



# Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
FRIDAY, March 18, 2022  
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## Jackson County Man Sentenced for Violation of Lacey Act

**LONDON, Ky.** — A McKee, Ky., man, Christopher Cool, 59, was sentenced to 15 months in federal prison on Friday, by U.S. District Judge Robert Wier, after pleading guilty to one count of violating the Lacey Act.

The Lacey Act makes it unlawful to commercialize and sell wildlife, in interstate commerce, if you know or should have known that the wildlife was taken, possessed, transported, or sold in a manner that is unlawful under the law or regulation of any state, the United States or a foreign country.

According to Cool's plea agreement, in July 2020, the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service discovered that Cool had 246 Eastern Box Turtles at his residence, which he was intending to sell and ship to individuals outside of Kentucky. The commercialization and sale of these turtles is prohibited by Kentucky statute and regulation; and without a permit, a person is only allowed to possess five or fewer turtles for personal use. Further investigation revealed that between July 2019 and July 2020, Cool had sold 669 Eastern Box Turtles, which had been taken from the wild in Kentucky. Cool received an average of \$100 a turtle.

In June 2021, U.S. Fish and Wildlife agents received reports from Pennsylvania and West Virginia wildlife officers indicating that Cool was selling and trafficking turtles in interstate commerce. According to information received, Cool was seen with over 125 Eastern Box Turtles while traveling through West Virginia. At the time, Cool admitted to others that he was bringing the turtles from Kentucky and was getting paid \$200 a turtle, by out of state purchasers. Cool was arrested in McKee, on September 15, 2021.

Cool pleaded guilty to violating the Lacey Act in November 2021.

"The Lacey Act is an important tool for preserving our valuable wildlife resources," said Carlton S. Shier, IV, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky. "We appreciate the hard work and dedication of our law enforcement partners, both state and federal, without whom this prosecution could not have been possible and this threat to protected wildlife could have continued."

“The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement, considers the illegal collection and commercialization of Eastern Box Turtles a high priority,” said Stephen Clark, Special Agent in Charge, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “We will continue to work closely with our State partners and the United States Attorney’s Office to investigate and prosecute these important cases.”

Under federal law, Cool must serve 85 percent of his prison sentence. Upon his release from prison, he will be under the supervision of the U.S. Probation Office for two years. Cool is also required to complete 80 hours of community service.

U.S. Attorney Shier and Special Agent in Charge Clark jointly announced the sentencing.

The case was investigated by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife, West Virginia Department of Natural Resources, and Pennsylvania Game Commission. The United States was represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Emily K. Greenfield.

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