

March 26, 2020

Dr. Grant Colfax, Director  
Dr. Tomas Aragon, Health Officer  
San Francisco Dept. of Public Health  
101 Grove  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Drs. Colfax and Aragon:

Some 25 years ago (approx. 1995 onward), many animal protection advocates worked on the issue of the inhumane conditions and environmental concerns of the live animal food markets, including Fisherman's Wharf, Farmer's Markets, supermarkets as Safeways and Albertsons that sold live crustaceans as lobsters and Dungeness crabs, and/or catfish, restaurants that had the same, and the Chinatown and the Clement Street markets. I had introduced the issue to the Animal Welfare Commission one night with one other non-involved person in the audience. Due to the stellar networking skills of Eric Mills of Action for Animals and the late Virginia Handley of the former Fund for Animals, the issue "hit the ground running" literally overnight, with eventually at least 30-35 advocacy groups on board. Ultimately, the story received heavy media coverage, including on the front pages of the SF Chronicle and SF Examiner, the LA and NY Times, other print print sources and radio and TV all over the country, and internationally, while literally hundreds of letters were sent in (we made copies of them all) asking then Mayor Willie Brown and the Board of Supervisors, the CA Dept. of Fish and (then) Game, the CA Fish and Game Commission, and the CA State Legislature for the cessation of the cruelty and making vows to boycott SF if there was no abatement. The focus had quickly become on the Chinatown markets for having the most with the worst: tremendous numbers of all species of wildlife, unspeakably cruel practices, serious environmental problems and mind-boggling insanitary conditions. In no time did we realize that the great cruelty was inextricably connected with the extreme health violations.

Today, in light of the novel coronavirus, that disease did NOT come from these markets, would be incredulous. As we know, SARS and COVID-19 originated in the "wet" markets in China where any and all species, legal or otherwise, are sold for food consumption and perceived aphrodisiac and medicinal purposes with no beneficial basis in scientific fact. The thought was that the pangolin, the most heavily trafficked of wildlife on earth, similar to the anteater, was the intermediary host after the fruit bat; perhaps an animal sneezed or coughed or there was contact with bodily fluids during slaughter. Pangolins are desired for their hard scales made of keratin-the same material as our fingernails-one wonders, why not use fingernail clippings? Sadly, when threatened, pangolins roll up into a ball making it easy for poachers to collect them. Their meat and blood are considered delicacies. They are a high-priced status symbol.

There are many such markets all over the U.S., with many in LA, Atlanta and NY, as well as in Stockton, Sacramento, Oakland, San Jose, Long Beach, etc. with animals similarly housed in squalor and overcrowded, with illegal species sometimes hidden under counters or in back rooms.

One night I witnessed, after closing, one market unloading literally hundreds of all-size soft-shell turtles from burlap bags into tanks. According to the Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, CA annually imports some 2 million American bullfrogs and an estimated 300,000-400,000

freshwater turtles (most taken from the wild, depleting local populations) for food. More than 3 dozen necropsies done by the herpetological vet hired by the SF/SPCA's then Richard Avanzino, as well as Action for Animals have shown that ALL these animals are diseased or parasitized, with cases of E. coli, salmonella, pasturella (all potentially fatal in humans), plus giardia, blood parasites, even one case of malaria. Many, if not most, of the red-eared slider turtles had shell-rot, and the majority of the bullfrogs (62% in one study), carry the chytrid fungus which is responsible for the extinction of about 200 amphibians worldwide. Soft-shell turtles and red-eared sliders and bullfrogs are fully or semi-aquatic-they are cold-blooded creatures with a whole repertoire of specific needs beyond mammalian species, which the markets do not fulfill. It is ILLEGAL to sell adulterated "meat" in the form of dying animals. Turtles and frogs are placed in bins on the floor or outside the markets, also illegal; children can touch the animals and then place their fingers in their mouths. All different species, including fish and marine invertebrates, are cut up on the same chopping block; species are commingled, all resulting in cross contamination. Some workers were smoking; flies abound. One butcher literally stood behind the counter armed with a flyswatter smashing the flies as they landed on the frozen fish for sale. In another market, another butcher stood on a tray of frozen fish while accessing the crayfish tank above. There is possibly the aerosolization of feces as hoses are used on the floors.

In the bird markets, Ming Kee Gamebirds on Grant Avenue and Never Ending Quail on Stockton St. (both today still in operation-I called earlier) exotic birds as Ring-Necked Pheasants, Jungle Fowl, chickens, ducks, Japanese Button Quail, Ghukars, Silky Chickens and King Pigeons are sold, the smaller birds often crammed into yellow transit crates thrown around and too short for the birds to stand erect. At Ming Kee, a king pigeon was dying, opening and closing his mouth, while densely packed in with other birds, feces piled up. The truck vendor at Heart of the City Farmer's Market had chickens jammed in so tight in makeshift cages, they were literally squealing. The vendor said he gave them cabbage, but none was evident, nor water, likely to cut down on fecal waste. Then Inspector John La Macchia of the Health Dept. cited him. The vendor also drove the birds from often-stifling and far away Modesto, once having an accident.

Another concern is that these markets are serving Santeria practitioners, one of whom sat behind me, dressed in white robes from head to toe, and standing, at one meeting, saying, "We buy our birds from Ming Kee." Home slaughter, not to mention sacrificial slaughter (one humane investigator stated the obvious, that ritual slaughter can be much more cruel than the traditional method) is especially problematic as it is done in a very clandestine manner, with clear health implications. And one person, who simply told me a relative buys chickens at the markets live, takes them home to slit their throats and lets them bleed out slowly as it is believed that method has better results with the meat.

As if this were all not enough, one CA Fish and Wildlife warden told of illegal sharkskin being kept at home; when a celebratory occasion arises, a food runner will bring it to a restaurant (one wonders of all the banquet halls that have since temporarily gone dark) with someone wealthy involved. The wardens can't catch it in time. Illegal ivory is an ongoing problem. Back then, there was a story of NY Health inspectors being paid off to keep their mouths shut. At the same time,

our numbers opportunistically. The ebola virus originated from the bushmeat trade, in which primates are consumed as a delicacy. Zoonotic disease will arise as long as wildlife are sold in the live animal markets. There is something very wrong when the world is turned upside down and inside out, with, as of March 24, 2020, worldwide, more than 374,000 people being infected and over 16, 000 dying from the virus, with more than 1.5 billion instructed to stay in their homes, and individual localities are doing nothing about precautions related to prevention. Markets selling wildlife must be closed immediately.

I await your reply in this matter.

Sincerely,

*Patricia* [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Copies to:

CA Dept. of Public Health  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)  
California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife  
CA Fish and Game Commission  
Center for Biological Diversity  
San Francisco Dept. of Animal Care and Control, Director Virginia Donohue  
San Francisco SPCA, Dr. Jennifer Scarlett  
SPCA/LA, Director Madeline Bernstein  
SF Animal Welfare Commission  
LA City Council, Councilmember Paul Koretz  
State Senator Scott Weiner  
State Assemblymember Phil Ting  
Action for Animals, Eric Mills  
PAWPAC Rene Rowland  
United States Fish and Wildlife Service  
Mayor London Breed, San Francisco  
Jonathan Young, Presidio Trust Wildlife Ecologist  
Various Reptile Groups  
Various Legislators, and more

ENCLOSURES:

26 photos of Live animal Markets in San Francisco: Chinatown, Heart of the City Farmer's Market (Civic Center), and Alemany Farmer's Market

8 photos of Live of Live Animal Markets in China, Courtesy Animals Asia Fdn.

SF Chronicle article: "Buddhists' "life release" ritual and its complexities"

NY Times article: "Stop Wildlife Trade..."

Action for Animals' Letter (current); past letters from those wanting reform (part of addresses redacted)

Past letter from Assemblywoman Sheila Kuehl



2126 HASTE STREET  
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September, 20, 1999

This is a report of my findings of a turtle brought to our hospital by Action For Animals. The turtle was purchased at a live food market and died within a day of purchase.

On presentation, the animal was a male Eastern River Cooter (*Pseudemys concinna concinna*). Weight was 550gm, and carapace length was 154cm. Carapace to plastron distance was 52cm.

Externally, the turtle appeared thin and underweight. The carapace was pitted, usually an indication the turtle was kept in crowded, unclean surroundings. Such findings are rarely seen in wild individuals.

Post-mortem examination showed a turtle with little or no fat stores. This is usually a sign of lack of nutrition over a prolonged period of time. Abrasions were present in the ventral surface of the front feet. Such abrasions are seen in turtles kept in crowded environments, or on rough, unnatural surfaces.

Lung tissue appeared hemorrhagic and congested. Histopathological samples showed the presence of Metazoa parasite ova, and secondary inflammatory tissue reaction. Such ova are suggestive of Spirochid fluke infestation, a parasite which is passed into the turtle via a snail intermediate host. This parasite causes granuloma formation in the host's lung tissue and can lead to secondary respiratory infection. Culture of the lung tissue showed normal mixed positive bacterial flora, along with several pathologic species. These included *Entrobacter* and a *aromonas* species.

The turtle's liver appeared congested and had numerous white granulomas throughout its surface. Such changes are usually secondary to starvation and concurrent or secondary infection. Histopathologic samples of the liver showed congestion and proliferation of melanomacrophage cells. The livers portal trials showed nodular foci of granulocyte extra-medullary hematopoiesis. This is again a change usually seen in infection, and in turtles that exhibit starvation.

The digestive tract was devoid of fecal material, a condition seen in turtles that have not eaten for a prolonged period of time. The tissues were congested and inflamed. Lymphocytes and heterophyllus were found in the small intestine's tissue surface on pathologic specimens submitted.

Such changes are usually seen secondary to parasitize infestation or bacterial infection. Cultures of the small intestine produced both normal and high numbers of pathologic bacterial species. The later included members of the *Aeromons*, *Citrobactor*, and *E. coli* genera.

Impression smears of the lining of the large intestine, were positive for enteric parasite infestations. The species found were pathologic pin worm and round worm species.

These findings are all suggestive of an ill, moribund reptile that was kept in sub-optimal environmental conditions. Such findings are rarely seen in wild caught individuals or in properly maintained captive species. The lung and liver parasitic infections can also have been exacerbated by stress or over crowded conditions.



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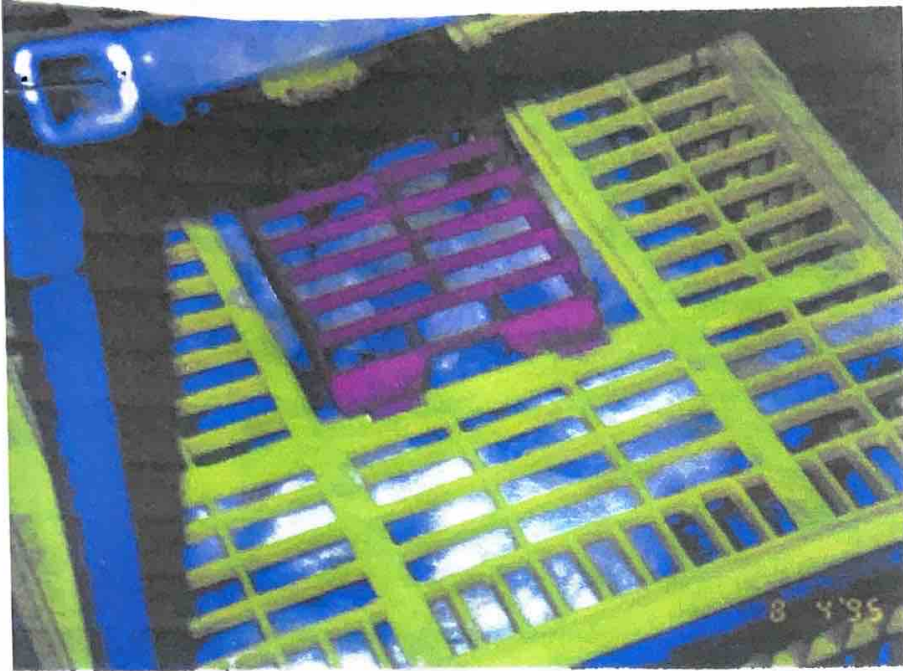
I feel that such findings show a turtle that was ill or near death. I also feel that if such a turtle was released into our native Californian habit, it could pose a threat to native reptile species, and also native non-reptilian species who either share the same habit, or may prey on the released species.

*Kenneth A. Harkewicz VMD*

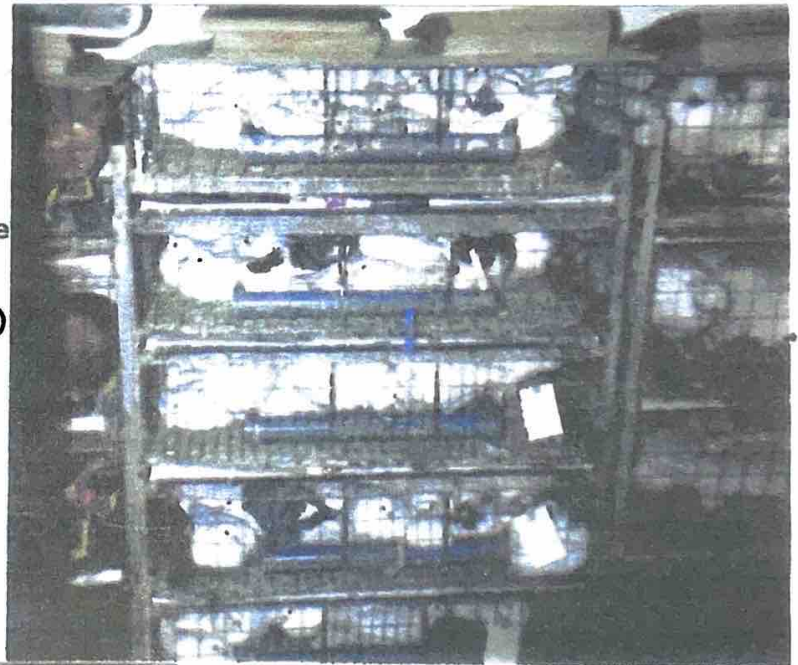
Kenneth A. Harkewicz V.M.D.

LIVE ANIMAL MARKETS, SAN FRANCISCO CHINATOWN

Silky chickens at "Never Ending Quail" on Stockton (still in operation)-sells all manner of birds; note black abrasions on backs of birds where feathers have worn off from too short crates-they are left in these for long periods; crates are also thrown around.



"Ming Keé Gamebirds" was at 1122 Grant; today there is a "Ming's Poultry" at 1136 Grant which also sells live birds (moved?); note overcrowding of king pigeons; Rhode Island Red chickens to left; silky chickens: to right; gray pigeons in with white ones from street (??) feces piled up; brown bags on top are used to put birds in upon sale. Many birds in overcrowded situations will peck each other to death.



Dried ducks



(P. 1 of 9  
25 photos total)

LIVE ANIMAL MARKETS, SAN FRANCISCO CHINATOWN

Markets are very busy; note all different species being cut up on same chopping block, which is against health codes.



Dead red-eared slider (turtles retreat into shells when picked up) in with live turtles



Fish swimming sideways in too shallow water



(P. 289)



LIVE ANIMAL MARKETS, SAN FRANCISCO CHINATOWN

Cardboard bin of red-eared sliders on floor-semi-aquatic animals with no water



Commingling of species (illegal)-note large, "pancake"-looking soft-shell turtle with tubercles (bumps) on left mixed in with red-eared sliders. Shell rot is common in the sliders and is contagious. Softshells are fully aquatic-no water.



Butchered soft-shell turtle on right; sea cucumbers, I believe, on left



(p. 3 of 9)







LIVE ANIMAL MARKETS, SAN FRANCISCO CHINATOWN

Frogs jammed together in filthy container

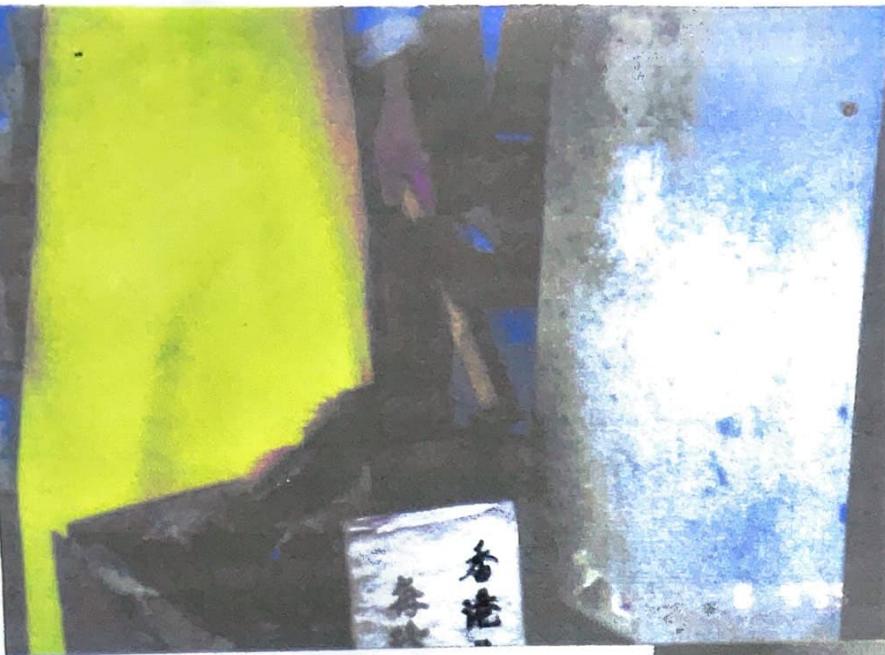


Butcher standing on tray of frozen, silver fish to access crayfish tank above (note price sign between his feet)

(P 5 7 9)

LIVE ANIMAL MARKETS, SAN FRANCISCO CHINATOWN

Fish with no water suffocating and flopping around to show "freshness"



Barely alive fish fell out of cardboard bin and was flopping around on sidewalk, that people routinely spit on.



Overall view of typical market; note many different animals sold and insanitary fish tanks



(p. 6 of 9)

LIVE ANIMAL MARKETS, SAN FRANCISCO CHINATOWN

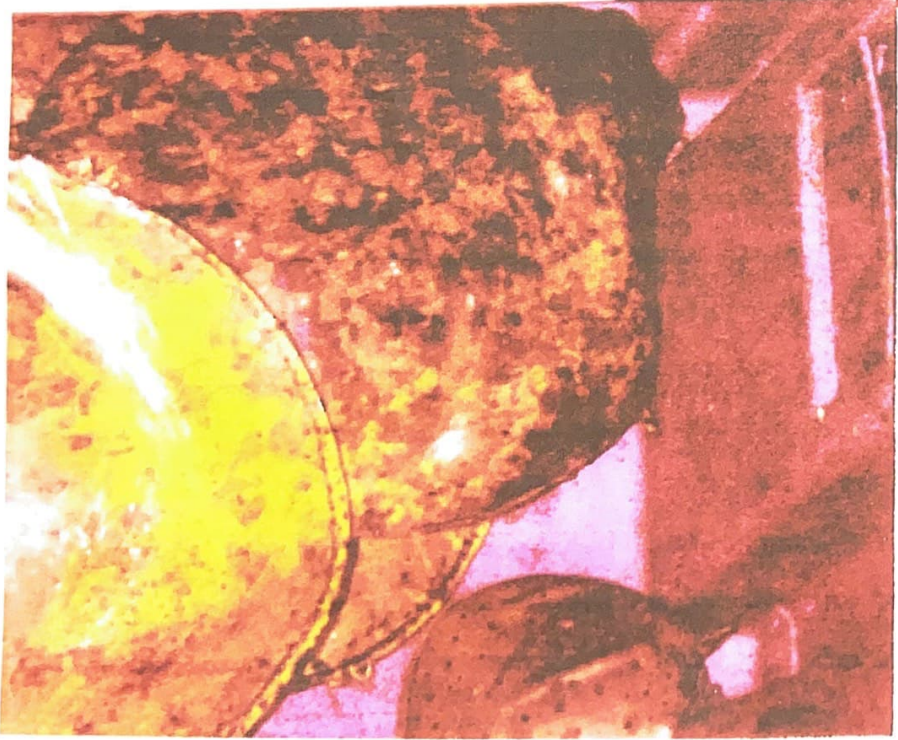
I noted a putrid smell coming from these turtles, with blackened shells (compare with live softshells bottom left); they must have been dead yet were still being offered for sale; did they die of starvation/disease(?)



Possibly tourist kid (note San Francisco Zoo T-shirt) touching the same dead turtles- this would be concerning if he put his hands to mouth afterwards



Fully aquatic softshell turtles with not a drop of water; babies under 4 inches were supposedly illegal; this baby seemed to be about 5 1/2 inches, so probably OK



(p 8 of 9)