



DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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Western District of New York

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 3, 2017

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CHINESE MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO ILLEGALLY SHIPPING SNAKES

BUFFALO, N.Y. - Acting U.S. Attorney James P. Kennedy, Jr. announced today that Chaoyi Le, 28, of Shanghai, China, pleaded guilty to Lacey Act False Labeling before Chief U.S. District Judge Frank P. Geraci, Jr. The charge carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Aaron J. Mango and Craig R. Gestring, who are handling the case, stated that on April 22, 2014, the defendant sent seven ball pythons from Amherst, NY, to Shanghai, China through the U.S. Mail using the fictitious name "Ben Fan." Le submitted a form falsely declaring that the package contained "Belts, Candy and Chocolate" with a value of \$80. At the time the package was shipped, the ball pythons had an approximate value of \$3,300.

The package was recovered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and inspected on May 3, 2014. In addition to the seven live ball pythons, the package also contained cloth bags typically used to hold snakes, hand warmers which are typically used in shipping reptiles, and insulation material. Written on one of the cloth bags were trade names for ball pythons: "Enchi Ghost," "Pastel Enchi Ghost," and "Butter Enchi," all common trade names for ball pythons color morphs. After discovering the pythons, the USFWS contracted with a wildlife expert to temporarily care for the pythons.

Le was stopped by Canadian border officials attempting to enter Canada on April 22, 2014, at which time three live albino western hog-nosed snakes were found hidden in his socks. The total value of the hog-nosed snakes was approximately \$500.

The plea is the result of an investigation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, under the direction of Honora Gordon, Special Agent-in-Charge, Northeast Region; the United States Postal Inspection Service, under the direction of Inspector-in-Charge Shelly Binkowski of the Boston Division; and Investigators with Environment and Climate Change Canada, Wildlife Enforcement Division.

Sentencing is scheduled for October 30, 2017 at 10:00 a.m. before Judge Geraci.

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