

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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Alan Levitt 202/343-5634

## MAJOR ALLIGATOR SMUGGLING INVESTIGATION CONCLUDED

A major wildlife law enforcement case involving the illegal commercialization of more than 2,500 hides of endangered American alligators with a street value of over \$1 million has resulted in jail sentences and fines totaling \$87,500 for three men and three corporations.

Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said Jacques Klapisch, 56, of Newark, New Jersey, was sentenced Friday, November 17 before Judge Charles P. Sifton in the U.S. District Court, Eastern District of New York on his plea of guilty to one count of conspiracy to violate the Lacey Act by illegally purchasing approximately 2,500 American alligator skins in the Southeastern United States, transporting them to New York, and shipping them to tanneries in Japan and France. Klapisch received about \$140,000 for the illegal sale of the raw hides, according to court records. He was sentenced to 4 months imprisonment and fined \$10,000.

Meg Import Corporation, Klapisch's employer and a New Jersey firm specializing in buying, selling, brokering, and exporting wild animal skins, pleaded guilty to one count of violating 18 U.S.C. 371 (conspiracy to make false statements and entries) and 12 counts of violating the Lacey Act by shipping the hides out of the United States using false and fictitious shipping documents. These documents contained the names of non-existent firms and did not disclose the fact that alligator skins were in the shipment. Meg Import Corporation was fined \$39,000.

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John Kelly, 36, of Queens, New York, was sentenced on his plea of guilty to one count of conspiracy to violate the Endangered Species Act. He was sentenced to 4 months imprisonment.

William Greenblatt, 44, of North Bellmore, New York; Kiyoshi Egawa, 37, of Queens, New York; and two corporations, Gunze, New York, Inc., and Egawa International Company, Ltd., both New York import/export firms that are subsidiaries of Japanese companies, also were sentenced on their pleas of guilt to violations of the Endangered Species Act. Greenblatt was fined \$2,500, given a 1 year suspended sentence, and placed on 2 years probation. Kiyoshi Egawa was fined \$2,500 for one count of violating the ESA. Egawa International was fined \$12,500. Gunze was fined \$21,000.

These convictions are the result of an investigation that began in 1974 conducted by special agents of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Customs Service. Klapisch, Kelly, and Meg Imports were convicted of similar offenses in 1976 and were fined a total of \$9,500.

The American alligator (Alligator mississippians) is listed as either an endangered or threatened species throughout the United States. The possession of unlawfully taken endangered species, and their export or sale in interstate or foreign commerce is prohibited. Threatened species also may not be exported but may, under strictly controlled circumstances, be taken. Hides of American alligators are particularly valued for their quality, appearance, and the ease with which they may be worked.

This investigation is part of a continuing effort by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to halt the illegal commercialization of the Nation's wildlife.