

said there was no ring. The officer told me he had noticed the passenger remove something from his pocket and place it in an already examined bag. On a second inspection, we found a diamond ring. The passenger said it was worth \$400, the allowable duty-free concession. I told the passenger I could not accept that for such a large diamond, and would hold the ring for an independent valuation. The ring was valued at \$16,300. Because of the passenger's attempts to defraud, he had to pay a penalty of \$14,411.80, double the amount of duty and sales tax.

Overseas collectors eagerly seek many species of Australia's unique wildlife. Some protected birds and reptiles fetch tens of thousands of dollars. This makes the illegal export of wildlife a tempting prospect for some people. Customs has inter-

cepted many illegal shipments of live birds and reptiles in passenger and crew baggage at Sydney Airport, as well as searching passengers concealing eggs and reptiles on their bodies.

A recent foiled attempt to smuggle six parrots out of Australia concerned an airline flight attendant whose downfall was not fastening the latch on his cabin bag. Passengers had been offloaded after the aircraft's air conditioning broke down before departure. A maintenance engineer noticed a parrot flying around the main cabin. His first thought was that the bird had flown through an open door. When he noticed two more birds flying around, he realised it was no fluke. He closed the cabin doors and contacted Customs. We found a bag of the kind carried by flight crew with three more birds in it. All crew

members were asked to retrieve their flight bags. The one flight attendant who did not retrieve his finally admitted to being the owner. The birds were handed over to Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service staff and the crew member was handed over to Customs investigation officers.

Many different situations present themselves daily – serious, funny and even sad. There is rarely a dull moment. It's pleasing that although some people might see Customs as a hindrance, most see that we are here to welcome and help people while at the same time protecting Australia.

Felicity Galvin joined Customs in 1987. She has worked in postal control, cargo and passenger processing.

Finding the ones carrying drugs

By James R McLean

Customs airport drug enforcement teams are known as Sierra teams. At the start of each shift at Sydney Airport, the Sierra leader briefs the team. The briefing will include information about happenings on previous shifts and recent seizures of prohibited items in other parts of Australia. Each officer has a list of targeted flights for that day. Targeted flights are based on risk assessment factors. Officers concentrate on these flights but do not ignore others which pose a high risk.

Walking around the baggage carousels, I speak to people while applying some risk management factors to each particular flight. Assessing the risk posed by individual passengers covers many factors. I will glean some from their passports, some from their tickets and some from their body language. Some passengers may fit a risk profile because of the pattern of recent travel,

others may stand out because dress and demeanour may not match a stated occupation.

For instance, let's say I approach a male traveller who identifies himself as an Australian interior designer working in Hong Kong. He seems badly dressed for an interior designer, is dishevelled and wearing a bulky jumper. I decide he is worth a closer look.

At the baggage counter a short while later, the man keeps trying to hide his lower body with his bag. I call a senior Customs officer who agrees to a search.

In an interview room, we explain to the man how the body search will be conducted and what his rights are. The man agrees. Around his lower waist area I feel a hard square lump. I ask him to explain what it is. He says he has something that will

cause some trouble. He says it is narcotics.

I caution him that he is not obliged to say anything but what he does say may be given in evidence. He agrees to cooperate with Customs and the Australian Federal Police. The search is videotaped. Packages found are photographed. He admits they contain heroin. The Customs supervisor asks if he has any complaints about the interviewing officers. He says he has not.

Soon, AFP agents arrive. They take him away and I return to my duties, which now include preparing reports for the AFP and court. Police charge him with importing a prohibited import and some months later he is sentenced to six years' jail with a non-parole period of three years.

James McLean is a Sierra officer at Sydney Airport. He joined Customs in 1982 and has worked mainly in passenger processing.