

detection dogs sniffing out wildlife traffickers

1,000 to 10,000

stronger sense of smell of a dog than compared to humans

200 - 300

pieces of luggage a dog can check in 20 minutes

4

police officers have received their official dog-handler diploma

▶ Handler Leopold is training his dog Olfa to sniff out wildlife products from luggage, boxes and other packages.



Throughout West Africa, poachers kill pangolins, turtles, elephants and other wildlife. The animals' body parts are then smuggled by ship or plane to markets in both Asia and Europe. Detection dogs — like the ones you see at the airport — can “sniff out” shipments of animal parts in the same way that police dogs detect narcotics.

Sniffing out wildlife crime

Along with Burkina Faso and Niger, Benin is home to the last viable elephant population in West Africa. In 2018, IFAW offered to work with the Beninese government, to expand the security mission of the K9 Brigade in Cotonou, to include the detection of endangered wildlife specimens, especially ivory and pangolin scales.

After modernizing the existing K9 brigade, we created a wildlife crime detection program to train eight dog-handler units, incorporating best practices and high animal welfare standards, with the objective of deploying them in strategic places such as

the port and airport of Cotonou.

With the program, **dogs become an integral part of the solution for disrupting illegal wildlife trade.** They are essential allies, as they can detect ivory, facilitate seizures, and even contribute to the arrest of smugglers.

Depending on the breed, a dog's sense of smell is 1,000 to 10,000 times stronger than that of humans!

Our approach

While the training methodology uses a common framework: using play to first teach the dogs to recognize the smells before increasing the difficulty of the search, **IFAW has implemented a visionary approach by letting the dogs lead their own training.**

This is an instrumental part of the learning process: there are days where the dogs don't want to work and that is fine. Handlers adapt to the dogs' needs so that they can learn more efficiently.



5
 dog-handler units have successfully completed the first training phase

2
 brigade cars were adapted for transport and deployment

- ◀ The first official dog-handler units who successfully completed IFAW's training program focused on the detection of wildlife products.
- ▶ Training exercise at the airport: Marley and her handler Tiburce.

This approach, in addition to a strong focus on the relationship between dog and handler, makes it possible to do an excellent job with dogs that ultimately might have been considered too weak to do the job.

Five dogs completed the training program so far: three of them come from a specialized breeder that works with the French Army, and two are from shelters in France. **It was important for us to diversify the origin of the dogs, to demonstrate that dogs coming from shelters can also accomplish this kind of mission.**

A sustainable future

We work on providing long-term solutions. We make sure to not offer one off training packages, and we transfer instead a real know-how and “know-be” with the dogs. This is the reason why we also train national trainers.

Our goal is for Cotonou’s K9 brigade to become a regional center of excellence, in order to share and spread this expertise with other countries of the sub-region.

As for the dogs, our approach is to set up a career monitoring policy from the moment the dog is ‘hired’ until they are retired. We are developing a charter to have a framework on the dog’s career, as well as a proper retirement policy for the dogs in Benin’s administration.

Working together

To increase our impact, we work together with several partners that support the development of IFAW’s training program and ensure the highest standards of animal welfare for the dogs.

Belgian development agency Enabel is co-funding the project, while French retailer Morin offers a reduction when purchasing dog equipment, and French multinational veterinary pharmaceutical company Ceva Santé Animale provides appropriate veterinary products. Until 2021, Almo Nature, a for-benefit company owned by Fondazione Capellino, provided food for the unit’s detection dogs. In addition, the first year of our work was co-funded by the Elephant Crisis Fund.

Thanks to the generous support of our supporters the Cotonou canine brigade now offers excellent working conditions for the dogs but also for their handlers. All the Benin detection dogs receive proper training and care, getting routine check-ups and other veterinary care directly on site. The dogs need constant training and care to achieve their mission: to help disrupt trafficking networks and protect wildlife.

▶ **see how at ifaw.org**



#StopWildlifeCrime