

Headline	Gecko no longer linked to AIDS cure		
MediaTitle	The Star		
Date	12 Sep 2013	Color	Full Color
Section	Nation	Circulation	304,904
Page No	3	Readership	1,026,812
Language	English	ArticleSize	345 cm ²
Journalist	ISABELLE LAI	AdValue	RM 16,005
Frequency	Daily	PR Value	RM 48,015



'Gecko no longer linked to AIDS cure'

Trade in lizards for NMCs declined markedly, says Traffic

By ISABELLE LAI

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PETALING JAYA: The Tokay Gecko is no longer being widely traded as a supposed AIDS cure, but is still in demand for traditional medicine uses, said Traffic South-East Asia.

The wildlife trade monitoring network said millions of the attractively-patterned lizards were being harvested from the wild to supply the traditional medicine trade in East Asia, which has been going on for hundreds of years.

"At the same time, the trade in Tokay Geckos for Novel Medicinal Claims (NMCs), including as a supposed cure for AIDS, has declined markedly," said its senior programme officer Kanitha Krishnasamy.

She stressed that there was no evidence to believe that it was a cure for HIV or AIDS, pointing out that the World Health Organisation had refuted such claims.

According to Traffic's report, regional demand for NMC trade in Tokay Geckos reached its peak from 2010 to 2011, after rumours sur-

faced in 2009 that its extract could provide a cure.

The 2013 report by Olivier S. Caillabet examined the Tokay Gecko trade in the region and included a case study in Peninsular Malaysia, the "purported centre of demand" in the NMC trade.

Despite the decline, it noted that the more prominent Tokay Gecko dealers appeared to be concentrated close to the Thai border, as well as being the source of the lizards entering the country.

"According to dealers interviewed during surveys, the primary consumers of Tokay Geckos for NMCs appear to be Singaporeans and locals. Some even claim the use of Tokay Geckos by Europeans and North Americans for medical research," said Caillabet.

He said the interviews indicated considerable sums of money were paid, especially for large Tokay Geckos weighing over 300g, with some dealers claiming those weigh-

ing over 400g were valued at RM3.26mil (US\$1mil).

"However, Traffic does not believe that these statements are credible. There is no evidence that such huge sums of money, as claimed by the dealers in Peninsular Malaysia, have been paid for Tokay Geckos weighing over 400g," he said, adding that the dealers' motivations for making such claims were not known.

The Tokay Gecko, sourced mainly from Thailand and Java, Indonesia, is highly in demand in the traditional medicine trade to treat various ailments and is widely consumed in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Vietnam.

Caillabet said Customs import data revealed that Taiwan had imported around 15 million Tokay Geckos since 2004, while 1.2 million dried Tokay Geckos bound for Hong Kong from Indonesia were seized in 2011.

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Tokay Gecko
(Gekko gecko)

Christel Gomes/TRAFFIC

- > Recognised by its blue-grey, orange-spotted skin and characteristic territorial vocalisation - a loud, barking crescendo.
- > Known as "cicak tokek" or "tokek" in Bahasa Malaysia.
- > Found throughout South-East Asia in both urban and naturally-forested environments.
- > Traded for traditional medicine for hundreds of years, and more recently as a pet in Europe and America.
- > Rumoured to be a cure for HIV and AIDS since late 2009. The World Health Organisation has said there is no scientific evidence to back the claims up.
- > Under the Wildlife Conservation Act 2010, it is listed as a protected species, which may be hunted or owned if the individual has a licence issued by Perhilitan.
- > Those hunting or keeping protected wildlife without a licence can be fined up to RM50,000, jailed two years or both. (For juveniles and females, a fine of up to RM100,000, five years' jail or both).

Sources: Traffic South-East Asia, Wildlife Conservation Act 2010

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