



NEWS RELEASE

Eileen M. Decker

United States Attorney
Central District of California

For Immediate Distribution

October 30, 2015

Thom Mrozek, Public Affairs Officer

thom.mrozek@usdoj.gov

(213) 894-6947

www.justice.gov/usao-cdca

@CDCANews

South American Man who Illegally Trafficked in Protected Orchids on Layover at LAX Pleads Guilty to Federal Wildlife Charge

LOS ANGELES – A Peruvian national who possessed orchids in violation of an international wildlife treaty has pleaded guilty to a federal offense of illegal trade in a protected species.

Victor Manuel Arias Cucho, 46, of Lima, Peru, pleaded guilty to the offense Wednesday in United States District Court.

This case is the result of U.S. authorities discovering more than 200 protected orchids in Cucho's luggage at Los Angeles International Airport. Cucho was flying from Australia to Peru on September 24, when he had a layover at LAX after attending an orchid trade show in Sydney.

The orchids are protected under the Convention on International Trade In Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and Cucho was aware that he could not bring the CITES-protected orchids into the United States or Peru without having proper documentation. Knowing that he did not have the CITES-required documentation, Cucho concealed the orchids in various parts of his luggage in order to avoid detection by customs authorities. Upon arriving at LAX, Cucho submitted a Customs declaration in which he denied that he was carrying any plants, and he was sent by customs authorities for a secondary agricultural inspection.

After pleading guilty on Wednesday, Cucho was sentenced by United States Magistrate Judge Karen L. Stevenson to two years of probation and was ordered to pay a \$7,500 fine.

The case against Cucho is the product of an investigation by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. U.S. Customs and Border Protection first discovered the orchids in Cucho's luggage. The United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Plant Protection and Quarantine Program provided assistance.

CONTACT: Assistant United States Attorney Dennis Mitchell
Environmental and Community Safety Crimes Section
(213) 894-2484

Release No. 15-119