

# Indonesia busts wildlife trafficking ring targeting Komodo dragons



Naina Rao

1 May 2026 Southeast Asia

Comments

Share article

Police in Indonesia have [announced](#) the dismantling of what they say is a major wildlife trafficking network largely targeting the world's largest lizard species.

Authorities have arrested 11 people in connection with the alleged syndicate, which was involved in trafficking endemic Indonesian species, particularly juvenile Komodo dragons (*Varanus komodoensis*), an endangered and protected species, to Thailand, police said in their April 16 announcement.

[According to investigators](#), the suspects concealed baby or juvenile dragons inside short lengths of plastic piping to avoid detection during transit. From January 2025 to February 2026, the group successfully moved at least 17 Komodo dragons from the island of Flores, where the species is found, to the islands of Java and Sumatra, and from there to Thailand, Mongabay Indonesia [reported](#) on April 17. The entire chain allegedly used a combination of sea, air, road and rail traffic. Their latest attempt, in February, involved three Komodo dragons, but was successfully foiled by police.

Authorities said the suspects specifically targeted the Pota area, in Flores's East Manggarai district. While most of Indonesia's Komodo dragon population is protected within a national park, in Pota an estimated 700 of the reptiles live outside official protected areas. The dragons were reportedly purchased for 5.5 million rupiah each (about \$320) in Pota, but by the time they reached markets in Java they were selling for nearly six times as much. In Thailand, they were going for the equivalent of nearly \$29,000.

you're currently offline

branch of the investigation, police seized 140 kilograms (308 pounds) of pangolin scales, for which an estimated 980 Sunda pangolins (*Manis javanica*), a critically endangered species, would have to have been killed. Police put the market value of the scales at roughly 8.4 billion rupiah (about \$484,000).

Other recovered species included 13 Talaud bear cuscus (*Ailurops melanotis*), a critically endangered marsupial; three Sulawesi dwarf cuscus (*Strigocuscus celebensis*), which are near-threatened; six green tree pythons (*Morelia viridis*); and a mangrove monitor lizard (*Varanus indicus*).

All 11 suspects are being prosecuted under “the crime of violating the conservation of biological resources and ecosystems,” police said.

The three rescued Komodo dragons are currently being cared for at a government-run wildlife rehabilitation center in East Java province, with plans for their eventual release back into the wild once legal proceedings conclude, according to provincial conservation authorities.

**Banner image:** One of three juvenile Komodo dragons from Flores Island that was seized by police from alleged traffickers. Image by Petrus Riski/Mongabay Indonesia.

Credits

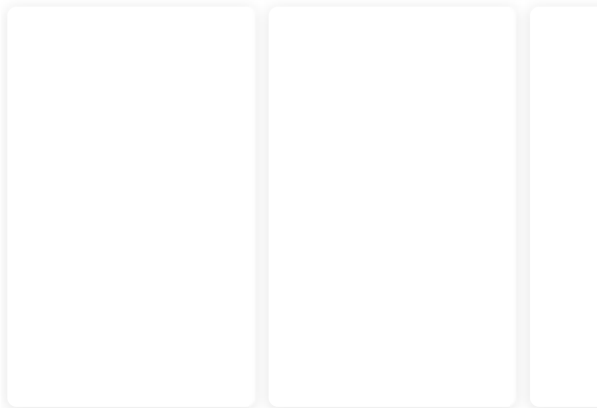


[Shreya Dasgupta](#)  
Editor

Topics

[endangered](#)   [endangered species](#)   [wildlife](#)   [wildlife crime](#)   [wildlife trafficking](#)  
[southeast asia](#)

## Popular in the Community



AdChoices

Sponsored

## Conversation 7 Comments

14 Viewing

Commenting as **Guest**

Log in Sign up

What do you think?



Sort by **Best** ▾

SK Susan Krinsk  
19 hours ago

