



Largest Seizure of Earless Monitor Lizards *Lanthanotus borneensis* in Kalimantan, Indonesia

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Authorities in Pontianak, Kalimantan, Indonesia, confiscated 40 endangered Earless Monitor Lizards (*Lanthanotus borneensis*) in March 2024, the most of this species ever seized in a single incident. Acting on intelligence, the Criminal Investigation Unit of the Pontianak Police intercepted the shipment at the port of Dwikora, along the Kapuas River in West Kalimantan, according to a statement issued during a press conference by the Unit and the West Kalimantan BKSDA (Balai Konservasi Sumber Daya Alam - Department of Natural Resources) on 19 March. The port is Pontianak's main harbor. One individual implicated in this case was detained and faces charges following ongoing investigations (<https://gardaanimalia.com/selamat-40-biawak-tak-bertelinga-gagal-diperdagangkan-ke-semarang/>).

This Bornean endemic reptile is known from five subpopulations in the Malaysian state of Sarawak and the Indonesian province of Kalimantan (Das and Auliya 2021), and was more recently reported from Brunei (Universiti Brunei Darussalam 2022), all on the island of Borneo. With such a limited range, where habitat destruction and loss are already a threat (Das and Auliya 2021), this species is highly susceptible to poaching for the international pet trade, regardless of it being a protected species in Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia (Nijman and Stoner 2014; Das and Auliya 2021). The Earless Monitor is categorized as Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species (Das and Auliya 2021).

International demand for this species for collectors and, in some cases, international zoos, has been well documented (Nijman and Stoner 2014; Janssen and Krishnasamy 2018; Das and Auliya 2021; Nijman 2021; Shepherd 2023). The Earless Monitor Lizard is protected in Indonesia; under the Second Amendment to the regulation of the Minister of Environment and Forest Number P.20/MENLHK/SETJEN/KUM.1/6/2018 regarding protected species of plants and animals (Ministry of Forestry and Environment 2018), trade in wild-caught animals is illegal.

In an effort to protect this species in Indonesia, the government has implemented a zero quota for the capture and trade of this species from the wild but does allow licensed breeders to breed them commercially for export. However, commercial breeding operations in Indonesia are well known to be fronts for the laundering of illegally caught reptiles from the wild into the international trade under the guise of being captive bred (Nijman and Shepherd 2009; Lyons and Natusch 2011; Janssen and Chng 2018). Furthermore, trafficking of wild caught Earless Monitor Lizards directly from the wild continues. Recently, in February 2023, two Earless Monitor Lizards were seized in Vietnam by the Cao Bang Environmental Police and Cao Bang Provincial Traffic Police with three people arrested (Shepherd 2023). Nijman (2021), also reported suspicious acquisitions of Earless Monitors by European zoos.

In 2017, Malaysia proposed listing the species in CITES Appendix I but the proposal was rejected and instead amended for inclusion in Appendix II “with a zero quota for wild specimens for commercial trade” (Janssen and Krishnasamy 2018; see also: <https://cites.org/eng/node/80609>). Given the ongoing trafficking of this species from Indonesia, the proposal to list the species in CITES Appendix I should be reconsidered.

The Earless Monitor Lizards seized in Pontianak were reportedly destined for Semarang, Central Java Province, although the final destination was likely international. This species and many others from Southeast Asia are in high demand in the United States of America (US) and the European Union (EU). In an effort to curtail the illegal trade in the US, a petition to list this species under the Endangered Species Act is based on the fact that the US is a leading importer of pet reptiles and could be a destination for trafficked Earless Monitor lizards. The fate of the seized Earless Monitor Lizards in this case is not known, although releasing them into the wild, given the seizure took place within the known range of the species, would seem like the logical decision.

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