

## **Illegal Bushmeat Trade Thriving In Bay Area**

Linda Yee Reporting

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(CBS 5) The illegal import of African bushmeat is a growing trade. Federal agents are confiscating thousands of pounds of animals including African rats, bats and great ape parts smuggled into the United States.

Tourists bringing in bushmeat in suitcases are being caught at airports at least once a week. And boxloads of illegal cargoes of bushmeat are discovered. There's a thriving black market, and authorities say it's a dangerous one.

"Bushmeat poses a risk to human health, " said Jennifer McQuiston, a public health officer with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

Bushmeat is a cultural food preference for African expatriates in the U.S. But government scientists say bushmeat carry potentially deadly diseases that have already spread from animals to humans.

"Some of these things include things as dangerous as ebola or monkey pox," Dr. McQuiston said. "Or things as mild as food borne illnesses such as salmonella or E.coli."

U.C. Berkeley Wildlife Ecology Professor Justin Brashares says health is not the only issue. He's worried whole species are now in danger of extinction.

"I don't condone it at all," he said, "but many people who are selling it, and eating it, would like to see some legalized trade. A U.S. Department of Agriculture-approved trade."

Brashares said his team of volunteers have seen markets openly selling the banned meat. The black market is especially lucrative in the Bay Area, including San Francisco and San Jose.

Brashares says anyone who wants it can find bushmeat. He once asked a taxi driver from Africa if he missed bushmeat.

"He said with a smile, I don't miss a lot of things because I get them here," Brashares recalled.

Health officials say the 2003 worldwide SARS epidemic is one example of how easily animal to human transfer of deadly diseases can happen.

They don't want a new global disaster because of a growing taste for exotic meats.

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