

Arowana Fish Smuggling

Fish importer pleads guilty to smuggling endangered Asian arowana fish into the U.S.

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Arowana fish such as this can command high prices. Qi Gui Nie, 33, of Charlotte, North Carolina, pleaded guilty before United States District Court Judge Willis B. Hunt, Jr., to charges of smuggling endangered and prohibited wildlife into the United States through the port of Atlanta.

According to United States Attorney David E. Nahmias the information presented in court: On October 6, 2008, Qi Gui Nie, doing business as "Lucky Fin, Inc.," a North Carolina based wildlife importer, smuggled into the United States from Vietnam ten live endangered Asian arowana fish.

During an inspection of Nie's legally-imported tropical fish shipment, a Fish and Wildlife Service inspector discovered false bottoms attached to several boxes in the shipment. The inspector opened those boxes and discovered in the hidden compartments ten live Asian arowana fish, with accompanying certificates of authenticity. When questioned by Fish and Wildlife Service special agents, Nie denied having any knowledge of the Asian arowana fish.

Subsequently, Fish and Wildlife special agents executed a search warrant on Nie's business email account. A review of Nie's emails revealed numerous messages detailing purchase prices for arowana fish and photos of certificates of authenticity for the Asian arowana fish that were exactly like the ones seized during the inspection of Nie's fish shipment. The ten endangered Asian arowana fish in this case have a fair market value of approximately \$25,000.

In many Asian communities Asian arowana fish are highly sought after because it is believed that the fish will bring good fortune and protection to the owner, according to the Fish and Wildlife Service. Asian arowana fish are protected under the Endangered Species Act through an international treaty known as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora ("CITES").

Unless permitted by regulation, it is unlawful to import, export, take, sell, purchase, or receive, in interstate or foreign commerce any species listed as endangered or threatened.

Nie faces a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison on the smuggling charge and a fine of up to \$250,000.00. His sentencing is scheduled for September 30, 2009.