

# Slow lorises fly so fast into Japan



## Introduction

Slow lorises (*Nycticebus spp.*) are native to South and Southeast Asia and belong to an ancient group of primates (CITES CoP14 Prop.1). Currently they are classified into three species, but it is likely, with the updates to the taxonomy and Red List classification (Asian Primate Red List Workshop, September 2006), the classification will be extended to 5 species. All the species are threatened with extinction so that the RL classification of them will be EN or VU (ibid.). It is understood from various literature that the main threats to their survival are, loss of habitat caused by deforestation, direct capture for pet trade, traditional medicine and as food (CITES CoP14 Prop.1).

Slow lorises are currently listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) which means, any international trade of the species is principally regulated through an export permit. However, the records from the CITES trade database show very little international trade reported by CITES Parties particularly in recent years (CoP14 Doc. 68 Annex 2). On the other hand, it is understood that illegal trade in them is getting rampant. Under these circumstances, Cambodia proposed to transfer slow lorises (genus *Nycticebus*) from Appendix II to Appendix I (CITES CoP14 Prop.1). Since CITES CoP14 Prop.1 suggests that Japan is one of the major destinations of slow lorises through illegal sources (CoP14 Prop.1), Japan Wildlife Conservation Society (JWCS) decided to report demand for slow lorises in Japanese pet market, analysis of the seizure records in Japan, and discussion on the benefit of up-listing CITES Appendix for conservation of slow lorises.

## Japanese Slow Lorises Market

The most popular primates pets are slow lorises and squirrel monkey (*Saimiri sciureus*) in Japan. It is understood that Slow lorises are advertised as easy to keep and especially popular among women. They are traded not only at pet shop but also through Internet (JWCS investigation in April, 2007).

### Price

Table 1 shows the prices of slow lorises demonstrated in advertisement on pet shop's websites.

The prices of slow lorises in Japan range from US\$1,500 to US\$4,000.

Table 1: Price of *Nycticebus spp.* on sale in Japan

| Retailers investigated | <i>N. coucang</i>                               |                   | <i>N. pigmaeus</i>                              |                   |
|------------------------|---|-------------------|---|-------------------|
|                        | Price   | Number of samples | Price   | Number of samples |
| A                      | 250,000 - 480,000JPY<br>(US\$2,083 - US\$4,000) | 6                 | 250,000 - 380,000JPY<br>(US\$2,083 - US\$3,166) | 4                 |
| B                      | 198,000 - 248,000JPY<br>(US\$1,650 - US\$2,066) | 11                | —   | —                 |
| C                      | 190,000 - 200,000JPY<br>(US\$1,583 - US\$1,666) | 2                 | 220,000JPY<br>(US\$1,833 )                      | 1                 |
| D                      | 300,000 - 450,000JPY<br>(US\$2,500 - US\$3,750) | 5                 | —   | —                 |

Source: Spot- investigation by JWCS in May 2007

### Source of slow lorises on sale

During a spot -investigation by JWCS at the pet shop in April 2007, most of pet shop employees explained the source of slow lorises as captive-bred in Japan. However, surveying the advertisement on the website aforementioned, some of it seemed to have originated from Java (Shop A and D), Sumatra (most of Shop D), and China (Shop C). Shop B advertised an arrival of 11 slow lorises (different seizures) on the same day. It is difficult to understand that so much captive-bred individuals are provided from a domestic breeding -business at a time and with several sizes (ages). Thus, it is suspected that those lorises had been imported from abroad.



### Increasing illegal import in slow lorises destined for Japan

#### Very little official import

The officially recorded imports between 1998 and 2006 of slow lorises with export-permit issued by the relevant exporting country are as follows (UNEP-WCMC CITES Trade Database) :

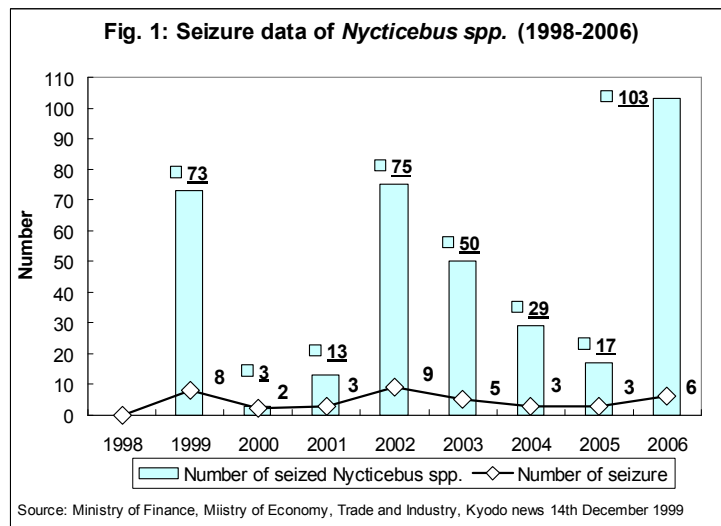
- 5 slow lorises (*Nycticebus coucang*) from Malaysia in 1998
- 2 slow lorises (*Nycticebus coucang*) from Myanmar in 1999
- 3 slow lorises (*Nycticebus coucang*) from Malaysia in 1999

#### Number of seizure and seized specimen of Slow lorises

While the officially recorded import is very little, illegal import is flourishing.

Figure 1 shows the number of seizure and seized specimen of slow lorises between 1998 and 2006.

There was no seizure of the specimen in 1998, however it has shot up since 1999. In nine years, between 1998 and 2006, a total of 39 seizures occurred and a total number of 363 specimens were seized (the seizures include a case where 5 dead lorises were found inside an air terminal after customs clearance (source: Kyodo news 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1999)).



#### Exporting country

Table 2, and Figure 2 and 3 show the exporting countries for seizures of slow lorises between 1998 and 2006.

Table 2: Exporting country of seized *Nocticebus* spp. destined for Japan (1998-2006)

|                        | Thailand   | Indonesia  | Singapore | Unknown  | Total |
|------------------------|------------|------------|-----------|----------|-------|
| <i>N. coucang</i>      | 106        | 119        | 11        | 5        | 241   |
| <i>N. pigmaeus</i>     | 117        | 0          | 0         | 0        | 117   |
| <i>Nycticebus</i> spp. | 5          | 0          | 0         | 0        | 5     |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>228</b> | <b>119</b> | <b>11</b> | <b>5</b> |       |

Source: Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry  
Kyodo news 14th December 1999

In the case of slow lorise (*N. coucang*), Thailand and Indonesia almost share the exporting countries of seized specimens. On the other hand, all the seized specimens of pigmy or lesser slow lorise (*N. pigmaeus*) were exported from Thailand.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2006, a Japanese national was arrested at Bangkok's new Suvarnabhumi Airport in an attempt to export nine slow lorises. That was the third time in 2006 when slow lorises had been confiscated en route from Thailand to Japan (IPPL News April 2007). On 24 February 2007, 23 slow lorises were seized at the airport, packed in a suitcase bound for Narita Airport, Japan (ibid.).

On 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2007, 40 slow lorises were seized at Narita Airport. They were concealed in a small trunk carried by a Japanese who arrived from Bangkok. This is the largest seizure as ever in Japan (Nikkan-sports 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2007). It is understood that Thailand is the major *entrepot* of slow lorises ranging Indo-China and pigmy slow lorise ranging Indonesia.

Slow lorise (*N. coucang*) has also been exported directly from the major range states or Indonesia.

Fig. 2: *Nycticebus coucang*  
- Exporting countries of the seized specimen

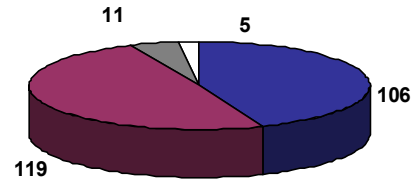
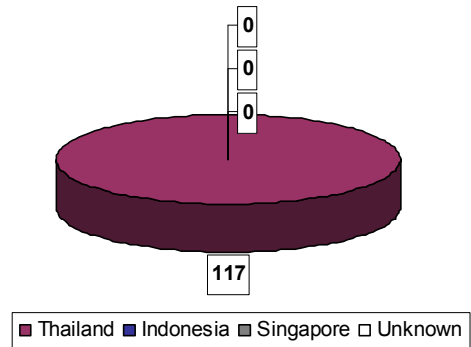


Fig. 3: *Nycticebus pigmaeus*  
- Exporting countries of the seized specimen



### Mortality rate

Table 3 and Figure 4,5, and 6 show the state (live / dead) of the specimen at the seizure between 1998 and 2006 by species. The state is decided at the time of transfer to zoo after sheltering it at the quarantine office.

Table 3: State of the *Nycticebus spp.* Specimen at seizure (1998-2006)

|                        | Live      | Dead       | Unknown    | Total      |
|------------------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| <i>N. coucang</i>      | 29        | 109        | 103        | 241        |
| <i>N. pigmaeus</i>     | 12        | 24         | 81         | 117        |
| <i>Nycticebus spp.</i> | 0         | 0          | 5          | 5          |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>41</b> | <b>133</b> | <b>189</b> | <b>363</b> |

Source: Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry  
Kyodo news 14th December 1999

While there is a necessity to investigate the currently unknown status of the specimens, the present data shows the mortality rate is as high as 76 % for all species of slow lorises, 79% for slow lorise (*N. coucang*) and 67% for pigmy or lesser slow lorise (*N. pigmaeus*).

Fig. 6: All specimen of *Nycticebus Spp.*  
- State of the specimen at the seizure (1998 - 2006)

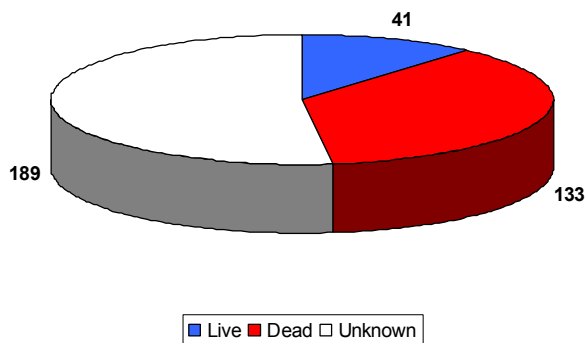


Fig. 4: *N. coucang*  
State of the specimen at the seizure  
(1998 - 2006)

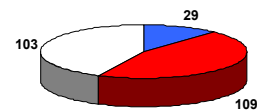
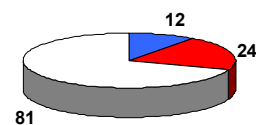


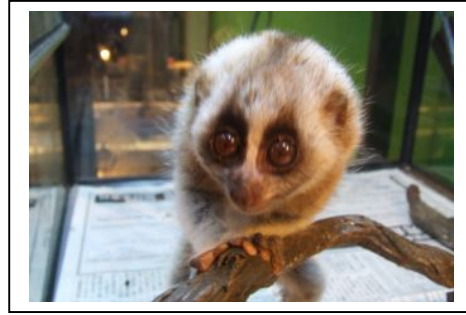
Fig. 5: *N. pigmaeus*  
State of the specimen at the seizure  
(1998 - 2006)



## Law enforcement

The Head of Customs takes action to the “Infraction case” against the Customs law as follows,

Where the sanction for the offence is worth a fine, the offender is notified of the requirement to pay the amount corresponding to the fine plus the goods themselves or the value of them instead (“Notified sanction”) and where the sanction is worth an imprisonment, the offender is criminally charged and handed over to the prosecutors.



It is understood that criminal charge or criminal investigation by the police was conducted in 9 out of 39 cases of seizures (23%) between 1998 and 2006. In 6 cases out of the 9 cases, the slow lorises were mixed with reptiles listed on Appendix I as Indian soft-shell turtle (*Trionyx gangeticus*) or Malay Gaviel (*Tomistoma schlegelii*), or with tens to hundreds of reptiles or raptors listed in Appendix II during the illegal trade. Even the other charged cases where only slow lorises were seized, it is reported that the emphasis of the Customs is not on conservation of slow lorises but on prevention of infectious diseases as Ebola (Kyodo News, 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2006). Considering these facts, 23% of criminal charge-rate cannot be evaluated as strict enough.

## Discussion

The demand for slow lorises in Japanese pet market is quite high and slow lorises are traded at high prices. Due to this demand, traders have resorted to illegal import and this has led to an increased incidence of smuggling. The study also proves the link of a well-established trade route from Thailand and Indonesia into Japan.

Many seized slow lorises have died before transferring to zoo. This high mortality must give the traders cause to buy in more specimens for sale than net volume intended to supply to the market. Thus the pet demand in Japan is leading to heavy illegal imports of slow lorises and may cause detrimental impact on the conservation of the species. Notwithstanding this situation, Japanese law enforcement against these smuggling is not so strict. The CITES listing status is considered as one of the most influential reasons for this weak law enforcement. Transfer of slow lorises from CITES Appendix II to Appendix I will have the law enforcement agencies give higher priority against smuggling of slow lorises than before, and hence, the conservation of slow lorises will be benefited.

## Recommendation

1. JWCS recommends that the Conference of the Parties to CITES adopts CoP14 Prop.1 at its 14<sup>th</sup> meeting.
2. JWCS recommends that the Japanese law enforcement agencies (the Police and the Customs) take more strict action than ever against smuggling of slow lorises.

Written by Masayuki Sakamoto

Secretary General of the Japan Wildlife Conservation Society (JWCS)

Published in May 2007, by Japan Wildlife Conservation Society

5F Suehiro Bld, 2-5-4 Toranomon, Minato-ku, Tokyo 105-0001, Japan

Phone / Fax: +81-3-3595-1171

E-mail: [info@jwcs.org](mailto:info@jwcs.org)

URL: <http://www.jwcs.org>

© 2007 Japan Wildlife Conservation Society

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

