

### 3 Departments in 3 States Leads to Arrests

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Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources News Release Ten people arrested, one cited for illegal sales of venomous snakes and other reptiles following two-year undercover investigation.

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Frankfort, Ky. - Conservation officers with the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources yesterday arrested 10 people, cited an additional person, seized more than 125 venomous snakes and other reptiles, and expect to issue more than 700 charges following a nearly two-year undercover investigation focusing on the illegal possession, importation and buying and selling of reptiles in Kentucky.

Forty-four conservation officers served arrest warrants in Bell, Harlan, Madison, Letcher and Boone counties. Officers also seized illegal western diamondback rattlesnakes, timber rattlesnakes, cottonmouth water moccasins, northern and southern copperheads, cobras, great basin rattlesnakes, a gaboon viper, a puff adder and an alligator.

Undercover officers purchased more than 200 illegal reptiles during the nearly two-year investigation code named "Twice Shy" that included Internet sales. Officers levied 416 charges, and expect to issue at least 300 more charges as the investigation continues.

"This was a well-conducted and well-documented investigation that has put those who would engage in the illegal selling and buying of any wildlife in Kentucky on notice that they are subject to arrest and prosecution," said Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Director of Law Enforcement Colonel Bob Milligan. "It is disturbing to me that individuals would keep such dangerous wildlife in their homes and in neighborhoods where they put their families, visitors and neighbors as such high risk."

· Gregory James Coots, 36, of Middlesboro was arrested and faces more than 150 charges of illegally buying, selling and possessing wildlife. Officers seized 74 snakes from his Middlesboro home, among them, 42 copperheads, 11 timber rattlesnakes, three cottonmouth water moccasins, a western diamondback rattlesnake, two cobras and a puff adder.

· Zechariah Johnson, 21, of Evarts in Harlan County faces at least 24 counts of illegally buying, selling and possessing venomous snakes. His father, Ricky Johnson, 55, also of Evarts faces at least 59 charges. Officers seized 24 timber rattlesnakes and copperheads from the residence.

· Verlin Ray Short, 36, of Mayking in Letcher County, was arrested and faces at least 78 charges of illegally buying, selling and possessing venomous snakes. Officers seized 34 venomous snakes, including a western diamondback rattlesnake, a great basin rattlesnake, timber rattlesnakes and northern and southern copperheads.

· Roger Leo Day, 33, of Harlan, was arrested and faces six charges of illegally buying, selling and possessing wildlife.

· Jerrod Allen, 21, of Berea, was arrested and faces at least nine charges of illegally buying, selling and possessing wildlife.

· Brian Fryer, 30, of Berea, was arrested and faces at least 46 charges of illegally selling, buying and possessing wildlife. Officers seized an illegal firearm as well.

· Michael Peterson, 39, of Florence, was arrested and faces at least 21 charges of illegally buying, selling and possessing wildlife. Officers seized an albino cobra, and the frozen remains of a gaboon viper and copperheads.

· John Rowland, 46, of Berea was arrested and faces two charges of illegally buying, selling and possessing wildlife. His son, Joel Rowland, 18, of Berea also was arrested and faces the same charges.

· William R. Howard, 56, of Harlan, was cited and faces three charges of illegally possessing wildlife and at least 35 charges of transporting wildlife without a permit.

Each charge of illegally buying, selling or possessing wildlife is a misdemeanor offense carrying a maximum penalty of one-year imprisonment and a \$1,000 fine.

