td>
<td>$14.95</td>
<td>Add to Cart</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

View Cart/Checkout
Illegal Trapping
What Did We Find?

• A very active, lucrative illegal market for native species at shows and online.

• A “culture” within a culture thirsty for possession of increasingly rare species.

• Markets outside of New York State influencing the illegal collection in NY.

• “Hollow” reasoning to justify possession, breeding, and sale.
Case Scenario 1

- A popular herp show vendor, author, and owner of a significant herp related website
- Sold spotted turtles to a covert operator multiple times with knowledge of the illegal act
Case Scenario 2

• Covert Operators bought and sold spotted, wood, and box turtles from members of several turtle conservation organizations
• Targets showed knowledge that act was illegal
• Revealed problems within the special interest community regarding possession, as well as protection
Case Scenario 3

“Wanted-Snapping Turtles”

• This add on Kingsnake.com lead to a relationship with two NY subjects that collected thousands of snapping turtle eggs each year and hatched them

• They then laundered them through a Louisiana turtle farm to Chinese buyers overseas
Case Scenario 4

A target claiming to be one of the largest turtle buyers in the Eastern US purchased over 2,000 pounds of live snapping turtles from NY covert operatives with knowledge their harvest was illegal.
Case Scenario 5
International Smuggling

“Looking for trustworthy Americans to trade rattlesnakes”

Investigators answered the above internet post and connected with a Canadian Poacher
A Model For Cooperation

- NYSDEC
- Environment Canada
- Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
- USFWS
- Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission
- US Immigration and Customs Enforcement
- New York State Police
33 Rattlesnakes hidden in a minivan’s compartments
Case Scenario 6

It all started with a salamander for sale...

And ended with an illegal collector selling covert investigators many species
Results

• Covert Investigators witnessed over 2,600 violations of laws protecting reptiles and amphibians
• 32 defendants were charged in New York, Florida, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Louisiana and Canada with misdemeanors and felonies
• State and Federal Investigations Continue
• Over $125,000 recovered in fines and penalties
• The public is now more aware of our commitment to protect our native wildlife and biodiversity in New York
The Future

- Continue training and awareness for LE
- Increase dialogue between LE and wildlife managers.
- Expand and promote intel sharing
- Continue to develop and maintain herp enforcement data base.
- Use Shellshock as a springboard for education.