

EXOTIC BIRD-EATING SPIDER CAUGHT IN CUSTOMS WEB



An exotic bird-eating spider found inside a parcel by Customs officers in Adelaide has found a new, permanent home in Australia.

The baby spider, identified as *Theraphosa blondi* (more commonly known as a goliath bird-eating tarantula), was found inside a plastic photo canister in an airmail parcel from Denmark. When fully grown, the spider can reach up to 25cm and live for up to 20 years.

The spider was seized by Customs because the importation of live animals without a permit is prohibited under Australia's *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Customs Regional Director South Australia Virginia Lynch said wildlife smuggling was a cruel practice, as many offenders ignored the health and well-being of the animals by packing them tightly in small containers with insufficient air, food and water.

"Australia's wildlife protection laws are some of the most stringent in the world," she said. "These kinds of importations are strictly controlled. The penalties for smuggling wildlife can attract fines of up to \$110,000 and/or imprisonment for up to 10 years."

The spider was transferred by the Department of the Environment and Heritage to the Melbourne Museum

where it joined a fully grown goliath tarantula and a variety of other tarantulas, spiders and insects as part of the *Bugs Alive!* exhibition.

Grade Four children from a Melbourne primary school watched the release of the spiders into their new homes during an event organised by Melbourne Museum.

The discovery of spiders in the post continued during the following weeks with a further 52 spiders discovered in two separate and unrelated packages in Sydney.

Customs officers checking international parcel mail in Sydney discovered 26 live spiders - one adult and 25 babies - hidden in two photo film canisters in one package. The package, sent from South America, was destined for an address in Austria.

It appears that the package was shipped to Australia by mistake. The spiders later died.



Customs officers in Sydney also discovered a further 26 spiders, already dead, while checking a package sent to Australia from Canada.

Customs investigations continue into the three detections.