

HOME » NEWS » UKNEWS » CRIME

## Stuffed in socks: 13 iguanas smuggled into UK in a suitcase

Border Agency found 13 'critically endangered' San Salvador rock iguanas stuffed into a suitcase for eight-hour flight, with 12 surviving



The Romanian degree students were caught at Heathrow Airport after stepping off a BA flight from the Bahamas with the San Salvador Iguanas stuffed inside socks Photo: PA

By Keith Perry

3:13PMBST 03 Apr 2014

Two "highly-intelligent, well-travelled young women" caught smuggling 13 critically-endangered iguanas, with a potential black market value of £260,000, were each jailed for 12 months.

The Romanian degree students were caught at Heathrow Airport after stepping off a BA flight from the Bahamas with the San Salvador iguanas, one of which had died, stuffed inside socks and wrapped in a blue towel in their suitcase.

Mechanical engineering student Angla-Alina Bitu, 26, who was working as an au pair in Switzerland, and finance student Vitora-Oliva Bucsa, 24, both pleaded guilty to the unlawful importation of the animals on February 3 at Terminal Five.

They were caught after their nine-day trip, which had been financed by a wealthy Swiss gentleman identified only as 'Thomas', before they could catch their onward flight to Dusseldorf, Germany, where the animals were to be collected.

The animals are unique to the Bahamas, where laws have been passed to prevent their export and it is believed the species now only amounts to a few hundred.

### Related Articles

Chinese customs foil snake smuggler 14 Nov 2013

Print this article

Share 718

Facebook 653

Twitter 65

Email

LinkedIn 0

0

### Crime

News » UK News » Earth » Environment » Wildlife »

### In Crime



### More From The Web



- Al Sharpton: 'I Am Not a Rat'
- Peaches Geldof Mystery: No Note or Drugs
- John Fund, Mary Matalin, Star Parker, Newsmax TV
- Kim Jong Un's Latest Purge: Death by Flamethrower
- Reid Sinks Under Family Cronyism
- April Notice For All Cars Newer Than 2005
- Retire 5 Years Early With These 38 Trades
- Assess Your Heart Attack Risk in Minutes. Click Here.

### More From The Web



\$54+: Myrtle Beach Vacation Spring Deals

Save up to 40% on Hotels

Click for More Offers

Powered By: Dunhill Travel Deals

- **Poachers 'systematically slaughtering red deer population', police warn** 22 Nov 2013
- **Prince of Wales: follow the money to combat poachers** 13 Feb 2014

Prosecutor Pamela Reiss told Isleworth Crown Court the women arrived in the early hours from Nassau, claiming they had spent an innocent holiday in the Caribbean, which they had financed themselves.

All their clothes had been stuffed into one suitcase and Border Agency officers checked the second one they had.

"In the other suitcase the 13 iguanas, one of which was dead, were found. Each had been wrapped inside a sock and then wrapped in a blue towel.

"They had been in the hold in the suitcase during the eight-hour flight.

"They come from a hot country and were in the cold hold all that time and must have suffered.



Angla-Alina Bita, 26 (left) and Vitora-Oliva Bucsa, 24 (PA)

"Bita said she did not know what they were and was given them by a man called 'Robert' in a beach bar and was not paid."

It is unknown what the final destination was for the reptiles, but Miss Reiss added: "They are valued at £10,000 each and that's a minimum, they could be sold illegally for up to £20,000 each."

It is difficult to place an accurate figure on the value because the trade is cloaked in secrecy, but the prosecutor added: "Maybe wealthy people keep them as status symbols because they are endangered."

The court heard that Bita lied when quizzed and Bucsa said nothing, but now both women claim 'Thomas' financed the whole trip and arranged for them to carry the Iguanas.

Their lawyer Miss Brinder Soora said: "They recognise the particularly devastating effect their actions have had and it is fortunate only one iguana passed away.

"These two defendants were naive in their actions and they did not know the iguanas were of such value and rarity."

Judge Phillip Matthews told the first-time offenders, who have been locked up in HMP Holloway since their arrest: "You are two highly-intelligent, well travelled young women who chose to act in the way you did free of pressure.

"There is a market for such creatures and for as long as people such as yourselves perpetrate the facility for them to be smuggled out of the Bahamas, that trade will continue."

Grant Miller from the Border Force's endangered species team said: "This particular species of iguana is incredibly rare - only a few hundred are believed to be left in existence - so this was a remarkable and very important seizure.

"Given the circumstances we found them in, it seems incredible that all but one survived such a long flight."

The animals were dehydrated and placed into the care of a specialist vet

## The unseen Krays: in pictures



Dave Lee Travis not guilty of 12 sex offence charges



Ronnie Biggs in pictures



'Slaves' pictured in 1997 documentary



Exclusive interview: I can heal Malaysian 'slave', says sister

## News Most Viewed

TODAY PAST WEEK PAST MONTH

1. Prince George's first royal engagement is child's play
2. MH370: missing Malaysia Airlines plane - April 7 and 8 as it happened
3. Live: Oscar Pistorius takes the stand
4. Maria Miller used expenses to pay parents' council tax
5. Blue Cross charity worker killed herself following 'betrayal' in lesbian love triangle

Discover the new M&S Collection >

FREE delivery to Australia\*

## More From The Web >

**Barnebys.co.uk**  
All Auctions In One Place

Search word, phrase or name of lot

EMERGENCY COMMITTEE of ATOMIC SCIENTISTS  
MEMORANDUM  
ROOM 28, 90 NASSAU STREET  
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

April 20th, 1947

Dr. F. J. Saylor, President  
California Naval Company, Ltd.  
310 Park Street  
San Francisco 4, California

Dear Dr. Saylor:

I send you my sincere thanks and those of my colleagues in the Emergency Committee of Atomic Scientists for the generous check in support of our work recently received from you through the Children Trust.

I am indeed grateful for the encouragement given our mission by the meeting held recently in San Francisco. The resulting Emergency Report should make possible a considerable extension of our work in California.

Sincerely yours,  
F. J. Saylor

43 of 50

where they remain.

Mr Miller said they are working with experts to find the best way to protect and safeguard the endangered creatures longer term.

✉ [Share](#) 718 [Facebook](#) 653 [Twitter](#) 65 [LinkedIn](#) 0

#### More from The Telegraph

- [Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen on selling his Cotswolds home](#) 29 Mar 2014
- [Discovery of 13 dead birds of prey in small area of Highlands is...](#) 28 Mar 2014
- [Kate Winslet: I missed out on my teenage years](#) 03 Apr 2014
- [Student fined after being caught driving car without any doors...](#) 03 Apr 2014
- [Device exploded in bomber's face after he 'forgot about clocks...](#) 02 Apr 2014
- [The Queen meets Pope Francis on visit to Rome](#) 03 Apr 2014

#### More from the web

- [People Don't Know What They Want Until You Show It To Them](#) Uberflip
- [Early Signs of Dementia that May Surprise You](#) Griswold Home Care
- [4 Things Highly Successful People Do To Get Ahead](#) The Huffington Post
- [13 Celeb Pairs You Didn't Know Were Related](#) Celebrity Gossip Answers
- [Daughter is brutally honest about mother in obituary. It's gone viral.](#) DailyDot
- [America's most fuel-efficient new car isn't a Prius](#) Road & Track

what's this?

#### Ads By Google

##### Diabetic Meal Plan

100s Of Delicious Meal Ideas - All Ready In 30 Minutes Or Less!  
[healthyweb.com/Diabetic-Meal-Plan](http://healthyweb.com/Diabetic-Meal-Plan)

##### Lumosity Brain Games

Challenge memory and attention with scientific brain games.  
[www.lumosity.com](http://www.lumosity.com)

##### You Could Be Owed £2400

If You've Ever Had A Loan You Could Be Owed A Refund  
[lloydstsb.bankrefunds.net](http://lloydstsb.bankrefunds.net)



**Albert Einstein signed letter, dated April 24th,**  
Clars Auction Gal..  
£ 660

[VIEW LOT!](#)

See all auctions

#### More from the web







[3-Year-Old Dies After His Mother Leaves Him Home Alone for 20 Hours](#)  
(Stirring Daily)






[Twitching Eye: What Does It Mean?](#)  
(See for Yourself)

#### MORE FROM TELEGRAPH.CO.UK

<b>MALAGA AND THE COSTA DEL SOL</b>  Sun, sand and sports: the beaches of the Costa del Sol <a href="#">View</a>	<b>BARNEBYS AUCTION</b>  At auction: Leslie Hindman and the best job in the world <a href="#">View</a>	<b>SOTHEBY'S</b>  Explore The World's Finest Homes <a href="#">View</a>	<b>PATAK'S</b>  Recipe: sizzling Goan pork burgers with rice <a href="#">View</a>
---	--	--	---

[Back to top](#)

 <b>HOME</b> News UK News Politics  <b>Long Reads</b> Wikileaks Jobs	<b>World News</b> Europe USA China  <b>Royal Family News</b> <b>Celebrity news</b> Dating	<b>Finance</b> Education Defence Health  <b>Weird News</b> <b>Editor's Choice</b> Financial Services	<b>Pictures</b> Video Matt Alex  <b>Comment</b> <b>Blogs</b> Crossword	<b>Contact Us</b> Privacy and Cookies Advertising Fantasy Football  <b>Tickets</b> Announcements Reader Prints	<b>Follow Us</b>  <b>Apps</b>  <b>Epaper</b> <b>Expat</b> Promotions Subscriber Syndication
--	--	---	---	---	---