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Traveller Under Investigation for Tortoise Smuggling Attempt

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— Categories: Crime



A woman from Boston is under investigation in the United Kingdom after a live baby tortoise was discovered hidden inside a cigarette packet during a border search. Authorities say the smuggling attempt has already occurred, but the legal response and public warnings remain active as enforcement agencies continue their inquiries.

The tortoise, believed to be a *Testudo graeca* commonly known as a Greek or spur-thighed tortoise, was found among the woman's belongings after she reportedly bought it at a market in Tunisia. The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) flagged the case, and

Lincolnshire Police are now examining possible offences under the Control of Trade in Endangered Species Regulations 2018 and the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. These laws regulate the importation of protected species, with potential penalties including fines or up to seven years' imprisonment.

Authorities confirm that the animal was recovered alive. It has since been transferred to Wild Things Rescue, a UK-based wildlife care centre, where it receives medical evaluation and support. The animal is reportedly in poor condition following its journey.

Lucy Steele, a centre staff member, expressed concern over the tortoise's treatment. "We usually work with British wildlife, so it was a surprise to be asked to care for an animal from Tunisia, especially under such distressing circumstances," she said. The tortoise is not in the best condition and will be seeing a specialist vet. He is a wild animal, not an accessory, and should never have been treated this way."

The tortoise species is currently listed as "vulnerable" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and is protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). These international rules are designed to stop the overexploitation of threatened species, including those often targeted by the exotic pet trade.

Lincolnshire Police have issued a reminder about the serious risks involved in wildlife smuggling. "Smuggling wildlife can pose serious risks to both an animal's welfare and UK biosecurity," the force stated in an official release.

Wildlife crime officer Aaron Flint is urging travellers to think twice before attempting to bring animals across borders. "Endangered species such as tortoises are protected under international law, and bringing one into the country without the correct permits is a criminal offence," he said. "What may seem like an innocent souvenir, even if purchased for a small amount, can result in serious criminal charges. If you don't have the proper documentation, don't take the risk; the consequences can be severe."

The investigation remains ongoing, with UK authorities continuing to monitor and crack down on the illegal wildlife trade. Officials say this case highlights the threats to animal welfare and the broader danger to public health and environmental security.