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U.S. Federal Agents Seize Rare Fossils Smuggled from Argentina
Smuggled prehistoric treasures include fossilized dinosaur eggs

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have seized nearly 8 tons of rare fossils that have significant scientific value and were believed to have been smuggled out of Argentina, according to a February 23 ICE press release.

The items were seized at the Tucson Gem, Mineral, and Fossil Showcase in Arizona earlier in February after ICE received information that a vendor was offering fossils illegally smuggled out of Argentina.

Included in the seizures, ICE said, were three dinosaur eggs valued at more than \$4,000 each.

Fossils are protected by the Argentine government, and removing them without government permission is against the law.

"These prehistoric treasures rightfully belong to Argentina and the Argentinean people," said Roberto Medina, special agent-in-charge for ICE investigations in Arizona. "It is shameful that someone would plunder specimens like these from another nation simply to pleasure hobbyists and line their own pockets."

ICE said no arrests had been made yet and the investigation was continuing.

Following is the text of the ICE press release:

(begin text)

U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT
News Release
February 23, 2006

ICE Seizes Nearly Eight Tons Of Rare Fossils Smuggled From Argentina

Smuggled Specimens Include Fossilized Dinosaur Eggs And Prehistoric Pinecones

TUCSON -- Acting on a lead received through Interpol, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents executed a seizure warrant at the Tucson Gem, Mineral, and Fossil Showcase earlier this month, seizing nearly eight tons of rare fossils, including prehistoric pinecones and dinosaur eggs.

ICE obtained the seizure warrant after receiving information that a vendor was potentially selling fossils illegally smuggled out of Argentina. ICE agents conducted undercover surveillance and obtained digital images of the suspicious specimens. After examining the images and conferring with representatives of the Argentinean Paleontological Society, authorities at Interpol advised ICE that the fossils have significant scientific value and it was "highly probable" they are of Argentinean origin.

Fossils, like cultural relics, are protected by the Argentinean government and removing them from that country without government permission is against the law.

"These prehistoric treasures rightfully belong to Argentina and the Argentinean people," said Roberto Medina, special agent-in-charge for ICE investigations in Arizona. "It is shameful that someone would plunder specimens like these from another nation simply to pleasure hobbyists and line their own pockets."

In all, Tucson ICE agents seized an estimated 14,000 to 17,000 pounds of fossils, including three dinosaur eggs valued at more than \$4,000 each. The items were being sold by an Argentinean-based vendor known as the Rhodo Company. ICE agents say the investigation into the fossil smuggling scheme is ongoing and no arrests have yet been made.

(end text)

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