

Wildlife crime in Hispanic America

An analysis of seizures and poaching incidents in 18 countries
(2017-2022)



Acknowledgements

Content warning: This document contains images of animals in situations where they are being mistreated.

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Maps were created by Go Insight.

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Two orange-chinned parakeets being transported in a styrofoam cooler were recovered by environmental authorities during an operation at a Bogota bus terminal in Colombia, April 2021.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

BCA	Brigada de Control Ambiental Ministerio de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible (Argentina)
BIDEMA	Brigada Investigadora de Delitos contra el Medio Ambiente y Patrimonio (Chile)
CODEFF	Comité Nacional pro Defensa de la Fauna y Flora (Chile)
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CIVS	Centros para la Conservación e Investigación de la Vida Silvestre (Mexico)
CRFS	Centro de Rehabilitación de Fauna Silvestre (Chile)
DGBAP	Dirección General de Biodiversidad y Áreas Protegidas, Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Agua (Bolivia)
DIJIN	Grupo Investigativo de Delitos contra el Medio Ambiente (Colombia)
DIPRONA	División de Protección a la Naturaleza (Guatemala)
DNDSyBA	Dirección Nacional de Defensa, Salud y Bienestar Animal (Paraguay)
EU	European Union
FELCC	Fuerza Especial de Lucha Contra el Crimen (Bolivia)
FEMA	Fiscalía Especializada en Materia Ambiental (Peru)
ICCW	International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organization
IPLC	Indigenous People and Local Communities
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LEMIS	Law Enforcement Management Information System
MADES	Ministerio del Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible (Paraguay)
MARENA	Ministerio del Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (Nicaragua)
MARN	Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (El Salvador)
MINAE	Ministerio de Ambiente y Energía (Costa Rica)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OIJ	Organismo de Investigación Judicial (Costa Rica)
ORSA	Oficina de Regulación y Seguridad Ambiental (Cuba)

Abbreviations and acronyms

OSIMFOR	Organismo de Supervisión de los Recursos Forestales y de Fauna Silvestre (Peru)
PIMVS	Instalaciones que Manejen Vida Silvestre fuera de su hábitat natural (Mexico)
PNC	Policía Nacional Civil (Guatemala)
PNR	Policía Nacional Revolucionaria (Cuba)
POFOMA	Policía Forestal Medio Ambiental (Bolivia)
PROFEPA	Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente (Mexico)
SAG	Servicio Agrícola y Ganadero, Ministerio de Agricultura (Chile)
SEMARNAT	Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (Mexico)
SENPA	Servicio Nacional de Protección Ambiental (Dominican Republic)
SERFOR	Servicio Nacional Forestal y de Fauna Silvestre (Peru)
SITADA	Sistema Integrado de Trámite y Atención de Denuncias Ambientales (Costa Rica)
T-MEC	Tratado entre México, Estados Unidos y Canadá
UFIMA	Unidad Fiscal para la Investigación de Delitos contra el Medio Ambiente (Ministerio Público Fiscal Argentina)
UMA	Unidades de Manejo para la Conservación de la Vida Silvestre (Mexico)
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UPMA	Unidad de Protección del Medio Ambiente (Ecuador)
USA	United States of America
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
MIDAGRI	Ministerio de Desarrollo Agrario y Riego (Peru)
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DINABISE	Dirección Nacional de Biodiversidad y Servicios Ecosistémicos (Uruguay)
DINAMA	Dirección Nacional de Medio Ambiente (Uruguay)

Executive summary

Executive summary

This study set out to compile and analyse data on wildlife seizures and poaching incidents reported in the media between 1 January 2017 and 31 December 2022 in the 18 countries of Hispanic America. It provides important baseline information on illegal exploitation of reptiles, birds, mammals, and amphibians in this biodiverse region.

The study's key findings include:

Species affected

- ▶ A total of 1,945 seizures and poaching incidents were identified, affecting a minimum number of 102,577 wild animals. Of these, 59% impacted reptiles; 28% birds; 9% amphibians; and 4% mammals. The high percentage of reptiles can be partly explained by two major seizures totaling 29,502 mud turtles and musk turtles, which took place in Mexico in 2020. In most countries, however, the most seized taxa were birds.
- ▶ At least 690 different affected species were recorded, including 328 bird species; 174 mammal species; 165 reptile species; and 23 amphibian species. Of these, more than half (363 species) are only protected by domestic laws, not by CITES.¹ This is disproportionately true for songbirds.
- ▶ The illegal wildlife trade in Hispanic America is a major contributor to the decline of some wildlife species and is driving some species to extinction. Forty of the 690 species found in illegal trade (6% of all species identified) are classified as 'Endangered' by IUCN, and 13 species (2% of all species) as 'Critically Endangered', meaning they face a high risk and an extremely high risk, respectively, of extinction in the wild.

Countries with the highest reported numbers of incidents and animals involved

Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Peru and Bolivia reported the highest numbers of seizures and poaching incidents and animals involved. Mexico surpassed all other countries, accounting for 28% of all incidents and 45% of all animals seized or poached.

Increasing trend

Region-wide, incident reports increased significantly between 2017 and 2022, a trend which could be attributable to factors including but not limited to: an uptick in poaching and trafficking, enhanced law enforcement focus, and/or increased media attention.

¹ Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (www.cites.org).

Domestic and foreign demand

- ▶ Trafficked wildlife appears to mainly supply domestic markets, including the pet trade; wild meat (bushmeat) consumption; traditional medicine; fashion; décor; jewellery; and the use of wildlife (alive, dead or their parts) in folkloristic practices or rituals.
- ▶ Only a small percentage (2.6%) of all seizures identified by this study concerned illicit shipments that were destined for and/or seized in the USA, Europe, and Asia. However, these shipments often involved rare and/or endemic species, highlighting the major threat this foreign demand presents to already vulnerable Hispanic American wildlife.

Live animal trade

Of all wildlife reported to be seized or poached in Hispanic America between 2017 and 2022, the vast majority (92.5%) reports concerned live animals, mainly to supply the demand for wild pets ('mascotismo'), which is strongly rooted in most Hispanic American cultures. This puts a spotlight on the need to better understand and reduce consumer demand, as well as to ensure there are adequate rescue and rehabilitation facilities in place, both from an individual animal welfare perspective and a species conservation perspective. It is also important that front line officials are well trained to identify wildlife species, protect themselves, and provide appropriate care to animals from the moment of seizure to when they can safely be transferred to specialised care or repatriated.

Impacts on animal welfare and human health

Illegal wildlife trade in Hispanic America is associated with untold animal suffering and high mortality rates, particularly given the large volumes of live animals smuggled over long distances in dire circumstances. In addition, there are significant risks of zoonotic disease transmission, e.g., in the case of live monkey trafficking and human consumption of monkeys.

Illegal online wildlife trade

Illegal online wildlife trade has reportedly increased exponentially in Hispanic America. However, online wildlife traffickers appear to be operating with near impunity, as most Hispanic American countries reported very few—if any—seizures of wildlife that was offered for sale online.

Law enforcement efforts

Wildlife crime remains a high-profit crime with relatively low risk of consequences for those who engage in poaching or trafficking in Hispanic America. Fighting wildlife crime does not appear to be a priority for many governments in the region; accordingly, resources allocated to responsible law enforcement actions to combat wildlife crime are broadly insufficient. Law enforcement responses to illegal wildlife exploitation in Hispanic America are predominantly reactive and by and large fail to effectively deter, disrupt, and dismantle wildlife crime networks.

Recommendations

The following recommendations represent opportunities to more effectively fight wildlife poaching and trafficking in Hispanic America.

The governments of Hispanic American countries included in this study are urged to:

- ▶ Strengthen efforts to fight wildlife poaching and trafficking in line with the Lima Declaration on Illegal Wildlife Trade of 4 October 2019, which was adopted by all Hispanic American countries except for Cuba and Venezuela.² The Declaration contains a holistic set of commitments to enhance responses to wildlife poaching and trafficking in Hispanic America and the Caribbean region, with an emphasis on:
 - ▶ Strengthening domestic laws, including by recognising wildlife poaching and trafficking as serious crimes and by addressing wildlife crime linked to the internet with effective penalties and sanctions.
 - ▶ Strengthening criminal justice responses to illegal wildlife trade, including by strengthening public institutions engaged in fighting wildlife poaching and trafficking; adopting financial investigation techniques; strengthening cross-border and regional cooperation; leveraging innovative technologies and tools that can facilitate the identification and control of illegal trade in wildlife species, their parts, and derivatives.
 - ▶ Raising awareness and eradicating consumer demand for wildlife, including by encouraging active participation of and close collaboration with indigenous peoples, local communities, civil society organisations, the private sector, and academia
- ▶ Inasmuch as they are not covered by the Lima Declaration, Hispanic American governments are furthermore urged to implement the following specific measures:
 - ▶ Enhance monitoring and investigations of illegal online wildlife trade, including through partnerships with internet service providers, civil society organisations, and academia.
 - ▶ Adopt and apply dissuasive and proportionate penalties and sanctions. Increase surveillance and controls of illegal trade in wildlife species that poses risks for zoonotic disease transmission, such as the trafficking of live monkeys and monkey parts.
 - ▶ Ensure that there are adequate facilities to rescue and rehabilitate, and where appropriate, provide long-term, expert care for live wild animals seized from poachers and traffickers.

Donor countries, agencies, and international financial institutions are urged to contribute to efforts by Hispanic American states to fight wildlife poaching and trafficking through the provision of funding and technical assistance in support of countries' national, cross-border, and subregional efforts.

International organisations and civil society organisations are urged to provide technical assistance in support of countries' national, cross-border, and subregional efforts to address wildlife crime.

² The Lima declaration on Illegal Wildlife Trade was adopted by the following states: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Spain, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay. See: https://lamejorreceta.ins.gob.pe/sites/default/files/2020-12/Lima%20Declaration_4.oct._2019_1.pdf

Introduction

Introduction

Latin America boasts incredible biodiversity, with seven Latin American nations ranking among the world's 20 most biodiverse countries: Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Bolivia.³ Unfortunately, this impressive biodiversity is under severe threat across the region. The decline of species in Latin America and the Caribbean is occurring more rapidly than anywhere else on Earth. World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) 2022 Living Planet report revealed a 94% decline in species populations between 1970 and 2018 for Latin America and the Caribbean, compared to an average, global, decline of 69%.⁴ Illegal exploitation of wildlife is an important driver of species loss which, in turn, exacerbates threats from habitat loss and degradation, invasive species, disease, and climate change.

Illegal wildlife exploitation in Latin America has long been underprioritised compared to other regions. While the issue has received more attention in recent years, to date research and conservation efforts have focused mainly on a few countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. For most of the other countries in the region, data reflecting the scale of illegal wildlife exploitation is scarce.

To aid in addressing this knowledge gap, IFAW commissioned a 2023 study on poaching and trafficking of reptiles, birds, mammals, and amphibians in the 18 Spanish-speaking countries of the Americas (Hispanic America). The study's aim was to identify key trafficking hotspots, routes, methods, trends, and targeted wildlife species.

The main source of information for the study consisted of open-source media reports on wildlife seizures and poaching incidents for each of the 18 Hispanic American countries. Reliance on this data source means that findings presented in this report must be interpreted with some caution. First, seizures of any illegal commodity represent only a fraction of the actual volume of illegal trade in that commodity; and this caveat is particularly important for countries in which little effort is made to tackle wildlife poaching and trafficking. Second, not all seizures and poaching incidents are reported to the media. And third, because it is impossible to identify all relevant media reports through open-source research; this analysis should be seen as initial work which can be augmented by more in-depth research.

³ The Swiftest (2022). The 201 Most (& Least) Biodiverse Countries. Available at: <https://theswiftest.com/biodiversity-index/>. Accessed on 4 April 2024.

⁴ WWF (2022) Living Planet Report 2022 – Building a nature-positive society. Almond, R.E.A., Grooten, M., Juffe Bignoli, D. & Petersen, T. (Eds). WWF, Gland, Switzerland. Available at: https://wwflpr.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/lpr_2022_full_report.pdf. Accessed on 4 April 2024.

Methods

Media reports on seizures and poaching incidents were collected through open-source research using the Google Chrome browser and Spanish search terms for the time frame 1 January 2017 through to 31 December 2022. The list of search terms used for this research is included as Annex 1.

The data were compiled in a Microsoft Excel database. Information on relevant seizures that occurred on or after 1 January 2023 was excluded from the data set, but is mentioned in this report where useful to highlight significant trends.

To contextualise the seizure and poaching data, other relevant sources of information were also considered and included in the analysis, including NGO reports, academic papers, and other open-source information. In addition, the study examined data contained in the Law Enforcement Management Information System (LEMIS) database maintained by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) with the aim of identifying key U.S. ports of entry for illicit wildlife shipped from Hispanic America. For this purpose, the study utilized a LEMIS dataset spanning 2016 to 2020, which was obtained by the Center for Biological Diversity through a Freedom of Information Act request and subsequently shared with IFAW in 2022.

Details collected from media reports for each poaching or seizure incident include: date of the incident; country and location of the incident; type of incident (poaching or seizure); geographic origin, transit location, and destination; transport mode; concealment method; indications of crime convergence; use of social media to advertise the wildlife specimen, if applicable; taxonomic information including species' name and class; quantity (live animals; dead animals; parts/derivatives; and/or product weight in kg); information on arrests and prosecution, if available; and weblink(s) for media report(s).

Local currency amounts mentioned in this report were converted to USA dollar (US\$) amounts based on conversion rates sourced from Xe currency converter (<http://xe.com>) in February 2024.

Maps were created using ArcGIS.

Identification of wildlife seizures

For purposes of this study, all incidents in which wild animals (live, dead, and/or as their parts and products) were confiscated by government authorities have been recorded as seizures. In addition, incidents in which wild animals were surrendered to authorities, or wild animals suspected to have been victims of poaching or trafficking were rescued by authorities (e.g. a jaguarundi cub found in a city street far from its natural habitat) were also recorded as seizures.

For each incident the number of animals involved was recorded. Where wildlife parts, products, or meat were seized, the minimum number of animals involved was calculated using the following methods:

Table 1: Guidance for calculating number of seized animals

Seized item	Minimum number of animals recorded	Notes ^{A, B, C}
One part of a wildlife specimen. For example, a claw, tail, paw, tooth, head, carapace, skin, antler, tongue, wing, feather, or rattle of a rattle snake	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In incidents where multiple parts belonging to a certain species were seized, the estimate was based on the number of those parts present in the species involved. For example, as mammals have 4 paws, 2-4 paws would equate to 1 mammal, 5-8 paws would equate to 2 mammals, etc. As big cats have four fangs, every four fangs seized were considered to involve one specimen. For example, a seizure of 185 jaguar fangs equated to 46 jaguars. • If a mixture of items of a certain wildlife species was seized, the minimum number of animals involved was conservatively calculated to avoid overestimation. For example, 33 fox legs and 19 fox tails were estimated to involve 19 foxes.
Wild meat, any quantity	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a large amount of meat from a certain wildlife species was seized, the average weight of an adult specimen for that species was used to estimate the minimum number of animals involved. For example, 106.3 kg of capybara meat was estimated to involve at least two capybaras as the body weight of free-living capybaras ranges between 63.4 kg and 100 kg.
A product containing parts or derivatives of a wildlife species. For example, a fashion or folkloristic item made from or containing a wildlife specimen's skin or feathers; a natural medicine containing wildlife derivatives (e.g. a potion made from reptiles or amphibians)	1	
One taxidermy	1	

Note A: If the estimated number of animals involved in a seizure was provided by the law enforcement agency that made the seizure, that number was recorded. For example, a seizure of 18 kg of spectacled caiman skins seized in Colombia was estimated by Colombian authorities to pertain to 23 specimens.

Note B: If a mixture of items of a certain wildlife species was seized, the minimum number of animals involved was conservatively calculated to avoid overestimation. For example, 200 kg of sea turtle meat and 3 sea turtle carapaces were estimated to involve three sea turtles and a seizure of 23 crocodile tails, 175 kg of crocodile meat and 58 crocodile pieces was estimated to involve 23 crocodiles.

Note C: Seized reptile or bird eggs were not extrapolated to numbers of animals.

Identification of wildlife poaching

Any incidents involving a dead animal that was suspected to have been killed illegally (with no person having taken possession of that animal) were classified as poaching incidents. Incidents where media outlets reported on illegal wildlife killings as evidenced by photos or videos circulated on social media were also recorded as poaching incidents.

Regional analysis

Regional analysis

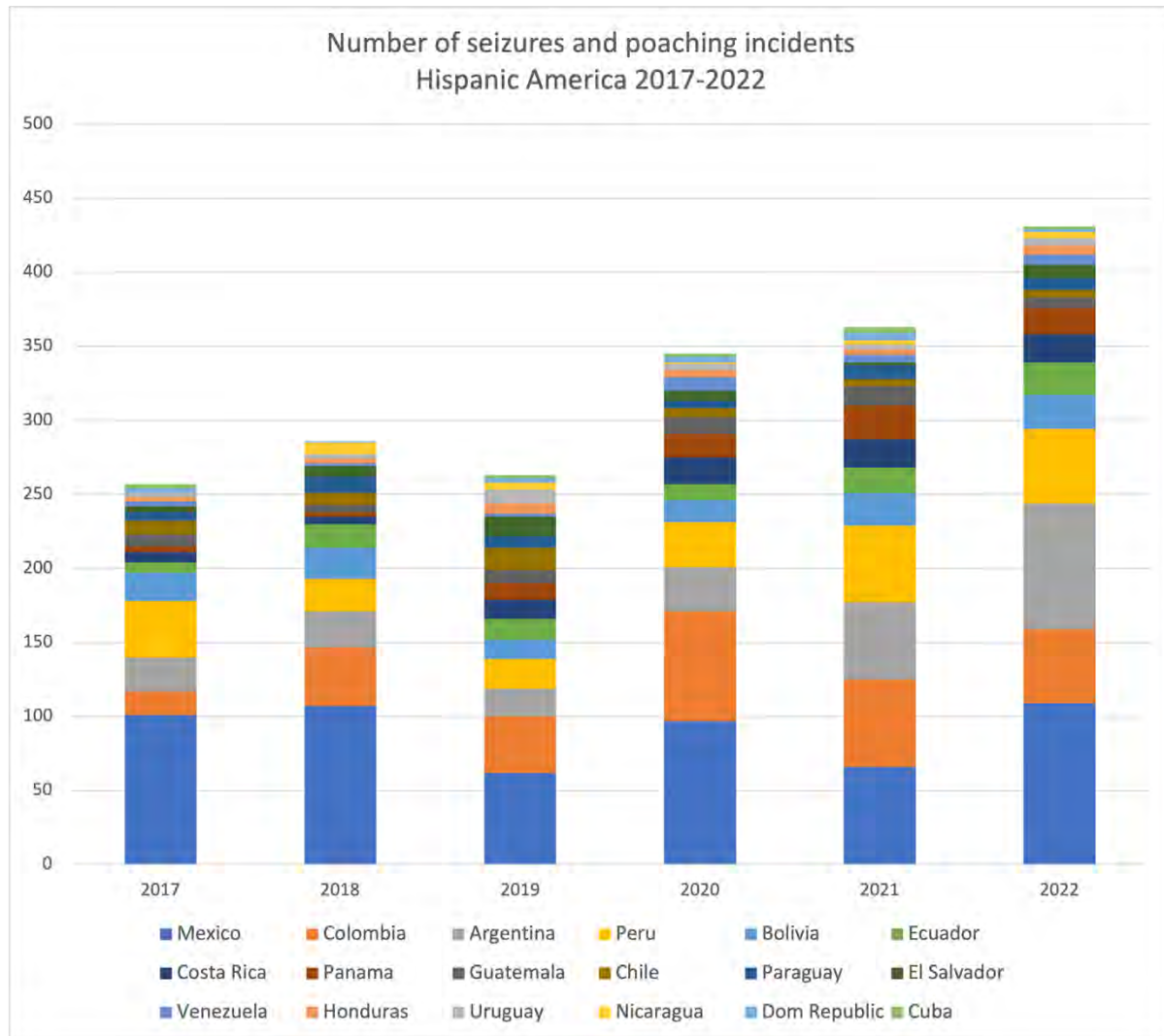


Figure 1: Number of seizures and poaching incidents in Hispanic America between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

This study collected and analysed 1,945 seizures and poaching incidents reported by media outlets for 18 Hispanic American countries between 2017 and 2022. Overall, the annual number of reported incidents increased significantly in this time frame. Possible explanations for this trend include:

- ▶ increased poaching and trafficking;
- ▶ increased law enforcement focus;
- ▶ and/or increased media attention.

With respect to recorded incidents, Mexico far surpassed all other countries, accounting for 28% of all incidents and 45% of all seized and poached animals included in this analysis. While this finding suggests that Mexican law enforcement agencies successfully intercept illegal wildlife shipments, data nonetheless indicate that wildlife crime remains a significant problem in that nation. Colombia, Argentina, Peru, and, to a lesser extent, Bolivia, also reported significant numbers of seizure and poaching incidents and wild animals harmed, reflecting both considerable law enforcement effort and high levels of wildlife crime.

The other 13 countries of Hispanic America reported significantly fewer incidents, ranging from 87 in Ecuador to only 13 in Cuba during the 2017-2022 study period. However, a low number of recorded incidents does not necessarily imply a low level of wildlife crime. Media reports and other open-source data analysed suggest that most, if not all of these countries, experience serious levels of illegal wildlife exploitation, suggesting that fighting wildlife crime is not a priority in these countries and/or a lack of enforcement capacity and resources.

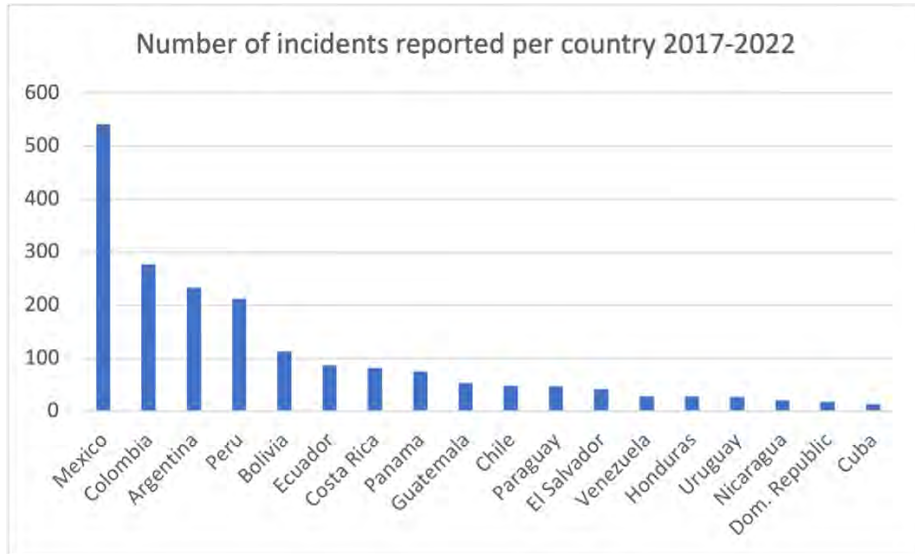


Figure 2: Number of seizure and poaching incidents reported per country between 2017 and 2022

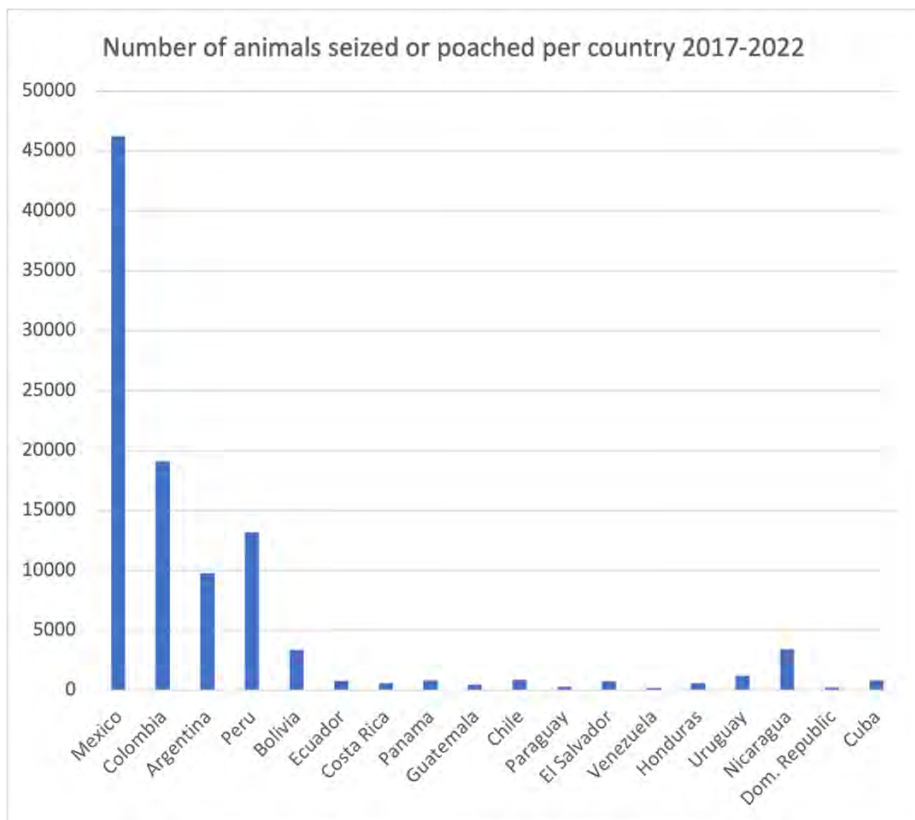


Figure 3: Number of animals seized or poached per country between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

The map below visualizes the regional distribution of seizures and poaching incidents recorded by this study. Country-level maps depicting the locations of seizures and poaching incidents are included in country analyses section.



Figure 4: Regional distribution of seizures and poaching incidents reported between 2017 and 2022

Species most at risk from wildlife crime

The seizures and poaching incidents identified by this study involved a minimum number of 102,577 wild animals, of which 59% were reptiles; 27.5% were birds; 9.5% were amphibians; and 4% were mammals. While this is a large number, it is important to note that these 102,577 animals represent just a fraction of the actual illegal offtake during the study period.

The high percentage of reptiles is explained in part by two major 2020 seizures which took place in Mexico and involved 29,502 mud turtles and musk turtles. These two seizures also explain the peak in animals seized in 2020 relative to other years in the study period. In fact, in most Hispanic American countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela), birds were the most seized species group. Reptiles were the most seized in Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and Nicaragua, whereas amphibians were the most seized in Panama and Peru.

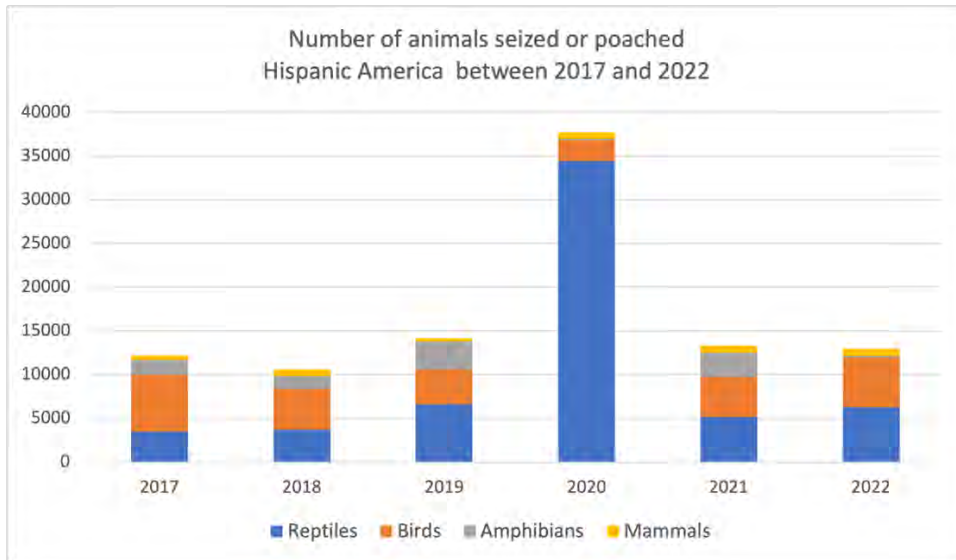


Figure 5: Number of animals seized or poached in Hispanic America between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

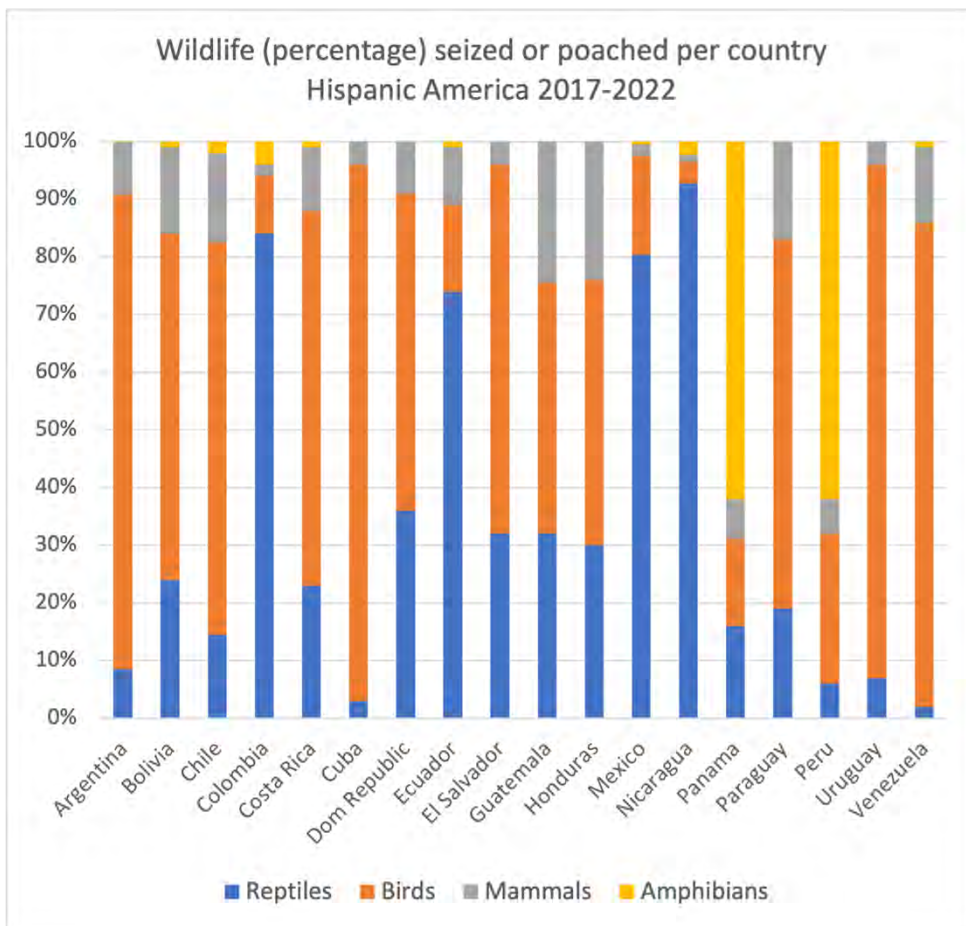


Figure 6: Wildlife (percentage) seized or poached per country in Hispanic America between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

A minimum of 690 different wildlife species were recorded in seizures and poaching incidents across Hispanic American countries between 2017 and 2022, impacting at least: 328 bird species; 174 mammal species; 165 reptile species; and 23 amphibian species. As media reports often failed to specify the exact (sub)species of animals involved in these incidents, it is very likely that the number of species

trafficked in the region during the study period is even higher. Of the 690 species, more than half (363 species) are only protected by domestic laws, not by CITES. This is disproportionately true for songbirds; only three of the 145 songbird species documented by this study are CITES- listed. Most wildlife specimens were seized within their countries of origin based on domestic laws which prohibit capture, trade, or possession without a permit. The lack of CITES protection has implications for criminal justice responses to specimens trafficked abroad, however (see below under Domestic/ regional versus international demand). A full list of the species documented in this study, including their Latin, English, and Spanish names and whether they are listed in CITES, is included in Annex 2 of this report.

The question of which species are most at risk from poaching and trafficking depends on local circumstances, particularly the occurrence of species in a certain country (i.e., supply), and demand for that species locally, regionally, and/or internationally (influenced, among other things, by socio-economic and cultural circumstances). Nonetheless, the following observations can be made.

Reptiles

Reptiles are trafficked in huge numbers in Hispanic America. They are poached for the domestic and foreign pet trade; for their skin, meat, and/or eggs; to be taxidermied; and in some countries for use in traditional medicine.

Freshwater turtles and tortoises are the most seized reptiles in Hispanic America. A minimum of 47,997 individuals were reported to be seized overall in this study, consisting mainly of live specimens destined for the pet trade. Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru reported the highest numbers. Mexico accounted for 64% of all freshwater turtles reported as seized in the region between 2017 and 2022. Most of these were mud turtles, with 24,849 specimens (including *Kinosternon leucostomum*, *Kinosternon integrum*, and *Kinosternon scorpioides*) reported to be seized. In Colombia, mata mata turtles (*Chelus fimbriata*) are most threatened by illicit trade, with 6,163 specimens seized. In Argentina, Chaco tortoises (*Chelonoidis chilensis*) are the most poached reptiles, with a total of 463 specimens seized during the study period. Ecuador's Galápagos tortoises (*Chelonoidis niger*) remain under severe threat from traffickers, with 392 specimens seized. In Bolivia and Peru, yellow-spotted river turtles (*Podocnemis unifilis*) are targeted for their meat and eggs. Peruvian authorities seized 10,802 yellow-spotted river turtle eggs and Bolivia seized 81,345 eggs of the same species between 2017 and 2022.

Caimans and crocodiles were also frequently seized (alive, dead, or as parts and products), accounting for 6,639 specimens. They are mainly targeted for their skins and meat. The highest numbers were reported in Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru, with 3,384 live Morelet's crocodiles (*Crocodylus moreletii*) seized in Mexico and 2,135 spectacled caimans (*Caiman crocodilus*), including 1,086 skins, seized in Colombia.

Also noteworthy is the illegal trade in lizards, which involves numerous species. A total of 3,102 specimens were reported to be seized and/or poached. Mexico accounted for a significant portion of this trade, with 1,812 lizards of 44 different species seized in Mexico as well as abroad, including 777 green iguanas (*Iguana iguana*); 392 alligator lizards (*Abronia graminea* and *A. taeniata*); 173 horned lizards (*Phrynosoma asio*, *P. orbiculare*, *P. solare*); and 121 Mexican spiny-tailed iguanas (*Ctenosaura pectinata*). These lizards are mainly targeted for the pet trade. Bolivian authorities seized 406 Forster's tree iguanas (*Liolaemus forsterii*), which are used for traditional medicine.

In El Salvador, iguanas are the most seized reptiles. Considered a culinary delicacy, 190 black spiny-tailed iguanas (*Ctenosaura similis*) and green iguanas (*Iguana iguana*) were seized from traffickers.

Marine turtles are targeted for their meat and their eggs as well as their shells, which are used to produce handicrafts for the local market. Furthermore, significant quantities of hawksbill turtle shells are trafficked to East Asia, mainly Vietnam and China, where they are highly prized. 312 marine turtles were reported to be poached, in addition to seizures of 283,339 marine turtle eggs and 1888 kg of meat. Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama reported the highest numbers. Mexico accounted for 90.1% of all marine turtle eggs seized in the region between 2017 and 2022.

Reptiles destined for the global pet trade are commonly smuggled alive. However, **smuggling of reptile eggs** has also been observed, including to Europe. In 2020 a major wildlife trafficking investigation led by the Spanish Guardia Civil and EUROPOL revealed that reptile eggs were being smuggled to Europe from Mexico, Brazil, Australia, South Africa, and the Middle East. The reptile eggs were smuggled under smugglers' clothes and in suitcases and artificially incubated in Europe. After hatching, juveniles were marketed as captive-bred in Europe, using forged documents to conceal their origin.⁵

Birds

Wild bird populations in Hispanic America are under significant pressure from poaching. Psittacids and songbirds were the most seized; both are mainly captured for the domestic and foreign pet trades.

Except for Cuba, all Hispanic American countries reported seizures of **psittacids**. A total of 10,869 New World psittacids were seized, including 5,729 parakeets of 22 different species; 4,424 parrots of 26 species; and 535 macaws of 11 species. In addition, 195 Old World psittacids of at least ten species were seized. These seizures represent just a fraction of actual illegal offtake. Indeed, a 2001 study estimated that between 400,000 and 800,000 psittacid chicks are poached each year in the Neotropics.⁶

The most significant seizures were reported by authorities in Argentina, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela. For 1,015 seized individual psittacids, media reports describing their seizure(s) failed to specify the species. Therefore, the numbers of seized specimens categorised by species below reflect minimum figures for each species.

Orange-fronted **parakeets** (*Aratinga canicularis*) were the most seized parakeet species (2,525 specimens, of which 97.3%—2,457 specimens—were seized in Mexico). Second came white-winged parakeets (*Brotogeris versicolorus*) with 1,609 specimens seized, all in Peru. In third place are orange-chinned parakeets (*Brotogeris jugularis*); 308 specimens were seized, the majority in Colombia (191 specimens) and El Salvador (81 specimens).

The most seized **parrot** species were turquoise-fronted amazons (*Amazona aestiva*): 1,683 specimens were seized, of which 96.4% (1,623 specimens) were seized in Argentina. The second most seized parrot species were red-lored amazons (*Amazona autumnalis*): 651 specimens were seized in total, of which 70% (452 specimens) were seized in Mexico and 20% (130 specimens) in Nicaragua. Pacific

⁵ Euronews, 13 November 2020. Police catch traffickers smuggling reptiles into Europe 'under their clothes'. <https://www.euronews.com/green/2020/11/13/police-bust-traffickers-smuggling-reptiles-into-europe-under-their-clothes>. Accessed on 29 April 2024.

⁶ Beissinger, S.R. (2001). Trade of live wild birds, principles and practices of sustainable use. In: Reynolds JD, Mace GM, Robinson JG (eds) Conservation of exploited species. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp 183–202.

parrotlets (*Forpus coelestis*) followed in third place with 605 specimens seized, of which 603 were seized in Peru.

Of particular concern is the presence of endangered parrot species in illegal trade, particularly in Mexico: 111 yellow-headed amazons (*Amazona oratrix*) were seized during the study period, including 86 in Mexico; 62 lilac-crowned amazons (*Amazona finschi*) were seized, all in Mexico; and 15 red-crowned amazons (*Amazona viridigenalis*) were seized, including 13 specimens in Mexico. Critically endangered yellow-naped amazons (*Amazona auropalliata*, 30 specimens) were primarily seized in El Salvador and Mexico. All four species are listed in CITES Appendix I, meaning that international commercial trade of wild-caught specimens is prohibited.

Blue and yellow macaws (*Ara araurana*) were the most seized **macaw** species overall: 166 specimens were seized across Hispanic America, with the highest numbers seized in Argentina (39); Colombia (32); and Bolivia (27). Scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*) were also frequently observed in illegal trade, with 97 specimens seized in various countries during the study period. The highest numbers were reported in Honduras (21), Venezuela (21), Mexico (9), and Nicaragua (8). Lastly, 77 military macaws (*Ara militaris*) were seized, most of which were intercepted in Mexico (49) and Venezuela (24).

Nicaragua and Paraguay were identified as source countries for the smuggling of parrot and macaw eggs to East Asia by Asian criminal networks. Taiwan region, where New World parrots and macaws are in high demand and command high prices, appears to be the key destination. The USA and Europe (including The Netherlands and Spain) are key transit points. Two seizures were recorded between 2017 and 2022: in 2017, authorities in Taiwan region seized 45 macaw eggs that originated in Paraguay; in 2019, 244 scarlet macaw eggs from Nicaragua were seized in Hong Kong SAR. Seizures continued after 2022: in 2023, authorities in Paraguay seized 40 macaw eggs from two smugglers from Taiwan region and U.S. authorities in Miami, Florida, USA, seized 29 parrot eggs (red-lored amazon and critically Endangered yellow-naped amazon) smuggled from Nicaragua, which were destined for Taiwan region. In 2024, Panamanian authorities seized 240 macaw eggs coming from Nicaragua that were destined for Taiwan region.

In several Hispanic American countries, **songbirds** are heavily trafficked for the cagebird trade. A total of 9,289 specimens were reported to be seized, involving at least 145 different species. Argentina reported the highest number of songbirds seized, with 3,428 specimens intercepted there. The next highest figures were reported by Mexico (2,841 specimens); Uruguay (1,000 specimens); Peru (704 specimens); Colombia (582 specimens); Bolivia (579 specimens); Cuba (449 specimens); and Costa Rica (98 specimens). As with psittacids, media reports often failed to specify the (sub) species involved in songbird seizures. This was the case for 2,449 songbirds. Nonetheless, it was possible to assess which species are most affected by illegal trade.

Saffron finches (*Sicalis flaveola*) were the most seized songbird species between 2017 and 2022, with at least 1,819 specimens intercepted. Peru reported the highest numbers (644 specimens), followed by Bolivia (570 specimens); Uruguay (350 specimens); Colombia (127 specimens); and Argentina (128 specimens). Cross-border trafficking is frequent, including from Peru to Brazil. The Peruvian subspecies *Sicalis flaveola valida* is in demand in Brazil because the birds are bigger and more aggressive than the Brazilian subspecies. They are trafficked to Brazil to be hybridised with the local subspecies so that their offspring can be used in illegal saffron finch fighting competitions.

Painted buntings (*Passerina ciris*) were the second most seized songbird species. Mexican law enforcers seized 1,256 specimens between 2017 and 2022. This included a shipment of 454 specimens that were transported in a car in 2017, and another shipment of 682 specimens transported in a passenger bus in 2018, highlighting the sheer scale of the illegal trade in this migratory species. Painted buntings are reportedly also heavily trafficked in Cuba, including through social media. However, Cuba reported only one seizure that involved painted buntings. This seizure took place in 2019 and concerned 277 songbirds of various species seized from the suitcase of an air passenger headed abroad.

The persistently high levels of illegal offtake are threatening some songbird species with extinction. A stark example is the yellow cardinal (*Gubernatrix cristata*, CITES Appendix I), which is classified as 'Critically Endangered' in IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species. At least 170 specimens were reportedly seized between 2017 and 2022, including 166 in Argentina, two in Uruguay and two in Chile. Formerly widespread and common throughout much of Argentina and Uruguay, yellow cardinal populations have declined rapidly due to constant and chronic exploitation for the cagebird market, compounded by habitat loss. Today, only 1,000-2,000 mature individuals remain in the wild in Argentina, in small and fragmented populations.⁷

Mammals

Wild mammals in Hispanic America are targeted for their meat, wool, skins (which are used for décor, accessories, and high-end fashion), and parts (which are used in folkloristic rituals, as good luck charms, and in traditional medicine), as well as for the pet and taxidermy trades. A total of 4,070 mammals representing 174 different species were identified in seizures and poaching incidents across Hispanic America between 2017 and 2022. This number is low relative to the other species groups that were part of this study; however, as with the other taxonomic groups, the figures provided in this report for mammal poaching and seizures represent just a fraction of actual illegal offtake.

The illegal trade in wild meat (bushmeat) is a major driver for the poaching of mammals, including deer, lowland pacas, capybaras, peccaries, armadillos, monkeys, tapir, opossums, anteaters, and sloths. In some areas, such as the Amazon, this illegal trade is increasing in the wake of infrastructure development. A 2022 study of wild meat trade in key urban markets in the Peruvian town of Iquitos found that wild meat sales had increased significantly between 1973 and 2018, reaching an estimated 442 tons in 2018 in Iquitos alone.⁸

In many countries, especially in the Amazon basin, indigenous people and local communities (IPLCs) engage in wildlife hunting. Several countries allow wildlife hunting by IPLCs for subsistence. However, such exemptions can create loopholes which see large-scale abuse, enabling commercial sale of bushmeat at unsustainable levels, as has been documented in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru (for more detail and references, please see the analyses for these countries in Section 3 of this report). In some countries (e.g., Argentina, Dominican Republic, and Uruguay) recreational hunters also engage in systemic wildlife poaching, including for commercial purposes.

Overhunting can cause large declines and local extirpations of wildlife populations. A 2017 review that analysed 176 studies on hunting and animal populations across the tropics showed that bird and mammal populations were considerably lower in areas where hunting occurred. Bird and mammal

⁷ BirdLife International (2024). Species factsheet: *Gubernatrix cristata*. Available at <http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/yellow-cardinal-gubernatrix-cristata>. Accessed on 23 January 2024.

⁸ Mayor, P. et al (2022). Wild meat trade over the last 45 years in the Peruvian Amazon. *Conservation Biology*. 36(2):e13801. Available from: <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cobi.13801>. Accessed on 22 Dec. 2023.

abundances declined by 58% and by 83% in hunted areas compared to non-hunted areas. Bird and mammal populations were depleted within 7 and 40 kilometres, respectively, from hunters' access points (roads and settlements). Additionally, hunting pressure was higher in areas with better accessibility to major towns where game meat could be traded.⁹

Despite these findings, few interceptions of wild meat poachers and traffickers were recorded by this study, suggesting that wild meat poaching and trafficking are not priorities for law enforcement officials in Hispanic America. Capacity to patrol protected areas is also low in many Hispanic American countries as there is often a lack of resources to address this type of crime. Furthermore, several countries, including Chile, Ecuador, and Venezuela reduced anti-poaching (and trafficking) budgets because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

All countries except for Cuba reported seizures of wild **primates**. A total of 579 primates were seized, involving no fewer than 41 New World species. In addition, four Old World primate species were identified, including chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*, 11 specimens seized in Peru) and three species seized in Mexico: green monkey (*Chlorocebus sabaues*, one specimen), lemur (*Lemuroidea*, three specimens), and baboon (*Papio sp.*, eight specimens). Mexican authorities seized the highest number of primates (110), followed by Peru (109), Argentina (79), and Colombia (79).

These seizures represent just a tiny fraction of the actual number of primates poached from the wild in Hispanic America. Researchers have estimated that, in Peru alone, up to 200,000 monkeys end up in the bushmeat or pet trade annually.¹⁰

Eight primate species reported to be trafficked in Hispanic America are listed in CITES Appendix I: Yucatán howler monkey (*Alouatta pigra*); Central American squirrel monkey (*Saimiri oerstedii*); Geoffroy's tamarin (*Saguinus geoffroyi*); white-footed tamarin (*Saguinus leucopus*); cotton-top tamarin (*Saguinus oedipus*); yellow-tailed woolly monkey (*Lagothrix flavicauda*); chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*); and lemur (*Lemuridae*).

Primates are targeted for food as well as for the pet trade. Hunters typically kill adult monkeys for consumption and the bushmeat trade, while simultaneously capturing their young to sell into the domestic or international pet trade. The most endangered—and therefore most valuable—species are targeted for the pet trade. Some countries have reported a rise in monkey trafficking for the international pet trade, with social media playing a key role in fueling global demand.

For instance, Mexico has seen a rise in spider monkey and howler monkey trafficking, both domestically and to the USA, to such an extent that it is threatening these species in the wild. The possession of these monkeys has become fashionable due to influencers flaunting their monkey 'babies' using social media.

Wild cats, including jaguars (*Panthera onca*), pumas (*Puma concolor*), jaguarundis (*Puma yagouaroundi*), and ocelots (*Leopardus pardalis*), are persecuted across their range out of fear and/or in retaliation for preying on livestock. Poaching incidents of jaguars and pumas often become public

⁹ Benítez-López, A. et al. (2017). The impact of hunting on tropical mammal and bird populations. *Science*. 356(6334). Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aaj1891>. Accessed on 27 March 2024.

¹⁰ Watsa, M. E. (2015). 200,000 of Peru's primates trafficked for pet trade or bushmeat yearly.

Mongabay, 11 December 2015. <https://news.mongabay.com/2015/12/200000-of-perus-primates-trafficked-for-pet-trade-or-bushmeat-yearly/>. Accessed on 4 April 2024.

after images of poachers posing with the dead animals are shared on social media. Most incidents remain unknown, however, as poachers make sure to hide the animals they kill for fear of prosecution. The cubs of poached wild cats are often sold as pets. Some wild cat species—in particular jaguars, pumas, and ocelots—are also targeted for the trade in their parts and products, as well as for the exotic pet trade. Some wild cat species—in particular jaguars, pumas, and ocelots—are also targeted for the trade in their parts and products, as well as for the exotic pet trade.

All Hispanic American countries except for Chile, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Uruguay reported **jaguar** poaching and trafficking incidents between 2017-2022, affecting a minimum of 188 jaguars. These incidents included 36 live jaguars; 65 dead jaguars; and parts and products of at least 87 jaguars (including 193 teeth, 25 skins, three heads, two claws, two skulls, four taxidermies, five fashion items and two other products). Bolivian authorities reported the greatest number of impacted animals (61 jaguars), due in large part to the 2018 seizure of 185 fangs, eight molars, three skins, two claws and one jaguar coat from a restaurant in Santa Cruz. Mexican authorities seized the highest number of live jaguars (21 specimens) during the same period.

A total of 133 **pumas** were reported to have been poached or seized in 11 countries, including 58 dead specimens, 55 live specimens, and parts and products representing at least 20 specimens. Argentina reported the highest number: 56 specimens, including 21 poached pumas, 21 live pumas, and parts and products of at least 14 pumas.

This study documented 696 **vicuñas** (*Vicugna vicugna*) affected by poaching and illegal trade. The vicuña is a small camelid species that inhabits the Altiplano in the central Andes, stretching across Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, and Peru. A smaller, introduced population lives in central Ecuador. The species nearly went extinct in the 1960s due to excessive hunting for their wool, which is considered the rarest and most expensive in the world. Concerted protection measures centred around regulated, community-based harvest and trade of vicuña fibre have contributed to the recovery of vicuña populations across the species' range. Poaching remains a threat in some areas, however. A total of 394 specimens were found slaughtered and the skins and wool of another 302 specimens were seized from poachers and traffickers. Peru reported the highest number of incidents and impacted animals, identifying 333 carcasses, stripped of their skins and, in some cases, partially dismembered. The majority of these specimens—totaling 310— were poached in the first half of 2020, with poachers most likely taking advantage of reduced enforcement during the country's lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Bolivian authorities seized the fleeces and wool of 231 specimens; in Argentina, 43 specimens were poached and the skins of 86 specimens seized; Chile, lastly, reported three poached specimens.

Amphibians

Although no fewer than 9,504 amphibians representing 23 different species were seized during the study period, only a few countries reported significant seizures of amphibians between 2017 and 2022.

The highest numbers were reported by Peruvian authorities, which seized 5,776 Titicaca water frogs (*Telmatobius culeus*) and 2,160 South American toads between 2017 and 2022. In Peru and neighbouring Bolivia Titicaca water frogs and South American toads (*Rhinella* sp.) are heavily exploited in connection with the belief that they cure diseases and act as an aphrodisiac. Titicaca water frogs are also poached for their meat, and there is evidence of illegal export for the pet trade.

Colombia and Panama are key source countries for poison dart frogs trafficked to Germany. Between 2017 and 2022, Colombia officials seized 640 poison dart frogs, including 627 critically endangered harlequin poison dart frogs (*Oophaga histrionica*) and Lehmann's poison dart frog (*Oophaga lehmanni*), which were destined for Germany. In Panama, Strawberry poison dart frogs (*Oophaga pumilio*) are the most exploited poison dart frog species. German authorities seized 112 poison dart frogs (including 108 *Oophaga pumilio*) originating from Panama in 2020 and, a year later, Panamanian officials seized 408 poison dart frogs (including 376 *Oophaga pumilio*).

Between 2017 and 2022, Mexican authorities seized 271 amphibians of 15 different species, including several endemic species, which are trafficked domestically and abroad. Examples include plateau tiger salamanders (*Ambystoma velasci*) and Mexican leaf frogs (*Agalychnis dacnicolor*).

Live animal trade

Between 2017 and 2022, 92.5% of all seizure/ poaching incidents reported in Hispanic America concerned live animals, most of which were trafficked to supply the global demand for wild pets. The remaining 7.5% of reported incidents concerned dead animals (3.7%), parts and products (3%), and meat (0.8%). These percentages are likely skewed by the fact that large numbers of animals are poached and consumed without being detected, as law enforcement capacity is generally limited in rural areas. Live animals, on the other hand, are more easily detected during transport or at the point of sale. Even so, it is clear that illegal live animal trade in Hispanic America is a significant problem.

This finding underscores the need for significant efforts to raise awareness and shift consumer behaviour away from the desire to own wild animals as pets. Furthermore, it draws attention to the need for adequate facilities to rescue, rehabilitate, and care for seized wildlife, both from an individual animal welfare perspective and a species conservation perspective. It is also important that front line officials responsible for intercepting shipments of live wildlife are well trained to identify species, protect themselves and the animals, and ensure that the animals receive appropriate care and attention during the period immediately after seizure until they can safely be transferred to specialised care or repatriated.

Domestic/regional versus international demand

When wild animals are seized, their intended destination is not always evident, and media reports seldom provide information on this aspect of the wildlife trade. However, a large majority of wildlife seizures recorded by this study involved native wildlife species and occurred in locations that suggest wildlife trafficking in Hispanic America mainly supplies domestic demand. Massive numbers of wildlife are taken from the wild and sold illegally, including in markets, streets, shops, and online, despite wildlife protection laws restricting such exploitation. Although governments and NGOs in some countries are working to raise awareness about illicit trade and discourage consumer audiences from buying wild animals and/or wildlife parts and products, wildlife consumption remains deeply ingrained. Demand for wild animals as pets ('mascotismo') appears to be the main driver for wildlife poaching in Hispanic America. Other drivers include: wild meat (bushmeat) consumption; traditional medicine; fashion; décor/jewellery; and the use of wildlife (alive, dead or their parts) in folkloristic rituals.

Exotic species native to Africa and Asia destined for the pet trade were also frequently seized in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, and Mexico. These seized animals included several species of pythons, chameleons, bearded dragons, leopard geckos, Mali uromastyx, Russian tortoises, African grey parrots, cockatoos, budgerigars, African lions, and tigers. Many of these species breed readily in captivity and are commonly traded in exotic pet markets, so it can be assumed that most have a captive origin. Based on seizure data and existing research, the USA and Europe are likely destinations for exotic wildlife trafficked in Hispanic America.

Within Hispanic America, cross-border smuggling is common and affects myriad species. Cross-border smuggling is often driven by demand and higher potential profit in neighbouring countries. In some instances, traffickers also exploit loopholes afforded by less restrictive laws in neighbouring countries. For example, mata mata turtles (*Chelus fimbriata*) have been smuggled by the thousands from Colombia, where mata mata turtle trade is banned, to Peru, where these turtles are reportedly laundered into Peru's legal export market for captive-bred mata mata turtles.

The seizure data also demonstrate that Hispanic American wildlife is trafficked to the USA, Europe, and Asia. This trade often involves rare, endemic species of birds and reptiles, which are in high demand in foreign pet markets. Examples of impacted species include mud turtles, horned lizards, alligator lizards, poison arrow frogs, and certain species of songbirds, Amazon parrots, and macaws.

Wildlife species trafficked abroad often lack CITES protections, though most are covered by national wildlife laws. To illustrate: this study identified 1,667 wild animals that were seized en route to or in Europe between 2017 and 2022. These animals belonged to 52 different species, 22 of which are endemic and, notably, only ten of which were listed under CITES at the time of seizure. This finding corroborates a 2022 threat assessment by EUROPOL, which states that traffickers operating in Europe are increasingly targeting less monitored endemic non-CITES listed species, which are trafficked to both EU and non-EU destinations. The lack of CITES protection has implications for criminal justice responses to such illicit shipments in destination countries. In many destination countries (including those within the EU), non-CITES listed species are not covered by national wildlife protection laws. Accordingly, smuggling of these species is often a low priority, and penalties are nonexistent or significantly lower than for smuggling of CITES-listed species (usually limited to fines based on violation of customs, animal welfare, or veterinary legislation).¹¹ The lack of adequate legal protection for species sourced in contravention of domestic laws in countries of origin furthermore hinders international judicial cooperation. For example, in 2021 Spanish authorities were unable to extradite a notorious bird trafficker to Peru because the rare Peruvian birds he had smuggled were not protected in Spain. As a result, his actions constituted only an administrative, and therefore not extraditable, offence.¹²

Demand from foreign consumer markets is a major threat to vulnerable Hispanic American species. For instance, the illegal trade of harlequin poison frogs (*Oophaga histrionica*) and Lehmann's poison frogs (*Oophaga lehmanni*), both endemic to Colombia, to European markets has contributed to such severe imperilment that the species are now IUCN-classified as 'Critically Endangered'.

¹¹ EUROPOL (2022). Environmental crime in the age of climate change. Threat assessment 2022. Available at: https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/Environmental%20Crime%20in%20the%20Age%20of%20Climate%20Change%20-%20Public%20report_5.pdf. Accessed on 6 May 2024.

¹² Iustel, 23 September 2021. La Audiencia Nacional rechaza extraditar a Perú al acusado de tráfico de aves porque los hechos no son delito en España. https://www.iustel.com/diario_del_derecho/noticia.asp?ref_iustel=1215282. Accessed on 14 May 2024.

Only a small percentage (2.6%) of all seizures identified by this study concerned illicit shipments that were destined for and/or seized in countries outside of the Hispanic American region. However, this figure too represents only a fraction of the actual volume of international traffic in Hispanic American wildlife species. Most illicit international shipments likely escape the attention of law enforcement agencies responsible for policing country borders for a variety of reasons including but not limited to: inadequate focus on travellers and goods leaving the country; lack of priority assigned to intercepting wildlife smugglers; and/or a lack of enforcement capacity and resources. Furthermore, international wildlife trafficking networks are predominantly operated by sophisticated criminal actors who are skilled at abusing weak governance and circumventing controls, e.g. through bribery, the use of sophisticated smuggling techniques and routes, and fraud by means of forged (transport/CITES/veterinary) documents.

Impact on species

The illegal wildlife trade in Hispanic America is a major contributor to the decline of some wildlife species and is driving certain species to extinction. Forty of the 690 species found in illegal trade (6% of all species identified) are classified as 'Endangered' by IUCN, and 13 species (2% of all species) as 'Critically Endangered', meaning that they face a high risk and extremely high risk, respectively, of extinction in the wild. Examples of 'Critically Endangered' species include: red-fronted macaws (*Ara rubrogenys*); great green macaws (*Ara ambiguus*); yellow-naped amazons (*Amazona auropalliata*); harlequin poison frogs (*Oophaga histrionica*); Lehmann's poison frogs (*Oophaga lehmanni*); Central American river turtles (*Dermatemys mawii*); and cotton-top tamarins (*Saguinus Oedipus*).

Furthermore, several species classified as 'Endangered' (facing a high risk of extinction in the wild) were identified, including: yellow cardinals (*Gubernatrix cristata*); red-crowned amazons (*Amazona viridigenalis*); Forster's tree iguanas (*Liolaemus forsteri*); and Titicaca water frogs (*Telmatobius culeus*).

In the case of psittacid trafficking, poachers often cut down nesting trees with suitable nesting cavities or open holes in the trunk to reach the nest cavity and collect nestlings. These practices not only affect wild parrot populations, but also the integrity and diversity of the forest, as parrots contribute to the dispersal of native plant seeds. While poachers often target newborn hatchlings or nestlings, adult specimens are also trapped in large numbers. This poaching is of particular concern because removing breeding adults directly disrupts the species' population dynamics and breeding potential.

Animal welfare and mortality

The illegal wildlife trade in Hispanic America—and globally—is associated with immense animal suffering, particularly in the context of live animals in trade. Common methods used to capture wild animals, such as use of glue to trap songbirds, often result in injuries and sometimes death. Wild animals are smuggled across long distances, often stashed in large numbers within cramped boxes or luggage and hidden in motor vehicle trunks and luggage holds, deprived of oxygen, food, and water. Some smugglers sedate live animals to avoid detection. As a result, the mortality rate of wildlife from the moment of capture or poaching through to the final point of sales is very high, especially for birds. In Argentina, officials estimate that between 40 and 70 percent of songbirds captured for the wildlife trade die before reaching the point of sale. Birds smuggled abroad face even higher mortality. For instance, out of 70 songbirds smuggled from Uruguay to Spain in a suitcase in 2017, 32 birds were dead upon arrival in Spain, and the rest died soon after from stress and other harms associated with their

capture and transport. A study undertaken in Mexico has estimated a mortality rate of 75% for trafficked psittacids before the animals reach the final consumer.¹³

Furthermore, a Mexican wildlife expert has estimated that, of those psittacids that manage to survive capture and transport, 90% die later due to disease, lack of care, or poor nutrition.¹⁴ Mortality is also high among trafficked reptiles, not only in the stages before sales but also afterward, after they have reached exotic pet owners' homes. An estimated 75% of trafficked reptiles die within the first year of captivity.¹⁵ To compensate for very low survival rates among trafficked wildlife, poachers often capture animals in numbers that far outweigh demand, further exacerbating the trade's adverse impact on wild populations; in turn, consumers wishing to replace dead specimens reinforce this practice.

The seizure data collected by the present study on wildlife crime in Hispanic America show that, in cases of domestic live animal smuggling, most specimens intercepted by law enforcement agencies are alive at the time of seizure. However, mortality of seized specimens after being intercepted is reportedly high. Seized animals often succumb due to the delay between the moment of seizure and placement in a suitable rescue facility or, in many cases, the lack of adequate rescue and rehabilitation facilities. For instance, according to a Venezuelan wildlife rescue expert, the survival rate of seed finches is very low after just 12 hours in captivity as the species is characterised by an extremely accelerated metabolism and must eat at all hours.¹⁶ The mortality of green iguanas seized in Mexico is reportedly nearly 100%, as the government lacks proper rescue facilities for the species.¹⁷

Risk of zoonotic disease transmission

Wildlife trafficking is associated with significant risks of zoonotic disease transmission, especially among mammals. A recent study for which researchers tested 388 monkeys that had been trafficked in nine Peruvian cities identified a total of 32 disease pathogens in the animals' blood, saliva, and faecal samples. These pathogens included mycobacteria, which cause tuberculosis, and parasites that cause Chagas disease, malaria, and various gastrointestinal ailments. Human malaria and tuberculosis killed more than two million people in 2020 alone. Throughout the entire trafficking chain, from the forest to markets to households, humans exposed to these animals are at constant risk of infection. Moreover, trafficked and rescued monkeys are at risk of being infected by human pathogens which, if the monkeys are released back into the wild, may spread to and endanger free-ranging primate populations.¹⁸

¹³ Cantú, J.C. et al (2007). Tráfico ilegal de pericos en México. Una evaluación detallada. Defenders of Wildlife, January 2007.

¹⁴ Méndez, E. And Olivera, A. (2022). Merciless Markets: How wildlife trafficking threatens Mexico's biodiversity. Centre for Biological Diversity, November 2022.

¹⁵ E. Toland, E. et al (2012). Pet hate. *Biologist*. 59(3):14-18.

¹⁶ <https://news.mongabay.com/2015/10/trafficked-tropical-animals-the-ghost-exports-of-venezuela/>

¹⁷ <https://www.elpinero.mx/federales-intervienen-autobus-pasajero-rescatan-50-iguanas-signos-maltrato-tehuantepec/>

¹⁸ Mendoza A.P. et al. (2024). Diversity and prevalence of zoonotic infections at the animal-human interface of primate trafficking in Peru. *PLoS ONE*. 19(2): e0287893. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0287893>. Accessed on 10 February 2024.

Onsite and online sales

Numerous wildlife seizures were recorded in street markets, fairs, traders' residences, and pet shops, and such onsite sales outlets remain important avenues for trafficking wildlife across Latin America. However, as is true elsewhere in the world, the internet has become a major conduit for illegal wildlife trade in Hispanic America. In some countries, like Argentina and Bolivia, it was reported that the relative significance of street markets for facilitating illegal wildlife sales has decreased with the introduction of social media. Colombian and Peruvian law enforcers saw illegal wildlife trade on social media surge during the COVID-19 pandemic, as restrictions on movement prompted traffickers to move their business online. Investigations conducted by the Colombian National Police have found that wild animals are offered for sale on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, negotiations take place via phone or direct messaging, and the animals are shipped to the buyer using hired drivers or public transport. In cases for which public transport is used, animals are often drugged to avoid detection.

Unfortunately, online wildlife traffickers appear to be operating with near impunity in much of Hispanic America, as most countries reported few seizures of wildlife that was offered for sale online. In the Dominican Republic and Panama no such wildlife seizures were reported, despite evidence of significant illegal online trade in these countries.

It seems likely that the limited enforcement success in the fight against illegal online wildlife trade is related to a lack of capacity and/or expertise to monitor the web and conduct online investigations. However, some countries are seen to be increasing their efforts. For instance, Argentina reported 16 seizures of wildlife that were offered for sale online, the highest number of any of the 18 Hispanic American countries; however, these seizures equate to only 7.5% of all seizures documented for this country. In Colombia, the National Police have employed 10 cybercrime specialists dedicated to monitoring websites and social media for evidence of wildlife trafficking. This enhanced capacity has delivered notable success: in April 2022, the police dismantled two criminal networks, seized 1,004 wild animals and, across Bogotá, Medellín, Magangué, Cali, and Popayan, arrested 21 people who had engaged in large-scale trafficking of wildlife using social media. In Mexico, in contrast, the dedicated wildlife cybercrime team of the country's environmental protection agency (Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente, PROFEPA) was disbanded in early 2019.¹⁴

Trafficking routes and methods

The wildlife seizures examined by the current study suggest most wildlife trafficked in Hispanic America is smuggled by road. Passenger buses appear to be the most frequently used transport method, even for large quantities of live animals, which are often carried over long distances. Several incidents involved trafficking of live birds, reptiles, and amphibians that were transported by the hundreds or even thousands. In March 2017, for instance, 490 songbirds were seized from a bus in Mexico. Two years later, 1,125 parakeets, parrots, and macaws were seized from a bus in Peru. In June 2019, 2,517 Titicaca water frogs were seized from a bus in Peru. Smugglers also use chartered tourist buses, vans, cars, cargo trucks, and motorcycles.

Some Hispanic American countries, particularly Mexico, Colombia, and Peru, reported or were implicated in illicit air shipments of wildlife. These shipments concerned both domestic smuggling and smuggling to other countries, including the USA and countries in Europe and Asia. Seizures involved passengers smuggling wildlife in their luggage; reptiles hidden in air parcels; and animals concealed in

cargo shipments, often with forged permits or transport documents. Several countries, including some nations with significant levels of illegal wildlife trade, reported no or very few wildlife seizures at airports. While this could indicate that wildlife trafficking by air is not a significant challenge in these countries, it is more likely that controls at the relevant airports are insufficient. For instance, seizures in other countries implicate Nicaragua as a key source country for illicit wildlife (including parrot and macaw eggs), yet Nicaraguan authorities had not intercepted any wildlife at its airports during the 2017-2022 study period.

Relatively few seizures included in this analysis involved wildlife transported by boat. However, given the importance of river and sea transport for the shipping of commodities in Hispanic America, it is likely that the extent to which boats are used to smuggle wildlife is greater than the data suggest.

Key ports of entry in the USA for illicit wildlife shipped from Hispanic America (2016-2020)

Analysis of shipments registered in the USFWS' LEMIS database¹⁹ reveals that the following ports of entry in the USA are most significant for illicit shipments of birds, reptiles, mammals, and amphibians from Hispanic America: 1. El Paso; 2. Nogales; 3. Dallas/Fort Worth; 4. Miami; 5. Laredo; and 6. San Diego/San Ysidro. Together, these ports of entry accounted for seizures of 64% of illicit wildlife shipped from Hispanic America. Mexico is by far the biggest source for wildlife trafficked to the USA, with 76% of seized wildlife shipped from this country. Not coincidentally, El Paso, Nogales, Laredo, and San Diego/San Ysidro are on the border between Mexico and the USA. Peru accounted for 7% of seized wildlife shipments between 2016 and 2022, followed by Nicaragua (3%).

Role of organized crime

A significant proportion of the illegal wildlife trade in Hispanic America appears to be opportunistic, committed outside the sphere of organised crime by low-level actors who catch or kill wild animals and sell these in streets, in local markets, or in urban hubs, or to middlemen. However, numerous incidents were identified that had characteristics of organised crime, which include: the trafficking of large quantities of valuable wildlife, the logistics of which require a high degree of sophistication; the use of fraud (e.g. forged CITES and transport documents); the laundering of illegally harvested wild specimens through captive breeding facilities; the use of chartered private tourist buses to smuggle wildlife; the use of sophisticated obfuscation methods (e.g. for the smuggling of parrot and macaw eggs to Asia using especially made incubators); and the use of social media to traffic large quantities of wildlife.

Hispanic American countries where one or more of these characteristics were recorded include Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

Law enforcement efforts

Wildlife crime remains a low-risk, high-profit crime in Hispanic America. In most Hispanic American countries, law enforcement efforts to tackle wildlife poaching and trafficking appear to be largely reactive rather than proactive. Most seizures identified between 2017 and 2022 were instigated by citizens' complaints or occurred during routine inspections at logistical nodes such as roads, bus stations, and airports. In numerous instances, law enforcers coincidentally detected illicit live bird shipments as they heard chirping noises from boxes or luggage hidden in cars or buses. In most countries, criminal justice efforts appear to focus mainly on seizing illicit wildlife, with little effort

¹⁹ The LEMIS data set 2016-2020 obtained by the Center for Biological Diversity through a Freedom of Information Act request, which was shared with IFAW in 2022.

directed to investigating and dismantling wildlife trafficking networks and prosecuting those who operate such networks. Peru and Colombia are noteworthy exceptions. Among other counter-trafficking efforts, Peru's government has adopted a strong anti-wildlife trafficking law and shown high-level commitment to tackle wildlife crime by hosting the first conference on illegal wildlife trade in the Americas in 2019. In 2021, Colombia's national police launched a national strategy to tackle environmental crime and increased its investigative capacity to fight wildlife and natural resources crime. Nonetheless, challenges remain throughout Hispanic America.

The rate of arrest in wildlife crime cases (based on information provided in media reports) is low in many countries. On average, 27% of seizures and poaching incidents recorded by this study resulted in arrest. Variation among countries was high, however, ranging from 7% of cases leading to arrest in Peru to 51% in Guatemala. Of course, these percentages say little about the effectiveness of criminal justice responses to wildlife crime in Hispanic America, including whether law enforcement agencies managed to arrest key wildlife crime actors, whether they were prosecuted, and whether they received meaningful sentences.

In many countries, public acceptance of prohibitions on the sale of protected wildlife is low. A symptom of this widespread attitude is the aggression that wildlife law enforcers sometimes encounter from wildlife sellers. For example, on 22 December 2022 Mexican wildlife inspectors who were undertaking an inspection of the Mercado Mixihuca in Mexico City were attacked and threatened by more than 20 people, forcing the inspectors to terminate the visit and leave the site immediately.

Convergence

Several sources have reported that organised crime groups in Hispanic America primarily involved in drugs and human trafficking have branched out into the illicit wildlife trade to diversify their sources of revenue. For instance, Mexican criminal groups are allegedly selling legal and illegal wildlife products to Chinese traders in exchange for fentanyl and methamphetamine, which the criminal groups send to the United States, Europe, and elsewhere.²⁰ In the Dominican Republic, prosecution authorities have reported that criminals purchase expensive, exotic wild animals with illicit cash and subsequently sell them to launder money.²¹

This study has identified several incidents (the majority in Mexico) in which wild animals were seized along with other illegal commodities such as drugs (marijuana, cocaine, and methamphetamine), stolen vehicles, illegal weapons, and ammunition, and proceeds of crime such as vehicles and luxury jewellery. However, these seizures usually occur in ranches or homes of members of organised crime syndicates, and concern wild animals kept as pets or in private zoos. Big cats and other rare and exotic wildlife are favoured status symbols for drug traffickers in Hispanic America (for more on this, see the Mexico section).

The wildlife seizures described in media reports between 2017 and 2022 provide evidence of crime convergence. Examples that were recorded include: a major marine turtle egg poaching event in a Nicaraguan wildlife reserve involving around 800 poachers employed by members of the M-19 crime group in 2018; several interceptions of vessels from Venezuela, which were smuggling wildlife and humans to the Dutch Antilles; the seizure of a massive cache of jaguar and other wildlife parts and

²⁰ Barth, T.P. (2017). Organized crime and the illicit wildlife trade in Mexico. Baker Institute, May 2017; Felbab-Brown, V. (2022). China-linked wildlife poaching and trafficking in Mexico; Earth League International and John Jay College of Criminal Justice (2023). Environmental Crime Convergence.

²¹ <https://www.elcaribe.com.do/destacado/coleccionar-animales-exoticos-la-aficion-ilegal-de-millonarios/>. Accessed on 19 November 2023.

products, along with a large sum of domestic and foreign currency and a loaded .22 calibre gun from a restaurant in Santa Cruz, Bolivia in 2018, suggesting convergence with financial crimes and possibly violent crime; and several seizures of illicit wildlife that was transported and sold jointly with illicit timber in Peru.

It is important to note that media reports on wildlife seizures (the primary source of information for this study) are ill-suited for comprehensively assessing the existence of crime convergence, as such reports rarely provide significant detail regarding the perpetrators and their activities. Moreover, high-level criminal actors engaged in wildlife crime are rarely identified, as they use low-level poachers and smugglers to procure and transport wildlife.

Country analyses

Argentina

Argentina

General overview

In Argentina, a minimum of 9,774 wild animals were involved in 210 seizures and 23 poaching incidents reported in the media between 2017 and 2022. Some 93.8% of these concerned live animals, with the balance comprised of 3.7% parts and products, 2% dead specimens, and 0.5% meat.

Unique characteristics

- High volume of seized wildlife
- Trafficking of songbirds and turquoise-fronted amazons
- Increased law enforcement efforts since 2020
- Low arrest rate
- Weak laws

For 62 specimens of birds, reptiles, and mammals seized from an educational farm in Ministro Rivadavia in September 2022,²² the government's press release did not specify the number of specimens for each species seized. Therefore, these 62 specimens could not be included in the analysis.

For the remaining 9,712 specimens identified by this study, 82.3% concerned birds (7,995 specimens). Mammals made up 9.1% (886 specimens); reptiles 8.5% (825 specimens); and amphibians 0.1% (6 specimens).

Number of incidents reported in the media

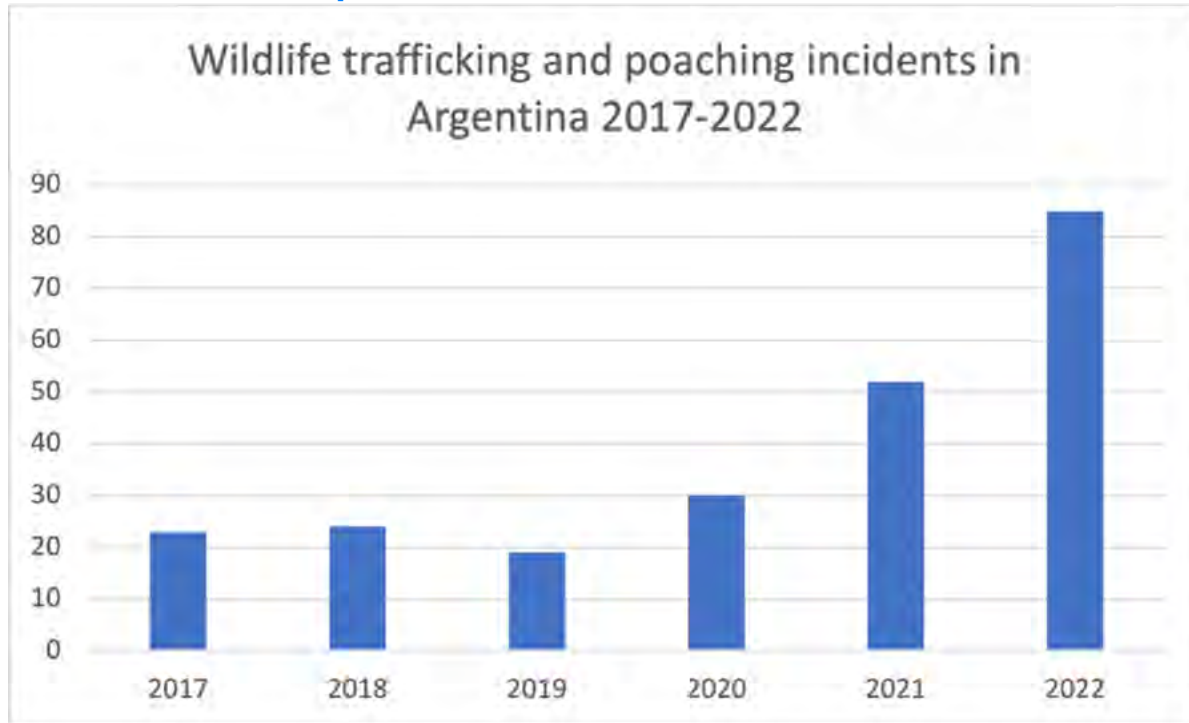


Figure 7: Wildlife trafficking and poaching incidents in Argentina between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports=

²² <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/noticias/ambiente-decomiso-mas-de-60-ejemplares-de-fauna-silvestre>. Accessed on 23 January 2024.

Number of animals involved

The table and figure below show the numbers of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians reported to be seized or poached in Argentina between 2017 and 2022.

Table 2: Number of animals involved in wildlife trafficking and poaching in Argentina between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Birds	1435	866	204	247	2720	2523	7995
Mammals	51	95	29	90	389	232	886
Reptiles	11	394	49	99	13	259	825
Amphibians	0	0	0	0	0	6	6
TOTAL	1497	1355	282	436	3122	3020	

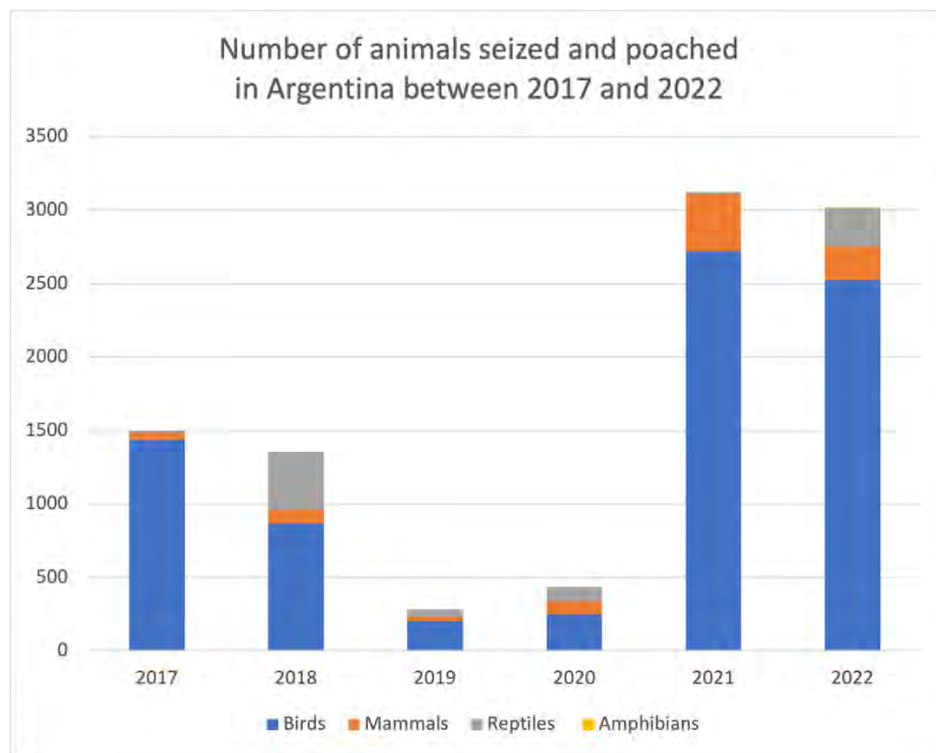


Figure 8: Number of animals seized or poached in Argentina between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

The illegal wildlife trade in Argentina is significant, with wild animals often trafficked in large volumes. No fewer than 24 seizures were recorded that involved more than 100 specimens, amounting to a total of 5,619 specimens (57.5% of the total amount of animals seized). One of these seizures concerned mammals (150 specimens); three seizures concerned reptiles (506 specimens); and the remaining 20 seizures were of birds (4,963 specimens). Such large shipments are indicative of the involvement of organized criminal networks, as the logistical process of buying up animals from poachers, arranging storage and transport and effectuating illegal sales requires a significant level of sophistication.

Species most targeted

Birds

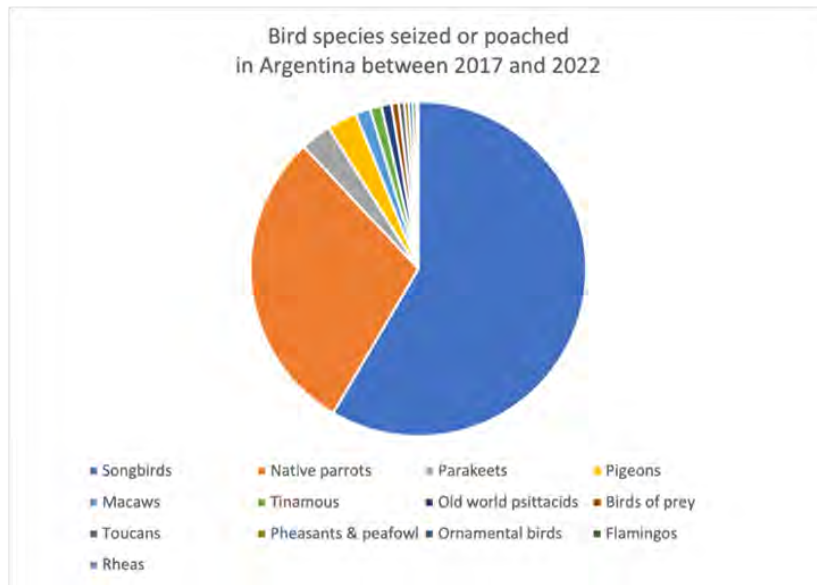


Figure 9: Bird species seized or poached in Argentina between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

For 2,130 (nearly 27%) of the 7,995 birds reported to be seized or poached in Argentina between 2017 and 2022, the number of specimens per species was not specified. This was often the case with seizures of large numbers of songbirds (with quantities sometimes totalling in the hundreds), where media often reported only the number of specimens and a list of species involved. Therefore, these could not be included in the analysis of most-targeted bird species.

For songbirds, psittacids, and toucans, the highest poaching pressure is in the northern half of the country as this is where the most striking bird species, and therefore the most sought after, are found.²³

Trafficking of songbirds

The illegal trade in songbirds is huge in Argentina. Of the 5,865 birds whose species was specified, 58% concerned songbirds. A total of 3,428 songbirds representing at least 61 species was reported to be seized in Argentina between 2017 and 2022. The graph below illustrates the variety of species involved. It should be noted that for 2,437 songbirds seized in 27 incidents the subspecies was not provided, therefore the numbers of birds seized per species is higher than presented here.

Most of the songbirds trafficked in Argentina concern species that are native to Argentina and which were poached from the wild in-country, mainly for the domestic market. Exceptions include the crested myna (*Acridotheres cristatellus*, native to southern China and Indochina); superb starling (*Lamprotornis superbus*, native to East Africa); emerald starling (*Lamprotornis iris*, native to west Africa); Java sparrow (*Lonchura oryzivora*, native to Java and Bali), zebra finch (native to Australia and Indonesia); European goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*, native to Europe, North Africa, West Asia, and Central Asia); Atlantic canary (*Serinus canaria*, native to the Canary Islands, the Azores, and Madeira); society finch (*Lonchura striata domestica*, a domesticated finch not found in the wild). All these are popular in the global cagebird trade and were likely bred in captivity, apart from the European goldfinch, which has been

²³ https://www.clarin.com/zonales/mafia-plumas-rescatan-660-aves-autoctonas-valor-1-millon_0_OVOgCsnEp.html

introduced in Argentina and Uruguay and is subject to poaching.²⁴ These non-native species represented 13% of the 973 songbirds whose species was specified in the media reports.

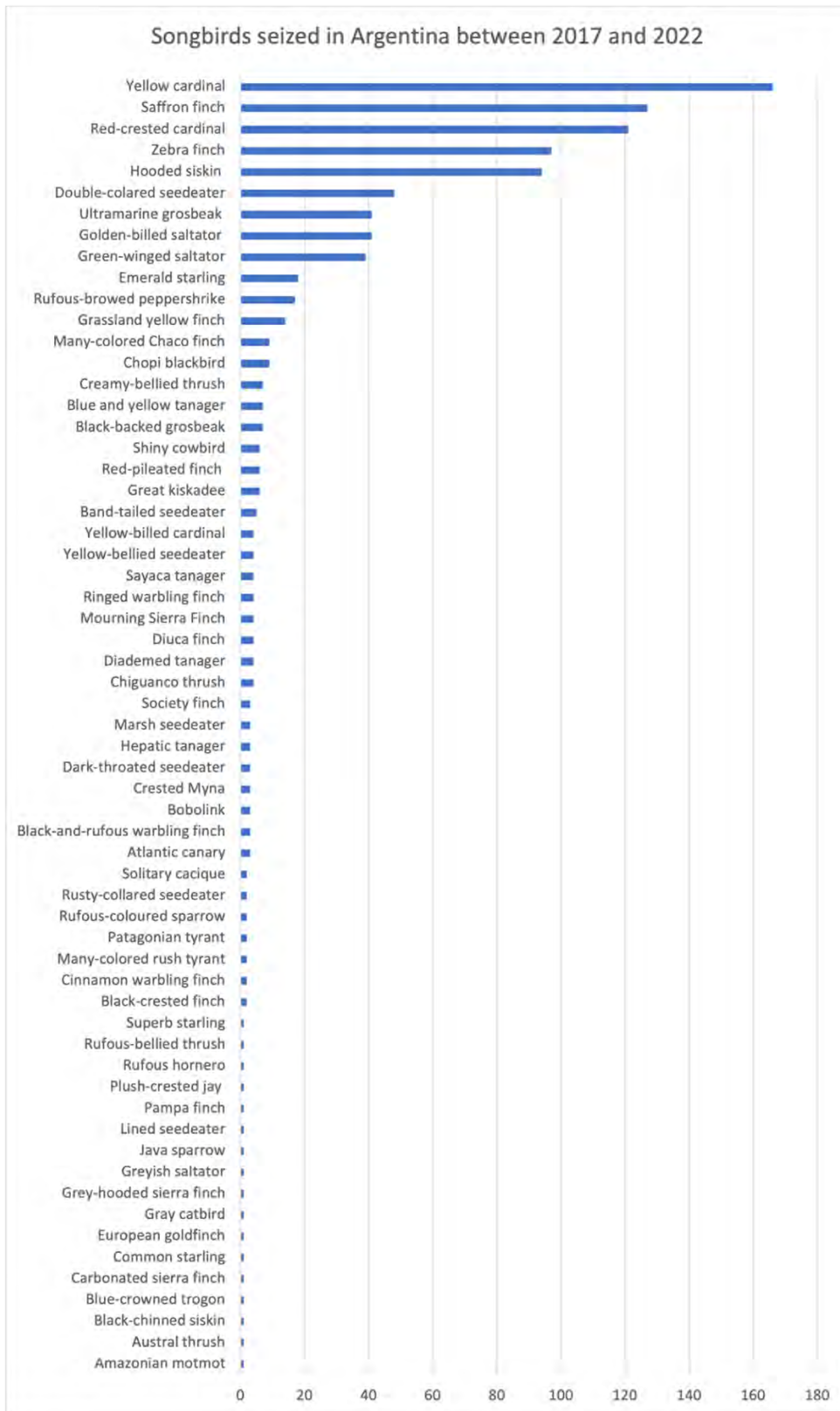


Figure 9: Songbirds seized in Argentina between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

²⁴ <https://www.argentinat.org/taxa/9398-Carduelis-carduelis>. Accessed on 30 January 2024.

Songbirds are often seized by the hundreds. For example:

- ▶ In July 2018, the Gendarmería seized 115 songbirds (stuffed in eight small cages) and 147 Chaco tortoises (*Chelonoidis chilensis*) from a truck during a routine inspection at the General Lagos toll station on the Rosario - Buenos Aires highway.²⁵
- ▶ In May 2021, environmental crime officers of the federal police seized 660 songbirds in 18 raids across several municipalities in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area. The birds were trafficked by a network dedicated to illegal breeding and sales of native birds. They were sold in different parts of the region, as well as in neighbouring countries. Not only live animals were sold but also their derivatives such as feathers, skins, or byproducts. Among the 660 birds were species in danger of extinction such as the yellow cardinal (*Gubernatrix cristata*) and pampas meadow lark (*Sturnella defilippii*). During the operation, 18 people were notified of a suspected criminal misdemeanour.²⁶
- ▶ In March 2021, a 46-year old man was arrested and 220 songbirds in very bad condition seized from his house in barrio Villa Luro, Buenos Aires, following a complaint. Among others, there were yellow cardinals (*Gubernatrix cristata*), hooded siskins (*Spinus magellanicus*), saffron finches (*Sicalis flaveola*), and a black-crested finch (*Lophospingus pusillus*).²⁷

In Argentina, songbird traffickers have a clear profile. According to an experienced researcher, they are usually middle-aged or elderly men who have often been in the business for almost their entire lives. They capture the birds in the mountains of Entre Ríos or in northern Argentina and bring them to Buenos Aires and the suburbs for sale. When you stop them, they tell you: 'I don't know how to do anything else.' The buyers are also generally elderly men.²⁸

Mortality of the trafficked birds is high. The birds travel long distances in the dark and are packed in small cages, hidden in car trunks or in trucks, usually without food or water. Many die along the way: police investigators estimate that an average of 40% of shipments die before reaching the point of sale. The UFIMA estimates the mortality rate to be at 70%.²⁹

Yellow cardinals (*Gubernatrix cristata*, CITES Appendix II) were formerly widespread and common throughout much of Argentina and Uruguay. However, the constant and chronic exploitation as a songbird for the cagebird market, compounded by habitat loss, has resulted in such rapid declines that this species qualifies as 'Endangered'. Between 1,000 and 2,000 mature individuals remain in the wild in Argentina, in small and fragmented populations.³⁰ The species was declared a Natural Monument in Entre Ríos province by decree issued in December 2002³¹, and in Sante Fe province by decree issued in 2022.³² The status of Natural Monument prioritises the species for conservation actions.

It is therefore highly concerning that this study identified 166 specimens seized from traffickers in 24 incidents recorded between 2017 and 2022. The actual number of yellow cardinals trafficked in Argentina is even higher since, as mentioned above, some media reports on seizures that included

²⁵ <https://www.lacapital.com.ar/la-region/rescatan-aves-y-tortugas-que-eran-transportadas-ilegalmente-un-camion-n1639469.html>. Accessed on 1 February 2024.

²⁶ https://www.clarin.com/zonales/mafia-plumas-rescatan-660-aves-autoctonas-valor-1-millon_0_OVOgCsnEp.html

²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=916736285806745>. Accessed on 1 February 2024.

²⁸ <https://www.infobae.com/sociedad/policiales/2017/06/11/mercado-negro-de-fauna-cuanto-cuesta-un-pajaro-argentino-en-peligro-de-extincion/>. Accessed on 1 February 2024.

²⁹ <https://www.infobae.com/sociedad/policiales/2017/06/11/mercado-negro-de-fauna-cuanto-cuesta-un-pajaro-argentino-en-peligro-de-extincion/>. Accessed on 1 February 2024.

³⁰ BirdLife International (2024) Species factsheet: *Gubernatrix cristata*. Available at <http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/yellow-cardinal-gubernatrix-cristata>. Accessed on 23 January 2024.

³¹ <https://eraverde.com.ar/vendia-cardenales-amarillos-por-internet-y-lo-atraparon/>. Accessed on 24 January 2024.

³² <https://www.lacapital.com.ar/la-ciudad/santa-fe-sale-al-rescate-del-cardenal-amarillo-el-rey-del-espinal-n10093120.html>

yellow cardinals did not specify the actual number of specimens. Furthermore, law enforcers intercept only a fraction of wildlife trafficked.

The most significant songbird seizure happened in May 2018 in Rufino, Sante Fe province. During a multi-agency raid, law enforcers seized 118 birds, including 78 yellow cardinals (representing between four and eight percent of the species' wild population); 36 hooded siskins (*Spinus magellanicus*); a Chopi blackbird (*Gnorimopsar chopi*); an ultramarine grosbeak (*Cyanocompsa brissonii*); a turquoise-fronted amazon (*Amazona aestiva*) and eight Chaco tortoises (*Chelonoidis chilensis*), in addition to a weapon, ammunition, and trapping equipment.³³

Also noteworthy is the seizure in Chajarí, Entre Ríos province, in April 2022, where 27 yellow cardinals were seized, along with 86 other birds, 118 trapping cages, a .22 calibre revolver, as well as four deer heads, and a taxidermied caiman. A multi-agency effort was launched to rehabilitate the birds and genetic analysis was performed to determine which population each individual belonged to (whether they were from Entre Ríos province where they were seized or another). These tests were followed by a behavioural readjustment process, which involves re-muscling the birds so that they can fly and feed on their own again. Meanwhile, a research team was tasked with identifying suitable locations for releasing the birds, taking into account the risk of inbreeding and the need to introduce genetic variants to enrich local populations and thus be able to increase the chances that they can survive over time.³⁴

Rosario (Sante Fe province), Córdoba (Córdoba province), and Buenos Aires are reportedly trafficking hotspots for yellow cardinals and other songbirds. The species is in such high demand that, although it is mainly valued alive for the cagebird trade due to its showiness and its song, taxidermied specimens are reportedly also trafficked.³⁵

Sadly, despite all efforts, the illegal trade in yellow cardinals continues seemingly unabated. The year 2023 saw several significant wildlife seizures that involved yellow cardinals:

- ▶ In April 2023, a wildlife trafficking network was dismantled and around 600 wild animals seized in 18 multi-agency raids carried out simultaneously in four provinces and Buenos Aires. The seizure included 87 yellow cardinals and 100 other birds of more than 20 different species.³⁶
- ▶ In October 2023, three Argentinians intent on entering Uruguay were arrested in Gualeguaychú, near the border with Uruguay, with 117 birds, including 95 yellow cardinals and 22 black siskins (*Spinus atratus*). The birds were transported overcrowded and without food and water in a cardboard box. As a result of these conditions, six yellow cardinals did not survive.³⁷
- ▶ In November 2023, more than 106 birds of 42 native and exotic species, including an unspecified number of yellow cardinals, were seized in Canning during two simultaneous raids.³⁸

³³ <https://www.santafe.gob.ar/noticias/noticia/261515/>. Accessed on 30 January 2024.

³⁴ <https://noticias.entrerios.gov.ar/notas/rescatan-27-cardenales-amarillos-y-evalan-su-liberacin-a-su-lugar-de-origen.htm>. Accessed on 30 January 2024.

³⁵ <https://www.lacapital.com.ar/la-ciudad/santa-fe-sale-al-rescate-del-cardenal-amarillo-el-rey-del-espinal-n10093120.html>. Accessed on 30 January 2024.

³⁶ <https://www.mundosilvestre.com.ar/2023/04/desmantelan-una-red-de-trafico-de-fauna.html?m=0>. Accessed on 23 January 2024.

³⁷ <https://www.elmiercolesdigital.com.ar/interceptan-importante-contrabando-de-fauna/>. Accessed on 23 January 2024.

³⁸ <https://laopinionaustral.com.ar/sociedad/ms-de-un-centenar-de-aves-silvestres-decomisadas-en-dos-operativos-en-canning-336567.html>. Accessed on 24 January 2024.

Owners of yellow cardinals upload videos to YouTube to boast about their song and collectors set up competitions to see which bird sings best. There are some farms where yellow cardinals are bred in captivity to supply demand, but wild specimens are the most coveted.³⁹

Yellow cardinals are also in demand in Europe, as was evidenced prior to the study period, in June 2016, when two Spaniards were arrested at the airport of Ezeiza with 127 wild birds hidden in their suitcases that they intended to smuggle to Madrid, Spain. The haul included 84 red-crested cardinals (*Paroaria coronata*); 24 yellow cardinals; six toucans (*Ramphastos* sp.); and 12 scarlet-headed blackbirds (*Amblyramphus holosericeus*). When the Spaniards' residence in La Plata (60 km south of Buenos Aires) was searched, around 700 more wild birds were found.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, demand for yellow cardinals is fuelled by their increasing rarity. And social media platforms are facilitating the trade. In 2021, a survey of illegal bird trade on Facebook found offers for 68 specimens across 50 advertisements, in six provinces.⁴¹

As the graph of songbirds seized between 2017 and 2022 shows, saffron finches (*Sicalis flaveola*) are also commonly found in illegal trade. A total of 128 specimens was seized in 19 incidents. The biggest amount was seized in May 2021, when federal BCA (Brigada de Control Ambiental) officers seized 30 saffron finches and 38 other songbirds from a pet shop in González Catán, a city near the southwestern end of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area.⁴²

Apart from in Argentina, saffron finches are also heavily trafficked in other Latin American countries, including Bolivia; Brazil; Colombia; Peru; and Uruguay (see elsewhere in this report).

Trafficking of psittacids

After songbirds, psittacids are the most trafficked bird species in Argentina, including both New World species (native to the Americas) and Old World species (native to Africa or Asia).

Most trafficked psittacids in Argentina are native parrots. Some 1,732 specimens were recorded, representing 30% of all birds seized or poached between 2017 and 2022. Almost all of them were turquoise-fronted amazons (*Amazona aestiva*, CITES Appendix II). With 1,623 specimens reported to be seized, they are the most trafficked bird species in Argentina. In addition, this study identified ten burrowing parrots (*Cyanoliseus patagonus*, 10 specimens) and one Tucumán amazon (*Amazona tucumana*). For 108 seized parrots, the species was not specified.

Turquoise-fronted amazons (locally known as 'loro hablador argentino') are highly popular pets in Argentina due to their attractive plumage, ability to mimic sounds, and strong voice. The species' conservation status according to IUCN is 'Near Threatened'. This species is heavily trapped for the cage-bird trade and its habitat is undergoing a decline in extent and quality, largely due to conversion to agriculture.⁴³ Conservation experts in Argentina are concerned about the impact on wild turquoise-

³⁹ <https://www.infobae.com/sociedad/policiales/2017/06/11/mercado-negro-de-fauna-cuanto-cuesta-un-pajaro-argentino-en-peligro-de-extincion/>. Accessed on 1 February 2024.

⁴⁰ <https://www.elcomercio.com/tendencias/sociedad/aeropuerto-argentina-decomiso-aves-trafficodespecies.html>. Accessed on 30 January 2024.

⁴¹ <https://www.telam.com.ar/notas/202201/582223-traffic-ilegal-fauna-silvestre.html>. Accessed on 30 January 2024.

⁴² <https://laderasur.com/articulo/argentina-autoridades-propinan-golpe-trafficantes-de-fauna-y-rescatan-del-comercio-ilegal-68-aves-en-buenos-aires/>. Accessed on 31 January 2024.

⁴³ BirdLife International (2024) Species factsheet: *Amazona aestiva*. Available at <https://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/turquoise-fronted-amazon-amazona-aestiva>. Accessed on 1 Feb. 2024.

fronted amazon populations of the high levels of offtake for the local and international pet trade. To collect nestlings, poachers cut down nesting trees or open holes in the trunk to reach the nest cavity. These practices not only affect wild parrot populations, but also the integrity and diversity of the forest, as parrots contribute to the dispersal of native plant seeds. Many nestlings do not survive the journey from harvest to market due to stress and overcrowding.⁴⁴

The 1,623 specimens identified by this study were seized in 24 incidents, six of which concerned shipments of more than 100 specimens, suggesting the involvement of organized crime networks. The most significant seizures include:

- ▶ In January 2021, police in Taco Pozo, Chaco province, seized 280 turquoise-fronted amazon chicks from the trunk of a vehicle at 4 am. The three men who were driving the vehicle were arrested.⁴⁵
- ▶ In January 2021, 216 turquoise-fronted amazon chicks were seized from the trunk of a car during a routine road inspection on a road 246 km from Santiago del Estero, the capital of the province with the same name. The two men driving the car were arrested. The police selected the car for inspection as they were playing loud music. Upon inspection they were alerted by the sounds of the parrot chicks, which were suffering a temperature of close to 40 degrees Celsius. The men were found to be linked to other cases of parrot smuggling in Argentina.⁴⁶
- ▶ In January 2022, Gendarmería seized 600 turquoise-fronted amazon chicks from a truck during a routine inspection on Ruta Nacional No. 34, near San Genaro, Santa Fe province. The birds had been squeezed into 13 cages and 23 of them had already died. The inspection was instigated due to the nervous behaviour of the man and woman driving the truck. They came from Salta and were headed for Buenos Aires, a trip of around 17 hours.⁴⁷

A total of 88 macaws was reported to be seized in 13 incidents between 2017 and 2022. These included 39 blue and yellow macaws (*Ara aurana*, CITES Appendix II); 30 red and green macaws (*Ara chloropterus*, CITES Appendix II); 13 Catalina macaws (hybrids)⁴⁸; three hyacinth macaws (*Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*, CITES Appendix I); two golden collared macaws (*Primolius auricollis*, CITES Appendix II); and one scarlet macaw (*Ara macao*, CITES Appendix I). Most of these species are not native to Argentina or are very rare. For instance, red and green macaws have been reintroduced in Argentina since 2015 after being locally extinct for 150 years.⁴⁹ Traffickers reportedly source red and green macaws from Bolivia.⁵⁰ It is likely the macaws trafficked in Argentina are illegally imported from other countries and/or bred in captivity in Argentina.

Four of the 13 seizures concerned macaws that were seized from private properties where they were kept as pets. The other seizures concerned properties that clearly had commercial purposes: five seizures took place in properties where macaws and other wildlife specimens were kept in quantities suggesting illegal sales and/or captive breeding; three seizures took place in illegal breeding facilities; and one seizure concerned an illegal zoo.

⁴⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/grupofauna.unrc/posts/2307005336203078/>. Accessed on 1 February 2024.

⁴⁵ https://www.novachaco.com/nota.asp?t=Se-quedaron-sin-palabras-cuando-los-descubrieron-con-loros-habladores&id=337424&id_tiponota=24. Accessed on 1 February 2024.

⁴⁶ <https://noticias24carabobo.com/contrabando-de-loros-en-argentina/>. Accessed on 1 February 2024.

⁴⁷ <https://www.sol915.com.ar/rescatan-577-loros-que-eran-trasladados-en-un-camion-en-santa-fe/>. Accessed 1 Feb 2024.

⁴⁸ Catalina macaws are a first-generation hybrid between blue and yellow macaws and scarlet macaws.

⁴⁹ <https://www.tompkinsconservation.org/news/2020/10/21/argentina-welcomes-red-and-green-macaws-the-first-born-in-the-wild-in-over-a-century/>

⁵⁰ <https://www.elentrieros.com/actualidad/la-ruta-14-una-de-las-preferidas-para-el-trafico-ilegal-de-animales.htm>

The following seizures are noteworthy:

- ▶ In May 2018, 32 macaws (including one scarlet macaw, nine red and green macaws, 12 blue and yellow macaws and 13 Catalina macaws) were seized from an illegal breeding facility in Roldán, a small city located within the metropolitan area of Rosario in Santa Fe province, along with 121 other birds (including six yellow cardinals). The raid was instigated by an anonymous call.⁵¹
- ▶ In 2018, ten blue and yellow macaws were seized from an illegal hatchery in Funes, a small town that is also located within the metropolitan area of Rosario in Santa Fe province, following a complaint from a private institution. They originated from Paraguay and were later returned to that country. This incident demonstrates that blue and yellow macaws are smuggled from Paraguay for commercial captive breeding purposes.⁵²

The fact that both breeding facilities were located in the same area near Rosario suggests they may have been part of the same bird trafficking operation.

Between 2017 and 2022 fifteen seizures were recorded of parakeets, involving 174 specimens of six different species. Of these, 95% (165 specimens) were monk parakeets (*Myiopsitta monachus*). The other 5% concerned black-hooded parakeet (*Aratinga nenday*, 1 specimen); blue-crowned parakeet (*Aratinga acuticaudata*, 3 specimens); mitred parakeet (*Psittacara mitratus*, 2 specimens); peach-fronted parakeet (*Eupsittula aurea*, 2 specimens); and ring-necked parakeet (*Phasianus colchicus*, 1 specimen).

Monk parakeets are native to Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay and have been introduced to many countries, including Japan and in Europe. Hundreds of thousands of wild-caught specimens have been traded since the species was listed in CITES Appendix II in 1981. It is considered an agricultural pest in many countries, including Argentina, and as the seizures show, it is being poached for the pet trade. Even so, the population is suspected to be increasing as ongoing land use changes are creating new areas of suitable habitat.⁵³

Monk parakeets are, apparently, not a valuable species in trade, as more than one instance was recorded where wildlife traffickers had dipped monk parakeets in hydrogen peroxide to pass them off as more expensive species. For instance, in September 2021, citizen's complaints resulted in the seizure of 15 monk parakeets dyed with hydrogen peroxide that were offered for sale in the streets of San José by three men. The men had reportedly already carried out the same criminal manoeuvre in the towns of Nogoyá and Villaguay, and in all cases, the birds had died after a few days.⁵⁴

Another example occurred in Rosario in August 2022, when four men were arrested, and 60 monk parakeets seized (15 of which were already dead). These birds too had been treated with hydrogen peroxide.⁵⁵ This practice was also observed in Bolivia, Paraguay, and Peru.

⁵¹ https://www.clarin.com/policiales/traficaban-guacamayos-cardenales-valuados-millon_0_HkCxEVj1m.html. Accessed on 2 February 2024.

⁵² <https://www.lt10.com.ar/noticia/236110--diez-guacamayos-que-estan-en-la-ciudad-volveran-a-paraguay>. Accessed on 2 February 2024.

⁵³ <https://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/monk-parakeet-myiopsitta-monachus/details>. Accessed on 2 Feb 2024.

⁵⁴ <https://eraverde.com.ar/capturan-a-estafadores-que-vendian-cotorras-tenidas/>. Accessed on 2 February 2024.

⁵⁵ <https://noticias.mitelefe.com/actualidad/venta-ilegal-de-aves-secuestraron-mas-de-medio-centenar-de-loros-intoxicados/>. Accessed on 2 February 2024.

Mammals

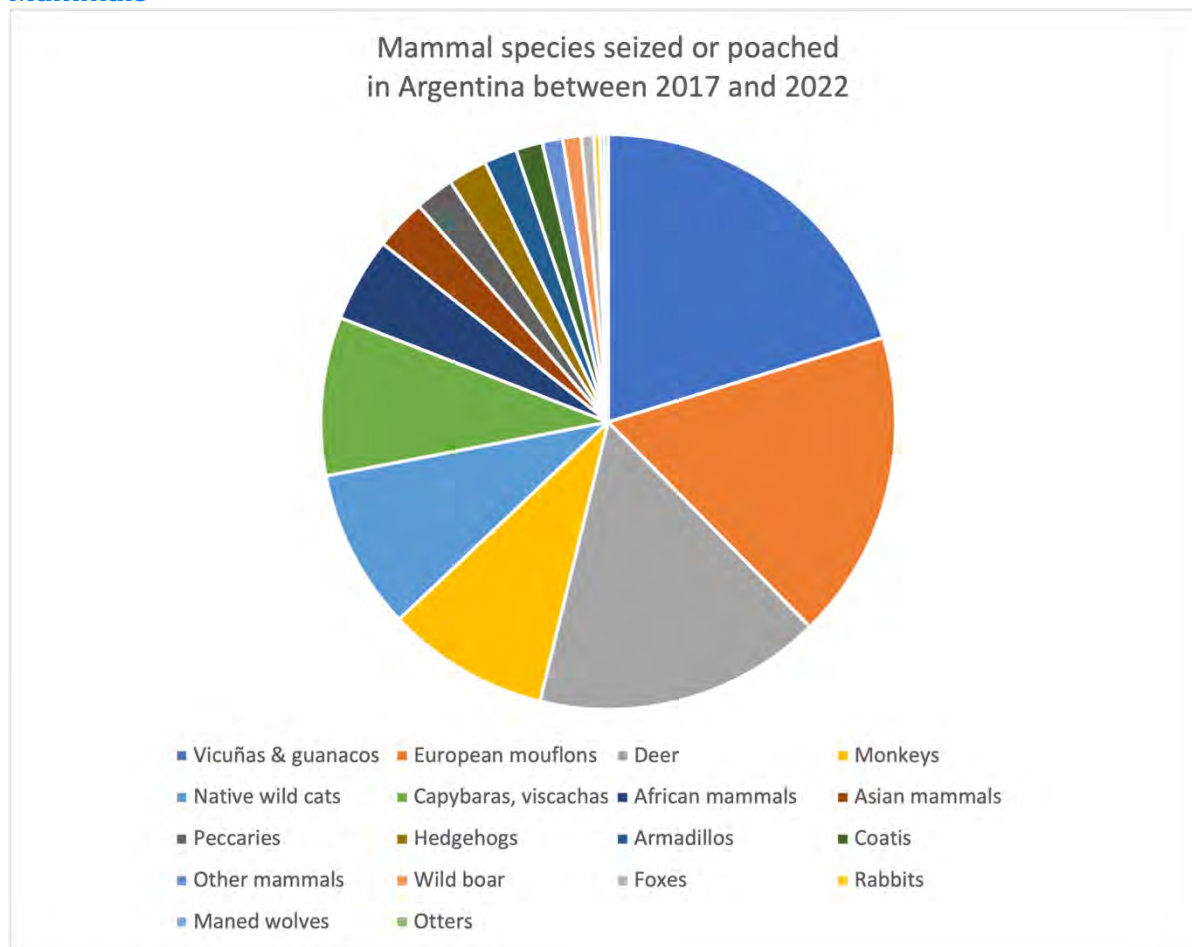


Figure 11: Mammal species seized or poached in Argentina between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Poaching of vicuñas and guanacos

Poaching of vicuñas and guanacos is widespread in Argentina, even inside reserves. Human activities such as sheep ranching and intensive hunting, either legal or illegal, have been regarded as the main causes for the dramatic decreases in distribution and abundance of both camelid species during the last century.⁵⁶

Vicuñas (*Vicugna vicugna*) inhabit the Altiplano in the central Andes, stretching across Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, and Peru. A smaller, introduced population lives in central Ecuador. The species nearly went extinct in the 1960s due to excessive hunting for their wool, which is considered the rarest and most expensive wool in the world. Concerted conservation measures centred around sustainable use by local communities have contributed to the recovery of vicuña populations across its range. In Argentina, the last census in 2006 estimated the total population at between 72,800 and 127,072 individuals. Jujuy and Catamarca provinces hold the largest numbers.⁵⁷ The last decade saw an upsurge in poaching, including in Argentina. Poachers include both members of local communities looking to supplement their income and poaching gangs (both local and from neighbouring countries), some of

⁵⁶ Donadio, E. and Buskirk, S.W. (2006). Flight behaviour in guanacos and vicuñas in areas with and without poaching in western Argentina. *Biological Conservation*. 127(2):139-145. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006320705003125>. Accessed on 6 February 2024.

⁵⁷ Acebes, P. et al (2018). *Vicugna vicugna*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2018: e.T22956A145360542. Available at: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/22956/145360542>. Accessed on 6 February 2024.

which are believed to have possible ties to cocaine trafficking. It has even been suggested that drug groups entering Argentina from Bolivia pay their way with illegal vicuña fibre.⁵⁸

Between 2017 and 2022, three seizures and two poaching events were recorded, affecting a total of 129 vicuñas.

- ▶ In September 2020, two poachers were arrested with 11 vicuña fleeces in Puna, Jujuy province.⁵⁹
- ▶ In August 2021, 45 vicuña fleeces were seized in La Quiaca, Jujuy province, on the border with Bolivia, from two Bolivian poachers who were transporting the fleeces on three donkeys. One poacher was arrested and the other escaped.⁶⁰
- ▶ In February 2022, 30 vicuña fleeces were seized from a vehicle during a road inspection in Purmamarca, Jujuy province.⁶¹
- ▶ In October 2022, two poaching events were reported in the area near the village of Lagunillas del Farallón in Puna, Jujuy province. Early in the month, 20 vicuñas were found slaughtered, while two weeks later another 23 vicuñas were killed. Local community members who found the carcasses confessed to be fearful of the poachers, who are armed. There is a park ranger, but he must cover 145,000 hectares of territory.⁶²

Although more abundant than vicuñas, guanacos (*Lama guanicoe*) have also suffered a drastic population decline in the last 100 years, from up to 50 million to around 2 million today. Argentina harbours more than 80% of total population.⁶³ The few large, fragmented populations are restricted to remote, dry areas with low plant productivity. The main causes of this population collapse are competition from livestock and (illegal) hunting. Guanacos are mostly poached for recreation by urban dwellers using 4 × 4 vehicles, although rural people occasionally kill guanacos for meat.⁶⁴

This study identified eight seizures, affecting a minimum of 46 guanacos. The seizures demonstrate a commercial-level trade in guanaco meat. For instance, in February 2020, four men were arrested transporting 10 dead guanacos and a puna rhea in a pick-up truck in Valcheta, Río Negro province. Two weeks later, in March 2020, 15 freshly killed guanacos and a rhea were seized from a trailer on Road RN26, Chubut province. In June 2021, during a routine police inspection, two poachers were arrested in Tecka, Chubut province, with more than 1000 kg guanaco and ostrich meat in their truck. Several knives and ammunition were also seized. In that same month, two other poachers were arrested with seven guanaco carcasses in their truck near Dolavon, Chubut province. The two men had been detained a few days earlier for illegally transporting guanaco meat in the town of Las Plumas, also in Chubut province.⁶⁵ This suggests the men were involved in systematic guanaco poaching. Unfortunately, some government officials also engage in this activity. In January 2020, the meat of nine guanacos was seized

⁵⁸ Nuwer, R. (2015). Poaching upsurge threatens South America's iconic vicuña. *Mongabay*. 24 November 2015.

<https://news.mongabay.com/2015/11/poaching-upsurge-threatens-south-americas-iconic-vicu%C3%B1a/>. Accessed 6 Feb. 2024.

⁵⁹ <https://www.tribuno.com/ujuy/nota/2020-9-7-21-54-0-decomisaron-11-cueros-de-vicu%C3%B1a-en-la-puna-ujuy>

⁶⁰ <https://www.ellitoral.com.ar/corrientes/2021-8-1-1-0-0-sorprendieron-a-cazadores-con-45-cueros-de-vicu%C3%B1a-en-la-puna-ujuy>. Accessed on 6 February 2024.

⁶¹ <https://noticias-ambientales-argentina.blogspot.com/2022/02/decomisan-cueros-de-vicu%C3%B1a-en-jujuy.html>

⁶² <https://www.somosujuy.com.ar/ujuy/preocupa-caza-furtiva-vicunas-puna-ujuy-encontraron-20-animales-muertos-n64897>. Accessed on 6 February 2024.

⁶³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/pharmacology-toxicology-and-pharmaceutical-science/guanaco>. Accessed on 6 February 2024.

⁶⁴ Radovani N.I. et al (2015). Guanaco *Lama guanicoe* numbers plummet in an area subject to poaching from oil-exploration trails in Patagonia. *Oryx*. 49(1):42-50. doi:10.1017/S0030605312001226. Accessed on 6 February 2024.

⁶⁵ <https://weekend.perfil.com/noticias/informativo/detienen-en-chubut-a-cazadores-furtivos-con-mas-de-1000-kilos-de-carne-de-guanaco-y-de-avestruz.phtml>. Accessed on 6 February 2024.

from a truck driven by a local police officer (member of the Comando Radioeléctrico de Caleta Olivia) in Caleta Olivia, Santa Cruz province.⁶⁶

Other mammals are also poached for their meat. Several incidents were recorded of poachers being caught with dead peccaries (*Tayassu pecari*), capybaras (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*), Pampas deer (*Ozotoceros bezoarticus*), marsh deer (*Blastocerus dichotomus*), Andean hairy armadillos (*Chaetophractus nationi*), and wild boar (*Sus scrofa*).

Bushmeat from Argentina is not only trafficked domestically, but also smuggled to neighbouring countries, including Paraguay: in September 2021 and June 2022, the Argentine navy seized large shipments of capybara meat (700 kg and 200 kg respectively) in Paraná from boats destined for Paraguay in the north via the Paraná river.⁶⁷ Argentinian bushmeat—including of lowland pacas, brocket deer, and peccaries—allegedly also supplies a clandestine gastronomic circuit in Brazil.⁶⁸

Persecution and trafficking of native wild cats

Native wild cats in Argentina are targeted for the trade in taxidermies and skins as well as the pet trade. In addition, pumas and jaguars are persecuted out of retaliation for their preying on livestock.

This study identified 78 wild cat specimens affected by poaching and trafficking, including 56 pumas; 12 jaguars (*Panthera onca*); three ocelots (*Leopardus pardalis*); three Geoffroy's cats (*Leopardus geoffroyi*); one jaguarundi (*Puma yagouaroundi*); one southern tigrina (*Leopardus guttulus*); and one Margay (*Leopardus wiedii*). For one wild cat the species was not specified.

As these numbers indicate, pumas are the cat species most affected by poaching and trafficking in Argentina. Of the 56 specimens recorded, 21 were killed by poachers in 13 incidents; 21 were alive (kept as pets or for illegal trophy hunting); and 14 specimens concerned parts and products (skins, skulls, and taxidermies). Poaching incidents often only become known when footage of puma poachers is shared on social media. For instance, in July 2022, a video of four poachers carrying four dead pumas (a mother and her cubs) while singing and shouting 'bravo' in the Buta Ranquil area, Neuquén province went viral on social media.⁶⁹

The puma is the most widespread top predator in Argentina. It occurs from the high-altitude deserts of the Andes to tropical and subtropical forests, and from the Pampas grasslands to the Patagonian steppe. During the last two centuries, hunting of wild prey and conversion of natural habitat into ranches and farms increased conflicts with humans and predation on livestock.⁷⁰ The species is considered near threatened in Argentina.⁷¹

Jaguars are a critically endangered species in Argentina. They have lost more than 95% of their original range, and it is estimated that only between 200 and 300 remain.⁷² Currently it is distributed only in

⁶⁶ <https://laopinionaustral.com.ar/pico-truncado/demoraron-a-un-policia-con-una-gran-cantidad-de-guanacos-faenados-155894.html>.

Accessed on 6 February 2024.

⁶⁷ <https://www.radiodos.com.ar/115238-incautaron-200-kilos-de-carne-de-carpincho-que-iban-a-paraguay>

⁶⁸ <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/lifestyle/trafico-animales-del-lavado-dinero-al-coronavirus-nid2397240/>

⁶⁹ <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/seguridad/un-video-viral-de-caza-ilegal-de-pumas-genero-polemica-en-redes-y-cruces-en-neuquen-nid18072022/>. Accessed on 7 February 2024.

⁷⁰ <https://wildcatconservation.org/tag/puma-in-argentina/>. Accessed on 7 February 2024.

⁷¹ Nielsen, C. et al (2015). Puma concolor. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2015: e.T18868A97216466.

<https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2015-4.RLTS.T18868A50663436.en>. Accessed on 7 February 2024.

⁷² <https://phys.org/news/2022-07-wild-jaguars-years-born-argentina.html>. Accessed on 7 February 2024.

the north, in the ecoregions of Selva Paranaense, Yungas, and Chaco Seco.⁷³ The main threats facing jaguars are poaching, often as a result of human-wildlife conflict, and habitat loss and fragmentation.⁷⁴ Every living jaguar is crucially important for the survival of the species in Argentina therefore. In 2001, the jaguar was declared a natural monument in Argentina.⁷⁵

Twelve jaguars were involved in poaching incidents or seizures reported between 2017 and 2022. These included five poached specimens and parts and products of seven specimens (a head, two skins, and three coats and a hat made of jaguar skin). Like pumas, poaching incidents of jaguars often become known when images are posted on social media. For instance, in September 2022 a video of three poachers with a dead jaguar went viral. Media reported that the animal was fleeing from forest fires in the area when it was spotted and killed by the three poachers.⁷⁶

Although, as mentioned above, conflict situations frequently result in the killing of pumas and jaguars, it should be noted that there were several incidents where photos circulated on social media depicted poachers skinning the puma or jaguar they had killed. This suggests the skins and possibly other parts, whether to keep or sell to a trader, are also motivations for killing the animals.

Trafficking of primates

Argentina harbours five primate species: two howler monkey subspecies (the black-and-gold howler monkey, *Alouatta caraya*, and the brown howler monkey, *Alouatta guariba*); two capuchin monkey subspecies (the black-horned capuchin, *Sapajus nigrinus*, and Azara's capuchin, *Sapajus cay*); and Azara's owl monkey (*Aotus azarae*). These species are distributed throughout the northern portion of the country. All five species are threatened by habitat loss due to logging, agriculture, and livestock grazing; anthropogenic effects (poaching, road killing dog attacks); and disease epidemics.⁷⁷

Monkeys are mainly poached for the pet trade. In some parts of Argentina, howler monkeys and capuchins are also hunted as bushmeat.⁷⁸ This study identified 35 incidents reported between 2017 and 2022 involving 79 monkeys. These concerned the following species: common marmoset (*Callithrix jacchus*, 40 specimens); black-horned capuchin (20 specimens)⁷⁹; black-and-gold howler monkey (17 specimens); and Azara's capuchin (1 specimen). One specimen was of an unknown monkey species. As mentioned above, all these species are native to Argentina, apart from common marmosets, which are native to Brazil, although they have also been introduced into the city of Buenos Aires.

Of the 79 monkeys identified, 77 concerned live specimens that were seized from: illegal sellers/smugglers (47); private homes where they were kept as pets (22); and other captive circumstances such as zoos or circuses (8). One specimen was stoned to death, and one specimen concerned an unknown monkey species whose skin was used to craft a coat that was seized from a clothing store in Buenos Aires.

⁷³ <https://noasur.conicet.gov.ar/los-pumas-en-argentina-donde-estan-y-que-factores-afectan-su-subsistencia/>

⁷⁴ <https://dialogochino.net/en/agriculture/373388-the-dramatic-struggle-to-save-the-last-300-jaguars-in-argentina/>

⁷⁵ <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/parquesnacionales/yaguarete>. Accessed on 7 February 2024.

⁷⁶ <https://tn.com.ar/sociedad/2022/09/11/jujuy-cazadores-furtivos-se-fotografiaron-con-un-yaguarete-al-que-mataron-cuando-escapaba-de-un-incendio/>

⁷⁷ Agostini, I. et al (2022). Prioritizing Areas for Primate Conservation in Argentina. *Diversity*14:982. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/d14110982>. Accessed on 8 February 2024.

⁷⁸ <https://neoprimate.org/argentina/wildlife-trafficking-argentina/>. Accessed on 8 February 2024.

⁷⁹ In Argentina, black capuchins (*Sapajus nigrinus*) and tufted capuchins (*Cebus apella*) are both referred to as mono caí. Since correct identification of seized specimens was challenging as adequate photos were often lacking in the media report, all monkeys referred to as mono caí have been recorded as *Sapajus nigrinus*, but it is possible some specimens concern *Cebus apella* that may have been smuggled to Argentina, e.g. from Bolivia or Brazil.

The most significant incident was the seizure of 37 common marmosets in May 2017 from a house in Paso de los Libres, Corrientes province. The seizure was instigated by a complaint from a staff member of the province's Natural Resources directorate (Dirección de Recursos Naturales).⁸⁰ No mention was made of any arrests, even though the number of specimens clearly indicates the serious and organized nature of the crime. The media report provided no detail about the origin of the marmosets, but it seems likely they were smuggled from their native country Brazil. Paso de los Libres is situated on the Uruguay river and connected with Brazil by a bridge.

In 2020, Uruguayan authorities stated that they were concerned to see an increase in the trafficking of common marmosets and capuchin monkeys from Brazil and Argentina, whilst lacking capacity to address it effectively.⁸¹

A seizure in November 2022 provides evidence that monkeys are smuggled from Paraguay: two juvenile capuchins and one juvenile black-and-gold howler monkey were seized in Formosa province on the Argentina-Paraguay border. They were destined for Buenos Aires.⁸²

DNA research of howler monkeys seized from traffickers has established that most howlers in captivity originate from the provinces of Formosa, Chaco, and Corrientes.⁸³ The species was declared a natural monument by Misiones province in 2022.⁸⁴

Trafficking of non-native mammals

The list of mammal species identified in seizures in Argentina contains a significant number of non-native species originating from Africa, Asia, and Europe. Species native to Africa that were recorded in Argentina include African lion, African elephant, cheetah, hippopotamus, African buffalo, zebra, oryx, common eland, sitatunga, waterbuck, lechwe, springbok, impala, lesser kudu, greater kudu, and common warthog. Asian mammal species include tiger, Indian buffalo, Himalayan tahr, Marco Polo sheep, chital, blackbuck, and Indian antelope. European mammals include European mouflon, European rabbit, wild boar, chamois, European fallow deer, and red deer. Several of these species have been introduced into Argentina, such as the red deer, European fallow deer, wild boar, chital, and blackbuck.

Non-native mammal species are mainly trafficked for the trophy hunting industry; the trade in taxidermies and skins; and illegal (private) zoos. These industries are also important drivers for the trafficking of native mammal species.

Wildlife violations in Argentina's trophy hunting industry

Argentina has a well-developed trophy hunting industry which attracts not only Argentinians, but also foreign hunters. According to a US-based hunting travel agency 'Argentina is the most popular hunting destination in the world, attracting more than 20,000 foreign hunters every year. The vast majority are

⁸⁰ <https://www.conclusion.com.ar/corazon-animal/hallan-37-monos-y-otros-animales-para-la-venta-en-corrientes/05/2017/>. Accessed on 7 February 2024.

⁸¹ <https://www.montevideo.com.uy/Ciencia-y-Tecnologia/Trafico-de-animales-Policia-incauto-un-mono-titi-que-fue-trasladado-al-Parque-Lecoq-uc744940>

⁸² <https://www.tiktok.com/@opinionfrontal/video/7156939604170444038>. Accessed on 7 February 2024.

⁸³ <https://www.tiempoar.com.ar/informacion-general/investigadores-del-conicet-rescatan-monos-del-trafico-ilegal-y-establecen-su-lugar-de-origen/>. Accessed on 7 February 2024.

⁸⁴ <https://laverdadnoticias.com/ecologia/Mono-aullador-en-peligro-de-extincion-es-declarado-monumento-natural-20220102-0013.html>. Accessed on 7 February 2024.

wingshooters, many of whom come for Argentina's world-famous high-volume dove shooting. Doves are considered pests in this region; huge flocks come into agricultural fields in incredible numbers. However, Argentina is also an excellent destination for big-game hunters; it has some of the best free-range red stag hunting in the world.⁸⁵ This study has identified several incidents that indicate illegal activities within the industry.

- ▶ In February 2018, more than 100 illegal wildlife trophies and taxidermies and more than 3,000 shotgun shells were seized from properties in three hunting reserves in Santo Domingo province owned by an Argentinian big game hunter named Jorge Nestor Noya. Among other things, the police found two puma carcasses in a freezer; puma skulls; an African elephant's head, feet, and tusks; a tapir taxidermy; lizard leather; coat hangers made with deer antlers; pieces of dik-dik deer; skulls of 18 peccaries; South African springbok; oryx; impala; a zebra skin, as well as a marsh deer, which is a native, endangered species. At the time, Noya owned four hunting reserves in Argentina that offered clients hunts of water buffalo and deer. The raid came after a year-long police investigation based on a tip-off, which involved surveillance and the use of drones to check which animals were being kept in the reserves.⁸⁶
- ▶ In January 2021, over 300 live mammals and birds (both native and originating from Europe and Asia) and 27 hunting trophies were seized from an illegal breeding farm near the city of Balcarce in Buenos Aires province. The police raid was instigated by an anonymous tip-off. Among the species seized were two tigers, 10 pumas, 150 European mouflons, 57 fallow deer, 14 red deer, 12 antelopes, six chital deer, 20 common peafowl, nine wild boars, a guanaco, and several native bird species, including a turquoise-fronted amazon and a yellow cardinal. The trophies included puma skins, various horns and stuffed heads of deer and antelope. The authorities subsequently opened an investigation on the suspicion that all or some of the animals were being sold for illegal hunting. According to authorities, the farm was breaching regulations by not only illegally trading the wild animals but also keeping them in filthy conditions.⁸⁷ It later emerged that numerous witnesses had stated that the man hunted animals as a hobby and that he presented himself as a hunting guide, despite not having the corresponding authorization. Other witnesses had testified that he would offer the animals in his field for other hobbyists to hunt.⁸⁸
- ▶ In January 2021, several live pumas and deer were seized from a farm in Cañada de Gomez, Santa Fe province, that authorities suspected served as an illegal hunting ground.⁸⁹

Trafficking of wildlife taxidermies and skins

Several seizures were identified that provide evidence of significant illegal trade in wildlife taxidermies and skins, with Buenos Aires clearly functioning as a hub. The most noteworthy seizures include:

- ▶ In September 2021, a large quantity of wildlife skins and taxidermies was seized from two clandestine workshops in San Justo and Florencio Varela (Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area). There were several species listed in CITES Appendix I/II: puma (*Puma concolor*), African elephant (*Loxodonta Africana*), African lion (*Panthera leo*), and hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*). Two men were detained. Authorities believed that a network of poachers and traffickers was operating behind these workshops.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ <https://www.bookyourhunt.com/en/hunting-in-argentina>. Accessed on 5 February 2024.

⁸⁶ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5345099/Argentina-police-hunt-big-game-shooter-illegal-quarry.html>. Accessed on 5 February 2024.

⁸⁷ <https://www.thefloridastar.com/articles/horror-farm-bred-tigers-and-pumas-to-pleasure-hunters/>. Accessed on 5 February 2024.

⁸⁸ <https://www.entrelneas.info/articulo/1066/38820/balcarce-confirmaron-el-procesamiento-del-hombre-que-tenia-tigres-de-bengala-pumas-y-ciervos-en-su-campo>. Accessed on 7 February 2024.

⁸⁹ <https://www.santafe.gob.ar/noticias/noticia/269808/>. Accessed on 7 February 2024.

⁹⁰ <https://infocielo.com/judiciales-y-policiales/desmantelan-dos-talleres-animales-listos-taxidermia-n721130>

- ▶ In August 2022, 51 wildlife taxidermies were seized from a chocolate factory in Buenos Aires, involving no less than 29 species native to Asia, Europe, Africa, North America, and South America. Here, again, were several endangered/CITES listed species such as puma, African elephant, African lion, white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*), and Pampas deer (*Ozotoceros bezoarticus*). The operation, conducted by the BCA, was one of the largest taxidermy raids to date. The ensuing investigation aimed to collect evidence on how the non-native CITES protected specimens managed to enter Argentina.⁹¹
- ▶ In May 2022, authorities seized coats and accessories made from wildlife skins from a clothing store in Buenos Aires. The products included several coats made from jaguar skin (*Panthera onca*), as well as the skins of cheetah (*Acinonyx*), monkey, ocelot (*Leopardus pardalis*), African leopard (*Panthera pardus*), mink and fox; and wallets and boots made from alligator, crocodile, and python. The raid took place after BCA officers had found the shop advertising similar wildlife fashion items on social media.⁹²

Wildlife trafficking and zoos

Several seizures were recorded where large numbers of wild animals were kept illegally, without the required documentation, in private zoos. For instance, in November 2018, 90 wild animals were seized from a zoo in Olavarría, province of Buenos Aires, including 40 deer, a tiger, sixteen macaws, and other bird species.⁹³ In September 2022, hundreds of wild animals were seized from a private zoo in Desvío Arijón, Sante Fe province, for animal abuse and failure to show relevant documentation. Among others, the seizure included a puma, a maned wolf (*Chrysocyon brachyurus*), two Geoffroy's cats (*Leopardus geoffroyi*), two neotropical otters (*Lontra longicaudis*), and a fox (subspecies not provided).⁹⁴

Around the world, there have been numerous situations where zoos have engaged in wildlife trafficking, for example by buying illegally sourced animals or by selling CITES Appendix I-listed specimens that cannot be traded commercially.⁹⁵ There is evidence of this happening in Argentina as well, given an incident recorded in Concordia, Entre Ríos province in October 2020. Wildlife officers conducting an inspection of a zoo found several irregularities in the zoo's records. Among other things, the zoo could not account for seven missing Bengal tigers, two bears, and two jaguars. They seized five tiger skins and one jaguar skin, whose legal origins could not be demonstrated.⁹⁶

⁹¹ <https://www.tiempoar.com.ar/informacion-general/decomisan-51-animales-taxidermizados-que-guardaba-una-fabrica-de-chocolates-de-almagro/>. Accessed on 5 February 2024.

⁹² <https://www.infobae.com/sociedad/policiales/2022/05/28/allanaron-un-comercio-porteno-que-vendia-abrigos-de-piel-de-fauna-silvestre-costaban-hasta-un-millon-de-pesos-cada-uno/>. Accessed on 5 February 2024.

⁹³ <https://www.entrelneas.info/articulo/1066/17646/desbarataron-un-zoologico-que-tenia-90-animales-en-cautiverio>

⁹⁴ https://www.ellitoral.com/sucesos/desvio-arion-departamento-san-jeronimo-animales-silvestres-granja-la-esmeralda-toe-aic-fauna_O_PeYJsuSaB3.html. Accessed on 5 February 2024.

⁹⁵ See e.g. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2004/mar/28/animalrights.conservacionandendangeredspecies>

⁹⁶ <https://www.revistachacra.com.ar/nota/37725-secuestran-cueros-de-tigre-y-yaguarete/>. Accessed on 5 February 2024.

Reptiles

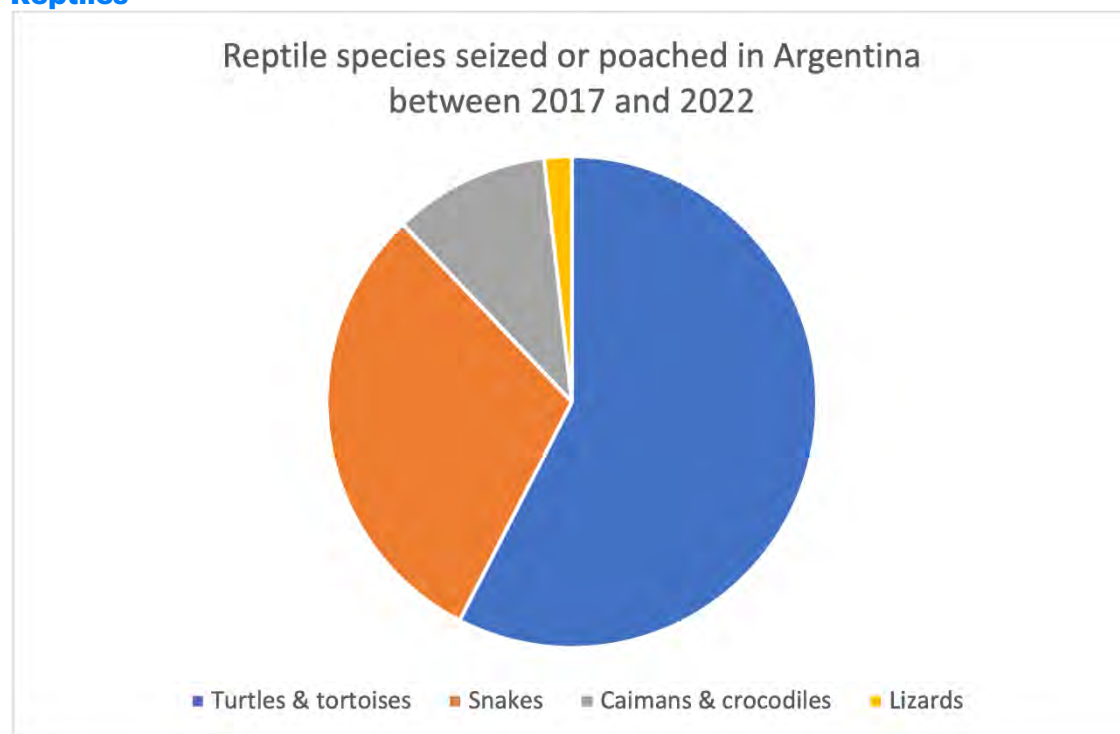


Figure 12: Reptile species seized or poached in Argentina between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

In Argentina, reptiles are mainly trafficked for the pet trade and their skins (predominantly snakes, lizards, caimans, and crocodiles). Of the 825 specimens identified in illegal trade, 89% (736 specimens) were alive, and 11% concerned skins and products made from reptile skins.

Traffickers supplying reptiles for the pet trade usually also sell birds, mammals, and/or amphibians. There appears to be little specialization in the illegal trade, therefore. An exception is the man who was caught in February 2018, with 219 snakes and 19 snake eggs in his apartment in Buenos Aires. Among others, the haul included African ball pythons (*Python regius*) and South American emerald tree boas (*Corallus caninus*). The snakes were found in large transparent containers with labels specifying their size, weight, and other characteristics.⁹⁷

Trafficking of Chaco tortoises

The reptile species most affected by illegal trade are Chaco tortoises (*Chelonoidis chilensis*). Chaco tortoises are native to Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay. The species was last assessed in 1996 as 'Vulnerable' by IUCN⁹⁸ and they have been listed in CITES Appendix II since 1997. In recent decades the tortoise's populations in Argentina have declined significantly. For example, in Córdoba currently estimated densities are three tortoises/ha, a sharp contrast with the density estimates of 30 tortoises/ha found in Córdoba during the 1960s. Illegal trade is a major cause of decline in Chaco

⁹⁷ <https://elcomercio.pe/mundo/latinoamerica/argentina-hallan-219-serpientes-departamento-buenos-aires-noticia-498809-noticia/>. Accessed on 6 February 2024.

⁹⁸ Tortoise & Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group. 1996. *Chelonoidis chilensis*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 1996: e.T9007A12949680. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.1996.RLTS.T9007A12949680.en>. Accessed 8 Feb. 2024.

tortoise populations. The species has been declared a natural monument based on law (S-0754/17), and its commercialization, hunting, or intentional capture throughout its distribution are prohibited.⁹⁹

The species continues to be poached, however, often in significant numbers indicating the involvement of organized crime networks. In total, 463 specimens were seized in 17 incidents, representing 56% of all reptiles reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. Turnover is high, as experts estimate that 32% of Chaco tortoises sold into the pet trade die in their first year in captivity.¹⁰⁰

Noteworthy seizures include:

- ▶ In July 2018, Gendarmería officers seized 147 Chaco tortoises and 115 songbirds from a truck during a routine inspection at a toll station near Rosario on the Rosario - Buenos Aires highway.¹⁰¹
- ▶ In March 2022, 140 Chaco tortoises were seized from the patio of a home in Tres Arroyos, Buenos Aires province.¹⁰²
- ▶ In May 2022, 50 Chaco tortoises were seized along with hundreds of songbirds and other wildlife from a house in Los Hornos, la Plata, a short drive from Buenos Aires. Authorities believed the animals were destined for export abroad.¹⁰³

Trafficking of snakes

With 250 specimens reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022, snakes made up 30% of the reptiles identified in illegal trade during this period. Most (219 specimens/87.6%) were seized in one incident, in February 2018, Buenos Aires, mentioned above. Another significant seizure concerned 17 pythons that were seized in May 2022 along with four bearded dragons (*Pogona* sp.), five exotic frogs, two tarantulas, a native bird, and 35 laboratory rats from a house in Córdoba.¹⁰⁴ Of the 250 snakes seized in Argentina only one specimen concerned a native species (the Argentina boa, *Boa constrictor occidentalis*). The other species originate from other parts of the Americas (rainbow boa, corn snake, milk snake), Africa (ball pythons), and possibly Australasia (for 19 pythons the subspecies was not specified), suggesting there is a market for exotic snakes in Argentina.

In addition to live snakes, an unspecified number of wallets and boots made from python skin (as well as caiman and crocodile) was seized in May 2022, in a shop in Buenos Aires that sold clothes and accessories made from wildlife skins, mainly of wild cats and reptiles. This seizure was already mentioned above under the section Mammals. The raid took place after BCA officers had found the shop advertising similar wildlife fashion items on social media.¹⁰⁵

Although only one seizure of a snakeskin was recorded, the illegal trade in snake skins for the fashion industry is significant in Argentina. For instance, in 2016, the year before the study period, 2,098 boa skins were reportedly seized in Formosa.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ Prado, W.S. et al (2012). Categorización del estado de conservación de las Tortugas de la República Argentina. *Cuadernos de Herpetología* 26:375–387. Available at: http://www.scielo.org.ar/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1852-57682012000300005. Accessed on 8 February 2024.

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.anapsid.org/chaco.html>. Accessed on 8 February 2024.

¹⁰¹ <https://www.lacapital.com.ar/la-region/rescatan-aves-y-tortugas-que-eran-transportadas-ilegalmente-un-camion-n1639469.html>. Accessed on 8 February 2024.

¹⁰² <https://infocielo.com/tortugas/incautan-mas-100-tortugas-tres-arroyos-n733211>. Accessed on 8 February 2024.

¹⁰³ <https://www.eldia.com/nota/2022-5-11-18-22-0-video---incautan-en-la-plata-mas-de-300-reptiles-y-animales-exoticos-que-se-exportaban-clandestinamente-al-exterior-la-ciudad>. Accessed on 8 February 2024.

¹⁰⁴ <https://viapais.com.ar/cordoba/cordoba-insolita-allanaron-una-casa-y-encontraron-viboras-tarantulas-y-otras-especies-exoticas/>. Accessed on 6 February 2024.

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.infobae.com/sociedad/policiales/2022/05/28/allanaron-un-comercio-porteno-que-vendia-abrigos-de-piel-de-fauna-silvestre-costaban-hasta-un-millon-de-pesos-cada-uno/>. Accessed on 5 February 2024.

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/lifestyle/trafico-animales-del-lavado-dinero-al-coronavirus-nid2397240/>

Trafficking of caimans

Caimans are in high demand for their skins and meat, domestically and internationally. Argentina has two species of caiman: yacare caiman (*Caiman crocodilus yacare*) and broad-snouted caiman (*Caiman latirostris*). Interjurisdictional transport, domestic trade, and export in (parts and products) of these caiman species had been prohibited since 1987, but this changed with a federal resolution issued by the Ministry of Environment in August 2019.¹⁰⁷ It remains to be seen whether this policy change will have an impact on caiman poaching, negatively or positively.

A seizure recorded in 2020 provides evidence of caiman skin trafficking between Argentina and Paraguay. In February of that year, the Argentine Gendarmería Nacional seized 82 broad-snouted caiman skins from a car driven by a Paraguayan citizen near the town of Formosa, Formosa province, on the border with Paraguay. The press release provided no information about the direction in which the man was headed. However, given the location of the seizure he must have been either arriving from or headed for Paraguay. Surprisingly, the man was not arrested but allowed to continue his journey. In February 2023, a cargo of 352 caiman skins was seized from a parcel delivery company vehicle near Tatané, a village just south of Formosa.¹⁰⁸

Trafficking of Argentine black and white tegus

Nine live Argentine black and white tegus (*Salvator merianae*) were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. Five of these were seized in three different seizures in the Pompeii bird fair of Buenos Aires in May 2017¹⁰⁹ and August 2017.¹¹⁰

The Argentine black and white tegu is a large lizard species native to Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Uruguay. There is also a significant population of Argentine black and white tegus in Florida and other Southern states of the US, most likely as a result of escaped or released specimens from the pet trade. They are now considered an invasive species in Florida.¹¹¹

This species is hunted for its skins and to a lesser degree to supply the commercial pet trade. In the 1980s they were thought to be the most exploited reptile in the world; millions of tegu skins were exported in the leather trade.¹¹² The trade in species of this genus decreased in the 2010s and remains monitored by management programs in Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay, and by CITES (it is listed in CITES Appendix II). The species has been assessed by IUCN as 'Least Concern' and the population is stable.¹¹³

Amphibians

The illegal trade in amphibians appears to be insignificant in Argentina, as only six specimens were seized in two incidents. As mentioned above, in May 2022 five non-native frogs (species unknown) were seized along with 17 pythons, four bearded dragons, one native bird, two tarantulas and 35 laboratory

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.agrolatam.com/nota/37449-autorizan-la-comercializacion-de-la-carne-y-el-cuero-de-yacares-de-criadero/>

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/noticias/envian-352-cueros-de-yacare-dentro-de-encomiendas>. Accessed 8 Feb. 2024.

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.infobae.com/sociedad/policiales/2017/06/11/mercado-negro-de-fauna-cuanto-cuesta-un-pajaro-argentino-en-peligro-de-extincion/>. Accessed on 8 February 2024.

¹¹⁰ https://www.bioguia.com/entretenimiento/rescatan-en-buenos-aires-a-cientos-de-animales-del-mercado-negro_29283300.html. Accessed on 8 February 2024.

¹¹¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7946314/>. Accessed on 8 February 2024.

¹¹² <https://news.gcu.edu/gcu-news/gcu-team-scales-extensive-tegu-lizard-study/>. Accessed on 8 February 2024.

¹¹³ Scott, N. et al (2016). *Salvator merianae*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2016: e.T178340A61322552. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2016-1.RLTS.T178340A61322552.en>. Accessed on 8 February 2024.

rats from a house in Córdoba.¹¹⁴ In December 2022, a horned frog (*Ceratophrys* sp.) was seized along with several other reptiles and mammals from the house of a veterinarian in Buenos Aires, who advertised the animals online.¹¹⁵

It is possible, however, that the illegal amphibian trade is escaping the attention of wildlife law enforcers or is not considered a priority.

Key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes

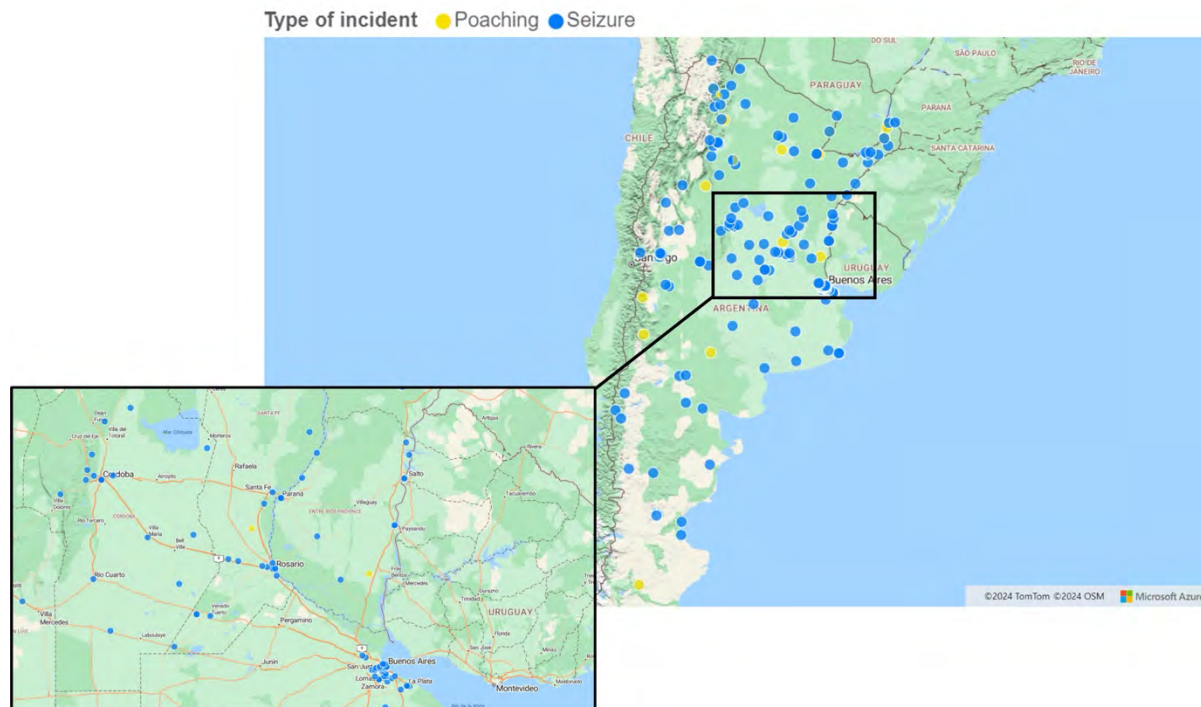


Figure 10 Locations of seizures and poaching incidents in Argentina reported between 2017 and 2022.

The seizure data indicate that Buenos Aires is the biggest wildlife trafficking hotspot in Argentina. A total of 25 seizures was recorded in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area between 2017 and 2022, involving a minimum of 2,303 animals (representing 24% of all animals seized or poached in Argentina during this time frame).

Trafficking by road

Roads are the favoured means to smuggle illegally sourced wildlife from source to market in Argentina. While most seizures take place in private homes, zoos, business premises, or markets, the majority of shipments that are intercepted en route are transported by road. Nineteen such seizures were recorded between 2017 and 2022, as opposed to two air shipments and two boat shipments (see below). Smugglers appear to mainly use private vehicles. No instances were recorded where wildlife was smuggled by public bus.

Around 90% of the wildlife that arrives in Buenos Aires is reportedly brought in by road from the north of the country. A major trafficking route is Route 14 (Ruta Nacional 14). Route 14 starts in the city of

¹¹⁴ <https://viapais.com.ar/cordoba/cordoba-insolita-allanaron-una-casa-y-encontraron-viboras-tarantulas-y-otras-especies-exoticas/>. Accessed on 9 February 2024.

¹¹⁵ <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/seguridad/boedo-rescatan-animales-exoticos-que-eran-vendidos-ilegalmente-por-redes-sociales-nid14122022/>. Accessed on 9 February 2024.

Bernardo de Irigoyen in Misiones province (one of the most biodiverse regions in Argentina, where a lot of wildlife is sourced) and ends in the small city of Ceibas, Entre Ríos province, not far from Buenos Aires. Route 14 is one of the busiest roads in Argentina, as it is also the entry point for commercial traffic coming from Brazil. Route 14 is one of the most used for bird trafficking, with birds smuggled in from Brazil using double bottom trucks, or from Paraguay, and heading for ports of departure in Uruguay and Argentina.¹¹⁶

There are many Gendarmería checkpoints in the interior, but similar to drugs, wildlife is allegedly often allowed to pass through. Researchers have highlighted that there is likely police complicity and acts of bribery when shipments are detected.¹¹⁷

Trafficking by boat

Two seizures were identified that provide evidence of wildlife smuggling by boat from Argentina to Paraguay. In September 2021 and June 2022, the Argentine navy seized large shipments of capybara meat (700 kg and 200 kg respectively) in Paraná that were meant to be carried by boat to Paraguay via the Paraná river.¹¹⁸

It is likely that wildlife is frequently trafficked by boat between Argentina and Paraguay. Firstly, because several incidents identified by this study have highlighted wildlife trafficking links between Paraguay and Argentina (listed below under Transboundary trafficking routes); and secondly, because the 1,689 km long country border between Argentina and Paraguay consists of three rivers: the Pilcomayo, Paraná, and Paraguay, providing ample opportunities for traffickers to smuggle wildlife across unnoticed.

The same is probably true for Uruguay, separated from Argentina by the Uruguay river, although no incidents were identified that highlight wildlife smuggling by boat between Uruguay and Argentina.

Trafficking by air

Only two seizures were identified which involved wildlife trafficking by air:

- ▶ In July 2021, a Spaniard was arrested at Buenos Aires' Aeropuerto Internacional Ministro Pistarini de Ezeiza for attempting to smuggle nine blackbuck hunting trophies (*Antilope cervicapra*) in his luggage to Spain.¹¹⁹
- ▶ Another incident was recorded which demonstrates reptiles are being smuggled by air. In November 2019, airport police officers carrying out a routine inspection in the cargo sector of Aeropuerto Jorge Newbery of the city of Comodoro Rivadavia, Chubut province, detected a parcel containing a corn snake that was transported in a vehicle belonging to a private mail company. The parcel was addressed to a recipient in the city of Comodoro Rivadavia, Chubut and had been sent from Mar del Plata, Buenos Aires province.¹²⁰

Given the significant level of wildlife trafficking in Argentina and the country's well-developed air travel sector, it is to be expected airplanes are more frequently used to smuggle wildlife, both domestically

¹¹⁶ <https://www.elentrerios.com/actualidad/la-ruta-14-una-de-las-preferidas-para-el-trafico-ilegal-de-animales.htm>. Accessed on 2 February 2024.

¹¹⁷ <https://www.elentrerios.com/actualidad/la-ruta-14-una-de-las-preferidas-para-el-trafico-ilegal-de-animales.htm>. Accessed on 2 February 2024.

¹¹⁸ <https://www.radiodos.com.ar/115238-incautaron-200-kilos-de-carne-de-carpincho-que-iban-a-paraguay>

¹¹⁹ <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/noticias/ambiente-intervino-en-un-operativo-en-ezeiza-por-trafico-de-fauna>

¹²⁰ <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/noticias/la-psa-rescato-mas-de-10-ejemplares-de-especies-protegidas-en-mar-del-plata>

and internationally. The fact that only two seizures related to air traffic were identified between 2017 and 2022 may indicate a lack of scrutiny with airport authorities.

Sales in markets, pet shops and in streets

As in most Latin American countries, street markets and fairs have traditionally been important nodes for the sale of wildlife. The most famous is the Pompeii bird fair in Buenos Aires (Feria de Pájaros de Nueva Pompeya). This market is a notorious hotspot for illegal wildlife trade, with sellers offering a wide variety of birds as well as mammals and reptiles. Researchers have counted 700 wild birds for sale on one day in this fair.¹²¹ Three seizures were identified here in August and May 2017, totalling 350 wild animals.¹²²

The importance of markets for illegal wildlife sales has decreased with the emergence of social media (see below).

Several incidents were identified which illustrate that pet shops are important points for illegal sales of live wild animals:

- ▶ In May 2017, 159 birds were seized from a pet shop in Buenos Aires.¹²³
- ▶ In November 2019, more than 100 wild birds, tortoises, and snakes were seized in raids in Mercado Armonía and shops in different towns in Santiago del Estero province.¹²⁴
- ▶ In January 2021, 49 wild birds and a tortoise were seized from a pet shop in Villa María.¹²⁵
- ▶ In March 2021, 63 live and 4 dead birds were seized from a pet shop in Villa Rosa.¹²⁶
- ▶ In May 2021, 68 birds were seized from a shop in González Catán, Buenos Aires.¹²⁷
- ▶ In August 2021, more than 100 songbirds were seized in a pet shop in Mar del Plata.¹²⁸

Three incidents were recorded where wildlife was offered for sale in the street. Two incidents concerned men selling birds in the street in Monte Carlo, Misiones province (December 2022)¹²⁹ and San José, Entre Ríos province (September 2021)¹³⁰. In both cases, the birds were native monk parakeets that had been bleached with hydrogen peroxide to pass them off as a more expensive species. The third incident concerned a man who was offering for sale an ocelot skin in a street in Posadas, Misiones province, in November 2018.¹³¹

Sales on social media

In the last decade, social media, and online marketplaces have become a major conduit for illegal wildlife trade in Argentina. According to local NGOs, wildlife traffickers operate with total impunity on

¹²¹ https://www.clarin.com/sociedad/quedan-pocas-aves-comprar-mascotas-loro-enjaulado-recuerdo-pasado_0_UrPiFUTTU.html

¹²² https://www.bioguia.com/entretenimiento/rescatan-en-buenos-aires-a-cientos-de-animales-del-mercado-negro_29283300.html and <https://www.infobae.com/sociedad/policiales/2017/06/11/mercado-negro-de-fauna-cuanto-cuesta-un-pajaro-argentino-en-peligro-de-extincion/>. Accessed on 9 February 2024.

¹²³ <https://www.infobae.com/sociedad/policiales/2017/06/11/mercado-negro-de-fauna-cuanto-cuesta-un-pajaro-argentino-en-peligro-de-extincion/>. Accessed on 9 February 2024.

¹²⁴ <https://www.conclusion.com.ar/corazon-animal/secuestran-mas-de-un-centenar-de-aves-silvestres-en-cautiverio-en-santiago-del-estero/11/2019/>. Accessed on 9 February 2024.

¹²⁵ <https://www.eldiariocba.com.ar/policiales/2021/1/7/rescataron-50-animales-silvestres-para-la-venta-35298.html>

¹²⁶ <https://www.infobae.com/sociedad/2021/03/23/rescataron-a-63-ejemplares-de-aves-hacinadas-en-una-forrajeria-de-pilar-que-las-vendia-de-manera-ilegal/>. Accessed on 9 February 2024.

¹²⁷ <https://laderasur.com/articulo/argentina-autoridades-propinan-golpe-trafficantes-de-fauna-y-rescatan-del-comercio-ilegal-68-aves-en-buenos-aires/>. Accessed on 9 February 2024.

¹²⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=159069783017203>. Accessed on 9 February 2024.

¹²⁹ <https://misionescuatro.com/policiales/demoraron-a-vendedores-ambulantes-que-comerciaban-28-loros-autoctonos/>

¹³⁰ <https://eraverde.com.ar/capturan-a-estafadores-que-vendian-cotorras-tenidas/>. Accessed on 9 February 2024.

¹³¹ <https://misionesonline.net/2018/11/02/ofrecen-piel-de-ocelote-en-plena-calle-de-posadas/>. Accessed on 9 Feb. 2024.

these platforms. As there are no statistics on the scale and dynamics of illegal online wildlife trade in Argentina, the NGO Aves Argentinas monitors the internet using volunteers. In their most recent survey, between January 2020 and August 2021, they focused on illegal bird trade on Facebook. They detected 1,429 records of the sale of wild animals from a total of 1,006 adverts posted by 581 users.

This represented a 585% increase in the number of publications compared to their prior survey in 2015, and 44 more bird species were offered for sale (88% increase). According to Aves Argentinas, Facebook is the commonly used platform for illegal wildlife sales in Argentina. Furthermore, there are many WhatsApp groups used by bird collectors which are more difficult to infiltrate.¹³²

Some government agencies have stepped up the monitoring of social media, however, and are increasingly seizing wildlife trafficked online. For instance, in 2017 the Mendoza province's wildlife department reported that they had identified 20 closed groups on Facebook and between 10 and 15 WhatsApp groups dedicated to wildlife trafficking. Some have up to 5,000 members. Among other things, the department found that social media facilitate bird traffickers who do it as a complementary activity or hobby.¹³³

This study identified 16 seizures of wildlife that had been offered for sale online, involving 591 live birds; 20 reptiles (live and reptile skin products); 18 mammals (live and mammal skin products); and one frog. Half of these seizures (eight) took place in 2022, compared to two in 2021, two in 2020, one in 2019, one in 2018 and two in 2017. This indicates a stronger focus of law enforcers on illegal online trade or higher levels of illegal online trade or (most likely) a combination of these two factors.

A few significant seizures, some of which have already been mentioned above, include:

- ▶ In November 2018, 58 songbirds were seized that were offered for sale in Lomas de Zamora, Buenos Aires on social media.¹³⁴
- ▶ In January 2020, a man was arrested and 91 wild animals (including 57 songbirds, 12 Chaco tortoises, 17 hedgehogs, and five slider turtles) were seized that were sold online from his house in Villa Elvira, Buenos Aires province.¹³⁵
- ▶ In March 2021, 365 non-native birds were seized from an illegal hatchery in Barrio de Liniers, Buenos Aires that advertised them online, following an anonymous complaint.¹³⁶
- ▶ In May 2022, authorities seized various coats and accessories made from wildlife skins from a clothing store in Buenos Aires. The items included skins of jaguar, cheetah, monkey, ocelot, African leopard, mink, fox, alligator, crocodile, and python. The raid took place after BCA officers had found the shop advertising similar wildlife fashion items on social media.¹³⁷
- ▶ In December 2022, three snakes, a bearded dragon, a Chaco tortoise, and a horned frog along with various dogs, rabbits, and guinea pigs were seized from an illegal breeding facility in a house in Buenos Aires. It was operated by a veterinarian who advertised the animals on Facebook.¹³⁸

Six of the 16 seizures took place in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, once again highlighting the role of Buenos Aires as a wildlife trafficking hotspot.

¹³² <https://www.telam.com.ar/notas/202201/582223-traffic-ilegal-fauna-silvestre.html>. Accessed on 11 February 2024.

¹³³ <https://www.losandes.com.ar/venden-aves-silvestres-por-facebook/>. Accessed on 11 February 2024.

¹³⁴ https://www.clarin.com/ciudades/rescatan-58-aves-departamento-vendian-redes-sociales_0_pl97yTJqW.html

¹³⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwdPFfVtuTM>. Accessed on 11 February 2024.

¹³⁶ <https://noticiaspositivas.org/traffic-ilegal-de-fauna-mas-de-400-aves-fueron-rescatadas-en-pilar-y-capital/>.

¹³⁷ <https://www.infobae.com/sociedad/policiales/2022/05/28/allanaron-un-comercio-porteno-que-vendia-abrigos-de-piel-de-fauna-silvestre-costaban-hasta-un-millon-de-pesos-cada-uno/>. Accessed on 5 February 2024.

¹³⁸ <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/seguridad/boedo-rescatan-animales-exoticos-que-eran-vendidos-ilegalmente-por-redes-sociales-nid14122022/>. Accessed on 8 February 2024.

Convergence

The wildlife seizures and poaching incidents recorded between 2017 and 2022 provide little evidence of convergence between wildlife crime and other types of organized crime.

There was one incident which suggests a possible convergence between wildlife and drugs trafficking. In December 2021, more than 10 reptiles, birds, and spiders and five marihuana plants were seized from a premises in Mar del Plata.¹³⁹ Five marihuana plants do not comprise a commercial quantity, however. In the Netherlands, for example, private citizens are allowed to grow five marihuana plants for their own use. It is possible, therefore, that the perpetrator in this case was growing marihuana for his own use.

Another noteworthy incident happened in April 2022 in the city of Paraná. Police officers who were searching a house to locate a suspect of a robbery coincidentally found 28 native songbirds allegedly destined for illegal sales, including a yellow cardinal.¹⁴⁰ This incident suggests illegal wildlife trade is an attractive line of industry for individuals engaged in other crime types.

Lastly, it has been rumoured that vicuña poaching gangs have possible ties to cocaine trafficking and that drug traffickers entering Argentina from Bolivia pay their way with illegal vicuña fibre¹⁴¹, but these rumours could not be corroborated by the seizures collected by this study.

Transboundary trafficking routes

Argentina > Bolivia

In August 2021, Argentinian authorities seized 45 vicuña skins and .22 calibre ammunition transported on donkeys by two Bolivians in La Quiaca, Jujuy province, on the border with Bolivia.¹⁴² Bolivians are known to enter Jujuy province in Argentina to hunt vicuñas for their skins.¹⁴³

Argentina > Chile

- ▶ In February 2018, Chilean Customs at the Pino Hachado checkpoint seized two yellow cardinals from a smuggler entering by car from Argentina.
- ▶ In January 2019, Chilean Customs at the Los Andes checkpoint seized six unidentified parrots hidden in a box on the fender of a truck arriving from Argentina and bound for San Antonio.¹⁴⁴
- ▶ In February 2019, Chilean Customs at the Mamuil Malal mountain pass seized a hat and stole made from the skin of a Geoffroy's cat and Andean fox, respectively, from a car from Argentina.
- ▶ In December 2019, a stuffed armadillo shell and armadillo tail were seized from an Argentinian citizen who intended to bring it to Chile through the Paso Frontizero Cardenal Samoré.
- ▶ In March 2021 Chilean Customs at the Nuevo Complejo Fronterizo Los Libertadores seized 100 tanned capybara skins from a truck arriving from Argentina.

¹³⁹ <https://11noticias.com/noticias/Nacionales/Rescataron-mas-de-10-ejemplares-de-especies-protegidas-tras-un-allanamiento-por-trafico-de-animales-18516.html>. Accessed on 8 February 2024.

¹⁴⁰ <https://eraverde.com.ar/cardenal-amarillo-enjaulado-en-una-vivienda-allanada-por-robo/>. Accessed on 11 Feb. 2024.

¹⁴¹ Nuwer, R. (2015). Poaching upsurge threatens South America's iconic vicuña. Mongabay, 24 November 2015. <https://news.mongabay.com/2015/11/poaching-upsurge-threatens-south-americas-iconic-vicuana/>. Accessed 6 Feb. 2024.

¹⁴² <https://www.ellitoral.com.ar/corrientes/2021-8-1-1-0-0-sorprendieron-a-cazadores-con-45-cueros-de-vicuana-en-la-puna-jujuna>. Accessed on 11 January 2024.

¹⁴³ <https://www.somosjujuy.com.ar/jujuy/ciudadanos-bolivia-cruzan-jujuy-cazan-vicunas-trabajan-agilizar-sanciones-n65380>. Accessed on 11 January 2024.

¹⁴⁴ <https://www.aduana.cl/incautan-loros-vivos-ocultos-en-el-tapabarros-de-un-camion-en-los/aduana/2019-01-03/111749.html>. Accessed on 19 January 2024.

- ▶ In December 2022, Argentine border force officers on Ruta Nacional No. 7 near the Chilean border seized a South American grey fox cub (*Lycopalex griseus*) from a car headed for Chile.¹⁴⁵

Argentina ↔ Paraguay

Several seizures were reported which suggest frequent wildlife trafficking between Argentina and Paraguay.

- ▶ In February 2020, the Argentine Gendarmería seized 82 broad-snouted caiman skins from a car driven by a Paraguayan citizen near the town of Formosa, on the border with Paraguay.
- ▶ In September 2021 and June 2022, the Argentine navy seized large shipments of capybara meat (700 kg and 200 kg, respectively) in Paraná from boats destined for Paraguay via the Paraná river.¹⁴⁶
- ▶ In September 2022, Argentine Gendarmería in Ituzaingó seized axis deer parts (three skins, one head, and one pair of antlers) destined for Paraguay from a vehicle during road inspection.¹⁴⁷
- ▶ In 2018 (which month is unclear), ten blue and yellow macaws originating from Paraguay were seized from an illegal hatchery in Funes.¹⁴⁸
- ▶ In November 2022, two juvenile capuchin monkeys and a baby black-and-gold howler monkey were seized in Formosa province on the Argentina-Paraguay border. They were destined for Buenos Aires.¹⁴⁹
- ▶ In February 2023, a cargo of 352 caiman skins was seized from a parcel delivery company vehicle near Tatané, a village just south of Formosa.¹⁵⁰

Argentina ↔ Uruguay

- ▶ In June 2019, Uruguayan Customs at Puente San Martín arrested three people for attempting to smuggle 350 saffron finches to Argentina and seized the birds.¹⁵¹
- ▶ In June 2019, as part of INTERPOL Operación Amazonas, the Uruguayan police seized over 100 wild animals that were smuggled from Argentina. For more, see the Uruguay section.¹⁵²
- ▶ In October 2023, three Argentinians intent on entering Uruguay were arrested in Gualeduaychú, near the border with Uruguay, with 117 birds, including 95 yellow cardinals and 22 black siskins.¹⁵³

Argentina > Europe (Spain)

In July 2021, a Spaniard was arrested at Buenos Aires' Aeropuerto Internacional Ministro Pistarini de Ezeiza for attempting to smuggle nine blackbuck hunting trophies in his luggage to Spain.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁵ <https://twitter.com/gendarmeria/status/1598719768910917636>. Accessed on 18 January 2024.

¹⁴⁶ <https://www.radiodos.com.ar/115238-incautaron-200-kilos-de-carne-de-carpincho-que-iban-a-paraguay>

¹⁴⁷ <https://www.eltterritorio.com.ar/noticias/2022/09/28/763649-gendarmeria-secuestro-restos-de-ciervo-axis-en-ituzaingo>

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.lt10.com.ar/noticia/236110--diez-quacamayos-que-están-en-la-ciudad-volverán-a-paraguay>

¹⁴⁹ <https://www.tiktok.com/@opinionfrontal/video/7156939604170444038>. Accessed on 11 February 2024.

¹⁵⁰ <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/noticias/envian-352-cueros-de-yacare-dentro-de-encomiendas>. Accessed 8 Feb. 2024.

¹⁵¹ <https://www.montevideo.com.uy/Noticias/Trafico-de-animales-Prefectura-evito-la-salida-de-350-aves-nativas-a-Argentina-uc720827>.

Accessed on 11 February 2024.

¹⁵² https://www.minterior.gub.uy/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6836. Accessed on 11 Feb. 2024.

¹⁵³ <https://www.elmiercolesdigital.com.ar/interceptan-importante-contrabando-de-fauna/>. Accessed on 23 January 2024.

¹⁵⁴ <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/noticias/ambiente-intervino-en-un-operativo-en-ezeiza-por-trafico-de-fauna>



Figure 11: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes to/from Argentina based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022

Law enforcement efforts

In taking a glimpse at law enforcement efforts in Argentina, it is important to note that Argentina is a federation composed of 23 provinces and an autonomous city, Buenos Aires. The provinces hold all the power that they chose not to delegate to the federal government; they must be representative commonwealths and must not contradict the Constitution. Beyond this, they are fully autonomous: they have their own constitutions and local governments and own and manage their natural and financial resources. Each province has its own set of provincial laws and justice system, a supreme court, a governor, an autonomous police force, and a congress.¹⁵⁵

This federal governance system means that law enforcement efforts against illegal wildlife trade are mainly implemented at the provincial levels, by provincial-level police agencies, and wildlife law enforcement agencies.

¹⁵⁵ <http://www.biblioteca.jus.gov.ar/Argentina-Constitution.pdf>. Accessed on 30 January 2024.

At the federal level, there is the Environmental Control Brigade (Brigada de Control Ambiental, BCA) of the Ministerio de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible, which was created in September 2020. Among other things, the BCA participates alongside security forces in operations against illegal wildlife trade, in which the BCA is responsible for the confiscation of the specimens.¹⁵⁶ The BCA carries out patrol work to detect traffickers, in addition to being part of international actions with Customs and INTERPOL. The BCA collaborates with the Public Prosecutor's Office and with police forces throughout the country. Violations are dealt with directly through administrative sanctions, and/or by filing a judicial complaint to, for example, obtain search warrants. In 2021, the BCA seized 928 live animals and wildlife products.¹⁵⁷

The Argentinian Federal Police also has a specialised environmental crime unit: the Departamento de Delitos Ambientales de la Policía Federal Argentina.

In addition, there is a specialised unit in the Public Prosecutors' Office (Ministerio Público Fiscal) called the Unidad Fiscal para la Investigación de Delitos contra el Medio Ambiente (UFIMA). It is tasked with generating preliminary investigations and supporting ongoing investigations, including of suspected violations of National Law 22.421 on the Protection and Conservation of Wildlife (Ley Nacional 22.421 de Protección y Conservación de la Fauna Silvestre).¹⁵⁸

Argentine Customs (Aduanas Argentina), gendarmerie (Gendarmeria Nacional), and the navy (Prefectura Naval Argentina) are also tasked with intercepting illegal wildlife shipments.

As the table and figures in the General Overview show, the numbers of seizures reported in the media as well as numbers of seized wildlife specimens have risen sharply in 2021 and 2022. This is the result of increased law enforcement efforts (including through the establishment of the BCA) and awareness raising in several provinces and nationally, which have prompted citizens to voluntarily surrender wild animals they kept as pets.¹⁵⁹

Low law enforcement deterrence

However, despite the notable efforts made at federal and provincial levels to address wildlife crime in Argentina, it appears the deterrent effect of law enforcement efforts is low.

First of all, the rate of arrest is low. Seventy-nine people were arrested in 40 incidents, which means that only 17% of the seizures and poaching incidents between 2017 and 2022 resulted in arrest (region-wide the average rate of arrest is 27%). Even in some cases where hundreds of wild animals are seized, the media reports make no mention of any perpetrator(s) being arrested.

In addition, penalties for wildlife poaching and trafficking are low. The National Law 22.421 on the Protection and Conservation of Wildlife (Ley Nacional 22.421 de Protección y Conservación de la Fauna Silvestre), establishes a penalty of between one month and three years imprisonment for the illegal possession and trade of wildlife. This law and its penalty regime, which was promulgated in 1981, are outdated. They are not in line with global perceptions concerning the serious nature of wildlife crime,

¹⁵⁶ <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/ambiente/control/brigada>. Accessed on 30 January 2024.

¹⁵⁷ <https://www.telam.com.ar/notas/202201/582223-traffic-ilegal-fauna-silvestre.html>. Accessed on 30 January 2024.

¹⁵⁸ <https://www.mpf.gob.ar/ufima/>. Accessed on 31 January 2024.

¹⁵⁹ <https://www.eldiariodelarepublica.com/nota/2019-11-12-13-23-0-cada-vez-se-rescatan-mas-animales-en-cautiverio>. Accessed on 30 January 2024.

which often goes hand in hand with other forms of serious crime such as corruption, fraud, tax evasion, and money laundering, necessitating that it is treated as a felony rather than a misdemeanour.¹⁶⁰

Penalties in provincial wildlife protection laws are even lower. In San Juan province, the capture and hunting of native fauna is prohibited by the Code of Misdemeanours and Law 606-L. The maximum penalty for a wildlife trafficker is a fine of 50,000 pesos (US\$61), 30 days of arrest, and/or confiscation of all merchandise. Most cases are dealt with through fines, which range between 2,000 and 10,000 pesos (between US\$2.42 and US\$12).¹⁶¹ In Rio Negro province, most people who are caught with wild animals in their possession are not prosecuted. Rather, the illegality of the situation is explained to them so that they can make a voluntary surrender. Fines are only imposed in cases where large volumes of wild animals are trafficked.¹⁶²

Critics point out that there is insufficient follow up of seizures in the form of conducting criminal investigations to collect evidence against the criminal networks behind significant seizures.¹⁶³ It requires dedicated law enforcement expertise and capacity to dismantle these networks by collecting intelligence and conducting investigations to identify key actors and ensuring they are prosecuted and receive deterrent penalties. Instead, most cases are initiated in response to citizen's complaints.

What is also problematic is that the federal governance system, with each province having its own courts, has resulted in the courts taking different approaches to wildlife crime cases. Punishments for comparable criminal acts therefore diverge depending on the province in which they are committed.¹⁶⁴

Various sources have reported that wildlife crime is not sufficiently prioritised in Argentina, and that lack of education translates into a lack of understanding of the issue and its impacts. Furthermore, there is insufficient insight into the issue due to a lack of centralized data collection and analysis of wildlife crime in the country.¹⁶⁵ Reportedly there are plans to strengthen the legislation and increase penalties, but this is a complicated process as it must be conducted in coordination with the provinces. Some government experts also admit that it is not easy as 'there are economies that practically make a living from this'.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ For example, on 23 July 2021, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the Resolution on Tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife, building upon UNGA resolutions on this topic adopted in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2019. It calls upon Member States to make illicit trafficking in protected wild fauna and flora a serious crime to ensure that, where the offense is transnational in nature and involves an organized criminal group, effective international cooperation can be afforded under the relevant international Conventions, such as the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the United Nations Convention Against Corruption. See <https://cites.org/eng/node/124903>. Accessed on 30 January 2024.

¹⁶¹ <https://www.diariodecuyo.com.ar/sanjuan/Se-mantienen-las-infracciones-por-aves-en-cautiverio-y-aumenta-la-cantidad-de-especies-20191022-0112.html>. Accessed on 30 January 2024.

¹⁶² <https://www.rionegro.com.ar/policiales/secuestraron-22-aves-en-cautiverio-en-una-cabana-del-oeste-de-bariloche-2137048/>. Accessed on 30 January 2024.

¹⁶³ <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/lifestyle/trafico-animales-del-lavado-dinero-al-coronavirus-nid2397240/>. Accessed on 31 January 2024.

¹⁶⁴ American Bar Association – Iniciativa para el estado de derecho (2020). Tráfico ilegal de vida silvestre y su relación con el crimen organizado transnacional en Latinoamérica y el Caribe. Available at: <https://beccarvarela.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/wildlife-trafficking-esp.pdf>. Accessed on 30 January 2024.

¹⁶⁵ American Bar Association – Iniciativa para el estado de derecho (2020). Tráfico ilegal de vida silvestre y su relación con el crimen organizado transnacional en Latinoamérica y el Caribe. Available at: <https://beccarvarela.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/wildlife-trafficking-esp.pdf>. Accessed on 30 January 2024.

¹⁶⁶ <https://www.telam.com.ar/notas/202201/582223-trafico-ilegal-fauna-silvestre.html>. Accessed on 31 January 2024.

Bolivia

Bolivia

General overview

In Bolivia, a minimum of 3,364 wild animals were involved in 96 seizures and 17 poaching incidents reported in the media between 2017 and 2022. Some 68% of these concerned live animals, with the balance comprised of 14% dead specimens, 11% parts and products, and 7% meat and wool.

For 103 specimens of wild cats, birds, and other animals seized in the Bolivian city of Trinidad between January and September 2017,¹⁶⁷ the media report did not specify the species nor the taxonomic group, so it was not possible to quantify exactly how many birds, reptiles, mammals, and/or amphibians were seized. Therefore, these 103 specimens were not included in the analysis.

For the remaining 3,261 specimens identified in Bolivia by this study, 60% concerned birds (1,971 specimens). Reptiles made up 24% (768 specimens); mammals 15% (493 specimens); and amphibians 1% (29 specimens).

The seizure data analysis was hampered by the low quality of reporting on seizures in Bolivia. Media reports often fail to specify the number of specimens and/or (sub)species seized. As a result, the research often had to rely on identifying species from photos in media reports. If no numbers of specimens seized were provided, the number of specimens identifiable from photos in the media reports was recorded. This means the count of specimens for Bolivia based on the seizure data collected is a significant underrepresentation of the actual numbers of specimens seized.

Unique characteristics

- Saffron finches trafficked from Peru
- Traditional medicine and folkloristic wildlife use major drivers for poaching
- Consumption river turtle eggs
- Jaguar parts trafficked domestically and to China
- Low arrest rate

¹⁶⁷ <https://www.la-razon.com/sociedad/2017/09/12/en-la-ciudad-de-trinidad-rescatan-103-animales-salvajes-en-lo-que-va-del-ano/>. Accessed on 2 January 2024.

Number of incidents reported in the media

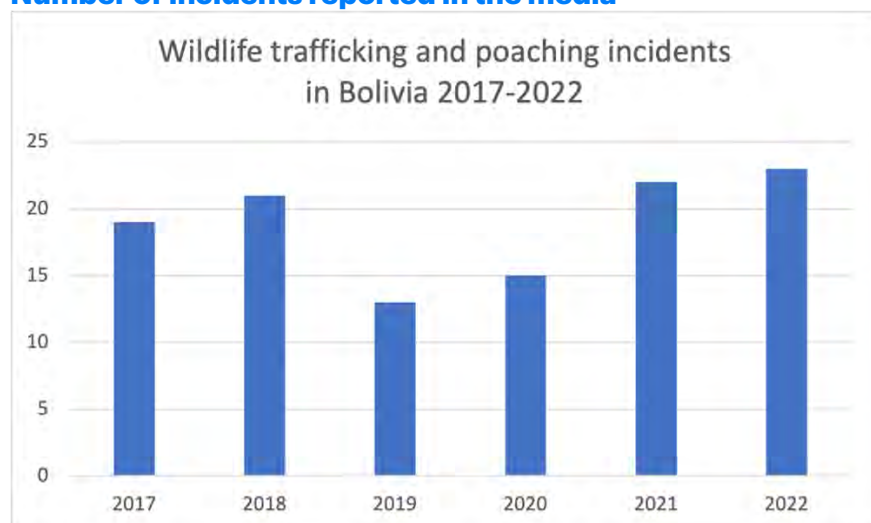


Figure 12: Wildlife trafficking and poaching incidents in Bolivia between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Number of animals involved

The table and figure below show the numbers of birds, reptiles, mammals, and amphibians reported to be seized or poached in Bolivia between 2017 and 2022.

Table 3: Animals seized or poached in Bolivia between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Birds	78	173	711	120	235	654	1971
Reptiles	172	63	347	87	39	60	768
Mammals	94	206	37	53	44	59	493
Amphibians	6	1	0	22	0	0	29
TOTAL	350	443	1095	282	318	773	

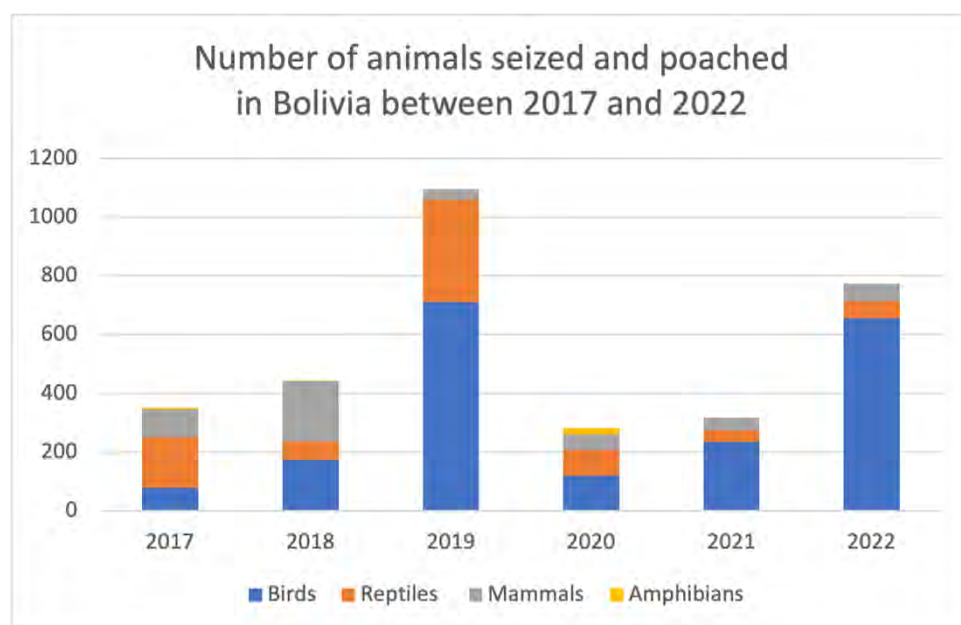


Figure 13: Number of animals seized or poached in Bolivia between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

The table and figure show that the number of seized animals peaked in 2019, whereas the number of incidents reported in 2019 was the lowest in the six-year timeframe documented in this study (see Figure 12 above). This can be explained by two events:

- ▶ A seizure in December 2019 of 600 birds that a woman was transporting to Cochabamba on a public bus.¹⁶⁸
- ▶ A seizure in March 2019 of 345 dead lizards (along with hundreds of wildlife parts and products from various species; dozens of dead mammals and birds; and 13 live birds) in markets La Pampa and Calatayud in Cochabamba.¹⁶⁹

Species most targeted

Birds

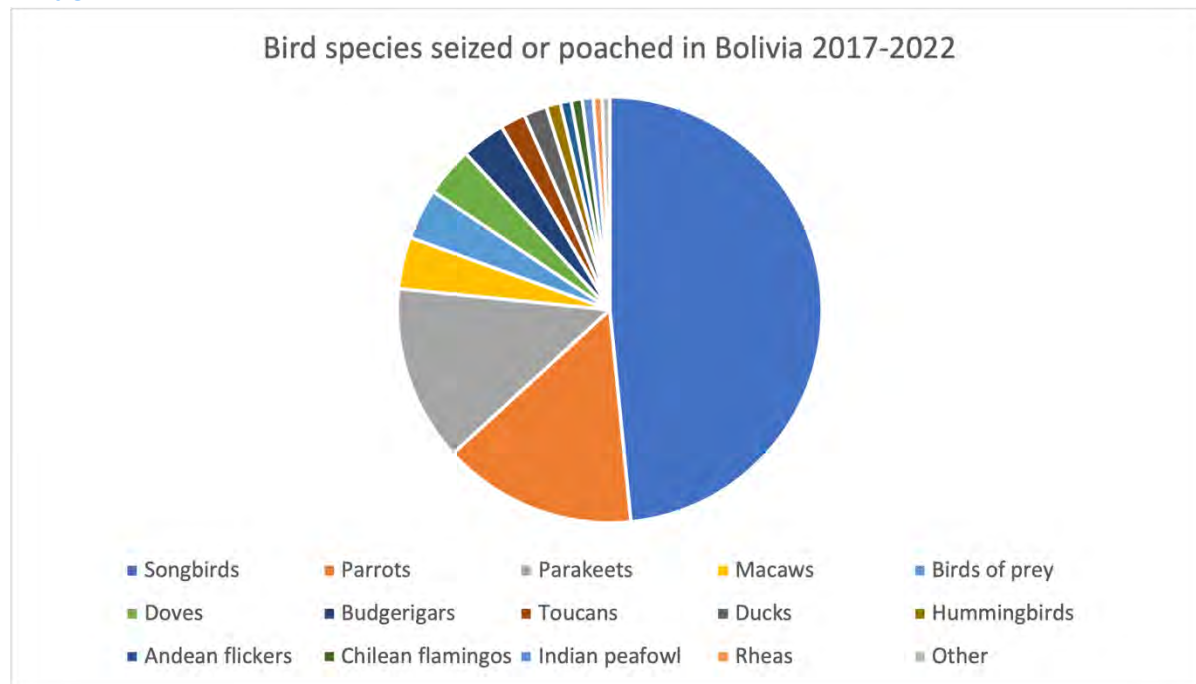


Figure 17: Bird species seized or poached in Bolivia between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

The analysis of illegal bird trade in Bolivia was hampered by the low quality of media reporting on bird seizures. For 775 birds seized between 2017 and 2022 (39% of the total of 1,971 birds), the media reports failed to specify the species. These therefore could not be included in the analysis.

Trafficking of songbirds

The high representation of songbirds (579 specimens, nearly 50%) in the total amount of birds seized or poached is due to just two seizures: In June 2022, POFOMA arrested three people and seized more than 570 saffron finches (*Sicalis flaveola*) at the checkpoint of Guaqui, a town on Lake Titicaca 30 kilometres from the border with Peru. The birds were transported in four small cages hidden in several vehicles and were believed to be destined for illegal sales in Cochabamba and Santa Cruz in Bolivia.

¹⁶⁸ <https://www.lostiempos.com/actualidad/pais/20191213/rescatan-500-aves-exoticas-paz-que-tenian-como-destino-cochabamba>. Accessed on 2 January 2024.

¹⁶⁹ <https://www.reportechaco.com/post/decomisan-774-partes-de-animales-silvestres-en-mercados>. Accessed 2 Jan 2024.

Some of the birds had died.¹⁷⁰ In all likelihood the birds had been smuggled from Peru, given the location of the seizure as well as the fact that a very similar seizure occurred in Peru, four years earlier. In January 2018, 581 saffron finches (including 100 dead) were seized from a bus in Puno, a Peruvian city on Lake Titicaca in the south of Peru. The bus was headed for Bolivia, where the birds would be marketed.¹⁷¹

The other songbird seizure concerned nine red-crested cardinals (*Paroaria coronata*) that were seized from a trafficker along with 137 other birds and turtles in Sucre in August 2020.¹⁷²

Trafficking of psittacids

Psittacids are by far the most frequently seized birds in Bolivia. Between 2017 and 2022 a total of 177 parrots, 160 parakeets, and 47 macaws were reported to be seized.

For 75% of seized parrots the subspecies was not specified in the media, making it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about which parrot species are most targeted in Bolivia. The parrots whose subspecies was specified included 38 cobalt-rumped parrotlets (*Forpus xanthopterygius*); four turquoise-fronted amazons (*Amazona aestiva*); one blue-headed parrot (*Pionus menstruus*); and one green-rumped parrotlet (*Forpus passerinus*).

The 47 macaws that were seized between 2017 and 2022 involved five subspecies: 27 blue and yellow macaws (*Ara araurana*, CITES Appendix II); four red and green macaws (*Ara chloropterus* CITES Appendix II); three red-fronted macaws (*Ara rubrogenys*, CITES Appendix I); two scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*, CITES Appendix I); and one chestnut-fronted macaw (*Ara severus*, CITES Appendix II). For ten specimens the media reports did not specify the subspecies.

The presence of red-fronted macaws in illegal trade is highly concerning as this species is critically endangered. Endemic to a small area on the east Andean slope of south-central Bolivia, the species has declined rapidly due to the impact of trapping. An estimated 600–800 individuals are left in the wild, dispersed across four small colonies.¹⁷³

Most macaws were seized from private homes where they were kept as pets, as well as from markets where they were offered for sale. Two seizures were recorded that highlight the use of live macaws and parakeets in ch'alla rituals as part of the Bolivian Carnival. Ch'alla is an ancient Andean ritual which consists of covering the earth with flower petals and burying a pot of cooked potatoes, cigarettes, coca leaves, and alcohol to feed the Pachamama (Mother Earth) and ask for prosperity in the coming year.¹⁷⁴ Apparently, in some instances, animals are part of the sacrifice.

On 2 March 2019, POFOMA officers rescued six macaws and five parakeets in two different locations:¹⁷⁵

- ▶ In Llallagua, Potosí, two blue and yellow macaws and five parakeets were seized from people who were in the process of pouring alcohol over them. The birds had mutilated tongues and wings, fractured legs, and shattered claws. The officers were unable to arrest the owners for fear of a

¹⁷⁰ <https://www.la-razon.com/sociedad/2022/06/27/al-menos-570-canarios-fueron-rescatados-en-guaqui/>. Accessed on 3 January 2024.

¹⁷¹ <https://www.servindi.org/actualidad-noticias/01/02/2018/serfor-rescata-mas-de-580-aves-boton-de-oro-de-procedencia-ilegal-en>. Accessed on 13 December 2023.

¹⁷² <https://www.laregion.bo/policia-rescata-aves-y-tortugas-en-empresa-de-transportes/>. Accessed on 3 January 2024.

¹⁷³ BirdLife International (2024). Species factsheet: *Ara rubrogenys*. <http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/red-fronted-macaw-ara-rubrogenys> on 04/01/2024. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

¹⁷⁴ <https://info.caserita.com/Challa-ritual-andino--a351>. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

¹⁷⁵ <https://www.la-razon.com/lr-article/rescatan-parabas-usadas-para-la-challa/>. Accessed on 3 January 2024.

confrontation with about 30 people drinking alcoholic beverages and the population in the middle of the Carnival festivities.

- ▶ In Huanuni, Oruro, 45 kilometres from Llallagua, two blue and yellow macaws, one scarlet macaw and one red-fronted macaw were rescued from a similar ch'alla ritual. The birds had cuts in their tail feathers and fractures in their wings.

It is unclear to what extent the use of psittacids (or other animals) in ch'alla rituals is a common practice. However, as these incidents occurred in two different locations it must be assumed these were not just singular events.

A total of 159 parakeets was reported to be seized in four different events between 2017 and 2022. The most significant seizure occurred in December 2021, when 150 yellow-chevroned parakeet chicks (*Brotogeris chiriri*) were seized in Yacuiba. The parakeets were transported in a van from the community of D'Orbigny where they had been caught to be marketed in Yacuiba. The seizure was in response to complaints from residents of D'Orbigny, whose trees had been cut down to remove the chicks.¹⁷⁶

Traffickers dye parakeets yellow to pass them off as more valuable species

Some vendors dye or bleach native parakeets yellow to pass them off as a more expensive exotic species, a practice that was also observed in Argentina, Paraguay, and Peru. This was established, for example, in Santa Cruz de la Sierra in November 2023. A vendor had dyed two monk parakeets (*Myiopsitta monachus*) yellow. They were seized along with five yellow-chevroned parakeets. The birds were brought to a rescue centre where they received medication to remedy the poisoning of their liver and skin caused by the chemicals used to colour them.¹⁷⁷

For historical context, a 2007 study of the psittacid trade in the Los Pozos pet market in Santa Cruz de la Sierra provides valuable insights into species trafficked, their origin, and destination. The study recorded a total of 7,279 individuals of 31 psittacid species for sale in this market from August 2004 to July 2005. The majority were sold as adults (77%). This is concerning, as removing adults of long-lived psittacid species, particularly macaws, can negatively impact the reproduction rates and long-term survival of populations. The most frequently sold species were the turquoise-fronted parrot (*Amazona aestiva*), monk parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*), and blue-winged parrotlet (*Forpus xanthopterygius*). The vast majority (94%) were said to have been captured wild. About 76% of all species were sold locally; 23% were taken to Cochabamba and 1% (13 specimens) to Brazil and Peru. The majority of the inexpensive species were sold for the internal market, but threatened and more valuable birds were frequently traded to middlemen with Peruvian trade connections. Bolivia appears to serve as a bridge for the wildlife trade between Brazil and Peru, as chicks of threatened species such as Lear's macaw (*Anodorhynchus leari*) and hyacinth macaw (*Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*) that arrived from Brazil were destined for markets in Peru. On occasion, particular species are requested (ordered) from Lima, Peru, and Mexico.¹⁷⁸ Even though the trade is illegal, the law is rarely enforced. Experts have pointed out that there seems to be a widespread attitude that because so many people do it and because there are still so many parrots in the wild, 'it's not that important.'¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ <https://aygun.com.bo/2021/12/08/yacuiba-codefauna-rescata-a-150-catitas-de-ser-vendidas/>. Accessed 3 January 2024.

¹⁷⁷ <https://www.laregion.bo/bolivia-trafficantes-tinen-plumas-de-loro-endemico-para-venderlo-como-ave-exotica/>

¹⁷⁸ Herrera M. and Hennessey, B. (2007). Quantifying the illegal parrot trade in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, with emphasis on threatened species. *Bird Conservation International*.17(4):295-300. doi:10.1017/S0959270907000858. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

¹⁷⁹ Mowbray, S. (2016). El comercio nacional de loros de Bolivia abastecido por aves consideradas 'plagas agrícolas'. Mongabay, 13 April 2016. Available at: <https://es.mongabay.com/2016/04/comercio-nacional-loros-bolivia-abastecido-aves-consideradas-plagas-agricolas/>. Accessed on 3 January 2024.

Bolivia's illegal parrot trade is fuelled by human-parrot conflict resulting from flocks of parrots feeding on and destroying agricultural crops. For this reason, many parrot species are considered agricultural pests. Before, at least until the seventies, farmers used to shoot the birds, but since this is no longer allowed, farmers look for someone to catch and sell them at the local market instead.¹⁸⁰

In addition to native psittacids, there is also a market for old world parrot species native to Asia and Australia, including budgerigars (*Melopsittacus undulatus*); love birds (*Agapornis*); and cockatoos (*Cacatuidae*). A significant incident occurred in December 2019, when 600 non-native birds (love birds, cockatoos, canaries, and Australian parrots) were seized from a female bus passenger. She had acquired the birds at the Feria 16 de Julio in El Alto and was taking them to Cochabamba. The birds were believed to be illegally bred in Bolivia.¹⁸¹

Rheas, a large flightless bird species native to Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay, are targeted for the pet trade and their feathers. This study identified eight live specimens, seized in three incidents in Cochabamba in 2022. Furthermore, 1,409 rhea feathers were seized in two seizures in Urkupiña, in 2017¹⁸² and 2022¹⁸³. The feathers are used in folkloristic costumes and plumes worn by dancers during the Entrada de Urkupiña (a parade that is part of the Urkupiña religious festival). Two subspecies are affected by this illicit trade: greater rhea (*Rhea americana*) and Darwin's rhea (*Rhea pennata*).

Reptiles

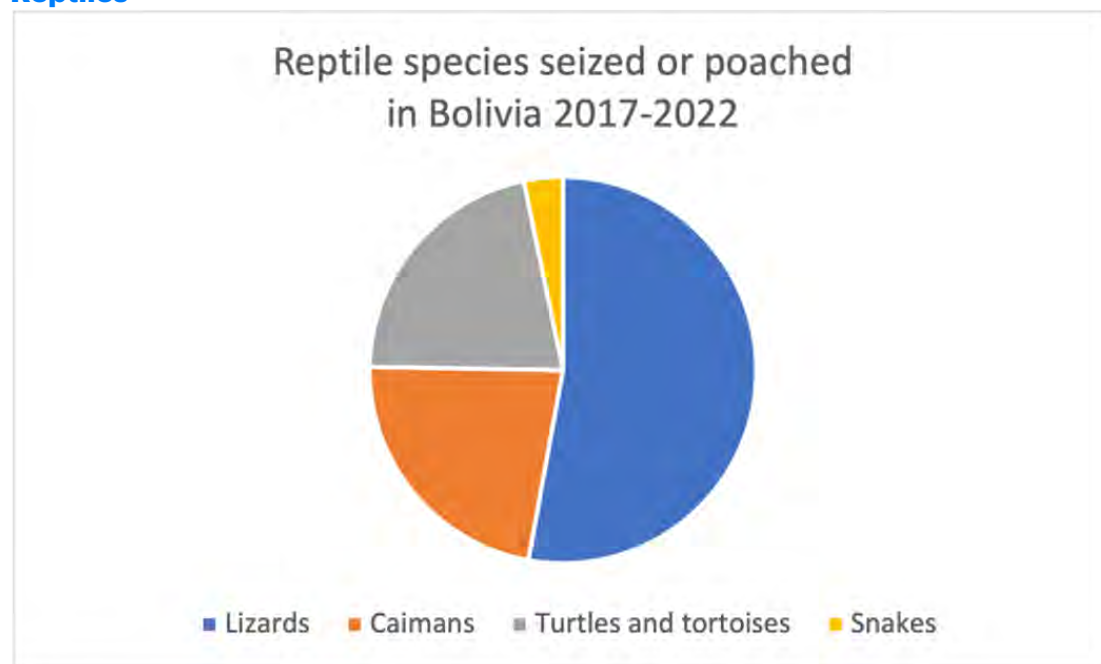


Figure 14: Reptile species seized or poached in Bolivia between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

¹⁸⁰ Mowbray, S. (2016). El comercio nacional de loros de Bolivia abastecido por aves consideradas 'plagas agrícolas'. *Mongabay*. 13 April 2016. Available at: <https://es.mongabay.com/2016/04/comercio-nacional-loros-bolivia-abastecido-aves-consideradas-plagas-agricolas/>. Accessed on 3 January 2024.

¹⁸¹ <https://www.lostiempos.com/actualidad/pais/20191213/rescatan-500-aves-exoticas-paz-que-tenian-como-destino-cochabamba>. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

¹⁸² <https://www.lostiempos.com/actualidad/local/20170822/decomisan-partes-animales-urkupina>. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

¹⁸³ <https://www.lostiempos.com/actualidad/cochabamba/20220816/decomisan-763-plumas-nandues-piyos-urkupina>

Trafficking of lizards

A total of 406 lizards was reported to be seized in four different incidents between 2017 and 2022, making up 53% of all reptiles seized or poached in that timeframe. Three seizures occurred in the Feria 16 de Julio in El Alto, in 2020, 2021, and 2022. The fourth seizure involved 345 dead lizards that were seized in March 2019 along with hundreds of other animals and wildlife parts and products at the La Pampa and Calatayud markets in Cochabamba.¹⁸⁴ The subspecies was not specified in any of the four seizures. In one incident, the subspecies could be identified from a photo in the media report. This concerned a seizure in December 2021 of a glass container ‘full of (live) lizards’ that was for sale in the Feria 16 de Julio in El Alto.¹⁸⁵ The lizards were Forster’s tree iguanas (*Liolaemus forsteri*), a species endemic to Bolivia that is used for traditional Andean medicine purposes.

The Feria 16 de Julio in El Alto is a known hub for the sale of Forster’s tree iguanas, known locally as ‘jaranko’. Bolivian law allows indigenous peoples to kill the animal for traditional medicine provided it is used for subsistence purposes, within their ancestral territory, and with practices prior to the Spanish invasion. The species is overexploited for illegal, commercial sales, however, and is now classified as endangered. Increased law enforcement efforts have prompted sellers to change tactics, for instance by displaying five or 10 animals while keeping the rest inside their stall. Some no longer sell entire animals but crush them and sell them as cream instead.¹⁸⁶

Trafficking of turtles and tortoises

Turtles and tortoises are the most frequently seized reptiles in Bolivia. A total of 165 specimens, all alive, was reported to be seized in 17 incidents between 2017 and 2022. Unfortunately, here too media reporting is inadequate: for 92 of the 165 specimens (56%) the species was not specified. The species that were specified included: yellow-spotted river turtle (*Podocnemis unifilis*, 66 specimens); yellow-footed tortoise (*Chelonoidis denticulata*, three specimens); red-footed tortoise (*Chelonoidis carbonaria*, two specimens); and red-eared slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*, two specimens).

Clearly yellow-spotted river turtles are the most heavily exploited testudines in Bolivia. They are targeted for their meat, their eggs, and the pet trade. As with other wildlife species, indigenous communities are allowed to hunt the turtles and harvest their eggs for their own livelihood. Here too however, illegal trade is widespread. The large-scale harvesting of yellow-spotted river turtles and Arrau turtles for human consumption has contributed to the species’ decline.¹⁸⁷

In addition to the 66 live specimens reported to be seized, law enforcers also confiscated a total of 81,345 yellow-spotted river turtle eggs in nine seizures. The largest quantity—more than 50,000 river turtle eggs—was seized in a series of raids in August and September of 2017 in the department of Beni.¹⁸⁸ In addition, 4,000 Arrau turtle (*Podocnemis expansa*) eggs were seized during the month of August 2017, at access points to Trinidad in Beni.¹⁸⁹ All seizures take place in August and September, which is the nesting season for these species. Both species have been listed in CITES Appendix II since 1975.

¹⁸⁴ <https://www.reportechaco.com/post/decomisan-774-partes-de-animales-silvestres-en-mercados>. Accessed 4 Jan 2024.

¹⁸⁵ <https://urgente.bo/noticia/rescatan-perros-y-lagartijas-que-eran-comercializados-en-la-feria-16-de-julio>

¹⁸⁶ Berton, E.F. (2023). They rely on this lizard to heal their pain. Now it’s endangered. *National Geographic*, 26 October 2023.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/traditional-medicine-lizards-bolivia-wildlife-crime>. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

¹⁸⁷ <https://news.mongabay.com/2018/03/conservationists-rush-to-save-bolivian-turtles-threatened-by-egg-trafficking/>. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

¹⁸⁸ <https://www.paginasiete.bo/sociedad/en-beni-decomisan-50000-huevos-de-tortugas-de-rio-en-menos-de-un-mes-IHPS151955>.

Accessed on 4 January 2024.

¹⁸⁹ <https://www.laregion.bo/mas-de-4-000-huevos-de-tortuga-decomisados-en-beni-solo-en-agosto/>. Accessed 4 Jan 2024.

While most river turtle eggs are destined for domestic markets, there is also evidence of trafficking to neighbouring countries. In October 2022, Chilean customs at Complejo Fronterizo, Colchane, near the border with Bolivia seized 50 river turtle eggs from a bus passenger arriving from Bolivia.¹⁹⁰

Trafficking of Yacare caimans

Bolivia allows exports of wild-caught and ranched Yacare caimans (*Caiman crocodilus yacare*, CITES Appendix II). Annually, thousands of skins, skin pieces, tails, sides, and leather products are exported.¹⁹¹ Illegal trade also persists, however, mainly for their skins and meat. A total of 172 specimens was involved in three seizures between 2017 and 2022, including 170 skins, one belt made from caiman skin, and one taxidermy. The most significant incident was in September 2017, when the Bolivian military seized 170 yacare caiman skins and 5,377 yellow-spotted river turtle eggs in Trinidad, the capital of Beni. Authorities stated that the value of the 170 skins was around US\$4,600 on the local black market but could increase by up to 80% in illicit markets in other countries.¹⁹² A seizure that occurred outside the time frame of this study but is noteworthy given its volume happened in 2013. In April of that year, 4,936 live baby Yacare caimans wild-caught in the Pantanal marshlands were seized from a truck on the road to Santa Cruz, along with 511 caiman skins.¹⁹³

Mammals

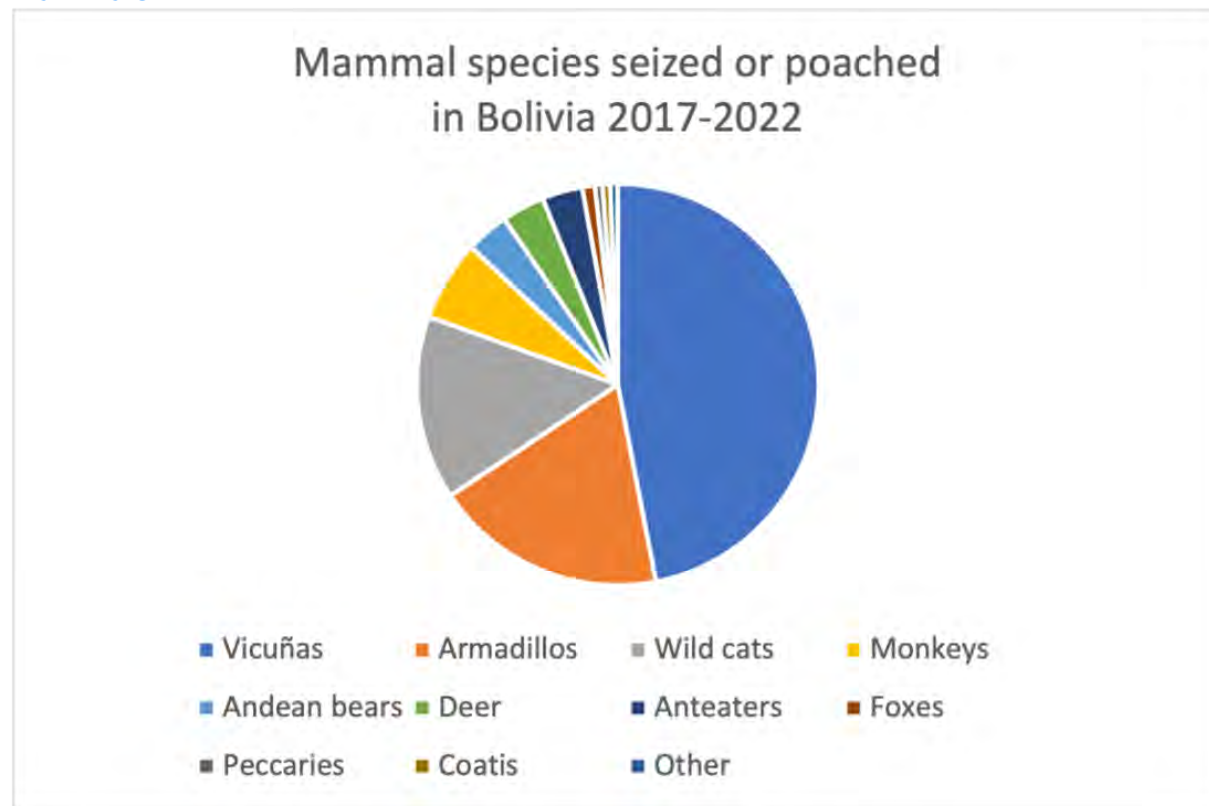


Figure 15: Mammal species seized or poached in Bolivia between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

¹⁹⁰ <https://www.elboyaldia.cl/noticia/sociedad/hallan-50-huevos-de-tortuga-de-rio-en-colchane-eran-transportados-para-consumo-huma>. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

¹⁹¹ See the CITES Trade Database, available at <https://trade.cites.org/>. Accessed on 3 January 2024.

¹⁹² <https://www.opinion.com.bo/articulo/el-pais/decomisan-5300-huevos-tortuga-170-cueros-lagarto-beni/20170905065000589080.html>. Accessed on 3 January 2024.

¹⁹³ <https://www.eluniverso.com/vida-estilo/2013/07/19/nota/1182566/extraccion-casi-5000-caimanes-sigue-impune-bolivia/>. Accessed on 3 January 2024.

Poaching of vicuñas

Nearly 50% of all mammals reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022 concerned vicuñas (*Vicugna vicugna*). In September 2022, 15 vicuñas were found dismembered with their fleece removed near Santiago de Andamarca, in the Oruro department.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, the wool of 216 vicuñas was seized in three seizures in El Alto, the hub for illegal trade in vicuña fibre:

- ▶ In May 2017, 13.34 kg of vicuña fibre was seized from a woman in the Feria de San Luis.¹⁹⁵
- ▶ In April 2018, 26 kg of vicuña fibre was seized in the Feria 16 de Julio.¹⁹⁶
- ▶ In February 2020, 20 fresh vicuña fleeces were seized from a private home.¹⁹⁷

According to authorities, five animals are killed to produce 1 kg of vicuña wool.¹⁹⁸

Vicuñas are a small camelid species that inhabit the Altiplano in the central Andes, which Bolivia shares with Argentina, Chile, and Peru. A smaller, introduced population lives in central Ecuador. The species nearly went extinct in the 1960s due to excessive hunting for their wool, which is considered the rarest and most expensive wool in the world. Conservation efforts led by the Bolivian and Peruvian governments have succeeded in recovering its numbers. A 2009 census confirmed the existence in Bolivia of around 112,000 vicuñas – 27% of the world’s vicuña population – up from 2,000 in 1969.¹⁹⁹

A system is in place for the sustainable harvest of vicuña fleece for the legal market. Every two years, local community members participating in the vicuña conservation program meet to isolate and shear the vicuñas, after which they are released back into the wild. This is time intensive and requires much capacity, however. Furthermore, the procedure to legally sell the fibre is long and cumbersome, providing an incentive for some residents to hunt and kill the vicuñas illegally instead to obtain their valuable fleece.²⁰⁰

Trafficking of armadillos

Armadillos and their parts and products are frequently seized in Bolivia. This study found 92 armadillos reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. Two live specimens were seized; the other 90 specimens involved body parts, products, and meat. Andean hairy armadillos (*Chaetophractus nationi*) appear to be the most targeted subspecies, with 48 specimens. Forty-three specimens were not identified; lastly, one giant armadillo (*Priodontes maximus*) was seized.

Andean hairy armadillos are considered a lucky animal in traditional Andean culture. Unfortunately, this has made them a target for poachers. They are killed and used in traditional medicine, as lucky charms, and also kept as pets. Their carapaces are used to manufacture ‘charangos’ (traditional music instruments) and the whole bodies are made into ‘matracas’ or ‘maracas’ (rattles), which are used in traditional dances—especially during the carnival in Oruro. They are also made into souvenirs. Overexploitation has resulted in the species’ decline. In fewer than 30 years, they have disappeared from part of their habitat.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁴ https://eldeber.com.bo/pais/degolladas-y-esquiladas-asi-fueron-encontradas-15-vicunas-en-menos-de-dos-semanas_294510. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

¹⁹⁵ http://www.eldiario.net/noticias/2017/2017_05/nt170525/nacional.php?n=43. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

¹⁹⁶ <https://eju.tv/2018/04/la-paz-5-mercados-negros-de-el-alto-trafican-con-fibra-de-vicuana/>. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

¹⁹⁷ Robin des Bois On The Trail, nr. 28, Page 73: https://www.robindesbois.org/wp-content/uploads/ON_THE_TRAIL_28.pdf. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

¹⁹⁸ http://www.eldiario.net/noticias/2017/2017_05/nt170525/nacional.php?n=43. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

¹⁹⁹ <https://bolivianexpress.org/blog/posts/saving-the-vicuana>. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

²⁰⁰ <https://bolivianexpress.org/blog/posts/saving-the-vicuana>. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

²⁰¹ IUCN SSC Anteater, Sloth and Armadillo Specialist Group (2017). *Chaetophractus vellerosus*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2017: e.T89604632A119877197. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2017-3.RLTS.T89604632A119877197.en>. Accessed on 5 January 2024.

It is illegal to hunt or trade Andean hairy armadillos in Bolivia, and since 2015, it is illegal to sell or own a new armadillo rattle. Dancers who already owned rattles in 2015 were allowed to keep them. Local enforcement authorities are reportedly doing little to enforce the law, however.²⁰²

Andean hairy armadillos are not the only wild animals that are used for folkloristic and/or traditional medicine purposes in Bolivia. Other wild animals that are used for traditional medicine, rituals, folk costumes, and as amulets include: foxes (noses, tails, and paws); viscachas (tails and paws), anteaters (tongues and paws); jaguars (fangs, faeces, skin, and blood); rheas (feathers, fat, and eggs); Andean condors (feathers); yellow-spotted river turtles (oil); bats (blood); toads (taxidermied); snakes (powder, skins, and eggs); lizards (fat); and alligators (skins).²⁰³

Bushmeat poaching

Bolivians have a deep-rooted culture of eating bushmeat, the meat of wild animals such as deer, peccaries, armadillo, caiman, and tapir. Indigenous people can legally hunt wildlife for their own consumption. Subsistence hunting is considered sustainable and provides an important source of protein for poor communities. Commercial trade in bushmeat is illegal, however, and there is evidence that this is prevalent in many rural areas of Bolivia. Conservation experts have expressed concern about the increased killing and trade of bushmeat to feed a new demand from foreigners working on infrastructure works and gold mining. Domestic consumption and trade are also significant, however. Many rural communities in Bolivia reportedly hunt, eat, and sell anything they can find, and there is hardly any enforcement.²⁰⁴ A study in 2003 estimated that 10 million animals are killed each year in Bolivia during the Brazil nut harvest season, when many people camp in the forest for long stretches of time, living off wildlife as a main food source.²⁰⁵

The illegal bushmeat trade does not appear to be a law enforcement priority however, as only one bushmeat seizure (40 kg of armadillo meat seized in September 2021 in Trinidad²⁰⁶) was identified between 2017 and 2022.

Wild cat persecution and trafficking

Wild cats in Bolivia are taken alive for the pet trade (commonly as cubs, with the mother likely killed) and killed for their body parts. Jaguars are furthermore frequent victims of human-wildlife conflict, in response to depredation on livestock and domestic animals by jaguars and out of fear of attacks on humans.²⁰⁷ Between 2017 and 2022, a total of 73 wild cats was involved in seizures and poaching incidents. This included:

- ▶ 61 jaguars (*Panthera onca*): three live specimens, five dead, and parts and products of 53 specimens
- ▶ 10 pumas (*Puma concolor*): two live and eight dead specimens
- ▶ one live Geoffroy's cat (*Leopardus geoffroyi*)

²⁰² <https://www.illegalwildlifetrade.net/2017/08/31/not-bright-future-andean-hairy-armadillo/> and <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/endangered-armadillos-poached-for-annual-carnival-of-oruro>

²⁰³ <https://www.lostiempos.com/actualidad/local/20160508/usan-animales-silvestres-curas-milagrosas>; <https://www.opinion.com.bo/articulo/cochabamba/denuncian-ahora-usan-lengua-oso-hormiguero-como-amuleto/20170821210400587607.html>; <https://es.mongabay.com/2018/11/juicios-trafico-jaguares-en-bolivia-colmillos/>. Accessed on 5 January 2024.

²⁰⁴ Verheij, P. (2019). An assessment of wildlife poaching and trafficking in Bolivia and Suriname. IUCN NL, Amsterdam. Available at: <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/49026>. Accessed on 3 January 2024.

²⁰⁵ Santivañez, J.L. (2003). Impacto de la cacería sobre la fauna silvestre en bosques de producción castañera en la Amazonía de Bolivia, Serie Técnica 3/2003. Programa PROMAB. Riberalta, Bolivia.

²⁰⁶ <https://www.laregion.bo/mas-de-4-000-huevos-de-tortuga-decomisados-en-beni-solo-en-agosto/>. Accessed 5 Jan. 2024

²⁰⁷ Negrões, N. et al (2016). Conflictos con jaguar (*Panthera onca*) en Bolivia: del dano al ganado a la percepción de riesgo. In C. Castano-Uribe, C. A. Lasso, R. Hoogesteijn, A. Diaz-Pulido, & E. Payan (Eds.), II. Conflictos Entre Felinos y Humanos En America Latina. Bogota, Colombia: Instituto de Investigacion de Recursos Biologicos Alexander von Humboldt.

- ▶ one unidentified specimen, whose skin parts were used in a belt

Jaguar poaching and trafficking is a significant concern in Bolivia that has been well documented in numerous publications and media reports.²⁰⁸ In 2020, the Bolivian government in its response to CITES Notification 055/2020²⁰⁹ reported that an average of 61 jaguars is poached in Bolivia annually and an average of 30 specimens seized from traffickers.²¹⁰

A 2018 study reported a significant rise in jaguar trafficking in Bolivia since 2012. Twenty-four jaguar seizures were identified between 2009 and January 2018, affecting a minimum of 324 jaguars (two live specimens, 322 dead). Most seizures (22) took place in Bolivia, one in the USA (a jaguar skull shipped from Bolivia in 2012); and one at the Beijing airport (119 canine teeth and 13 claws seized in March 2015 from a Chinese businessman with an enterprise in Bolivia). The study found that the surge in jaguar trafficking appeared to be driven almost entirely by Chinese demand. Of the 22 Bolivian seizures, 17 cases involved Chinese individuals. The seizure data also highlighted China as the main destination for jaguar parts, with air parcel post the favoured method for shipping. Between 2014 and 2016, Bolivia's mail company Correos de Bolivia seized 16 parcels containing 300 jaguar canines and other parts addressed to people in China.²¹¹ The Bolivian government, alarmed by the surge in jaguar trafficking, took a proactive stance in detecting and prosecuting jaguar traffickers. No fewer than 21 people were prosecuted, including 17 Chinese-origin residents. By 2020, five people had been sentenced.²¹²

This study identified three poaching incidents and five seizures reported by the media between 2017 and 2022. Three seizures occurred in 2017, and two in 2018.

The three jaguar poaching incidents reported in May 2019²¹³, June 2021²¹⁴, and July 2022²¹⁵, only became known because images of the poachers with the dead animals were posted on social media. Particularly tragic was the poaching in July 2022 of an adult female jaguar with her two cubs. When authorities raided the home of the suspect, who was identified because his daughter proudly posted images of him with the dead jaguars, they found 11 jaguar teeth. Most likely these were meant to be sold to traffickers.

²⁰⁸ See e.g. Nuñez, A. and Aliaga-Rossel, E. (2017). Jaguar fangs trafficking by Chinese in Bolivia. *CATNews*. 50–51; Brackowski, A. et al. (2019) The ayahuasca tourism boom: an undervalued demand driver for jaguar body parts? *Conservation Science and Practice*. 1, e126; Verheij, P. (2019). An Assessment of Wildlife Poaching and Trafficking in Bolivia and Suriname. IUCN National Committee of The Netherlands, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Arias, M. (2021). The Illegal Trade in Jaguars (*Panthera onca*). CITES Secretariat, Geneva, Switzerland.

²⁰⁹ CITES Notification to the Parties No. 2020/055. Geneva, 2 September 2020. Request for input for study on illegal trade in jaguars (*Panthera onca*): <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/notif/E-Notif-2020-055.pdf>

²¹⁰ https://cites.org/sites/default/files/articles/CITES_Study_on_Illegal_Trade_in_Jaguars_ESP.pdf

²¹¹ Verheij, P. (2019). An assessment of wildlife poaching and trafficking in Bolivia and Suriname. IUCN NL, Amsterdam. Available at: <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/49026>. Accessed on 3 January 2024.

²¹² <https://efeverde.com/jaguars-en-bolivia-bajan-incautaciones-crecen-sospechas-por-nuevas-modalidades-de-las-mafias/>. Accessed on 8 January 2024.

²¹³ <https://www.elciudadano.com/medio-ambiente/un-cazador-furtivo-muestra-en-facebook-como-despelleja-a-un-jaguar/12/03/>. Accessed on 8 January 2024.

²¹⁴ https://correodelsur.com/sociedad/20210630_revelan-videos-del-brutal-biocidio-de-un-jaguar-en-el-oriente-boliviano.html. Accessed on 8 January 2024.

²¹⁵ https://eldeber.com.bo/edicion-impresa/matan-a-jaguar-hembra-y-sus-dos-cachorros-en-zona-de-influencia-del-madidi_290986. Accessed on 8 January 2024.

The five jaguar seizures reported in 2017 and 2018 concerned:

- ▶ In June 2017, a jaguar cub was seized in Villa Tunari that was advertised on social media for US\$ 800. The seller received a sentence of three years in prison.²¹⁶
- ▶ In June 2017, a jaguar cub was seized from a private property near Porongo along with a boa constrictor, a capuchin monkey, and 'many adult jaguar skins'.²¹⁷
- ▶ In June 2017, a 10-year-old jaguar was seized from a private property in Yalaca.²¹⁸
- ▶ In March 2018, a jaguar skull and teeth were seized in Trinidad that were advertised online.²¹⁹
- ▶ In February 2018, some 185 jaguar teeth, eight jaguar molars, two jaguar claws, three jaguar skins, and one jaguar skin coat were seized from a Chinese restaurant in Santa Cruz along with a giant armadillo claw, two rattlesnake tails, two marsh deer antlers, one bag made from African leopard, and 11 African elephant ivory figurines. Also seized were a large sum of domestic and foreign currency and a loaded .22 calibre gun. In November of that year, the owners of the restaurant, a Chinese man and his wife, were sentenced to three and four years in prison.²²⁰ This unprecedented seizure provides evidence of the significant level of jaguar and other wildlife trafficking activity by Chinese residents in Bolivia, associated financial crimes (likely laundering of illicit cash generated by these wildlife crimes and tax evasion), and possible convergence with violent crime.

Since 2018, no seizures of jaguars/jaguar parts have been reported. This might signify a reduction in illegal trade and/or reduced law enforcement effort, but it is more likely that Bolivia-based criminal networks engaged in jaguar trafficking have changed their modus operandi and found different avenues to ship jaguar parts.

Under-cover NGO investigations conducted between 2018 and 2022 found that Chinese mafia based in Bolivia that are involved in illegal gambling rackets, money laundering, and cocaine trafficking in addition to running legitimate businesses such as restaurants and shops, are also trafficking jaguar parts to China. The preferred means of smuggling jaguar parts is by air, with individuals carrying the jaguar parts in their luggage or on their bodies. Traffickers allegedly often bribe high-level police officers to facilitate jaguar smuggling. Direct routes and airports with stricter controls are avoided. Popular transit points are Brazil, Vietnam, and Hong Kong SAR. In some instances, international shipping services are used. The investigations also identified new smuggling routes across the land border of Bolivia with Brazil in 2022, as it became more difficult to smuggle jaguars and other wildlife products outside of Bolivia.²²¹

While the links with China have received much attention, it is important to note that domestic trade in and demand for jaguar parts are also significant in Bolivia. A study published in 2021 highlighted that jaguar body parts, such as skins, fat, and teeth are commonly used for decorative, medicinal, and cultural purposes.²²²

Research published in 2023 furthermore found that inmates of the Mocovi prison in Trinidad purchase skins of jaguars and other wild animals from hunters and vendors at local markets. The inmates produce

²¹⁶ <http://www.lostiempos.com/actualidad/local/20170613/condenan-trafficante-jaguar-tres-anos>. Accessed 8 Jan. 2024.

²¹⁷ <http://blogverdebolivia.blogspot.pt/2017/06/>. Accessed on 8 January 2024.

²¹⁸ https://elpotosi.net/nacional/20170609_policia-forestal-rescata-a-jaguar-de-propiedad-rural.html Accessed 8 Jan. 2024.

²¹⁹ https://eldeber.com.bo/bolivia/detienen-a-un-hombre-que-ofertaba-colmillos-de-jaguar-por-internet_95531

²²⁰ <https://www.lostiempos.com/actualidad/pais/20181110/sentencian-3-4-anos-carcel-2-chinos-caso-traffic-colmillos>; <https://es.mongabay.com/2018/11/sentencia-trafficantes-colmillos-de-jaguar-bolivia/>. Accessed on 8 January 2024.

²²¹ Crosta, A. et al (2022). The criminal networks behind jaguar trafficking. IUCN/Earth League International, 2022. Available at: <https://www.iucn.nl/app/uploads/2022/11/IUCN-NL-Operation-Jaguar-Summary-Report-2022.pdf>. Accessed on 8 January 2024.

²²² Arias, M. Et al (2021). Prevalence and characteristics of illegal jaguar trade in north-western Bolivia. *Conservation Science and Practice*. 3(7). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.444>. Accessed on 8 January 2024.

wallets, hats, purses, and other goods from the skins and sell these back to vendors to provide income for their daily sustenance. There were also indications of large bulk orders for wildlife products being placed by a non-Bolivian client base.²²³

Primate trafficking

Like elsewhere in Latin America, monkeys are popular pets in Bolivia. Thirty-two monkeys were seized in 16 incidents reported between 2017 and 2022, involving at least seven species. Sixty per cent of these (19 specimens) were seized in four incidents in markets in El Alto, Cochabamba, La Paz, and Caranavi, where the animals were offered for sale. Two monkeys had been used to attract tourists in Irupana and Caranavi. The remaining monkeys were seized from private homes where they were kept as pets or had been abandoned.

Most seized are capuchin monkeys (19 specimens), including white-fronted capuchins (*Cebus albifrons*); tufted capuchins (*Cebus apella*); and black-striped capuchins (*Cebus libidinosus*). For most capuchin monkeys the subspecies was not provided. Also seized were a howler monkey (*Alouatta* sp.); a Peruvian spider monkey (*Ateles chamek*); and an unidentified spider monkey (*Ateles* sp.). Another eight monkeys were seized whose species were not specified.

Andean bear trafficking

Noteworthy, and lastly, is the illegal trade in Andean bears (*Tremarctos ornatus*) and their parts. Andean bears, also known as spectacled bears, are endemic to the tropical Andes regions of Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, and potentially Panama.²²⁴ They are often illegally killed as a livestock nuisance and to supply the demand for bear parts in local black markets. Sometimes they are kept as pets. The species is listed in CITES Appendix I and has been classified as 'vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List. They are among the carnivores that are most likely to move toward extinction.²²⁵

Between 2017 and 2022, 14 specimens were reported to be poached and three live specimens seized that were offered for sale.

Amphibians

Twenty-nine amphibians were reported to be seized in three incidents in Bolivia between 2017 and 2022.

- ▶ In August 2017, six taxidermied toads (*Rhinella* sp.) were seized from the market in Urkupiña along with 441 other wildlife parts and products that were sold for use by dancers in the Urkupiña religious festival.²²⁶
- ▶ The other 23 amphibians, all live specimens, were Titicaca water frogs (*Telmatobius culeus*). One specimen was seized from a market vendor in El Alto in August 2018.²²⁷ In December 2020, 22 Titicaca water frogs were seized from sellers in the Mercado La Pampa in Cochabamba, along with 75 turtles, 15 doves, and four parrots.²²⁸

²²³ Elwin, A. et al (2023). Going over the wall: insights into the illegal production of jaguar products in a Bolivian prison. *Oryx*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0030605323000492>. Accessed on 8 January 2024.

²²⁴ <http://www.bearconservation.org.uk/Andean%20Bear%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>. Accessed on 9 January 2024.

²²⁵ Velez-Liendo, X. and García-Rangel, S. (2017). *Tremarctos ornatus* (errata version published in 2018). The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2017: e.T22066A123792952. Available at: <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2017-3.RLTS.T22066A45034047.en>. Accessed on 9 January 2024.

²²⁶ <https://www.opinion.com.bo/articulo/cochabamba/decomisan-447-partes-animales-silvestres-utilizadas-urcupi-ntilde/20170821085300587506.html>. Accessed on 9 January 2024.

²²⁷ <https://radioluisdefuentes.com/especiales/rescatan-en-el-alto-a-cria-de-rana-gigante-traida-del-titicaca-esta-especie-es-unica-en-el-mundo-y-en-peligro-critico-de-extincion/>. Accessed on 9 January 2024.

²²⁸ <https://www.reduno.com.bo/noticias/decomisan-animales-silvestres-en-el-mercado-la-pampa-202012318741>

Titicaca water frogs are an endangered amphibian species endemic to the Lake Titicaca basin in the Andean highlands of Bolivia and Peru. Regulations in Peru and Bolivia prohibit the removal of this amphibian from its habitat, but this has not stopped the trade.²²⁹ They are captured for food and for use in medicinal products. The medicinal use includes use as an aphrodisiac and to treat various ailments, such as memory loss, impotence, and asthma, in Peru and Bolivia. They are traded whole and fresh, desiccated, as leather, as a juice, or as flour. Most commercial sale is for domestic consumption in Peru and Bolivia, but there is also evidence of illegal exports to markets in the USA, Canada, Europe, Brazil, and Japan.²³⁰

The few specimens seized in Bolivia suggest the levels of illegal trade in Bolivia are relatively low compared to Peru, which reported 5,776 seized specimens between 2017 and 2022. This could also be a result of inadequate enforcement in Bolivia, however.

Key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes

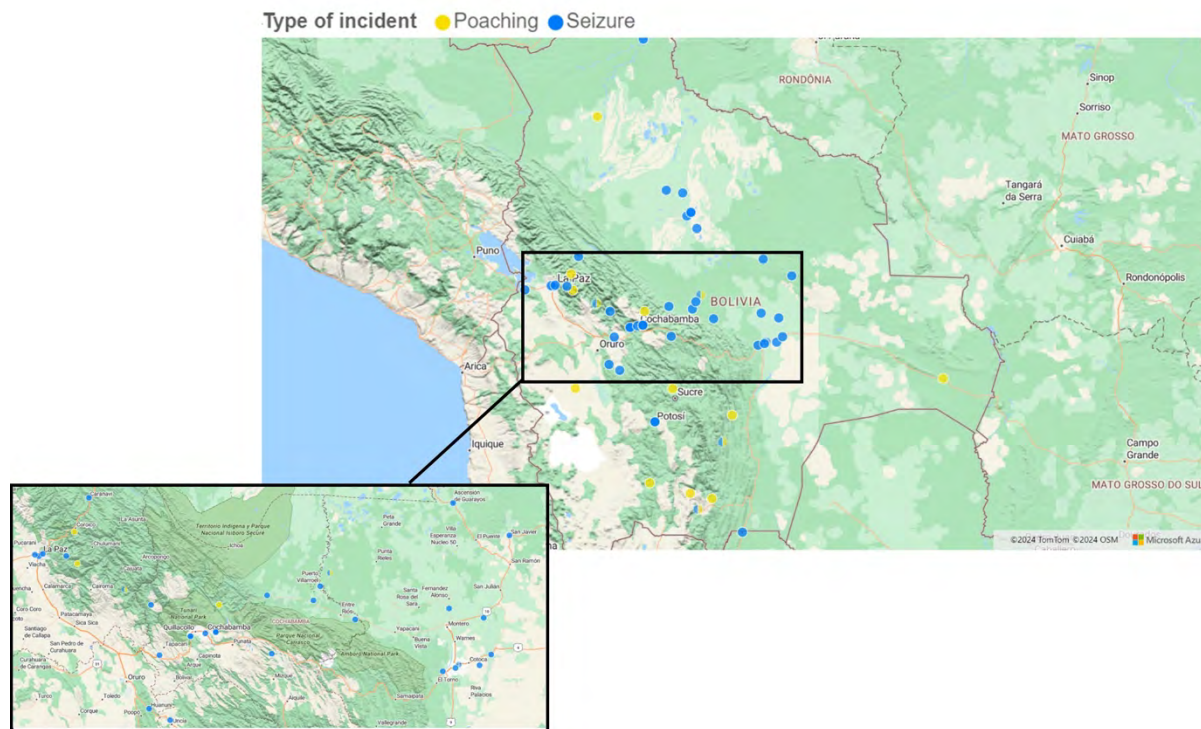


Figure 2016: Locations of seizures and poaching incidents in Bolivia reported between 2017 and 2022

As mentioned above, the quality of media reporting on seizures is rather poor in Bolivia. Apart from the fact that (sub)species are often not specified, media reports are often also vague about the circumstances of a seizure. Media reports will often only mention what was seized, without providing information on the location of the seizure, where and how specimens were transported, their origin and destination, and perpetrator(s). This has hindered an analysis of key trafficking nodes based on the seizure data.

²²⁹ <https://radioluisdefuentes.com/especiales/rescatan-en-el-alto-a-cria-de-rana-gigante-traida-del-titicaca-esta-especie-es-unica-en-el-mundo-y-en-peligro-critico-de-extincion/>. Accessed on 11 December 2023.

²³⁰ IUCN SSC Amphibian Specialist Group. 2020. *Telmatobius culeus*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2020. Available at: <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2020-2.RLTS.T57334A178948447.en>. Accessed on 12 December 2023.

Few interceptions of illicit wildlife shipments en route

In Bolivia, relatively few interceptions are made of illicit shipments en route, in comparison to other countries with significant levels of illegal wildlife trade. Only 11 out of the 113 seizures were made on roads or rivers. This included seven seizures of river turtle eggs, two from boats and five from vehicles, and four seizures of birds:

- ▶ In July 2017, 10 Chilean flamingos were seized from a car that were headed for Cochabamba.
- ▶ In December 2019, 600 birds were seized from a female bus passenger headed for Cochabamba.
- ▶ In December 2021, 150 yellow-chevroned parakeets were seized from a van destined for Yacuiba.
- ▶ In June 2022, 570 saffron finches headed for Cochabamba and Santa Cruz were seized from several vehicles.

No seizures were reported in Bolivia's airports, which is concerning as there is evidence of traffickers shipping wildlife, including jaguar parts and products, out via airports.

Law enforcement efforts in Bolivia appear mostly focused on illegal wildlife sales in markets and illegal ownership. Between 2017 and 2022, just over a third of wildlife was seized in markets; a total of 21 seizures was made in markets, involving a minimum number of 1,047 animals. Seizures in private homes of animals kept as pets in private properties totalled 24, involving 83 animals.

Key hubs for illegal sales in markets

Based on the seizure data, the three main hubs for illegal wildlife sales are the cities of El Alto, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz de la Sierra.

- ▶ Seven seizures involving 269 animals and/or their parts and products were reported in El Alto, mostly in the Feria 16 de Julio as well as Feria San Luis. El Alto is Bolivia's second-largest city located adjacent to La Paz in the Altiplano highlands of west Bolivia, not far from Lake Titicaca and the border with Peru.
- ▶ Six seizures involving 567 animals and/or their parts and products were reported in Cochabamba, mostly in Mercado La Pampa as well as Mercado Calatayud. Cochabamba is Bolivia's fourth largest city, located in central Bolivia in a valley in the Andes mountain range.
- ▶ Four seizures involving 93 animals and/or their parts and products were reported in several markets in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, including in the Mercado Los Pozos and Feria Barrio Lindo. Santa Cruz is the largest city in Bolivia, situated in the eastern tropical lowlands of Bolivia.

These three cities are reportedly also the main centres for illegal bird trade in Bolivia.²³¹

The numbers of animals and/or their parts and products seized in these cities are still a vast underrepresentation of actual volumes trafficked. For instance, the department of Santa Cruz, of which Santa Cruz de la Sierra is the capital, receives at least 10 phone calls daily to its Fauna Viva 800-142052 hotline to report on illegal trade or possession of wild animals. Authorities report there are groups of people who constantly offer wildlife in street fairs and markets in the capital of Santa Cruz and on the internet.²³²

²³¹ Asociación Armonía, Tráfico de aves silvestres en Bolivia, Boletín informativo, Año 14, No 1. Noviembre 2008. Available at: <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/52860096/trafico-de-aves-silvestres-en-bolivia>. Accessed 10 Jan. 2024.

²³² <https://eju.tv/2022/08/cada-dia-se-reportan-diez-llamadas-que-alertan-sobre-danos-a-animales-silvestres/>. Accessed on 10 January 2024.

Sales on social media

Illegal wildlife trade through social media is an acknowledged issue of concern in Bolivia. In 2018, an official of the Santa Cruz government highlighted that the trade in wild animals had reduced in markets and fairs and migrated to social networks, sites that are monitored by authorities.²³³

In 2022, Bolivian media reported that the illegal online wildlife trade had increased in recent years, making this illicit business more visible. Birds, mammals, reptiles, and other species are advertised online for different purposes, either to keep them as pets or to use their parts for natural medicine or for folkloristic purposes. A Bolivian wildlife rescue expert commented that 'traffickers are so smart that now they do it through the networks, they sell to you through WhatsApp'.²³⁴

Research published in 2023 found evidence of illegal online trade in jaguar parts in Bolivia. The study looked at potential jaguar trade across 31 online platforms in seven languages (Spanish, Portuguese, English, Dutch, French, Chinese, and Vietnamese). Of the 230 posts that were identified between 2009 and 2019, 19 online advertisements of jaguar parts were linked to Bolivia, involving 12 teeth, four heads, and three skins.²³⁵

This study identified the following six seizures reported between 2017 and 2022 that were related to illegal wildlife sales on social media:

- ▶ In June 2017, a man in Villa Tunari was sentenced to three years in prison for advertising a jaguar cub on social media for US\$800.²³⁶
- ▶ In August 2017, a turquoise-fronted amazon was seized in Trinidad after authorities received a complaint about a woman offering the parrot for sale on Facebook.²³⁷
- ▶ In March 2018, a man was arrested in Trinidad for advertising a jaguar skull and teeth online.²³⁸
- ▶ Also in March 2018, a sting operation by authorities in Santa Cruz led to the arrest of a man and the seizure of a toco toucan (*Ramphastos toco*) that he had advertised on Facebook.²³⁹
- ▶ In August 2021, more than 4,000 Arrau turtle eggs were seized at access points to Trinidad. The eggs had been advertised on Facebook and WhatsApp.²⁴⁰
- ▶ In June 2022, a woman in Cochabamba was arrested for advertising five toucans, five blue and yellow macaw hatchlings, three ducks, and four tortoises online. The animals were about to be shipped to Chile. The woman was a repeat offender.²⁴¹

Convergence

No seizures were identified between 2017 and 2022 that provide indications of wildlife being trafficked alongside other illicit commodities. However, as noted above, the seizure of 185 jaguar fangs and other wildlife parts with a large sum of money and a loaded .22 calibre gun from a Chinese restaurant in 2018 reveals possible financial crimes associated with wildlife trafficking, such as money laundering and tax evasion, as well as a possible convergence with violent crime.

²³³ https://eldeber.com.bo/santa-cruz/salvan-tucan-que-iban-a-vender-por-facebook_103401. Accessed 10 January 2024.

²³⁴ <https://www.lostiempos.com/actualidad/cochabamba/20220515/rescatan-79-animales-silvestres-4-meses-crece-venta-ilegal-rrss>. Accessed on 10 January 2024.

²³⁵ Polisar J, Davies C, Morcatty T, Da Silva M, Zhang S, Duchez K, et al. (2023) Multi-lingual multi-platform investigations of online trade in jaguar parts. *PLoS ONE*. 18(1): e0280039. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0280039>. Accessed on 10 January 2024.

²³⁶ <https://www.lostiempos.com/actualidad/local/20170613/condenan-trafficante-jaguar-tres-anos>. Accessed 10 Jan 2024.

²³⁷ https://elpais.bo/archivo-sociedad/20170803_263249-decomisan-loro-ofrecido-en-facebook.html. Accessed on 10 January 2024.

²³⁸ https://eldeber.com.bo/bolivia/detienen-a-un-hombre-que-ofertaba-colmillos-de-jaguar-por-internet_95531

²³⁹ https://eldeber.com.bo/santa-cruz/salvan-tucan-que-iban-a-vender-por-facebook_103401. Accessed 10 January 2024.

²⁴⁰ <https://www.laregion.bo/mas-de-4-000-huevos-de-tortuga-decomisados-en-beni-solo-en-agosto/>. Accessed on 10 January 2024.

²⁴¹ <https://noticias.unitel.bo/sociedad/rescatan-a-pichones-de-paraba-tucanes-patos-silvestres-y-tortugas-que-iban-a-ser-enviados-a-chile-OFUN144486>. Accessed on 10 January 2024.

Convergence between jaguar trafficking and other types of organized crime was furthermore highlighted by NGO investigations between 2018 and 2022. These found that Chinese mafia based in Bolivia involved in illegal gambling rackets, money laundering, and cocaine trafficking in addition to running legitimate businesses such as restaurants and shops, are trafficking jaguar parts to China.²⁴²

Transboundary trafficking routes

Bolivia is both a source for wildlife trafficked abroad and a destination for wildlife smuggled from neighbouring countries. Bolivia is also believed to be a transit country, e.g., for illegal wildlife trade between Brazil and Peru.²⁴³ This mirrors Bolivia's role as a transit country for the smuggling of drugs, weapons, and humans from Brazil, Paraguay, and Peru.²⁴⁴ According to Bolivian authorities, wildlife smuggling occurs across all the borders that Bolivia shares with Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Peru.²⁴⁵

More than 90% of trafficked wildlife is sold directly on the local market and through social networks, while species considered rare, charismatic, or threatened are targeted for sales abroad.²⁴⁶

Bolivia ↔ Peru

- ▶ Two seizures, one in Bolivia, and one in Peru, demonstrate illegal trade in Peruvian saffron finches to Bolivia:
 - ▶ In January 2018, 581 saffron finches (including 100 dead) were seized from a bus in Puno, a Peruvian city on Lake Titicaca in the south of Peru. The bus was headed for Bolivia.²⁴⁷
 - ▶ In June 2022, more than 570 saffron finches were seized in Guaqui, a Bolivian town on Lake Titicaca close to the border with Peru. Most likely they were smuggled in from Peru.²⁴⁸
- ▶ Bolivians frequently travel to Peru to sell traditional handicrafts, some of which are made from wild animals. In May 2017, two Bolivians were arrested with a large quantity of illicit wildlife in the craft fairs of Juliaca and Puno, near the Bolivian border.²⁴⁹

Bolivia ↔ Chile

- ▶ In January 2017, two turquoise-fronted amazon hatchlings were seized during a routine inspection of a bus in Chile, route 15 between Huara and Colchane (border town with Bolivia) in the Tarapacá Region. A 30-year-old man Chilean man who intended to take the parrots to Bolivia was arrested.²⁵⁰
- ▶ In October 2018, Chilean Customs at the Quillagua outpost seized a rhea egg hidden in the luggage of a foreign passenger travelling on an international bus coming from Cochabamba, Bolivia.²⁵¹

²⁴² Crosta, A. et al (2022). The criminal networks behind jaguar trafficking. IUCN/Earth League International, 2022. Available at: <https://www.iucn.nl/app/uploads/2022/11/IUCN-NL-Operation-Jaguar-Summary-Report-2022.pdf>. Accessed on 27 December 2023.

²⁴³ Herrera M. and Hennessey, B. (2007). Quantifying the illegal parrot trade in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, with emphasis on threatened species. *Bird Conservation International*. 2007;17(4):295-300. doi:10.1017/S0959270907000858. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

²⁴⁴ <https://ocindex.net/country/bolivia>

²⁴⁵ Tráfico ilegal de vida silvestre Bolivia, Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Agua, Dirección General de Biodiversidad y Áreas Protegidas 2013. Available at: <https://www.slideshare.net/vladyvostok/guia-control-trfico>. Accessed on 11 Jan 2024.

²⁴⁶ <https://news.mongabay.com/2016/12/wildlife-for-sale-jaguars-are-the-new-trafficking-victims-in-bolivia/>

²⁴⁷ <https://www.servindi.org/actualidad-noticias/01/02/2018/serfor-rescata-mas-de-580-aves-boton-de-oro-de-procedencia-ilegal-en>. Accessed on 13 December 2023.

²⁴⁸ <https://www.la-razon.com/sociedad/2022/06/27/al-menos-570-canarios-fueron-rescatados-en-guaqui/>

²⁴⁹ <https://www.servindi.org/actualidad-noticias/13/05/2017/en-operativo-conjunto-rescataron-animales-silvestres-que-eran>. Accessed on 20 December 2023.

²⁵⁰ <https://www.soychile.cl/Iquique/Policial/2017/01/10/440295/Loros-hablaron-y-delataron-al-contrabandista-que-los-llevaba-desde-Bolivia-a-Chile.aspx>. Accessed on 10 January 2024.

²⁵¹ <https://aduananews.com/incautan-huevo-de-nandu-especie-en-peligro-extincion/>. Accessed on 11 January 2024.

- ▶ In November 2018, a Bolivian woman who had tried to smuggle a red and green macaw, a blue and yellow macaw, and four turquoise-fronted parrots on a bus travelling from Cochabamba, Bolivia, to Iquique in Chile was arrested at the Complejo Fronterizo, Colchane.²⁵²
- ▶ In June 2022, five toucans, five blue and yellow macaw hatchlings, three ducks, and four tortoises were seized from a woman in Cochabamba who advertised them online. The animals were about to be shipped to Chile.²⁵³
- ▶ In October 2022, Chilean customs at Complejo Fronterizo, Colchane near the border with Bolivia seized 50 river turtle eggs from a bus passenger arriving from Bolivia.²⁵⁴

Argentina > Bolivia

In August 2021, Argentinian authorities seized 45 vicuña skins and .22 calibre ammunition transported on donkeys by two suspected poachers in La Quiaca, Jujuy, on the border with Bolivia. One of the men escaped, and the other, a Bolivian, was arrested.²⁵⁵ Bolivians are known to enter Jujuy province in Argentina to hunt vicuñas for their skins.²⁵⁶

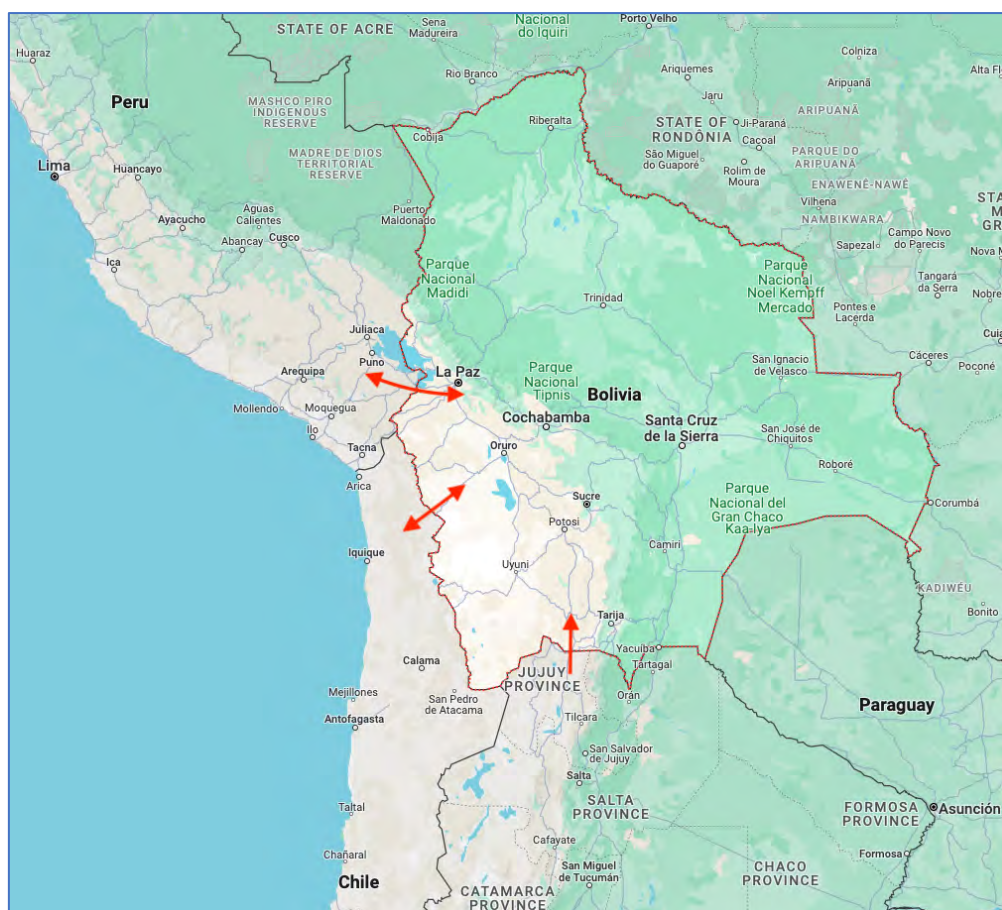


Figure 2117: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes to/from Bolivia based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022.

²⁵² <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1397798833689495&set=boliviana-intent%C3%B3-meter-aves-en-un-aguayo-se-trata-de-dos-guacamayos-y-cuatro-lo>. Accessed on 11 January 2024.

²⁵³ <https://noticias.unitel.bo/sociedad/rescatan-a-pichones-de-paraba-tucanes-patos-silvestres-y-tortugas-que-iban-a-ser-enviados-a-chile-OFUN144486>. Accessed on 10 January 2024.

²⁵⁴ <https://www.elboyardia.cl/noticia/sociedad/hallan-50-huevos-de-tortuga-de-rio-en-colchane-eran-transportados-para-consumo-huma>. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

²⁵⁵ <https://www.ellitoral.com.ar/corrientes/2021-8-1-1-0-0-sorprendieron-a-cazadores-con-45-cueros-de-vicuna-en-la-puna-jujena>. Accessed on 11 January 2024.

²⁵⁶ <https://www.somosjujuy.com.ar/jujuy/ciudadanos-bolivia-cruzan-jujuy-cazan-vicunas-trabajan-agilizar-sanciones-n65380>. Accessed on 11 January 2024.

Law enforcement efforts

Bolivia has strong laws in place that strictly prohibit the hunting and trade of wildlife. Exploitation of wildlife (including for consumption and pet ownership) remains the norm in Bolivian culture, however, and this study shows poaching and illegal wildlife trade are widespread. Law enforcers are sometimes met with aggression by wildlife vendors, who are reportedly organized in associations and resist any efforts to ensure their compliance with the law. For example, a law enforcement officer responsible for the environment in Rurrenabaque was almost lynched in 2017 when he tried to confiscate various wildlife products, including bushmeat, jaguar wallets, and lizard belts that were being sold at a fair.²⁵⁷

The rate of arrests is low in Bolivia. A total of 35 people was arrested in 15 seizure incidents reported between 2017 and 2022. This means only 13% of seizures in Bolivia resulted in the suspect(s) being arrested (the regional average is 27%). In two additional wildlife crime cases, the media reported that the prosecutors' office had filed criminal proceedings against the suspect without mentioning whether they were arrested.

Three of the incidents involved jaguar trafficking/poaching, apparently considered a priority by the Bolivian prosecutors' office. Worthy of mention is the arrest of 15 market vendors and seizure of 25 stuffed wild animals and 63 cats and dogs at the Feria 16 de Julio in El Alto in May 2022.²⁵⁸ These arrests were unusual as illegal sellers are seldom arrested during raids.

Apart from the low rate of arrests, law enforcement deterrence in Bolivia is negatively impacted by the low conviction rate for wildlife crime cases. According to information provided in 2018 by Bolivia's Minister of Environment and Water, only 10 of the 82 criminal proceedings opened for wildlife trafficking between 2008 and 2018 have resulted in an enforceable sentence.²⁵⁹

The primary law enforcement agencies charged with fighting wildlife trafficking in Bolivia are the Forestry and Environmental Police (Policía Forestal Medio Ambiental, POFOMA), and the Special Police Force in the Fight against Crime (Fuerza Especial de Lucha Contra el Crimen, FELCC). Regional and local governments are also mandated to enforce Bolivia's wildlife protection laws. Some, particularly the governments of La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz, have shown commitment to clamp down on wildlife trafficking. The Santa Cruz Department of Natural Resources, for example, has conducted awareness raising activities and established a hotline (Fauna Viva 800-142052) that citizens can use to report suspected wildlife crime incidents. At the national level, the Dirección General de Biodiversidad y Áreas Protegidas (DGBAP) of the Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Agua has also engaged in awareness raising activities.²⁶⁰

Noteworthy are the efforts undertaken by Bolivian authorities to tackle jaguar trafficking, which have resulted in several successful criminal proceedings. Law enforcement reportedly remains poor, however, both domestically and at Bolivia's land borders. Law enforcement agencies are hampered by a lack of resources; moreover, corruption in the police and judiciary allegedly also stand in the way of effective action against wildlife crimes in Bolivia. Although wildlife markets are sometimes raided, the

²⁵⁷ Navia, R. (2018). Fang trafficking to China is putting Bolivia's jaguars in jeopardy, *Mongabay*. 26 January 2018:

<https://news.mongabay.com/2018/01/fang-trafficking-to-china-is-putting-bolivias-jaguars-in-jeopardy/>. Accessed on 3 January 2024.

²⁵⁸ <https://www.abi.bo/index.php/noticias/gobierno/22714-pofoma-rescata-63-animales-domesticos-y-secuestra-25-animales-silvestres-disecados-en-el-alto>. Accessed on 10 January 2024.

²⁵⁹ https://eldeber.com.bo/bolivia/en-10-anos-solo-el-12-casos-de-trafico-de-vida-silvestre-tiene-sentencia_68526. Accessed on 2 January 2024.

²⁶⁰ Jemio, M.T. (2016). Wildlife for sale: Jaguars are the new trafficking victims in Bolivia, *Mongabay*. 20 December 2016:

<https://news.mongabay.com/2016/12/wildlife-for-sale-jaguars-are-the-new-trafficking-victims-in-bolivia/>. Accessed on 3 January 2024.

day-to-day trade is allowed to continue.²⁶¹ Authorities furthermore admit that controls to tackle poaching are deficient and poaching remains relatively common in various areas of the country.²⁶²

Bolivia's public prosecutors' office does not have a specialised prosecution division like, for example, Peru and Colombia. The Bolivian courts also suffer from a lack of specialization, and judges sitting in criminal cases generally do not consider environmental crimes, including wildlife crimes, to be 'real crime'. There have been some high-profile wildlife crime prosecutions, including of suspected jaguar traffickers, but civil society actors complain that wildlife trafficking and other environmental crimes are given little priority in Bolivia.²⁶³

²⁶¹ Verheij, P. (2019). An assessment of wildlife poaching and trafficking in Bolivia and Suriname. IUCN NL, Amsterdam. Available at: <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/49026>. Accessed on 3 January 2024.

²⁶² <https://www.elciudadano.com/medio-ambiente/un-cazador-furtivo-muestra-en-facebook-como-despelleja-a-un-jaguar/12/03/>. Accessed on 10 January 2024.

²⁶³ <https://law.lclark.edu/live/files/31078-illegal-wildlife-trafficking-and-its-relation-to>. Accessed on 2 January 2024.

Chile

Chile

General overview

In Chile, a total of 859 animals were involved in 35 seizures and 13 poaching incidents reported between 2017 and 2022. Some 77% of these concerned live specimens, with the balance comprised of 12% wildlife parts or products and 11% dead animals. In addition, 50 yellow-spotted river turtle eggs were seized. No wild meat was reported to be seized.

Unique characteristics

- Trafficking of slender-billed parakeets
- Destination for wildlife trafficked from Bolivia, Peru, and Argentina; other countries in the region; USA; and Europe
- Limited enforcement effort

For one incident, a seizure of 40 birds, turtles, and snakes recovered in several operations in 2019 as part of international Operation Thunderball coordinated by INTERPOL²⁶⁴, the number of birds versus reptiles was not specified. This incident could not be included in the analysis, therefore.

For the remaining 819 specimens identified by this study, 68% concerned birds (555 specimens). Mammals made up 15.5% (129 specimens); reptiles 14.5% (120 specimens); and amphibians 2% (15 specimens).

Number of incidents reported in the media

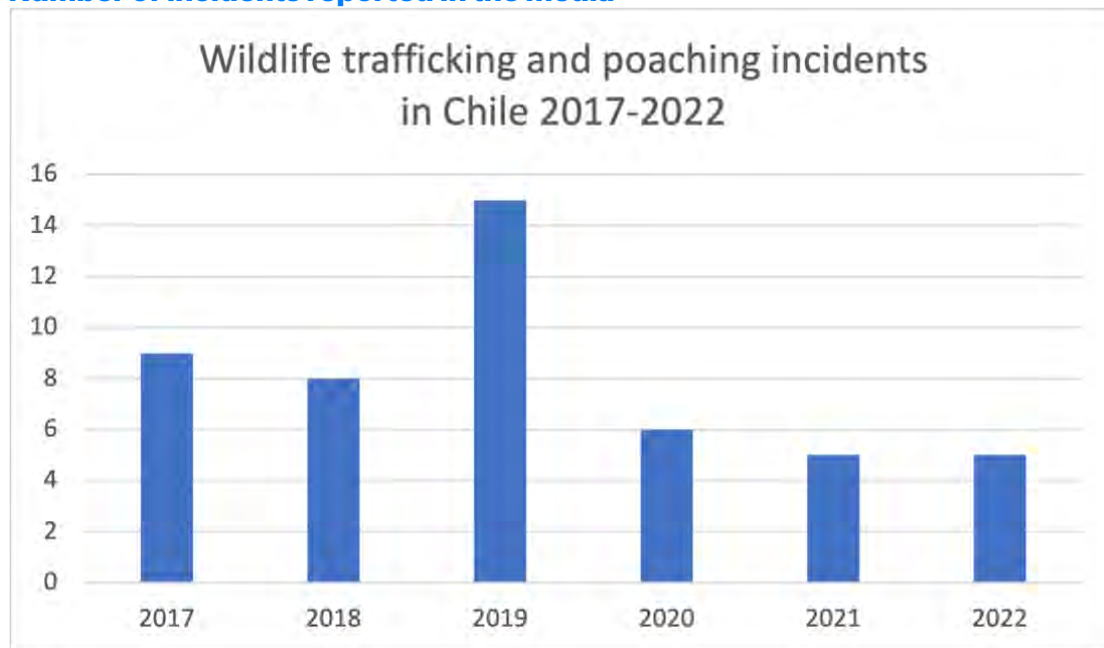


Figure 22: Wildlife trafficking and poaching incidents in Chile between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

²⁶⁴ <https://www.latercera.com/nacional/noticia/operativo-la-pdi-desbarato-una-red-traffic-animales/742686/>. Accessed on 14 January 2024.

Number of animals involved

The table and figure below show the numbers of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians reported to be seized or poached in Chile between 2017 and 2022.

Table 4: Number of animals seized or poached in Chile between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Birds	19	403	131	1	0	1	555
Mammals	4	5	10	4	103	3	129
Reptiles	70	0	0	3	46	1	120
Amphibians	15	0	0	0	0	0	15
TOTAL	108	408	141	8	149	5	

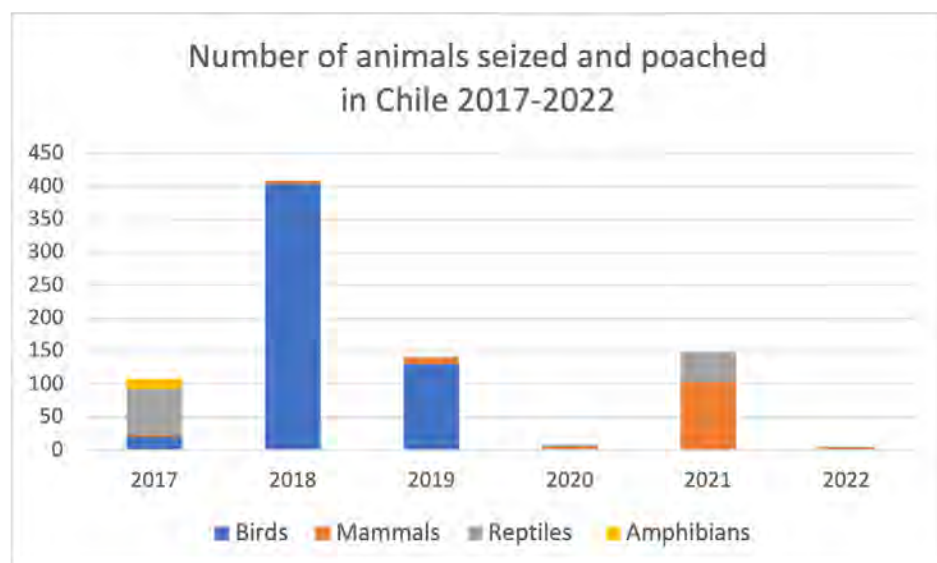


Figure 23: Number of animals seized or poached in Chile between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

The table and figure above provide a somewhat erratic picture of wildlife law enforcement efforts in Chile. This can partly be explained by the fact that 460 wild animals (= 53% of all wildlife reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022) were seized in just three law enforcement operations in 2018, 2019, and 2021. These operations were Chile's contribution to global annual operations coordinated by INTERPOL with the aim of tackling illegal wildlife trade:

- ▶ In May 2018, 374 exotic birds (the term generally used for any non-native wildlife) were seized and nine people arrested in eight police operations carried out in the metropolitan region of Chile's capital Santiago as part of INTERPOL Operation Thunderstorm.²⁶⁵
- ▶ In June 2019, 40 parrots, turtles, and snakes were seized as part of INTERPOL Operation Thunderball.²⁶⁶
- ▶ In October 2021, 35 iguanas, nine tortoises, and two bearded dragons were seized as part of INTERPOL Operation Thunder.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ <https://www.latercera.com/nacional/noticia/pdi-incauta-mas-300-aves-exoticas-la-region-metropolitana/227656/>. Accessed on 14 January 2024.

²⁶⁶ <https://www.latercera.com/nacional/noticia/operativo-la-pdi-desbarato-una-red-trafico-animales/742686/>. Accessed on 14 January 2024.

²⁶⁷ <https://www.pdichile.cl/centro-de-prensa/detalle-prensa/2021/11/30/operaci%C3%B3n-internacional-contra-el-tr%C3%A1fico-de-especies>. Accessed on 15 January 2024.

Species most targeted

Birds

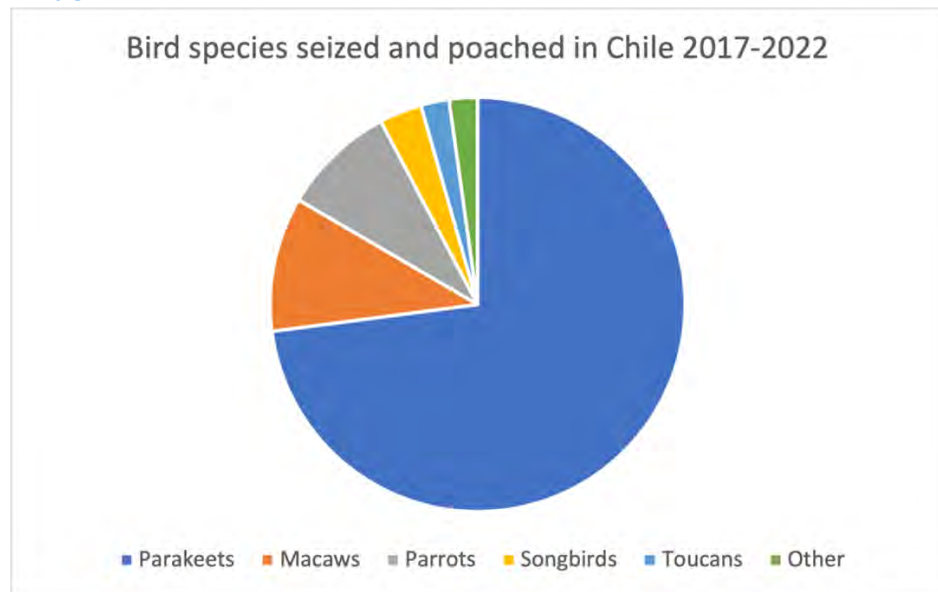


Figure 24: Bird species seized or poached in Chile between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

For 374 of the 555 birds that were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022, the subspecies was not specified. These birds were seized in May 2018 as part of INTERPOL Operation Thunderstorm. For this reason, unfortunately, they could not be included in this analysis of bird species most targeted by traffickers.

Trafficking of endemic parakeets

Of the remaining 181 birds, 131 specimens (72%) concerned slender-billed parakeets (*Enicognathus leptorhynchus*). One other parakeet was seized: a Chilean burrowing parakeet (*Cyanoliseus patagonus bloxami*). Both species are endemic to Chile and listed in CITES Appendix II.

The slender-billed parakeets (known as 'loro choroy' in Chile) were seized in seven incidents reported between 2017 and 2018. Three incidents concerned specimens that were kept as pets. The other four incidents are noteworthy as they are indicative of significant illegal trade, including on social media:

- ▶ In February 2017, Bidema seized four slender-billed parakeet chicks from a home near Curiñanco that were offered for sale on Facebook after monitoring various profiles on Facebook.²⁶⁸
- ▶ In February 2018, Bidema seized 18 live and two dead slender-billed parakeet chicks and arrested a man who had offered them for sale in closed Facebook groups with false registration papers. The birds were kept in appalling conditions in houses in Puente Alto and La Florida. The man, who claimed he received the birds from third parties, distributed the birds to various locations in Santiago.²⁶⁹
- ▶ In January 2019, Chilean carabineros seized 45 slender-billed parakeet chicks in Purranque from a van following an anonymous complaint and arrested the three men driving the van. They were headed for Santiago, where the birds would be marketed.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ <https://www.paislobo.cl/2017/02/4-polluelos-de-la-especie-loros-choroy.html>. Accessed on 16 January 2024.

²⁶⁹ <https://www.soychile.cl/Santiago/Politica/2018/02/28/519369/Detuvieron-a-hombre-que-vendia-loros-choroy-en-Santiago.aspx>.

Accessed on 16 January 2024.

²⁷⁰ <https://www.soychile.cl/Osorno/Policial/2019/03/28/588151/Liberan-a-loros-choroy-decomisados-en-enero-en-Purranque.aspx>

- ▶ In February 2019, Bidema officers seized 59 slender-billed parakeet chicks and juveniles and arrested a man in Buin who had poached them from their nests in the city of Osorno. Initially they discovered 29 specimens in the suspect's vehicle during an identity check. Upon further investigation they found another 30 specimens in deplorable conditions in his home. The man turned out to be a repeat offender, who claimed his income depended on the sales of the birds, at 24,000 Chilean pesos (= around US\$ 26) per animal.²⁷¹

Although the population size of slender-billed parakeets is unknown, the species is classified as Least Concern on IUCN's Red List.²⁷² Chilean experts are concerned about intense levels of trafficking, however. In 2019, the CODEFF (Comité Nacional pro Defensa de la Fauna y Flora) and its rehabilitation centre (Centro de Rehabilitación de Fauna Silvestre, CRFS) stated that they had received 1,697 native parrots since 1992, 77% of which were slender-billed parakeets. They explained that, where possible, seized specimens are rehabilitated with the aim of releasing them back into the wild, a process that can take up to five years.²⁷³ It is unclear what happens with non-native birds. Unless they are returned to their country of origin, it seems likely that they spend the rest of their lives in captivity.

The one Chilean burrowing parakeet (known as 'loro tricahue' in Chile) that was seized was discovered by accident in April 2017 when Bidema officers heard its sounds during a routine inspection of a home in Copiapó where it was kept as a pet.²⁷⁴ In the 1980s, Chilean burrowing parakeets were close to extinction, but conservation measures have seen their numbers increase from 217 to nearly 4,500 in 2021.²⁷⁵

Non-native bird species, particularly macaws and Amazon parrots are in high demand in Chile. Apart from the parakeet species discussed above, all other birds reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022 were smuggled in from neighbouring countries.

Based on the seizure data, Bolivia and Peru are the most important source countries for birds trafficked to Chile. Seizures of birds originating from Bolivia and/or Peru involved 19 macaws; 16 Amazon parrots; four toucans; and four black-backed grosbeaks. Significant seizures included the following incidents:

- ▶ In April 2017, Chilean Customs at the Quillagua outpost in northern Chile seized twelve birds that were hidden in a truck transporting vegetables. The driver and his companion showed forged SAG permits, which suggests those responsible for the shipment were sophisticated traffickers. The birds most likely originated from Peru, because the truck came from Arica, a Chilean town on the border with Peru. The shipment included four blue and yellow macaws (*Ara araurana*); two turquoise-fronted amazons (*Amazona aestiva*); one red and green macaw (*Ara chloropterus*); one southern mealy amazon (*Amazona farinosa*), and four black-backed grosbeaks (*Pheucticus aureoventris*).²⁷⁶ All these species are listed in CITES Appendix II except for the grosbeaks, which are not CITES-listed.

²⁷¹ <https://www.meganoticias.cl/nacional/250092-loros-choroy-trafico-bidema-aves-en-peligro-de-extincion.html>. Accessed on 16 January 2014.

²⁷² BirdLife International (2024). Species factsheet: *Enicognathus leptorhynchus*. Available at:

<http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/slender-billed-parakeet-enicognathus-leptorhynchus>. Accessed on 16 Jan 2024.

²⁷³ <https://codeff.cl/declaracion-publica-ante-reportaje-sobre-tenencia-ilegal-de-ejemplar-de-loro-choroy-emitido-por-chilevision-noticias/>. Accessed on 16 Jan 2024.

²⁷⁴ <https://www.elciudadano.com/chile/hombre-que-poseia-un-loro-tricahue-en-su-casa-fue-detenido-por-pdi/04/29/>

²⁷⁵ <https://news.mongabay.com/2021/11/chiles-burrowing-parrot-marks-35-years-of-a-slow-but-successful-recovery/>

²⁷⁶ <https://www.aduana.cl/aduana-rescata-12-aves-exoticas-desde-la-cabina-de-un-camion/aduana/2017-04-24/170257.html>. Accessed on 16 January 2024.

- ▶ In November 2018, a blue and yellow macaw, a red and green macaw, and four turquoise-fronted amazons were seized at the Colchane border complex from a Bolivian woman who was travelling on a bus from Cochabamba, Bolivia, to Iquique in Chile.²⁷⁷
- ▶ In February 2019, Chilean Customs seized nine macaw chicks from a truck at the El Lloa outpost near the Bolivian border, which is also a known entry point for drugs from Bolivia. The birds appeared to be drugged²⁷⁸, a method often used by smugglers to avoid detection.
- ▶ In March 2019, three Toco toucan chicks (*Ramphastos toco*, CITES Appendix II) and two red and green macaw chicks were rescued by Customs inspectors at the Quillagua outpost along route A-5 North, about 259 km from the Bolivian border. The rescue was instigated when a Customs inspector saw a brightly coloured bird walking in the middle of the desert. Upon further inspection, a box containing the five chicks was found in a ravine. It was believed smugglers had dumped the box in the ravine to avoid detection by Customs.²⁷⁹

The illegal bird trade is ongoing: in March 2023, Chilean Customs at the El Loa outpost seized 25 birds from a truck, including twelve macaws, four Amazon parrots, three Australian parakeets, two toucans, three rosellas, and one blue-headed parrot.²⁸⁰

Trafficking in songbirds

Illegal trade in songbirds is also reportedly an issue in Chile²⁸¹, although only six specimens were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. All six came from neighbouring countries:

- ▶ As mentioned above, four black-backed grosbeaks were seized in April 2017 at the Quillagua outpost along with three parrots and five macaws from a truck which most likely came from Peru.²⁸²
- ▶ In February 2018, Chilean Customs at the Pino Hachado checkpoint seized two yellow cardinals (*Gubernatrix cristata*, CITES Appendix II) from a smuggler entering by car from Argentina.²⁸³ It should be noted that yellow cardinals are in danger of extinction. Only 1,000-2,000 adult specimens are believed to survive in the wild in Argentina, in small and fragmented populations.²⁸⁴ Despite concerted efforts to conserve the species, illegal trade continues unabated. For more, please see the Argentina section.

Bird trafficking from Peru and Bolivia is fuelled by the poverty levels in these countries. This creates an incentive for traffickers to smuggle wildlife to Chile, where they can get much higher prices for wildlife (as well as other illicit commodities such as timber and drugs). There are hundreds of kilometres of unprotected borders, and boats have also been used to smuggle wildlife from Peru's coastal towns.²⁸⁵ For instance, in 2009 the Chilean navy seized a shipment of 407 wild animals from a boat arriving from Peru in the northern port of Arica. The shipment included 308 yellow-bellied sliders, 40 tortoises, 27 squirrels, 11 baby caimans, and 18 parrots and macaws.²⁸⁶

²⁷⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1397798833689495&set=boliviana-intent%C3%B3-meter-aves-en-un-aquayo-se-trata-de-dos-guacamayos-y-cuatro-lo>. Accessed on 16 January 2024.

²⁷⁸ <https://correodelsur.com/panorama/20190331-el-trafico-ilegal-de-aves-no-conoce-de-fronteras.html>

²⁷⁹ <https://aduananews.com/chile-rescata-a-aves-exoticas-del-comercio-ilegal/>. Accessed on 16 January 2024.

²⁸⁰ <https://www.24horas.cl/regiones/zona-norte/tarapaca/aduanas-incauta-25-aves-exoticas>. Accessed on 17 Jan. 2024.

²⁸¹ <https://aveschile.cl/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Nota-editorial-1.pdf>. Accessed on 16 January 2024.

²⁸² <https://www.aduana.cl/aduana-rescata-12-aves-exoticas-desde-la-cabina-de-un-camion/aduana/2017-04-24/170257.html> Accessed on 16 January 2024.

²⁸³ <https://www.aduana.cl/aduana-rescata-2-aves-vivas-e-incauta-fosiles-y-marihuana/aduana/2018-02-06/154051.html>

²⁸⁴ BirdLife International (2024) Species factsheet: *Gubernatrix cristata*. Available at <http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/yellow-cardinal-gubernatrix-cristata>. Accessed on 23 January 2024.

²⁸⁵ Ortiz-von Halle, B. (2018). Bird's-eye view: Lessons from 50 years of bird trade regulation and conservation in Amazon countries.

TRAFFIC, Cambridge, UK. Available at: <https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/11517/birds-eye-view.pdf>. Accessed on 11 December 2023.

²⁸⁶ <https://www.ultimahora.com/decomisan-chile-400-animales-exoticos-origen-peruano-n187270>. Accessed 17 Jan 2024.

Mammals

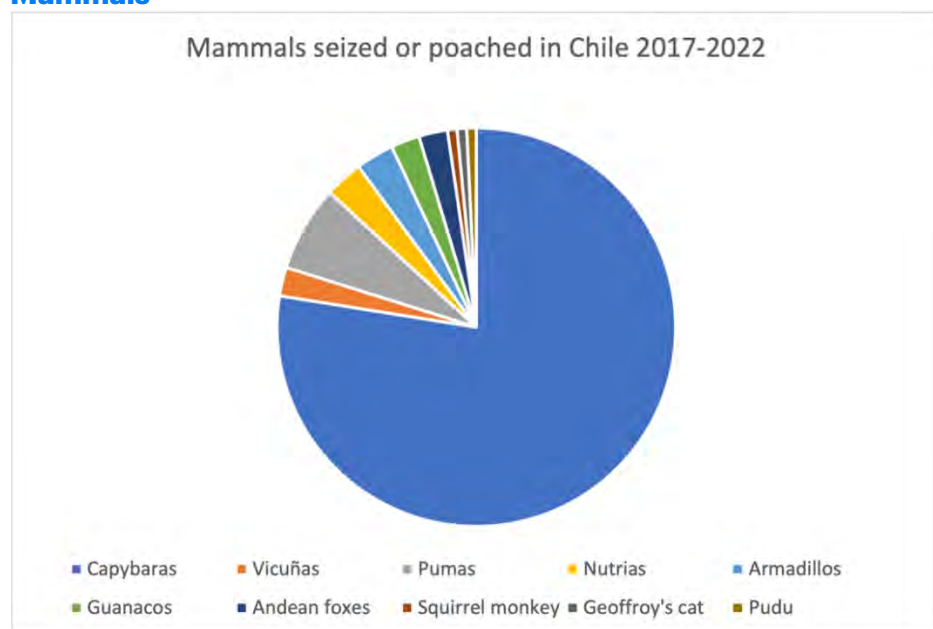


Figure 25: Mammals species seized or poached in Chile between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Even though wildlife poaching, including of mammals, is reported to be widespread in Chile²⁸⁷, this study identified few seizures and poaching incidents involving protected mammal species.

Capybaras (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*) make up 77% of the 129 mammals involved in seizures and poaching incidents reported between 2017 and 2022. This is due to a seizure in March 2021 by Chilean Customs of 100 tanned capybara skins at the Nuevo Complejo Fronterizo Los Libertadores, a mountain pass in the Andes on the border between Chile and Argentina. The skins were hidden in the cabin of a truck arriving from Argentina and estimated to be worth 14 million Chilean pesos (over US\$15,000).²⁸⁸ The capybara is the largest living rodent in the world and found in Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Peru, Brazil, Paraguay, Northeast Argentina, and Uruguay. Capybara skins are highly valued for their softness and durability. In some countries they are being farmed for their skins, but illegal trade continues nonetheless.²⁸⁹

The skin trade also affects other wildlife. The species most in demand for their skins are reportedly foxes and pumas, which are often killed in retaliation for preying on livestock such as chickens, sheep, and cattle.²⁹⁰ Here, too, Argentina is a source country. For instance, in February 2019 Chilean Customs at the Mamuil Malal mountain pass seized a hat made from the skin of a Geoffroy's cat (*Leopardus geoffroyi*, CITES Appendix I) and a stole made from the skin of an Andean fox (*Lycopalex culpaeus*, CITES Appendix II) from a vehicle coming from Argentina.²⁹¹

²⁸⁷ <https://laderasur.com/articulo/el-estado-de-la-caza-ilegal-en-chile-el-complejo-escenario-de-la-region-de-valparaiso-en-pandemia/>. Accessed on 18 January 2024.

²⁸⁸ <https://www.aduana.cl/incautan-100-valiosas-pieles-de-contrabando-en-los-libertadores/aduana/2021-03-03/131056.html>. Accessed on 14 January 2024.

²⁸⁹ Reid, F. (2016). *Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2016: e.T10300A22190005. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2016-2.RLTS.T10300A22190005.en>. Accessed on 17 January 2024.

²⁹⁰ <https://www.mhvn.gob.cl/galeria/turismo-y-artesania-internacion-ilegal-de-especies-protegidas>. Accessed 17 Jan 2024.

²⁹¹ <https://www.biobiochile.cl/noticias/nacional/region-de-la-araucania/2019/02/13/incautan-prendas-elaboradas-con-piel-zorro-culpeo-y-gato-montes-argentino-en-paso-fronterizo.shtml>. Accessed on 17 January 2024.

Across their range, pumas (*Puma concolor*) are frequent victims of human-wildlife conflicts. The cubs of killed females are often sold into the pet trade. So too in Chile. Seven pumas were reported to be poached between 2017 and 2022, and one taxidermied puma was seized. In addition, a live cub that was abandoned at a government office in Limarí province was seized in November 2020.²⁹² An incident that attracted a lot of attention happened in June 2022 in Villarrica, when a SAG official was filmed offering a caged puma and fox to a group of dogs to be attacked and devoured. The case was brought to the attention of the authorities by an anonymous complainant, who provided the video material.²⁹³

In the 1980s and 1990s, monkey trafficking in Chile was significant, but reportedly this illicit trade has decreased to almost negligent levels.²⁹⁴ Only one monkey seizure was reported during the study period: an adult black-capped squirrel monkey (*Saimiri boliviensis*), which was seized along with drugs, cash, weapons, rifle scopes, and four air rifles during a raid of a drug traffickers' home in Colina in November 2022. The monkey had several injuries and was in a state of malnutrition.²⁹⁵ As there are no squirrel monkeys in the wild in Chile, it is likely this specimen originated from neighbouring Bolivia or Peru, where squirrel monkeys are native.

Armadillos in Chile are hunted for their meat; for their shells, which are used in musical instruments ('charangos'); for the pet trade; and to be taxidermied for use in religious rituals by indigenous peoples.²⁹⁶ Four specimens were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. Two were seized domestically: a live greater hairy armadillo (*Chaetophractus villosus*) kept as a pet that was seized in Coquimbo in April 2017,²⁹⁷ and a taxidermied specimen seized along with a taxidermied puma in a drugs lab near Codpa in July 2017.²⁹⁸ Two other specimens were seized by Chilean Customs at Chile's borders: in August 2018, a taxidermied Andean hairy armadillo was seized from the suitcase of a Peruvian woman during a routine inspection at the complejo Chacalluta in Arica, at the border with Peru.²⁹⁹ In December 2019, a stuffed armadillo shell and an armadillo tail were seized from an Argentinian citizen who intended to bring it to Chile through the Paso Frontizero Cardenal Samoré.³⁰⁰

²⁹² <https://www.sag.cl/noticias/sag-realiza-denuncia-en-fiscalia-por-cachorro-de-puma-que-tendra-que-vivir-en-cautiverio>

²⁹³ <https://www.meganoticias.cl/nacional/379491-funcionario-sag-video-entrega-zorro-puma-perro-ataquen-villarrica-07-06-2022.html>.

Accessed on 17 January 2024.

²⁹⁴ <https://www.mestizos.cl/mestizos-magazine/2019/04/12/trafico-de-animales-el-90-muere-en-el-camino.html>

²⁹⁵ <https://www.24horas.cl/actualidad/nacional/maltrato-animal-allanamiento-en-colina-termino-con-rescate-de-mono-ardilla>. Accessed on 17 January 2024.

²⁹⁶ <https://codeff.cl/crfs/quirquincho-de-la-puna-embajador-de-la-fauna-chilena-2017/>. Accessed on 18 January 2024.

²⁹⁷ <https://www.sag.gob.cl/noticias/funcionarios-de-la-oficina-sectorial-de-elqui-rescatan-quirquincho-peludo-en-coquimbo>. Accessed on 18 January 2024.

²⁹⁸ <https://www.soychile.cl/Arica/Policial/2017/07/13/475486/Carabineros-entrego-al-SAG-un-puma-y-quirquincho-embalsamados-tras-ser-incautados-en-procedimiento-policial.aspx>. Accessed on 18 January 2024.

²⁹⁹ <https://aduananews.com/aduanas-chile-reporta-quirquincho-fauna-amenazada/>. Accessed on 18 January 2024.

³⁰⁰ <https://www.aduana.cl/decomisan-caparazon-y-cola-de-quirquincho-disecados-en-paso-fronterizo/aduana/2019-12-17/093833.html>.

Accessed on 18 January 2024.

Reptiles

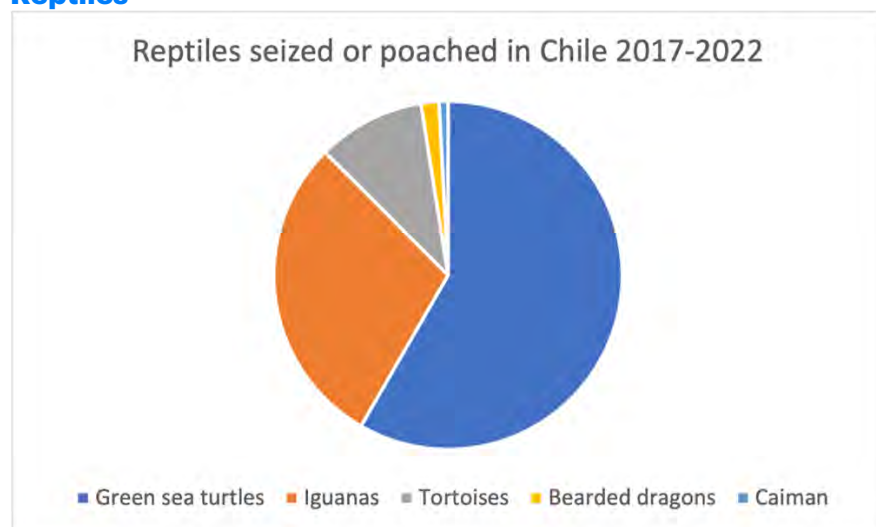


Figure 18: Reptile species seized or poached in Chile between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Reptiles are rarely reported to be seized or poached in Chile. Only five incidents were identified, involving 120 reptiles.

At least 70 green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), representing 58% of all seized or poached reptiles, were found decapitated between August 2017 and 2018 on Playa Chinchorro in Arica, the city in the far north of Chile. The case became known because a local NGO sought publicity and requested information on the perpetrators from the general public.³⁰¹ Apart from this case, no information was identified on the killing of sea turtles in Chile; therefore, this does not appear to be common.

There does appear to be some demand for turtle eggs. In October 2022, Chilean customs at the Colchane checkpoint on the border with Bolivia seized 50 yellow-spotted river turtle eggs (*Podocnemis unifilis*, CITES Appendix II) from a bus passenger arriving from Bolivia.³⁰² No other turtle egg seizures were identified.

In December 2020, Chilean Customs seized three juvenile red-footed tortoises (*Chelonoidis carbonaria*, CITES Appendix II) at the El Loa outpost from a Venezuelan man arriving on foot who carried them in his backpack. He said he was taking them to family in Santiago (south Chile).³⁰³ This species appears to be popular in Chile's pet trade, given interactions observed on social media, where users frequently ask to buy and sell specimens.³⁰⁴ Red-footed tortoises sell at 240,000 Chilean pesos (around US\$260) per animal. As the minimum monthly wage in Venezuela at the time of the seizure was US\$1.68³⁰⁵, it seems much more likely the man intended to sell the tortoises.

³⁰¹ <https://www.meganoticias.cl/nacional/226762-se-busca-monstruo-asesino-que-decapita-tortugas-marinas-denuncian-muerte-de-mas-de-70-tortugas-en-playa-de-arica.html>. Accessed on 18 January 2024.

³⁰² <https://www.elboyaldia.cl/noticia/sociedad/hallan-50-huevos-de-tortuga-de-rio-en-colchane-eran-transportados-para-consumo-huma>. Accessed on 18 January 2024.

³⁰³ <https://www.aduana.cl/aduanas-rescata-tres-tortugas-de-patas-rojas-en-avanzada-el-loa/aduana/2020-12-18/123323.html>. Accessed on 18 January 2024.

³⁰⁴ See e.g. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/315339033476557> and <https://www.instagram.com/tortugasdetierra.cl>, accessed on 18 January 2024.

³⁰⁵ <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2019/09/06/757822363/a-doctor-or-nurse-might-earn-6-a-month-in-venezuela-if-theyre-lucky>. Accessed on 18 January 2024.

The most significant reptile seizure occurred in October 2021. Within the framework of INTERPOL Operation Thunder, the Bidema division in the Valparaíso region seized 46 CITES-listed reptiles from a commercial premises located in the centre of Quilpué. This included 35 iguanas originating from El Salvador, two bearded dragons from Brazil, and nine tortoises from Europe. Unfortunately, the Bidema press release provided no other details on the subspecies and their origin. The owner of the establishment was arrested for not having the necessary legal documentation to authorise entry into the country, possession, and sales of these specimens, which are violations of the Hunting and Smuggling Law (Ley de Caza y Contrabando).³⁰⁶

This incident shows that there is an illicit market for exotic reptiles in Chile. This is furthermore evidenced by a Peruvian seizure in October 2020: Peruvian authorities in Pucallpa seized 41 Arrau turtles that were destined for Chile.³⁰⁷

Reptiles are also sent by air from the USA, as was revealed by two seizures in August and September 2023. Although outside the time frame of this study, they are too significant not to mention here. In August and September 2023, Customs at the international airport of Santiago seized two parcels sent from the USA that were similar in routes, packaging, and species involved. The August parcel contained two boa constrictors and an unidentified tortoise; the September parcel contained two unidentified snakes and two unidentified turtles.³⁰⁸

Amphibians

In June 2017, the SAG seized 15 live helmeted water toads (*Calyptocephalella gayi*) that were about to be cooked in a restaurant in Laraquete, a town on the central coast of Chile, after receiving complaints on Facebook. Despite their being a protected species in danger of extinction—the hunting of which is prohibited—cooked toads were reportedly one of the restaurant’s specialties.³⁰⁹

Helmeted water toads are an amphibian species endemic to Chile. In Chile, they are hunted for food. Thousands of specimens have also been exported for the pet trade. There are captive breeding facilities in Chile, but the demand exceeds the production capacity of these facilities. Hence, individuals are mainly extracted from the wild.³¹⁰

³⁰⁶ <https://www.pdichile.cl/centro-de-prensa/detalle-prensa/2021/11/30/operaci%C3%B3n-internacional-contra-el-tr%C3%A1fico-de-especies>. Accessed on 18 January 2024.

³⁰⁷ <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/pucallpa-decomisan-41-tortugas-charapas-que-pretendian-ser-llevadas-a-chile/>

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ <https://www.biobiochile.cl/noticias/nacional/region-del-bio-bio/2017/06/14/incautan-15-ranas-en-peligro-de-extincion-que-iban-a-ser-cocinadas-en-local-de-laraquete.shtml>. Accessed on 17 January 2024.

³¹⁰ UCN SSC Amphibian Specialist Group (2019). *Calyptocephalella gayi*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2019: e.T4055A85633603. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2019-1.RLTS.T4055A85633603.en>. Accessed on 17 January 2024.

Key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes

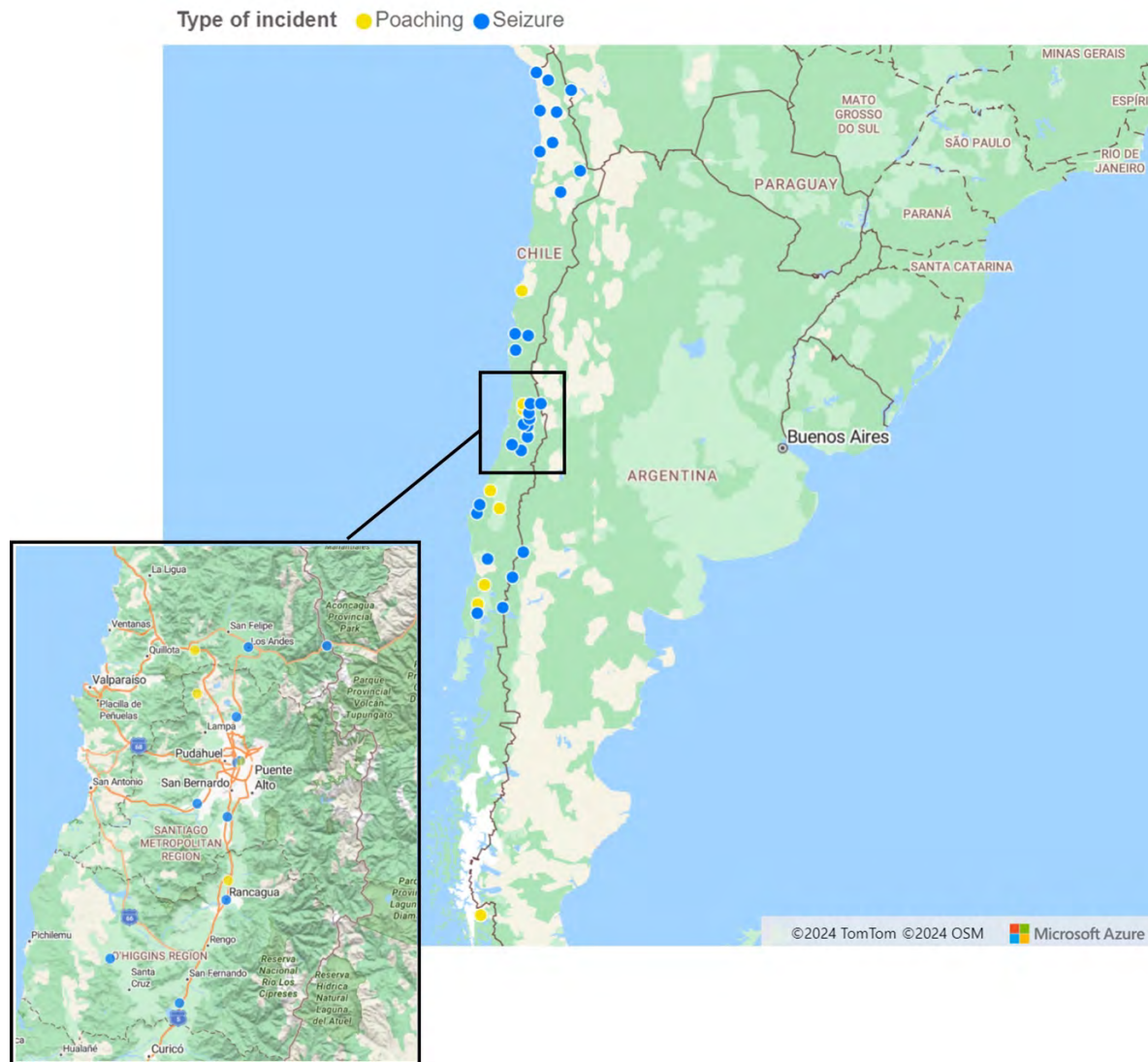


Figure 19: Locations of seizures and poaching incidents in Chile reported between 2017 and 2022

Seizures reported between 2017 and 2022 highlight that Chile is a key destination for wildlife trafficked from neighbouring countries (Bolivia, Peru, and Argentina) as well as countries elsewhere in Latin America (Brazil and El Salvador) and Europe. Authorities are not aware that Chile is exporting wildlife illegally³¹¹, as only one seizure was identified where an attempt was made to smuggle wildlife (two parrot hatchlings) out of the country to Bolivia.

Trafficking across land borders

Chilean Customs frequently intercept wildlife smuggled into Chile by land from Peru, Bolivia, and Argentina. Peru and Bolivia are sources for Amazonian wildlife species (mainly birds and reptiles), with the northern cities of Antofagasta, Arica, and Iquique in the Atacama Desert hotspots for this illicit trade.³¹² Live birds and mammals, as well as skins of species native to Argentina, are smuggled in through the mountain passes in the Andes bordering Argentina. Modes of transport used include public buses, trucks, vans, and private vehicles. Some smugglers even travelled by foot.

³¹¹ <https://www.emol.com/noticias/Nacional/2019/01/12/934055/Trafico-de-animales-PDI-incauto-597-especies-exoticas-durante-2018-y-detuvo-a-11-personas-relacionadas-al-delito.html>. Accessed on 15 January 2024.

³¹² <https://correodelsur.com/panorama/20190331-el-trafico-ilegal-de-aves-no-conoce-de-fronteras.html>

Trafficking by air

According to the authorities, the international airport of Santiago Airport is a key entry point for illegal wildlife, birds in particular. In 2018, 394 birds were seized there in 20 seizures, which was a major increase compared to 2017, when 62 birds were seized in nine seizures.³¹³

This study was unable to identify these seizures in media reports, nor were any other seizures in Chilean airports identified between 2019 and 2022. Possible reasons for this data gap are that airport seizures are not being reported by authorities and/or not picked up by the media. Several other incidents were identified, however, which indicate wildlife is trafficked by air from the USA, Mexico, El Salvador, Brazil, and Europe (please see below in the section on Transboundary trafficking routes).

Trafficking by sea

The 2009 seizure by the Chilean navy in the northern port of Arica of a shipment of 407 wild animals smuggled on a boat from Peru provides historic evidence that wildlife is trafficked to Chile by sea.³¹⁴

Between 2017 and 2022, no seizures were identified of illicit wildlife shipments arriving by sea. However, in 2018 there was reportedly a major seizure of 370 birds in Puerto San Antonio³¹⁵ on Chile's central coast, but no media reports on this incident could be identified. Puerto San Antonio is Chile's main freight port, 120 km from Santiago.

Physical sales outlets

The seizure data provide little insight into physical outlets for illegal wildlife sales in Chile. In May 2022, police officers seized a caiman head and claw that a man offered for sale at a fair in the city of Racangua in central Chile after receiving a complaint.³¹⁶ Caimans are not native to Chile, therefore these caiman parts must have been smuggled from abroad. No other seizures were reported in markets or fairs, which are common sales outlets in most other Latin American countries.

Possibly, exotic wildlife is more commonly sold through specialised pet shops. This is evidenced by the seizure in October 2021 of 46 non-native, CITES-listed reptiles in a shop in Quilpué as part of Operation Thunder.

Sales on social media

Illegal wildlife sales on social media have reportedly grown significantly. According to law enforcement experts, collectors are key actors in Chile's illicit online market for exotic animals. In 2019, a Bidema police officer outlined their profile as follows: 'They want to be able to have an animal that stands out among the rest. In general, they like to show them in collector circles. In fact, many of them buy exotic animals to trade them. It is quite similar to what happens with art dealers: they know each other. Among them, they maintain closed Facebook and WhatsApp groups, and through these means they carry out the commercialization of this type of animal.'³¹⁷

³¹³ https://correodelsur.com/panorama/20190331_el-trafico-ilegal-de-aves-no-conoce-de-fronteras.html

³¹⁴ <https://www.ultimahora.com/decomisan-chile-400-animales-exoticos-origen-peruano-n187270>. Accessed 17 Jan 2024.

³¹⁵ https://correodelsur.com/panorama/20190331_el-trafico-ilegal-de-aves-no-conoce-de-fronteras.html

³¹⁶ <https://www.elrancaguino.cl/2022/05/19/detenido-por-vender-partes-de-lagarto-disecado-en-plaza-de-los-heroes/>

³¹⁷ <https://www.latercera.com/nacional/noticia/operativo-la-pdi-desbarato-una-red-trafico-animales/742686/>

Two seizures were identified which concerned illegal wildlife sales on social media:

- ▶ In February 2017, after monitoring various profiles on Facebook, Bidema seized four slender-billed parakeet chicks that were offered for sale on Facebook.³¹⁸
- ▶ In February 2018, Bidema seized 18 live and two dead slender-billed parakeet chicks and arrested a man who had offered them for sale in closed Facebook groups with false registration papers.³¹⁹

Convergence

No incidents were identified that might suggest convergence between wildlife trafficking and other types of organized crime. Two seizures were reported where wildlife was found in possession of drug traffickers, but these provided no evidence of involvement in illegal wildlife trade:

- ▶ In July 2017, a taxidermied puma and taxidermied armadillo were seized in a drugs lab near Codpa. The owner claimed he had poisoned, then taxidermied, the animals as decoration for the lab.³²⁰
- ▶ As mentioned above, a pet squirrel monkey was seized along with drugs, cash, weapons, rifle scopes, and four air rifles during a raid of a drug traffickers' home in Colina in November 2022. The monkey had several injuries and was in a state of malnutrition.³²¹

Transboundary trafficking routes

This study identified a significant number of seizures pointing to Chile being a key destination for illegal wildlife trade trafficked by land from neighbouring countries as well as by air from other countries in Latin America, North America, and Europe. The seizures are listed below. Many were already discussed above, with media references provided. In this section, media references are only included for incidents that were not discussed earlier.

Argentina > Chile

- ▶ In February 2018, Chilean Customs at the Pino Hachado checkpoint seized two yellow cardinals from a smuggler entering by car from Argentina.
- ▶ In January 2019, Chilean Customs at the Los Andes checkpoint seized six unidentified parrots hidden in a box on the fender of a truck arriving from Argentina and bound for San Antonio in Chile.³²²
- ▶ In February 2019, Chilean Customs at the Mamuil Malal mountain pass seized a hat and stole made from the skin of a Geoffroy's cat and Andean fox, respectively, from a car from Argentina.
- ▶ In December 2019, a stuffed armadillo shell and armadillo tail were seized from an Argentinian citizen who intended to bring it to Chile through the Paso Frontizero Cardenal Samoré.
- ▶ In March 2021, Chilean Customs at the Nuevo Complejo Fronterizo Los Libertadores seized 100 tanned capybara skins from a truck arriving from Argentina.
- ▶ In December 2022, Argentine border force officers on Ruta Nacional No. 7 near the Chilean border seized a South American grey fox cub (*Lycopalex griseus*) from a car headed for Chile.³²³

³¹⁸ <https://www.paislobo.cl/2017/02/4-polluelos-de-la-especie-loros-choroy.html>. Accessed on 16 January 2024.

³¹⁹ <https://www.soychile.cl/Santiago/Politica/2018/02/28/519369/Detuvieron-a-hombre-que-vendia-loros-choroy-en-Santiago.aspx>.

Accessed on 16 January 2024.

³²⁰ <https://www.soychile.cl/Arica/Policial/2017/07/13/475486/Carabineros-entrego-al-SAG-un-puma-y-quirquincho-embalsamados-tras-ser-incautados-en-procedimiento-policial.aspx>. Accessed on 17 January 2024.

³²¹ <https://www.24horas.cl/actualidad/nacional/maltrato-animal-allanamiento-en-colina-termino-con-rescate-de-mono-ardilla>. Accessed on 17 January 2024.

³²² <https://www.aduana.cl/incautan-loros-vivos-ocultos-en-el-tapabarros-de-un-camion-en-los-aduana/2019-01-03/111749.html>. Accessed on 19 January 2024.

³²³ <https://twitter.com/gendarmeria/status/1598719768910917636>. Accessed on 18 January 2024.

Bolivia ↔ Chile

- ▶ In January 2017, a Chilean man was arrested near the Colchane border complex trying to smuggle two turquoise-fronted amazon hatchlings to Bolivia on a bus.³²⁴
- ▶ In October 2018, Chilean Customs at the Quillagua outpost seized a rhea egg hidden in the luggage of a foreign passenger travelling on an international bus coming from Cochabamba, Bolivia.³²⁵
- ▶ In November 2018, two macaws and four parrots were seized at the Colchane border complex from a Bolivian woman travelling on a bus from Cochabamba, Bolivia, to Iquique in Chile.
- ▶ In February 2019, Chilean Customs seized nine macaw chicks from a truck at the El Lloa outpost near the Bolivian border, which is also a known entry point for drugs from Bolivia.
- ▶ In March 2019, Chilean Customs at the Quillagua outpost rescued three toucan chicks and two macaw chicks that had been dumped in a ravine by smugglers. Given the location of the outpost, the origin of the birds may also have been Peru.
- ▶ In December 2020, Chilean Customs at the El Loa outpost seized three juvenile red-footed tortoises from a Venezuelan man arriving on foot.
- ▶ In October 2022, Chilean customs at the Colchane checkpoint on the border with Bolivia seized 50 yellow-spotted river turtle eggs from a bus passenger arriving from Bolivia.
- ▶ In March 2023, Chilean Customs at the El Loa outpost seized 25 exotic birds, including macaws, parrots, toucans, and Australian parakeets and rosellas from the trunk of a car.

Mexico > Chile

In September 2018, Mexican police seized 21 American bullfrogs and seven scorpions from a parcel at a courier company in Mexico City that were destined for Chile.³²⁶

Peru > Chile

- ▶ In April 2017, Chilean Customs at the Quillagua outpost in northern Chile seized twelve birds, including macaws, parrots, and songbirds from a truck arriving from Arica.
- ▶ In August 2018, Chilean Customs in Arica, a Chilean town on the border with Peru, seized a taxidermied Andean hairy armadillo from a Peruvian woman.
- ▶ In October 2020, Peruvian authorities in Pucallpa seized 41 Arrau turtles that were destined for Chile.³²⁷

USA > Chile

- ▶ In the last week of August 2023, Chilean Customs at the airport of Santiago seized a parcel with two boa constrictors and a tortoise packed in small plastic containers with punched holes to allow in oxygen that was sent from the USA.³²⁸
- ▶ The parcel was joined by a similar parcel seized early September 2023, with two snakes and two turtles, also packed in plastic containers, sent from the USA.³²⁹

³²⁴ <https://www.soychile.cl/Iquique/Policial/2017/01/10/440295/Loros-hablaron-y-delataron-al-contrabandista-que-los-llevaba-desde-Bolivia-a-Chile.aspx>. Accessed on 10 January 2024.

³²⁵ <https://aduananews.com/incautan-huevo-de-nandu-especie-en-peligro-extincion/>. Accessed on 11 January 2024.

³²⁶ <https://www.sopitas.com/noticias/rescatan-ranas-alacranes-paqueteria-cdmx/>. Accessed on 18 January 2024.

³²⁷ <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/pucallpa-decomisan-41-tortugas-charapas-que-pretendian-ser-llevadas-a-chile/>

³²⁸ <https://www.latercera.com/nacional/noticia/encomienda-con-serpientes-y-tortugas-vivas-aduanas-requisita-paquete-proveniente-de-estados-unidos-en-aeropuerto-de-santiago/MVNQF2WPCVG5BL7QHO7H5DRW5E/>. Accessed 10 Jan. 2024.

³²⁹ Ibid.

El Salvador > Chile

In October 2021, Chilean police seized 35 iguanas originating from El Salvador in a shop in Quilpué.

Brazil > Chile

In October 2021, Chilean police seized two bearded dragons originating from Brazil in a shop in Quilpué.

Europe > Chile

In October 2021, Chilean police seized nine tortoises originating from Europe in a shop in Quilpué.



Figure 28: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes to and from Chile based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022,

Law enforcement efforts

The main agencies responsible for tackling illegal wildlife trade in Chile are the Servicio Agrícola y Ganadero (SAG) of the Ministerio de Agricultura and the police’s environmental crime unit: the Brigada Investigadora de Delitos contra el Medio Ambiente y Patrimonio (Bidema). The latter was established in 2002. Chilean Customs also plays a significant role in fighting illegal wildlife trade in Chile.

As mentioned in the General Overview, anti-wildlife trafficking efforts in Chile appear to be somewhat erratic. Most of the wildlife (460 animals = 53%) seized between 2017 and 2022 was seized in three law enforcement operations in 2018, 2019, and 2021 as part of global INTERPOL operations.

Another 148 animals (17%) were reported to be seized by Chilean Customs. The agency frequently intercepts wildlife smuggled in by land from Peru, Bolivia, and Argentina. Thirteen of the 35 seizures in Chile (37%) reported between 2017 and 2022 were made by Customs, all involving incoming wildlife traffic.

Most of the remaining seizures identified by this study were made during routine inspections or in response to citizen complaints. The results of the INTERPOL operations and the interceptions by Customs, however, demonstrate the existence of significant illegal wildlife trade in Chile. They also suggest that more wildlife would likely be seized if efforts were more proactive and focused on detecting, investigating, and dismantling criminal networks involved in wildlife trafficking.

A total of 23 people were arrested in ten seizures reported between 2017 and 2022, including the nine people arrested in May 2018 as part of INTERPOL Operation Thunderstorm mentioned above. This means that 21% of incidents identified by this study resulted in arrest (the regional average rate of arrest is 27%). In two other incidents the culprits received only a warning.

‘Mascotismo’, the keeping of (exotic) wild animals as pets is a popular and widely accepted practice in Chile.³³⁰ It is telling that the seizure of a slender-billed parakeet that a family kept as a pet in Isla de Maipo in April 2019 was met with an outcry from the general public, who considered it inhumane to separate the bird from the family.³³¹

Demand in Chile for exotic wildlife, particularly macaws and parrots from the Amazon region, has grown exponentially in the last decade. Since 2016, when Law 20962 implementing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was enacted, surveillance was reinforced in ports, border areas, and potential clandestine breeding sites, and coordinated work was implemented between Customs, the Prosecutors’ Office, and security forces to fight against this illicit market. Authorities saw an increase in seizures at the national level, from 136 animals in 2017 to 1,018 in 2018.³³²

Even so, wildlife crime is not seen to be a law enforcement priority in Chile. This is particularly true for poaching, which reportedly is widespread and mostly goes unpunished. Wildlife conservation experts have expressed concern at the impunity provided to poachers by the authorities’ lack of action, especially where less iconic species are concerned. ‘There is simply no control, no means to do so, and even less will.’³³³ The enforcement gap was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when capacity to control wildlife crime through the Agricultural and Livestock Service, the Police, park rangers, and honorary inspectors was reduced significantly. As a result, poaching spiraled out of control. For instance, in the Valparaíso region in central Chile, reports came in daily of animals such as birds of prey and foxes being injured or killed by gunshots.³³⁴

³³⁰ <https://laderasur.com/articulo/el-mascotismo-que-es-y-como-afecta-a-la-fauna-silvestre-esto-dicen-tres-especialistas/>. Accessed on 15 January 2024.

³³¹ <https://www.biobiochile.cl/noticias/nacional/region-metropolitana/2019/06/09/familia-pide-devolucion-de-mascota-incautada-por-sag-para-que-no-muera-de-pena-es-eso-verdad.shtml>. Accessed on 15 January 2024.

³³² <https://correodelsur.com/panorama/20190331-el-trafico-ilegal-de-aves-no-conoce-de-fronteras.html>. Accessed on 15 January 2024.

³³³ <https://orcachile.org/cazadores-furtivos-presumen-caza-coipo/>. Accessed on 15 January 2024.

³³⁴ <https://laderasur.com/articulo/el-estado-de-la-caza-ilegal-en-chile-el-complejo-escenario-de-la-region-de-valparaiso-en-pandemia/>. Accessed on 15 January 2024.

Colombia

Colombia

General overview

In Colombia, a minimum of 19,094 animals were involved in 234 seizures and 43 poaching incidents reported in the media between 2017 and 2022. This represents 18.6% of all wildlife seized or poached in Hispanic America in that time frame. Some 88.2% concerned live animals, with the balance comprised of 8.6% parts and products, 3% dead specimens, and 0.2% meat.

For 991 specimens of birds, reptiles, and mammals seized in a major crackdown on two wildlife trafficking networks in April 2022, the media reports did not specify the species nor the species group (i.e. how many birds, reptiles, or mammals were seized). Therefore, these 991 specimens could not be included in the analysis.

For the remaining 18,103 specimens identified by this study, 84% concerned reptiles (15,288 specimens); birds made up 10% (1,865 specimens); amphibians 4% (640 specimens); and mammals 2% (310 specimens).

These figures are just a fraction of actual numbers being seized in Colombia. For example, in 2021 media reported that the National Police had seized a total of 19,596 wild animals in 2020; 20,783 in 2019, and 34,794 in 2018.³³⁵ Of those seized wild animals, authorities are able to relocate or release an estimated 70%. The remaining 30% do not survive or are euthanized due to their poor condition.³³⁶

Unique characteristics

- High volume of seized wildlife
- Significant trafficking of testudinae and iguanas for meat and eggs
- Mata mata turtles trafficked to Peru for global pet trade
- High demand for songbirds and psittacids
- Poison dart frogs trafficked to Germany
- Fashion industry driver for skin trafficking
- High level of organized wildlife crime
- Proactive law enforcement

³³⁵ <https://www.agronegocios.co/agricultura/la-policia-nacional-incauto-un-total-de-19-596-ejemplares-de-fauna-silvestre-en-2020-3126304>. Accessed on 27 October 2023.

³³⁶ <https://oab.ambientebogota.gov.co/animales-silvestres-como-mascotas-la-amenaza-para-la-fauna-en-colombia/>. Accessed on 29 October 2023.

Number of incidents reported in the media

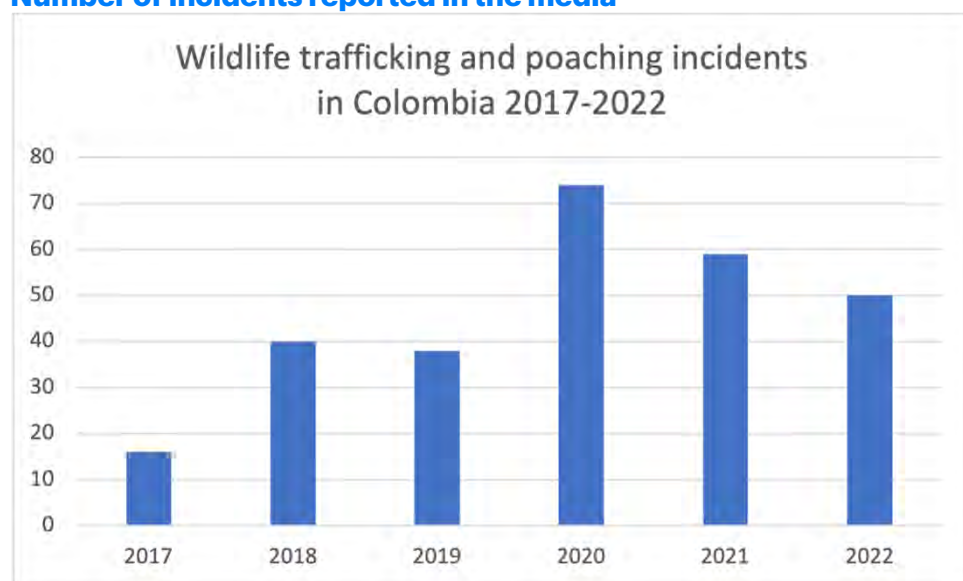


Figure 20: Wildlife trafficking and poaching incidents in Colombia between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

The peak of incidents recorded for 2020 is directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Authorities saw wildlife trafficking skyrocket that year, as loss of income meant many resorted to wildlife poaching and trafficking as a livelihood. In addition, social media use surged during this period, which facilitated online wildlife sales.³³⁷

Number of animals involved

The table and figure below show the numbers of reptiles, birds, amphibians, and mammals reported to be seized or poached in Colombia between 2017 and 2022.

Table 5: Number of animals seized or poached in Colombia between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Reptiles	2031	1376	2227	3659	3796	2203	15292
Birds	99	141	250	256	389	726	1861
Amphibians	0	216	424	0	0	0	640
Mammals	8	68	30	49	56	99	310
TOTAL	2138	1801	2931	3964	4241	3028	

³³⁷ <https://www.semana.com/actualidad/articulo/29-aves-se-libraron-de-ser-traficadas-en-barrancabermeja--colombia-hoy/56903/>. Accessed on 29 October 2023.

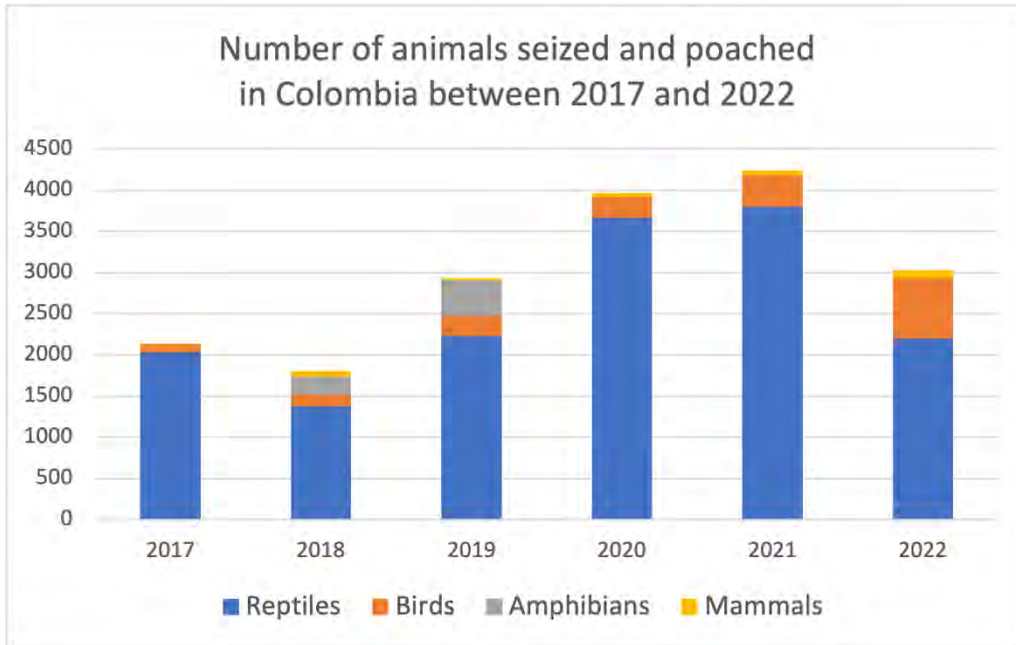


Figure 30: Number of animals seized or poached in Colombia between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

The rise in seized wildlife specimens between 2017 and 2021 could be the result of increased law enforcement efforts, increased crime activity, increased media attention, or a combination of these factors. It is unclear why the numbers of seized wildlife reduced in 2022, given that the National Police launched an environmental crime strategy in 2021 and increased capacity to investigate environmental crime (see below in Law Enforcement efforts section).

Species most targeted

Reptiles

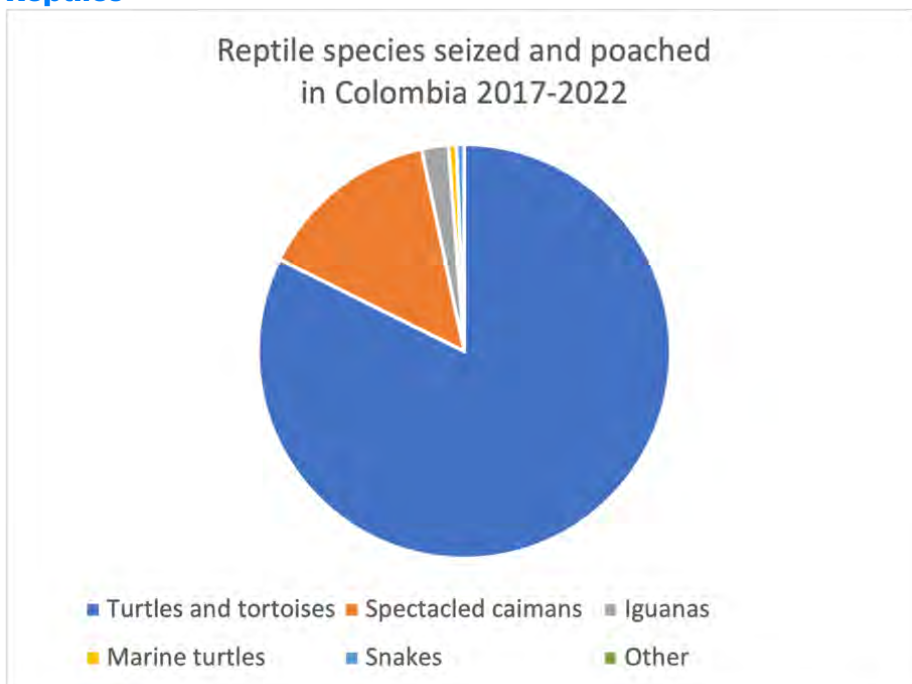


Figure 21: Reptile species seized or poached in Colombia between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Some 15,288 reptiles were reported to be seized or poached in Colombia between 2017 and 2022. Of these, 88% concerned live specimens and the balance comprised of 10.5% meat, parts, and products, and 1.5% dead specimens. For 399 reptiles seized from traffickers, the species was not specified so these were not included in the analysis.

Trafficking of turtles and tortoises

Turtles and tortoises are by far the most affected by poaching and trafficking, making up more than 80% of all reptiles reported to be poached or seized. The most affected species are:

- ▶ Mata mata turtles (*Chelus fimbriata*); 6,163 specimens seized in five incidents
- ▶ Colombian sliders (*Trachemys callirostris*); 4,447 specimens seized in 15 incidents
- ▶ Arrau turtles, (*Podocnemis expansa*); 971 specimens seized in two incidents
- ▶ Red-footed tortoises, (*Chelonoidis carbonaria*); 623 specimens seized in 11 incidents

In addition, 309 eggs were seized, including 237 Arrau turtle eggs and 72 eggs of the red-footed tortoise, yellow-spotted river turtle, and Arrau turtle.

Mata mata turtles are a large species of freshwater turtle found in the Amazon and Orinoco River basins. In Colombia, the species is native to the Orinoquía region in eastern Colombia. Juvenile mata mata turtles are traded in large volumes in international pet markets. They are sought after by aquarium and turtle hobbyists in Europe, the USA, and Japan, where they can fetch around US\$400 each, depending on size.³³⁸ In 2023, the species was listed in CITES Appendix II along with *Chelus orinocensis* over concerns of the impacts of illegal trade on wild populations.³³⁹

A total of 6,163 mata mata turtles was reported to be seized in five seizures in 2019, 2020, and 2021. Four of the five seizures concerned air shipments, with numbers ranging from 860 to more than 2,000 specimens. Three seizures occurred at Bogotá's international airport, one at Leticia's International Airport located in the far south of Colombia's Amazon, bordering Peru and Brazil. The scale and frequency of these seizures are indicative of organized crime involvement.

Some shipments are flown directly to consumer markets. For example, in March 2020, Colombian police seized more than 2,000 mata mata turtle hatchlings that were packed in bags and hidden inside boxes, and reportedly destined for the USA and Japan. They were found by a detection dog during a routine inspection.³⁴⁰

Other shipments are flown from Bogotá to Leticia and from there to Peru. This trafficking route is evidenced by seizures in April 2019 (1,359 mata mata turtles destined for Leticia airport seized at Bogotá's airport)³⁴¹, and in February 2020 (860 mata mata turtles seized at Leticia airport).³⁴² Trafficking to Peru has been fuelled by the existence of a legal export market for ranched and captive bred mata mata turtles in Peru.³⁴³ In Peru, wild-caught illegal specimens from Colombia are laundered into this legal trade, or at least, this was the case before the species was listed in CITES. It remains to be seen whether the CITES-listing will succeed in protecting wild populations from poaching and trafficking.

³³⁸ <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/51800323>. Accessed on 29 October 2023.

³³⁹ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/E-CoP19-Prop-22-R1.pdf>. Accessed on 29 October 2023.

³⁴⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/51800323>. Accessed on 29 October 2023.

³⁴¹ <https://periodicoamarillo.com/incautan-1359-tortugas-que-iban-a-ser-trafficadas-bajo-la-modalidad-de-encomienda/>. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

³⁴² <https://twitter.com/MinAmbienteCo/status/1255538176535429120>. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

³⁴³ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/E-CoP19-Prop-22-R1.pdf>. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

Colombian sliders, red-footed tortoises, and Arrau turtles are mainly trafficked for their meat and eggs (although a few specimens have been seized that were kept as pets). Their commercialization (as well as of iguanas and caimans) reaches its peak during the first months of the year, just before the celebration of Holy Week. As Catholic tradition prohibits the consumption of red meat during that time, the population sees these reptiles as a different option than chicken or fish to avoid falling into sin.³⁴⁴

Media reports for the study period identified several significant turtle seizures:

- ▶ In 15 incidents, 4,447 Colombian sliders were seized. The most significant incident was in May 2021 when 1,120 Colombian slider hatchlings and four baby monkeys (including two CITES Appendix I listed cotton-top tamarins) were seized from a car at a checkpoint in Puerto Araujo.³⁴⁵ Another major incident happened in February 2018 when 1,112 Colombian slider hatchlings were seized from a vehicle in the rural area of San Marcos, following a citizen's complaint.³⁴⁶
- ▶ In one incident in February 2017, 970 Arrau turtles and 237 Arrau turtle eggs were seized in Tres Esquinas.³⁴⁷
- ▶ In 11 incidents, 623 red-footed tortoises were seized. Most of them (521 specimens) were rescued in January 2019 from a ravine in Valle del Cauca that they had been dumped. The identity of the perpetrators and the origin of the tortoises was unclear.³⁴⁸ Red-footed tortoises are also smuggled in from Venezuela, as evidenced by a seizure of 34 hatchlings from a Venezuelan man in August 2017 at Bogotá's bus terminal. The man had travelled 900 km by bus from the Venezuelan state of Guárico and intended to sell the tortoises in Cali, Valle del Cauca.³⁴⁹

Trafficking of spectacled caimans

Spectacled caimans (*Caiman crocodilus*) are hunted for their skins as well as for their meat. A total of 2,135 specimens (including 1,086 skins) was involved in 20 seizures and poaching incidents.

Colombia's fashion industry is a major driver for the illegal trade in caiman skins. In March 2019, 800 live specimens were seized during a road inspection in the Córdoba region as part of a multi-agency anti-wildlife trafficking operation. In March 2017, 906 skins were seized in the La Guajira border area that had been smuggled from neighbouring Venezuela. This was the largest ever seizure of caiman skins in Colombia. The skins were destined for Barraquilla to be used in the leather goods industry, especially in the manufacture of footwear and belts. The skins were valued at 72,480,000 pesos (approximately US\$18,000).³⁵⁰

Even though spectacled caimans are protected by Colombian law and their hunting prohibited, some indigenous autonomous territories allow its citizens to hunt the species for their own livelihood. This exemption provides a loophole for uncontrolled hunting to supply markets and restaurants in these

³⁴⁴ <https://www.diariodelcesar.com/archivos/128344/el-viacrucis-de-la-iguana-en-cuaresma/>; <https://es.mongabay.com/2017/04/comercio-ilegal-una-amenaza-las-tortugas-charapa-terecay-colombia/>. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

³⁴⁵ <https://www.semana.com/sostenible/medio-ambiente/articulo/se-salvaron-de-morir-mas-de-mil-tortugas-y-cuatro-monos-fueron-rescatados-en-santander/202125/>. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

³⁴⁶ <https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/otras-ciudades/decomiso-de-hicoteas-en-san-marco-sucre-187658>. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

³⁴⁷ <https://www.publimetro.pe/actualidad/2017/05/12/comercio-ilegal-amenaza-tortugas-charapa-y-terecay-colombia-59966-noticia/>. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

³⁴⁸ <https://www.periodicolaguajira.com/index.php/general/159-medio-ambiente/83806-rescatan-mas-de-500-tortugas-morrococoy-en-el-valle-del-cauca>. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

³⁴⁹ <https://www.elspectador.com/bogota/recuperan-en-bogota-34-tortugas-morrococoy-que-eran-transportadas-de-forma-ilegal-article-876689/>. Accessed on 1 November 2023.

³⁵⁰ <https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/otras-ciudades/detectan-trafico-de-pieles-de-babilla-en-frontera-65756>. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

regions, and possibly beyond.³⁵¹

Trafficking of iguana meat and eggs

Consumption of iguana meat and eggs, particularly on the Caribbean Coast of Colombia, is driving the poaching of green iguanas (*Iguana iguana*). As mentioned above, the consumption of turtles, iguanas, and endangered fish increases during Holy Week.³⁵²

This study identified 15 seizures involving 135 live iguanas, 180 dead iguanas, and 60,295 eggs. The extraction of the eggs from female iguanas is a cruel affair. Poachers catch the iguanas, remove the eggs while they're alive by making an incision, stitch them up and release them back into their natural environment. Of the iguanas subjected to this procedure, however, experts have warned that only 10% manage to recover. The remaining 90% die, while those that survive remain sterile for their entire lives.³⁵³ As a female iguana can carry around 70 eggs, this means around 861 iguanas were subjected to this procedure to produce the 60,295 eggs reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022.

Trafficking of marine turtle parts and products

Ten seizures involving 91 marine turtles were identified between 2017 and 2022. This included 43 live specimens, 12 dead specimens, 1,828.25 kg of meat, three carapaces, and 15 hawksbill turtle shell pieces. Species affected included loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*); green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*); and hawksbill sea turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*).

Marine turtle meat trafficking in Colombia is significant and appears to be a well-organized affair. In 2021, a police investigation led to a crackdown on a criminal network that trafficked sea turtle meat for sales in restaurants and advertised on social media. The investigation resulted in the arrest of three people and the seizure of 140 kg hawksbill meat in December 2021.³⁵⁴ In September 2022, another police operation resulted in five people being arrested and 855 kg meat seized.³⁵⁵ In both cases the networks operated in La Guajira, the far northern tip of Colombia.

³⁵¹ <https://www.semana.com/impacto/articulo/indigenas-de-inirida-matan-babillas-y-las-venden-en-el-mercado/40881/>. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

³⁵² <https://www.rcnradio.com/colombia/caribe/mas-de-30-mil-huevos-de-iguana-fueron-hallados-en-el-mercado-publico-de-magangué>. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

³⁵³ <https://www.rcnradio.com/colombia/caribe/capturan-tres-personas-e-incautan-mas-de-2000-huevos-de-iguana-en-cartagena>. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

³⁵⁴ <https://www.policia.gov.co/noticia/3-capturados-140-kg-carne-tortuga-carey-especie-protegida-acuerdos-internacionales>. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

³⁵⁵ <https://www.policia.gov.co/noticia/capturados-mas-800-kg-carne-tortuga-carey>. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

Birds

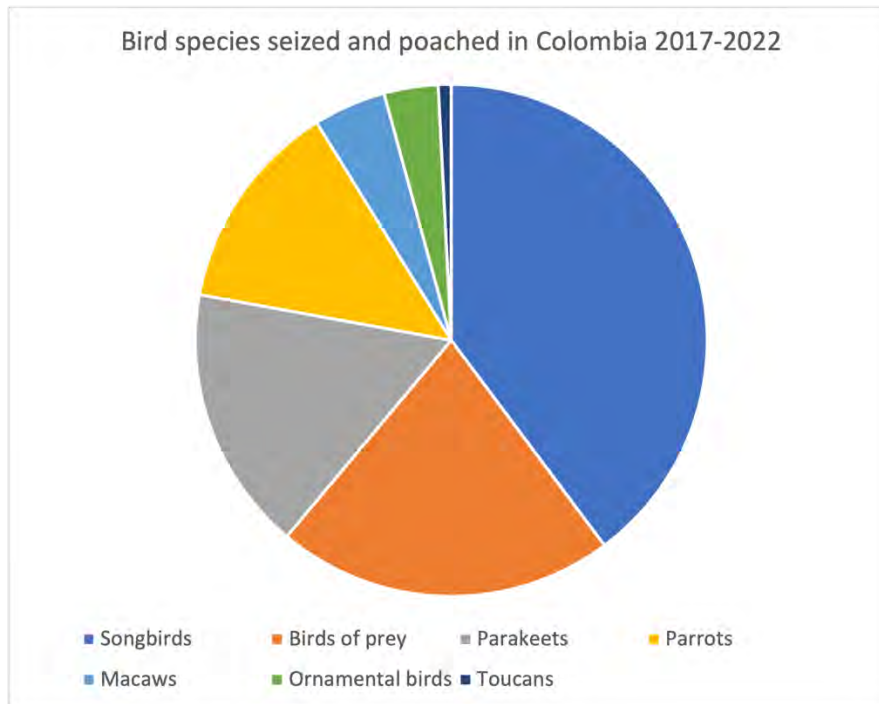


Figure 22: Bird species seized or poached in Colombia between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

A reliable analysis of the illegal bird trade in Colombia was hindered by the fact that media reports often fail to specify the species of birds seized. This was the case for 402 birds from 13 seizures in Colombia (representing 22% of all 1,865 birds reported to be seized or poached in Colombia between 2017 and 2022).

Even so, it is clear that songbirds are the most targeted bird species in Colombia. Some 582 specimens were reported to be seized, involving 40 different species. The most seized were:

- ▶ Tri-coloured munias (*Lonchura malacca*), which are native to Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and southern China, but have been introduced to the Caribbean and Venezuela. Some 208 specimens were seized in two incidents, the majority of which (200 specimens) were seized in March 2022 during anti-trafficking controls in barrio Belén, Cali.³⁵⁶ The origin of these specimens is unclear.
- ▶ Saffron finches (*Sicalis flaveola*) are considered among the most trafficked wildlife species in Colombia.³⁵⁷ Some 127 specimens were seized in 10 incidents. The males are used in songbird contests, with attendees gambling on the winning bird.
- ▶ A total of 56 blue-black grassquits (*Volatinia jacarina*) were seized in two incidents, including 54 specimens that were seized in March 2021 along with 46 other birds in the mercado de Bazurto in Cartagena.³⁵⁸
- ▶ A total of 45 mockingbirds were seized in six incidents, including 43 Northern mockingbirds (*Mimus polyglottos*) and two tropical mockingbirds (*Mimus gilvus*).

³⁵⁶ <https://www.qhubocali.com/asi-paso/rescatan-mas-de-200-aves-durante-controles-al-trafico-ilegal-en-cali/>. Accessed on 31 October 2023. u

³⁵⁷ <https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/otras-ciudades/especies-silvestres-mas-trafficadas-en-colombia-136124>. Accessed on 31 October 2023.

³⁵⁸ <https://www.eluniversal.com.co/cartagena/trafico-de-fauna-silvestre-decomisan-100-aves-en-bazurto-BG4383636>. Accessed on 31 October 2023.

Birds of prey feature high in the list of most targeted birds in Colombia between 2017 and 2022 due to the slaughter of 300 Swainson's hawks (*Buteo Swainsoni*) that took place in the north of Tolima department in March 2022. Their carcasses were found following an anonymous complaint. Swainson's hawks are a migratory species that pass through the region during this time of year on their 13,000 km migration route northward across 13 countries in the Americas. Poachers kill them every year, but this was the first time it happened on such a large scale. They are believed to be an aphrodisiac and/or a danger to communities.³⁵⁹

Psittacids are also frequently seized in Colombia. Parakeets, parrots, and macaws make up 35% of all birds seized or poached in Colombia between 2017 and 2022.

Some 245 parakeets were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022, including 191 orange-chinned parakeets (*Brotogeris jugularis*) and 37 brown-throated parakeets (*Aratinga pertinax*). An example of the inhumane methods by which wild birds are smuggled occurred in September 2019 at the Bogotá's bus terminal (Terminal de Transportes Salitre). Authorities found 106 orange-chinned parakeets tightly packed in cardboard boxes that were being transported on top of a bus's gas tank. The birds, whose wings and tails had been clipped to prevent flight, were in very bad shape due to dehydration, stress, and overcrowding.³⁶⁰

In addition, 195 parrots were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. The most affected species are yellow-crowned amazons (*Amazona ochrocephala*), with a total of 123 specimens seized in 22 seizures. The most significant seizure concerned 44 yellow-crowned amazon chicks transported by car that were intercepted during a road inspection in Puerto Gaitán in March 2017.³⁶¹

During the study period, 67 macaws were reported to be seized. The majority (32 specimens) were blue and yellow macaws (*Ara araurana*). Most macaws had been kept as pets or in tourist attractions, but there were some incidents indicative of organized trade, such as the eight macaws seized along with 43 other birds and mammals in Valledupar in November 2019. The animals had been poached to be sold in Colombia and abroad.³⁶² The number of 67 seized macaws is a vast underrepresentation of actual seizures as, on average, 150 macaws are reportedly seized in Colombia annually.³⁶³

Amphibians

Poison dart frogs are trafficked from Colombia to supply demand from collectors in Europe, North America, and Asia attracted to their colourful appearance. The greatest pressure from illegal trade occurs in Colombia, Peru, and Panama, as these countries host the greatest wealth of these species. Illegal trade of this charismatic group of frogs has occurred since the 1970s. Illegal activity has persisted due to the wide colour variations in poison arrow species, which continue to attract collectors, as well as the desire to introduce fresh blood lines. It should be noted that the communities from which the

³⁵⁹ <https://www.elespectador.com/ambiente/cazadores-ilegales-mataron-a-mas-de-300-aguilas-cuaresmeras-en-el-departamento-de-tolima-en-colombia/>. Accessed on 31 October 2023.

³⁶⁰ https://www.ambientebogota.gov.co/tr/noticias-de-ambiente1/-/asset_publisher/CWsNLtoGa4f6/content/incautados-mas-de-100-pericos-bronceados-en-la-terminal-de-transportes-el-salitre. Accessed on 31 October 2023.

³⁶¹ <https://prensalibrecasanare.com/meta/24622-cormacarena-rescatu-45-loros-y-pericos-en-puerto-gaitbn.html>. Accessed on 31 October 2023.

³⁶² <https://www.elheraldo.co/cesar/rescatan-51-animales-en-operacion-contra-trafico-de-fauna-silvestre-677857>. Accessed on 31 October 2023.

³⁶³ <https://colombia.wcs.org/es-es/WCS-Colombia/Noticias/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/17381/GUACAMAYAS-NO-SE-LIBRAN-DEL-TRAFFICO-QUE-LAS-TRANSFORMA-EN-MASCOTAS.aspx>

specimens are extracted receive payments of fewer than a dollar per individual, while the value of these same frogs can reach several thousand euros or dollars when they reach their destination.³⁶⁴

In Colombia, two seizures involving 640 specimens were reported, both at Bogotá's international airport and both destined for Germany. Based on these seizures as well as seizures in Panama, Germany appears to be the main destination.

In November 2018, 216 poison dart frogs, including 153 Harlequin poison frogs (*Oophaga histrionica*); 50 Lehman's poison frogs (*Oophaga lehmanni*); and 13 little devil poison frogs (*Oophaga sylvatica*) were found hidden in photographic rolls in a suitcase abandoned in the restrooms of the airport. According to the Police, the frogs had been transported by land from the city of Cali to Bogota and were meant to be carried to Germany. Authorities estimated each individual to be worth around US\$2,000 in the illegal market, so these specimens would have a value of more than 1,200,000,000 pesos (US\$432,000) in the illegal trade.³⁶⁵

Six months later, in April 2019, a Colombian man was arrested at Bogotá's airport for attempting to smuggle 424 poison arrow frogs (Harlequins and Lehman's) in his luggage to Germany. The frogs, which were also hidden in photo rolls, were detected thanks to X-ray. The man said a German citizen had contacted him and bought his air tickets to take the frogs to Germany via Sao Paulo, Brazil. He had reportedly travelled from the city of Cali to Bogotá in the morning and then made a connection with Sao Paulo. The frogs, which had been extracted from the departments of Chocó and Valle del Cauca were in precarious condition. At the time of counting the specimens, it was found that four frogs had died.³⁶⁶

The smuggling of poison arrow frogs continues unabated. In January 2024, Colombian authorities at Bogota's Airport arrested a Brazilian woman with 130 critically endangered harlequin poison frogs (*Oophaga histrionica*) in her suitcase. She had booked a flight to Sao Paulo, Brazil, via Panama, where she reportedly intended to sell or drop off the frogs.³⁶⁷ Panama is a well-known hotspot for poison arrow frog trafficking to Europe (see the Panama section).

Harlequin and Lehmann's poison frogs are endemic to the Chocó region in western Colombia and are listed as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species; little devil poison frogs are listed as near threatened and occur in Colombia and Ecuador.³⁶⁸ All three species have been listed in CITES Appendix II since 1987. The story goes that Lehmann's poison frog, considered the 'holy grail' by frog enthusiasts worldwide, used to be so common that it littered the ground in its native habitat. However, a German-led documentary, filmed in 2013, that aimed to find a red morph of Lehmann's poison frog could only find a single one in a remote part of its range.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁴ <https://www.inecol.mx/inecol/index.php/es/ct-menu-item-25/ct-menu-item-27/17-ciencia-hoy/2021-trafico-ilegal-de-fauna-el-caso-de-las-ranas-venenosas>. Accessed on 1 November 2023.

³⁶⁵ https://ambientebogota.gov.co/historial-de-noticias/-/asset_publisher/VqEYxdh9mhVF/content/incautadas-216-ranas-venenosas-en-el-aeropuerto-internacional-el-dorado. Accessed on 1 November 2023.

³⁶⁶ <https://www.catorce6.com/actualidad-ambiental/16910-en-rollos-fotograficos-llevarian-424-ranas-venenosas-a-europa>

³⁶⁷ <https://www.infobae.com/colombia/2024/01/29/brasilena-pretendia-sacar-130-ranas-venenosas-por-el-aeropuerto-el-dorado-las-iba-a-vender-en-panama/>. Accessed on 30 January 2024.

³⁶⁸ <https://www.iucnredlist.org/>

³⁶⁹ <https://news.mongabay.com/2015/11/farmed-and-legally-exported-colombian-poison-frogs-take-on-the-black-market-pet-trade/>. Accessed on 1 November 2023.

Mammals

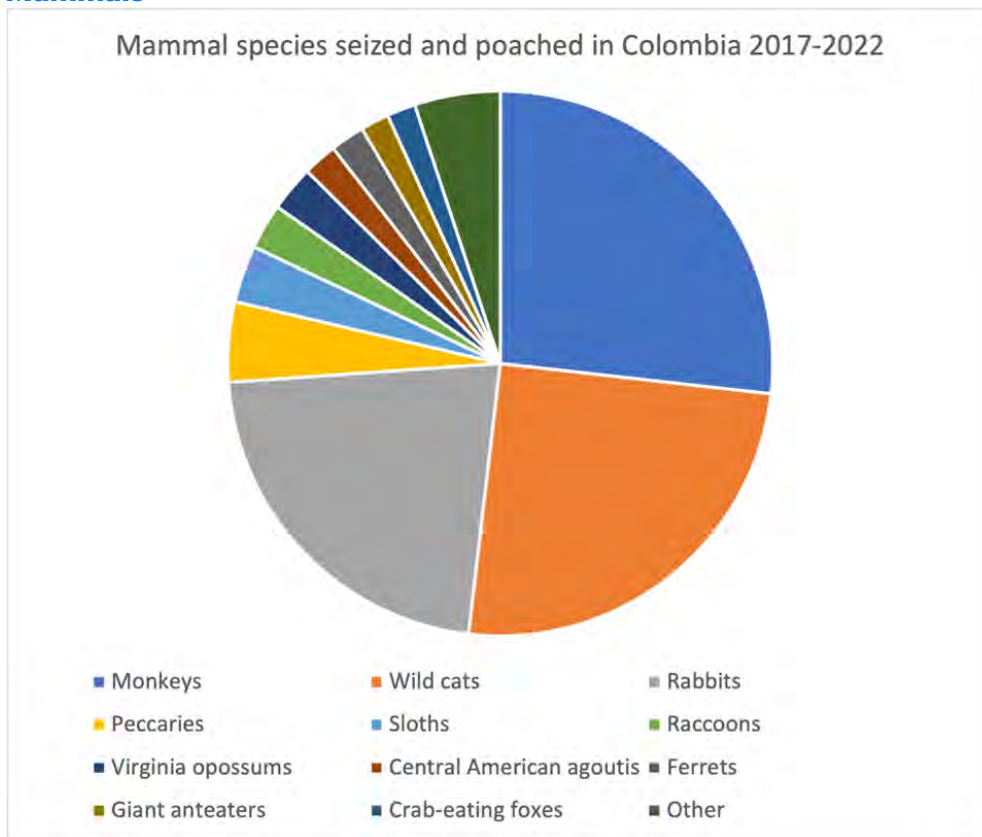


Figure 33: Mammal species seized or poached in Colombia between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Between 2017 and 2022, 310 mammals were involved in 105 seizures and 36 poaching incidents reported in Colombia. Of these, 67.5% were alive, 18% concerned parts and products (mainly skins), and 14.5% were dead.

Trafficking of primates

Primates are the mammals most affected by trafficking; between 2017 and 2022, a total of 79 specimens were reported to be seized or poached, making up 27% of all mammals seized or poached. Of the 41 primate species existing in Colombia, at least 13 were identified in seizures. These included 23 capuchin monkeys, 22 tamarins (including 21 critically endangered cotton-top tamarins), 14 howler monkeys, nine night monkeys, seven spider monkeys (including one critically endangered brown spider monkey), two squirrel monkeys, one common marmoset, and one ornate titi.

Some 51% of the monkeys (40 specimens in total) were seized from private pet owners, usually following a citizen's complaint. Of these, 7% were found dead (5 specimens) or wounded (1 specimen) following abuse by citizens; 4% (3 specimens) had been used to attract tourists; and the remaining 38% (30 specimens) were seized from the hands of traffickers. For instance:

- ▶ In May 2021, four baby monkeys (two Colombian white-faced capuchins (*Cebus capucinus*) and two cotton-top tamarins (*Saguinus oedipus*)) along with 1,120 Colombian slider hatchlings were seized from a car at the Puerto Araujo checkpoint in Cimitarra.³⁷⁰

³⁷⁰ <https://www.semana.com/sostenible/medio-ambiente/articulo/se-salvaron-de-morir-mas-de-mil-tortugas-y-cuatro-monos-fueron-rescatados-en-santander/202125/>. Accessed on 1 November 2023.

- ▶ In April 2022, police seized 1,004 wild animals, including three Colombian night monkeys (*Aotus lemurinus*), three white-fronted capuchins (*Cebus albifrons*), and two cotton-top tamarins, and arrested 21 people as part of operation Leopardo (see below in the key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes section).³⁷¹
- ▶ In December 2022, police arrested 10 people and seized four cotton-top tamarins along with 160 other animals in Córdoba.³⁷²

The monkeys seized from traffickers were all babies or juveniles, which can only be obtained alive by killing the mother and sometimes other members of the group.

This study identified nine night monkeys that were seized from traffickers. However, this does not reflect the huge scale at which this species is exploited in Colombia. Some night monkeys are trafficked for the pet trade, but the large majority is taken from the wild to be used in biomedical research in Cali, Colombia. In the Colombia-Peru-Brazil tri-border area several thousands of Nancy Ma's night monkeys (*Aotus nancymaae*) have been taken from the wild in the last decades, resulting in near extirpation of the Colombian population.³⁷³ Grey-handed night monkeys (*Aotus lemurinus*), endemic to the forests of northern Colombia, have also been the target of systematic poaching to supply research facilities in Cali. In 2018 and 2019 alone, around a hundred specimens were reportedly captured by local poachers and brought to Cali without permits in a twenty-hour road journey. In response to pressure by NGOs, authorities undertook a raid in February 2023 on the premises of the laboratory and seized 102 night monkeys and six squirrel monkeys.³⁷⁴

Persecution and trafficking of wild cats

Wild cats are heavily affected by poaching and trafficking in Colombia. Seventy-five specimens were reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022. Forty-six specimens were alive; 28 were dead; and 1 specimen was taxidermied. The main species targeted are ocelots (*Leopardus pardalis*, 29 specimens); pumas (*Puma concolor*, 18 specimens); jaguars (*Panthera onca*, 14 specimens); and jaguarundis (*Puma yagouaroundi*, 6 specimens).

Ocelots and jaguarundis mainly end up as pets after their mother is killed. Apart from one ocelot that was reported to be killed by a poacher in October 2020, all ocelots and jaguarundis identified in this study were seized alive, most of them from private pet owners in response to citizen's complaints.

Poaching of jaguars and pumas is intense in Colombia. Fourteen jaguars were reported to be poached or seized, including 12 dead specimens, one taxidermy, and one live specimen. Eighteen pumas were identified, including 14 dead and four live specimens. Poaching of these big cats usually becomes known after images of the killing or dead animal go viral on social media or following an anonymous tip. Although this is not always evident, jaguars and pumas are often killed in conflict situations, with those responsible for the killing claiming the animal preyed on their livestock. For example, in July 2018, villagers killed a jaguar in Amalfi, Antioquia, in retaliation for eating their dogs, chickens, horses, and

³⁷¹ <https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/delitos/trafico-de-fauna-silvestre-capturan-a-21-personas-en-colombia-664626>

³⁷² <https://www.lavanguardia.com/natural/20221206/8636008/diez-detenidos-colombia-trafficar-fauna-silvestre-jaguar.html>. Accessed on 2 November 2023.

³⁷³ <https://whitleyaward.org/winners/night-monkey-colombia/>; <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/sep/27/poached-caged-shipped-in-socks-on-patrol-with-the-police-battling-colombias-wildlife-trade>. Accessed on 2 November 2023.

³⁷⁴ Robin des Bois, On the Trail nr. 38, page 111: https://robindesbois.org/wp-content/uploads/ON_THE_TRAIL_38.pdf. Accessed on 2 November 2023.

cows. They also claimed they feared for the lives of their children. The media report noted that 14 similar cases had already occurred in the Antioquia department that year.³⁷⁵

The high percentage of rabbits in the number of mammals seized in Colombia is explained by two seizures. In March 2022, 38 Eastern cottontail rabbits (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) were seized during a road inspection in La Guajira. This species is frequently hunted for consumption.³⁷⁶ Rabbits are also targeted for their skins, which are used in fashion. In March 2018, an Argentinian fashion designer was arrested in Cali on charges of wildlife trafficking, following a citizen's complaint. More than 600 wild animal skins and products were seized, including 27 rabbit skins.³⁷⁷ The media report did not specify the rabbit species, but it is likely they were either *Sylvilagus floridanus* or *Sylvilagus brasiliensis*, which are the two wild rabbit species present in Colombia.

Bushmeat trafficking

In Colombia there is high consumption of bushmeat. Research shows more than 150 species of insects, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and mammals are eaten, including turtles, alligators, opossums, tapirs, deer, peccaries, capybaras, rabbits, monkeys, manatees, parrots, and macaws. In rural and indigenous areas, bushmeat is often the only source of animal protein. While bushmeat hunting for personal livelihoods is allowed, there is debate concerning the sustainability of bushmeat hunting to supply increasing demand from markets and restaurants in local towns.³⁷⁸ Tackling trafficking of bushmeat derived from mammals does not appear to be a law enforcement priority, however, as this study identified only two bushmeat seizures. In April 2022, 10 kg of capybara, lowland paca, and armadillo meat was seized from a bus passenger in Medellín.³⁷⁹ In March 2018, 35 kg of capybara meat was seized along with a live sloth and 30 tortoises from Cartagena's Mercado de Bazurto as part of the campaign 'En Semana Santa, yo protejo la vida'.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁵ <https://www.elcolombiano.com/historico/campesinos-dicen-que-el-temor-los-llevo-a-matar-al-jaguar-PUEC-199336>. Accessed on 2 November 2023.

³⁷⁶ <https://www.elspectador.com/ambiente/incautan-25-libras-de-carne-de-tortuga-y-38-conejos-en-vias-de-la-guajira/>. Accessed on 3 November 2023.

³⁷⁷ <https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2018/03/02/un-disenador-argentino-fue-capturado-con-mas-de-500-pieles-de-animales-silvestres-en-colombia/>. Accessed on 3 November 2023.

³⁷⁸ <https://es.mongabay.com/2017/02/consumo-carne-monte-colombia/>

³⁷⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZaisgOSDdg>

³⁸⁰ <https://www.elinformador.com.co/index.php/general/189-medio-ambiente/172999-rescatan-30-tortugas-y-un-oso-perezoso-que-iban-a-ser-vendidos-en-cartagena>. Accessed on 3 November 2023.

Key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes

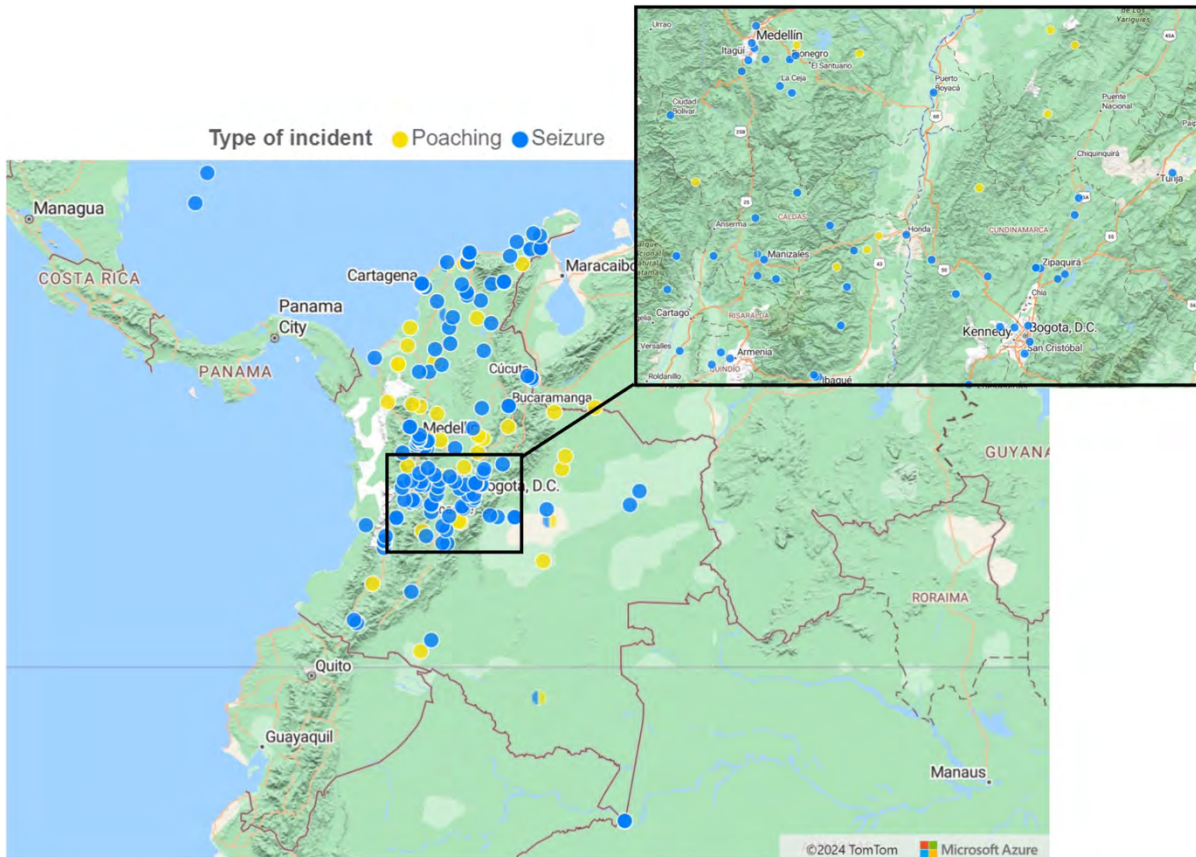


Figure 34: Locations of seizures and poaching incidents in Colombia reported between 2017 and 2022

Most wildlife seizures identified by this study occurred in markets, farms, residences of traders, or from private pet owners. Of the 234 seizures reported in Colombia between 2017 and 2022, 43 seizures (18%) were made on roads, bus terminals, or airports. The following graph depicts transport modalities used in these 43 seizures:

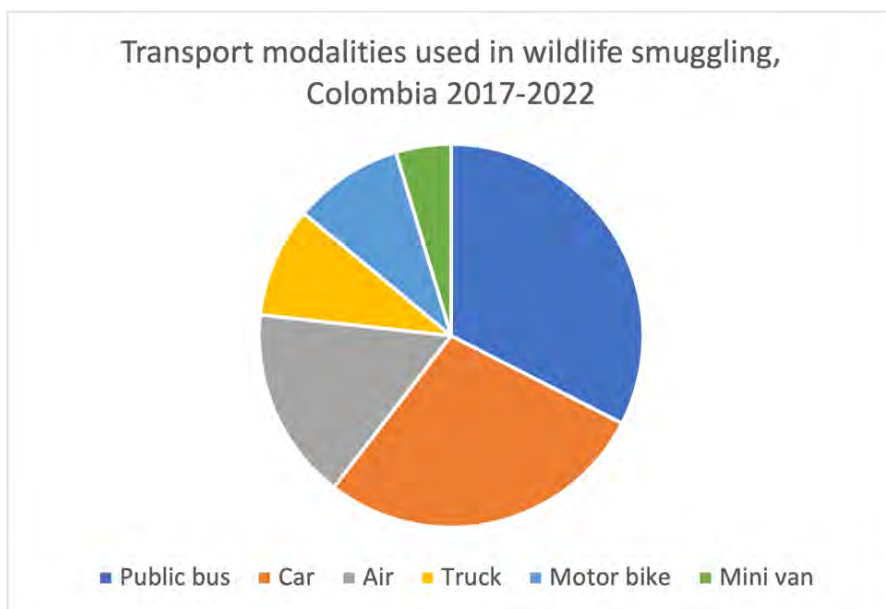


Figure 35: Transport modalities used in wildlife smuggling in Colombia between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Most interceptions take place during routine inspections. In some cases, illegal wildlife shipments are only detected when law enforcers hear animal sounds. This happened for example in May 2018, when police officers conducted an inspection of a public bus and heard sounds coming from the luggage hold. Upon closer inspection they found six flamingos (*Phoenicopterus*) tightly packed in a cardboard box, each bird sealed with adhesive plastic. The bus they were in was taking them from La Guajira to southern Colombia.³⁸¹

Bogotá main hub

Colombia's capital Bogotá is the country's biggest hub for wildlife trafficking. In 2021, authorities seized more than 6,000 wild animals in Bogotá.³⁸² This study identified 41 seizures (18% of all seizures) involving 6692 reptiles, birds, amphibians, and mammals in Bogotá between 2017 and 2022.

Ten seizures were recorded in the Salitre bus terminal (Terminal de Transportes Salitre). The terminal is Colombia's main land port and an important infrastructural node for wildlife smugglers. In 2021 the 'Compromiso Protección Animal' campaign was launched to inform passengers that Salitre is committed to being a pet-friendly terminal.³⁸³

Trafficking by air

Seven airport seizures were recorded, including six at Bogotá's Aeropuerto Internacional El Dorado and one at Leticia's Aeropuerto Internacional General Alfredo Vásquez Cobo.

The air shipment seizures identified by this study mainly concerned reptiles (4,155 mata mata turtles, three seizures) and amphibians (640 poison dart frogs, two seizures). One seized parcel (destined for the USA) contained eight raccoon tails and six ferret skins. A seizure of 15 songbirds, including 12 saffron finches and three tocyuo sparrows (*Arremonops tocuensis*) from an air parcel at Bogotá's airport highlights that birds are also trafficked by air. The birds were shipped from Barranquilla and were transiting in Bogotá with their intended final destination Isla de San Andrés and Isla de Providencia.³⁸⁴

It is likely many illicit wildlife shipments go through airports undetected. While reptiles and amphibians are relatively easy to smuggle in parcels and/or luggage, smugglers are known to carry birds on their bodies to avoid detection by luggage screening. For example, in 2016 after a year-long investigation, the National Police dismantled a major criminal network that had been trafficking birds, reptiles, and mammals for over a decade. The group of eight men, known as 'Los Pajareros' (roughly translated as persons dedicated to hunting, breeding, and selling birds) smuggled wildlife by road as well as air. Rare birds including parrots, toucans, and macaws would be sedated and taped to their bodies or smuggled in three-litre soda bottles.³⁸⁵

Sales in markets

Markets remain a popular avenue for illegal wildlife sales, birds in particular. Nine seizures at markets were recorded between 2017 and 2022 involving 362 live animals and 1 dead specimen. Some 80% of all wild animals seized at markets were birds (songbirds and parakeets). The following markets were

³⁸¹ <https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/otras-ciudades/policia-encontro-seis-flamingos-en-la-bodega-de-un-bus-216508>. Accessed on 3 November 2023.

³⁸² <https://bogota.gov.co/mi-ciudad/ambiente/bogota-cuantos-animales-se-han-rescatado-en-el-2021-foto>

³⁸³ <https://bogota.gov.co/mi-ciudad/ambiente/fauna/reglas-para-el-transporte-de-animales-en-la-terminal-de-bogota>

³⁸⁴ <https://www.alertabogota.com/noticias/local/autoridades-15-aves-silvestres-en-el-aeropuerto-el-dorado>. Accessed on 31 October 2023.

³⁸⁵ <https://www.elespectador.com/judicial/en-las-entranas-del-trafico-de-animales-articulo-642748/>. Accessed 1 Nov 2023.

identified: Mercado del Restrepo in Bogotá; Mercado de Bazurto in Cartagena; Mercado de Granos in Baranquilla; Mercado Nuevo in Valledupar; and the municipal markets in Purificación and Magangué.

Sales on social media

Media report that illegal online wildlife trade is a significant and growing concern in Colombia, with traffickers taking advantage of the anonymity offered by online sales.³⁸⁶ The National Police has recognised this and employs 10 cybercrime specialists dedicated to monitoring websites and social media for evidence of wildlife trafficking.³⁸⁷ According to the police, wild animals are offered for sale on social media like Facebook and Instagram; negotiations take place via phone or direct messaging; and the animals are shipped to the buyer using hired drivers or public transport (in which case animals are drugged to avoid detection).

This study identified five incidents between 2017 and 2022 where social media were used to market wildlife:

- ▶ In May 2018, three men were arrested in Valledupar for advertising iguanas and parrots online. Twenty-two iguanas (10 dead) and three parrots were seized.³⁸⁸
- ▶ In August 2020, a person was arrested in Antioquia department for offering a baby Colombian red howler (*Alouatta seniculus*) for sale on Facebook, after an internet user filed a complaint.³⁸⁹
- ▶ In December 2021, three people were arrested and 140 kg of hawksbill turtle meat seized after a 9-month police investigation. The sea turtle meat was advertised on social media; restaurants and street vendors were the main clients.³⁹⁰
- ▶ In April 2022, police dismantled two criminal networks, seized 1,004 wild animals, and arrested 21 people in Bogotá, Medellín, Magangué, Calí, and Popayan that had engaged in industrial-scale trafficking of wildlife using social media.³⁹¹ See text box in the law enforcement efforts section for more detail on this case, known as Operation Leopardo.
- ▶ In September 2022, five people were arrested and 855 kg of Hawksbill turtle meat was seized in five operations in Riohacha and Uribia, La Guajira, following a months-long police investigation of illegal sea turtle meat sales to restaurants and street vendors, using social media for advertising.³⁹²

Convergence

Several sources have reported convergence between drugs and timber trafficking in Colombia. For example, Colombian drug cartels are known to use timber shipments as a cover to traffic cocaine. Legitimate timber and gold businesses are also used to launder illicit drugs money.³⁹³ In the 1980s, drug lord Pablo Escobar from the Medellín cartel procured a collection of wild animals in his private zoo, inspiring current-day drug traffickers in Mexico to do the same.

³⁸⁶ See e.g. <https://www.rcnradio.com/estilo-de-vida/medio-ambiente/asi-funciona-la-venta-de-animales-silvestres-por-redes-sociales-en-https://www.elpais.com.co/california/la-web-se-convirtio-en-un-medio-para-el-trafico-ilegal-de-fauna-2512.html>. Accessed on 3 November 2023.

³⁸⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/colombia-launches-strategy-tackle-environmental-crimes-2021-12-06/>. Accessed on 27 October 2023.

³⁸⁸ <https://www.maravillastereo.com/ofrecian-iguanas-por-internet-y-fueron-capturados/>

³⁸⁹ <https://www.noticiasrcn.com/nacional/noestansolos-salvan-mono-aullador-bebe-que-banda-criminal-intentaba-vender-360939>

³⁹⁰ <https://www.policia.gov.co/noticia/3-capturados-140-kg-carne-tortuga-carey-especie-protegida-acuerdos-internacionales>

³⁹¹ <https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/delitos/trafico-de-fauna-silvestre-capturan-a-21-personas-en-colombia-664626>;
<https://tubarco.news/tubarco-noticias-colombia/escalofriante-trafico-de-animales-exoticos-los-vendian-por-whatsapp-y-con-algunos-hacian-pocimas-sexuales/>

³⁹² <https://www.policia.gov.co/noticia/capturados-mas-800-kg-carne-tortuga-carey>

³⁹³ Van Uhm, D., South, N. and Wyatt, T. (2021). Connections between trades and trafficking in wildlife and drugs. *Trends Organ Crim.* 24:425–446. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12117-021-09416-z>

While it is quite likely that Colombian drug cartels are engaging in illegal wildlife trade, this study was unable to verify this based on seizures of reptiles, birds, amphibians, and mammals reported in the media.

Only one example was found of convergence between wildlife and timber crime. In August 2022, Colombian navy and police officers in the Colombian Amazon, near Leticia, seized 12 testudinae, including red-footed tortoises, Arrau turtles, and yellow-spotted river turtles; 72 eggs belonging to these species; and 41 m³ of espavé wood (*Anacardium excelsum*) from a Peruvian-registered boat, and arrested two Peruvians. A police spokesman explained that this Colombian fauna ends up in the hands of Peruvian and Brazilian traffickers, and that wildlife trafficking networks working for Brazilian mafias commit crimes in this part of the triple border area.³⁹⁴

Transboundary trafficking routes

Venezuela > Colombia

- ▶ In March 2017, 906 spectacled caiman skins originating from neighbouring Venezuela were seized in the La Guajira border area in the far northeast.³⁹⁵
- ▶ In August 2017, 34 red-footed tortoise hatchlings were seized from a Venezuelan man at Bogotá's bus terminal. The man had travelled 900 km by bus from the Venezuelan state of Guárico and intended to sell the tortoises in Cali, Valle del Cauca.³⁹⁶

Nicaragua > Colombia

In May 2021, the Colombian navy seized a fishing vessel flying a Nicaraguan flag that was headed to Isla San Andrés with 138 kg of hawksbill sea turtle meat.³⁹⁷ San Andrés is a Colombian island in the Caribbean Sea off the Nicaraguan coast.

Colombia > Peru

- ▶ In 2019 and 2022 several seizures were reported concerning mata mata turtles trafficked by air to Peru; see discussion above in the species most targeted section.
- ▶ As mentioned above, Colombian authorities have arrested Peruvian nationals with turtles, turtle eggs, and illegal wood in the Colombian Amazon.

The tri-border area of the Amazon where Colombia meets Peru and Brazil is a known crime hub, with its key rivers, the Caquetá, Putumayo, and Amazon, facilitating the trafficking of timber, gold, and drugs. Turf wars between Brazilian and Colombian gangs are frequent.³⁹⁸ It is likely that wildlife traffickers systematically smuggle wildlife across these countries' borders, abusing lax government controls in this remote area. As there are no roads that connect the area with other parts of Colombia, wildlife is trafficked through the airport Leticia.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁴ <https://noticias.caracol.tv.com/colombia/caen-trafficantes-de-animales-en-amazonas-los-pillaron-con-12-tortugas-en-peligro-de-extincion-rg10>

³⁹⁵ <https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/otras-ciudades/detectan-traffic-de-pieles-de-babilla-en-frontera-65756>

³⁹⁶ <https://www.elespectador.com/bogota/recuperan-en-bogota-34-tortugas-morrocay-que-eran-transportadas-de-forma-ilegal-articulo-876689/>. Accessed on 1 November 2023.

³⁹⁷ <https://laderasur.com/articulo/colombia-la-armada-intercepta-embarcacion-nicaraguense-y-halla-escondidos-en-bultos-138-kilogramos-de-carne-de-tortuga-carey/>. Accessed on 4 November 2023.

³⁹⁸ https://www.unodc.org/res/WDR-2023/WDR23_B3_CH4_Amazon.pdf; <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/sep/27/poached-caged-shipped-in-socks-on-patrol-with-the-police-battling-colombias-wildlife-trade>. Accessed on 4 November 2023.

³⁹⁹ https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/14510/routes_taking_off_report.pdf. Accessed on 4 November 2023.

Colombia ↔ Ecuador

In June 2019, Ecuadorian authorities seized 85 animals, including 20 leopard geckos, six poison frogs, and 52 centipedes and spiders from a garbage bin on the international Rumichaca bridge that connects Ecuador with Colombia. While it was not clear whether the animals were destined for Ecuador or Colombia, the seizure highlights trafficking links between the two countries.⁴⁰⁰

Colombia > USA

- ▶ In March 2020, Colombian police seized more than 2,000 mata mata turtle hatchlings that were destined for the USA and Japan.⁴⁰¹
- ▶ In August 2021, an air parcel with eight raccoon tails and six ferret skins (both non-native species) were seized at Bogotá's El Dorado airport destined for the USA (likely the fashion industry).⁴⁰²
- ▶ In July 2022, USA authorities arrested Colombian fashion designer Nancy Gonzalez for trafficking hundreds of crocodile skin bags (made from spectacled caiman skins) to the USA. Gonzalez smuggled hundreds of handbags by paying friends, relatives, and employees to carry them in their personal luggage on flights to the USA, instructing them to state the items were gifts for their relatives if they were asked any questions by Customs officers. The handbags sold for up to US\$10,000 in designer stores in the USA and Europe.⁴⁰³ On 22 April 2024 Gonzalez was sentenced to 18 months in prison by a Florida court.⁴⁰⁴

Colombia > Asia (Japan)

- ▶ As mentioned above, in March 2020, Colombian police seized more than 2,000 mata mata turtle hatchlings that were destined for the USA and Japan.⁴⁰⁵
- ▶ Although fish are not a focus of this study, it is noteworthy that shark fins are trafficked to Asia from Colombia. In September 2021, a shipment of 3500 illegal shark fins destined for Hong Kong SAR was seized at Bogotá's airport.⁴⁰⁶

Colombia > Europe (Germany)

- ▶ Germany is a known destination for poison dart frogs smuggled from Colombia.
- ▶ Arachnids (which, like fish, are not part of this study) are also frequently smuggled out of Colombia. For instance, in December 2021 two Germans were arrested at Bogotá's airport with 232 tarantulas, nine spider eggs, a scorpion with seven of its spiderlings, and 67 roaches.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁰ <https://www.ambiente.gob.ec/85-especimenes-de-vida-silvestres-exoticas-fueron-rescatadas-de-un-basurero-en-el-puente-internacional-de-rumichaca/>

⁴⁰¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/51800323>. Accessed on 29 October 2023.

⁴⁰² <https://www.semana.com/sostenible/impacto/articulo/incautan-pieles-de-mapaches-y-hurones-que-tenian-como-destino-estados-unidos/202132/>. Accessed on 4 November 2023.

⁴⁰³ <https://apnews.com/article/britney-spears-entertainment-travel-fashion-f0423b571b20b986ac2f98379251f6d5>

⁴⁰⁴ <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdfl/pr/luxury-handbag-company-founder-and-co-conspirator-sentenced-smuggling-handbags-made>. Accessed on 23 April 2024.

⁴⁰⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/51800323>. Accessed on 29 October 2023.

⁴⁰⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/colombia-confiscates-nearly-3500-shark-fins-their-way-hong-kong-2021-09-24/>. Accessed on 4 November 2023.

⁴⁰⁷ <https://outsider.com/news/colombia-arrests-two-germans-attempting-smuggle-hundreds-arachnids-europe/>

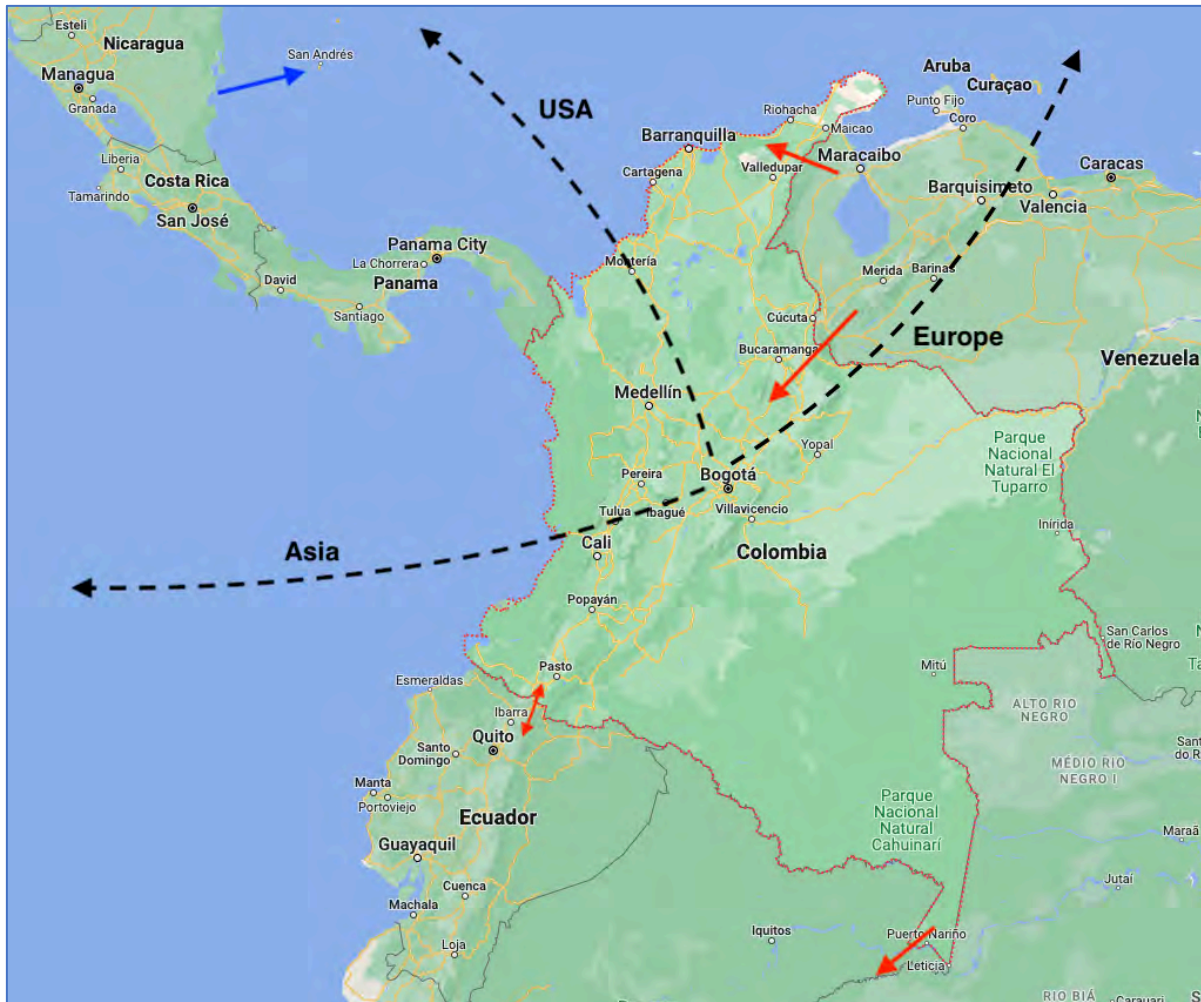


Figure 23: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes to/from Colombia based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022.

Law enforcement efforts

Between 2017 and 2022, 122 people were reported to be arrested in 57 incidents, all of them seizures. Therefore 21% of cases resulted in arrest (the average regional arrest rate is 27%).

The high numbers of seizures and poaching incidents and of animals seized in Colombia are indicative of the scale of illegal wildlife exploitation in the country. Wildlife poaching and trafficking are deeply ingrained in local culture and reportedly there are often confrontations between police and local people during raids. Many poachers rely on illegal wildlife exploitation for their livelihood as they lack other means of income.⁴⁰⁸ At the same time, illegal wildlife trade is a lucrative industry in Colombia which has attracted sophisticated criminal groups.

Wildlife seized by Colombian authorities between 2008 and 2013 had a commercial value of more 108,000 million pesos, or about US\$29 million.⁴⁰⁹ Wildlife trafficking is reportedly facilitated by corruption and lax enforcement. Smugglers often rely on the falsification of documents to move animals or wildlife products under the guise of legal exports.

⁴⁰⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/sep/27/poached-caged-shipped-in-socks-on-patrol-with-the-police-battling-colombias-wildlife-trade>. Accessed on 29 October 2023.

⁴⁰⁹ <https://insightcrime.org/news/wildlife-under-threat-traffickers-target-colombia-vital-fauna/>. Accessed on 4 November 2023.

As in most other countries in the region, Colombian law enforcement responses to wildlife crime are often reactive, with wildlife being seized in response to citizen's complaints or during routine inspections. However, in recent years the National Police has undertaken several successful, major intelligence-led operations to crack down on wildlife trafficking networks.

There is an Environmental Police unit tasked with providing support to the authorities, territorial entities, and the community in general in the defence and protection of renewable natural resources.⁴¹⁰ Since 2013 the Environmental Police employs a canine detection unit to detect wildlife trafficking. In 2021, the unit had 14 specially trained dogs that frequently carry out searches in places such as markets, courier, and mail companies.⁴¹¹ Furthermore, since 2000, the Central Directorate of the Judicial Police has a special team to investigate environmental crimes (Grupo Investigativo de Delitos contra el Medio Ambiente, DIJIN). It is divided into three teams focusing on fauna, flora, and hydrobiological resources and environmental pollution.

In December 2021, Colombia's national police launched a national strategy to tackle environmental crime and increased its investigative capacity. It now deploys 100 criminal intelligence and investigation officers, including 50 environmental crime investigators, 40 intelligence analysts, and 10 cybercrime specialists that monitor websites and social media for wildlife trafficking.⁴¹²

Authorities also undertake awareness-raising activities. For example, in 2021 a campaign was launched at Bogotá's bus terminal, a major hub for wildlife smugglers, to prevent wildlife trafficking and to make it pet-friendly for domestic animals that are transported on passenger buses.⁴¹³

However, while the Colombian police is stepping up efforts to tackle wildlife trafficking, the criminal justice system has yet to catch up. The maximum prison sentence for trafficking animals is five years, but illegal wildlife trade is often not seen as a crime worthy of prison time. Prosecutors frequently dismiss cases and reportedly local judges can often be swayed with bribes or community connections.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹⁰ <https://www.policia.gov.co/file/6537/download?token=O1CZh3nX>. Accessed on 27 October 2023.

⁴¹¹ <https://www.semana.com/sostenible/articulo/guias-de-perros-policias-entrenan-internacionalmente-para-combatir-el-trafico-de-flora-y-fauna/202127/>. Accessed on 27 October 2023.

⁴¹² <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/colombia-launches-strategy-tackle-environmental-crimes-2021-12-06/>. Accessed on 27 October 2023.

⁴¹³ <https://bogota.gov.co/mi-ciudad/ambiente/fauna/reglas-para-el-transporte-de-animales-en-la-terminal-de-bogota>. Accessed on 29 October 2023.

⁴¹⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/sep/27/poached-caged-shipped-in-socks-on-patrol-with-the-police-battling-colombias-wildlife-trade>. Accessed on 29 October 2023.

Operation Leopardo

In April 2022, following an in-depth criminal investigation, the National Police dismantled two criminal networks, 'Naturales' in Bogotá and 'Libertad' in Medellín, arresting 21 people and conducting 15 raids in Bogotá, Medellín, Magangué, Cali, and Popayan. They seized 1,004 wild animals with a value of over US\$1 million US dollars.

Using undercover operatives, the police had established that the two organisations had a well-established logistics and hatchery infrastructure. They paid locals to poach wildlife in the Bolívar Department. There, the animals were packed in boxes and sent by air or land parcels to Medellín, Antioquia, using public service buses and cargo transport, with the complicity of local transporters who allowed the animals to be camouflaged in boxes and luggage. The network also had breeding facilities in Medellín and Bogotá for species such as lizards and turtles.

Using social media, the traffickers shared photographs of wildlife on offer to clients, mainly collectors and owners of commercial establishments, and agreed on price, payment method, and delivery method. Wildlife trafficked included macaws, parrots, monkeys, ocelots, deer, iguanas, turtles, snakes, spectacled caimans, etc. The network furthermore trafficked exotic wildlife not native to Colombia or the Americas, such as geckos, uromastyx, chameleons, bearded dragons, and African hedgehogs. These were imported for reproduction and sales in Colombia. Most animals were sold alive, but the network also trafficked parts and products and sexual potions (produced with hedgehog parts, among others).

Operation Leopardo was a collaboration of the National Police, the Attorney General's Office (Fiscalía General de Nación), the Special Group for the Fight against Animal Abuse (Grupo Especial para la Lucha contra el Maltrato Animal (Gelma)), and the environmental authorities of Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, Popayán, and Magangué (Bolívar), with the support of the United States Fish & Wildlife Service.

Sources:

[https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2022/04/12/trafico-de-fauna-silvestre-capturan-a-21-personas-en-bogota-y-medellin-se- incautaron-mas-de-mil-animales-exoticos/;](https://www.infobae.com/america/colombia/2022/04/12/trafico-de-fauna-silvestre-capturan-a-21-personas-en-bogota-y-medellin-se- incautaron-mas-de-mil-animales-exoticos/)
<https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/delitos/trafico-de-fauna-silvestre-capturan-a-21-personas-en-colombia-664626;>
<https://tubarco.news/escalofriante-trafico-de-animales-exoticos-los-vendian-por-whatsapp-y-con-algunos-hacian-pocimas-sexuales/>

Costa Rica

Costa Rica

General overview

In Costa Rica, a minimum of 590 animals were involved in 77 seizures and four poaching incidents reported in the media between 2017 and 2022. Some 88% of these events concerned live animals, with the balance comprised of 6% dead specimens, 5% parts and products, and 1% meat.

Sixty-five percent of all animals seized or poached involved birds (384 specimens); 23% reptiles (138 specimens); 11% mammals (65 specimens); and fewer than 1% amphibians (at least one specimen).

Unique characteristics

- Significant songbird trafficking
- Costa Rican snakes targeted for domestic and global pet trade
- Marine turtles poached for eggs and meat
- Costa Rican amphibians trafficked to Europe
- Increased law enforcement effort, including online

As in most other countries, these figures do not reflect actual numbers seized. For example, authorities reported to have seized 800 wild animals in 2018 (much more than the six specimens identified by this study). In the first six months of 2019, 354 animals were reportedly seized,⁴¹⁵ reflecting an increase in illegal trade which was also observed in the seizure data collected by this study.

Media reporting on wildlife poaching and trafficking in Costa Rica leaves much room for improvement. Articles about wildlife crime incidents usually provide little detail on species involved and relevant circumstances. Where possible, the exact (sub)species was identified on the basis of photo(s) provided in the article. However, this lack of specificity has hindered conducting a meaningful analysis.

Number of incidents reported in the media

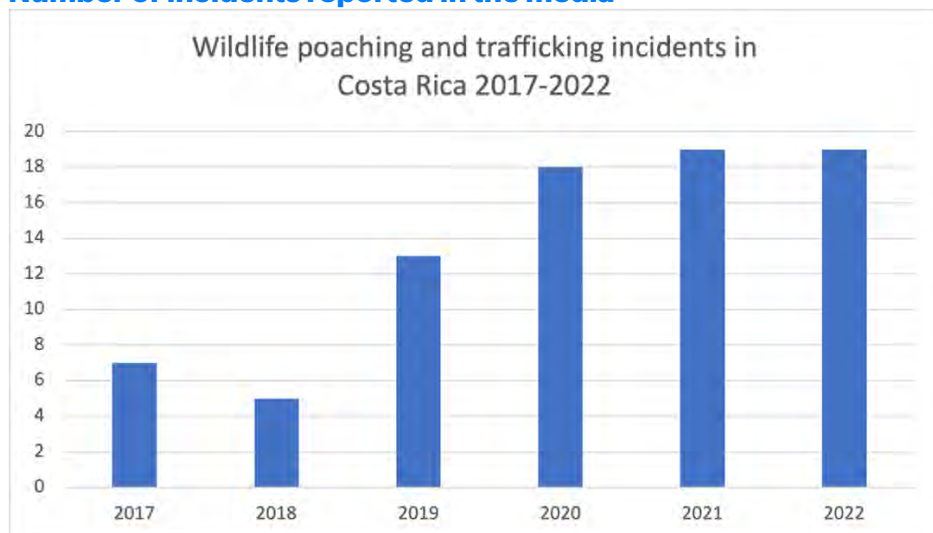


Figure 37: Wildlife poaching and trafficking incidents in Costa Rica between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

⁴¹⁵ <https://observador.cr/354-animales-silvestres-fueron-decomisados-en-el-primer-semestre-del-2019/>. Accessed on 16 October 2023.

Number of animals involved

The table and figure below show the numbers of birds, reptiles, mammals, and amphibians reported to be seized or poached in Costa Rica between 2017 and 2022.

Table 6: Number of animals seized or poached in Costa Rica between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Birds	7	3	4	105	54	213	386
Reptiles	1	2	3	51	74	7	138
Mammals	2	1	5	16	15	26	65
Amphibians	0	0	?	0	0	1	1
TOTAL	10	6	12	172	143	247	

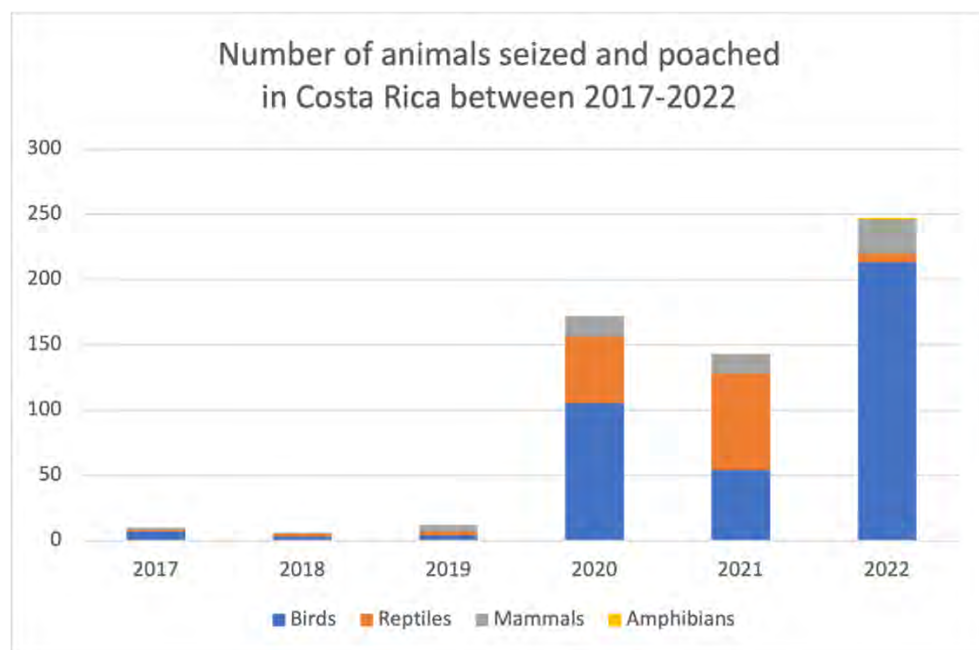


Figure 3824: Number of animals seized or poached in Costa Rica between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

The above show a marked overall increase in the number of seizures and poaching incidents between 2017 and 2022, with the number of wild animals seized increasing significantly since 2020. This is likely thanks to increased law enforcement efforts by the Costa Rican authorities (see the law enforcement efforts section).

Species most targeted

Since 2012, Costa Rica's Wildlife Conservation Law No. 7317 (Ley de Conservación de la Vida Silvestre) has prohibited commercial and sporting hunting of wildlife, as well as trafficking and possession of wild animals as pets. This made the country one of the first in the world, along with Kenya and Malawi, to ban the practice completely. Poaching remains an issue of concern, however.⁴¹⁶ The possession of

⁴¹⁶ <https://www.revistaoij.com/post/delitos-ambientales-taxidermia-vs-casa-furtiva>; <https://observador.cr/operativo-sorpresa-en-corcovado-deja-cinco-personas-detenido/>; <https://delfino.cr/2021/05/detras-de-la-jaula-el-comercio-ilegal-de-aves-en-costa-rica>. Accessed on 13 October 2023.

exotic pets, birds in particular, has been an ingrained practice in Costa Rican culture for decades that has proven difficult to reverse.⁴¹⁷

Birds

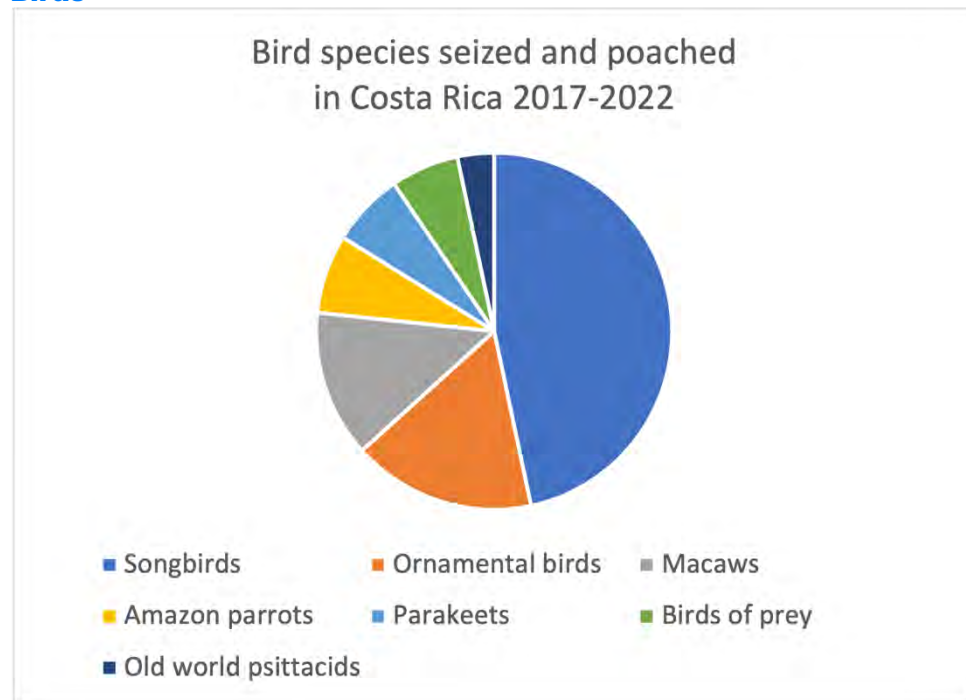


Figure 39: Bird species seized or poached in Costa Rica between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Unfortunately, for 46% of all birds reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022 (176 specimens) the species could not be identified, and/or the number of specimens for each species was not specified in the media report. Therefore, these 176 birds could not be included in the analysis and the findings in this section should be taken with some caution.

Of the 386 birds reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022, the large majority (69%, 267 specimens) were seized during 2021 and 2022. Most, if not all, seizures took place in response to citizen's complaints. The largest seizure occurred in November 2022, when 101 birds were seized from a farm, including common quails, doves, ring-necked pheasants, Egyptian geese, Indian peafowl, red-masked parakeets, and 84 unidentified birds. A man was arrested for illegal wildlife sales.⁴¹⁸

Songbirds are the most affected by illegal trade. A total of 98 songbirds was seized, including

- ▶ Black-faced solitaires (*Myadestes melanops*): 44 specimens seized in three incidents.
- ▶ Yellow-faced grassquits (*Tiaris olivaceus*): 14 specimens seized in three incidents.
- ▶ Other songbirds: 40 specimens (including lesser goldfinches, yellow-bellied siskins, cinnamon-rumped seedeaters, Atlantic canaries, and a parula) seized in six incidents.

Ornamental birds were also seized – 35 in total – including exotic species such as Indian peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*); ring-neck pheasants (*Phasianus colchicus*); common ostriches (*Struthio camelus*), Egyptian geese (*Alopochen Aegyptiaca*); rock doves (*Columba livia*), common quail (*Coturnix coturnix*); and an

⁴¹⁷ <https://toucanrescueranch.org/2021/04/behind-the-cage-illegal-bird-trade-in-costa-rica/>. Accessed on 16 October 2023.

⁴¹⁸ <https://www.lateja.cr/sucesos/por-comercializar-animales-silvestres-capturan-a/PXBMUDJF7NHFBIZQTRIBX6GG7Y/story/>. Accessed on 16 October 2023.

emu (*Dromaius novaehollandiae*) as well as some native species: great curassows (*Crax rubra*); green ibis (*Mesembrinibis cayennensis*); a hummingbird (*Trochilidae* sp.); a woodpecker (*Melanerpes* sp.), and a black-bellied whistling duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*).

Macaws remain popular pets in Costa Rica, with 28 specimens reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. This included 16 scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*) and four great green macaws (*Ara ambiguus*). Both species are listed in CITES Appendix I and threatened by habitat loss and poaching. Great green macaws are listed as Critically Endangered by IUCN. According to the Macaw Recovery Network there are about 300 great green macaws in the north and the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, while the scarlet macaw population reaches about 2,000 animals.⁴¹⁹

Fifteen Amazon parrots were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. This included four red-ored parrots (*Amazona autumnalis*, CITES Appendix I); one southern mealy amazon (*Amazona farinose*); and fifteen unidentified specimens.

Fourteen parakeets were reported to be seized, including seven orange-chinned parakeets (*Brotogeris jugularis*); five orange-fronted parakeets (*Aratinga canicularis*); and two red-masked parakeets (*Psittacara erythrogenys*).

Thirteen birds of prey were reported to be poached or seized. Eleven of these were killed by two poachers of Chinese ethnicity; they were arrested in October 2020 with one dead duck and seven Swainson's hawks (*Buteo swainsoni*), two grey falcons (*Falco hypoleucos*), and two laughing falcons (*Herpetotheres cachinnans*).⁴²⁰ The media report provides no explanation for the men's objective in killing the birds of prey. In Colombia, however, each year hundreds of Swainson's hawks are killed by hunters because they are considered an aphrodisiac, in addition to being considered a nuisance.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁹ <https://thecostaricanews.com/lapas-begin-fill-skies-costa-rica/>. Accessed on 16 October 2023.

⁴²⁰ <https://www.crhoy.com/nacionales/capturan-a-2-hombres-con-12-aves-muertas/>. Accessed on 16 October 2023.

⁴²¹ <https://www.elespectador.com/ambiente/cazadores-ilegales-mataron-a-mas-de-300-aguilas-cuaresmeras-en-el-departamento-de-tolima-en-colombia/>. Accessed on 20 October 2023.

Reptiles

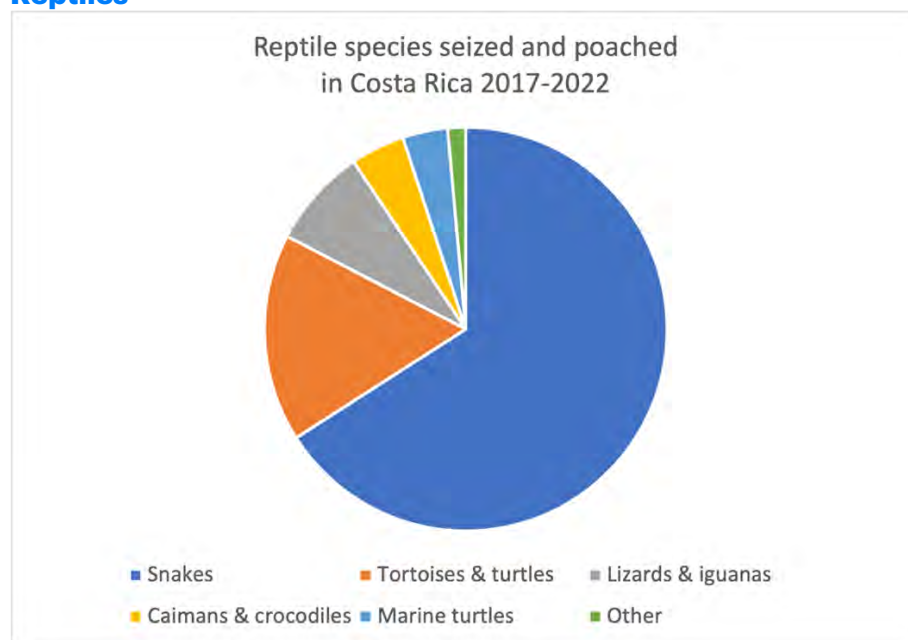


Figure 40: Reptile species seized or poached in Costa Rica between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Costa Rica's snakes are targeted for the domestic and international pet trade. Some 66% of all reptiles seized concerned snakes, all live specimens, including boa constrictors (*Boa constrictor*); eyelash vipers (*Bothriechis schlegelii*); palm pit vipers (*Bothriechis* sp.); Western lyre snake (*Trimorphodon biscutatus*); 1 common tree boa (*Corallus ruschenbergerii*); and at least one anaconda (*Eunectes* sp.). It is impossible to determine which snake species are most found in illegal trade as media articles identified the snake species for only six of the 91 snakes seized.

The following incidents are noteworthy:

- ▶ In March 2021, 39 snakes were seized along with other reptiles and birds from a property in San Antonio de Belén following a citizen's complaint. The owner, who allegedly used them in shows, was arrested on charges of wildlife trafficking.⁴²²
- ▶ In April 2021, an American citizen was detained at Liberia's Daniel Oduber Quirós International Airport while attempting to smuggle out seven snakes (including one Western lyre snake and one common tree boa) and six lizards.⁴²³

Three seizures which involved a total of 23 tortoises and turtles were identified. The species of only one specimen was identified, namely a blackwood turtle (*Rhinoclemmys funerealis*) seized in 2022 at the Costa Rica-Nicaragua border from a Nicaraguan man who was returning to his home in Nicaragua.⁴²⁴ Twenty tortoises/turtles were seized in the incident mentioned above in March 2021, from a man who kept a menagerie of wild animals to use them in shows.⁴²⁵

⁴²² <https://ameliarueda.com/nota/decomisan-aves-serpientes-tortugas-mofetas-sospechoso-noticias-costa-rica>. Accessed on 16 October 2023.

⁴²³ <https://www.lateja.cr/sucesos/detienen-a-gringo-que-intento-salir-del-pais-con/VMFNNKEMNB3ZH6M5TT7I5444E/story/>. Accessed on 16 October 2023.

⁴²⁴ https://robindesbois.org/wp-content/uploads/ON_THE_TRAIL_37.pdf, page 154. Accessed on 16 October 2023.

⁴²⁵ <https://ameliarueda.com/nota/decomisan-aves-serpientes-tortugas-mofetas-sospechoso-noticias-costa-rica>. Accessed on 16 October 2023.

Marine turtles are poached for their meat and eggs. Due to its large size and unpalatable meat, the leatherback turtle is only exploited for its eggs in Costa Rica. Green turtles are prized for their meat and eggs, and the hawksbill turtle suffers additional exploitation for its shell, which is crafted into jewellery and trinkets.⁴²⁶

Seizures identified by this study involved two live green sea turtles; two dead specimens (one olive ridley, one green); and 26 kg of green sea turtle meat. Poachers often use cruel measures to achieve their purpose. Sometimes turtles are fished from the ocean and their eggs extracted while they are still alive. This happened, for example, in April 2021 in the Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Ostional when two poachers were caught in the act.⁴²⁷ The turtle did not survive its ordeal. Staff of the refuge interviewed on the case pointed out the extreme pain and stress inflicted on turtles in this process of eggs extraction.

Marine turtles poached for their meat are often carried alive to their final destination. A ghastly find was made, for example, in October 2018, when two live green sea turtles were seized from a car in Moín during a routine traffic inspection.⁴²⁸

A total of 3,741 marine turtle eggs were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022, affecting four species: loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*); green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*); leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*); and Olive Ridley sea turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*). As, on average, marine turtles lay 110 eggs per clutch, a minimum of 34 nests was raided to obtain these eggs.⁴²⁹

The actual pressure on marine turtle nests in Costa Rica is many times higher than these figures suggest, however. Media have reported that marine turtle egg poaching is a nightly occurrence during the nesting season. The poaching is allegedly carried out by gangs who earn a profitable business trafficking the eggs in Costa Rica and Nicaragua.⁴³⁰

The COVID-19 pandemic reportedly led to a surge in marine turtle egg poaching. For example, in 2020 poaching quadrupled in Costa Rica's Reserva Natural Pacuare on the east coast. The number of poached nests increased to 20 compared to five in 2019, with poachers taking advantage of the reduced monitoring capacity in the reserve due to reduced tourist income and influx of volunteers to support monitoring.⁴³¹

⁴²⁶ Mortimer, J. A., Donnelly, M., and (IUCN SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group). (2008). *Eretmochelys imbricata*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2008: e.T8005A12881238. Available online at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2008.RLTS.T8005A12881238.en>. Accessed on 18 October 2023.

⁴²⁷ <https://vozdequanacaste.com/explicador-dos-personas-cazaron-una-tortuga-lora-en-ostional-una-comunidad-dedicada-a-su-conservacion/>. Accessed on 18 October 2023.

⁴²⁸ <https://www.nacion.com/ciencia/medio-ambiente/policia-encuentra-dos-tortugas-verdes-que-eran/XWEZ3GZIIIRHLVJCSOVFMGS4C74/story/>. Accessed on 16 October 2023.

⁴²⁹ <https://conserveturtles.org/information-sea-turtles-frequently-asked-questions/>. Accessed on 17 October 2023.

⁴³⁰ Robin des Bois On the Trail no.29 p.177 https://www.robindesbois.org/wp-content/uploads/ON_THE_TRAIL_29.pdf. Accessed on 16 October 2023.

⁴³¹ https://www.teletica.com/teletica/saqueos-de-nidos-de-tortugas-baula-se-cuadruplicaron-a-causa-de-la-pandemia_294604. Accessed on 16 October 2023.

Mammals

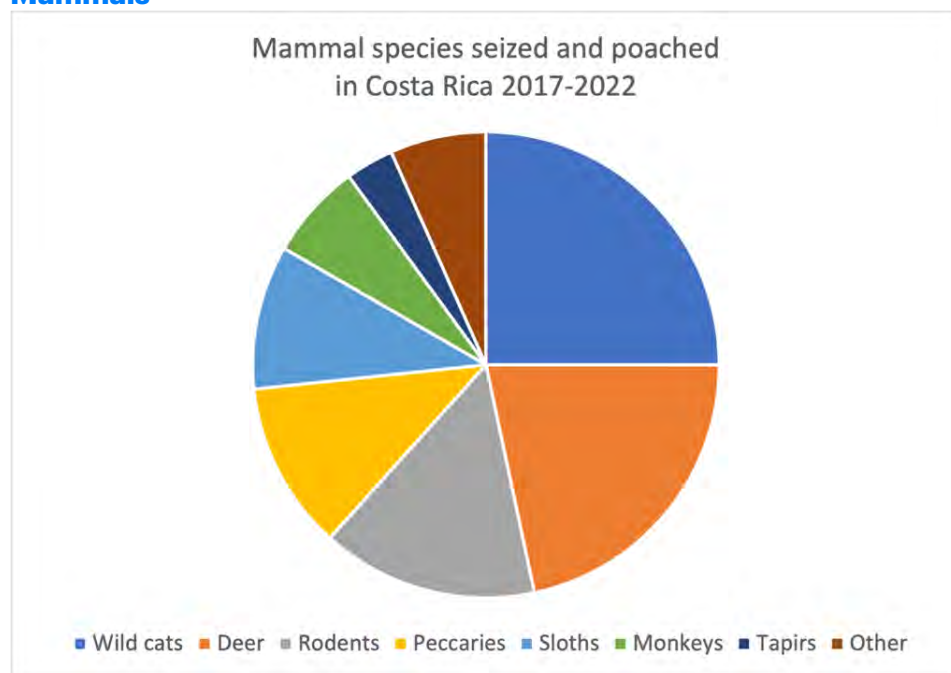


Figure 25: Mammal species seized or poached in Costa Rica between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

In Costa Rica, mammals are taken from the wild alive for the pet trade and poached for their meat or to turn their parts into trophies. Of the 65 mammals affected by poaching and trafficking between 2017 and 2022, 45% concerned live specimens; 28% taxidermies, skins, and skulls; 26% dead specimens; and 1% meat. The relatively large percentage of taxidermies can be explained by one significant seizure in August 2022, where taxidermies of 16 mammals, seven birds, two reptiles, and one amphibian were seized from a farm.⁴³²

Wild cats were the most represented mammal species in seizures and poaching incidents reported in Costa Rica between 2017 and 2022. Fifteen specimens were involved, including five jaguars, three pumas, two margays, two ocelots, and one jaguarundi. Furthermore, a skin and a skull of an unidentified wild cat species were seized. Big cats are killed in conflict situations, as well as for trophies.

⁴³² <https://www.nacion.com/sucesos/judiciales/oj-descubre-animales-disecados-en-finca-en/F77KMF7S6RGW3KWCVZTVEMDYUY/story/>. Accessed on 13 October 2023.

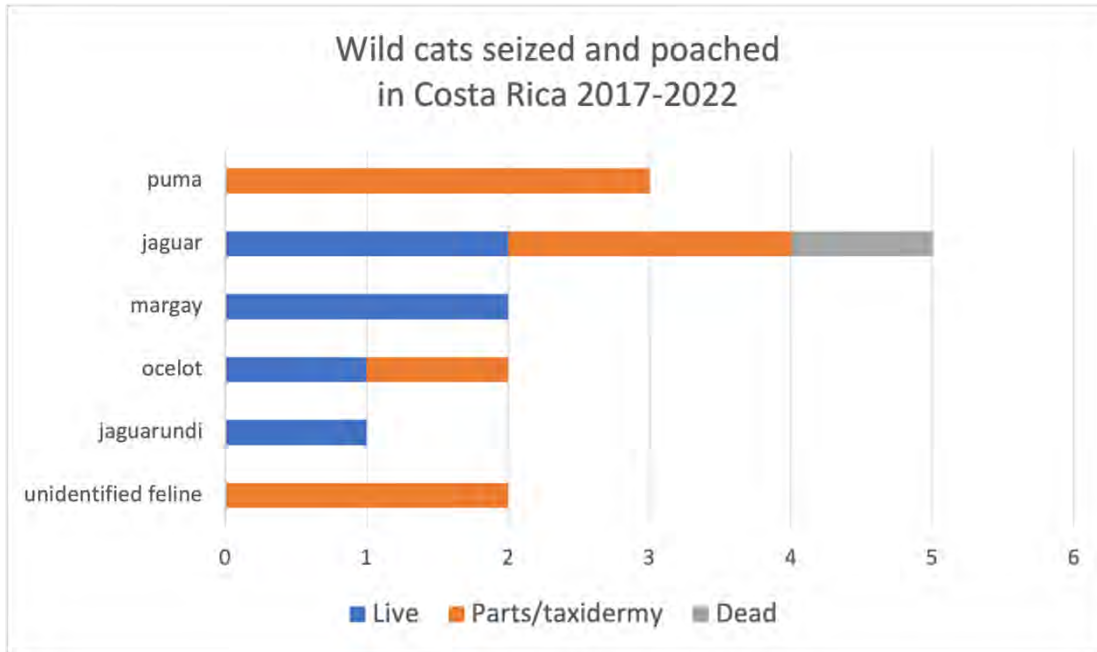


Figure 26: Wild cats seized or poached in Costa Rica between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

With regard to jaguars, one specimen was killed in March 2017 by illegal hunters in the Refugio Nacional de Vida Silvestre Mixto Maquenque, a protected area in Alajuela province, after it killed two of their dogs.⁴³³ According to the anonymous tip received by the authorities, the group of hunters consisted of at least ten individuals who enter the reserve every two months to poach wildlife. Two live jaguars were seized in August 2022 from a farm in Alajuela province where they were held captive.⁴³⁴ Lastly, in that same month, two taxidermied jaguars were seized from the farm mentioned above, where a large collection of taxidermied wildlife was seized.⁴³⁵

Deer are being poached for their meat and to be taxidermied, as well as kept as pets in private zoos. Incidents recorded involved seven live deer, four dead, and two taxidermies. Most specimens concerned white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*).

Rodents (including five lowland pacas and 1 Central American agouti) and peccaries (including six collared peccaries and one white-lipped peccary) are mainly poached for their meat. In addition, peccaries are sometimes kept as pets.

Sloths are poached for their meat or to be sold as pets. Four dead sloths were seized in three incidents, and one live sloth was seized that was used as a tourist attraction.

In Costa Rica, primates appear to be less targeted for the pet trade than in some other countries in Latin America. Only four specimens were reported to be seized: three Central American squirrel monkeys (*Saimiri oerstedii*), which were kept as pets; and one Panamanian white-faced capuchin (*Cebus imitator*), which was seized from a store.

⁴³³ <https://www.crhoy.com/ambiente/jaguar-fue-acribillado-por-cazadores-en-zona-prottegida-de-san-carlos/>. Accessed on 17 October 2023.

⁴³⁴ https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/costa-rica-animales_rescatan-a-dos-jaguares-que-estaban-enjaulados-en-una-finca-en-costa-rica/47864166. Accessed on 17 October 2023.

⁴³⁵ <https://www.nacion.com/sucesos/judiciales/oij-descubre-animales-disecados-en-finca-en/F77KMF7S6RGW3KWCVZTVEMDYUY/story/>. Accessed on 17 October 2023.

Amphibians

Costa Rican frogs and toads are known to be in high demand for the international pet trade.⁴³⁶ Glass frogs in particular have been greatly affected by international trade, mainly to Europe.

For historic context, prior to the study period, In September 2014, a 31-year-old German was caught at San José's International Airport with 184 frogs, 42 lizards, nine snakes, and 203 tadpoles in his luggage. The man was headed to Panama en route to Dusseldorf, Germany.⁴³⁷ The seizure included a number of specimens of *Hyalinobatrachium valerioi* (La Palma glass frogs) and *Sachatamia ilex* (ghost glass frogs), species which have been observed for sale in online in Germany, The Netherlands, and Spain.⁴³⁸

In an effort to regulate the trade, all 158 glass frogs of the genera *Hyalinobatrachium*, *Centrolene*, *Cochranella*, and *Sachatamia* were listed in CITES Appendix II in 2022, following a proposal submitted by Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Honduras.⁴³⁹

This study identified two seizures between 2017 and 2022 which involved amphibians.

- In December 2019, three Germans, one Chilean, and one Russian national were detained at Aeropuerto Internacional Juan Santamaría for attempting to smuggle insects and amphibians in their luggage and pants pockets.⁴⁴⁰ The media report failed to specify the species and number of specimens. It did mention that the Environmental Prosecutor's Office only had one case pending for this illegal act.
- In August 2022, a taxidermied tree frog (*Hylidae* sp.) was seized from a farm as part of a large collection of taxidermied wildlife.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁶ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/oryx/article/emerging-trends-of-the-illegal-wildlife-trade-in-mesoamerica/3625F730CF60CF99FE2B523AC79767F7>. Accessed on 17 October 2023.

⁴³⁷ <https://theworld.org/stories/2014-09-18/costa-rica-deports-german-caught-smuggling-over-400-frogs-and-reptiles-takeout>. Accessed on 17 October 2023.

⁴³⁸ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/18/prop/19032019/E-CoP18-Prop-38.pdf>

⁴³⁹ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/18/prop/19032019/E-CoP18-Prop-38.pdf>; <https://defenders.org/newsroom/glass-frog-proposal-moves-forward-full-adoption-cites-after-overwhelming-support>

⁴⁴⁰ <https://www.repretel.com/noticia/cuatro-extranjeros-detenidos-en-el-aeropuerto-juan-santamaria-por-intentar-sacar-animales-silvestres/>

⁴⁴¹ <https://www.nacion.com/sucesos/judiciales/oij-descubre-animales-disecados-en-finca-en/FZ7KMF7S6RGW3KWCVZTVEMDYUY/story/>

Key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes

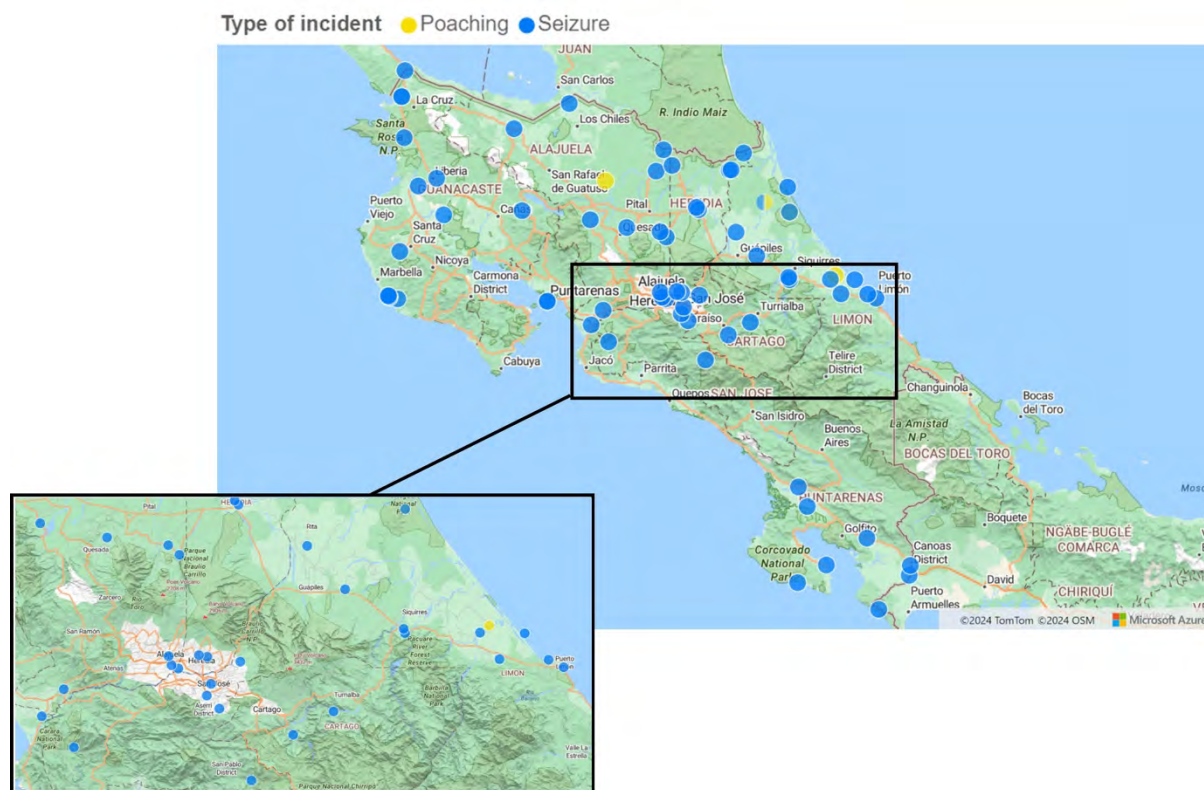


Figure 43: Locations of seizures and poaching incidents in Costa Rica reported between 2017 and 2022

Based on the media reports on illegal wildlife trade in Costa Rica identified by this study, it is difficult to assess how wild animals are marketed in Costa Rica. Most seizures are made at locations where wild animals are kept as pets (either private individuals or public places such as restaurants where they are used to attract clientele). Two incidents were identified where a large number of wild animals was seized from the private property of alleged traffickers, but no seizures were found that involved illegal sales in markets or shops. Therefore, with the exception of online sales (discussed below), it remains somewhat unclear what types of outlets are used to supply wildlife to consumers.

In a notice dated 13 June 2022 on the public prosecutors' office website, environmental prosecutor Luis Diego Hernández Araya stated that wildlife traffickers use air parcel shipments, hand luggage, and cargo shipments in sea containers to smuggle Costa Rican wildlife to foreign consumer markets.⁴⁴²

Indeed, Costa Rica is known to be favoured by foreign wildlife traffickers. According to data from Costa Rican authorities, Germany, the Czech Republic, Spain, Russia, the United States, and Canada are the main destinations for Costa Rican wildlife. Miniature orchids, spiders, glass frogs, butterflies, beetles, shark fins, cocobolo wood, and sea cucumbers are reportedly the species most trafficked from Costa Rica abroad. The environmental prosecutor has stated that people from Germany, China, and elsewhere hire local people in Costa Rica to send them native species which have a very high value on the black market, to add them to their private collections.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴² <https://ministeriopublico.poder-judicial.go.cr/index.php/medios-informativos/noticias-judiciales/fiscal-especializado-el-trafico-de-vida-silvestre-compromete-el-planeta-y-la-vida-humana>

⁴⁴³ <https://www.larepublica.net/noticia/trafico-de-vida-silvestre-en-el-pais-podria-estar-vinculado-con-lavado-de-activos>

This study identified three incidents between 2017 and 2022 where foreigners were arrested for attempting to smuggle Costa Rican wildlife specimens out of the country, in one instance to Germany, the other two instances to the USA. See further below under 'Transboundary trafficking routes'.

Sales on social media

Costa Rica's public prosecutors' office has recognised that online sales platforms and social media are being used to traffic wildlife, including by groups that are dedicated to advertising and selling wildlife.⁴⁴⁴ The environmental crimes section of the judicial investigation body OIJ monitors online sales platforms and social media to identify people or groups engaged in illegal wildlife trade.⁴⁴⁵

This study identified three incidents, in 2019, 2020, and 2021, where wildlife specimens were seized that had been advertised online.

- ▶ In February 2019, a newborn caiman was seized along with a vehicle, cell phone, and cash, and the man who had offered it for sale online was arrested.⁴⁴⁶
- ▶ In February 2020, a man was arrested for advertising a juvenile anaconda online for ₡250,000 (approximately US\$470).⁴⁴⁷
- ▶ In May 2021, a juvenile red-lore amazon that was offered for sale on social media for ₡35,000 (approximately US\$66) was seized after authorities were alerted to the situation.⁴⁴⁸

Costa Ricans also purchase wildlife online from foreign countries. In 2016, Costa Rican authorities seized 'several live reptiles' arriving from the USA by parcel post which a Costa Rican had purchased online. Authorities stated that, although the package came from the United States, it had yet to be determined if the animals came from this country, or if they originated from another country before being shipped from the USA.⁴⁴⁹

Convergence

No incidents were identified where wildlife was seized jointly with other illicit commodities and/or in circumstances that might indicate convergence with other types of organized crime. There was one incident, in April 2021, where a puma skin, a skin of an unidentified cat species, and a live white-tailed deer were seized during a raid on the property of a suspected drug trafficker, but there is no evidence to suggest that he was engaged in wildlife trafficking.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁴ <https://ministeriopublico.poder-judicial.go.cr/index.php/medios-informativos/noticias-judiciales/fiscal-especializado-el-trafico-de-vida-silvestre-compromete-el-planeta-y-la-vida-humana>. Accessed on 17 October 2023.

⁴⁴⁵ <https://www.ucr.ac.cr/noticias/2022/7/18/el-trafico-de-vida-silvestre-no-se-detiene.html>. Accessed on 17 October 2023.

⁴⁴⁶ Robin des Bois On the Trail no. 24 p. 29 https://robindesbois.org/wp-content/uploads/ON_THE_TRAIL_24.pdf. Accessed on 18 October 2023.

⁴⁴⁷ <https://www.nacion.com/sucesos/judiciales/hombre-detenido-como-sospechoso-de-vender-anaconda/VXZ2V4HHP5EH5PW67356H2U3VE/story/>. Accessed on 18 October 2023.

⁴⁴⁸ <https://www.repretel.com/noticia/rescatan-lora-que-iba-a-ser-comercializada/>. Accessed on 18 October 2023.

⁴⁴⁹ <https://www.diarioextra.com/Noticia/detalle/299704/decomisan-reptiles-vivos-provenientes-de-ee-uu->. Accessed on 17 October 2023.

⁴⁵⁰ Robin des Bois On the Trail no.32 p.239 https://robindesbois.org/wp-content/uploads/ON_THE_TRAIL_32.pdf. Accessed on 17 October 2023.

Transboundary trafficking routes

Costa Rica > USA

Two incidents were identified where Americans tried to smuggle wildlife to the USA:

- ▶ In April 2021, an American was arrested at Liberia's Daniel Oduber Quirós International Airport with seven snakes and six lizards in his luggage.⁴⁵¹
- ▶ Just a week later, in May 2021; at the same airport, authorities caught an American man with a taxidermied spectacled caiman head in his luggage. Evaluation by specialists confirmed that the head of the reptile was not a handicraft souvenir.⁴⁵²

It appears a curious coincidence that these two seizures took place within one week of each other, at the same location. The media reports provided no indications that the two incidents were related, however.

Costa Rica > Europe

Although Europe is a known destination for trafficked Costa Rican wildlife, only one incident was found between 2017 and 2022 that involved smuggling to Europe. As mentioned above in the species most targeted section in December 2019 three Germans, a Chilean, and a Russian were detained at San José's Aeropuerto Internacional Juan Santamaría for attempting to smuggle insects and amphibians in their luggage and pants pockets.

Nicaragua <> Costa Rica

Criminal gangs in Costa Rica and Nicaragua are systematically trafficking drugs, humans, timber, and other contraband across the country's borders, including by sea.⁴⁵³ This study identified only small-scale transboundary wildlife trafficking incidents, however.

In two incidents, Nicaraguan citizens were arrested in Costa Rica for attempting to smuggle in wildlife illegally sourced in Nicaragua:

- ▶ In April 2021, a Nicaraguan woman was arrested with two orange-chinned parakeet chicks (*Brotogeris jugularis*) in her handbag. One chick was close to suffocation. Entering Costa Rica illegally, the woman had carried them on the bus coming from Los Chiles, on the Costa Rica/Nicaragua border and was heading for Quesada.⁴⁵⁴
- ▶ In September 2022, two were men arrested in Los Chiles near the border with Nicaragua for attempting to smuggle a juvenile margay (*Leopardus wiedii*) from Nicaragua by car.⁴⁵⁵

In addition, in June 2019, a Costa Rican citizen carried three orange-chinned parakeet chicks across the border in Peñas Blancas, Costa Rica, and surrendered them to Costa Rican border officials. He claimed

⁴⁵¹ <https://www.lateja.cr/sucesos/detienen-a-gringo-que-intento-salir-del-pais-con/VMFNNKEMNB3ZH6M5TT7I5444E/story/>. Accessed on 16 October 2023.

⁴⁵² <https://www.amcostarica.com/U.S.%20citizen%20arrested%20for%20allegedly%20trafficking%20an%20alligator%20head.html>. Accessed on 18 October 2023.

⁴⁵³ See e.g. <https://nicaraguainvestiga.com/nacion/102554-cuatro-nicaraguenses-involucrados- trafico-droga-costa-rica/>; <https://nicaraguaactual.tv/capturan-nicaraguense-involucrado- trafico-droga-costa-rica-espana/>; <https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/ analisis/ trafico-de-personas-prolifera-entre-costa-rica-y-nicaragua/>; <https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/ noticias-del-dia/el-trafico-ilegal-de-madera-de-nicaragua- devasta-la-reserva-forestal-mas-grande-de-centroamerica/>. Accessed on 18 October 2023.

⁴⁵⁴ <http://www.mundoguanacaste.com/index.php/noticias-en-guanacaste/1750-rescatan-a-pichones-de-perico-que-estaban-a-punto-de-asfixiarse>. Accessed on 10 October 2023.

⁴⁵⁵ <https://ameliarueda.com/nota/detienen-dos-hombres-transportaban-caucel-noticias-costa-rica>. Accessed on 10 October 2023.

he had bought them for 30 US\$ from a Nicaraguan man who offered them for sale on the Nicaraguan side of the border.⁴⁵⁶

One incident suggests Costa Rican wildlife is also smuggled to Nicaragua. In August 2022, a blackwood turtle was seized from a Nicaraguan man near Los Chiles. He was returning to his home in Nicaragua.⁴⁵⁷

In 2020, Costa Rica reported to the CITES secretariat (in response to CITES Notification 055/2020), that the land border between Nicaragua and Costa Rica is suspected to be a jaguar trafficking route. No seizures were identified that could corroborate this.⁴⁵⁸

Panama > Costa Rica

Similar to the Costa Rica-Nicaragua border, the border between Costa Rica and Panama also sees frequent trafficking of contraband, including drugs, humans, and timber. Both Costa Rica and Panama are key hubs for cocaine exports to Europe.⁴⁵⁹

In January 2019, Panamanian authorities arrested a Costa Rican citizen in Paso Canoas on the Costa Rica/Panama border with 15 hawksbill turtle shell pieces (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). The man, who was returning to Costa Rica, claimed he had bought them in David, the capital of Chiriquí province in western Panama.⁴⁶⁰

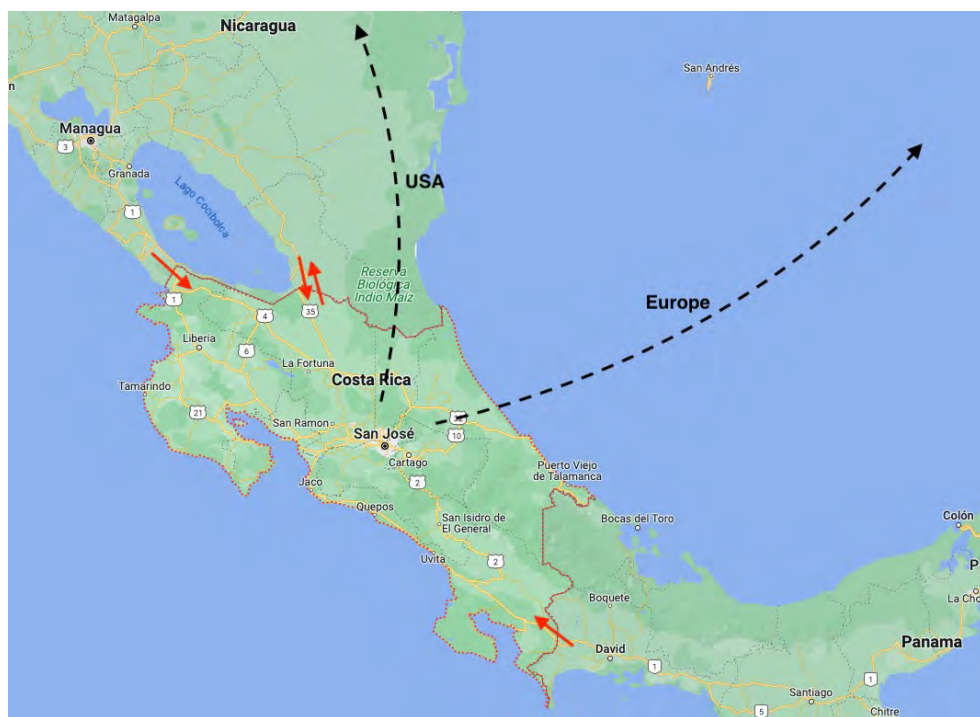


Figure 44: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes to/from Costa Rica based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022

⁴⁵⁶

https://www.facebook.com/ahoranoticiascr/posts/1425336910954747/?paipv=0&eav=AfavEOW98r_XOGC9p3SaNKheCshD8uYiU3_08KDdjp_oxcge6t0sshR3Qt5W8ODS5Qs&_rdr. Accessed on 10 October 2023.

⁴⁵⁷ https://robindexbois.org/wp-content/uploads/ON_THE_TRAIL_37.pdf, page 154. Accessed on 18 October 2023.

⁴⁵⁸ https://cites.org/sites/default/files/articles/CITES_Study_on_Illegal_Trade_in_Jaguars%20.pdf. Accessed on 9 October 2023.

⁴⁵⁹ <https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/panama-costa-rica-pasos-claves-cocaina-europa/>; <https://es.euronews.com/2019/07/31/costa-rica-y-panama-desmantelan-una-red-internacional-de-traffic-de-migrantes>; <https://www.panamaamerica.com.pa/nacion/traffic-ilegal-de-madera-panamena-479121>. Accessed on 17 October 2023.

⁴⁶⁰ <https://www.panamaamerica.com.pa/provincias/decomisan-15-piezas-de-tortuga-carey-un-ciudadano-costarricense-en-paso-canoas-1125816>. Accessed on 17 October 2023.

Law enforcement efforts

As mentioned in the overview, the number of wild animals seized increased significantly since 2020.

While it is possible that this increase is due to an increase in illicit activity, it is more likely that it reflects efforts by Costa Rican authorities to prioritise wildlife crime responses. Since around 2019 – 2020, awareness-raising activities have been conducted to tackle wildlife trafficking and to stimulate citizens to report cases of environmental crimes through a designated portal: ‘Sistema Integrado de Trámite y Atención de Denuncias Ambientales’ (SITADA) managed by the Ministry of Environment and Energy (Ministerio de Ambiente y Energía, MINAE).⁴⁶¹ This has had notable impact, as complaints about illegal wildlife trade increased exponentially from 157 in 2019 and 291 in 2020 to 455 in 2021.⁴⁶² In response to the increase in complaints, the judicial investigation body (Organismo de Investigación Judicial, OIJ) created a specialised section against environmental crimes in 2022. Operational since 1 April 2022, the section was established to streamline law enforcement processes, give greater importance to wildlife crimes so that they are no longer considered ‘minor’ and reduce the number of complaints. The section has about 20 investigation officers dedicated to investigating wildlife trafficking cases. In addition, Law No. 7317 was strengthened.⁴⁶³ It is noteworthy that the public prosecutors’ office has specialised environmental crimes prosecutors who are proactive in communicating about wildlife crime issues in the country.

This study identified 53 arrests in 30 incidents. Therefore, 37% of the 81 poaching and seizure incidents reported in Costa Rica between 2017 and 2022 resulted in arrest. This is significantly higher than the regional average of 27%.

In 60% of these incidents (18 cases), the arrests concerned individuals who were caught with wild animals or animal parts they had just poached. Furthermore, 61% of such poacher arrests (11 incidents) involved illegal killing of marine turtles or marine turtle eggs. Marine turtle (egg) poaching is clearly a priority issue for Costa Rican wildlife law enforcers.

⁴⁶¹ <https://www.sitada.go.cr/denunciaspublico/>

⁴⁶² According to data from the Agrarian and Environmental section of the Public Prosecutors Office (Fiscalía Agrario Ambiental del Ministerio Público), see <https://www.ucr.ac.cr/noticias/2022/7/18/el-trafico-de-vida-silvestre-no-se-detiene.html>. Accessed on 13 October 2023.

⁴⁶³ <https://www.ucr.ac.cr/noticias/2022/7/18/el-trafico-de-vida-silvestre-no-se-detiene.html>. Accessed on 13 October 2023.

Cuba

Cuba

General overview

Data on wildlife poaching and trafficking in Cuba are very scarce. Only 13 seizures of wildlife were reported for the period of between 2017 and 2022, and four of those seizures took place outside Cuba (two in the USA, one in The Netherlands, and one in Spain). A minimum of 831 animals were involved in these seizures. Some 67% concerned live animals, with the balance comprised of 22% seized dead and 11% parts and products.

Unique characteristics

- Sharp rise in songbird trapping and trafficking, including to USA and Europe
- Consumption of mammals and reptiles, including marine turtles
- Unbridled trade on social media
- Low seizure rate

The most affected species group are birds, representing 93% of all wildlife seized between 2017 and 2022. Mammals make up 4%, followed by reptiles at 3%. No amphibians were reported to be seized.

It should be noted that actual seizure numbers are higher than could be gleaned from media reports. In 2021, Cuba's Office of Environmental Regulation and Safety (Oficina de Regulación y Seguridad Ambiental, ORSA) denounced the increase in illegal wildlife trade in recent years.⁴⁶⁴ They reported that in 2021, sanctions were imposed on more than 320 people and fines totalling 315,000 pesos (US\$13,130), for natural resource crimes (including illegal logging, fishing, and poaching of plants and wildlife). They also reported having made 140 seizures, the majority of which were protected birds.⁴⁶⁵

Number of incidents reported in the media

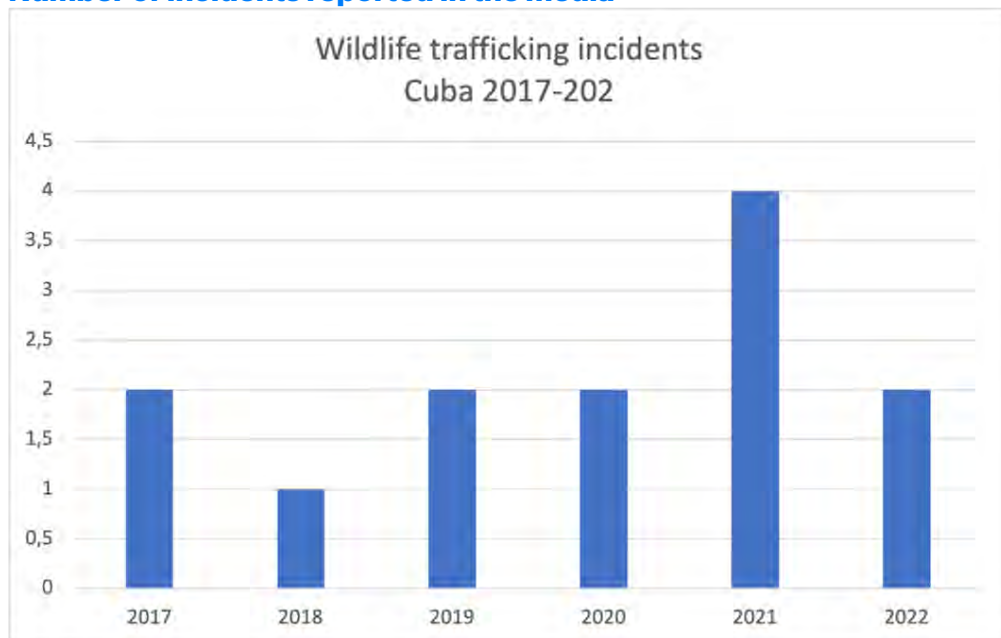


Figure 4527: Wildlife trafficking incidents implicating Cuba between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

⁴⁶⁴ <http://www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2021/06/23/denuncian-en-cuba-aumento-del-comercio-ilicito-de-especies-de-la-biodiversidad/>. Accessed on 6 November 2023.

⁴⁶⁵ <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2022-02-03-u1-e199370-s27061-aplican-sanciones-decomisos-danos-recursos-naturales-sancti>

Number of animals involved

The table and figure below show the numbers of birds, mammals, and reptiles seized between 2017 and 2022.

Table 7: Number of animals seized in/originating from Cuba between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Birds	60	175	277	2	250	5	769
Mammals	0	0	0	37	0	0	37
Reptiles	1	0	1	23	0	0	25
TOTAL	61	175	278	62	250	5	

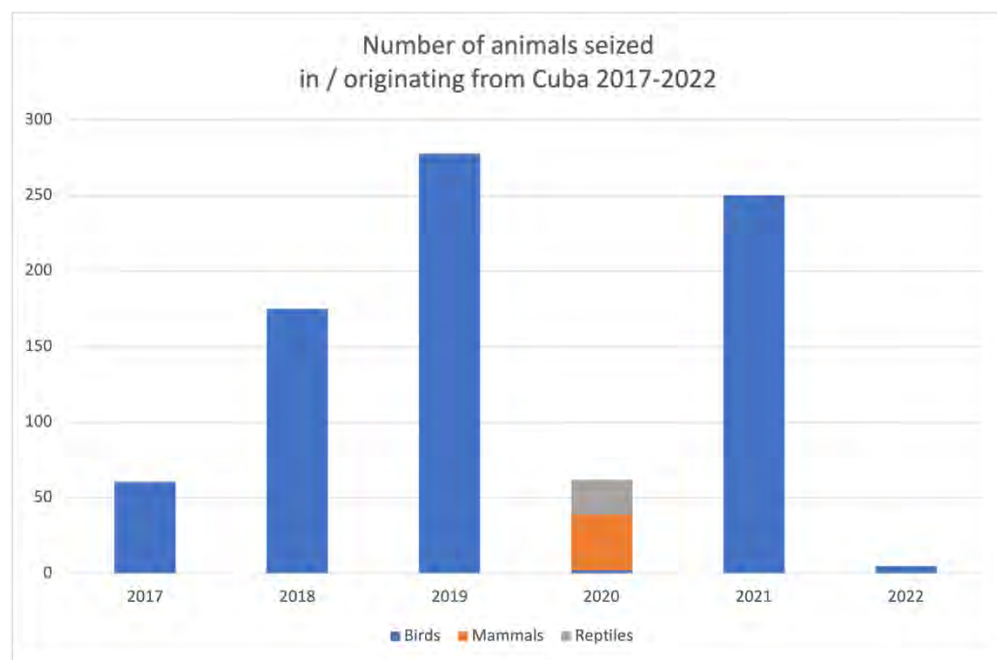


Figure 46: Number of animals seized in/originating from Cuba between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Species most targeted

Birds

Songbirds are the species group most affected by poaching and trafficking in Cuba. Of the 769 birds reported to be seized in Cuba or abroad between 2017 and 2022, the majority (449 specimens, 58%) were songbirds. This included both resident species (some of which are endemic) and migratory species. The seizures recorded by this study show that the live bird trade supplies not only local but also international demand from Europe and the USA. In the USA (particularly Florida), they are used in songbird competitions by Cuban diaspora.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁶ <https://www.univision.com/local/miami-wltv/investigacion-posible-traffic-ilegal-de-aves-exoticas-desde-cuba-a-estados-unidos>. Accessed on 10 November 2023.

The following two seizures of a total of 438 songbirds are noteworthy:

- ▶ In April 2019, Cuban Customs at Havana's Aeropuerto Internacional José Martí seized 277 live birds from the luggage of a passenger headed abroad. These included Cuban trogons (*Priotelus temnuris*); cardinals (*Cardinalis* sp.); painted buntings (*Passerina ciris*); indigo buntings (*Passerina cyanea*); Cuban grassquits (*Phonipara canorus*); yellow-faced grassquits (*Tiaris olivaceus*); and Cuban bullfinches (*Melopyrrha nigra*). They were discovered through X-ray.⁴⁶⁷ None of these species are CITES-listed, apart from Cuban bullfinches, which have been listed in CITES Appendix III and EU Appendix C since 2023.
- ▶ In April 2021, Spanish Customs at Madrid's airport seized 161 wild songbirds (species not specified) hidden in boxes in two suitcases of a Cuban national who was transiting in Madrid to fly to Valencia. Some birds had suffocated (how many was not specified).⁴⁶⁸

Over the years, there have been several interceptions of Cubans attempting to smuggle songbirds to the USA. In 2012, an elderly Cuban man was arrested at Miami International Airport with 16 Cuban bullfinches.⁴⁶⁹ In 2014, a man was detained at Ignacio Agramonte Airport in the Cuban city of Camagüey with 66 birds sewn into his pants, including finches and hummingbirds. Some of the birds' beaks were sealed shut so they would not be detected.⁴⁷⁰ In 2016, a Cuban was arrested at Miami's International Airport with nine birds in a bag and in the groin area of his pants.⁴⁷¹

This study identified one USA-related seizure between 2017 and 2022. In May 2022, an elderly Cuban man was arrested at Miami airport with four Cuban bullfinches hidden in plastic containers in his luggage. One of the birds had suffocated. The man was sentenced to 19 days imprisonment.⁴⁷²

Catching and keeping wild birds in cages is a common and widespread tradition in Cuba dating back to the colonial days of Spanish rule. In recent years, however, the trapping of wild birds has increased dramatically, even though the practice has been banned since 2011.⁴⁷³ This is reportedly fuelled by economic hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the strengthened USA blockade of Cuba. Wild bird poaching and trafficking provides an opportunity for residents to substantially boost their income, including among younger Cuban citizens. The illegal trade is furthermore facilitated by the advent of social media in Cuba.⁴⁷⁴

The peak season for bird poaching is between October and December, when tens of thousands of around 224 species of migratory birds migrate southwards from the USA, using the island of Cuba as an essential stop on their journey to South America. Intensive poaching has been reported in protected areas of Cayo Coco island as well as in the capital Havana. Poachers reportedly use water bottles to smuggle live birds and use Transmetro buses as a means of transportation.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁶⁷ <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2019-04-30-u1-e199556-s27061-decomisan-equipaje-277-aves-vivas-intentaban-sacar-pais>. Accessed on 7 November 2023.

⁴⁶⁸ <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2021-04-30-u1-e129488-s27061-interceptan-espana-160-aves-silvestres-equipaje-procedente>. Accessed on 7 November 2023.

⁴⁶⁹ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/alberto-diaz-gonzalez-mia_n_2257377. Accessed on 7 November 2023.

⁴⁷⁰ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2647135/Budgie-smuggling-Man-arrested-trying-enter-Cuba-66-tiny-birds-sewn-trousers-customs-officer-spots-bulge.html>. Accessed on 7 November 2023.

⁴⁷¹ <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdfl/pr/miami-resident-sentenced-smuggling-birds-cuba>. Accessed on 7 November 2023.

⁴⁷² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWsuokShXT4>. Accessed on 7 November 2023.

⁴⁷³ <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2022-03-28-u1-e199370-s27061-competencias-aves-cantoras-ponen-peligro-especies-fauna-cuba>. Accessed on 7 November 2023.

⁴⁷⁴ <https://www.birdscaribbean.org/2021/12/birdscaribbean-expresses-alarm-at-the-escalating-illegal-bird-trafficking-problem-in-cuba/>. Accessed on 7 November 2023.

⁴⁷⁵ <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2022-10-23-u1-e43231-s27061-incrementa-caza-venta-ilegal-aves-migratorias-cuba>. Accessed on 8 November 2023.

Locally, the birds are used in songbird competitions where bird owners place bets on whichever bird sings the longest or is most melodious. Some owners subject the birds to abuse when training them for competitions. For example, some give the birds steroids to stimulate their performances or cauterise the eyes of competitors' birds with a hot spoon in the hope that the territorial birds, unable to see their opponent, will continue singing.⁴⁷⁶

Another driver for bird poaching is the sacrifice of birds in rituals of the Afro-Cuban religion Santería. In 2018, authorities seized 175 dead birds from a person who was selling them for use in Santería ceremonies. The seizure included 37 different species of birds, including migratory birds; resident birds; and at least seven species that are endemic to Cuba (e.g. 19 dead Cuban Trogons).⁴⁷⁷

In July 2017, Dutch authorities at Amsterdam's Schiphol airport seized 60 flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) that were en route to China. One bird was dead and many were injured during transport as their feet had gotten stuck in the ventholes of the boxes they were in. They were seized because transport conditions were inadequate, and the transport documents not in order.⁴⁷⁸

In January 2021, a Cuban national was caught poaching 84 blue-winged teals (*Spatula discors*), a migratory bird species overwintering in Cuba, using 200 m² mist nets. Ten of the birds were dead when law enforcers arrived.⁴⁷⁹ It is likely the man intended to sell them for consumption.

Mammals

Bushmeat consumption, including of mammals, is reportedly a significant driver for wildlife poaching in Cuba.⁴⁸⁰ Only one seizure involving a mammal species was identified, however.

In December 2020, Cuban border guards seized 143.1 kg of refrigerated Cuban hutia meat (*Capromys pilorides*) in addition to 175.05 kg American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*) meat and arrested 'several people' that were transporting the meat in refrigerators on three wooden boats. The seizure was instigated by an anonymous tip.⁴⁸¹ As an average adult Cuban hutia weighs 3.85 kg,⁴⁸² it is estimated that a minimum number of 37 animals were killed to produce the seized amount of 143.1 kg. The quantities involved indicate the men were engaged in poaching for commercial purposes.

Cuban hutias are a rodent species endemic to Cuba. It is the largest native mammal occurring in Cuba and its consumption is a deep-rooted tradition for Cuba's indigenous and Afro-Cuban populations. Indiscriminate hunting has made the species rare or extinct in certain areas in Cuba, which has prompted a temporary hunting ban.⁴⁸³

⁴⁷⁶ <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2022-03-28-u1-e199370-s27061-competencias-aves-cantoras-ponen-peligro-especies-fauna-cuba>. Accessed on 7 November 2023.

⁴⁷⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAOrPdLvNW0&t=18s>. Accessed on 7 November 2023.

⁴⁷⁸ <https://nltimes.nl/2017/07/07/sixty-flamingos-intercepted-schiphol>; <https://nos.nl/artikel/2181919-tientallen-verwaarloosde-flamingo-s-in-beslag-genomen-op-schiphol>. Accessed on 7 November 2023.

⁴⁷⁹ <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2022-02-03-u1-e199370-s27061-aplican-sanciones-decomisos-danos-recursos-naturales-sancti>. Accessed on 7 November 2023.

⁴⁸⁰ <https://ocindex.net/country/cuba>. Accessed on 7 November 2023.

⁴⁸¹ <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2020-12-02-u1-e129488-s27061-unidad-tropa-guardafronteras-mayabeque-decomisa-318-kilogramos>. Accessed on 7 November 2023.

⁴⁸² Witmer, G. W. and Lowney, M. (2007). Population biology and monitoring of the Cuban hutia at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. USDA National Wildlife Research Center - Staff Publications. 731. Accessible at: https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/icwdm_usdanwrc/731. Accessed on 7 November 2023.

⁴⁸³ <https://www.fondazioneSlowFood.com/en/ark-of-taste-slow-food/cuban-hutia/>. Accessed on 7 November 2023.

Reptiles

Marine turtles are targeted for their meat and eggs as well as their shell, which is used to produce handicrafts. Two incidents were identified that involved marine turtles.

The most significant incident occurred in April 2017, when five Chinese citizens were caught with handicrafts made from hawksbill turtle shells (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) in the coastal town of Gibara. The operation was carried out by the National Revolutionary Police (Policía Nacional Revolucionaria, PNR), border guard officers, and the local Forest Ranger Corps. The investigation showed that the five detainees reside in Havana City and are repeat offenders in the illegal trade in hawksbill turtle shells and products. The traffickers received a fine of 2,000 CUC each (= US\$ 2,000).⁴⁸⁴ It should be noted that hawksbill turtle products are highly prized in China. Chinese consumers purchase hawksbill turtle products for their beauty, as a sign of prestige, and in the belief that they ward off evil spirits. A finished taxidermy product can sell for more than US\$1,000 in China. Illegal trade in hawksbill sea turtle products to supply this demand is thriving in Vietnam and China. Chinese Customs have had several cases of individuals smuggling hawksbill turtle shells from places as far as the Caribbean, in addition to Chinese tourists bringing sea turtle products back from their overseas holiday destinations.⁴⁸⁵

In November 2021, a fisherman was caught in the Bufeadero area with 60 kg of loggerhead sea turtle meat. He received a fine of 6,000 Cuban pesos (US\$ 250) and his licence was withdrawn.⁴⁸⁶

American crocodiles are poached for their meat, as indicated by the seizure of 175.05 kg of American crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*) meat along with 143.1 kg of refrigerated Cuban hutia meat (*Capromys pilorides*), as discussed above in the Mammals section.

Cuban rock iguanas (*Cyclura nubila*) are reportedly affected by poaching⁴⁸⁷, yet no incidents were reported between 2017 and 2022. In September 2016, a Canadian man was caught trying to smuggle two Cuban rock iguanas into Canada. He was sentenced to three months in prison in 2017.⁴⁸⁸ The species has been listed in CITES Appendix I since 1981.

⁴⁸⁴ <https://www.cubanet.org/noticias/operativo-en-holquin-destapa-trafico-de-caparazones-de-tortugas-carey/>. Accessed on 8 November 2023.

⁴⁸⁵ <https://chinadialogueocean.net/en/conservation/4096-smugglers-cashing-in-on-sea-turtles/>. Accessed 8 Nov. 2023.

⁴⁸⁶ <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2019-11-27-u185759-e185759-s27061-decomisan-60-kg-carne-caguama-pescador-submarino>

⁴⁸⁷ González et al (2016). Monitoring the density of the Cuban rock iguana (*Cyclura nubila nubila*) from protected areas in Southern Cuba. *Herpetological Conservation and Biology*. 11(Monograph 6):68–78. Accessible at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306293460_MONITORING_THE_DENSITY_OF_THE_CUBAN_ROCK_IGUANA_CYCLURA_NUBILA_NUBILA_NUBILA_FROM_PROTECTED_AREAS_IN_SOUTHERN_CUBA

⁴⁸⁸ <https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/man-sentenced-in-n-b-for-illegally-importing-cuban-rock-iguanas-1.3451534>

Key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes

Type of incident ● Seizure

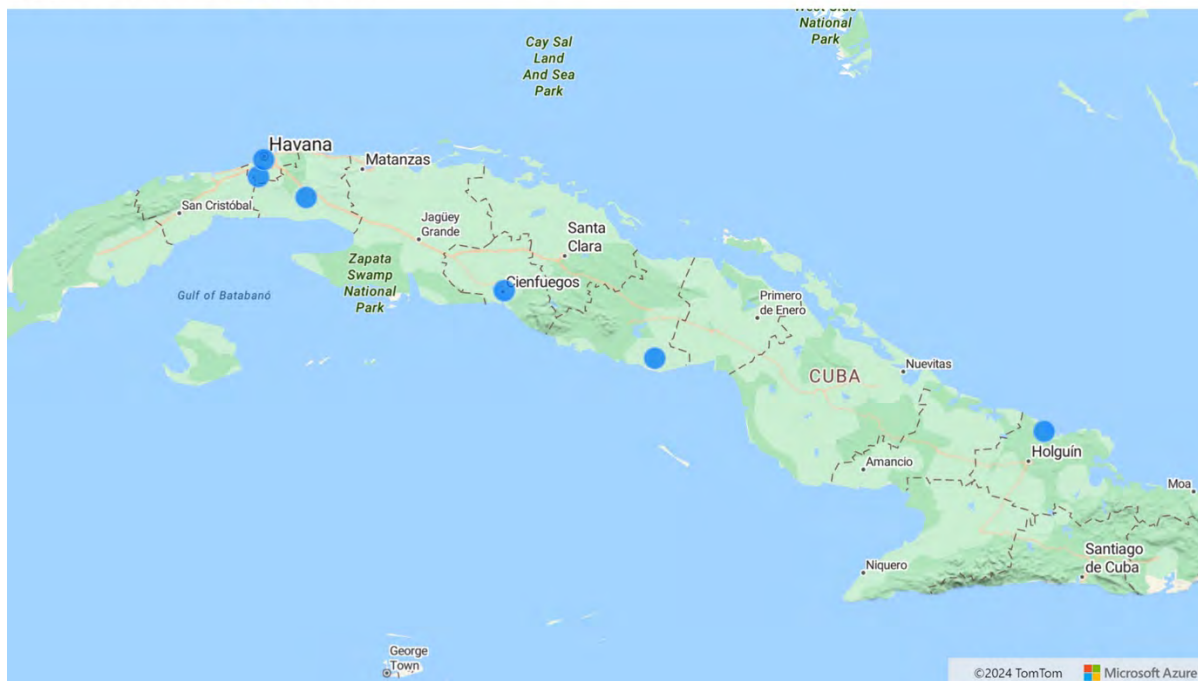


Figure 4728: Locations of seizures in Cuba reported between 2017 and 2022

Trafficking by air

The bird seizures discussed in the species most targeted section demonstrate that Havana’s airport is a key hub for wildlife smuggling to the USA and Europe. Based on the data, it appears that smugglers mainly smuggle live birds in their luggage. It is not unlikely that reptiles and wildlife parts and products, e.g., hawksbill shells and hawksbill products are also trafficked abroad, but no seizures were identified to corroborate this. Furthermore, although no seizures were recorded for wildlife smuggled from other international airports in Cuba, it is not unlikely wildlife is also smuggled through other airports.

It is unclear whether smuggling is mainly an opportunistic activity or also involves organized trafficking networks.

Sales on social media

It is not clear by what channels wildlife is sold to consumers in Cuba as no seizures were reported for illegal sales in physical outlets such as shops or markets. On the other hand, it is clear the internet has gained an increasing importance for illegal wildlife sales in recent years.

In December 2021, the NGO BirdsCaribbean rang the alarm bell over the rise in illegal bird trade on social media. In 2021, 36 Facebook groups were identified that are openly selling wild birds—each group composed of from a few hundred up to 49,000 members. BirdsCaribbean monitored one of these Facebook groups (with 46,000 members) for the month of October 2021 and established that a total of 3,270 wild birds from 28 different species were offered for sale by 356 members, including 2,041 indigo buntings, 785 painted buntings, 235 rose-breasted grosbeaks, and many others. Based on

this, BirdsCaribbean estimated that tens of thousands of birds are trapped annually. In addition to Facebook, transactions are also made via WhatsApp groups.⁴⁸⁹

This study identified one seizure of wildlife advertised on social media. In May 2022, authorities seized a Caribbean barn owl (*Tyto alba furcata*) from a person in Havana who offered it for sale for between 4,000 and 5,000 Cuban pesos (US\$167 – US\$209).⁴⁹⁰ The owl was possibly meant to be sold for sacrifice in a Santería ritual. In 2020, a Cuban animal rights activist denounced an advertisement of an owl on at a price of US\$50 on the Facebook group 'Revolico_compra y vende Habana', which she believed would be used for witchcraft purposes.⁴⁹¹

Convergence

No incidents were identified where wildlife was seized jointly with other illicit commodities and/or in circumstances that might indicate convergence with other types of organized crime.

Transboundary trafficking routes

Cuba > USA

As discussed above, the USA is a key destination for birds smuggled from Cuba to supply demand from Cuban diaspora in Florida.

Cuba > Europe (Spain)

Spain is another key destination for Cuban birds. It is likely that Cuban birds that survive the journey to Spain are subsequently bred and sold across the EU, including countries like France, Belgium, The Netherlands, and Germany where exotic songbirds are in high demand.

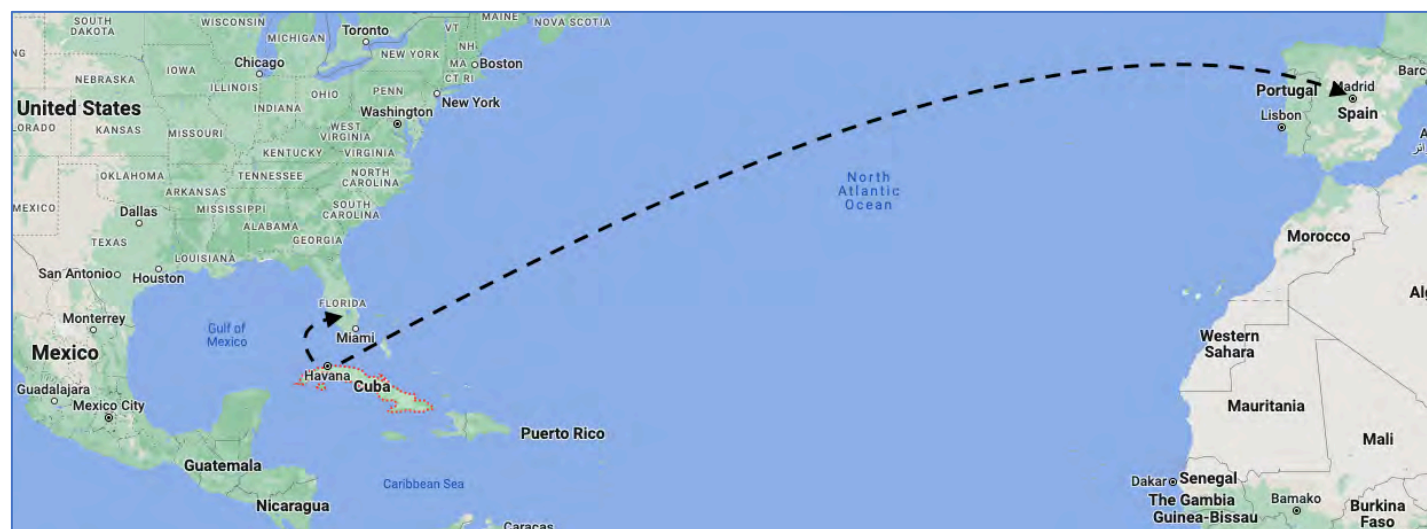


Figure 48: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes from Cuba based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022

⁴⁸⁹ <https://www.birdscaribbean.org/2021/12/birdscaribbean-expresses-alarm-at-the-escalating-illegal-bird-trafficking-problem-in-cuba/>. Accessed on 7 November 2023.

⁴⁹⁰ <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2022-05-19-u1-e129488-s27061-rescatan-lechuza-vendia-cuba-traves-redes-sociales>. Accessed on 10 November 2023.

⁴⁹¹ <https://www.cibercuba.com/noticias/2022-05-19-u1-e129488-s27061-rescatan-lechuza-vendia-cuba-traves-redes-sociales>. Accessed on 10 November 2023.

Law enforcement efforts

The rate of arrests is relatively low in Cuba. Media reported arrests in only two of the nine seizures (22%, compared to the regional average of 27%) that occurred in Cuba between 2017 and 2022. In one case, in April 2017, five people were arrested with hawksbill sea turtle handicrafts; in the other case, in December 2020, 'several people' were arrested carrying hundreds of kilograms of Cuban hutia and American crocodile meat. These incidents were discussed above in the key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes section.

Wildlife seizures in Cuba are few and far between. Meanwhile, various sources report on significant and increasing levels of wildlife poaching and trafficking, particularly of birds. Therefore, it must be assumed wildlife law enforcement is not a priority in Cuba, contrary to the fight against drug trafficking, for example, which has received substantial resources.⁴⁹²

In 2021, the government issued a new animal welfare law, which covers mammals, birds, bees, reptiles, fish, mollusks, crustaceans, and amphibians.⁴⁹³ Under this law, the maximum fine for persons or legal entities found guilty of wildlife poaching and trafficking is 1,500 Cuban pesos (US\$63) and 4,000 Cuban pesos (US\$167) respectively (Article 58 and 59). No prison terms are imposed for violations of this law. These are very mild sentences, which will pose little deterrence for those engaged in commercial-level illegal wildlife trade. This was acknowledged by the head of the ORSA in a TV interview in 2021.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹² <https://ocindex.net/country/cuba>. Accessed on 6 November 2023.

⁴⁹³ Decreto-Ley 31/2021 'De Bienestar Animal': <https://www.tsp.gob.cu/sites/default/files/documentos/goc-2021-ex25-.pdf>

⁴⁹⁴ https://diariodecuba.com/cuba/1622714882_31634.html

Dominican Republic

Dominican Republic

General overview

In Dominican Republic, a minimum of 207 animals were involved in 18 seizure and poaching incidents (16 seizures, two poaching incidents) reported in the media between 2017 and 2022. The majority (96%) concerned live animals.

The most affected species group is birds, representing 55% of all seized or poached specimens; reptiles make up 36% and mammals 9%. No amphibians were reported to be seized.

Unique characteristics

- Trafficking of endemic Hispaniolan amazon parrots
- Non-native wildlife (including birds and monkeys) trafficked from South America via Haiti
- Trafficking of endemic slider turtles
- Consumption of marine turtle meat and eggs
- Hawksbill sea turtle shells trafficked domestically and to China
- Low seizure rate

The number of animals affected by poaching and trafficking identified by this study represents a fraction of the actual volume of illegal trade. According to statistics from the Specialised Prosecutor's Office for the Defence of the Environment and Natural Resources (Procuraduría Especializada para la Defensa Ambiente y Recursos Naturales), 2,437 wild animals were seized between October 2018 and December 2020, and 16 criminal cases started related to wildlife trafficking.⁴⁹⁵

Number of incidents reported in the media

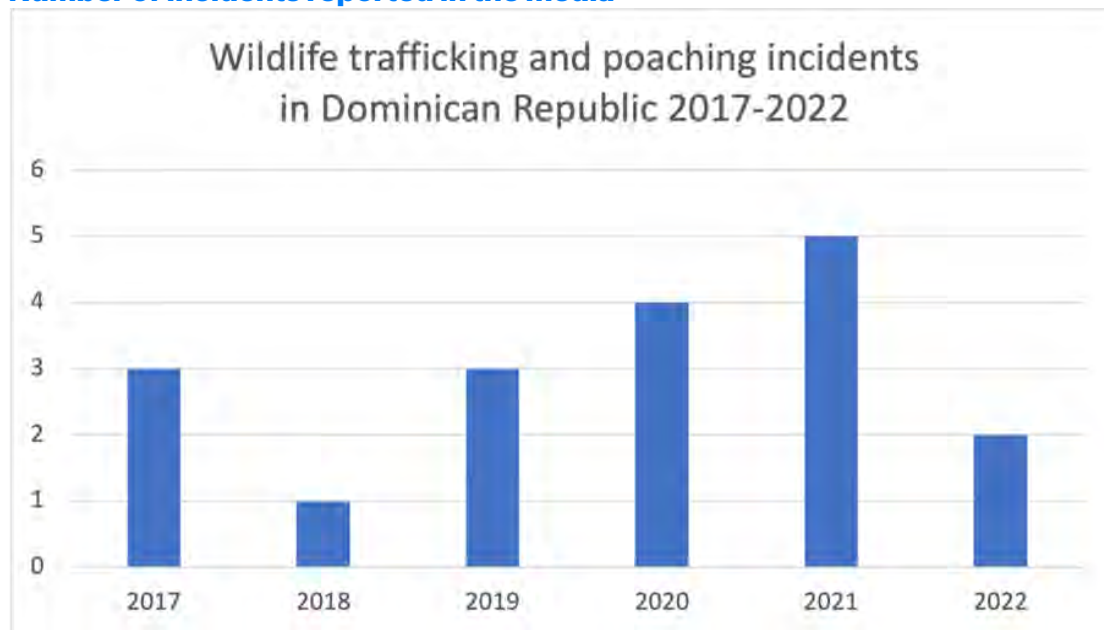


Figure 49: Wildlife trafficking and poaching incidents in Dominican Republic between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

⁴⁹⁵ <https://www.elcaribe.com.do/destacado/coleccionar-animales-exoticos-la-aficion-ilegal-de-millonarios/>. Accessed on 15 November 2023.

Number of animals involved

The table and figure below show the numbers of birds, reptiles, and mammals seized or poached between 2017 and 2022.

Table 8: Animals seized or poached in Dominican Republic between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Birds	6	53	23	0	33	0	115
Reptiles	2	0	16	3	10	43	74
Mammals	0	2	0	1	15	0	18
TOTAL	8	55	39	4	58	43	

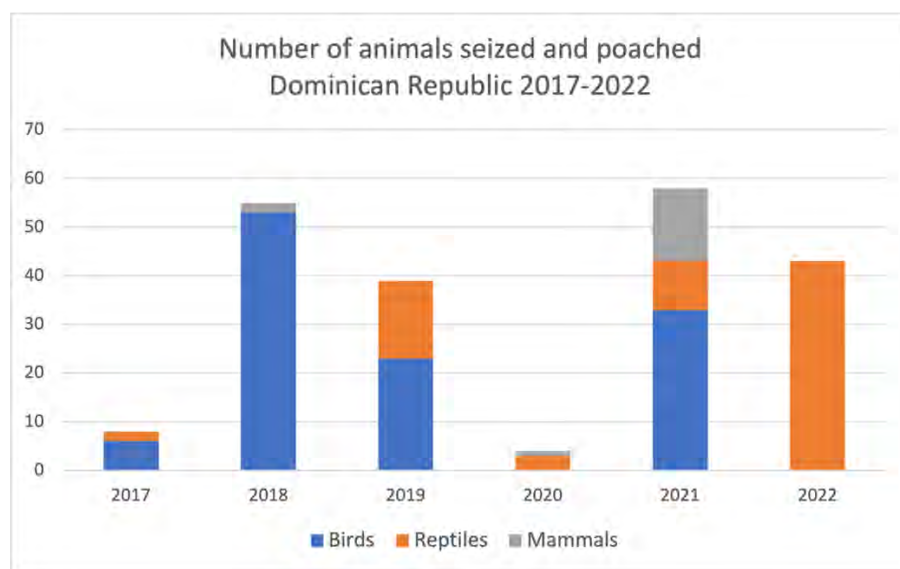


Figure 5029: Number of animals seized or poached in Dominican Republic between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Demand for endemic and non-native wildlife

The island of Hispaniola, which Dominican Republic shares with Haiti, is considered to have the highest biodiversity in the Caribbean. The island harbours a high number of endemic species, such as the Hispaniolan amazon (*Amazona ventralis*); Hispaniolan parakeets (*Psittacara chloropterus*); Hispaniolan slider (*Trachemys decorata*); Rhinoceros iguana (*Cyclura cornuta*); and Hispaniolan solenodon (*Solenodon paradoxus*).

Illegal overexploitation of wildlife for local and international markets is a concern. Illegal hunting of birds (e.g., doves, coots, flamingos); reptiles (e.g., turtles, iguanas); and trafficking of parrots and parakeets are traditional local practices.⁴⁹⁶

The few seizures that were identified between 2017 and 2022 provide clear indications that traffickers target not only endemic species but also species that are not native to Dominican Republic, such as monkeys and macaws. Of the 30 species involved in the seizures and poaching incidents reported between 2017 and 2022, only 12 are native to Dominican Republic. At least 72 non-native animals were seized, which is 35% of the 207 animals recorded by this study. This means that wildlife is being smuggled to Dominican Republic. The animals are used in tourist attractions or end up as pets.

⁴⁹⁶ See e.g. https://datazone.birdlife.org/userfiles/file/IBAs/CaribCntryPDFs/dominican_republic.pdf. Accessed on 15 November 2023.

According to the Specialised Prosecutor's Office for the Defence of the Environment and Natural Resources (Procuraduría Especializada para la Defensa del Medio Ambiente y los Recursos Naturales), the majority of non-native wildlife trafficked in Dominican Republic originates in Central America and is smuggled via Haiti.⁴⁹⁷ This smuggling route may be facilitated by the fact that Haiti is not a party to the CITES Convention. This provides a loophole to bring CITES-protected wildlife into Haiti without much scrutiny and smuggle it across the border with Dominican Republic. The Haiti-Dominican Republic border is notoriously porous and corruption of Customs agents on both sides a known driver of illegal cross-border trade.⁴⁹⁸

Species most targeted

Birds

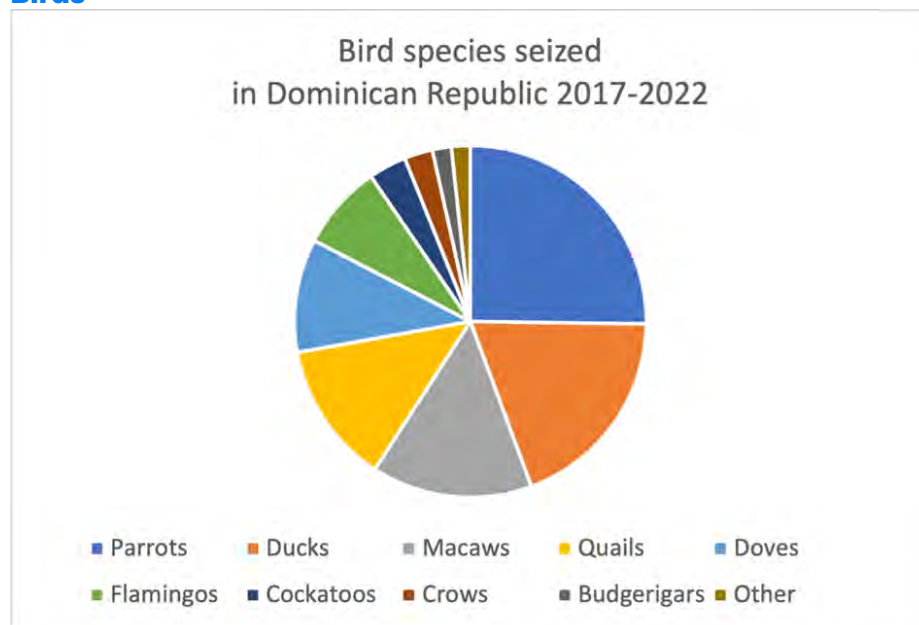


Figure 51: Bird species seized in Dominican Republic between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Parrots make up 25% of all birds seized between 2017 and 2022. Of the 29 parrots seized, 28 were Hispaniolan amazons (*Amazona ventralis*). The other parrot was a yellow-crowned amazon (*Amazona ochrocephala*, native to South America). The Hispaniolan amazons were seized in two different seizures of ten and 18 specimens respectively, with both seizures concerning chicks:

- ▶ In June 2019, a man was arrested in Pedernales on the southern border with Haiti with 18 Hispaniolan amazon chicks that were to be sold in Santo Domingo at RD\$2,500 per specimen (US\$45).⁴⁹⁹ Although the media report provided no further detail on this, it is likely he had smuggled the chicks across the border from Haiti.
- ▶ In June 2021, ten Hispaniolan amazon chicks were seized near Hoyo de Pelempito in the Sierra de Bahoruco, an area where these birds are frequently trafficked.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁷ <https://www.elcaribe.com.do/destacado/coleccionar-animales-exoticos-la-aficion-ilegal-de-millonarios/>. Accessed on 19 November 2023.

⁴⁹⁸ <https://ht.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/100/CSIS-Haiti-DR-border-study-March-2019.pdf>. Accessed on 19 November 2023.

⁴⁹⁹ <https://elgranerodelsur.com/2019/06/19/incautan-18-pichones-de-cotorras-iban-a-ser-comercializadas-en-pedernales/>. Accessed on 16 November 2023.

⁵⁰⁰ <https://x.com/orlandojm/status/1400986855546535937?s=20>. Accessed on 16 November 2023.

Hispaniolan amazons are the only Amazon species on Hispaniola. Its population (estimated at between 10,000 and 20,000 individuals) is rapidly declining due to hunting for food, habitat loss, and trapping for the local and international pet trade. Trapping of adults and robbing nests for chicks to supply the local pet trade is a particular concern. In some areas most families own a parrot, and as mortality of these birds is high in captivity, often living only a few years, there is constant demand for new birds.⁵⁰¹ New supply mainly comes from wild populations as this species is difficult to breed in captivity.⁵⁰² Moreover, the robbing of nests frequently results in destruction of the nest cavity or nest tree, further exacerbating loss of nesting habitat to other causes.⁵⁰³

Hispaniolan amazons command high prices on the international market. On 17 November 2023, a baby specimen was found for sale for US\$4,000 on an American website, with shipping offered.⁵⁰⁴

Hispaniolan parakeets (*Psittacara chloropterus*), another endemic species, are reportedly also captured for the illegal pet trade⁵⁰⁵, but no seizures of this species were reported.

Ducks feature high on the list of targeted bird species because 22 specimens were seized in a major seizure reported in November 2018. The ducks were seized from a farm in Santiago Rodríguez along with 33 other mammals and birds, in a joint operation by the Ministry of Environment, the national police, the Dominican army, and SENPA.⁵⁰⁶ The seizure included ten mandarin ducks (*Aix galericulata*), a species native to Europe, Eurasia, and North Africa; and 12 ducks of an unidentified species. Also seized were 15 quails (*Coturnix* sp.); 12 quail-doves (*Geotrygon* sp.); one toucan (*Ramphastos* sp.); one raven (*Corvus* sp.); one cockatoo (*Cacatuidae*); one dead crane (*Grus* sp.); one lion (*Panthera leo*); and one golden-handed tamarin (*Saguinus midas*).⁵⁰⁷ At least 15 animals were not native to Dominican Republic. The owner, a successful entrepreneur from a wealthy family who was arrested but later released by the court, claimed he had intended to set up a zoo to attract tourists, but was frustrated by the lack of cooperation from the authorities.⁵⁰⁸

There is significant demand for macaws in Dominican Republic. Seventeen specimens were seized in two incidents, including 14 blue and yellow macaws (*Ara araurana*); one red and green macaw (*Ara chloropterus*); one red-shouldered macaw (*Diopsittaca nobilis*); and one Catalina macaw (a hybrid between *Ara araurana* and *Ara macao*). Fifteen of these were seized in a law enforcement operation in Punta Cana in September 2021. Two men were arrested and 39 non-native animals seized that were used as photo props to attract tourists. In addition to 13 blue and yellow macaws, one red and green macaw, and one red-shouldered macaw, there were three white cockatoos (*Cacatua alba*); one yellow-crowned amazon (*Amazona ochrocephala*); two budgerigars (*Melopsittacus undulatus*); seven squirrel monkeys (*Saimiri* sp.); seven capuchin monkeys (*Cebus* sp.); and four pythons (*Pythonidae*).⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰¹ <https://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/hispaniolan-amazon-amazona-ventralis/text>

⁵⁰² <https://susanclubb.com/knowledge-center/bird-species-profiles/14-amazons/29-hispaniolan-amazon>. Accessed on 17 November 2023.

⁵⁰³ <https://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/hispaniolan-amazon-amazona-ventralis/text>. Accessed on 17 November 2023.

⁵⁰⁴ <https://www.birdbreeders.com/bird/205825/hispaniolan-amazon>. Accessed on 17 November 2023.

⁵⁰⁵ https://datazone.birdlife.org/userfiles/file/IBAs/CaribCntryPDFs/dominican_republic.pdf. Accessed on 15 November 2023.

⁵⁰⁶ <https://www.accionverde.com/autoridades-apresan-hombre-y-le-confiscan-una-leona-un-mono-caballos-aves-perros-y-otros-animales/>.

Accessed on 16 November 2023.

⁵⁰⁷ <https://www.accionverde.com/autoridades-apresan-hombre-y-le-confiscan-una-leona-un-mono-caballos-aves-perros-y-otros-animales/>.

Accessed on 16 November 2023.

⁵⁰⁸ <https://www.diariodigital.com.do/2018/11/10/serpientes-pitones-retenidas-por-medio-ambiente-habian-sido-donadas-por-su-dueno-al-zoologico>. Accessed on 16 November 2023.

⁵⁰⁹ <https://elnuevodiario.com.do/arrestan-a-dos-personas-por-explotacion-de-animales-exoticos-en-punta-cana/>;

<https://www.diariolibre.com/actualidad/justicia/tribunal-ordena-libertad-de-hombre-al-que-confiscaron-una-leona-y-dos-serpientes-piton-GF11365614>. Accessed on 16 November 2023.

A seizure that took place in Venezuela sheds some light on how macaws and other wildlife enter Dominican Republic. In October 2022, Venezuelan police officers seized an illegal shipment of 60 wild birds (including 50 macaws, nine yellow-crowned amazons, and one king vulture) and two giant anteaters that were transported in a truck. The animals were headed for the International Airport in Maiquetía, on the northern coast of Venezuela from where they would be shipped to Dominican Republic. The officers discovered the animals during a routine inspection when they heard sounds from the truck. The shipment included 18 military macaws, which are listed in CITES Appendix I and are prohibited from being commercially traded. The animals reportedly came from a wildlife farm operated by a commercial company engaged in breeding and trading exotic birds and mammals. For more on this incident, see the Venezuela section.⁵¹⁰

Reptiles

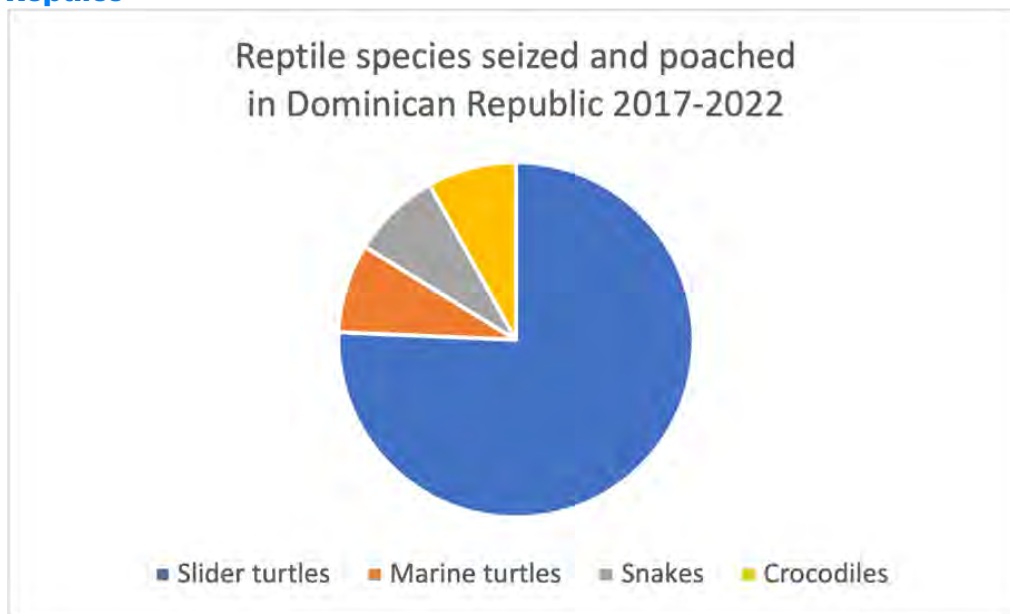


Figure 52: Reptile species seized in Dominican Republic between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Some 76% of all reptiles seized or poached between 2017 and 2022 were slider turtles. A total of 56 specimens were seized in three incidents. The biggest seizure happened in Miches, January 2022, when 42 slider turtles of various subspecies were seized from an illegal breeding facility.⁵¹¹

Unfortunately, the media reports failed to identify the subspecies, but it is possible some were Hispaniolan sliders (*Trachemys decorata*). This freshwater turtle species, found exclusively on the island of Hispaniola, is considered the rarest of all sliders. It is poorly studied, and little is known about its spatial distribution, its ecology, or its conservation status. Classified as vulnerable on the IUCN red list, it faces numerous threats, including commercial exploitation, in particular for the pet trade or for use in voodoo practices.⁵¹²

⁵¹⁰ Boon, L. (2023). Este negocio se cobra en especies. Armando Info, 10 September 2023. Available at: <https://armando.info/este-negocio-se-cobra-en-especies/>. Accessed 13 September 2023.

⁵¹¹ <https://www.accionverde.com/ministerio-de-medio-ambiente-rescata-42-hicotetas-en-miches/>. Accessed on 17 November 2023.

⁵¹² <https://www.caribaea.org/en/of-turtles-and-men-immersion-in-haiti-in-the-footsteps-of-trachemys-decorata/>. Accessed on 17 November 2023.

In the USA, Hispaniolan sliders are offered for sale online for prices between US\$375 and US\$995, with free shipping included.⁵¹³ Sellers note ‘only a small handful of US breeders work with this hardest to find of species, making just a few hatchlings per year’.

Marine turtles are poached for their meat, shells, and eggs. Four seizures and two poaching incidents were identified involving three species listed in CITES Appendix I: hawksbill sea turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*); green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*); and leatherback sea turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*). Three incidents concerned violent killings of marine turtles, such as the juvenile green sea turtle that was found beheaded, her shell scratched, and with a hole pierced through her in Bávaro, May 2020. She was the third turtle killed in one month; killings of two leatherback sea turtles were also reported in the same area in the east of the country.⁵¹⁴ In one of these instances, the turtle was in the process of laying eggs when she was attacked with machetes.⁵¹⁵ It was believed fishermen were responsible for all three killings.

No marine turtle egg seizures were identified in Dominican Republic between 2017 and 2022, but egg poaching is a known concern. In June 2020, conservationists reported that the leatherback sea turtle sanctuary Ría Maimón Natural Park was threatened by turtle egg poaching. Turtle eggs are considered an aphrodisiac. According to some community members in the area, eggs are sold to clients with a certain purchasing power at a rate of RD\$80.00 (US\$1.41) per egg and a pound of meat between RD\$25 (US\$ 0.44) and RD\$40 (US\$0.70).⁵¹⁶

Historically, there is persistent trafficking of hawksbill sea turtle shell pieces and objects for both domestic and foreign markets in Dominican Republic. Analysis of USA LEMIS wildlife trade data between 2004 and 2013 shows that Dominican Republic was Latin America’s biggest source and exporter for illegal hawksbill turtle shell products in that time frame.⁵¹⁷

In 2009, TRAFFIC reported that sales in Dominican Republic of tourist souvenirs made from hawksbill turtle shell had ceased after a government campaign cracked down on shops illegally trading such items. More than 99 per cent of these souvenirs had been withdrawn or confiscated according to TRAFFIC.⁵¹⁸

It appears some of this trade has resurfaced since 2009. This study identified two seizures of hawksbill turtle shell parts and products, in Dominican Republic and China:

- ▶ In October 2017, 100 objects made from hawksbill turtle shells were seized from shops catering to tourists in municipalities in the north and east of the country.⁵¹⁹
- ▶ In November 2019, an air parcel containing 55 hawksbill turtle shell pieces sent from Dominican Republic was seized in China, at Guangzhou’s airport.⁵²⁰

⁵¹³ See e.g. <https://theturtlesource.com/Hispaniola-slider/>; and <https://exotictortoises.com/shop/turtles/hispaniola-slider/>. Accessed on 17 November 2023.

⁵¹⁴ <https://www.diariolibre.com/actualidad/medioambiente/desconocidos-matan-otra-tortuga-marina-en-el-este-CB19183122>. Accessed on 17 November 2023.

⁵¹⁵ <https://www.armariodenoticias.com/2020/05/matan-machetazos-tortuga-tinglar.html>. Accessed on 17 November 2023.

⁵¹⁶ <https://www.diariolibre.com/actualidad/medioambiente/santuario-de-tortuga-tinglar-en-la-vacama-es-amenazado-por-el-robo-de-huevos-GE18945399>. Accessed on 18 November 2023.

⁵¹⁷ <https://defenders.org/sites/default/files/publications/combating-wildlife-trafficking-from-latin-america-to-the-united-states-and-what-we-can-do-to-address-it.pdf>. Accessed on 18 November 2023.

⁵¹⁸ <https://www.traffic.org/news/turtles-no-longer-turn-to-souvenirs-in-dominican-republic/>. Accessed 18 Nov. 2023.

⁵¹⁹ <https://efeverde.com/carey-especies-amenazadas-dominicana/>. Accessed on 17 November 2023.

⁵²⁰ https://news.cnr.cn/native/city/20191113/t20191113_524856991.shtml. Accessed on 17 November 2023.

Hawksbill sea turtle shell pieces are also trafficked abroad from neighbouring Haiti. In July 2017, French Customs at Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris seized an air cargo shipment of half a ton of hawksbill sea turtle pieces (attributed to an estimated 380 turtles) from Haiti en route to Vietnam. The shipment had an estimated street value of US\$ 350,000.⁵²¹

Past research has highlighted illegal trade in Rhinoceros iguanas (*Cyclura cornuta*), an endangered iguana species endemic to Hispaniola and listed in CITES Appendix I.⁵²² Hispaniolan Rhinoceros iguanas are threatened by illegal hunting of subadults and adults for food and local trade. In Dominican Republic, iguanas are rendered into an oil that is used for medicinal and cosmetic purposes. Since the mid-1980s, the international trade of wild animals from Dominican Republic has been controlled by CITES, however, no such control exists in Haiti as Haiti is not a party to the CITES Convention. National trade of iguanas within Dominican Republic is controlled to some extent, but there is still substantial movement of individuals throughout the country for pets and tourist exhibits, known as iguanarios.⁵²³

This study identified no seizures of this species in Dominican Republic between 2017 and 2022. There was a seizure of two specimens in Mexico, Guadelajara, in March 2019.⁵²⁴ No information was provided on the origin of these specimens. While it is possible that they came from captive breeding sources in Mexico, it is not unlikely Rhinoceros iguanas continue to be poached in Dominican Republic and trafficked abroad.

Mammals

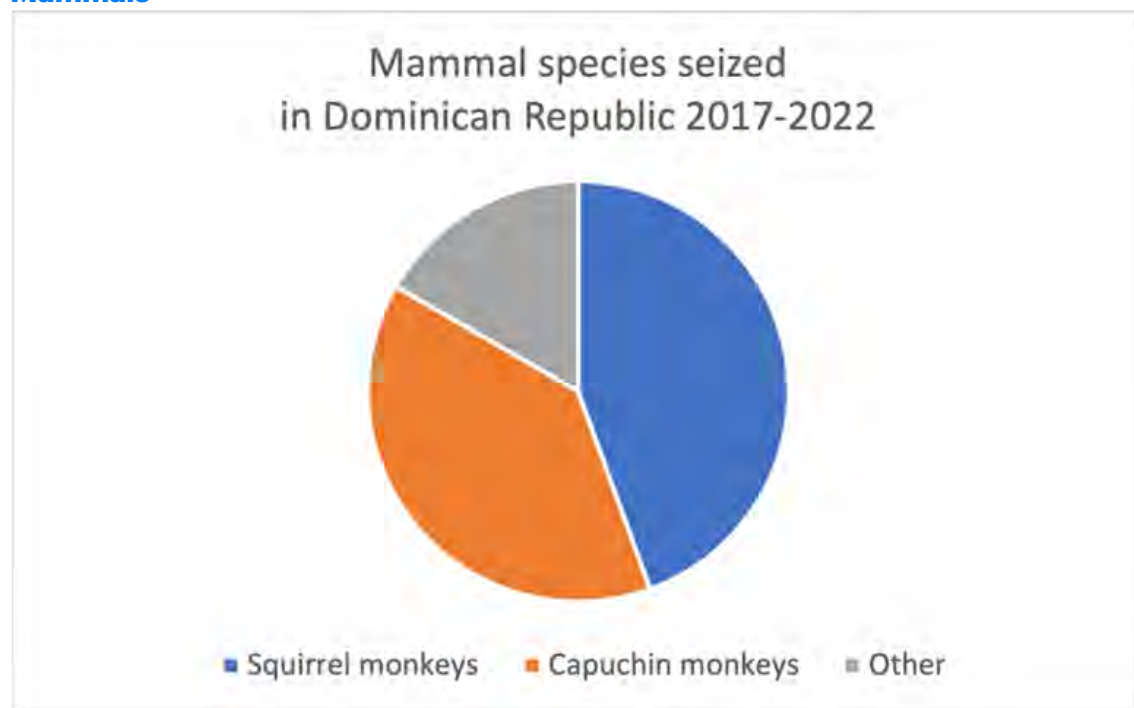


Figure 53: Mammal species seized in Dominican Republic between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

⁵²¹ <https://wwmt.com/news/nation-world/french-officials-seize-nearly-half-a-ton-of-smuggled-tortoise-shells>. Accessed on 18 November 2023.

⁵²² https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/12516/trade_in_endemic_caribbean_reptiles.pdf. Accessed 18 Nov. 2023.

⁵²³ Pasachnik, S.A. & Carreras De León, R. 2019. *Cyclura cornuta*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2019: e.T6042A3099941. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2019-2.RLTS.T6042A3099941.en>. Accessed on 15 November 2023.

⁵²⁴ <https://www.eloccidental.com.mx/local/decomisan-en-jalisco-dos-iguanas-rinoceronte-3223730.html>

Eighteen mammals were seized between 2017 and 2022, including eight squirrel monkeys (*Saimiri* sp.) and seven capuchin monkeys (*Cebus* sp.). The most significant seizure, also mentioned above, was of seven squirrel monkeys and seven capuchin monkeys in Punta Cana in September 2021 along with 25 non-native birds and reptiles. They were used as photo props to attract tourists.⁵²⁵

Other seizures of mammals involved a golden-handed tamarin (*Saguinus midas*); a Hispaniolan solenodon (*Solenodon paradoxus*); and an African lion (*Panthera leo*).

Of these species, only the solenodon is native to Dominican Republic. Squirrel monkeys and capuchin monkeys are native to Central and South America; golden-handed tamarins are native to the forested areas north of the Amazon River in Brazil, Guyana, French Guiana, Suriname, and possibly Venezuela; the lion, of course, is native to Sub Saharan Africa. According to the Specialised Prosecutor's Office for the Defence of the Environment and Natural Resources, the majority of non-native wildlife in Dominican Republic originates from Central America and is smuggled via Haiti.⁵²⁶

Hunting is deeply ingrained in Dominican Republic's culture. The government has regulations in place for various forms of hunting, but acknowledges illegal hunting is a problem.⁵²⁷

In the east of the country, near El Puerto, deer hunting is a well-established industry. Many locals live from deer hunting and display their heads as trophies in the living rooms of their homes. Deer were introduced to the country in the mid-1950s and have reproduced in forested areas. Hunters are incentivised by farm owners keen to eradicate deer as it feeds on cassava, corn, and sugarcane plantations. The calves, which are very vulnerable to attack, are sold for RD\$5,000.00 (US\$88), while a pound of deer meat, which is in high demand, is sold for RD\$150.00 (US\$2.64). The Ministry of the Environment reportedly only intervenes when the media reports on these wildlife crimes.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁵ <https://elnuevodiario.com.do/arrestan-a-dos-personas-por-explotacion-de-animales-exoticos-en-punta-cana/>. Accessed on 16 November 2023.

⁵²⁶ <https://www.elcaribe.com.do/destacado/coleccionar-animales-exoticos-la-aficion-ilegal-de-millonarios/>

⁵²⁷ https://listindiario.com/la-vida/vida-verde/20230727/caceria-republica-dominicana-importante-regulacion_765391.html;

<https://www.diariolibre.com/planeta/medioambiente/2023/06/21/evaluan-reglamento-para-la-caceria-en-rd/2378548>. Accessed on 15 November 2023.

⁵²⁸ <https://www.diariolibre.com/actualidad/medioambiente/la-caza-del-venado-un-animales-exotico-se-realiza-sin-control-en-el-puerto-AB13745885>. Accessed on 18 November 2023.

Key geographical/ logistical trafficking nodes

Type of incident ● Poaching ● Seizure

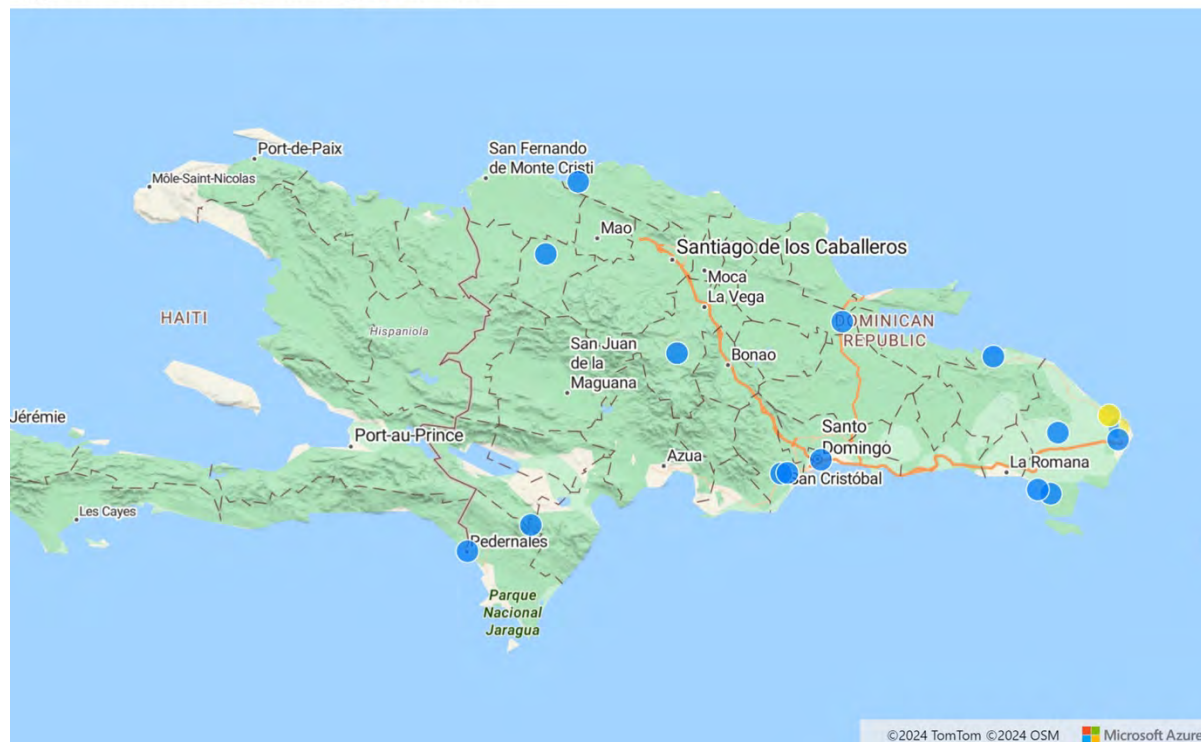


Figure 54: Locations of seizures and poaching incidents in Dominican Republic reported between 2017 and 2022

Pet shops selling non-native wildlife

The limited number of wildlife seizures identified between 2017 and 2022 provide few clues as to how wild animals are marketed and sold in Dominican Republic. Only one incident was found concerning illegal wildlife sales. In March 2021, a boa constrictor and a ball python, native to Central/South America and West Africa respectively, were seized from a shop in the capital Santo Domingo.⁵²⁹ A quick online search of pet shops operating in Dominican Republic identified at least one pet shop that, based on photos of macaws on its Facebook page, appears to be selling exotic wildlife. Therefore, it may be concluded that there are pet shops in Dominican Republic catering to demand for exotic wildlife.

Sales on social media

Traffickers are known to use social media in Dominican Republic for illegal transactions, including of illegal migrants.⁵³⁰ No incidents were identified of illegal wildlife sales on social media, however, as noted above, pet shops with an online presence in the country are advertising non-native species such as blue and yellow macaws.

Convergence

No incidents were identified where wildlife was seized jointly with other illicit commodities and/or in circumstances that might indicate convergence with other types of organized crime. However, authorities in Dominican Republic acknowledge links between wildlife crime and other forms of organized crime. In May 2021, the head of the Specialised Prosecutor's Office for the Defence of the

⁵²⁹ <https://elnuevodiario.com.do/autoridades-dominicanas-decomisan-una-boa-constrictor-y-una-piton-real/>. Accessed on 19 November 2023.

⁵³⁰ <https://listindiario.com/la-republica/2023/02/23/764173/las-redes-sociales-una-vitrina-para-el-trafico-ilicito-de-migrantes-en-latinoamerica-y-rd.html>. Accessed on 19 November 2023.

Environment and Natural Resources was interviewed on the exotic pet trade in Dominican Republic. He alleged that the business of wildlife trafficking is sometimes used to launder money, similar to drug trafficking. People who are involved in money laundering purchase expensive, exotic wild animals with illicit cash to launder money. 'I buy it with cash, I don't leave traces, I'm already laundering, I continue selling, and the supply chain continues'.⁵³¹

Transboundary trafficking routes

Dominican Republic harbours several organized crime networks that play important roles in the human trafficking, human smuggling, and drug trafficking markets, as well as some of the smaller criminal markets such as the environmental or natural resources market. These networks collaborate with Haitian networks, especially in the trafficking of cannabis, humans, and illegal timber. Dominican Republic is believed to be the leading Caribbean transit hub for cocaine from Venezuela destined for North America or Europe. Cocaine is primarily imported into the country using go-fast boats and shipping containers. From Dominican Republic, traffickers often target Puerto Rico as a gateway into the USA. Similarly, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Anguilla, Bermuda, and the British Virgin Islands provide opportunities for organized crime groups to ship cocaine to France and the UK. Traffickers also often target Spain, where there is a substantial Dominican diaspora, making Spain the principal European entry point for cocaine from Dominican Republic.⁵³²

An understanding of these well-established transnational trafficking routes may be useful in assessing how wildlife is trafficked to and from Dominican Republic. The wildlife seizures identified by this study provide evidence that wildlife is smuggled in via Haiti or directly from South America.

Haiti > Dominican Republic

As mentioned above, in June 2019 a seizure was recorded of 18 Hispaniolan amazon chicks near the Haiti border, which had most likely been smuggled from Haiti.⁵³³ Dominican Republican authorities have furthermore highlighted that the majority of non-native wildlife in Dominican Republic is smuggled via Haiti.⁵³⁴ Haiti is therefore a key source and transit country for native, endemic, and non-native wildlife smuggled to Dominican Republic.

Venezuela > Dominican Republic

A seizure in Venezuela in 2022 of 60 wild birds (including 50 macaws, nine yellow-crowned amazons, and one king vulture) and 2 giant anteaters that were meant to be transported to Dominican Republic by air has revealed that wildlife also arrives directly from Venezuela.⁵³⁵

⁵³¹ <https://www.elcaribe.com.do/destacado/coleccionar-animales-exoticos-la-aficion-ilegal-de-millonarios/>. Accessed on 19 November 2023.

⁵³² https://ocindex.net/country/dominican_republic. Accessed on 19 November 2023.

⁵³³ <https://elgranerodelsur.com/2019/06/19/incautan-18-pichones-de-cotorras-iban-a-ser-comercializadas-en-pedernales/>. Accessed on 16 November 2023.

⁵³⁴ <https://www.elcaribe.com.do/destacado/coleccionar-animales-exoticos-la-aficion-ilegal-de-millonarios/>

⁵³⁵ Boon, L. (2023). Este negocio se cobra en especies. Armando Info, 10 September 2023. Available at: <https://armando.info/este-negocio-se-cobra-en-especies/>. Accessed 13 September 2023.

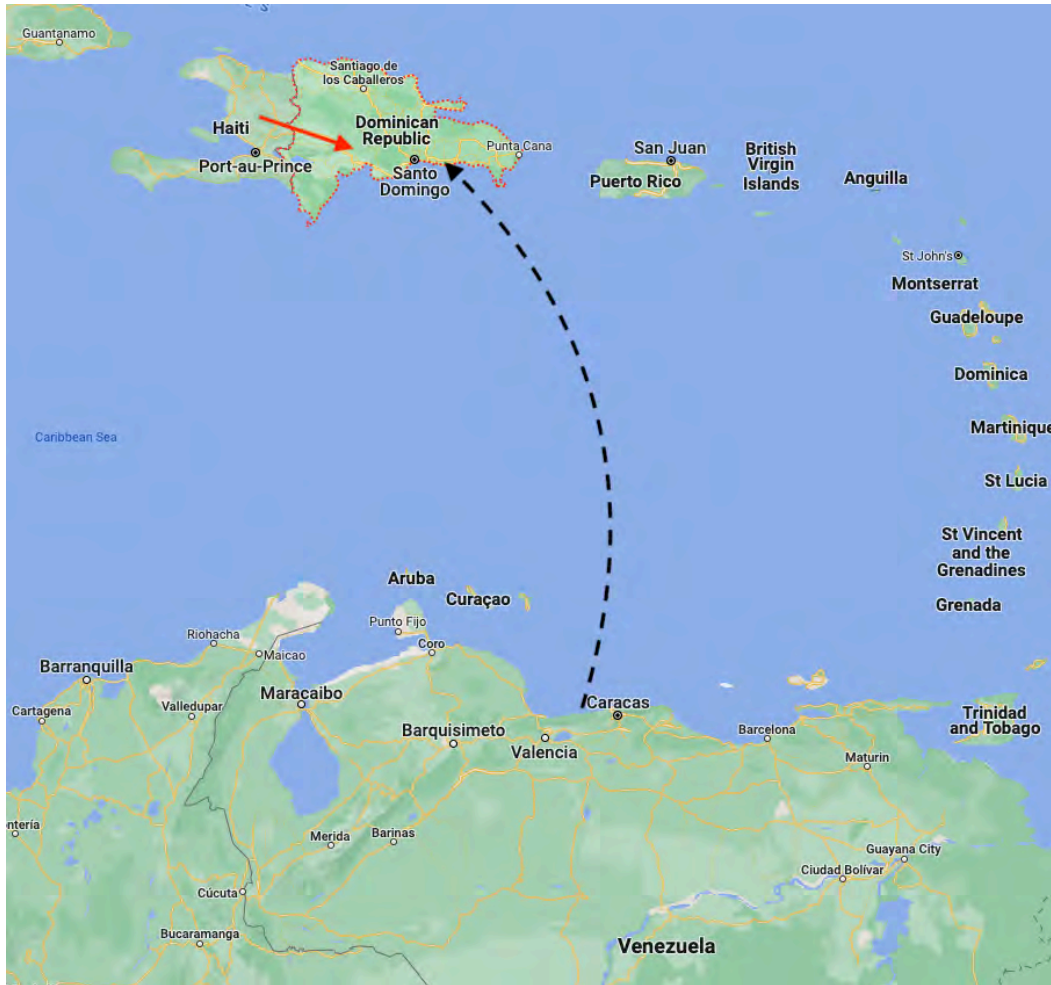


Figure 55: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes to Dominican Republic based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022

Law enforcement efforts

In seven of the 17 seizures reported in Dominican Republic between 2017 and 2022, 13 people were arrested. Therefore, 41% of cases resulted in arrest. This is well above the regional average of 27%.

Given that only 18 seizures and poaching incidents could be identified between 2017 and 2022, it appears that fighting wildlife poaching and trafficking is not a high priority in Dominican Republic. Nonetheless, there have been some successful law enforcement interventions against wildlife traffickers. In April 2022, the director of the National Environmental Protection Service (Servicio Nacional de Protección Ambiental, SENPA) shared some results from ‘Operation Arcadia’, which targeted gangs dedicated to the trafficking of birds and exotic species in Dominican Republic. He reported that joint intelligence operations had allowed the confiscation of wild animals such as macaws and monkeys imported illegally from South America.⁵³⁶ Indeed, this study identified several seizures of macaws and monkeys, which were discussed in species most targeted section.

SENPA is a specialised body of the Armed Forces. The SENPA Command Centre works together with the Specialised Prosecutor's Office for the Defence of the Environment and Natural Resources to confront crimes that threaten ecosystems in Dominican Republic, including illegal logging and forest fires.

⁵³⁶ <https://www.accionverde.com/desmantelan-bandas-dedicada-al-trafico-ilicito-de-aves-y-especies-exoticas/>. Accessed on 15 November 2023.

Ecuador

Ecuador

General overview

In Ecuador, a minimum of 788 animals were involved in 75 seizures and 12 poaching incidents reported in the media between 2017 and 2022. Some 88% of these (695 specimens) concerned live animals.

By far the most affected species group are reptiles, which represent 74% of all animals reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022. Birds make up 15%, followed by mammals (10%) and amphibians (1%).

Unique characteristics

- Endemic reptile species from Galápagos trafficked to global pet markets, including via Peru
- Trafficking of psittacids, including to Peru
- Jaguar parts trafficking, including to Asia
- High levels of bushmeat trafficking
- Effective wildlife prosecutions

Number of incidents reported in the media

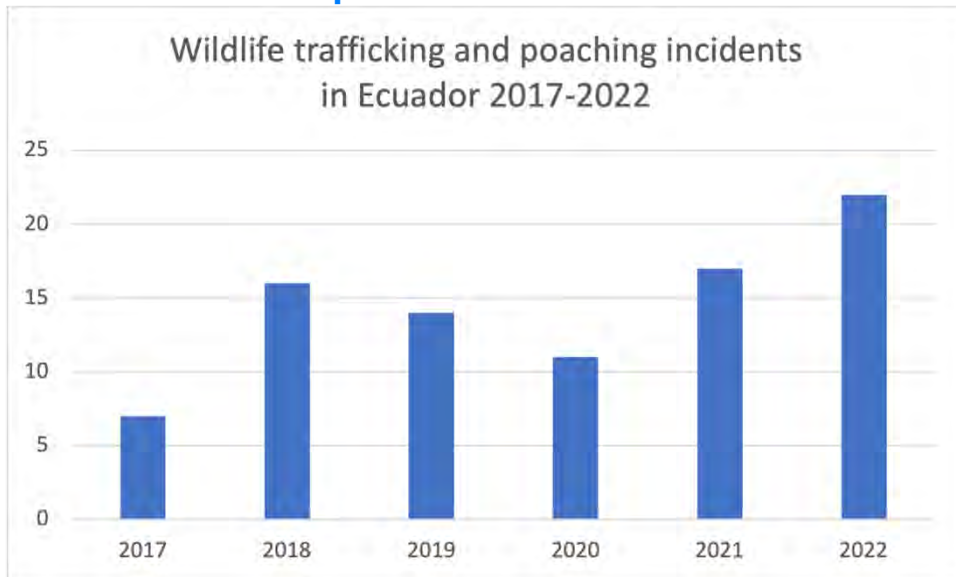


Figure 306: Wildlife trafficking and poaching incidents in Ecuador between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Number of animals involved

The table and figure below show the numbers of reptiles, mammals, birds, and amphibians seized or poached in Ecuador between 2017 and 2022.

Table 9: Number of animals seized or poached in Ecuador between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Reptiles	4	127	28	7	234	181	581
Birds	0	17	57	14	7	25	120
Mammals	6	25	7	12	12	19	81
Amphibians	0	0	6	0	0	0	6
TOTAL	10	169	98	33	253	225	

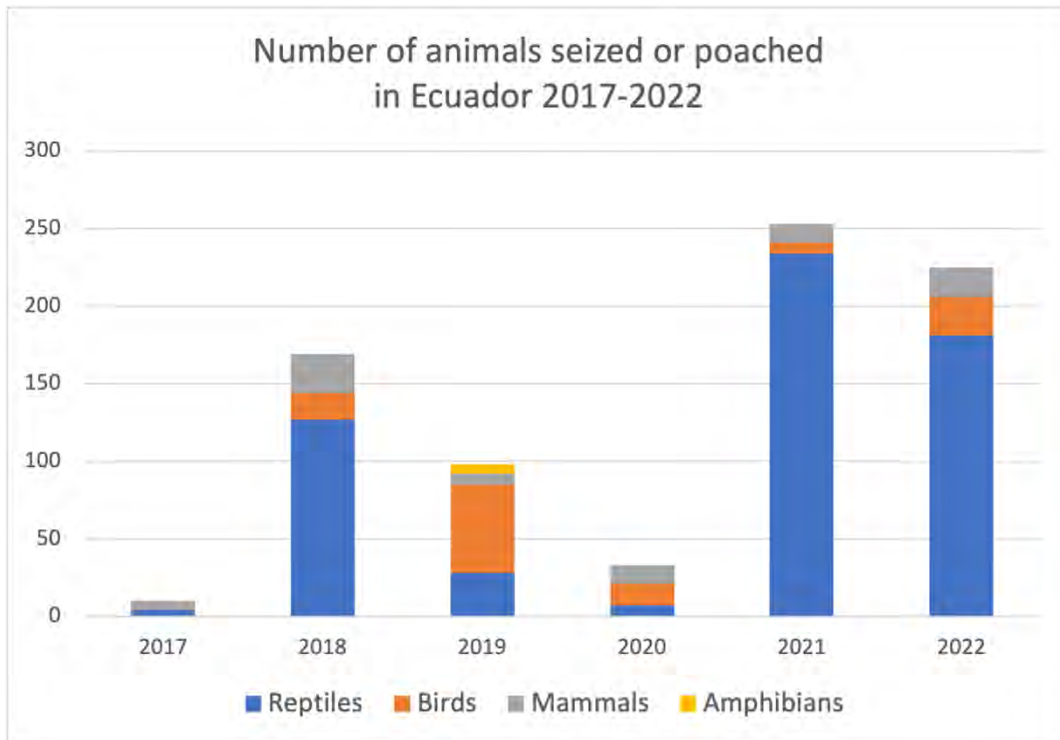


Figure 317: Number of animals seized or poached in Ecuador between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Actual volumes of illegal wildlife trade in Ecuador are much higher than these numbers suggest. In 2020 alone, the National Police seized 4,645 wild animals.⁵³⁷ In 2021, nearly 6,000 animals were seized, and this figure rose to more than 6,800 in 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic caused illegal wildlife trade in Ecuador to accelerate, as citizens turned to wildlife poaching due to unemployment and poverty.⁵³⁸

The TUERI USFQ Wildlife Hospital of the San Francisco de Quito University, which has partnered with the government to rescue and rehabilitate seized wildlife, saw the influx of wildlife during the pandemic double to almost 1,000 specimens in 2020. Between 2016 and 2019, the centre treated an average of 500 animals per year.⁵³⁹ According to TUERI's clinic staff, only about one in five animals recover sufficiently to return to their natural habitat. Many don't survive their ordeal; others will spend the rest of their life in shelters, as they are unable to survive in the wild.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁷ <https://www.raisg.org/en/radar/el-trafico-de-fauna-silvestre-va-en-incremento-en-ecuador/>. Accessed 28 Nov. 2023.

⁵³⁸ <https://www.planv.com.ec/historias/sociedad/tortugas-ecuatorianas-mayores-victimas-del-trafico-especies>.

⁵³⁹ <https://www.planv.com.ec/historias/sociedad/tortugas-ecuatorianas-mayores-victimas-del-trafico-especies>.

⁵⁴⁰ <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20231020-like-escobar-ecuador-s-drug-lords-build-narco-zoos>.

Species most targeted

Reptiles

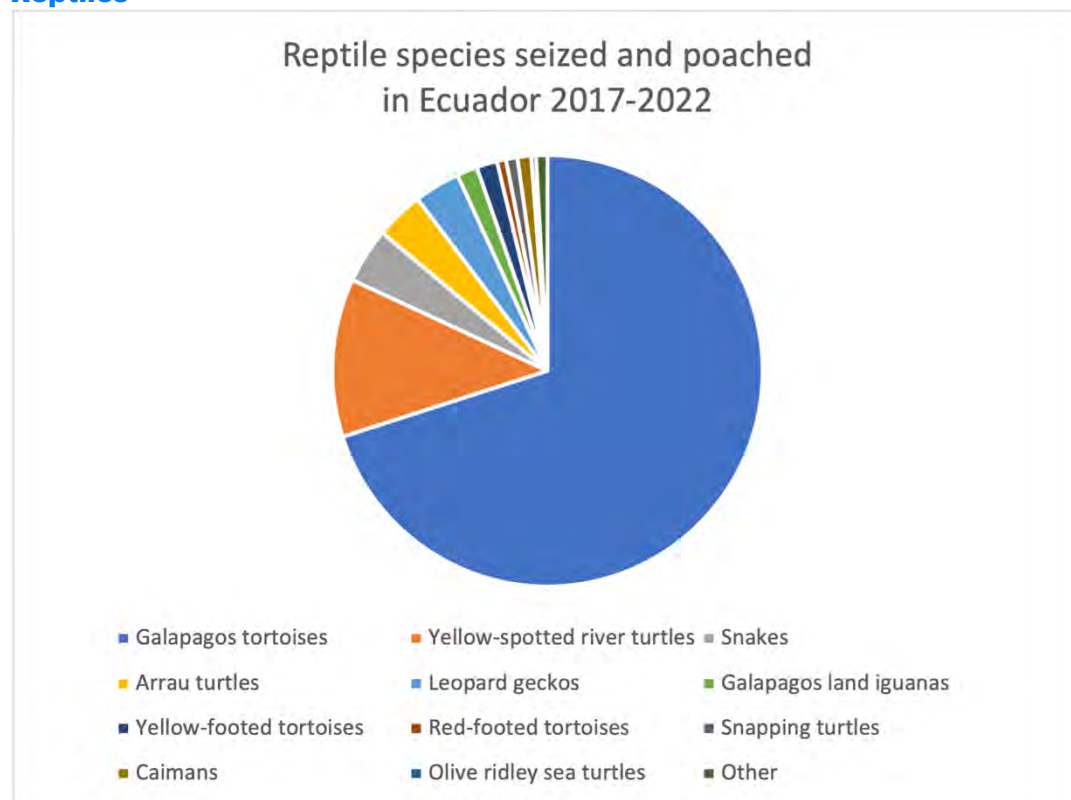


Figure 5832: Reptile species seized or poached in Ecuador between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Trafficking of Galápagos tortoises

Galápagos tortoises (*Chelonoidis niger*, CITES Appendix I), the iconic tortoise species endemic to the Galápagos islands, are in high demand in international pet markets. Locally, they are also killed for their meat. Few residents poach tortoises; however, authorities expressed concern that the 'ongoing killing' and escalation of local demand for tortoise meat and tortoise products poses a major threat to the species' survival.⁵⁴¹

A total of 407 specimens (70% of all reptiles seized or poached) was involved in three seizures and one poaching incident reported between 2017 and 2022:

- ▶ In October 2018, 123 giant Galápagos tortoise hatchlings were stolen from a breeding centre in Isla Isabella, Galápagos.⁵⁴²
- ▶ In March 2021, 185 Galápagos tortoise hatchlings were seized during a routine inspection at the Aeropuerto Ecológico Galápagos of Isla Baltra. They were wrapped in plastic, hidden in two suitcases, and declared as souvenirs. Sixteen were already dead when they were discovered. An Ecuadorian policeman was arrested and prosecuted in relation to the seizure. Security camera videos showed that he had brought the suitcases to the airport in a police patrol car, leaving them

⁵⁴¹ <https://www.newsweek.com/near-extinct-galapagos-tortoise-slaughtered-threatens-species-existence-1640517>. Accessed on 28 November 2023.

⁵⁴² <https://www.emol.com/noticias/Tendencias/2018/10/05/922960/Denuncian-el-robo-de-123-crias-de-tortuga-desde-un-centro-de-Galapagos.html>. Accessed on 28 November 2023.

at a courier company. They were meant to fly to the port city of Guayaquil, Ecuador's second largest city known as the gateway to the Galápagos.⁵⁴³

- ▶ In October 2021, 15 Galápagos tortoises were found slaughtered for their meat on Isla Isabela, Galápagos National Park.
- ▶ In June 2022, at 30 nautical miles from Puntilla de Santa Elena, the Ecuadorian navy seized 84 Galápagos tortoises and five Galápagos land iguanas (*Conolophus Subcristatus*) from two vessels that were headed for the mainland. Six people were arrested. Seven tortoises were dead when they were seized.⁵⁴⁴

A seizure that took place in Peru in April 2017 reveals that Galápagos tortoises are smuggled to Peru across the land border: 29 Galápagos tortoise hatchlings (two dead), wrapped in plastic and hidden in a box, were seized from an international bus on the Piura-Sullana highway in Peru. The bus came from the Tumbes region, which borders Ecuador. A police official stated the tortoises may have been destined for trade in Lima, but that it was more likely they were meant to be transported from Lima to another destination by sea or air. 'We think it is an international network of illegal species trade. Each of the 29 turtles had a code'.⁵⁴⁵

The USA is an important market for Galápagos tortoises. In November 2019, a resident of Nevada was sentenced to two-year probation, 120 days home confinement, and US\$7,000 fine for the illegal purchase, transport, and possession of a Galápagos tortoise. He had seen an online advertisement for Galápagos hatchlings from a licensed breeder based in Miami, Florida, and paid his cousin to purchase a hatchling for US\$3,900 and ship it to him in Nevada using an airline courier company.⁵⁴⁶

Trafficking of other turtle and tortoise species

Other testudine species are also targeted by traffickers. This study identified seizures of 69 yellow-spotted river turtles (*Podocnemis unifilis*); 21 Arrau turtles (*Podocnemis expansa*); nine yellow-footed tortoises (*Chelonoidis denticulata*); four red-footed tortoises (*Chelonoidis carbonaria*); four South American snapping turtles (*Chelydra acutirostris*); one common snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*); and two Olive Ridley sea turtles (*Lepidochelys olivacea*). In addition, 368 yellow-spotted river turtle eggs, 84 Arrau turtle eggs, and two yellow-footed tortoise eggs were seized.

Yellow-spotted river turtles and Arrau turtles (known locally as 'charapa pequeña' and 'charapa grande') are river turtles native to the tributaries of the Amazon and Orinoco river basins. They are poached for their meat and eggs as well as for the pet trade. In addition, the turtles are used for the production of oils and fats used for food and the production of skin products, such as soaps and creams.⁵⁴⁷ Significant incidents include:

- ▶ In 2020, a man was sentenced to three years in prison for offering for sale 84 Arrau turtle eggs, five pounds of paca meat, and six pounds of deer meat in the market of El Coca, Orellana province.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴³ <https://www.planv.com.ec/historias/sociedad/tortugas-ecuatorianas-mayores-victimas-del-trafico-especies>; Accessed on 28 November 2023.

⁵⁴⁴ https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/ecuador-medioambiente_seis-procesados-por-transportar-ilegalmente-tortugas-e-iguanas-de-gal%C3%A1pagos/47707830. Accessed on 28 November 2023.

⁵⁴⁵ <https://es.mongabay.com/2017/04/peru-tortugasgalapagos-extincion-ecuador/>. Accessed on 3 December 2023.

⁵⁴⁶ <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdfl/pr/nevada-resident-pled-guilty-and-was-sentenced-miami-trafficking-endangered-galapagos>. Accessed on 28 November 2023.

⁵⁴⁷ https://www.terraecuador.net/revista_28/28_charapas.htm. Accessed on 30 November 2023.

⁵⁴⁸ <https://www.eluniverso.com/larevista/ecologia/por-traficar-huevos-de-tortuga-carne-de-guanta-y-de-venado-en-orellana-ciudadano-fue-sentenciado-a-tres-anos-de-prision-nota/>. Accessed on 30 November 2023.

- ▶ In May 2021, a man was arrested with 16 yellow-spotted river turtle hatchlings that he carried in a suitcase to sell in the market in Quito.⁵⁴⁹
- ▶ In November 2021, a man was arrested for offering for sale 10 yellow-spotted river turtles in his veterinary centre in Durán, Guayas province.⁵⁵⁰
- ▶ In December 2021, two men were arrested with 368 yellow-spotted river turtle eggs, 102.6 kg bushmeat, guns, and ammunition during enforcement operations in Napo and Orellana provinces.⁵⁵¹
- ▶ In March 2022, a woman was sentenced to 1 year in prison for illegal possession of 13 yellow-spotted river turtles in Guayaquil.⁵⁵²
- ▶ In April 2022, 57 turtles were seized from a house in El Coca, including 29 yellow-spotted river turtles, 21 Arrau turtles, and seven yellow-footed tortoises.⁵⁵³

Furthermore, there are indications that yellow-spotted river turtles are trafficked to Ecuador from Peru. In July 2018, Peruvian Customs at the Carpitás checkpoint in the northeastern Tumbes region seized 199 yellow-spotted river turtle hatchlings (11 dead) from the trunk of a bus headed for the city of Tumbes further north, on the border with Ecuador.⁵⁵⁴ It is likely the turtles were meant to be smuggled to Ecuador.⁵⁵⁵

Trafficking of Galápagos land iguanas

Galápagos land iguanas (*Conolophus Subcristatus*, CITES Appendix II), another endemic species from the Galápagos islands, are also threatened by illegal trade. According to the CITES trade database, Ecuador has never reported exports of live specimens, yet other countries do report trade in this species. The main exporter is Uganda, which since 2017 reported exports of 37 live specimens, purportedly captive-bred, to Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, Canada, Sweden, and Sudan.⁵⁵⁶

However, according to experts it is unlikely that Galápagos land iguanas breed in captivity outside the Galápagos, due to their complex mating and breeding behaviour.⁵⁵⁷ In 2015, the IUCN Iguana Specialist Group raised concerns that the CITES system was being used to launder smuggled specimens into the pet trade. At the CITES Standing Committee meeting in March 2022, the government of Ecuador declared that any Galápagos land iguanas traded internationally are in fact stolen from the Galápagos.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁴⁹ <https://www.infobae.com/america/medio-ambiente/2021/05/31/detuvieron-a-un-hombre-que-llevaba-16-tortugas-vulnerables-en-una-maleta-para-venderlas-en-un-mercado/>. Accessed on 30 November 2023.

⁵⁵⁰ <https://gk.city/2021/11/06/hombre-detenido-vender-tortugas-charapa-duran/>. Accessed on 30 November 2023.

⁵⁵¹ <https://www.elorientec.com/articulo/2-personas-fueron-aprehendidas-por-trafico-ilegal-de-carne-de-especies-amenazadas/19151>. Accessed on 30 November 2023.

⁵⁵² <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/ecuador/mujer-prision-tenencia-ilegal-tortugas.html>. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

⁵⁵³ <https://www.ambiente.gob.ec/57-tortugas-fueron-decomisadas-en-un-operativo-en-orellana/>. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

⁵⁵⁴ <https://www.milenio.com/virales/fauna/rescatan-peru-200-crias-tortuga-maletero-autobus>; <https://elcomercio.pe/peru/tumbes/tumbes-rescatan-199-taricayas-puesto-control-fronterizo-noticia-536784-noticia/>. Accessed 15 December 2023.

⁵⁵⁵ <https://elcomercio.pe/peru/tumbes/tumbes-rescatan-199-taricayas-puesto-control-fronterizo-noticia-536784-noticia/>. Accessed on 30 November 2023.

⁵⁵⁶ <https://trade.cites.org/>. Accessed on 29 November 2023.

⁵⁵⁷ [https://en.bitacoraec.com/post/where-are-the-pink-iguanas-of-galapagos](https://en.bitacoraec.com/post/where-are-the-pink-iguanas-of-galapagos;);

<https://www.darwinfoundation.org/en/datazone/checklist?species=5262> Accessed on 30 November 2023.

⁵⁵⁸ <https://en.bitacoraec.com/post/where-are-the-pink-iguanas-of-galapagos>. Accessed on 30 November 2023.

This study identified two seizures of Galápagos land iguanas between 2017 and 2022:

- ▶ In January 2017, a German man was arrested at Isla Baltra's airport Aeropuerto Ecológico Galápagos with four Galápagos land iguanas in his suitcase.⁵⁵⁹
- ▶ In June 2022, the Ecuadorian navy seized 5 Galápagos land iguanas (and 84 Galápagos tortoises, as mentioned above) from two vessels that were headed for the mainland. Six people were arrested.⁵⁶⁰

The German who was arrested in 2017 appears to be a notorious iguana trafficker. In 2013, an Ecuadorian court sentenced him to four years in prison for attempting to smuggle out four Galápagos land iguanas in July 2012. He must have just been released from prison (if he served the full sentence) before trying again. This was not his only run-in with the law either. In 2011, the man was convicted of attempting to smuggle a pregnant crested iguana from Fiji in a backpack.⁵⁶¹

Another smuggling attempt was foiled in 2015, when two Galápagos land iguanas were confiscated from the backpack of a Mexican citizen.⁵⁶²

No doubt many more iguanas are smuggled from the Galapagos islands undetected. A criminal group of at least 15 people is allegedly engaged in trafficking iguanas, tortoises, and other protected wildlife from the Galápagos, using the following smuggling routes:⁵⁶³

- ▶ By air: from Galápagos to Guayaquil and from there to Lima and the port of Callao, Peru, to be sent by ship to Asia or Europe.
- ▶ By sea: traffickers leave Isabela Island at night for the open sea and deliver the iguanas, turtles, and lizards (among other animals) to an intermediary on a fishing boat or cargo ship that takes the consignment of animals to Peru, from which they are sent to Europe and Asia.

The land smuggling route from Ecuador to Peru is corroborated by the seizure, mentioned above under 'Trafficking of Galápagos tortoises', of 29 Galápagos tortoise hatchlings in Peru, in April 2017.⁵⁶⁴

The illegal trade in endemic species from the Galápagos islands is fuelled by its highly profitable nature: Galápagos land iguanas have a value of up to US\$20,000; Galápagos tortoises are valued between US\$3,000 and US\$5,000, depending on their size and age.⁵⁶⁵

Trafficking of snakes

Snakes, particularly boas, are poached for the pet trade, to be used as photo props for tourists, and for their skin. In some parts of Ecuador, they are also used in concoctions believed to have medicinal properties. The latter is an age-old tradition of the tsa'chila, an indigenous people of the Ecuadorian province of Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas.⁵⁶⁶ In March 2022, a man was sentenced to one year prison and payment of 10 basic salaries (US\$ 4,250) for selling 4.49 kg of snake concoctions in the market of Lago Agrio, Sucumbíos Province. The concoctions contained 13 snakes, including forest flame snake

⁵⁵⁹ <https://www.foxnews.com/lifestyle/man-arrested-after-trying-to-steal-galapagos-iguanas>. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

⁵⁶⁰ https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/ecuador-medioambiente_seis-procesados-por-transportar-ilegalmente-tortugas-e-iguanas-de-gal%C3%A1pagos/47707830

⁵⁶¹ <https://phys.org/news/2013-01-german-convicted-smuggling-galapagos-iguanas.html>. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

⁵⁶² https://www.reptilesofecuador.com/conolophus_subcristatus.html. Accessed on 30 November 2023.

⁵⁶³ <https://en.bitacoraec.com/post/where-are-the-pink-iguanas-of-galapagos>. Accessed on 30 November 2023.

⁵⁶⁴ <https://es.mongabay.com/2017/04/peru-tortugasgalapagos-extincion-ecuador/>. Accessed on 3 December 2023.

⁵⁶⁵ https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/ecuador-medioambiente_seis-procesados-por-transportar-ilegalmente-tortugas-e-iguanas-de-gal%C3%A1pagos/47707830. Accessed on 28 November 2023.

⁵⁶⁶ <https://www.elcomercio.com/tendencias/tsachilas-elaboran-brebaies-curativos-chamanes.html>. Accessed 30 Nov 2023.

(*Oxyrhopus petolarius*); common lancehead (*Bothrops atrox*); yellow-spotted whipsnake (*Chironius flavopictus*); and indigo snake (*Drymarchon corais*).⁵⁶⁷

Trafficking of non-native reptiles and amphibians

There is also a market for non-native reptiles and other wildlife in Ecuador. In June 2019, 85 'exotic animals', including 20 leopard geckos (*Eublepharis macularius*), six poison frogs (species not specified), and 52 centipedes and spiders were rescued from a garbage bin on the international Rumichaca bridge that connects Ecuador with Colombia, following a citizen's complaint.⁵⁶⁸ Leopard geckos are native to South Asia and popular reptile pets as they are relatively easy to keep.⁵⁶⁹ It is not clear whether the animals were destined for Ecuador or Colombia, but the seizure highlights trafficking between the two countries.

Birds

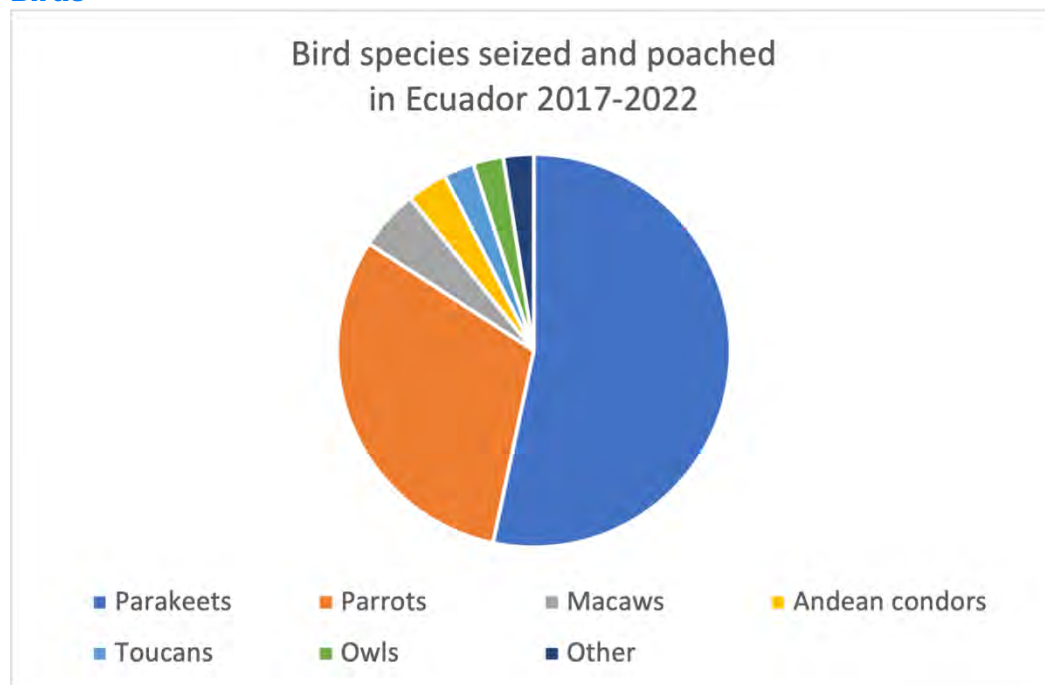


Figure 59: Bird species seized or poached in Ecuador between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Psittacids are heavily poached and trafficked in Ecuador, making up 89% of all birds reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022. The following specimens were seized:

- ▶ A total of 64 parakeets, including 47 grey-cheeked parakeets (*Brotogeris pyrrhoptera*); seven red-masked parakeets (*Psittacara erythrogenys*); one cobalt-winged parakeet (*Brotogeris cyanoptera*); one pacific parakeet (*Psittacara strenuus*); and eight unidentified parakeets.
- ▶ 37 parrots, including 14 blue-headed parrots (*Pionus menstruus*); three bronze-winged parrots (*Pionus chalcopterus*); three orange-winged amazons (*Amazona amazonica*); two Pacific parrotlets (*Forpus coelestis*); three red-lored amazons (*Amazona autumnalis*); five southern mealy amazons (*Amazona farinosa*); one yellow-crowned amazon (*Amazona ochrocephala*); and six unidentified specimens.

⁵⁶⁷ <https://www.metroecuador.com.ec/noticias/2022/03/17/prision-para-hombre-que-vendia-brebajes-hechos-con-serpientes-en-mercado-de-lago-agrio/>. Accessed on 29 November 2023.

⁵⁶⁸ <https://www.ambiente.gob.ec/85-especimenes-de-vida-silvestres-exoticas-fueron-rescatadas-de-un-basurero-en-el-puente-internacional-de-rumichaca/>

⁵⁶⁹ <https://www.reptilecentre.com/pages/info-leopard-gecko-care-sheet>

- ▶ Six macaws, including four scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*) and two blue and yellow macaws (*Ara aurana*).

The vast majority of seizures concerned specimens that were seized from private homes where they were kept as pets, following citizen's complaints. Some owners claimed they had bought the birds in the street or in a local market. Just a few seizures were identified that involved the illegal sale or transportation of psittacids, mainly in small quantities of between one and six specimens. This suggests that either there is no large-scale trafficking of psittacids in Ecuador, or, if there is, authorities are not effective in detecting or tackling such trade.

One instance was identified which does in fact point to the existence of large-scale trade and smuggling to neighbouring Peru. In November 2018, a joint investigation by the police and the Ministry of Environment led to the arrest of 3 men and seizure of 46 grey-cheeked parakeets and three red-masked parakeets that they were transporting in a car. It is believed the men were headed for the province of El Oro, to reach Huaquillas and sell the birds on the international bridge with Peru.⁵⁷⁰ Grey-cheeked parakeets are a small parakeet species native to a very limited range in southwest Ecuador and the extreme northwest of Peru. IUCN has classified them as vulnerable. Their estimated population of 10,000 mature individuals is believed to be decreasing due to the illegal cage-bird trade and habitat loss. The export of grey-cheeked parakeets is banned in both Ecuador and Peru.⁵⁷¹

Research into the domestic parrot trade in Peru and southern Ecuador has found that local poaching is widespread across rural areas of Peru and Ecuador. Household-poached native parrots were found in 96% of the rural localities surveyed. Most parrots (86.1%) were locally poached by people and kept as their own pets (71.6%) or bought from other local poachers (28.4%), without entering markets. Only 13.9% of the parrots were bought in markets. This is significant, as it means that the large majority of the parrot trade in these two countries occurs out of view from law enforcers and others interested in understanding the trade, such as academics and NGOs. It also means that any estimates of offtake-levels based on market surveys present only a fraction of parrots poached annually. The researchers also found that poachers targeted species that are preferred due to their colouration, size, and mimicry ability (Amazon parrots and large macaws), and that these species were more often transported over larger distances, even crossing country boundaries, than less preferred species. To obtain parrots, poachers mainly extract chicks from their nests (62.4% of pets), but also capture adults in crops with traps and nets (37.6%).⁵⁷²

Andean condors (*Vultur gryphus*), the largest non-marine bird species on earth, are in danger of extinction in Ecuador due to persecution. This study recorded four poaching incidents, in which three Andean condors died:

- ▶ In December 2018, a female Andean condor was killed by poisoned bait in Cotopaxi.⁵⁷³
- ▶ In December 2019, a young female specimen was found injured in Archidona as a result of gun shots and died a few days later.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷⁰ <https://www.policia.gob.ec/policia-rescata-49-especies-de-vida-silvestre/>. Accessed on 27 November 2023.

⁵⁷¹ IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2021: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/22685966/195043485>. Accessed on 3 December 2023.

⁵⁷² Romero-Vidal, P. et al (2023). Poaching sources and trade routes in Peru and Ecuador warn of the unsustainable rural demand for preferred parrot species. *Conservation Science and Practice*. 5(7). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.12936>. Accessed on 28 November 2023.

⁵⁷³ <https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/medellin/condor-andino-encontrado-en-ecuador-murio-envenenado-con-pesticidas-309944>. Accessed on 3 December 2023.

⁵⁷⁴ <https://www.meganoticias.cl/mundo/286559-matan-condor-andino-con-perdigones-peligro-de-extincion-ecuador-1ab.html>. Accessed on 3 December 2023.

- ▶ In May 2021, an Andean condor was found alive with pellets in its body.⁵⁷⁵
- ▶ In July 2022, another female condor was found dead in Cahasqui, with bullets in its cavicle.⁵⁷⁶

A 2018 census counted about 150 Andean condors in Ecuador, but in 2020 experts expressed fears that about twenty had died since then. It is feared that the species will go extinct in Ecuador if this trend is not reversed, as they reproduce very slowly, with females laying only one egg every two years.⁵⁷⁷

Mammals

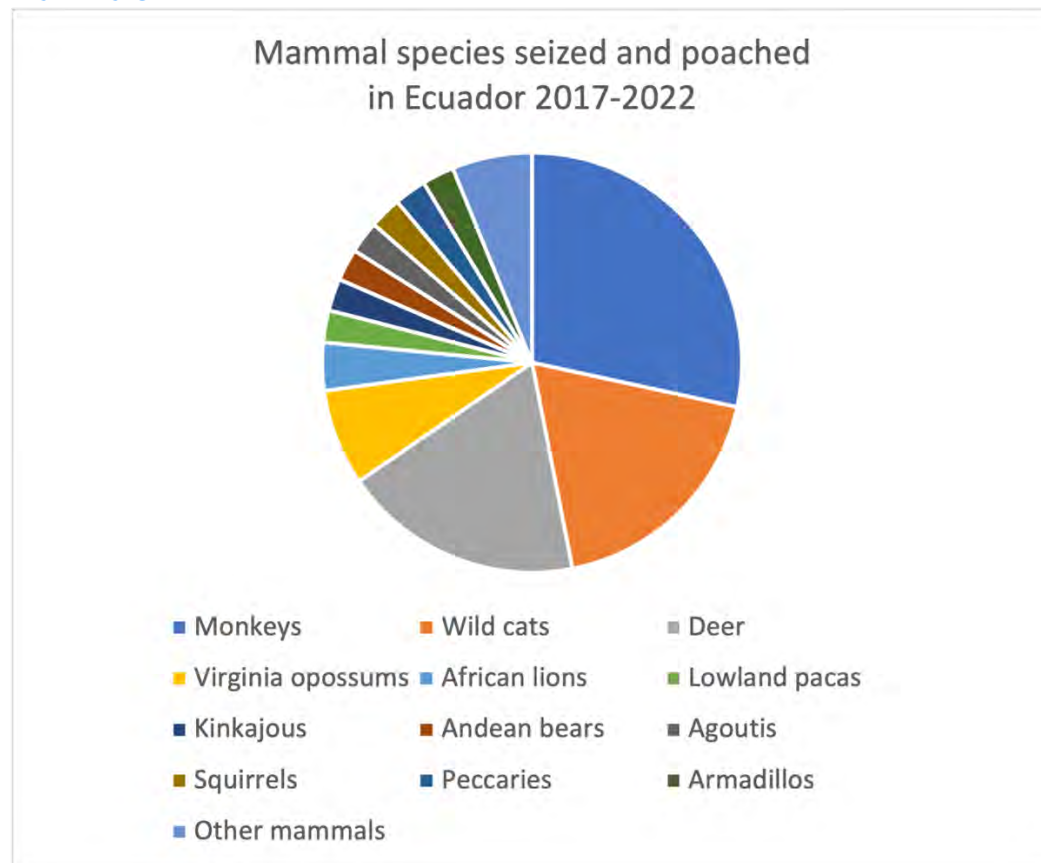


Figure 60: Mammal species seized or poached in Ecuador between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Trafficking of primates

Monkeys are popular pets in Ecuador. Some 23 specimens were reported to be seized, representing 28% of all mammals seized or poached between 2017 and 2022. No fewer than 11 different monkey species were involved (see Figure 33 below). The most seized were capuchin monkeys (*Cebus capucinus*, 8 specimens) and Central American squirrel monkeys (*Saimiri oerstedii*, 4 specimens).

All monkeys except for one were seized from private homes where they were kept as pets or were found abandoned in places far from their natural habitat, suggesting they were victims of wildlife trafficking. One incident was identified which concerned illegal sale: in March 2017, a baby Central American squirrel monkey that was being offered for sale in Guayaquil was seized. The seller was arrested.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁵ <https://www.primerahora.com/noticias/mundo/notas/rescatan-a-un-condor-con-perdigones-en-el-cuerpo-en-ecuador/>

⁵⁷⁶ <https://quitozoo.org/2022/07/16/condor-murio-por-un-possible-acto-de-caceria/>. Accessed on 3 December 2023.

⁵⁷⁷ <https://www.juiciocrudo.com/articulo/preocupaci-oacute-n-en-ecuador-por-el-retroceso-en-la-poblaci-oacute-n-del-c-oacute-ndor-andino/15793>. Accessed on 3 December 2023.

⁵⁷⁸ <https://www.metroecuador.com.ec/ec/noticias/2017/03/13/rescatan-mono-payaso-pretendian-comercializar.html>. Accessed on 4 December 2023.

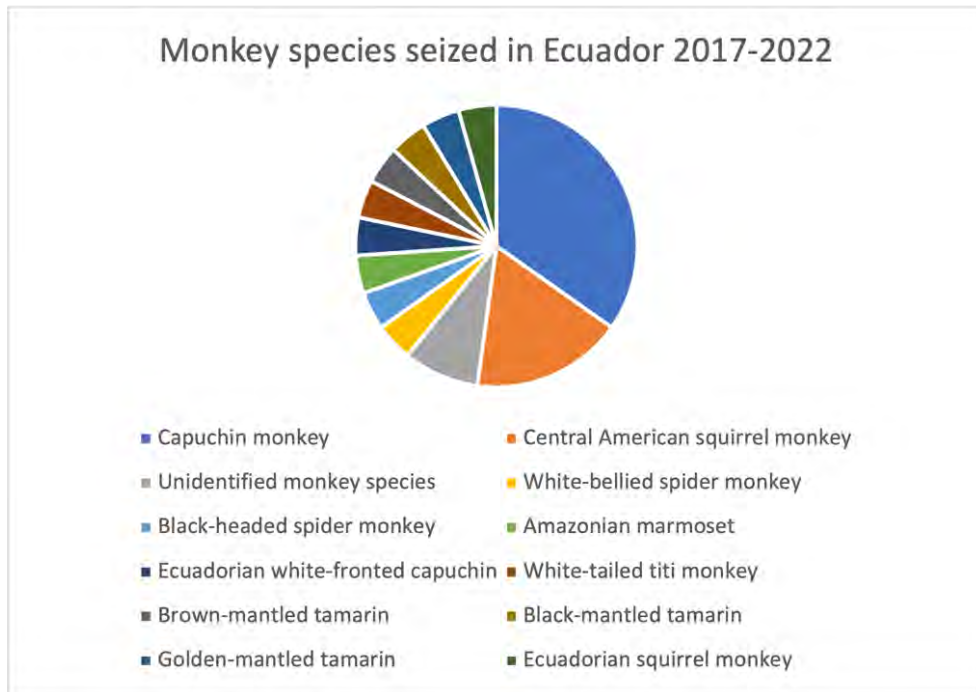


Figure 331: Monkey species seized in Ecuador between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

In 2020, authorities saw a surge in the illegal monkey trade. Between July and October 2020, more monkeys were brought to the TURI wildlife hospital in Quito than normally in a whole year. The director of the wildlife hospital pointed out that the trafficking process for this species is especially cruel. For a baby monkey to arrive in the market, the mother will most likely have died defending her baby. The dominant male may be another victim in the confrontation with poachers.⁵⁷⁹

Persecution and trafficking of wild cats

Wild cats in Ecuador are frequent victims of poaching and trafficking. Nine ocelots (*Leopardus pardalis*); three jaguars (*Panthera onca*); two pumas (*Puma concolor*); and one oncilla (*Leopardus tigrinus*) were reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022.

Seven of the nine ocelots were cubs that were seized from private owners or seized from illegal sellers. It is likely that their mothers were harmed or killed before obtaining the cubs. In June 2017, the Turi wildlife hospital received an ocelot cub that had been offered for sale on social media in Puyo. The hospital had already received five ocelots for treatment in the first half of 2017.⁵⁸⁰

Ocelots are also targeted for their skins. In June 2018, a woman in Orellana province was arrested for illegal sales of eight hats containing pieces of ocelot skin. She later received a fine of US\$ 1,750.⁵⁸¹

Jaguars are killed in human-wildlife conflicts, in retaliation for preying on farmers' livestock. Two such incidents were reported, which became known only because the perpetrators posted images of the dead animals on social media.

⁵⁷⁹ <https://www.planv.com.ec/historias/sociedad/tortugas-ecuatorianas-mayores-victimas-del-trafico-especies>. Accessed on 4 December 2023.

⁵⁸⁰ <https://www.ecuadortimes.net/es/tigrillo-se-recupera-en-quito-luego-de-que-lo-intentaran-vender-por-redes/>. Accessed on 4 December 2023.

⁵⁸¹ <https://www.elcomercio.com/tendencias/ambiente/multa-comercio-craneo-pieles-animales.html>. Accessed on 4 December 2023.

- ▶ In November 2021, two men killed a juvenile jaguar in San Antonio, Morona Santiago province because it ate a pig; they posted the image of the dead cat on Facebook.⁵⁸²
- ▶ In September 2022, three men killed a jaguar in Pastaza province, then posted an image of the dead animal on Facebook.⁵⁸³

There is also evidence that jaguars are poached for their parts. In February 2019, a jaguar skin with bullet holes was seized from a house in Loreto, Orellana province. During the search, the owners of the house alleged that the skin had been ordered by third parties.⁵⁸⁴

Demand from Asia is a major driver for jaguar poaching and trafficking. Asian criminal networks operating in Ecuador and Peru are allegedly procuring jaguar parts in these countries. In Ecuador, jaguar parts and products are transported either by air, generally via transit points, or by sea. Peru is often the first transit destination. From Lima, products are shipped to China. Other transit points are Hong Kong SAR and Vietnam. Some of the individuals identified in Ecuador engaged in jaguar trafficking are allegedly also major traders or shipping facilitators in shark fins.⁵⁸⁵

Ecuador still has jaguars in 17 of its 24 provinces.⁵⁸⁶ The survival of jaguars in Ecuador is threatened by habitat loss due to deforestation and fragmentation, poaching of its prey, and illegal hunting. Loss of habitat is the biggest threat, particularly along the coast, where more than 70% of the original forest cover has been lost due to expansion of logging and agriculture industries. A recent study by WWF estimates that 2,000 jaguars live in the Amazon border region of Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru, in what is known as the Napo-Putumayo corridor, including 21 identified in Ecuador's Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve.⁵⁸⁷

Drug lords and illegal wildlife possession

Jaguars are also owned as status symbols by Ecuadorian drug lords. In May 2023, the police seized two live jaguars that were held in cages on a property owned by Wilder Emilio Sánchez Farfán—alias 'Gato Farfán'—a suspected drug lord with ties to Mexico's Jalisco New Generation cartel and wanted in the United States. He was arrested in Colombia in February 2023.⁵⁸⁸ Along with the jaguars, police also found parrots, parakeets, and other exotic birds Farfán is believed to have imported from China and South Korea. Previously, police have also found turtles, snakes, furs, and animal heads on other drug kingpins' properties. The phenomenon is relatively new and coincides with the rise of an underground drug industry in Ecuador in the last few years.⁵⁸⁹

Trafficking of bushmeat

The bushmeat trade is an important driver for the poaching of wild mammals in Ecuador. Although illegal, bushmeat consumption appears to be an accepted practice in some parts of society. This became apparent in January 2022, when participants in the cooking show MasterChef Ecuador were made to prepare dishes from capybara, crocodile, deer, and shark meat. The show caused an outrage amongst conservationists as it could fuel demand for bushmeat. The capybara and crocodile meat may

⁵⁸² <https://quenoticias.com/comunidad/comuneros-jaguar-muerto-morona-santiago/>

⁵⁸³ <https://quenoticias.com/noticias/foto-matan-jaguar-pastaza/>

⁵⁸⁴ <https://www.ecuavisa.com/noticias/ecuador/decomisan-piel-jaguar-canton-loreto-CHEC456361>. Accessed on 4 December 2023.

⁵⁸⁵ Crosta, A. et al (2022). The criminal networks behind jaguar trafficking. IUCN/Earth League International, 2022. Available at: <https://www.iucn.nl/app/uploads/2022/11/IUCN-NL-Operation-Jaguar-Summary-Report-2022.pdf>. Accessed on 27 December 2023.

⁵⁸⁶ <https://www.infobae.com/america/medio-ambiente/2021/12/01/dos-hombres-mataron-a-un-jaguar-en-ecuador-y-publicaron-fotos-en-redes-sociales/>. Accessed on 4 December 2023.

⁵⁸⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uskaRYiBPMM>. Accessed on 4 December 2023.

⁵⁸⁸ <https://www.larepublica.ec/blog/2023/05/23/la-policia-halla-dos-jaguars-durante-un-operativo/>. Accessed on 4 December 2023.

⁵⁸⁹ <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20231020-like-escobar-ecuador-s-drug-lords-build-narco-zoos>. Accessed on 4 December 2023.

have come from farms which produce such meat for consumption, but the deer and shark meat could only have had an illegal origin.⁵⁹⁰

White-lipped peccary, red brocket, and lowland paca are reportedly the species most targeted by the bushmeat trade.⁵⁹¹

In northeastern Ecuador a wholesale wild meat market has developed since 1994, fuelled by new road infrastructure and a surge in demand from immigrants in the wake of oil extraction within Yasuní National Park. A 2012 study of the Maxus road in Yasuní National Park revealed new indigenous settlements along the road and a shift of Waorani hunters from sustainable practices to unsustainable commercial hunting. Both prey and predator wildlife species numbers dropped precipitously near the oil road.⁵⁹² Researchers found 11.717 kg of bushmeat for sale between 2005 and 2007 in the market of Pompeya, a town 5 km outside the boundary of the national park. Some 80% of this volume consisted of meat from lowland pacas, white-lipped peccaries, collared peccaries, and woolly monkeys. The meat is supplied by members of the Waorani and Kichwa indigenous communities, which are allowed by law to hunt wildlife for their subsistence. It is illegal to sell their catch, however. The researchers observed that bushmeat sales at the Pompeya market occurred openly as laws were not enforced. Although local authorities and park rangers know about the market, they lack the resources and political will to stop the illegal trade of wildlife in Pompeya, primarily to avoid conflicts with the local indigenous population.⁵⁹³

- ▶ This study identified only three incidents where bushmeat was seized, in 2018, 2020, and 2021. All three incidents occurred in the Ecuadorian Amazon.
- ▶ In July 2018, 35 kg of smoked white-lipped peccary meat was seized from a public bus during a control operation in Sucumbíos. The meat was likely meant to be sold in Puerto El Carmen and Lago Agrio.
- ▶ In 2020, 2.3 kg lowland paca meat, 2.7 kg red brocket meat and 84 turtle eggs were seized in the market of El Coca. The seller was sentenced to 3 years prison and a fine in March 2022.⁵⁹⁴
- ▶ In December 2021, 102.6 kg bushmeat from caiman, curassow, lowland paca, peccary, and silvery woolly monkey was seized along with 368 turtle eggs, illegal guns, and ammunition in Napo and Orellana provinces during an investigation and control operation; two men were arrested.⁵⁹⁵

Amphibians

Ecuador is home to 635 amphibian species, including 287 endemic species, making Ecuador one of the countries with the highest number of amphibian species in the world. While in countries like Colombia, Panama, and Costa Rica amphibian species, particularly poison dart frogs, are trafficked to consumer

⁵⁹⁰ <https://www.eluniverso.com/larevista/ecologia/autoridades-de-colombia-inician-investigacion-de-denuncias-contramasterchef-ecuador-por-uso-de-carne-silvestre-nota/>. Accessed on 4 December 2023.

⁵⁹¹ https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/ecuador-medioambiente_autoridades-lanzan-campa%C3%B1a-para-combatir-tr%C3%A1fico-de-vida-silvestre-en-ecuador/46418940. Accessed on 4 December 2023.

⁵⁹² Suárez, E. et al (2012). Controlling access to oil roads protects forest cover, but not wildlife communities: a case study from the rainforest of Yasuní Biosphere Reserve (Ecuador). *Animal Conservation*. 16(3):265-274. Available at: <https://zslpublications.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1469-1795.2012.00592.x>. Accessed 4 December 2023.

⁵⁹³ Suárez, E. et al (2009). Oil industry, wild meat trade and roads: indirect effects of oil extraction activities in a protected area in north-eastern Ecuador. *Animal Conservation*. 12(4):364-373. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-1795.2009.00262.x>. Accessed on 28 November 2023.

⁵⁹⁴ <https://www.eluniverso.com/larevista/ecologia/por-traficar-huevos-de-tortuga-carne-de-quanta-y-de-venado-en-orellana-ciudadano-fue-sentenciado-a-tres-anos-de-prision-nota/>

⁵⁹⁵ <https://www.eloriente.com/articulo/2-personas-fueron-aprehendidas-por-trafico-ilegal-de-carne-de-especies-amenazadas/19151>. Accessed on 4 December 2023.

markets in the USA and Europe, there is no evidence that Ecuadorian amphibians are targeted in the same way.

A 2021 Red List assessment of Ecuadorian amphibians concluded that they are among the most threatened in South America, due to increased rates of habitat loss and deforestation for cattle raising, agriculture, mining, and oil exploitation. The assessment made no mention of poaching and trafficking as threats, however.⁵⁹⁶

This study identified only one seizure of six poison frogs. As mentioned above, they were seized in June 2019 along with 20 leopard geckos and 52 centipedes and spiders from a garbage bin on the international Rumichaca bridge that connects Ecuador with Colombia.⁵⁹⁷ It is not clear whether the animals were destined for Ecuador or Colombia.

Key logistical/geographical trafficking hotspots

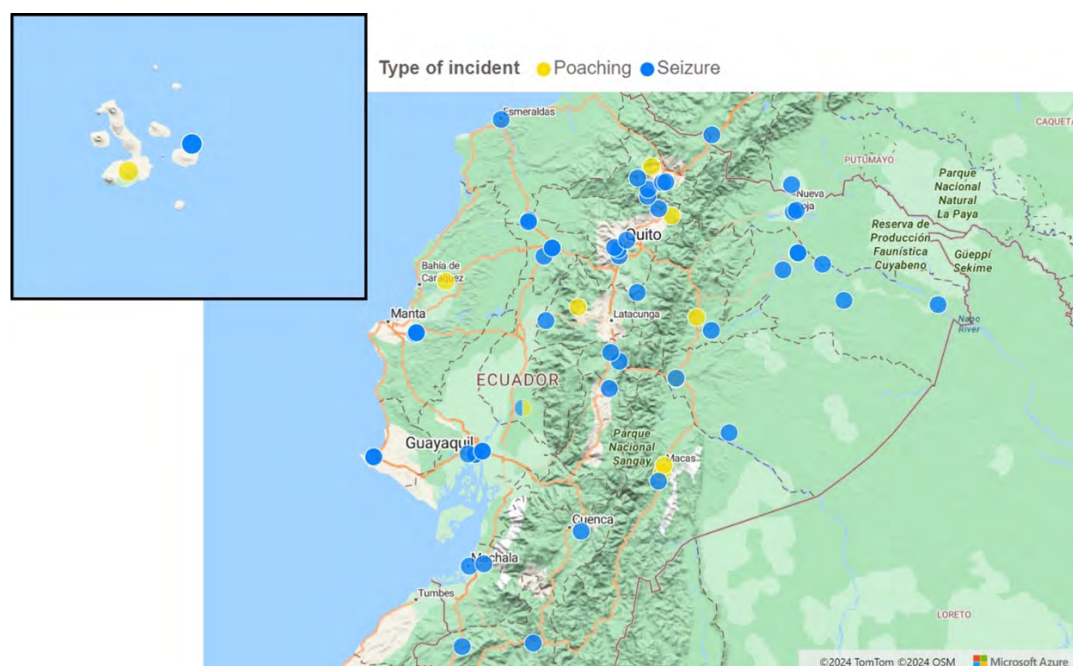


Figure 62: Locations of seizures and poaching incidents in Ecuador reported between 2017 and 2022. Insert: Galápagos Islands.

The sectors most affected by wildlife poaching and trafficking in Ecuador are reportedly the protected areas located in Orellana, Napo, Pastaza, Imbabura, Pichincha, Carchi, Cotopaxi, Tungurahua, Manabí, Guayas, and Galápagos provinces.⁵⁹⁸ Three of these, Orellana, Napo, and Pastaza, are in the Ecuadorian Amazonian, bordering Peru, where wildlife traffic is 'an open secret'.⁵⁹⁹

Not surprisingly, most of the seizures identified by this study (seven in total) took place in the capital, Quito, Pichincha province. Ecuador's second largest city, Guayaquil, the capital of Guayas province, is

⁵⁹⁶ Ortega-Andrade H.M. et al (2021). Red List assessment of amphibian species of Ecuador: A multidimensional approach for their conservation. *PLoS ONE*. 16(5): e0251027. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0251027>. Accessed on 28 November 2023.

⁵⁹⁷ <https://www.ambiente.gob.ec/85-especimenes-de-vida-silvestres-exoticas-fueron-rescatadas-de-un-basurero-en-el-puente-internacional-de-rumichaca/>. Accessed on 5 December 2023.

⁵⁹⁸ <https://www.planv.com.ec/historias/sociedad/tortugas-ecuatorianas-mayores-victimas-del-trafico-especies>. Accessed on 5 December 2023.

⁵⁹⁹ <https://www.raisg.org/en/radar/el-trafico-de-fauna-silvestre-va-en-incremento-en-ecuador/>. Accessed on 5 December 2023.

another hotspot, reporting six seizures. Four seizures were reported in El Coca, the capital of Orellana province in the northeast. Four more seizures took place half an hour's drive away in Joya de los Sachas and three more seizures were reported elsewhere in this province. Also noteworthy are the four incidents reported in Galápagos province: two seizures at Isla Baltra's airport and two poaching incidents on Isla Bella.

Law enforcement blind spots?

It is remarkable that no wildlife seizures were reported at the airports of Quito and Guayaquil, Ecuador's two main international airports. Nor were any parcels intercepted in airports or bus terminals. The question whether these might be law enforcement blind spots seems justified, given the significant scale of illegal wildlife trade in Ecuador; Ecuador's high-value wildlife, which is in high demand in consumer markets in the USA, Europe, and Asia; and increasing importance of wildlife trafficking by air, including by parcel post globally and in the region.

Sales in markets and on roads

As mentioned above, most seizures reported between 2017 and 2022 happened in private homes and concerned wild animals that were kept as pets. As discussed in the species most targeted section under Birds there is evidence that people in rural areas obtain wild parrots by poaching them themselves or buying them from local poachers directly. It is not unlikely the same is true for other wild animals. Wildlife is also commonly traded in markets and on roads.⁶⁰⁰

This study identified illegal wildlife sale incidents in markets in Quito, Guayaquil, and El Coca. Two incidents were recorded of illegal sales on roads, likely opportunistic given the small numbers involved. In February 2020, a snapping turtle was offered for sale in the streets of Machala, the capital of El Oro province; and in June 2020, five blue-headed parrots were seized from a street seller in Guayaquil.

Sales on social media

Only one incident was identified that involved illegal sales online. In June 2017, the Ministry of Environment seized a three-month old ocelot cub that was offered for sale on social media. No mention was made of an arrest.⁶⁰¹

Illegal online wildlife trade is significant in Ecuador, however. A 2015 paper on wildlife trade in Ecuador found substantial levels of trade, and a web survey conducted that year found 15 distinct websites with a total of 197 online advertisements for the sale of wildlife originating from within Ecuador or native to Ecuador, totalling 458 products. Half of all listings were for birds, accounting for 42% of live animals advertised and 72% of adverts were for parts and derivatives.⁶⁰²

In March 2022, Vistazo, an Ecuadorian media outlet, reported that there is an abundant illegal online wildlife market in Ecuador. Vistazo found 200 accounts engaged in trafficking wildlife on Facebook during the month of February 2022. Species found for sale included turtles, tortoises, ferrets, snakes, hedgehogs, and parakeets. Many of the sellers did not even try to hide their identity, and provided

⁶⁰⁰ See e.g. Suárez et al (2009); and <https://www.raisg.org/en/radar/el-trafico-de-fauna-silvestre-va-en-incremento-en-ecuador/>. Accessed on 5 December 2023.

⁶⁰¹ <https://www.ecuadortimes.net/es/tigrillo-se-recupera-en-quito-luego-de-que-lo-intentaran-vender-por-redes/>. Accessed on 5 December 2023.

⁶⁰² Sinovas, P. & Price, B. (2015). Ecuador's Wildlife Trade. English translation of the technical report prepared for the Ministry of the Environment of Ecuador and the German Development Cooperation (GIZ). UNEP-WCMC. Quito, Ecuador.

phone numbers for further communication, which according to Vistazo showed the lack of vigilance on the part of the authorities.⁶⁰³

Convergence

Between 2017 and 2022 no incidents were identified that indicate a convergence between wildlife trafficking and other types of organized crime in Ecuador. The seizure in May 2023 of two live jaguars and other protected wildlife in the home of drug trafficking kingpin Wilder Emilio Sánchez Farfán could indicate his involvement in wildlife trafficking, but no information was found to corroborate this.

Transboundary trafficking routes

Wedged between major cocaine producers Colombia and Peru, Ecuador has become a 'cocaine superhighway' in recent years due to large-scale cocaine trafficking through its Pacific ports, as well as a growing domestic market. Ecuador is now one of the main source countries for cocaine trafficked to Europe.⁶⁰⁴ This enhanced connectivity is important to consider as it creates new avenues for wildlife traffickers to smuggle wildlife into and/or out of Ecuador.

Ecuador <> Peru

Multiple seizures were identified that demonstrate Ecuadorian wildlife is trafficked to Peru across the Huaquillas-Tumbes border in the far southwest of Ecuador.

- ▶ In April 2017, Peruvian officials on the Piura-Sullana highway in northwest Peru seized 29 Galápagos tortoises arriving from Ecuador on an international bus.⁶⁰⁵
- ▶ In November 2018, Ecuadorian police seized 49 parakeets that were believed to be en route to Peru via the Huaquillas border crossing.⁶⁰⁶

There are further indications of wildlife trafficking from Peru to Ecuador. In July 2018, Peruvian Customs at the Carpitás checkpoint in the northeastern Tumbes region seized 199 yellow-spotted river turtle hatchlings (11 of which were dead) from a bus that was headed north for the town of Tumbes near the border with Ecuador.⁶⁰⁷

Ecuador <> Colombia

As noted above, the seizure in June 2019 of 85 'exotic animals', including 20 leopard geckos, six poison frogs, and 52 centipedes and spiders from a garbage bin on the international Rumichaca bridge that connects Ecuador with Colombia highlights trafficking links between the two countries.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰³ <https://www.vistazo.com/estilo-de-vida/sostenibilidad/en-ecuador-se-vende-todo-tipo-de-animales-silvestres-por-redes-sociales-YX1404111>. Accessed on 5 December 2023.

⁶⁰⁴ <https://ocindex.net/country/ecuador>. Accessed on 6 December 2023.

⁶⁰⁵ <https://es.mongabay.com/2017/04/peru-tortugasgalapagos-extincion-ecuador/>. Accessed on 3 December 2023.

⁶⁰⁶ <https://www.policia.gob.ec/policia-rescata-49-especies-de-vida-silvestre/>

⁶⁰⁷ <https://elcomercio.pe/peru/tumbes/tumbes-rescatan-199-taricayas-puesto-control-fronterizo-noticia-536784-noticia/>. Accessed on 30 November 2023.

⁶⁰⁸ <https://www.ambiente.gob.ec/85-especimenes-de-vida-silvestres-exoticas-fueron-rescatadas-de-un-basurero-en-el-puente-internacional-de-rumichaca/>

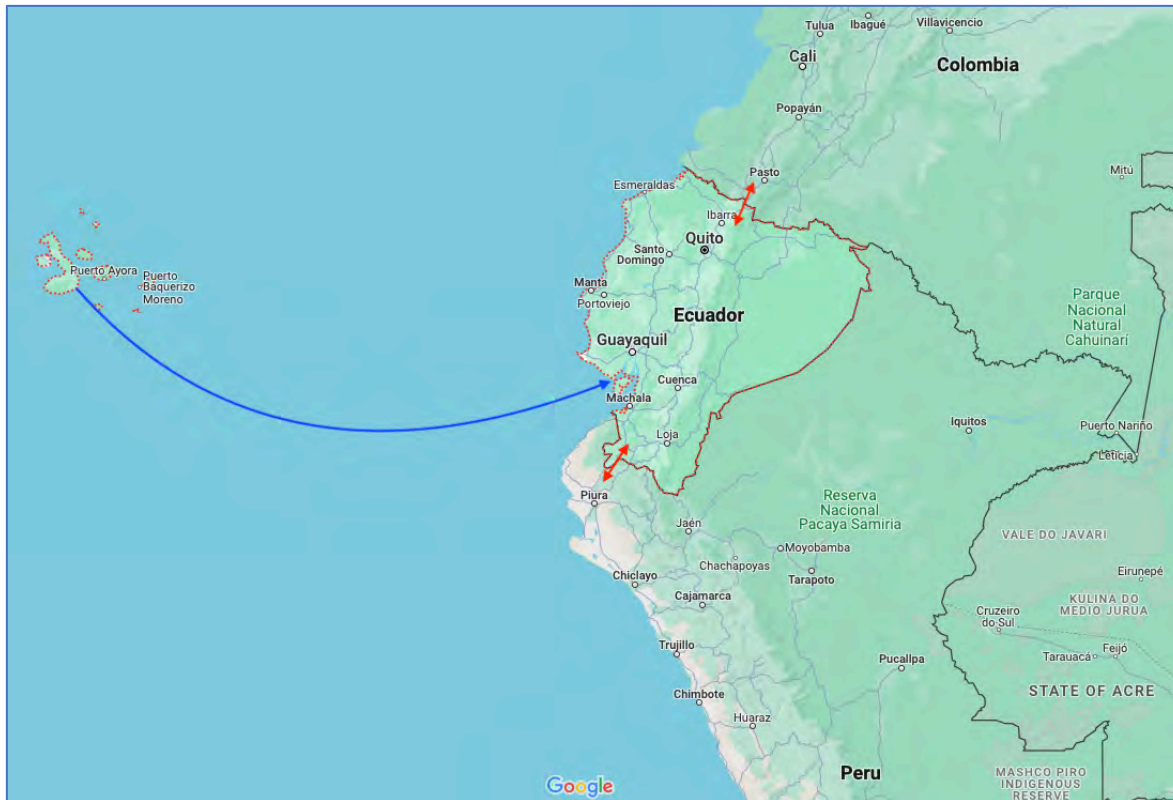


Figure 343: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes to/from Ecuador based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022

Law enforcement efforts

The rate of arrests associated with wildlife poaching and trafficking appears rather low in Ecuador. A total of 27 people was reportedly arrested in 17 incidents, out of a total of 87 seizure and poaching incidents reported to take place in Ecuador between 2017 and 2022. Therefore, 20% of seizure and poaching incidents reported by the media resulted in arrests (compared to the regional average of 27%). It should be noted the cases that involved arrests predominantly concerned illegal wildlife trade activities, whereas most seizures reported in Ecuador concerned illegal possession of wild animals as pets.

Wildlife prosecution appears to be quite effective. Reportedly, 50% of wildlife trafficking cases are sentenced⁶⁰⁹ and Ecuadorian courts impose relatively high sentences for wildlife crimes. For example, in November 2022, two men were sentenced to four years in prison and a fine of US\$4,250 each for illegal possession and attempt to commercialize two red-footed tortoises (*Chelonoidis carbonarius*). According to the investigation by the Prosecutor's Office, the two convicted men had participated in a wildlife trafficking network. In Ecuador, wildlife crimes carry a sentence of 1 to 3 years in prison, but the two men's sentence was increased by a third due to aggravated circumstances.⁶¹⁰ In another case, in 2021, a man was sentenced to three years in prison for keeping a white-bellied spider monkey (*Ateles belzebuth*) chained at his home.⁶¹¹

It is noteworthy that in 2008, Ecuador was the first country to recognise the rights of nature in its national constitution, enshrining the right of its people to live in a healthy environment, but it was not

⁶⁰⁹ <https://www.infobae.com/americas/medio-ambiente/2021/05/31/detuvieron-a-un-hombre-que-llevaba-16-tortugas-vulnerables-en-una-maleta-para-venderlas-en-un-mercado/>. Accessed on 28 November 2023.

⁶¹⁰ <https://www.eltelegrafo.com.ec/noticias/actualidad/44/condenan-cuatro-prision-personas-trafico-vida-silvestre>

⁶¹¹ <https://www.ambiente.gob.ec/tres-anos-de-prision-para-ciudadano-por-tenencia-ilegal-de-fauna-silvestre/>.

El Salvador

El Salvador

General overview

In El Salvador, a minimum of 739 animals were involved in 40 seizures and two poaching incidents reported in the media between 2017 and 2022. Of these, 712 specimens (96%) were live animals.

Species groups involved were birds (64%, with 475 specimens); reptiles (32%, with 239 specimens); and mammals (4%, with 31 specimens). No amphibians were reported to be seized or poached.

Unique characteristics

- High % of live animal trade
- High demand for psittacids
- Trafficking of iguanas for their meat
- Marine turtle egg trafficking
- Destination and transit for wildlife trafficked from neighbouring countries

Number of incidents reported in the media

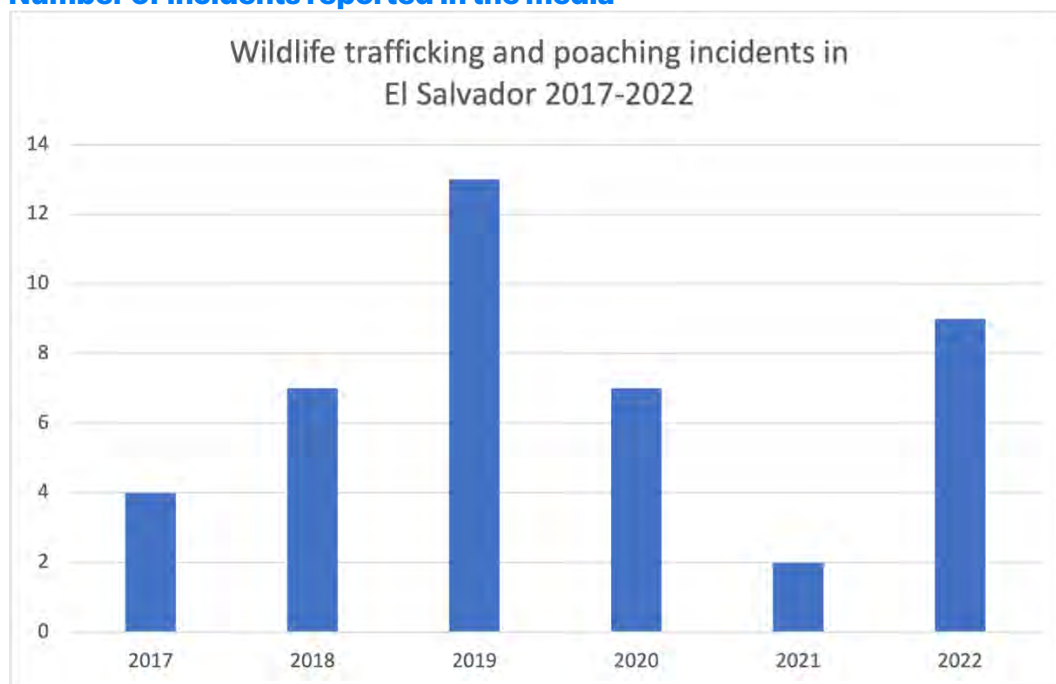


Figure 6435: Wildlife trafficking and poaching incidents in El Salvador between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Number of animals involved

The table and figure below show the numbers of birds, reptiles, and mammals seized or poached in El Salvador between 2017 and 2022.

Table 10: Number of animals seized or poached in El Salvador between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Birds	99	24	102	24	85	141	475
Reptiles	27	89	67	24	29	3	239
Mammals	2	1	14	1	3	4	25
TOTAL	128	114	183	49	117	148	

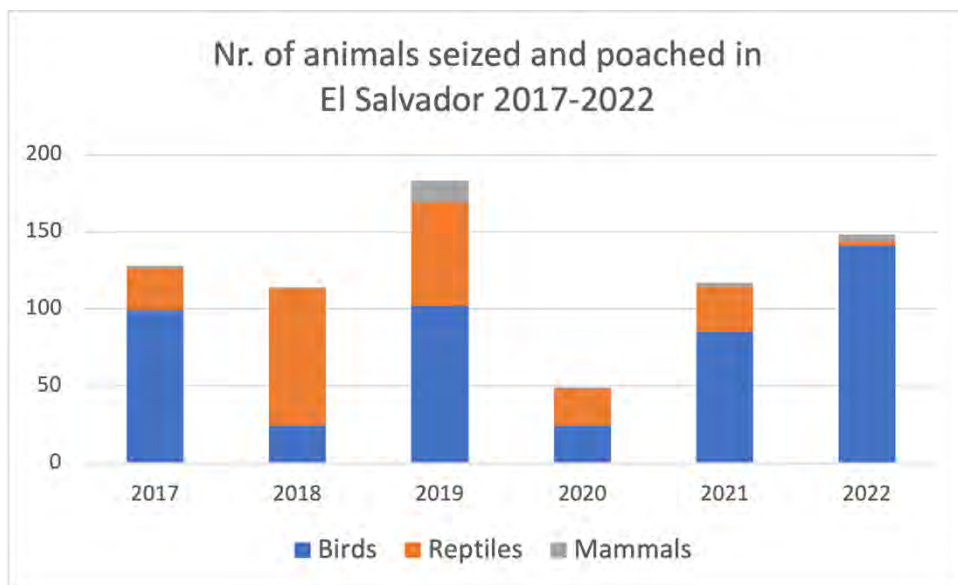


Figure 365: Number of animals seized or poached in El Salvador between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

The highest number of incidents and seized wildlife specimens were reported in 2019. This number dropped sharply in 2020, possibly due to reduced law enforcement activity as a result of COVID-19 quarantine measures. Wildlife crimes reportedly increased in 2020, however: in the first months of quarantine, El Salvador's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (Ministerio de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, MARN) registered an increase in complaints about wildlife trafficking, as well as assistance to injured or beaten animals.⁶¹⁹

Species most targeted

Birds



Figure 376: Bird species seized in El Salvador between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

⁶¹⁹ <https://diarioelsalvador.com/trafico-de-especies-silvestres-incremento-en-la-cuarentena/4801/>. Accessed on 3 October 2023.

Between 2017 and 2022, 98% of all birds reported to be seized or poached in El Salvador were psittacids, with parakeets by far the most affected.

Trafficking of parakeets

A total of 361 seized parakeets were recorded, accounting for 76% of all birds reported to be seized in El Salvador between 2017 and 2022. Pacific parakeets (*Psittacara strenuus*) were the most affected, with 181 specimens seized. One seizure in particular draws attention: in August 2022, a shipment of 106 juvenile Pacific parakeets was seized in Las Tunas, department of La Unión, along with 14 Amazon parrots (including three critically endangered yellow-naped amazons (*Amazona auropalliata*)) and one capuchin monkey. The three smugglers who were arrested also carried a handgun.⁶²⁰ It is highly likely the shipment arrived by sea from Nicaragua. Las Tunas is a beach resort located on the far southeastern coast of El Salvador not far from the Nicaraguan coast that is a well-known landing site for drugs and other illicit commodities, including wildlife from Nicaragua and countries further south.⁶²¹

After pacific parakeets, the most seized parakeets between 2017 and 2022 were orange-chinned parakeets (*Brotogeris jugularis*, 81 specimens), followed by orange-fronted parakeets (*Aratinga canicularis*, 47 specimens); and scarlet-fronted parakeets (*Psittacara wagleri*, 38 specimens). The 38 scarlet-fronted parakeets were seized in a shipment in December 2021 that was smuggled by boat from Nicaragua⁶²², again confirming Nicaragua as a key source for birds smuggled to El Salvador.

The widespread illegal trade in parakeets is harming wild populations in El Salvador. This is the case, for example, for orange-fronted parakeets. Known as 'chocoyo' in El Salvador, these parakeets have been popular pets in Salvadoran households for generations. Illegal capture and trade of this species has led to the decline of its populations in El Salvador.⁶²³

Parrots are also popular in El Salvador: 20% of all birds (96 specimens out of a total of 475) reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022 concerned parrots. Species seized included red-lored amazons (*Amazona autumnalis*, 13 specimens); turquoise fronted amazons (*Amazona aestiva*, four specimens); white-fronted amazons (*Amazona albifrons*, two specimens); cobalt-rumped parrotlets (*Forpus xanthopterygius*, six specimens); white-crowned parrots (*Pionus senilis*, three specimens); yellow-naped amazons (*Amazona auropalliata*, 10 specimens); and yellow-headed amazons (*Amazona oratrix*, four specimens). The latter two are listed in CITES Appendix I. Furthermore, yellow-naped amazons are listed as Critically Endangered by IUCN.⁶²⁴ The numbers of specimens provided here are just minimum quantities as media reports failed to specify the subspecies for 54 parrots seized from traffickers.

Nine macaws were seized between 2017 and 2022: eight were scarlet macaws (*ara macao*), one a military macaw (*ara militaris*). Both are endangered species listed in CITES appendix I. These macaws were seized in January 2022 along with three parrots.⁶²⁵ Macaws are extinct in El Salvador, so these birds were most likely sourced from Nicaragua or another neighbouring country.

⁶²⁰ <https://lapagina.com.sv/nacionales/medio-ambiente-custodia-106-pericos-14-loras-y-1-mono-capuchino-decomisados-por-la-pnc/>; <https://revistaviatori.com/notas/rescatan-loros-en-el-salvador/>. Accessed on 2 October 2023.

⁶²¹ <http://especiales.eldiariodehoy.com/2018/drogas/index.php>; <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias-crimen-organizado-el-salvador/la-union-el-salvador/>. Accessed on 2 October 2023.

⁶²² <https://diario.elmundo.sv/Nacionales/capturan-a-cinco-personas-que-transportaban-mas-de-80-animales-en-peligro-de-extincion>. Accessed on 2 October 2023.

⁶²³ <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/El-chocoyo-el-perico-amenazado-con-desaparecer-en-El-Salvador-20210219-0104.html>. Accessed on 2 October 2023.

⁶²⁴ BirdLife International. 2021. *Amazona auropalliata*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2021: e.T22686342A180373727. Accessed on 2 October 2023.

⁶²⁵ <https://twitter.com/MedioAmbienteSV/status/1480679217725595652>. Accessed on 2 October 2023.

Reptiles

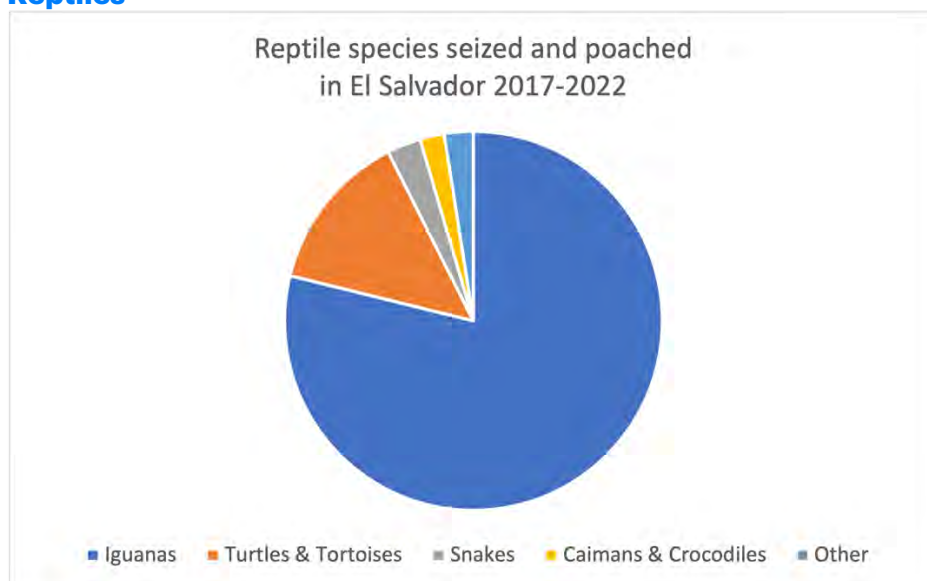


Figure 6738: Reptile species seized or poached in El Salvador between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Trafficking of iguanas

Iguanas are heavily trafficked in El Salvador: in total, 190 black spiny-tailed iguanas (*Ctenosaura similis*) and green iguanas (*Iguana iguana*) were seized, making up 79% of all reptiles seized between 2017 and 2022. Both species are considered a delicacy and are found on the menu of restaurants in San Salvador and for sale in markets across the country.⁶²⁶ The species are sourced both locally and in neighbouring country Honduras and Nicaragua, from where large quantities are smuggled (see the key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes section). Media have reported that iguanas are smuggled from Nicaragua and sold to people in San Miguel, a city in the east of the country, to be resold to street vendors.⁶²⁷

There were few seizures of turtles and tortoises between 2017 and 2022. Noteworthy is a seizure in August 2018 of 19 painted wood turtles (*Rhinoclemmys pulcherrima*) in San Salvador's Mercado Central. They were likely sold for consumption, but this species is also popular in the global pet trade. Concerns over overexploitation of wood turtles of the *Rhinoclemmys* genus has led to their being listed in CITES Appendix II, effective 2023.⁶²⁸ Another seizure worthy of mention is that of eight African spurred tortoises (*Centrochelys sulcata*) along with five bearded dragons (*Pogona*) and one veiled chameleon (*Chamaeleo calytratus*) from a shop named 'Animales Exóticos' in San Salvador in April 2018. These are non-native species, suggesting there is a market for exotic pets in El Salvador.⁶²⁹

Seven seizures of a total amount of 4,107 marine turtle eggs in markets and during routine traffic controls were recorded between 2017 and 2022. The main species affected are Olive Ridley turtles (*Lepidochelys olivacea*). Given that the average clutch size of a female Olive Ridley is 110 eggs⁶³⁰, this means a minimum of 452 marine turtle nests were raided between 2017 and 2022 to supply demand

⁶²⁶ <https://www.caftadr-environment.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/IIF-Iguana-Survey-and-Status-Report-Spanish.pdf>. Accessed on 2 October 2023.

⁶²⁷ <https://vanguardia.v.net/el-comercio-de-las-vidas-inocentes-lo-exotico-que-encierra-a-los-animales-parte-ii/2017/>. Accessed on 2 October 2023.

⁶²⁸ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/E-CoP19-Prop-27.pdf>. Accessed on 2 October 2023.

⁶²⁹ <https://www.debate.com.mx/mundo/hombre-fue-detenido-por-venderanimales-en-peligro-de-extincion-20181204-0169.html>

⁶³⁰ Márquez, R. Olive Ridley Turtles (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) show signs of recovery at La Escobilla, Oaxaca. *Marine Turtle Newsletter*. 73, 5-7, 1996b.

for marine turtle eggs. In December 2022, El Salvador's environment ministry MARN announced stricter law enforcement controls to curb the sales of marine turtle eggs.⁶³¹

Mammals

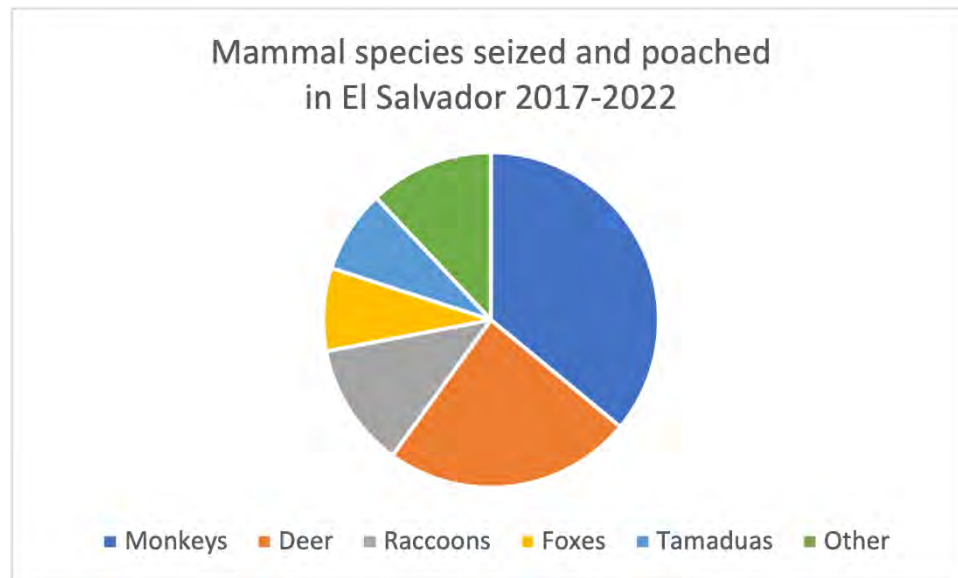


Figure 39: Mammal species seized or poached in El Salvador between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Nine live monkeys were reported to be seized in El Salvador between 2017 and 2022, representing 36% of all mammals seized in that period. These included five Central American spider monkeys (*Ateles geoffroyi*) and four white-faced capuchins (*Cebus capucinus* or *Cebus imitator*). One spider monkey and two capuchin monkeys were seized from smugglers arriving from Nicaragua.⁶³² The other live monkeys were seized from restaurants, recreational centres, and a shop.

Central American spider monkeys, the only monkey species residing in El Salvador, are threatened with extinction due to poaching and habitat loss. Around 250 individuals are estimated to survive in the wild.⁶³³ White-faced capuchins, however, are not native to El Salvador, suggesting they were either smuggled into the country or bred in captivity.

Other mammals seized in various incidents between 2017 and 2022 included six white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*); three common raccoons (*Procyon lotor*); two baby tamanduas (*Tamandua Mexicana*); and two grey foxes (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*). All were offered for sale or kept as pets. One puma was reported to be killed by poachers, its front paws removed as trophies.⁶³⁴

⁶³¹ <https://diario.elmundo.sv/nacionales/medio-ambiente-intensifica-inspecciones-para-frenar-comercio-de-huevos-de-tortuga>. Accessed on 2 October 2023.

⁶³² <https://diario.elmundo.sv/Nacionales/capturan-a-cinco-personas-que-transportaban-mas-de-80-animales-en-peligro-de-extincion> and <https://lapagina.com.sv/nacionales/medio-ambiente-custodia-106-pericos-14-loras-y-1-mono-capuchino-decomisados-por-la-pnc/>. Accessed on 3 October 2023.

⁶³³ <https://historico.elsalvador.com/historico/625193/el-mono-arana-en-situacion-critica-de-extincion-en-el-pais.html>. Accessed on 3 October 2023.

⁶³⁴ <https://gatoencerrado.news/2020/05/13/cazadores-furtivos-matan-a-un-puma-en-chalatenango/>. Accessed on 3 October 2023.

Key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes

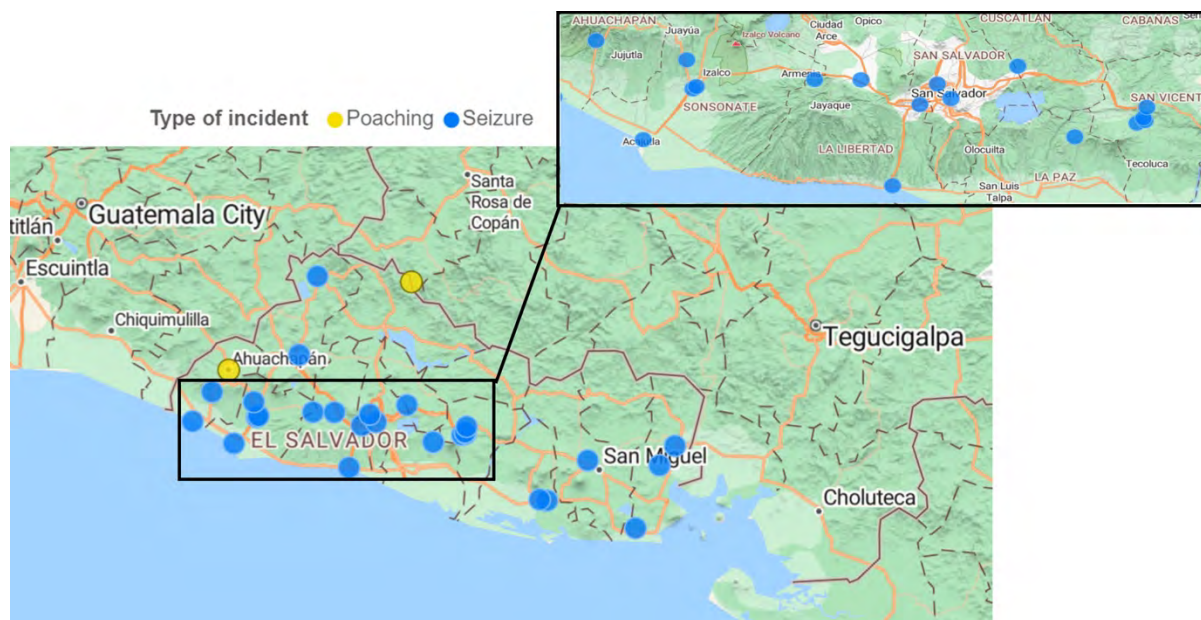


Figure 69: Locations of seizures and poaching incidents in El Salvador reported between 2017 and 2022.

Sales in markets

Several seizures of wildlife offered for sale in markets across El Salvador were recorded, including in San Miguel and San Felipe. The Mercado Central in El Salvador's capital San Salvador is the biggest hub for wildlife sales in the country, however. A total of 153 parakeets, parrots, iguanas, and turtles as well as 1,550 marine turtle eggs were seized in four incidents in 2017 and 2018, representing more than 20% of all wildlife seized in El Salvador between 2017 and 2022. Many wild animals offered for sale in the Mercado Central are smuggled from Nicaragua and Honduras, suffering a long journey which many, especially birds, do not survive.⁶³⁵ Given the Mercado Central's well-publicised role in facilitating the region's illegal wildlife trade, it is remarkable that no seizures were reported in this market between 2019 and 2022.

Sales on social media

Only one incident was identified pertaining to wildlife sales on social media. In May 2018, police officers arrested a Salvadoran man for attempting to sell five parrots on social media (two red-lored amazons and three white-crowned parrots, one of which was already dead). The parrots were taken from the wild in northern Guatemala and the four remaining live specimens were repatriated there afterwards. During the operation, police officers also seized five chicks of an unidentified parrot species.⁶³⁶

Convergence

No incidents were identified where wildlife was seized jointly with other illicit commodities and/or in circumstances that might indicate convergence with other types of organized crime. Research into organized crime in El Salvador furthermore suggests that wildlife traffickers in El Salvador do not appear to be part of larger criminal organisations.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁵ <https://news.mongabay.com/2015/11/el-salvador-serves-as-bridge-for-export-of-trafficked-nicaraguan-birds/>. Accessed on 3 October 2023.

⁶³⁶ <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/MARN-repatria-cuatro-aves-exoticas-a-Peten-en-Guatemala-20180914-0110.html>. Accessed on 3 October 2023.

⁶³⁷ Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime. Organized Crime Index 2023. https://ocindex.net/country/el_salvador/. Accessed on 3 October 2023.

Transboundary trafficking routes

El Salvador is both a destination and transit point for illegal wildlife from neighbouring Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. As El Salvador's currency is the US dollar, the country is attractive for wildlife traffickers due to its much higher market prices for wildlife. For example, in August 2019 four Nicaraguan women were arrested in San Salvador for attempting to sell 32 Amazon parrots, with media reporting they had smuggled the parrots from Nicaragua with the objective of selling them at a higher price.⁶³⁸ A yellow-naped Amazon parrot worth up to 200 córdobas (US\$8.3) in Nicaragua can command US\$50 in El Salvador (1,192 córdobas). And black spiny-tailed iguanas worth US\$ 2-3 in Nicaragua are smuggled to El Salvador and offered for sale between US\$15 and US\$25.⁶³⁹⁶⁴⁰

The following transboundary trafficking routes were identified:

Honduras > El Salvador

- ▶ In March 2019, the border security division of the National Civil Police arrested a Honduran man in Pasaquina, near the eastern border with Honduras, with 25 black spiny-tailed iguanas and 14 iguanas. He had caught the reptiles in Honduras and intended to sell them in eastern El Salvador.⁶⁴¹
- ▶ In February 2021, Salvadoran army officers arrested four Hondurans at the El Naranjo border crossing in Santa Clarita in eastern El Salvador for attempting to smuggle 29 black spiny-tailed iguanas into El Salvador from Honduras.⁶⁴²

Guatemala > El Salvador (> Europe/USA)

- ▶ In May 2018, a Salvadoran man was arrested for advertising five parrots that had been sourced in Guatemala on social media.⁶⁴³
- ▶ It has been reported that Guatemala serves as a wildlife smuggling route into El Salvador, from where animals are smuggled to Europe. Guatemalan reptiles (including Guatemalan beaded lizards, *Heloderma horridum*; and Guatemalan spiny-tailed iguanas, *Ctenosaura plearis*) are reportedly collected by locals, who sell them to local buyers, who then resell to a main trader, before export to Europe or the USA.⁶⁴⁴ This alleged trafficking route could not be verified by this study.

El Salvador > Chile

In October 2021, Chilean police seized 35 iguanas originating from El Salvador in a shop in Quilpué.

El Salvador <> Nicaragua

In 2017, media reported that black spiny-tailed iguanas worth US\$2-US\$3 in Nicaragua are smuggled to El Salvador and offered for sale at prices between US\$15 and US\$25.⁶⁴⁵

⁶³⁸ <https://historico.elsalvador.com/historico/630310/policia-detiene-en-san-salvador-a-cuatro-mujeres-que-tenian-mas-de-30-loras-y-planeaban-venderlas-en-100-cada-una.html>. Accessed on 3 October 2023.

⁶³⁹ <https://vanguardia.net/el-comercio-de-las-vidas-inocentes-lo-exotico-que-encierra-a-los-animales-parte-ii/2017/>. Accessed on 3 October 2023.

⁶⁴⁰ <https://vanguardia.net/el-comercio-de-las-vidas-inocentes-lo-exotico-que-encierra-a-los-animales-parte-ii/2017/>. Accessed on 3 October 2023.

⁶⁴¹ <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/Capturan-a-hondureno-cuando-transportaba-25-garrobos-y-14-iguanas-en-Pasaquina-20190325-0304.html>. Accessed on 4 October 2023.

⁶⁴² <https://lapagina.com.sv/nacionales/fuerza-armada-detuvo-a-cuatro-hondurenos-que-trataban-ingresar-de-forma-ilegal-fauna-silvestre-al-pais/>. Accessed on 4 October 2023.

⁶⁴³ <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/MARN-repatría-cuatro-aves-exóticas-a-Peten-en-Guatemala-20180914-0110.html>. Accessed on 4 October 2023.

⁶⁴⁴ <https://www.peoplenotpoaching.org/law-enforcement-lizards-guatemala>. Accessed on 23 September 2023.

⁶⁴⁵ <https://vanguardia.net/el-comercio-de-las-vidas-inocentes-lo-exotico-que-encierra-a-los-animales-parte-ii/2017/>. Accessed on 3 October 2023.

In December 2021, four Nicaraguans and a Salvadoran taxi driver were arrested in department San Miguel with 85 parrots and parakeets (among which were 34 orange-fronted parakeets, 38 crimson-fronted parakeets, 30 Pacific parakeets, and four yellow-naped amazons), one white-faced capuchin monkey, one spider monkey, and one kinkajou that they were transporting in a taxi. The animals were smuggled by sea from Nicaragua to El Salvador through weak points in the border control in Playa Las Tunas, El Salvador.⁶⁴⁶

In August 2022, three smugglers were arrested in Las Tunas, department of La Unión, with 106 juvenile Pacific parakeets, 14 Amazon parrots, and one capuchin monkey. The animals likely arrived by sea from Nicaragua.⁶⁴⁷

In December 2022, Nicaraguan authorities at the Cosigüina control post arrested a Nicaraguan man transporting 3,091 tortoises. The authorities identified them as Bolson tortoises (*Gopherus Flavomarginatus*), and noted they had been smuggled from El Salvador, probably by sea given the location of the seizure.⁶⁴⁸ It is doubtful these were Bolson tortoises, however. Bolson tortoises (endemic to Mexico), are critically endangered and listed in CITES Appendix I, and recent estimates suggest that fewer than 2,000 bolson tortoises remain in the wild'.⁶⁴⁹



Figure 70: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes to/from El Salvador based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022

⁶⁴⁶ <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/Dejienen-a-4-extranjeros-que-transportaban-ilegalmente-a-mas-de-80-loros-y-pericos-en-un-taxi-20211227-0019.html>. Accessed on 10 October 2023.

⁶⁴⁷ <https://revistaviatori.com/notas/rescatan-loros-en-el-salvador/>. Accessed on 4 October 2023.

⁶⁴⁸ <https://radio-corporacion.com/blog/archivos/169144/decomisan-mas-de-3-mil-tortugas-en-cosiguina/>. Accessed on 4 October 2023.

⁶⁴⁹ <https://tesf.org/project/bolson-tortoise/#:~:text=Population%20decline%20and%20contraction%20of%20tortoises%20remain%20in%20the%20wild>. Accessed on 4 October 2023.

Law enforcement efforts

Twenty-five people were arrested in 11 incidents, therefore 26% of all incidents recorded in El Salvador between 2017 and 2022 resulted in arrest (the regional average arrest rate is 27%). Interestingly, 52% of all people arrested were foreigners (eight from Nicaragua, five from Honduras). Most arrests for wildlife poaching or trafficking reportedly result in alternative penalties rather than imprisonment.⁶⁵⁰

Law enforcement capacity to fight wildlife trafficking is limited in El Salvador. There appear to be few, if any, proactive, intelligence-led investigations to tackle wildlife crime. Many wildlife interceptions are by-catch of anti-drug trafficking patrols at El Salvador's borders or are instigated by citizen's complaints.⁶⁵¹

In 2020, MARN launched an awareness raising campaign aiming to curb illegal wildlife exploitation.⁶⁵²

⁶⁵⁰ <https://vanguardiasv.net/el-comercio-de-las-vidas-inocentes-lo-exotico-que-encierra-a-los-animales-parte-ii/2017/>. Accessed on 3 October 2023.

⁶⁵¹ <https://vanguardiasv.net/el-comercio-de-las-vidas-inocentes-lo-exotico-que-encierra-a-los-animales-parte-ii/2017/>. Accessed on 3 October 2023.

⁶⁵² <https://www.ambiente.gob.sv/inicia-campana-de-sensibilizacion-para-la-proteccion-de-la-vida-silvestre/>. Accessed on 3 October 2023.

Guatemala

Guatemala

General overview

For Guatemala, a minimum of 425 animals were involved in 48 seizures and five poaching incidents reported between 2017 and 2022. Some 80% concerned live animals, with the balance comprised of 14% parts and products, and 6% dead animals.

Birds made up 53% of all seized wildlife (186 specimens); followed by reptiles with 32% (136 specimens); and mammals with 24.5% (103 specimens). No amphibians were reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022.

Unique characteristics

- Trafficking of Amazon parrots
- Source and transit for monkeys and other wildlife trafficked to Mexico/USA
- High arrest rate

Actual numbers seized are much higher than what could be established based on media reports about seizures and poaching incidents. For example, the government reported to have seized 312 wild animals in 2022 alone, including spider monkeys, howler monkeys, opossums, armadillos, pelicans, parrots, snakes, lizards, Margays, owls, toucans, and turtles.⁶⁵³

Number of incidents reported in the media

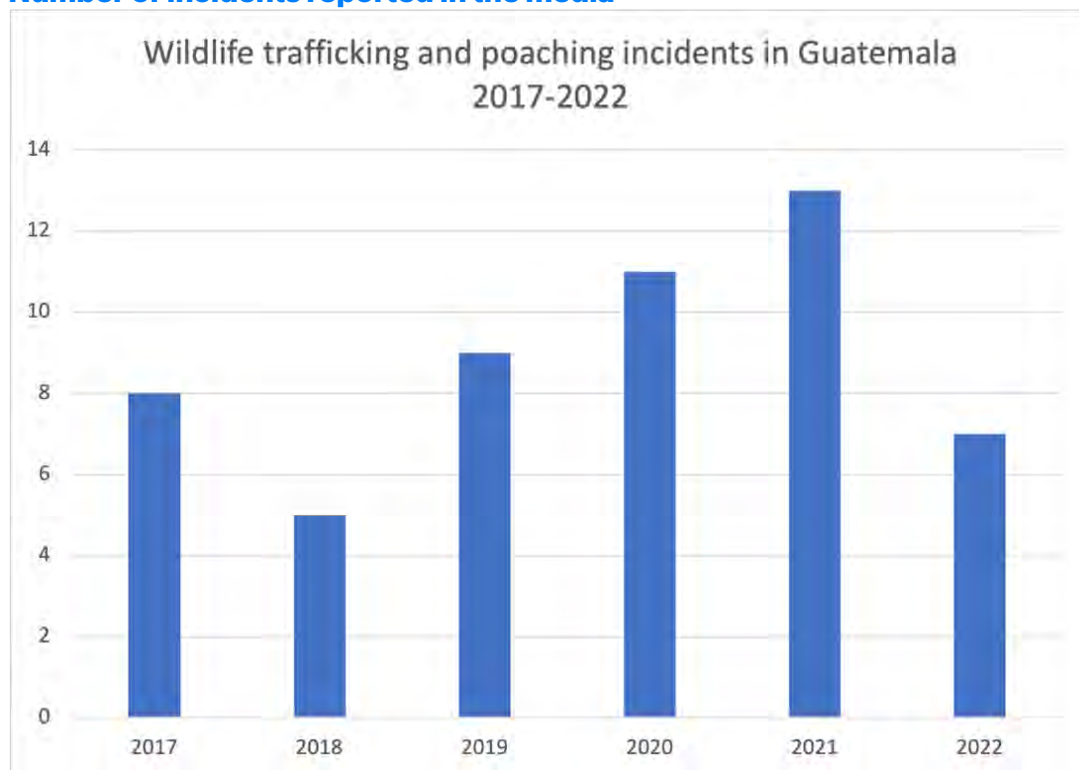


Figure 71: Wildlife trafficking and poaching incidents in Guatemala between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

⁶⁵³ <https://mingob.gob.gt/diprona-captura-por-delitos-contra-la-naturaleza-a-832-personas/>. Accessed 21 September 2023.

Number of animals involved

The table and figure below show the numbers of birds, reptiles, and mammals reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022.

Table 11: Animals seized or poached between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Birds	2	12	16	37	83	36	186
Reptiles	44	28	13	5	29	17	136
Mammals	41	4	21	23	13	1	103
TOTAL	87	44	50	65	125	54	

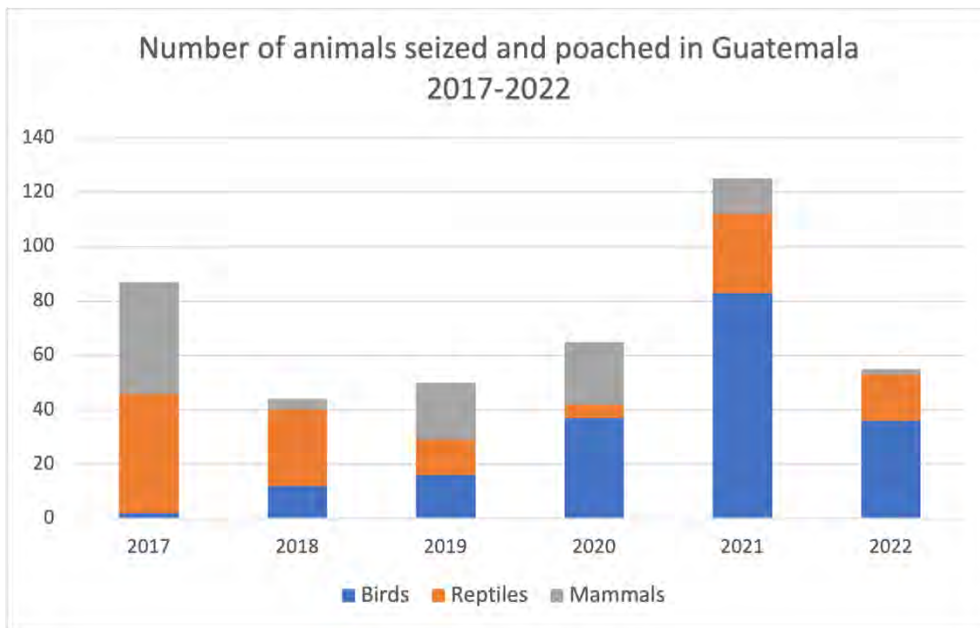


Figure 402: Number of animals seized or poached in Guatemala between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Species most targeted

Birds

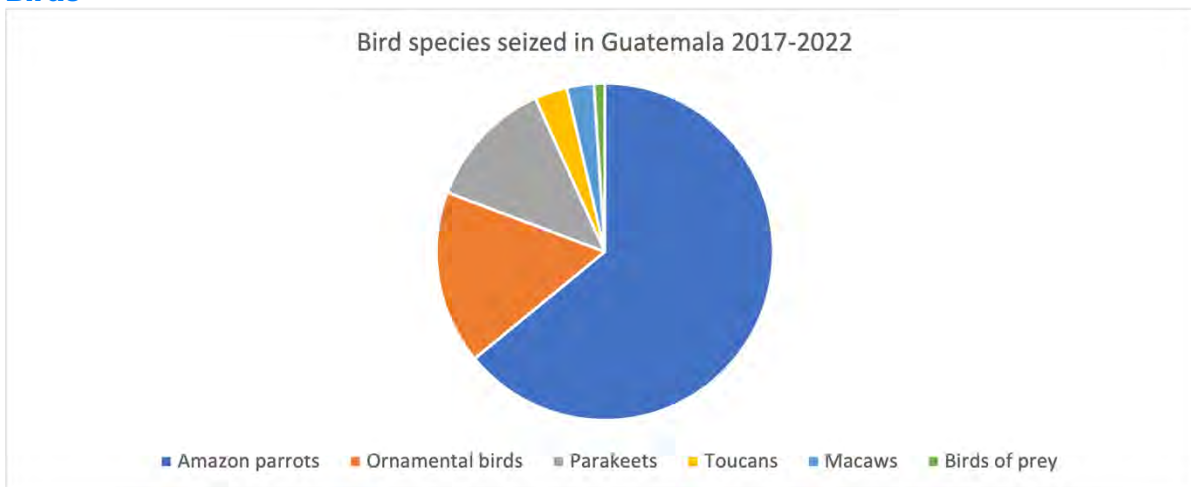


Figure 73: Bird species seized in Guatemala between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Amazon parrots were the most seized bird species in Guatemala, in particular white fronted amazons (*Amazona albifrons*, 57 specimens seized) and red-lored amazons (*Amazona autumnalis*, 36 specimens seized). Together, these CITES Appendix II listed species represent 75% of the 123 parrots reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022.

Some seizures provide indications of an organized trade. For example, in May 2021, 54 juvenile parrots (including 44 white-fronted amazons and 10 southern mealy amazons) along with a white-faced capuchin monkey were seized from a hotel room where they had been abandoned by an unidentified man.⁶⁵⁴ The seizure took place in Santa Elena, Petén, a small town adjacent to the Maya Biosphere Reserve from where the animals had likely been poached. Another noteworthy incident happened in May 2020 when a box with 18 dead red-lored amazon parrot chicks was found abandoned by the side of the road in the small town of Los Amates, close to the border with Honduras.⁶⁵⁵ They had probably suffocated during transport.

Of the ornamental birds, whistling ducks (*Dendrocygna* sp, 16 specimens seized) were the most affected, making up 50% of all 32 seized ornamental birds.

Orange-fronted parakeets (*Aratinga canicularis*) were the most seized parakeet species in Guatemala between 2017 and 2022: 16 specimens were reported to be seized, representing 67% of the 24 parakeets intercepted from traffickers.

Six toucans were reported to be seized, including three choco toucans (*Ramphastos brevis*); two keel-billed toucans (*Ramphastos sulfuratus*); and one chestnut-eared aracari (*Pteroglossus castanotis*). The three choco toucans were seized along with 13 baby monkeys in January 2020 from two Mexican men who intended to smuggle the animals into Mexico on a passenger bus. Sadly, one toucan was already dead at the time of seizure.⁶⁵⁶

Five macaws were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022: three blue-and-yellow macaws (*Ara araurana*, CITES Appendix II) and two scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*, CITES Appendix I). Scarlet macaws are under severe pressure from habitat loss and poachers in their range (spanning the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve in Mexico, Chiquibul National Park in Belize, and the Maya Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala). Only around 1,000 specimens are believed to persist in the wild, 300 of which are in Guatemala.⁶⁵⁷ Scarlet macaw chicks taken from their nests are trafficked across the borders of both Guatemala and Belize as well as Mexico. The main markets are reportedly in Guatemala and Mexico, where they fetch a higher price. They have even been seized from the homes of high-ranking government officials. In 2015, two scarlet macaws were seized from the home of Guatemala's then Vice President Roxana Baldetti. Three years later she was convicted of corruption and sentenced to 15.5 years in prison.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁴ <https://www.soy502.com/articulo/pnc-decomisa-loros-mono-abandonados-hotel-peten-24039>. Accessed on 22 September 2023.

⁶⁵⁵ <https://www.prensalibre.com/ciudades/izabal/loros-muertos-son-hallados-en-izabal-victimas-de-trafficantes/>. Accessed on 22 September 2023.

⁶⁵⁶ <https://www.prensalibre.com/ciudades/guatemala-ciudades/decomiso-de-13-monos-evidencia-presencia-de-bandas-transnacionales-de-traffic-de-animales-en-guatemala/>. Accessed on 23 September 2023.

⁶⁵⁷ <https://republica.gt/guatemala/2021-6-1-18-49-36-en-guatemala-solo-quedan-unos-300-ejemplares-de-guacamayo-rojo-en-estado-silvestre>. Accessed 21 September 2023.

⁶⁵⁸ <https://news.mongabay.com/2018/12/scarlet-macaws-stalked-by-wildlife-traffickers-in-guatemala/>. Accessed 22 September 2023.

Reptiles

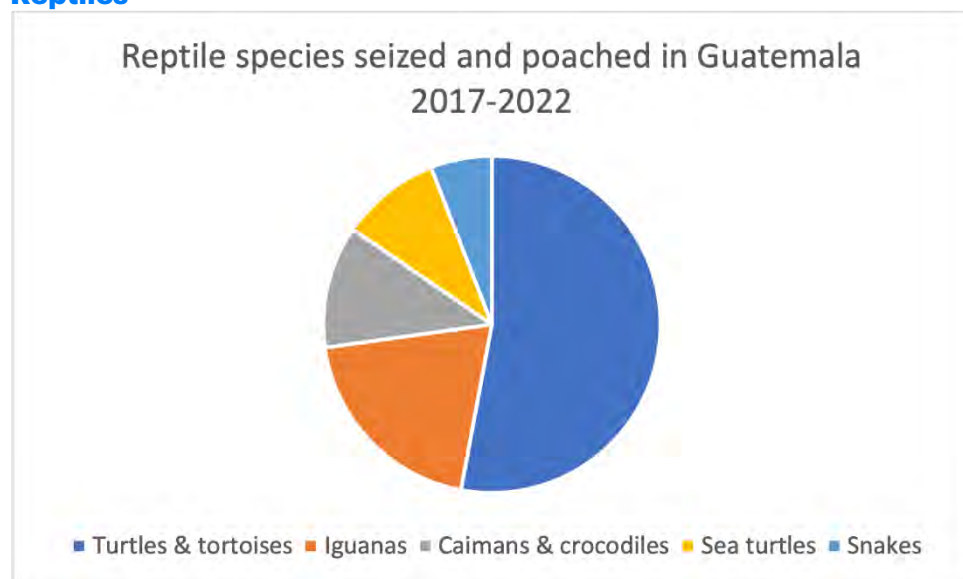


Figure 41: Reptile species seized or poached in Guatemala between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Of all reptiles reported to be seized or poached in Guatemala between 2017 and 2022, 53% involved testudinae (72 specimens seized). Media reports often neglect to specify which species are seized; however, it appears mud turtles (*Kinosternon* sp.) are most popular in the illegal trade. Twenty-six specimens were reported to be seized, 25 of which were smuggled on a passenger bus along with three caimans, in August 2018.⁶⁵⁹

After testudinae, iguanas are most affected by illegal trade. Twenty-seven iguanas were seized from traffickers between 2017 and 2022, representing 20% of all reptiles seized. These included 14 black spiny-tailed iguanas (*Ctenosaura similis*); six Western spiny-tailed iguanas (*Ctenosaura pectinata*); and seven common green iguanas (*Iguana iguana*).

The remaining reptile groups affected by trafficking and poaching are caimans and crocodiles (12%), sea turtles (10%), and snakes (5%). There is a tradition of consuming crocodile and iguana meat during Lent in the western highlands of Guatemala, with the city of Quetzaltenango operating as a key sales hub. Even though it is illegal, authorities profess to be reticent to address it, as operations against illegal sales often result in conflict between the traffickers and the law enforcers.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁹ <https://www.prensalibre.com/ciudades/quetzaltenango/rescatan-a-25-tortugas-y-tres-lagartos-en-un-bus-que-ingresaba-a-xela-desde-la-costa-sur/>. Accessed 21 September 2023.

⁶⁶⁰ <https://www.prensalibre.com/ciudades/quetzaltenango/incrementa-venta-ilegal-de-carne-de-lagarto-por-cuaresma-en-quetzaltenango/>. Accessed on 21 September 2023.

Mammals

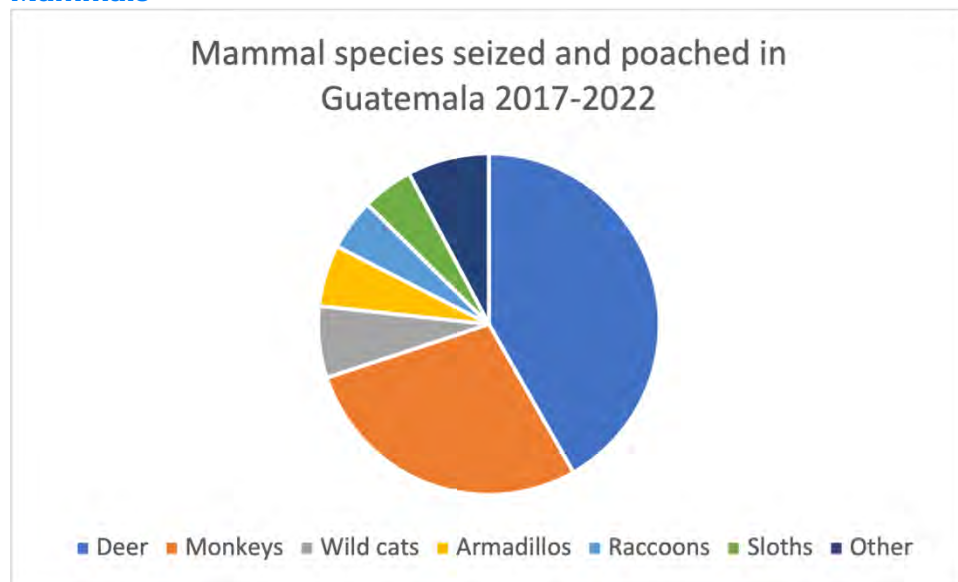


Figure 75: Mammal species seized or poached in Guatemala between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Of all mammals affected by poaching and trafficking in Guatemala between 2017 and 2022, 41% concerned deer, particularly white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*). All seizures were of deer parts: antlers, taxidermies, and skulls.

Live monkeys were also frequently seized (28% of all mammal seizures) and included: 15 Panamanian white-faced capuchins (*Cebus capucinus imitator*); 11 Colombian white-faced capuchins (*Cebus capucinus*); one Central American spider monkey (*Ateles geoffroyi*); one Yucatán spider monkey (*Ateles geoffroyi yucatanensis*); and one Yucatán howler monkey (*Alouatta pigra*).

Live monkeys and other wildlife are smuggled from Guatemala to Mexico, with Guatemala serving as a source as well as transit point. This was evidenced by the two following incidents:

- ▶ In April 2019, a Guatemalan woman was arrested at the checkpoint in Talismán, on the border with Mexico, for attempting to smuggle nine baby monkeys and five baby sloths into Mexico on a public passenger bus.⁶⁶¹
- ▶ In January 2020, two Mexican men were arrested at a bus stop in Santiago Sacatepéquez on the Pan American Highway (CA1). They intended to smuggle 13 baby Panamanian white-faced capuchins and three choco toucans on a passenger bus to Mexico. The animals were not native to Guatemala and were believed to have originated from Honduras or Nicaragua. The suspects said they had received the animals in Metro Norte, zone 18 of Guatemala City. Authorities noted that this case highlights Guatemala's role as a corridor for illicit wildlife headed for illegal markets in the USA and Mexico.⁶⁶²

The third mammal group worthy of mention are wild cats (8% of incidents concerning mammals). These incidents involved two margays (1 live, 1 dead); two jaguars (1 skin, 1 head); two oncillas (2 skins); and one bobcat (1 taxidermy).

⁶⁶¹ https://www.chiapasparalelo.com.translate.google/noticias/chiapas/2019/04/detienen-a-mujer-que-trafficaba-monos-cara-blanca-y-osos-perezosos/?x_tr_sl=es&x_tr_tl=en&x_tr_hl=en&x_tr_pto=wapp. Accessed on 23 September 2023.

⁶⁶² <https://www.prensalibre.com/ciudades/guatemala-ciudades/decomiso-de-13-monos-evidencia-presencia-de-bandas-transnacionales-de-trafficado-de-animales-en-guatemala/>. Accessed on 23 September 2023.

Key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes

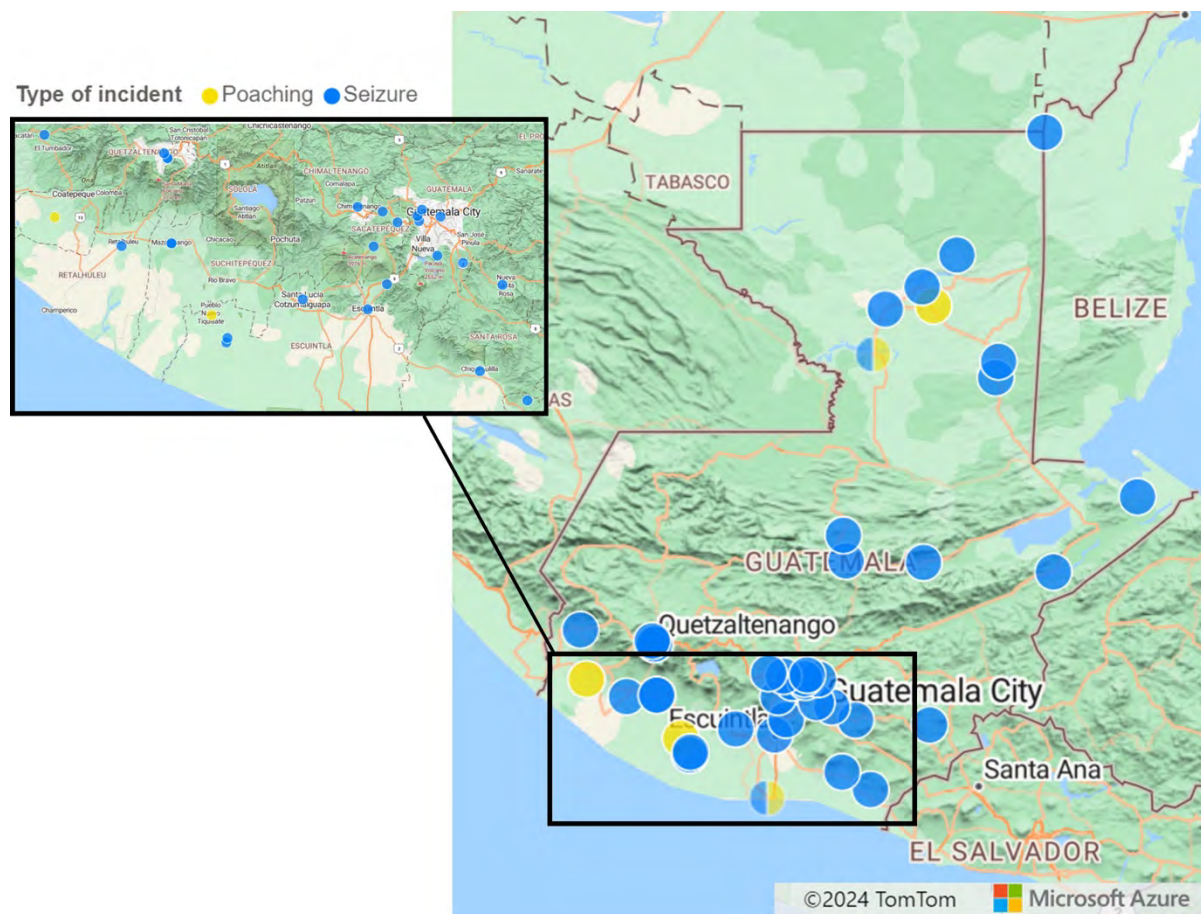


Figure 7642: Locations of seizures and poaching incidents in Guatemala reported between 2017 and 2022

Sales in markets

It is common practice in Guatemala to sell wildlife in markets. According to experts, the most significant wildlife market is El Guarda, in zone 11 of Guatemala City. Protected species such as turtles, crocodiles, yellow-headed amazons (endangered), blue-headed parrots, and monkeys have been observed for sale there, with near impunity.⁶⁶³ This study identified only one law enforcement intervention in this location. In August 2021, 2 white-fronted amazons, 6 orange-fronted parakeets, and 6 green iguanas were seized there, and two men arrested.⁶⁶⁴

Mercado La Democracia in zone 3 of Quetzaltenango, the fifth biggest city in Guatemala located in the southwest, is another key hub for illegal wildlife sales. In February 2018, two parrots and three parakeet chicks were seized there⁶⁶⁵, and in May 2021 another seizure was recorded, of two red-lore amazons and 9 orange-fronted parakeets.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶³ <https://www.prensalibre.com/ciudades/sedados-con-pastillas-o-alcohol-y-atados-en-tubos-plasticos-las-cruelles-formas-de-traficar-animales-silvestres/>. Accessed on 23 September 2023.

⁶⁶⁴ <https://www.prensalibre.com/ahora/guatemala/justicia/capturan-a-dos-personas-y-rescatan-animales-silvestres-en-operativo-en-la-capital/>. Accessed on 23 September 2023.

⁶⁶⁵ <https://www.soy502.com/articulo/descubren-traficaban-loros-pericas-mercado-quetzaltenango-5313>. Accessed on 23 September 2023.

⁶⁶⁶ <https://mingob.gob.gt/rescatan-11-aves-en-peligro-de-extincion-en-quetzaltenango/>. Accessed on 23 September 2023.

Sales on social media

Two incidents were recorded in which social media was used to advertise protected wildlife. Both incidents involved birds. On 22 March 2021, after authorities received a complaint from social media users, a man was arrested in Guatemala City for attempting to sell three red-masked parakeets on social media.⁶⁶⁷ Just two months later, on 27 May 2021, a man was arrested in Chimaltenango for attempting to sell 4 yellow-headed amazons on Facebook.⁶⁶⁸

Convergence

Six incidents were recorded where wildlife was seized along with other illicit commodities, including drugs and timber. In three instances, live animals were seized along with drugs and/or during anti-drug trafficking raids; in two instances, protected wildlife including live animals and parts and products of wild cats, deer, and turtles were seized along with illicit timber; and in one instance, a baby howler monkey and a parrot were seized during a search for illicit weapons.

One incident worthy of mention happened in October 2019, when several exotic birds, including a keel-billed toucan, cash, and ten firearms (among which was a gold-plated .44 Magnum handgun) were seized during a raid on several properties of the mayor of the small town of Nueva Concepción, west Guatemala. The mayor was arrested on suspicion of being a member of a drug-trafficking ring.⁶⁶⁹

Transboundary trafficking routes

Several incidents were identified that indicate wildlife is trafficked to, from, and through Guatemala. Only land border smuggling routes were identified, but it is likely wildlife smugglers also make use of air and/or sea routes.

(South/Central America) > Guatemala > Mexico

Guatemala is a well-known conduit for trafficking of drugs, humans, and other contraband from South and Central America to Mexico and the USA by land, air, and sea.⁶⁷⁰ This study identified two incidents where smugglers were caught trying to bring wild animals into Mexico.

- ▶ In April 2019, a Guatemalan woman was arrested at the checkpoint in Talismán, on the border with Mexico, for attempting to smuggle nine baby monkeys and five baby sloths into Mexico on a public passenger bus.⁶⁷¹
- ▶ In January 2020, two Mexican men travelling in a passenger bus were arrested at a bus stop in Santiago Sacatepéquez on the Pan American Highway (CA1) with 13 baby Panamanian white-faced capuchins and three choco toucans (1 dead). The animals were believed to have originated from Honduras or Nicaragua and to be destined for the pet trade in Mexico or the USA.⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁷ <https://www.soy502.com/articulo/vendia-loros-internet-podria-pasar-10-anos-carcel-100931>. Accessed on 23 September 2023.

⁶⁶⁸ <https://www.soy502.com/articulo/detienen-hombre-vendia-especies-peligro-extincion-32419>. Accessed on 23 September 2023.

⁶⁶⁹ <https://www.guatevision.com/nacionales/arma-banada-en-oro-aves-exoticas-y-dinero-entre-los-lujos-incautados-a-alcalde-vinculado-al-narco>. Accessed on 23 September 2023.

⁶⁷⁰ See e.g. <https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/resurgence-central-american-cocaine-highway/>; <https://time.com/smugglers-inc/>. Accessed on 23 September 2023.

⁶⁷¹ https://www.chiapasparalelo.com.translate.goog/noticias/chiapas/2019/04/detienen-a-mujer-que-trafficaba-monos-cara-blanca-y-osos-perezosos/?x_tr_sl=es&x_tr_tl=en&x_tr_hl=en&x_tr_pto=wapp. Accessed on 23 September 2023.

⁶⁷² <https://www.prensalibre.com/ciudades/guatemala-ciudades/decomiso-de-13-monos-evidencia-presencia-de-bandas-transnacionales-de-trafico-de-animales-en-guatemala/>. Accessed on 23 September 2023.

Guatemala <> Belize

Various media reports indicate there is systematic smuggling of wildlife between Guatemala and Belize. Criminal networks involving local farmers, intermediaries in cities and towns, people of Asian origin, and corrupt government officials allegedly exploit the lack of governance and severe poverty in this disputed and lawless border area to traffic drugs, wildlife, and timber (including rosewood, which is highly prized in Asia). Illicit deforestation in this area has skyrocketed. Illicit activity is concentrated in the southern area between the two countries. Here, Guatemalans smuggle wildlife poached in Belize's Chiquibul National Park into Guatemala. In the northern border area, it is the other way around, with Belizeans smuggling wildlife poached in the Maya Biosphere Reserve in Petén to Belize.⁶⁷³

Guatemala > El Salvador (> Europe/USA)

It has been reported that Guatemala serves as a wildlife smuggling route into El Salvador, from where animals are smuggled to Europe. Guatemalan reptiles (including Guatemalan beaded lizards, *Heloderma horridum*; and Guatemalan spiny-tailed iguanas, *Ctenosaura palearis*) are reportedly collected by locals, who sell them to local buyers, who then resell to a main trader, before export to Europe or the USA.⁶⁷⁴ No incidents were identified in Guatemala to corroborate this smuggling route. However, in El Salvador a Salvadoran man was arrested in May 2018 for advertising on social media four parrots that had been poached in Petén, Guatemala.⁶⁷⁵

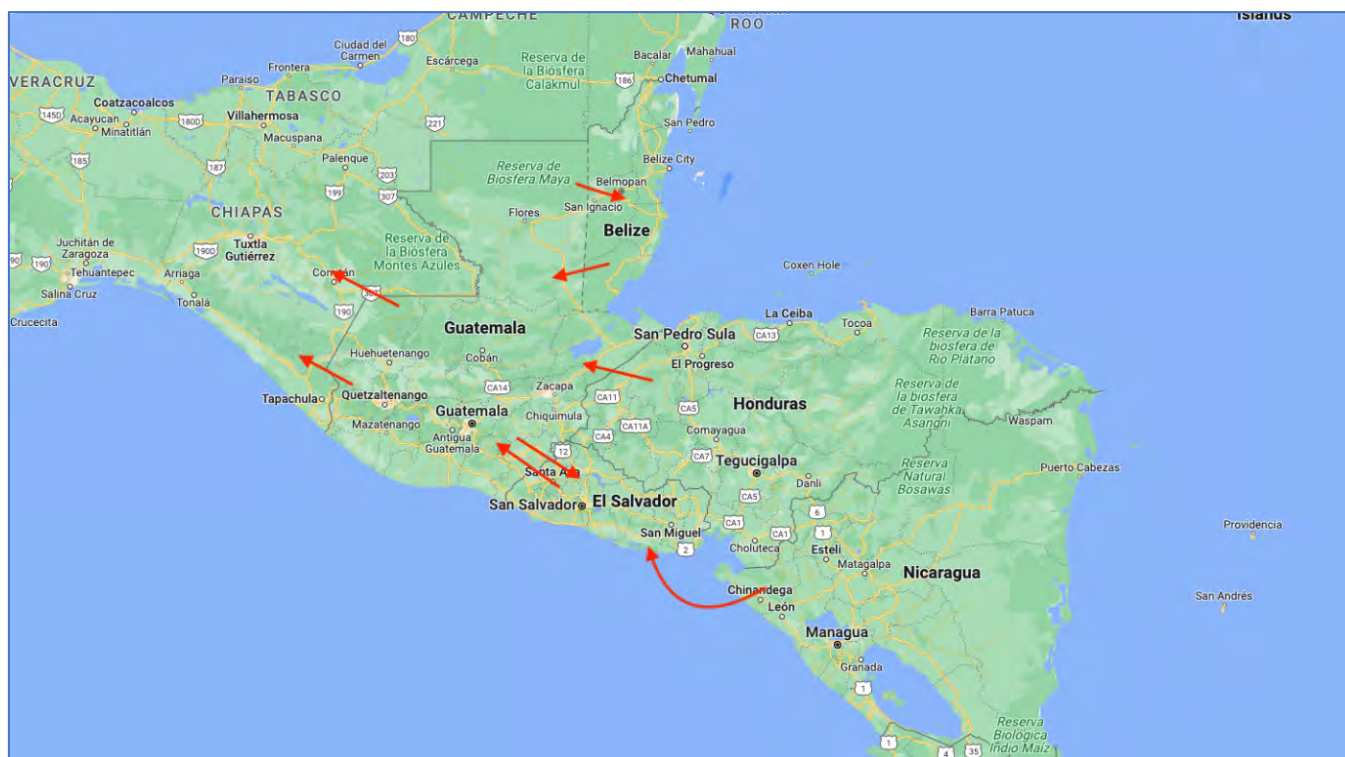


Figure 437: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes to/from/through Guatemala based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022

⁶⁷³ <https://blogs.elespectador.com/medio-ambiente/mongabay-latam/la-falta-control-guatemala-belize-beneficia-los-trafficantes-especies-silvestres>; <https://insightcrime.org/news/brief/eco-trafficking-thrives-lawless-guatemala-belize-border/>. Accessed 22 September 2023.

⁶⁷⁴ <https://www.peoplenotpoaching.org/law-enforcement-lizards-guatemala>. Accessed on 23 September 2023.

⁶⁷⁵ <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/MARN-repatría-cuatro-aves-exóticas-a-Petén-en-Guatemala-20180914-0110.html>. Accessed on 23 September 2023.

Law enforcement efforts

Thirty-five individuals were arrested in 27 seizure and poaching incidents reported in the media between 2017 and 2022. Therefore 51% of incidents result in arrest, which is considerably higher than the regional average of 27%. It is unclear how many of these arrests lead to prosecution. However, in September 2022, in one case which was publicised, a woman was sentenced to five years in prison and a fine of Q10 million (over US\$1.2 million)⁶⁷⁶ for illegal possession of eight whistling ducks, eight snakes, two turtles, and two endangered yellow-headed amazon parrots (*Amazona oratrix*, CITES Appendix I).⁶⁷⁷ It should be noted that this is the minimum sentence for wildlife trafficking in Guatemala: under the Guatemalan wildlife law the penalty for wildlife trafficking is between five and ten years imprisonment and a fine of between Q10 million and Q20 million.⁶⁷⁸

The actual number of arrests for crimes against flora and fauna is higher than what can be gleaned from media reports about seizures and poaching incidents. For example, in August 2022, Guatemala's Nature Protection Division (División de Protección a la Naturaleza, DIPRONA), of the National Civil Police (Policía Nacional Civil, PNC) reported that between 1 January and 1 August 2022, 517 people had been arrested for crimes against flora and fauna. Most arrests were for illegal logging and other flora crimes, however; only 11 arrests were related to illegal hunting, sales, and trafficking of wild fauna.⁶⁷⁹

Even so, in an interview in 2018, the head of DIPRONA acknowledged that a lack of personnel to serve the 19 delegations in Guatemala hampers the country's ability to combat wildlife crime. In 2018, DIPRONA had 612 agents assigned to the unit, divided into three teams.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁶ Xe.com currency rate on 21 September 2023.

⁶⁷⁷ <https://republica.gt/seguridad-y-justicia/condenan-a-10-anos-de-carcel-a-mujer-que-tenia-pijijes-loros-y-serpientes-sin-permiso-ambiental-2022971060>. Accessed on 21 September 2023.

⁶⁷⁸ Ley de Áreas Protegidas, Decreto No. 4-89.

⁶⁷⁹ <https://agn.gt/reportan-mas-de-500-capturas-por-delitos-contr-la-flora-y-fauna/>. Accessed on 21 September 2023.

⁶⁸⁰ <https://www.prensalibre.com/ciudades/sedados-con-pastillas-o-alcohol-y-atados-en-tubos-plasticos-las-cruelles-formas-de-trafficar-animales-silvestres/>. Accessed on 23 September 2023.

Honduras

Honduras

General overview

In Honduras, 22 seizures and six poaching incidents were recorded between 2017 and 2022, which together involved a minimum number of 552 animals. Some 93% were live specimens, with the balance comprised of 6% dead specimens and 1% parts and products.

Of all seized animals, 46% concerned birds (254 specimens); followed by reptiles with 30% (164 specimens); and mammals, with 24% (134 specimens). No amphibians were reported to be seized.

Media reporting on wildlife poaching and trafficking in Honduras is scant. The issue receives little attention, and where incidents are reported, very little detail is provided on the perpetrator(s), species involved, and relevant circumstances. Where possible, the exact (sub)species was identified on the basis of photo(s) provided in the article.

Unique characteristics

- Trafficking of psittacids, including scarlet macaws
- Honduran snakes trafficked to global pet market
- Iguanas trafficked for their meat
- Weak border controls
- Low seizure rate

Number of incidents reported in the media

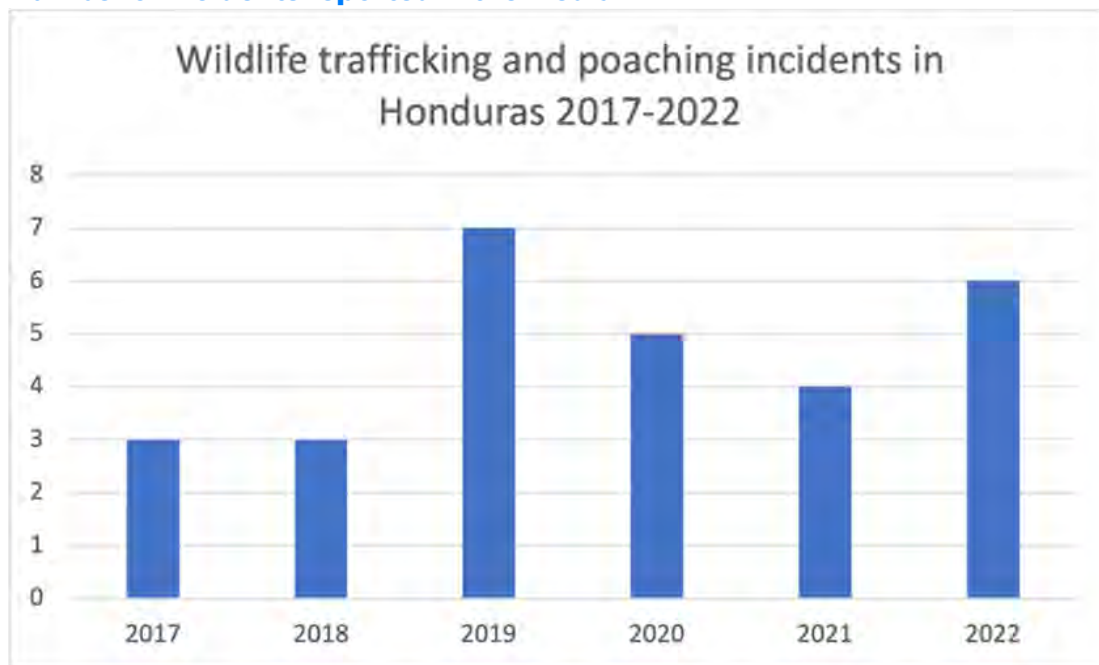


Figure 448: Wildlife trafficking and poaching incidents in Honduras between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Number of animals involved

The table and figure below show the numbers of birds, reptiles, and mammals reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022.

Table 12: Animals seized or poached in Honduras between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Birds	28	3	18	15	119	71	254
Reptiles	45	1	4	0	2	112	164
Mammals	14	90	13	4	10	3	134
TOTAL	87	94	35	19	131	186	

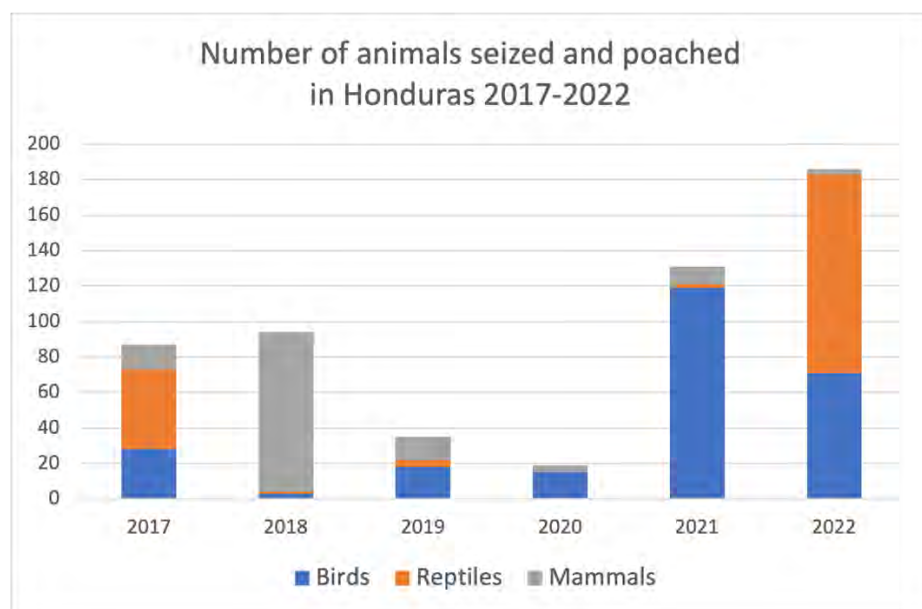


Figure 79: Number of animals seized or poached in Honduras between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

In July 2023, a media report noted that Honduran authorities seized 9,352 wild animals between 2005 and 2022. However, most of these were seized between 2004 and 2006, with a huge peak of 3,680 animals seized in 2005. Since 2013, the annual number of seized animals varied between 19 and 37 specimens, with a slight rise to 46 specimens in 2022. The media report provides no explanation for the drop in seizure figures.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁸¹ <https://www.elheraldo.hn/elheraldoplus/data/9352-animales-silvestres-decomisaron-a-trafficantes-BP14393345>. Accessed on 28 September 2023.

Species most targeted

Birds

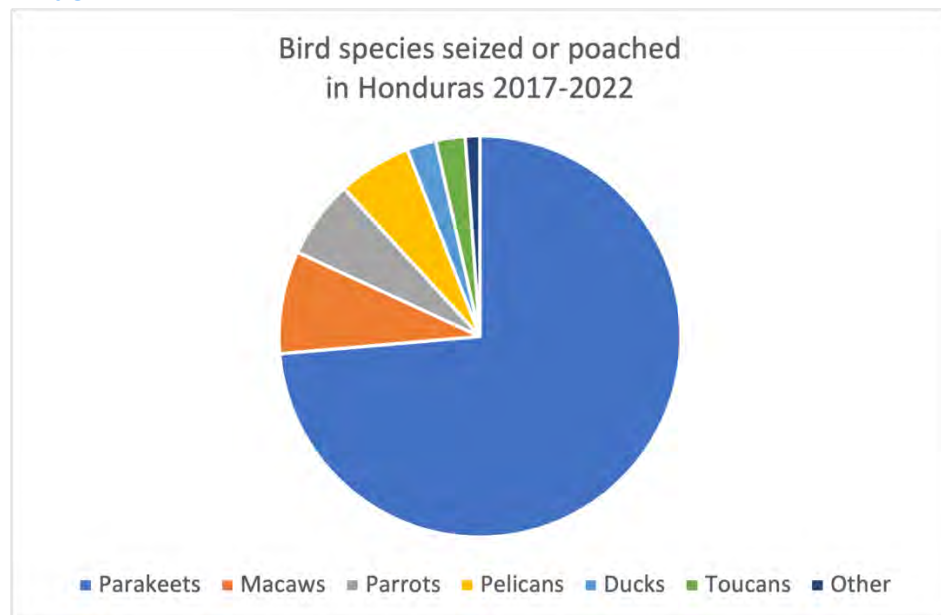


Figure 80: Bird species seized or poached in Honduras between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Parakeets are the most heavily trafficked bird species in Honduras. Media reports of seizures seldom specify the subspecies; however, at least 63% of the 187 parakeets seized between 2017 and 2022 involved Pacific parakeets (*Psittacara strenuus*). These 63% are made up by 118 birds that were seized on 1 October 2021 at the El Amatillo border crossing on the border with El Salvador in the south of Honduras. On that day, Honduran Border Police and the Secretaría de Recursos Naturales y Ambiente (Serna) arrested two men (one Nicaraguan, one Salvadoran) who were attempting to smuggle the 118 parakeets in their truck from Nicaragua to El Salvador via Honduras, concealed in fruit boxes. The law enforcers were alerted to the presence of the birds by the chirping sounds they were making. The birds had suffered from dehydration and the overcrowded conditions, and ten had already died of suffocation. Authorities estimated the birds would have been worth the equivalent of US\$79 in Honduras, while in El Salvador they would have been sold for US\$100.⁶⁸²

Scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*) are under serious threat from trafficking in Honduras. This iconic species, the national bird of Honduras, is popular as a pet within Honduras and on the international market. Scarlet macaws inhabit forests from northern Central America to the southern Amazon, but their population has declined precipitously due to poaching. Today, around 600 scarlet macaws remain in the forests of the Gracias a Dios department in the far eastern tip of Honduras near the border with Nicaragua. This area, also known as La Mosquitia, is a known hotspot for scarlet macaw trafficking as well as other wildlife and illicit commodities.⁶⁸³

This study found that 21 scarlet macaws were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2021. Some had been used as tourist exhibits or kept as pets, but there were a few incidents that point to trafficking

⁶⁸² <https://archivos.latribuna.hn/2011/10/01/decomisan-mas-de-200-aves-en-el-amatillo/>; <https://insightcrime.org/news/brief/honduras-seizes-parakeets-smuggled-from-nicaragua/>. Accessed 25 September 2023.

⁶⁸³ <https://news.mongabay.com/2019/07/la-mosquitia-dangerous-territory-for-scarlet-macaws-in-honduras/>. Accessed 25 September 2023.

activity. Noteworthy is a seizure in November 2017 of twelve specimens along with 69 other live animals that were stored behind a restaurant in Siguatepeque, central Honduras.⁶⁸⁴ This large a quantity might indicate the birds were meant to be commercialized. Another noteworthy incident happened in October 2022 in Sierra de Agalta, eastern Honduras. During a routine patrol, military officers arrested a man carrying two juvenile macaws on a motorbike. Possibly they had been poached in the nearby Sierra de Agalta National Park.

Reptiles

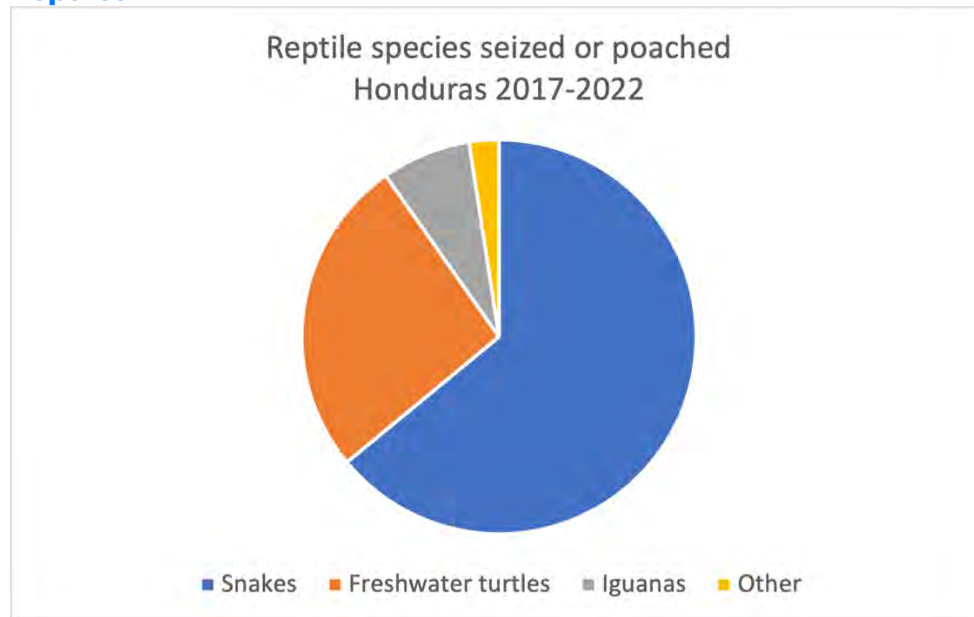


Figure 81: Reptile species seized or poached in Honduras between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Honduran snakes are known to be trafficked abroad.⁶⁸⁵ Of the 164 reptiles reported to be seized in Honduras between 2017 and 2022, 64% concerned snakes (105 specimens). This number is heavily skewed by one incident, however. In August 2022, a Honduran man was arrested at the Pavana border crossing checkpoint in the south near the Nicaraguan border, carrying 104 snakes and eight lizards in a box on a passenger bus. He had travelled from the north coast, and it can be assumed that he intended to smuggle the reptiles to Nicaragua.⁶⁸⁶ The reptiles concerned species that are in high demand in the global pet market, including milk snakes (*Lampropeltis triangulum*); March's palm pit vipers (*Bothriechis marchi*); eyelash vipers (*Bothriechis schlegelii*); green vine snakes (*Oxybelis fulgidus*); and yellow rat snakes (*Spilotes pullatus*). The man also carried seven smooth helmeted lizards (*Corytophanes cristatus*) and one green spiny lizard (*Sceloporus malachiticus*). None of the species are CITES-listed. It is not unlikely that the reptiles were to be exported from Nicaragua as Nicaraguan specimens. An indication that this may be the case is that green spiny lizards and smooth helmeted lizards are offered for sale in Europe as originating from Nicaragua, priced at €79.95 and €119.95 respectively.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁴ <https://www.mp.hn/publicaciones/decomisan-81-animales-en-restaurante-de-siguatepeque/>. Accessed 26 Sept 2023.

⁶⁸⁵ E.g. in January 2004 Honduran authorities seized 25 endemic rosy boas (*Lichanura trivirgata*) that were destined for the US: <https://www.mypainview.com/news/article/Se-incautan-25-boas-rosadas-en-Honduras-8758566.php>. Accessed on 27 September 2023.

⁶⁸⁶ <https://www.tunota.com/honduras-hoy/articulo/serpientes-lagartijas-trafico-ilegal-hondureno-choluteca-2022-08-03>. Accessed on 27 September 2023.

⁶⁸⁷ See e.g.: <https://www.heevis.nl/products/sceloporus-malachiticus> and <https://reptilia.nl/terrarium-dieren/chordata-chordadieren/reptilia-reptielen/sauria-hagedissen/corytophanes-cristatus/>

Freshwater turtles (of the genus *Trachemys*) are trafficked for consumption of their meat and are popular in the global pet trade. Two incidents were recorded involving 43 specimens. One concerned a man who had advertised five fried turtles on Facebook, in October 2017.⁶⁸⁸ The other incident involved 38 turtles that were seized along with 47 other animals from behind a restaurant in Siguatepeque, in November 2017.⁶⁸⁹

Noteworthy, finally, is the traffic of iguanas. A local tradition of eating iguanas and spiny-tailed iguanas (in popular dishes including spiny-tailed iguana soup and iguana in coconut milk) has reportedly led to overexploitation.⁶⁹⁰ Twelve iguanas were seized in five different incidents in Honduras, including two black spiny-tailed iguanas (*Ctenosaura similis*); three green iguanas (*Iguana iguana*); and the seven smooth helmeted iguanas mentioned above.

Two seizures that took place in El Salvador demonstrate there is significant cross-border smuggling of green iguanas and black spiny-tailed iguanas from Honduras to El Salvador. In March 2019, the Salvadoran Border Police arrested a Honduran man with 25 black spiny-tailed iguanas and 14 green iguanas in a briefcase. He had caught the reptiles in Honduras and was taking them in a boat bound for El Salvador.⁶⁹¹ In February 2021, Salvadoran authorities at the border crossing point El Naranjo in eastern El Salvador arrested four Hondurans for attempting to smuggle 29 black spiny-tailed iguanas into El Salvador from Honduras.⁶⁹²

Mammals

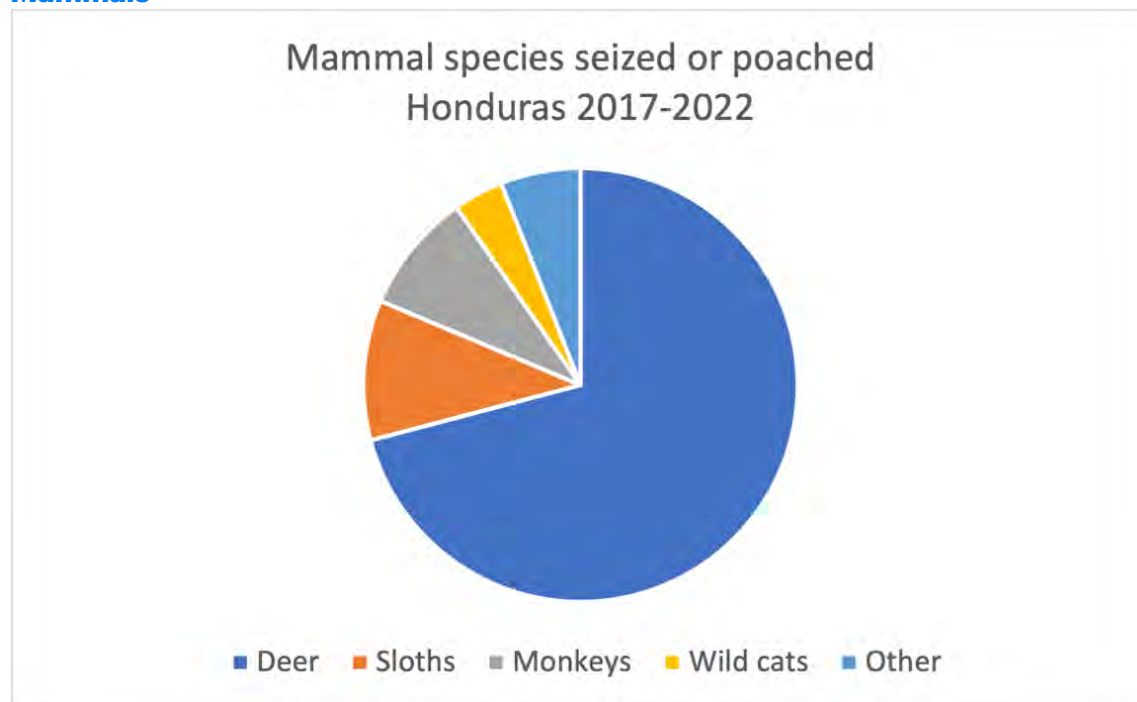


Figure 452: Mammal species seized or poached in Honduras between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

⁶⁸⁸ <https://tiempo.hn/indignacion-hondureno-pone-la-venta-carne-tortuga-redes-sociales/>. Accessed on 27 September 2023.

⁶⁸⁹ <https://www.mp.hn/publicaciones/decomisan-81-animales-en-restaurante-de-siguapeque/>. Accessed on 27 September 2023.

⁶⁹⁰ <https://dialogo-americas.com/articulos/honduran-armed-forces-guardians-of-wildlife/>. Accessed on 27 September 2023.

⁶⁹¹ <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/Capturan-a-hondureno-cuando-transportaba-25-garrobos-y-14-iguanas-en-Pasaquina-20190325-0304.html>. Accessed on 27 September 2023.

⁶⁹² <https://lapagina.com.sv/nacionales/fuerza-armada-detuvo-a-cuatro-hondurenos-que-trataban-ingresar-de-forma-ilegal-fauna-silvestre-al-pais/>. Accessed on 27 September 2023.

White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) make up 71% of all mammals reported to be seized in Honduras between 2017 and 2022. Ninety-five live specimens were seized from private owners in various municipalities, from a ranch, and from a restaurant owner. The white-tailed deer is a protected species in Honduras and listed in CITES Appendix II. It was declared the national mammal of Honduras in 1993⁶⁹³, which may explain their popularity as a pet in the country. In addition, they are hunted for their meat.

Fourteen sloths were seized in two different incidents, representing 10.5% of all mammals seized. In November 2018, ten brown-throated three-toed sloths (*Bradypus variegatus*) including seven adults and three babies, were seized from a village in La Mosquitia, in eastern Honduras. Possibly, they had been taken from the nearby Reserva de la biosfera de Río Plátano and were intended to be sold as pets.⁶⁹⁴ In January 2019, four Hoffman's two-toed sloths (*Choloepus hoffmani*) were seized from a hotel/illegal zoo on Islas de la Bahía off the northern coast of Honduras, where they were probably kept to attract tourists.⁶⁹⁵

Monkeys are the most often seized mammals in Honduras. A total of twelve monkeys was seized in nine different incidents. Nine of these concerned white-faced capuchin monkeys (*Cebus capucinus*) kept in illegal tourist exhibits, zoos, or as pets. Two black-headed spider monkeys (*Ateles fusciceps*) were seized from deplorable conditions in the town of Tegucigalpa.⁶⁹⁶ A noteworthy incident concerned the seizure of a dead Geoffroy's spider monkey (*Ateles geoffroyi*, CITES II) in September 2019 in Puerto Cortés on the northwest coast. Also seized were a boa skin, a black spiny-tailed iguana skin, two live lowland pacas, and one live armadillo. A man was arrested on suspicion of wildlife trafficking. The monkey was found crucified on a wooden plank where it was in the process of being dissected.⁶⁹⁷ It is possible the monkey was intended to be sold as a taxidermy, which can be a profitable business. In the USA, a spider monkey taxidermy is sold for over US\$3,000.⁶⁹⁸

These seizure numbers probably represent only a fraction of the actual trade: on 13 July 2023, the head of the internal border control post in Pavana, Choluteca, said in an interview in the Honduran newspaper *El Heraldo* they had recently seized 12 white-faced capuchins who he believed were smuggled from Nicaragua.⁶⁹⁹

Ocelots and jaguars are targeted by poachers out of retaliation for preying on livestock and/or for their parts. This study identified four poaching/trafficking incidents involving three ocelots and two jaguars. In August 2020, an ocelot (*Leopardus pardalis*) that had been shot in the mountains of Parque Nacional Mico Quemado in the north was rescued⁷⁰⁰, while in June 2022, the military unit *El Primer Batallón*

⁶⁹³ <http://www.cich.org/publicaciones/09/OdocoileusVirginianus.pdf>. Accessed on 27 September 2023.

⁶⁹⁴ <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/fiscalia-de-honduras-recupera-10-osos-perezosos-en-la-mosquitia-OVlp1235597#image-1>. Accessed on 27 September 2023.

⁶⁹⁵ <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/decomisan-varios-animales-exoticos-hotel-islas-la-bahia-honduras-PCLP1254803>. Accessed on 27 September 2023.

⁶⁹⁶ <https://www.laprensa.hn/sucesos/rescatan-dos-monos-arana-eran-maltratados-aldea-tegucigalpa-CXLP1471012#image-1>. Accessed on 27 September 2023.

⁶⁹⁷ <https://www.laprensa.hn/sucesos/tres-hombres-detenido-operacion-independencia-puerto-cortes-OYLP1318251>. Accessed on 27 September 2023.

⁶⁹⁸ <https://www.safariworkstaxidermysales.com/products/premier-spider-monkey-full-body-lifesize-taxidermy-mount-gb4146>. Accessed on 27 September 2023.

⁶⁹⁹ <https://www.elheraldo.hn/elheraldoplus/data/9352-animales-silvestres-decomisaron-a-trafficantes-BP14393345>. Accessed on 28 September 2023.

⁷⁰⁰ <https://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/rescatan-tigrillo-montana-mico-quemado-el-progreso-yoro-honduras-EHLP1399872#image-1>. Accessed on 28 September 2023.

Verde de Protección Ambiental rescued two ocelot cubs in the forests of the Olancho department in eastern Honduras. Their mother had likely been killed by poachers.⁷⁰¹

In October 2022, the police rescued a juvenile jaguar (*Panthera onca*) that had been shot in Parque Nacional El Cusuco in the far northwest, close to the border with Guatemala.⁷⁰² In February 2020, a group of men killed a jaguar that had killed a calf in La Mosquitia in eastern Honduras near the border with Nicaragua. The incident became known because images of the men carrying the dead animal were circulated on social media.⁷⁰³

Key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes

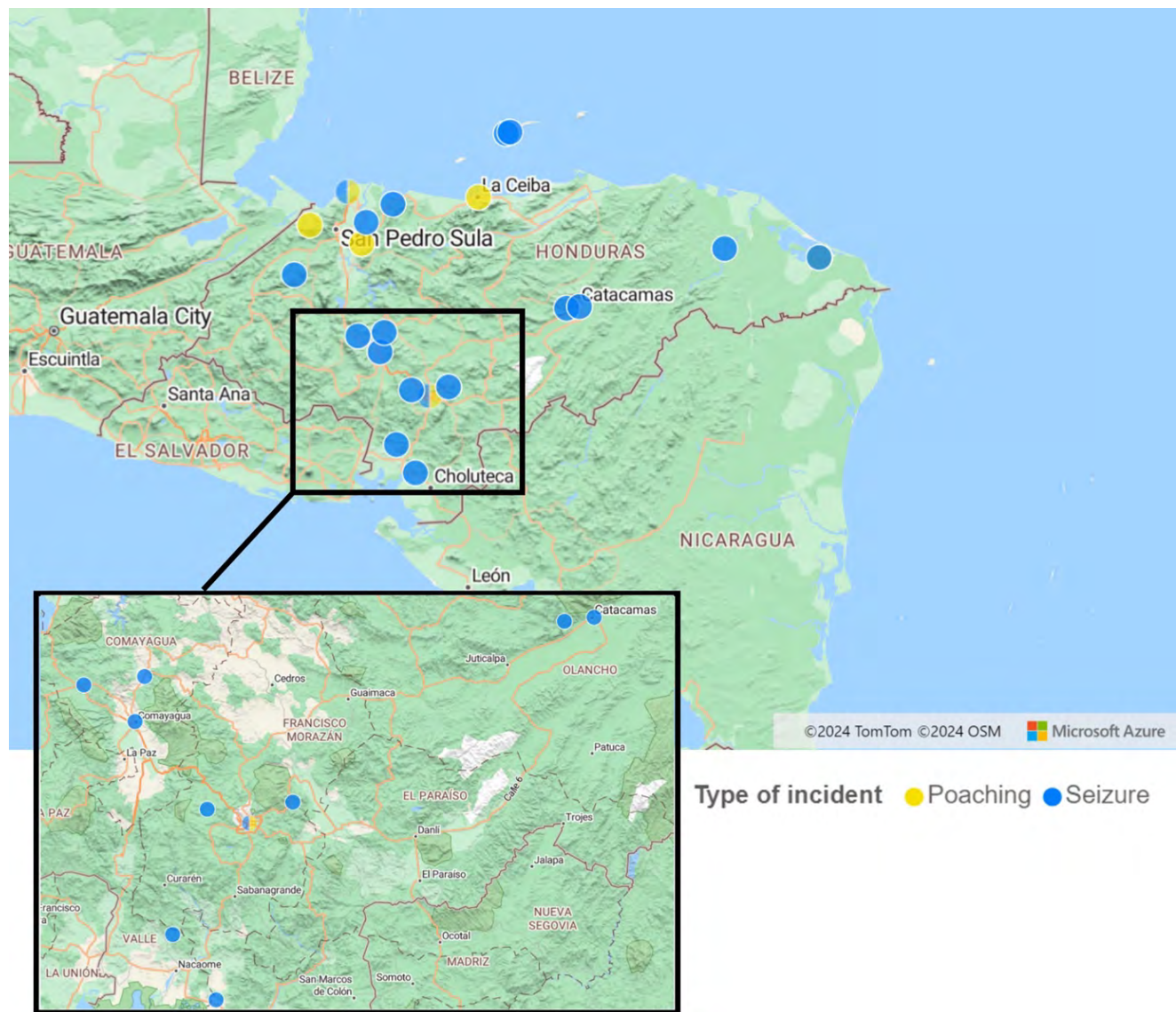


Figure 83: Locations of seizures and poaching incidents in Honduras reported between 2017 and 2022

⁷⁰¹ <https://www.oncenoticias.hn/autoridades-rescatan-a-dos-cachorros-de-ocelote-abandonados/>. Accessed on 28 September 2023.

⁷⁰² <https://www.laprensa.hn/sanpedro/video-captan-a-pequeno-jaguar-herido-de-bala-por-un-cazador-en-el-merendon-JE10501329>.

Accessed on 28 September 2023.

⁷⁰³ <https://notibomba.com/honduras-jaguar-en-peligro-de-extincion-es-sacrificado-cuando-se-alimentaba/>. Accessed on 28 September 2023.

This study did not identify any wildlife seizures in Honduras that took place in physical sales outlets such as street markets or shops. Therefore, it is unclear to what extent markets and shops play a role in supplying illicit wildlife in Honduras. However, it is reportedly common to find people selling all sorts of wild animals along the road to Choluteca, in Valle (south Honduras near the Nicaraguan border), including black spiny-tailed iguanas and green iguanas.⁷⁰⁴

Sales on social media

The only incident pertaining to sales on social media between 2017 and 2022 was that of the man advertising fried turtle meat on Facebook mentioned above. However, media have reported that illegal online trade is significant in Honduras. For example, on the website <https://hn.clasificados.st/> protected species like scarlet macaws have been observed for sale, but also exotic species like veiled chameleons (*Chamaeleo calytratus*, native to the Arabian peninsula) and bearded dragons (*Pogona*, native to Australia), indicating there is a market for exotic pets in Honduras.⁷⁰⁵ A quick scan of this website as part of this study on 28 September 2023 identified advertisements for parrots, parrot chicks, fertilised parrot eggs, macaws, and caiques, as well as non-native cockatoos and African grey parrots.

Convergence

The wildlife seizures recorded in Honduras between 2017 and 2022 provide no indications of convergence with other types of organized crime. There was a seizure of three wild animals (a yellow-crowned amazon, scarlet macaw, and white-faced capuchin) during a raid on the home of El Cholo Houston, the alleged leader of crime gang Mara Salvatrucha MS-13, but these were most likely part of his pet collection.⁷⁰⁶

Transboundary trafficking routes

Its location and terrain have contributed to Honduras being a known hub for the regional trafficking of illicit goods and people between South America and the USA. The Honduran-Guatemalan border is notorious for clandestine border crossings and border police often lack the necessary resources for patrols. Additionally, the Honduran navy is substantially lacking in operational capacity. The Honduran government's territorial control is limited by the vast forest cover that conceals various criminal activities in rural areas and criminal networks in urban areas.⁷⁰⁷

Honduras > El Salvador

Two seizures that took place in El Salvador provide evidence of wildlife smuggling from Honduras to El Salvador. In March 2019, Salvadoran border police in Pasaquina near Honduras' southern border arrested a Honduran man carrying 25 black spiny-tailed iguanas and 14 green iguanas in a briefcase. He had caught the reptiles in Honduras and was taking them in a boat bound for El Salvador.⁷⁰⁸ In February 2021, Salvadoran authorities at the border crossing point El Naranjo in eastern El Salvador arrested four Hondurans for attempting to smuggle 29 black spiny-tailed iguanas (*Ctenosaura similis*) into El Salvador from Honduras.⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁴ <https://www.elheraldo.hn/elheraldoplus/data/9352-animales-silvestres-decomisaron-a-trafficantes-BP14393345> Accessed on 28 September 2023.

⁷⁰⁵ <https://www.elheraldo.hn/elheraldoplus/data/9352-animales-silvestres-decomisaron-a-trafficantes-BP14393345>. Accessed on 28 September 2023.

⁷⁰⁶ <https://tiempo.hn/incautan-mono-loro-y-quacamaya-que-pertenecian-a-el-cholo-houston/>. Accessed 28 Sept. 2023.

⁷⁰⁷ Global Organized Crime Index 2023: <https://ocindex.net/country/honduras>. Accessed on 27 September 2023.

⁷⁰⁸ <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/Capturan-a-hondureno-cuando-transportaba-25-garrobos-y-14-iguanas-en-Pasaquina--20190325-0304.html>. Accessed on 28 September 2023.

⁷⁰⁹ <https://lapagina.com.sv/nacionales/fuerza-armada-detuvo-a-cuatro-hondurenos-que-trataban-ingresar-de-forma-ilegal-fauna-silvestre-al-pais/>. Accessed on 28 September 2023.

Nicaragua > Honduras > El Salvador (> Guatemala > Mexico > USA)

Honduras is not only a destination for wildlife smuggled from Nicaragua, but also a transit point for smuggling from Nicaragua (and possibly from countries further south) to El Salvador. In El Salvador, they are sold in San Salvador's Mercado Central and/or smuggled further north to Mexico and the USA. Examples identified by this study include the 118 Pacific parakeets seized at the Nicaragua/Honduras border in October 2021.

Honduras > Nicaragua

As mentioned in the species most targeted section, La Mosquitia in eastern Honduras is a known hotspot for trafficking of illicit commodities, including scarlet macaws and other wildlife. This illicit activity is facilitated by a lack of government control in this area. Reportedly, trafficking is fuelled by foreigners who come to the area to buy macaws. Investigations by the public prosecutor's office have observed a Chinese national paying locals to steal hatchlings and eggs from the nests, and birds being smuggled along the route passing through the Honduran villages of Mocerón and Rus Rus and across the Nicaraguan border through the village of Leimus.⁷¹⁰

Wildlife is also smuggled across Honduras' southern border with Nicaragua, as the seizure in August 2022 of the 112 snakes and lizards (see species most targeted section) illustrates.

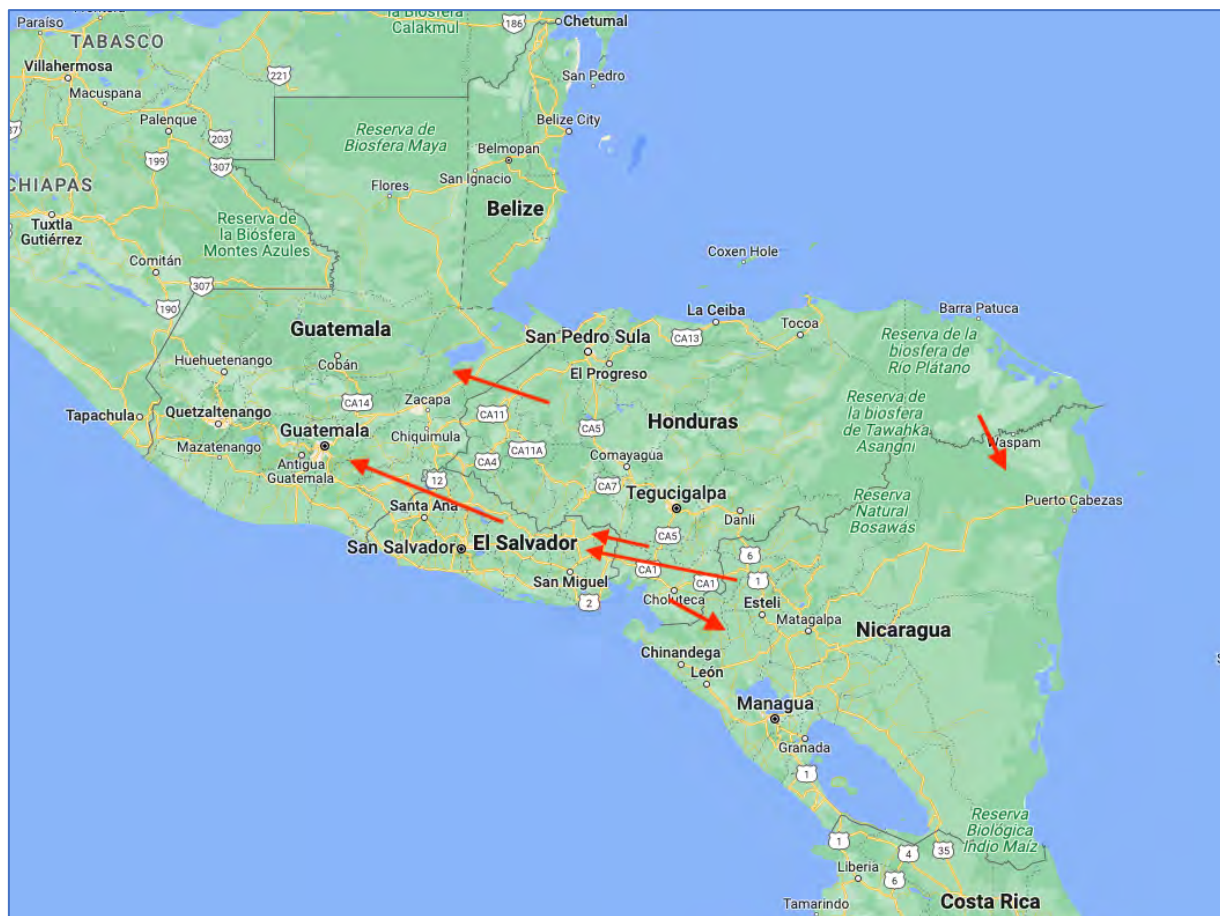


Figure 464: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes to/from Honduras based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022

⁷¹⁰ <https://news.mongabay.com/2019/07/la-mosquitia-dangerous-territory-for-scarlet-macaws-in-honduras/>. Accessed 25 September 2023.

Law enforcement efforts

A total number of 18 people were arrested in eight incidents. Therefore, 29% of incidents resulted in arrest (just over the regional average of 27%). One case was identified where an individual was successfully prosecuted for wildlife trafficking: in March 2019, a man was sentenced to three years in prison for offering four parrot chicks for sale in a park in the town of Valle de Ángeles.⁷¹¹

Given the low number of law enforcement interventions and animals seized, tackling wildlife crime does not appear to be a high priority for Honduran law enforcement. In addition, law enforcement effectiveness is impaired by the limited government control in parts of the country where vast forest cover conceals various criminal activities, including in border regions such as in the northeast.⁷¹²

On 30 May 2022, a new military unit was established dedicated to stopping forest clearing, illegal mining, and combatting drug activity with the aim of safeguarding the country's natural resources. The new unit, named El Primer Batallón Verde de Protección Ambiental, will initially be operating in the Department of Olancho, with the intention of joining forces and combating environmental crime in the Biosphere of the Río Plátano and the Sierra de Agalta.⁷¹³

⁷¹¹ <https://tiempo.hn/honduras-por-vender-loros-lo-condenan-a-tres-anos-de-prision/>. Accessed on 28 September 2023.

⁷¹² Global Organized Crime Index 2023: <https://ocindex.net/country/honduras>. Accessed on 27 September 2023.

⁷¹³ <https://www.oncenoticias.hn/autoridades-rescatan-a-dos-cachorros-de-ocelote-abandonados/>. Accessed on 28 September 2023.

Mexico

Mexico

General overview

Illegal wildlife exploitation in Mexico far surpasses that of any of the 17 other Hispanic American countries that were part of this study, both in terms of quantity as well as diversity of species trafficked. A minimum of 46,244 animals were involved in 512 seizures and 30 poaching incidents reported in the media between 2017 and 2022.⁷¹⁴ Twenty-three seizures of a total number of 486 specimens involved shipments of wildlife originating in Mexico that were seized abroad (China, Germany, USA, The Netherlands).

Some 98.5% (45,523 specimens) of all wildlife seized concerned live animals, with the balance comprised of 1.1% dead specimens and 0.4% parts and products and bushmeat.

By far the most affected species group are reptiles, representing 80.3% of all wildlife reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022 (37,162 specimens); followed by birds with 17.2% (7,982 specimens); mammals with 2% (838 specimens); and amphibians with 0.5% (271 specimens).

Of the 486 wildlife specimens seized outside Mexico in 23 incidents, 81% (396 specimens) concerned reptiles; 10% were amphibians (47 specimens); 6% birds (30 specimens); and 3% mammals (13 specimens). All but one of these specimens (a piece of python skin seized in China in 2020) concerned live animals—although 21 specimens were dead at the time of seizure. The high representation of reptiles in transboundary smuggling incidents can, at least partly, be explained by the fact that reptiles are generally easier to hide and can go without food and water longer than the other species groups.

Unique characteristics

- High volume of seized wildlife
- High % of live animal trade
- Endemic reptile and amphibian species trafficked to global pet markets and domestically
- High levels of songbird and psittacid trafficking
- Increase in monkey trafficking domestically and to the USA
- Trafficking of tigers, lions, and jaguars
- Illegal zoos owned by Mexican crime syndicates

⁷¹⁴ This number would have been higher but for the fact that seizures reported in press releases by Mexico's environmental protection agency, PROFEPA, could not be accessed as their website (www.profepa.gob.mx) was not available during the data collection for Mexico, in July and August 2023.

Number of incidents reported in the media

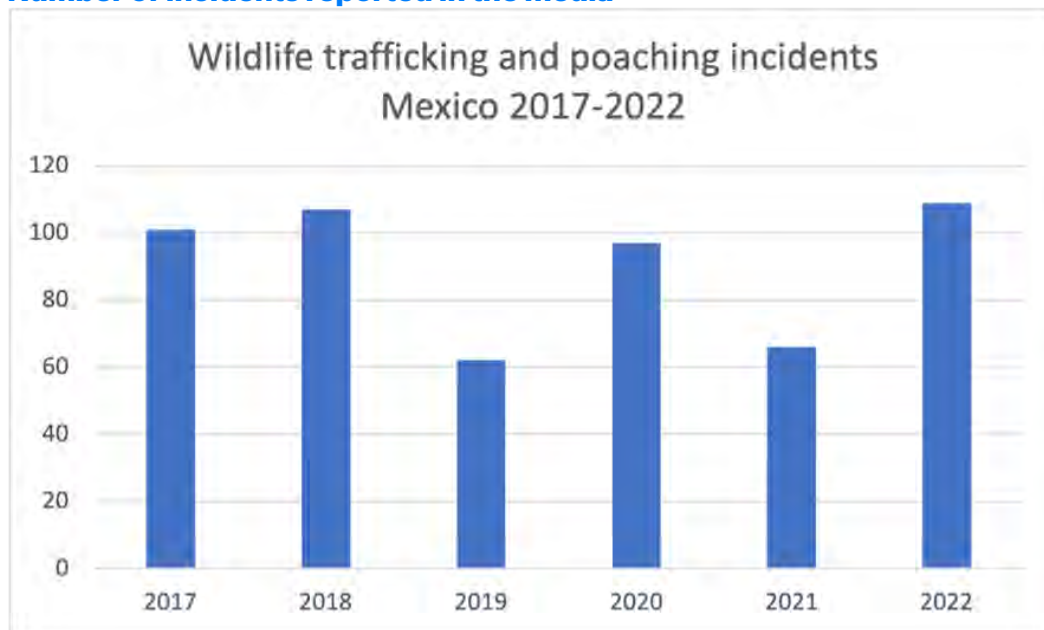


Figure 8547: Wildlife trafficking and poaching incidents implicating Mexico between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Number of animals involved

The table and figure below show the numbers of reptiles, birds, mammals, and amphibians reported to be seized or poached in Mexico between 2017 and 2022.

Table 13: Number of animals seized or poached in/originating from Mexico between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Reptiles	1009	1095	3688	30417	720	224	37153
Birds	3340	1998	78	1309	278	979	7982
Mammals	125	191	93	122	28	279	838
Amphibians	166	42	10	11	15	27	271
TOTAL	4640	3326	3869	31859	1041	1509	

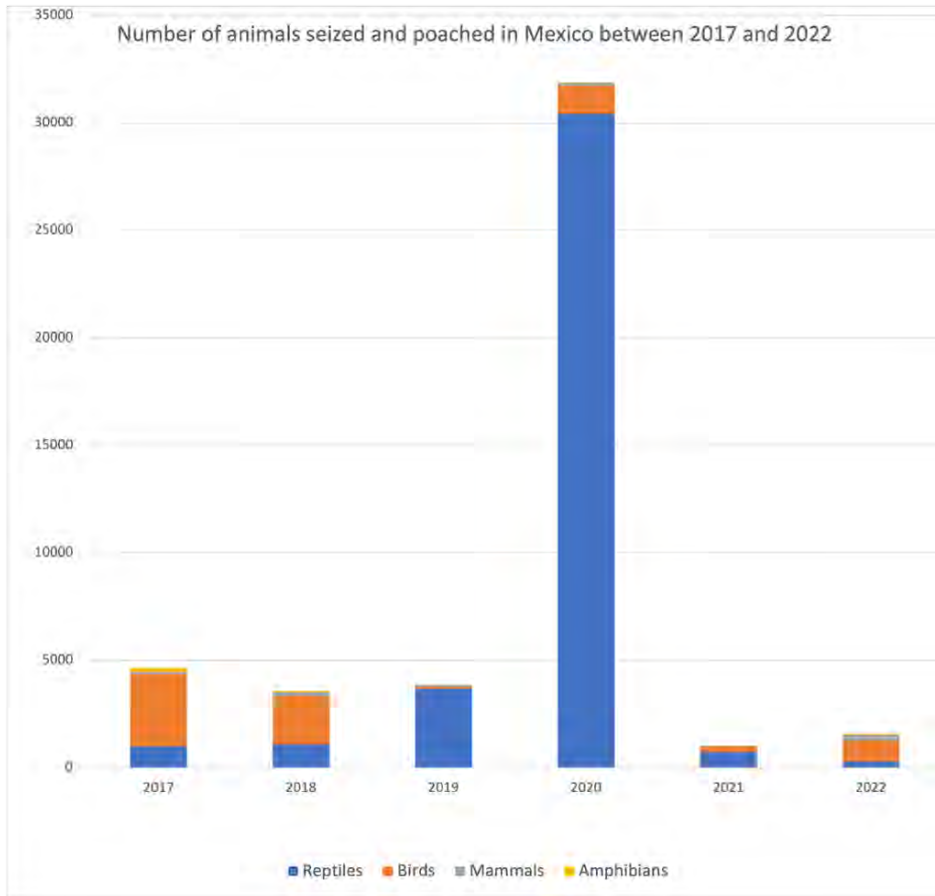


Figure 48: Number of animals seized or poached in/originating from Mexico between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Illegal trade in non-native species

Most of the wildlife seized in Mexico between 2017 and 2022 concerns species native to Mexico, Central America, and South America. However, there were also frequent seizures of species native to regions outside the Americas, much more so than in any of the other 17 Hispanic American countries that were part of this study. Several seizures took place in pet shops which had rare, exotic CITES I and CITES II species for sale without legal documentation. Mexico has a well-developed market for exotic pets, therefore. Seizures of non-native species often concerned reptiles, originating from Africa (including ball pythons, Mali uromastyx, Savannah monitors, and various chameleon subspecies); Asia (leopard geckos, green tree pythons, pacific ground boas, monitor lizards, Chinese water dragons, and Russian tortoises). Birds native to Asia were also observed (including budgerigars, cockatoos, Indian peafowl, and even a cassowary), as well as mammals (including African and Asiatic lions, tigers, emus, nilgai, and axis deer).

Sources for these non-native species include the USA and Europe. Seizures identified by this study highlight illegal imports of reptiles and amphibians from the USA. The EU is another likely source, as a study on wildlife trafficking between the European Union and Mexico has documented illegal wildlife exports from various EU countries to Mexico.⁷¹⁵

⁷¹⁵ Arroyo-Quiroz, I. and Wyatt, T. (2019). Wildlife trafficking between the European Union and Mexico. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*. 8(3): 23-37. DOI: 10.5204/ijcsd.v8i3.1243.

Species most targeted

Reptiles

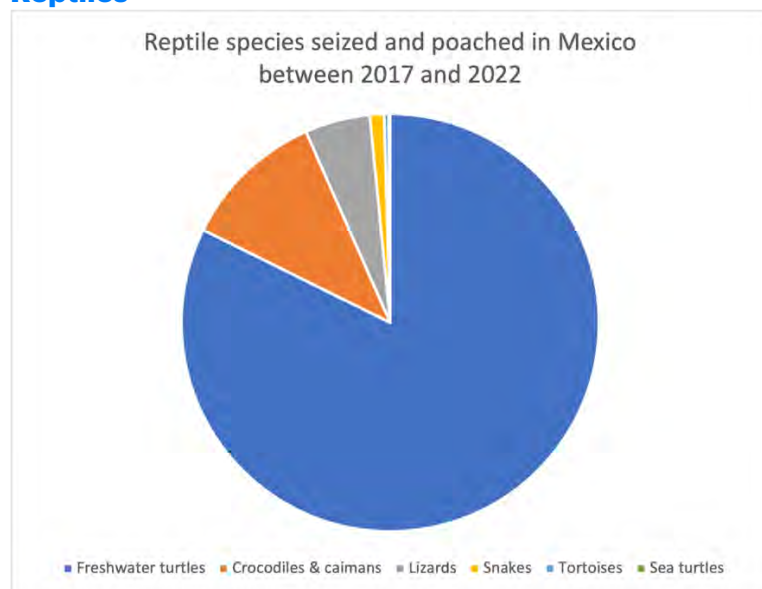


Figure 87: Reptile species seized or poached in/originating from Mexico between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

With 37,153 specimens reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022, the illegal reptile trade in and from Mexico is clearly huge in scale. It also affects a myriad of species, as seizures involved no fewer than 131 different species. Several are endemic to Mexico, such as Mexican spiny-tailed iguana (*Ctenosaura pectinata*); several species of horned lizard (*Phrynosoma* sp.); several species of alligator lizards (*Abronia* sp.); and several snake species. As noted above, this study also identified several reptile species native to Africa and Asia.

Trafficking of freshwater turtles

Freshwater turtles were the most targeted reptile species in Mexico's illegal wildlife trade between 2017 and 2022. A total of 30,262 freshwater turtles were seized, representing 82% of all reptiles seized. This number is made up almost entirely by the 29,502 mud turtles and musk turtles that were seized in two incidents reported in 2020:

- ▶ On 12 May 2020, a shipment of 15,053 freshwater turtles destined for China was seized at Mexico City's airport. Some 260 turtles were already dead at the time of seizure, even before their intended journey to China had begun.⁷¹⁶ There were 10,132 mud turtles: 4,887 white-lipped mud turtles (*Kinosternon leucostomum*); 4,931 Mexican mud turtles (*Kinosternon integrum*); 314 scorpion mud turtles (*Kinosternon scorpioides*); and 4,921 musk turtles, including narrow-bridged musk turtles (*Claudius angustatus*). Most of them showed evidence of being wild caught (for example with hooks in the mouth, typical wounds, scars of wild specimens on the carapace, and visible external parasites) according to Mexico's CITES Scientific Authority.⁷¹⁷
- ▶ A few months later on 26 November 2020, also in Mexico City (Iztapalapa), the Guardia Nacional seized 14,449 mud turtles, along with 661 other reptiles, 69 birds (toucans, macaws, parrots, parakeets, and songbirds), and 283 tarantulas during a raid on two homes. The search was ordered by a judge following a citizen's complaint. The two caretakers of the animals who were present in

⁷¹⁶ <https://udgtv.com/noticias/el-trafico-no-para-decomisa-profepa-15-mil-tortugas-mexicanas-empaquetadas-rumbo-a-china/11452>.

Accessed 4 September 2023.

⁷¹⁷ https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/E-CoP19-Prop-29_0.pdf

the homes during the raid were arrested. The homes belonged to a family that allegedly had been involved in wildlife trafficking for several years. It is unclear whether those responsible were held accountable as no information was found on any follow-up arrests or prosecutions in this case.⁷¹⁸

The massive size of these illegal shipments signifies the extent to which freshwater turtles are targeted by traffickers. They also point to the sophistication of the organisations involved, in their ability to collect and distribute such large shipments.

Experts have expressed concern at the impact of such high levels of harvest on local turtle populations. Unregulated and/or excessive trade is one of the main threats to all turtles of the genus *Kinosternon* and can lead to the extirpation of entire local populations. In Mexico and Guatemala, scorpion mud turtles (*Kinosternon scorpioides*) are harvested in large numbers for food, mainly during religious festivities such as lent. Mud turtles are historically and currently among the most heavily exploited turtle species. They are harvested for consumption by humans; illegal trade for use as pets domestically and internationally; and as raw material to make decorative objects, musical instruments, and natural medicines. Illegal trade is targeted at adult individuals with a larger size and more striking colours, which has significant demographic consequences for population dynamics. The ongoing harvest of large breeding individuals prevents the generation of new individuals, leading to the partial or total decline of the population; this is particularly serious for species with a restricted distribution or species in greater demand.⁷¹⁹

Concerns about illegal overexploitation of mud turtles led to all *Kinosternon* species being listed in CITES Appendix II in 2023, except for *Kinosternon cora* and *Kinosternon vogti*, which were listed in CITES Appendix I.⁷²⁰

Asia is a major destination for Mexican freshwater turtles, including not only mud turtles and musk turtles but also box turtles (*Terrapene* spp., CITES Appendix II), which are endemic to Mexico. This is evident from several seizures of box turtles in the USA and China.

- ▶ In 2019, Chinese Customs in Shanghai seized 40 spotted box turtles (*Terrapene nelsoni*) and one Central American river turtle (*Dermatemys mawii*, CITES Appendix II). The turtles were hidden in a large shipment of more than 2,000 non-endangered turtles.⁷²¹ The Central American river turtle is among the most critically endangered freshwater turtles in the world.⁷²²
- ▶ In March and April 2020, US authorities at Memphis (Tennessee, USA) airport intercepted three consecutive air parcels with a total of 42 Mexican box turtles (*Terrapene carolina mexicana*) in transit to Asia from Mexico in 2021. The shipments were identical in how they were packed, suggesting they came from the same sender—the turtles had been taped, wrapped in socks, and stuffed inside baby formula cans.⁷²³

⁷¹⁸ <https://www.excelsior.com.mx/comunidad/estos-son-los-animales-rescatados-tras-decomiso-historico-en-iztapalapa/1419311>. Accessed 4 September 2023.

⁷¹⁹ CoP19 Prop. 29. https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/E-CoP19-Prop-29_0.pdf

⁷²⁰ CITES Notification to the Parties No. 2023/005 <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/notifications/E-Notif-2023-005.pdf>

⁷²¹ <https://wap.xinmin.cn/content/31619120.html>. Accessed 4 September 2023.

⁷²² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/B9780128211397000532?via%3Dihub>

⁷²³ <https://www.memphisflyer.com/rare-turtles-seized-at-port-of-memphis>. Accessed 4 September 2023.

Trafficking of crocodilians

After freshwater turtles, crocodiles and caimans are the most targeted reptiles, with 4,063 specimens reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. This included 3,384 Morelet's crocodiles (*Crocodylus moreletii*, CITES Appendix I/II); 243 American crocodiles (*Crocodylus acutus*, CITES Appendix I/II); 44 spectacled caimans (*Caiman crocodilus*, CITES Appendix II); and one American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*, CITES Appendix II). For 392 crocodiles the species was not specified.

Almost all Morelet's crocodiles (98.5%) came from a crocodile farm in Tabasco in May 2019. A total of 3,338 Morelet's crocodile hatchlings and juveniles was seized there, as they lacked the markings required by SEMARNAT.⁷²⁴

Morelet's crocodiles are native to Mexico, Belize, and Guatemala. Their populations were greatly reduced in many areas due to unregulated skin hunting in the 1940s and 1950s. A prohibition was decreed for the region in the 1970s, but illegal hunting persisted into the 1980s and 1990s. Due to severe sanctions, illegal hunting is now thought to be minimal, but still considered to be the principal threat to population recovery in some areas. Traditional use of the species persists, especially in rural communities.⁷²⁵

Trafficking of lizards

Lizards are also trafficked in considerable numbers. A total of 1,812 specimens of 44 species were seized. The most seized species included: 777 green iguanas (*Iguana iguana*); 329 alligator lizards (*Abronia graminea* and *Abronia taeniata*); 173 horned lizards (*Phrynosoma asio*, *Phrynosoma orbiculare*, and *Phrynosoma solare*); and 121 Mexican spiny-tailed iguanas (*Ctenosaura pectinata*).

Green iguanas, which are listed in CITES Appendix II, are targeted for their meat and skins, as well as the pet trade. They are frequently seized from passenger buses during routine inspections. For instance, in June 2019, police seized three suitcases with 140 iguanas and 30 turtles that were abandoned in the trunk of a bus in Puebla's bus station.⁷²⁶ The mortality of iguanas that are seized is reportedly extremely high. In March 2018, when 50 iguanas were seized during a routine inspection of a passenger bus near Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, a commercial iguana breeding expert lamented that these iguanas were most likely all going to die. He pointed out that the government lacks proper rescue facilities for this species. 'They are really condemning them to die since wild iguanas will never live in captivity and out of 100 perhaps one will survive'.⁷²⁷

Other lizard species that are seized in Mexico are mainly sold to the pet trade, domestically and abroad. Horned lizards (*Phrynosoma*) and alligator lizards (*Abronia* sp.), which include several species endemic to Mexico, are in particularly high demand in foreign pet markets, as the seizures below illustrate.

- ▶ In October and November 2020, German Customs seized two consecutive parcels containing a total of 26 horned lizards, alligator lizards, and box turtles. The animals were sewed inside dolls made of Mexican cloth. When they discovered the animals ten had already died from suffocation inside the dolls. The parcels were only detected because of the smell of dead animals emanating from them.⁷²⁸

⁷²⁴ <https://www.elciudadano.com/animal/profepa-asegura-a-mas-de-3-mil-cocodrilos/03/24/>. Accessed on 5 Sep. 2023.

⁷²⁵ Platt, S.G. et al (2023). *Crocodylus moreletii*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2023: e.T5663A193672551.

<https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2023-1.RLTS.T5663A193672551.en>. Accessed on 5 September 2024.

⁷²⁶ <https://www.virtualpuebla.com/seguridad/decomisan-140-iguanas-y-30-tortugas-al-interior-de-la-capu.html>

⁷²⁷ <https://www.elpinero.mx/federales-intervienen-autobus-pasajero-rescatan-50-iguanas-signos-maltrato-tehuantepec/>

⁷²⁸ <https://www.heute.at/s/tierschmuggel-lebende-eidechsen-in-puppen-eingenaht-100115779>

- ▶ In January 2021, Mexican Customs at Mexico City’s airport seized six alligator lizards hidden in stuffed toys from a parcel destined for Germany. They were discovered by X-ray.⁷²⁹
- ▶ In September 2021, Dutch Customs arrested a Russian woman carrying a suitcase filled with 129 reptiles and amphibians in transit to Russia. Most of these were endemic to Mexico and not listed in CITES at the time of seizure. The seizure included 26 horned lizards, 5 alligator lizards, and 30 Guatemalan emerald spiny lizards (*Sceloporus taeniocnemis*). This last species is not CITES-listed and is endemic to Mexico and Guatemala.⁷³⁰
- ▶ In February 2022, US authorities at the San Ysidro Port of Entry in California, USA, arrested a Californian man who carried 43 horned lizards and nine snakes on his body and in his clothes.⁷³¹ Six months later, on 24 August 2022, the man pleaded guilty to smuggling more than 1,700 wild animals into the USA between 2016 and February 2022. He used social media to arrange to smuggle animals from Mexico. Most were reptiles and included Yucatan box turtles, Mexican box turtles, baby crocodiles, and Mexican bearded lizards. He paid his accomplices a fee to drive animals from Mexico to El Paso, Texas, where he had them shipped to his family's home in California and resold them to customers throughout the USA.⁷³²

Nearly 19% (69 specimens) of the Mexican reptiles that were seized abroad were horned lizards. This genus was listed in CITES Appendix II in 2023 following a proposal by Mexico due to concerns of overexploitation.⁷³³

Trafficking of snakes

Snakes are the most frequently seized reptiles in Mexico, though usually found in relatively small quantities. Mexico has about 396 species of snakes, making the country attractive to traffickers. Mexican snakes are exported but there is also significant domestic demand for native as well as exotic snake species. There is evidence of illegal imports, including from the USA. In total, 405 snakes involving 56 species were seized. The top 6 of most seized snakes:

- ▶ Boa constrictors (*Boa constrictor*, CITES Appendix II, 31 specimens)
- ▶ Longtail alpine garter snakes (*Thamnophis scalaris*, 31 specimens) – endemic to Mexico
- ▶ Milk snakes (*Lampropeltis triangulum*, 20 specimens)
- ▶ Ball pythons (*Python regius*, CITES Appendix II, 19 specimens) – native to West/Central Africa
- ▶ Dumeril’s boas (*Acrantophis dumerili*, CITES Appendix I, 12 specimens) – endemic to Madagascar
- ▶ Burmese pythons (*Python molurus bivittatus*, 10 specimens) - native to Southeast Asia

Seizures that include snakes commonly involve different snake species in addition to other species of reptiles and amphibians, and sometimes birds. Below is a sample of seizures involving snakes which illustrate the trade dynamics:

- ▶ In January 2017, PROFEPA seized 149 reptiles, amphibians, and arachnids, including several exotic species, from a shop specializing in reptiles and exotic wildlife for failure to provide proof of their legal origin. The seizure involved 22 reptile and amphibian species, including 24 snakes of the following species: milk snake (*Lampropeltis triangulum*); California king snake (*Lampropeltis getula*); carpet python (*Morelia spilota*, CITES Appendix II); boa constrictor (*Boa constrictor*); emerald tree boa (*Corallus caninus*, CITES Appendix II); desert rosy boa (*Lichanura trivirgata*, CITES

⁷²⁹ <https://www.e-consulta.com/nota/2021-01-30/seguridad/decomisan-6-dragoncitos-escondidos-en-un-pelucho>

⁷³⁰ <https://nos.nl/artikel/2407745-honderden-illegale-vogels-en-gesmokkelde-reptielen-in-beslag-genomen>

⁷³¹ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/local-media-release/cbp-officers-find-43-horned-lizards-and-9-snakes-and-under-man-s>. Accessed on 5 September 2023.

⁷³² <https://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/oxnard-man-pleas-guilty-to-smuggling-60-reptiles-hidden-in-clothes-across-border/3031470/>. Accessed 19 September 2023.

⁷³³ CITES CoP19, Proposal 18. <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/E-CoP19-Prop-18.pdf>

Appendix II); and common garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*). Carpet pythons are native to Australia, Guinea, and the Solomon Islands; the other snake species are native to the Americas.⁷³⁴

- ▶ In December 2020, US authorities at Hidalgo-Reynosa International Bridge in Texas, USA, seized more than 70 reptiles and amphibians, including 23 snakes, 23 chameleons, 16 geckos, and 10 toads/frogs (species not specified) that a male American citizen tried to smuggle into Mexico in his car.⁷³⁵

Worthy of mention are the high number of marine turtle eggs seizures in Mexico. The species most affected are Olive Ridley sea turtles (*Lepidochelys olivacea*). No fewer than 257,356 marine turtle eggs were reported to be seized in 28 seizures, mainly in the Pacific coastal states of Oaxaca and Jalisco. Given that the average clutch size of a female Olive Ridley is 110 eggs⁷³⁶, this means a minimum number of 2,339 sea turtle nests were raided between 2017 and 2022 to supply demand for sea turtle eggs.

Birds

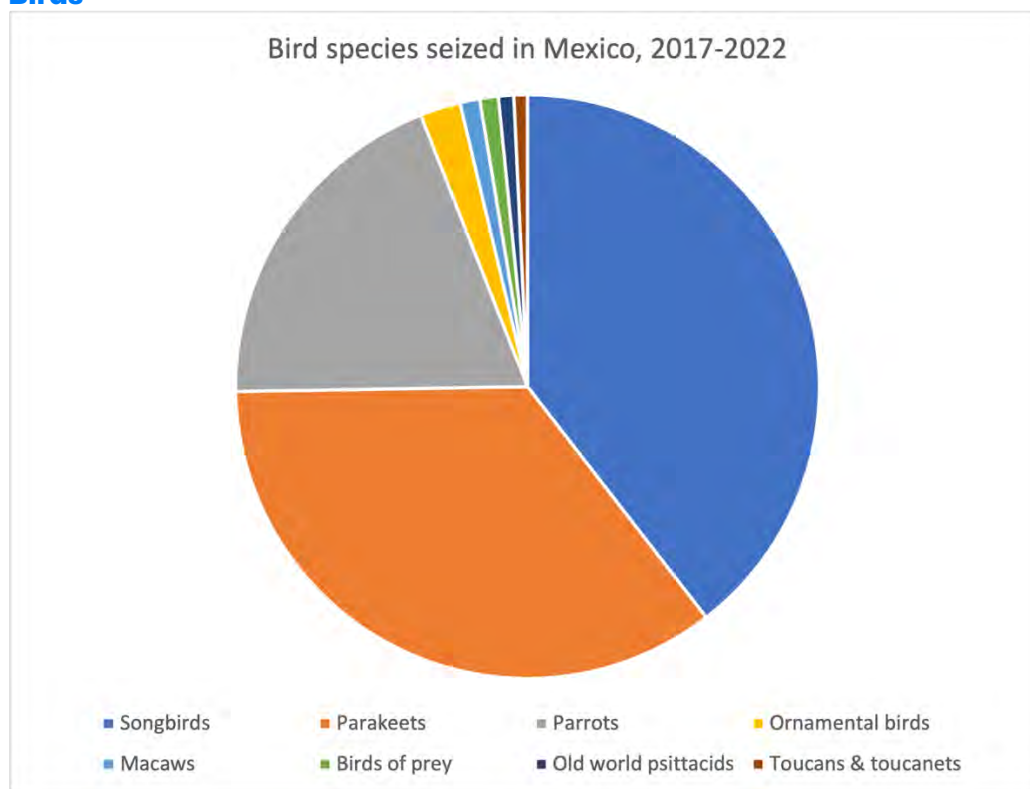


Figure 8849: Bird species seized in/originating from Mexico between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

The illegal bird trade in Mexico is at concerning levels. The seizures recorded reveal that 7,983 specimens were trafficked between 2017 and 2022. Most affected are songbirds (2,841 specimens); parakeets (2,535 specimens); and parrots (1,388 specimens).

Seizures of songbirds, Amazon parrots, and parakeets frequently involve large shipments with dozens, sometimes hundreds, of specimens transported by road to markets in urban centres. Seventeen

⁷³⁴ <https://www.gob.mx/profepa/prensa/asegura-profepa-149-ejemplares-de-reptiles-anfibios-y-aracnidos-a-establecimiento-en-tijuana-b-c>. Accessed on 5 September 2023.

⁷³⁵ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/local-media-release/cbp-officers-discover-undeclared-reptiles-hidalgo-international-bridge>. Accessed on 5 September 2023.

⁷³⁶ Márquez, R. Olive Ridley Turtles (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) show signs of recovery at La Escobilla, Oaxaca. *Marine Turtle Newsletter*, 73, 5-7, 1996b.

seizures were recorded that involved more than 100 birds. The birds are commonly hidden in cardboard boxes stashed in the luggage hold of passenger buses or trunks of private cars. In the case of parrots and parakeets, these large volumes invariably involve hatchlings or juvenile birds that have been taken from their nests shortly after hatching. Most seizures of parrot and parakeet hatchlings and juveniles occur between the months of February and June, coinciding with the breeding season of these species.

Trafficking of songbirds

A total of 2,841 songbirds representing at least 40 species was reported to be seized in Mexico between 2017 and 2022.

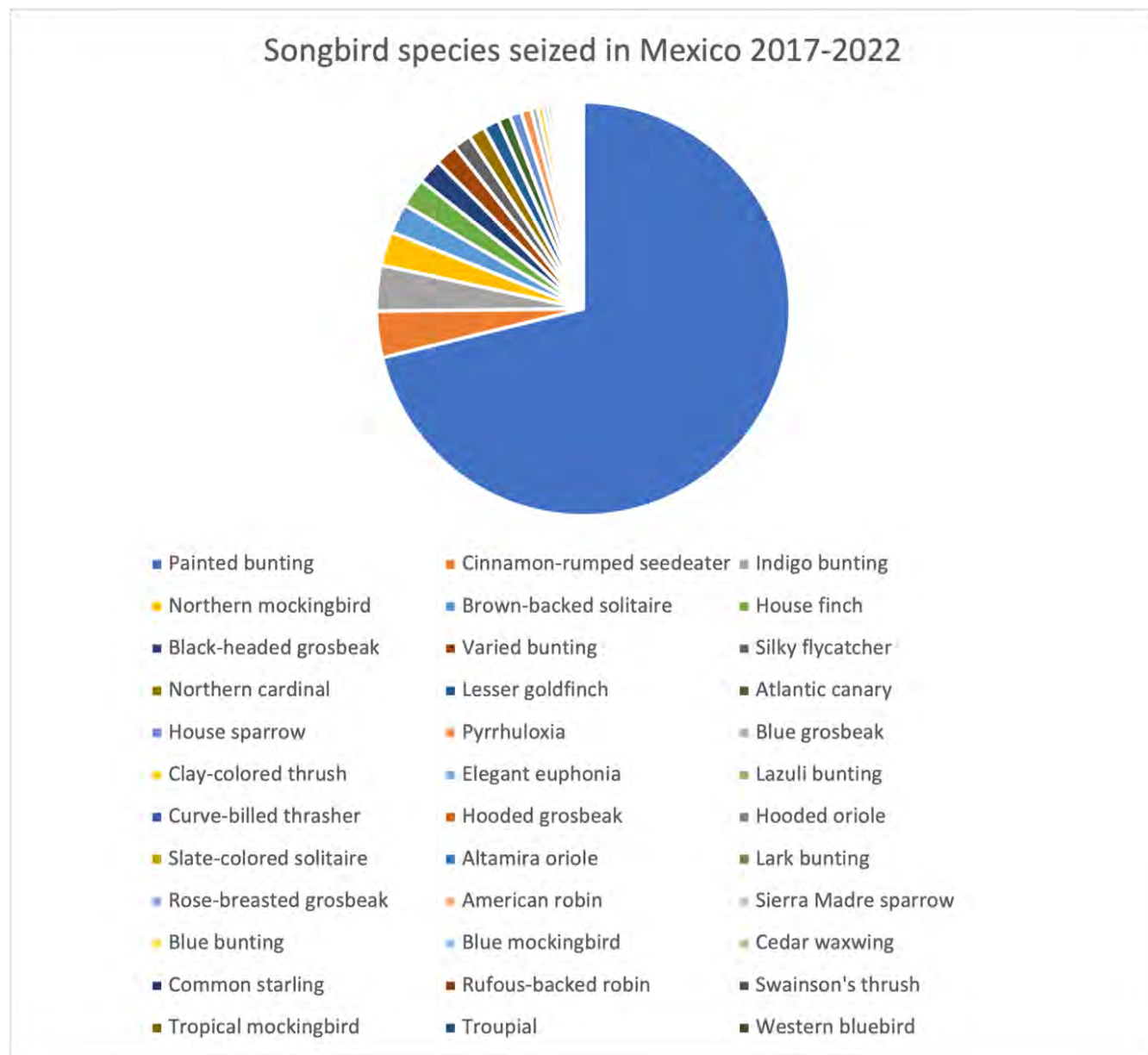


Figure 89: Songbird species seized in Mexico between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

As the graph shows, painted buntings (*Passerina ciris*) were by far the most seized songbirds (1,256 specimens). Two seizures stand out:

- ▶ In March 2017, at a toll booth on international highway No. 51 Mexico-Nogales, PROFEPA arrested a man and seized 490 songbirds, including 454 painted buntings, that he was transporting in a car after police detected the birds during a road inspection.⁷³⁷
- ▶ In April 2018, 767 recently captured songbirds, including 682 painted buntings, were seized from a passenger bus at a toll booth on highway Tepic-Guadajajara during an anti-trafficking operation by PROFEPA and the federal police. The bus driver said the birds were loaded in Ruiz, Nayarit, and were unaccompanied. No mention was made of any arrests.⁷³⁸

Male painted buntings are in high demand for their song and the bright colours of their plumage domestically as well as in the USA, Europe, and Asia. In 2004, the overharvesting of this migratory species was highlighted as problematic, prompting Mexico and the USA to propose listing it in CITES Appendix II.⁷³⁹ The proposal was rejected.⁷⁴⁰ The numbers seized in Mexico, however, testify to ongoing illegal trade, which appears to be well-organized.

Trafficking of psittacids

Wild populations of psittacids (parakeets, parrots, and macaws) are heavily affected by the illegal trade in Mexico. This study identified 4,002 seized specimens, which is, of course, just a fraction of the actual volume trafficked. A 2007 study based on interviews with trappers and trade representatives, and other data estimated that between 65,000 and 78,500 are taken from the wild in Mexico annually. The study also estimated that the mortality rate of these species before reaching the final consumer exceeds 75%.⁷⁴¹ A Mexican wildlife expert has estimated that in the illegal trade of parrots, parakeets, and macaws in Mexico, 8 out of 10 animals die before reaching the final buyer. Of those that manage to survive, 90% die later due to diseases, lack of care or poor nutrition. Of 100 captured wild parrots, seven die in the capture stage, 24 during storage and confinement, 22 during transportation, and 30 during distribution and sale.⁷⁴²

Since 2008, Mexico's national wildlife law prohibits the extraction of all native parrot species for livelihood or commercial purposes.⁷⁴³ Clearly this has not been effective in curbing the illegal offtake.

Seven species of parakeets (totalling 2,535 specimens) were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. Almost all (97%) were orange-fronted parakeets (*Aratinga canicularis*, 2,457 specimens). Other parakeet species seized included: olive-throated parakeet (*Aratinga nana*); monk parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*); red-masked parakeet (*Psittacara erythrogenys*); pacific parakeet (*Psittacara strenuus*); green parakeet (*Psittacara holochlorus*); orange-chinned parakeet (*Brotogeris jugularis*); and mitred parakeet (*Aratinga mitrata*).

⁷³⁷ <https://www.gob.mx/profepa/prensa/asegura-profepa-490-ejemplares-de-aves-silvestres-en-nayarit> Accessed 6 September 2023.

⁷³⁸ <https://www.debate.com.mx/mexico/decomisan-767-traffic-aves-paquete-autobus-nayarit-jalisco-liberan-20180407-0233.html>. Accessed 6 September 2023.

⁷³⁹ Proposal for inclusion of *Passerina ciris* in Appendix II. CITES CoP13 Prop. 14 <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/cop/13/prop/E13-P14.pdf>, accessed 6 September 2023.

⁷⁴⁰ <https://enb.iisd.org/events/13th-meeting-cites-conference-parties-cop13/daily-report-12-october-2004>, accessed 6 September 2023.

⁷⁴¹ Cantú, J.C. et al (2007). Tráfico ilegal de pericos en México. Una evaluación detallada. Defenders of Wildlife, January 2007. Available at: https://defenders.org/sites/default/files/publications/trafico_ilegal_de_pericos_en_mexico.pdf, accessed 4 September 2023.

⁷⁴² Méndez, E. And Olivera, A. (2022). Merciless Markets: How wildlife trafficking threatens Mexico's biodiversity. Center for Biological Diversity, November 2022. Available at: <https://biologicaldiversity.org/campaigns/Mexico-wildlife-trafficking/pdfs/Mexico-wildlife-trafficking-report-English.pdf>. Accessed 6 September 2023.

⁷⁴³ Decreto por el que se adiciona un artículo 60 Bis 2 a la Ley General de Vida Silvestre https://dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle_popup.php?codigo=5063852. Accessed 6 September 2023.

Orange-fronted parakeets, which are listed in CITES Appendix II, are poached and smuggled across Mexico in huge numbers. Eight of the 41 seizures that concerned this species involved more than 100 specimens, amounting to 1,933 parakeets.

Significant seizures include:

- ▶ In March 2017, police arrested a couple on highway 175 between Pochutla and Oaxaca with 489 orange-fronted parakeet chicks (including 13 dead specimens) and 12 white-fronted amazons (*Amazona albifrons*) in their car. The birds were destined for sales in Tehuacán.⁷⁴⁴
- ▶ In June 2017, 348 orange-fronted parakeets (including 8 dead specimens) were seized from a passenger bus at a tollbooth near El Rosario, Sinaloa. No mention was made of any arrests.⁷⁴⁵
- ▶ In September 2020, police seized 383 orange-fronted parakeets from a truck that was pulled over on the Tonalá-Arriaga highway, Chiapas, for violating speed limits to evade the police. The seven passengers were arrested.⁷⁴⁶

A total of 1,388 New World parrots of 16 different species were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022, including: 452 red-lored amazons (*Amazona autumnalis*); 227 white fronted amazons (*Amazona albifrons*); 86 yellow-headed amazons (*Amazona oratrix*); 62 lilac crowned amazons (*Amazona finschi*); 39 southern mealy amazons (*Amazona farinosa*); 24 yellow-crowned amazons (*Amazona ochrocephala*); 15 white-crowned parrots (*Pionus senilis*); 10 yellow-naped amazons (*Amazona auropalliata*); five Mexican parrotlets (*Forpus cyanopygius*): two red-crowned amazons (*Amazona viridigenalis*); one burrowing parrot (*Cyanoliseus patagonus*); one orange-winged amazon (*Amazona amazonica*); one turquoise-fronted amazon (*Amazona aestiva*); one thick-billed parrot (*Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha*): and one Yucatan amazon (*Amazona xantholora*). For 446 seized parrots the subspecies was not specified.

Most of these New World parrot species are listed in CITES Appendix II, except for the yellow-headed amazons, lilac-crowned amazons, yellow-naped amazons, red-crowned amazons, and the thick-billed parrot, (161 specimens in total = 11.5%), which are listed in CITES Appendix I.

The relatively high numbers of yellow-headed amazons and lilac-crowned amazons in illegal trade are concerning. Both species are listed as 'Endangered' on the IUCN Red List. Yellow-headed amazons (native to Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras) are estimated to be in very rapid decline due to habitat loss and degradation and poaching, with around 4,700 mature individuals remaining. Lilac-crowned amazons, which are endemic to the northeast of Mexico, are estimated to be in rapid decline, with between 4,700 and 6,700 mature individuals remaining.⁷⁴⁷

Significant seizures include:

- ▶ In January 2018, authorities arrested a man and seized 244 red-lored amazons that he was transporting in nine black-painted cardboard boxes on a passenger bus from Balancán to Villahermosa, in the state of Tabasco.⁷⁴⁸
- ▶ In May 2018, three men were arrested for transporting 387 parrots, parakeets, turtles, and snakes in three private tourist service buses from Acayucan and Orizaba, state of Veracruz, to Mexico City where they presumably would be sold. The parrots in the shipment included 155 red-lored amazons,

⁷⁴⁴ <https://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2017/03/31/1155212>. Accessed 13 September 2023.

⁷⁴⁵ https://www.nuestravision.com.mx/index.php?option=com_videoflow&task=play&id=61391. Accessed 13 Sep. 2023.

⁷⁴⁶ <https://aquinoticias.mx/rescatan-383-cotorras-transportadas-ilegalmente/>. Accessed 13 September 2023.

⁷⁴⁷ See assessments on <https://www.iucnredlist.org/>

⁷⁴⁸ <https://www.gob.mx/conanp/prensa/liberan-244-loros-al-interior-del-parque-nacional-palenque>

36 white-fronted amazons, 35 southern mealy amazons, 15 yellow-headed amazons, and nine scaly-headed parrots.⁷⁴⁹

- ▶ In September 2020, army officers at the Cucapá checkpoint in San Luis Río Colorado seized 34 lilac-crowned amazons (CITES Appendix I) from the trunk of a passenger bus that was headed for Tijuana on the border with the USA.⁷⁵⁰ It is likely they were destined for the USA, where an adult specimen commands prices of up to US\$3,500.⁷⁵¹
- ▶ In June 2021, US authorities at the San Ysidro Port of Entry in California, USA, seized 22 yellow-crowned amazons (CITES Appendix I) from a woman intending to smuggle them into the USA. The birds were hidden in the front door compartment of the car she was driving. She had been offered US\$500 to smuggle the birds from Mexico. The birds were detected when the officers heard a screeching sound.⁷⁵²

Seventy-nine macaws were reported to be seized in Mexico between 2017 and 2022, including 49 military macaws (*Ara militaris*, CITES Appendix I); 10 blue and yellow macaws (*Ara araurana*, CITES Appendix II); nine scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*, CITES Appendix I); and two Catalina macaws (hybrid). For nine macaws the subspecies was not specified.

Military macaws are listed as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List due to a continuing rapid population decline caused by habitat loss and capture for the cagebird trade. Between 2,000 and 7,000 mature individuals are estimated to remain.⁷⁵³ Two seizures were identified that suggest significant levels of trade:

- ▶ In February 2018, PROFEPA seized 10 military macaws that were hidden in five cardboard boxes in the luggage compartment of a passenger bus in Atlacomulco on the Atlacomulco – Maravatío federal highway. The bus came from Mazatlán, Sinaloa.⁷⁵⁴
- ▶ In March 2020, PROFEPA seized 12 juvenile macaws at Mazatlan International Airport, state of Sinaloa. They were found in two wooden boxes that had been abandoned in the parcel area of an airline company at the airport.⁷⁵⁵

Media have reported on cross-border trafficking of scarlet macaws between Mexico (Quintana Roo state), Belize, and Guatemala. In 2017, an expert estimated that around 500 scarlet macaws are captured in Belize annually and trafficked to Guatemala and Mexico.⁷⁵⁶ As mentioned above, nine scarlet macaws were reported to be seized in Mexico between 2017 and 2022. Six of these were seized in August 2017 (along with two military macaws, four white-fronted amazons, and one keel-billed toucan) in Motozintla from a car driving on the highway between Motozintla and Huixtla in Chiapas. Chiapas is the most southern Mexican state that borders Guatemala and Motozintla is very close to the border, so these birds could well have been smuggled in from Guatemala.⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁴⁹ <https://laverdadnoticias.com/ecologia/Aseguran-trafico-ilegal-de-tucanes-boas-y-pericos.-20180530-0135.html>

⁷⁵⁰ <https://www.tribunadesanluis.com.mx/policiaca/aseguran-pericos-en-camion-pasajero-de-san-luis-rio-colorado-5752094.html>. Accessed 5 September 2023.

⁷⁵¹ <https://www.parrotstars.com/Lilac-Crowned-Amazon-Parrot-Stars-p/vt21-6lilacblack.htm>. Accessed 5 Sep 2023.

⁷⁵² <https://www.justice.gov/enrd/page/file/1505541/download> Page 18.

⁷⁵³ BirdLife International. 2020. *Ara militaris*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2020: e.T22685548A179407584. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2020-3.RLTS.T22685548A179407584.en>. Accessed on 6 March 2024.

⁷⁵⁴ <https://www.gob.mx/profepa/prensa/profepa-asegura-10-quacamayas-verdes-que-eran-transportadas-ilegalmente-en-atlacomulco-edomex>. Accessed 5 September 2023.

⁷⁵⁵ <https://imagenagropecuaria.com/2020/rescatan-a-12-ejemplares-de-quacamaya-verde-en-mazatlan/>

⁷⁵⁶ <https://www.expedientequintanaroo.com/2017/03/quacamayas-en-riesgo-trafico-gran.html>. Accessed 4 September 2023.

⁷⁵⁷ <https://www.miambiente.com.mx/sustentabilidad1/rescata-profepa-aves-en-peligro-de-extincion-en-chiapas/>. Accessed 5 September 2023.

Media have reported a significant illegal trade in dead hummingbirds for sales as love charms known as ‘chuparosa’, named after the suckling rose plant that hummingbirds favour. The witchcraft market in Mexico City’s Mercado Sonora is a well-known outlet for these chuparosas.⁷⁵⁸ In 2009 researchers documented more than 650 dead hummingbirds for sale in this market.⁷⁵⁹ According to a 2022 study, this centuries-old Mexican tradition has spread to the USA, where chuparosa charms are sold in mystic shops. Between 2013 and 2021 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seized a total of 905 hummingbird carcasses, representing 22 different species, 18 of which are protected by the USA Migratory Bird Treaty Act.⁷⁶⁰

The illegal hummingbird trade does not appear to be a law enforcement priority however, as only one dead hummingbird was reported to be seized (in 2019 from a market in Alcaldía de Iztacalco, México City).⁷⁶¹

Mammals

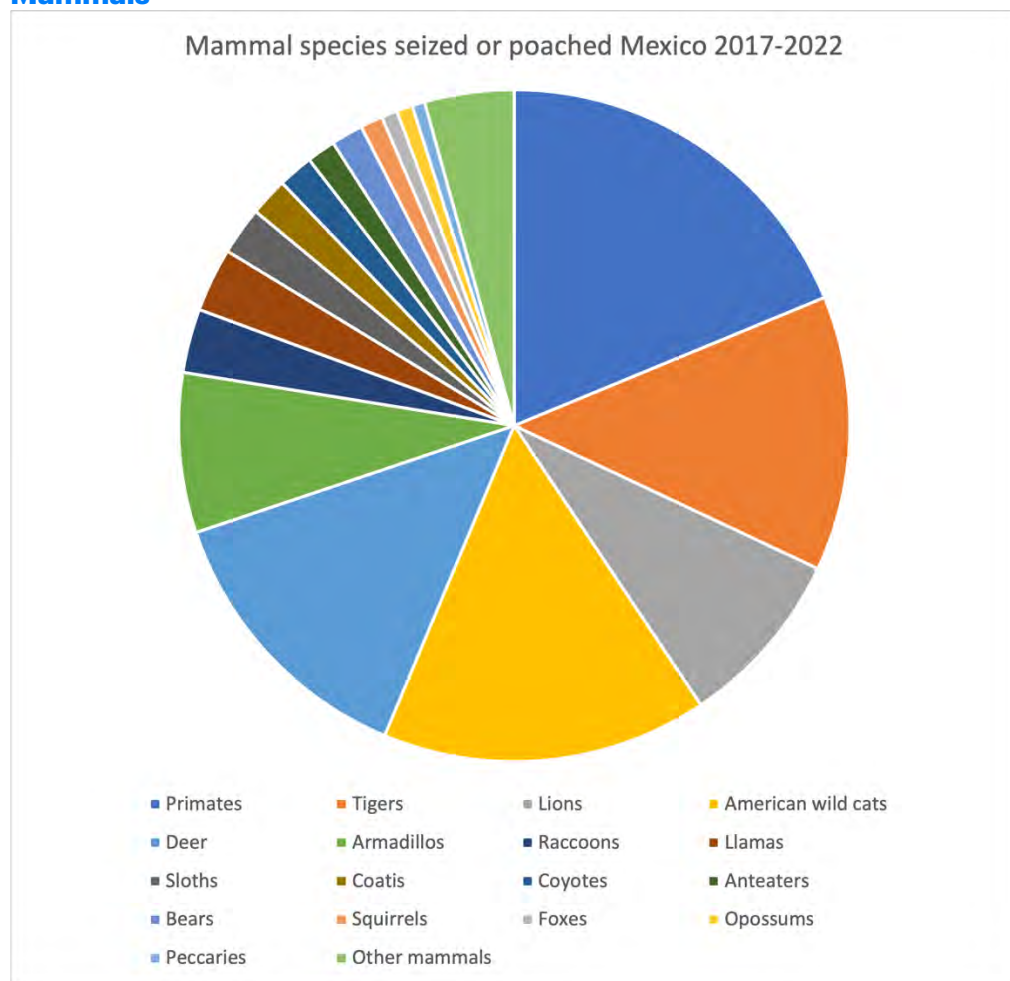


Figure 90: Mammal species seized or poached in/originating from Mexico between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

⁷⁵⁸ <https://www.nmas.com.mx/foro-tv/programas/las-noticias-erik-camacho/videos/colibri-amuleto-para-encontrar-supuestamente-amor>. Accessed 5 September 2023.

⁷⁵⁹ <https://www.nationalgeographic.es/animales/2018/04/dentro-del-misterioso-mundo-del-comercio-ilegal-de-colibries>. Accessed 5 September 2023.

⁷⁶⁰ <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/csp2.12679>. Accessed 5 September 2023.

⁷⁶¹ <https://www.gob.mx/profepa/prensa/profepa-asegura-de-114-partes-y-derivados-de-fauna-silvestre-en-un-tianguis-de-la-alcaldia-iztacalco-en-la-ciudad-de-mexico-210649>. Accessed 5 September 2023.

Of the 837 mammals involved in seizures and poaching incidents between 2017 and 2022, 85% (716 specimens) were live animals; 10% (84 specimens) concerned taxidermies, parts, and products or meat; and 5% (37 specimens) dead animals.

Trafficking of felids

As the graph shows, felids (tigers, lions, and wild cat species native to the Americas) are among the most seized mammal species. In total, 86 tigers (*Panthera tigris*); 56 lions (*Panthera leo*); and 102 American wild cats, including 49 jaguars (*Panthera onca*), 20 pumas (*Puma concolor*), 13 ocelots (*Leopardus pardalis*), nine jaguarundis (*Puma yagouaroundi*), eight bobcats (*Lynx rufus*), and three margays (*Leopardus wiedii*) were recorded. The percentage of felids is even higher than the graph suggests, because a seizure of 190 lions, tigers, jaguars, and pumas that were abandoned in the Ajusco lion sanctuary⁷⁶² is not included, as the number of specimens per species was not specified. With these 190 big cats included, a total of 434 felids was seized or poached between 2017 and 2022, representing 52% of all mammals.

The high number of tigers and lions that were seized between 2017 and 2022 confirms reports about significant illegal trade in captive bred tigers and lions in Mexico.⁷⁶³ Some of these are smuggled to the USA. For instance:

- ▶ In August 2017, US authorities at the Otay Mesa port of entry in California, USA, seized a tiger cub from an 18-year-old American citizen arriving from Mexico by car. He claimed he had bought the cub in Tijuana for US\$300 from a man who was walking a tiger on a leash in the streets of Tijuana.⁷⁶⁴
- ▶ In May 2018, US authorities in Brownsville, Texas, USA, seized a sedated tiger cub in a duffel bag that was abandoned by three people who had attempted to enter the USA on foot.⁷⁶⁵

Big cats and Mexican crime syndicates

Many tigers and lions remain in Mexico, where dangerous big cats are popular pets, including with high-level criminals. Mexican media frequently report on big cats and other iconic wild animals being seized during raids on properties owned by members of criminal gangs. Between 2017 and 2022, a total of 19 seizures involving 15 tigers, eight lions, and two jaguars were reported as part of raids on properties associated with organized crime syndicates or in circumstances indicative of organized crime involvement (such as lion and tiger cubs seized from cars along with weapons, drugs, and/or large amounts of cash). It is well known that Mexican drug traffickers like to keep dangerous wild animals as pets and set up private zoos as a symbol of status and power, imitating the Colombian drug lords of the 1980s and 90s. Some are used to guard property owned by criminals. This study identified two seizures of tigers that were used as such in two different incidents in 2018 and 2021, one of them involving the Sinaloa cartel.⁷⁶⁶ More sinister is the use of big cats by some heads of drug cartels to torture or kill adversaries or victims.⁷⁶⁷ In February 2022, three tigers were reportedly seized along with weapons and drugs from a ranch operated by Los Ardillos criminal group. The tigers had been used to

⁷⁶² <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/metropoli/profepa-halla-190-felinos-entre-leones-africanos-y-blancos-tigres-jaguares-y-pumas-maltratados-en-santuario-del-ajusco/>. Accessed 6 September 2023.

⁷⁶³ Méndez, E. And Olivera, A. (2022). Merciless Markets: How wildlife trafficking threatens Mexico's biodiversity. Center for Biological Diversity, November 2022.

⁷⁶⁴ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/local-media-release/cbp-intercepts-tiger-cub-otay-mesa>

⁷⁶⁵ <https://abc7news.com/tiger-found-in-duffel-bag-abandoned-by-smugglers-cub/3420799/>

⁷⁶⁶ <https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2021/09/24/un-tigre-de-bengala-vehiculos-y-armas-largas-al-interior-del-excentrico-rancho-decomisado-a-presuntos-sicarios-en-sonora/> and Robin des Bois, On the Trail, no.21 p.64 https://robindesbois.org/wp-content/uploads/ON_THE_TRAIL_21.pdf. Accessed 6 September 2023.

⁷⁶⁷ <https://apnews.com/article/caribbean-mexico-monkeys-primates-animals-ea45aa616ffec385aabfb4eea8e98e90;> <https://panamatimes.wordpress.com/2020/10/12/tigres-monos-y-aves-silvestres-las-mascotas-favoritas-del-narco/>. Accessed 6 September 2023.

devour their rivals. One male suspect was arrested but had to be released in exchange for five military officers who had been taken hostage by the gang.⁷⁶⁸

Thirty-four incidents relating to jaguar poaching and trafficking were recorded, involving 49 jaguars:

- ▶ Ten jaguars were found dead as a result of poaching.
- ▶ Parts and products of 16 jaguars were seized, including 14 skins.
- ▶ Twenty-three live jaguars were seized, mostly from private pet owners. Three seizures were recorded of jaguar cubs that were trafficked by air.

While some jaguars were reportedly killed by farmers out of retaliation for killing their livestock, there were several incidents where jaguars were killed with the apparent objective of marketing their parts. Noteworthy are two incidents that occurred in 2019 in the southern state of Chiapas. In January 2019, a jaguar corpse was found on the banks of the Usumacinta river in the Área Natural Protegida de Yaxchilán, without its head, legs, tail, and genitals.⁷⁶⁹ A few months later, in May 2019, another jaguar corpse was found in the Lacandona jungle, its genitals missing.⁷⁷⁰ Experts interviewed on these incidents commented that this modus operandi resembles that of traffickers in Bolivia and Peru, where such jaguar tissues have been seized and are believed to be indicative of involvement of Chinese criminal networks.

Trafficking of primates

After big cats, primates are the mammal species most affected by trafficking in Mexico. A total of 110 primates were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022, including 36 spider monkeys, 21 capuchin monkeys, and 17 howler monkeys, including 11 endangered Yucatán black howlers (*Alouatta pigra*, CITES Appendix I). Other species included baboons (nine specimens, native to Sub Saharan Africa); lemurs (three specimens, native to Madagascar); Central American squirrel monkeys (two specimens); one green monkey (native to West Africa); and one black-tufted marmoset. Twenty specimens concerned monkeys whose subspecies was not clarified in the media report.

In 2021, Mexican experts raised the alarm over the rise in spider and howler monkey trafficking, warning that these species are in danger of disappearing due to the illegal pet trade. The trafficking is reportedly fuelled by a rising demand as the possession of these monkeys has become fashionable due to influencers flaunting their monkey babies on social media.⁷⁷¹

Poaching of these two primate species is centred in the South-eastern states of Chiapas, Campeche, and Yucatán. Many peasants who were previously involved in cultivating marijuana for their livelihood have reportedly abandoned this activity due to the drop in marihuana prices and been forced to illegally capture and sell wildlife. The main market is reportedly in northern Mexico, where the purchasing power is higher and where it has become common to see people showing off their monkey pet as a status symbol in public or on social media. Spider monkeys are targeted more than howler monkeys as they are more resistant to handling and smuggling, while howler monkeys die quickly as they are even more

⁷⁶⁸ <https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2022/02/19/un-tigre-de-bengala-drogas-y-armas-al-interior-del-excentrico-rancho-decomisado-a-los-ardillos/>. Accessed 6 September 2023.

⁷⁶⁹ <https://dialogochino.net/es/comercio-y-inversiones-es/36363-pac-man-el-jaguar-que-delato-a-los-trafficantes-chinos-en-mexico/>. Accessed 15 September 2023.

⁷⁷⁰ <https://netnoticias.mx/nacional/denuncian-caza-de-jaguar-mexicano-para-venta-de-genitales-en-china/>; <https://www.milenio.com/politica/comunidad/hallazgo-jaguar-mutilado-revela-mercado-trafico-ilegal-china>. Accessed 15 September 2023.

⁷⁷¹ Cancunmio 21 September 2021. Incrementa tráfico y posesión de monos araña y saraguatos en México: <https://www.cancunmio.com/27193204-incrementa-trafico-y-posesion-de-monos-arana-y-saraguatos-en-mexico/>. Accessed 6 September 2023.

delicate. Experts highlight the need for the public to be made aware that behind every baby monkey captured and trafficked is a story of untold animal suffering, with poachers having to kill its mother and sometimes an entire family to obtain the baby.⁷⁷²

An incident that is illustrative of the cruelty inflicted by poachers happened in April 2021, when a few days' old howler monkey baby was found in the arms of its dead mother, who was killed by poachers in the Reserve of the Calakmul Biosphere, in Campeche. The howler monkey baby had an open fracture in his left arm, possibly caused when his mother fell from a tree after being shot by the poachers. The poachers had left him to die, as with his fractured arm he was of no value to them. His rescuers named him 'Muuk', which in Mayan means 'Strength'.⁷⁷³

Spider monkeys are also smuggled across the land border to the USA: five seizures involving a total of ten spider monkeys were reported at USA ports of entry between 2017 and 2022. Smuggling appears to have surged in 2023: on 30th July 2023, a Mexican man attempted to smuggle no fewer than seven baby spider monkeys across the border near Brownsville, Texas⁷⁷⁴, while on 14 August 2023 an attempt to smuggle three baby spider monkeys was foiled at the Calexico port of entry.⁷⁷⁵

Amphibians

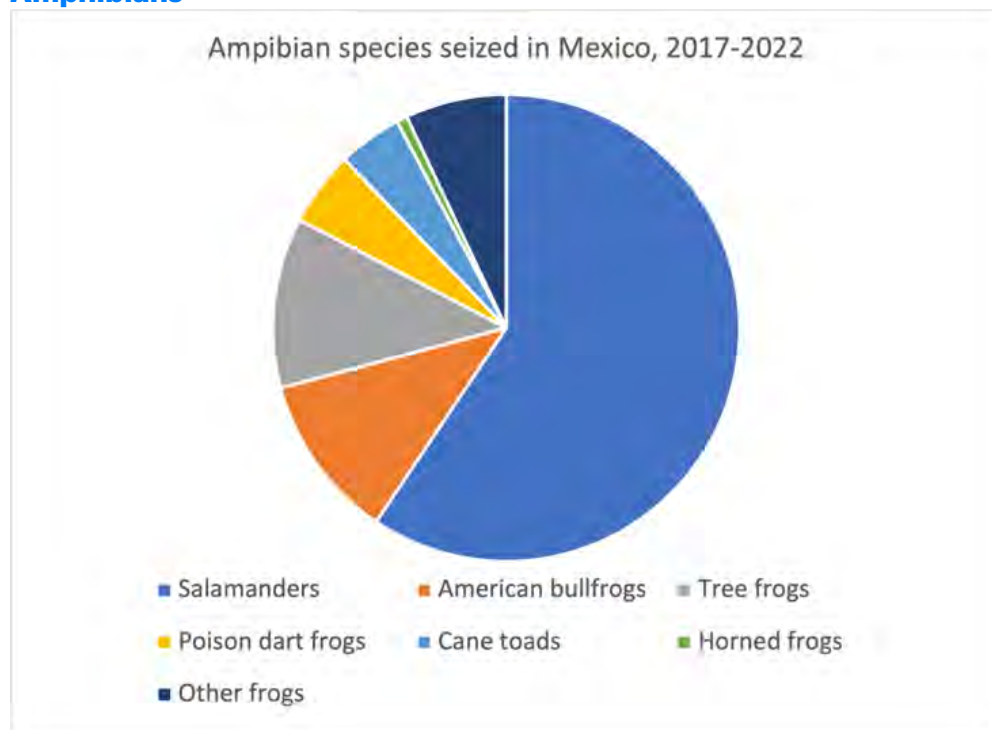


Figure 91: Amphibian species seized in/originating from Mexico between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Between 2017 and 2022, 271 amphibians were seized in 15 seizures. More than half of these concerned plateau tiger salamanders (*Ambystoma velasci*, endemic to Mexico, not CITES-listed): 152 specimens

⁷⁷² Ibid.

⁷⁷³ <https://www.algoqueinformar.com/muuk-pequeno-mono-aullador-rescatado-fractura-campeche>

⁷⁷⁴ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/us-border-patrol-spider-monkey-backpack-texas/>. Accessed 11 September 2023.

⁷⁷⁵ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/local-media-release/cbp-officers-stop-spider-monkey-smuggling-attempt-calexico-port-entry>.

Accessed 11 September 2023.

of this species were seized in Mercado Emilio Carranza de la Delegación Cuauhtémoc in Mexico City in April 2017, along with 166 birds, reptiles, and invertebrates.⁷⁷⁶

Amphibians are also trafficked abroad from Mexico. For instance, the Russian woman caught with a suitcase filled with 145 reptiles and amphibians at Schiphol Airport in The Netherlands in September 2021, carried 15 Mexican leaf frogs (*Agalychnis dacnicolor*, endemic to Mexico).⁷⁷⁷

In August 2022, three Mexican men arrested trying to smuggle more than 160 reptiles, amphibians, and insects into Mexico from the USA. Two men drove a van, a third man followed in a separate vehicle. The seizure included 10 red-eyed tree frogs (*Agalychnis callidryas*); six dyeing poison dart frogs (*Dendrobates tinctorius*); and six green and black poison dart frogs (*Dendrobates auratus*, endemic to the Guiana Shield).

⁷⁷⁶ <https://oaxaca.quadratin.com.mx/decomisan-318-animales-mercado-la-morelos-cdmx/>. Accessed 11 September 2023.

⁷⁷⁷ <https://nos.nl/artikel/2407745-honderden-illegale-vogels-en-gesmokkelde-reptielen-in-beslag-genomen>

Key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes

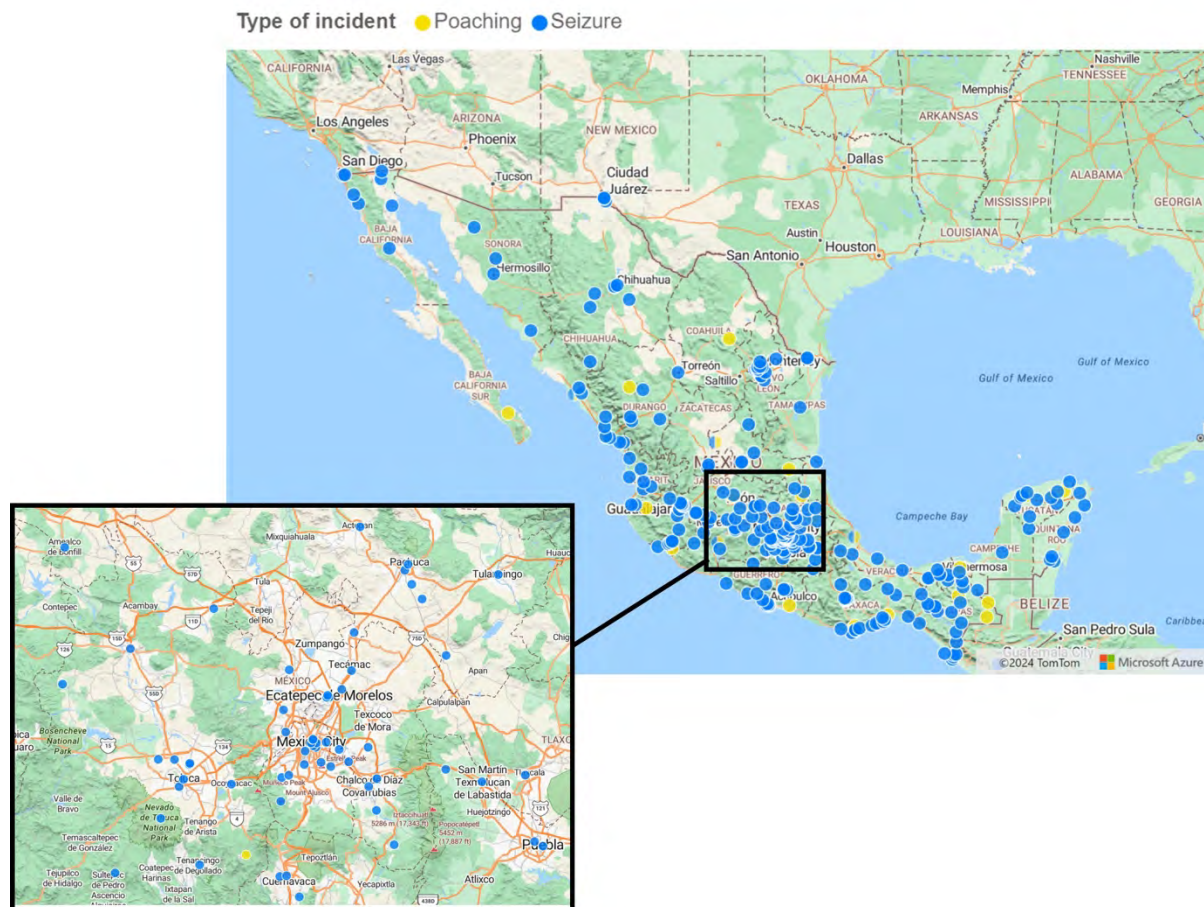


Figure 92: Locations of seizures and poaching incidents in Mexico reported between 2017 and 2022

Sales in markets

Street markets have historically played a key role in the supply of wildlife to end consumers in Mexico and continue to do so today. Between 2017 and 2022, 1,224 wild animals (including 1,175 live animals, 31 dead animals, and parts and products of at least 18 animals) were involved in 44 seizures in markets across the country. Some 43% of these were birds (predominantly songbirds, parrots, and parakeets); 40% reptiles; 14% amphibians; and 3% mammals. Seizures are usually instigated by citizen’s complaints.

The number of wild animals seized in markets fell between 2017 and 2022, as Figure 9350 below shows. This could be explained by a reduction in wildlife sales in markets or by reduced effectiveness of enforcement efforts, or a combination of the two.

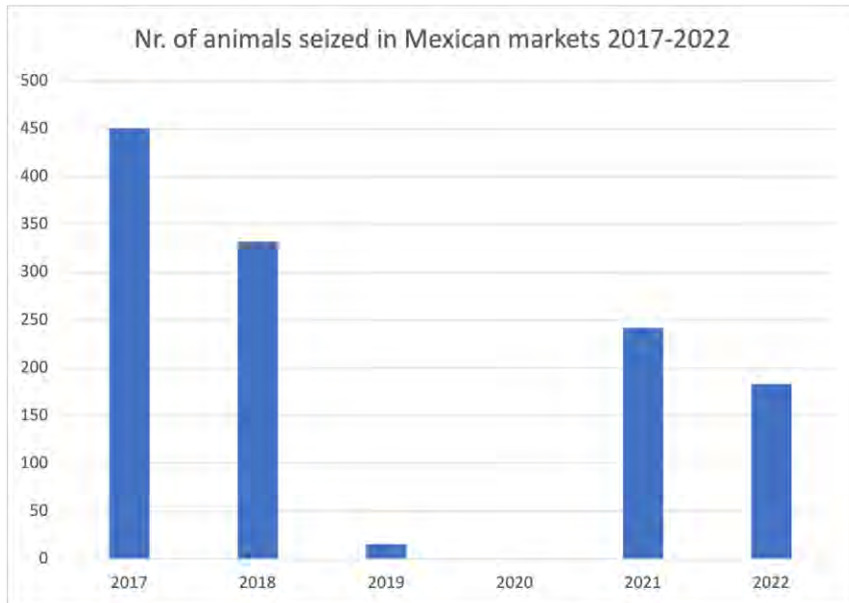


Figure 9350: Number of animals seized in Mexican markets between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Mexico City appears to be the largest centre for sales in markets. A total of 714 live wild animals and parts and products of at least 18 wild animals were seized from the following markets in Mexico City: Mercado La Morelos, Mercado San Lázaro, Mercado Nuevo San Lázaro de la Magdalena Mixihuca, and an unnamed open-air market in Iztacalco.

While Mexican law prohibits the sales of wild animals in markets, culturally it appears to be an accepted livelihood. Sometimes, law enforcers are met with hostility and intimidated by market vendors. For example, PROFEPA staff undertaking an inspection of the Mercado Mixihuca in Mexico City on 22 December 2022 were attacked and threatened by more than 20 people, forcing them to terminate the visit and leave the site immediately.⁷⁷⁸

Parcel post widely used for live animal trafficking

Parcel post is a popular means of shipping wildlife in Mexico. Sixty-six seizures of parcels were identified between 2017 and 2022, involving 443 live animals; 11 dead animals; and parts and products of 20 animals. The majority (81%) concerned reptiles (361 live specimens, 11 dead, and parts/products of three specimens); followed by amphibians (33 live specimens); birds (27 live specimens, one dead); and mammals (17 live specimens, eight skins). It is noteworthy that 11 of the 17 live mammals seized from parcels concerned big cat cubs: five tigers, three lions, three jaguars, and two bobcats.

Forty-eight of the 66 parcels were to be shipped by air, mainly between domestic airports.

Parcels containing illicit wildlife are usually detected by coincidence during routine inspections of courier company's premises, often by Federal Police or National Guard canine units using dogs trained to detect narcotics, firearms, and cash. For twelve parcel post seizures, the media report made mention of such canine detection units.

⁷⁷⁸ <https://889noticias.mx/noticias/aseguran-a-pericos-y-loros-en-el-mercado-de-mixihuca-tenian-lesiones-oculares-porque-les-pintaban-la-cabeza/>. Accessed 10 September 2023.

The number of seized parcels increased between 2017 and 2020 and dropped sharply in 2021 and 2022. The peak in 2020 can be explained by a surge in illegal wildlife trade via air during the COVID-19 pandemic. In June 2020, the National Guard reported that, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, they saw an increase of more than 100% in trafficking of various species after reinforcing their inspection work at San Luis Potosí's International Airport. They also found that the average number of species per shipment had increased during that period from one or two per parcel to up to more than ten. The main places of destination and origin were reported to be Monterrey Nuevo León, Guadalajara, Guanajuato, and Querétaro.⁷⁷⁹

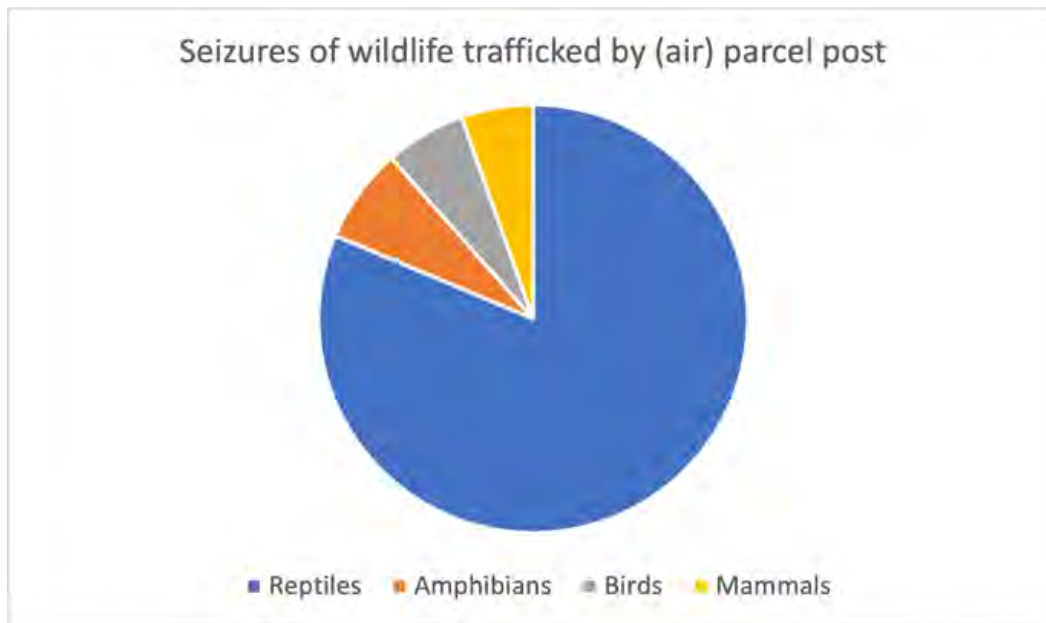


Figure 94: Seizures of wildlife trafficked by (air) parcel post



Figure 95: Number of parcels seized between 2017 and 2022

⁷⁷⁹ <https://www.elsoldesanluis.com.mx/local/video-duplica-guardia-nacional-decomisos-en-trasiego-de-especies-5390905.html>. Accessed 10 September 2023.

Reptile shipments by parcel post often contained rare and endangered species, some endemic and/or CITES I listed, such as:

- ▶ Two Galápagos tortoises (*Chelonoides niger*) in two different parcels, both seized on 4 June 2022 at Mexico City's Querétaro International Airport.⁷⁸⁰
- ▶ Six alligator lizards (*Abronia* sp.), hidden in stuffed animals in a parcel destined for Germany that was seized at Mexico City's Querétaro International Airport.⁷⁸¹
- ▶ Twelve juvenile military macaws (*Ara militaris*) in two shipments strapped in wooden boxes, that were abandoned in the parcel area of an airline at Mazatlan International Airport, State of Sinaloa.⁷⁸²

Trafficking by road

Mexico's road network is commonly used to smuggle wildlife. Ninety-four seizures of wildlife smuggled by road in cars, public buses, or private passenger buses were reported between 2017 and 2022, involving a total of 7,002 wild animals. Of these smuggling attempts, 98% involved live animals (6,841 specimens). While trafficking by air mainly affects reptiles as discussed above, trafficking by road mainly concerns birds: 79% of all wild animals (live, dead, and/or parts and products) seized in road inspections involved birds; followed by reptiles (19%); and amphibians and mammals (together 2%).

It is remarkable that traffickers frequently make use of passenger buses to transport wildlife. It seems likely that this occurs with the knowledge and/or participation of the bus driver, as live animals, often smuggled in large numbers, are surely difficult to conceal. A few incidents were recorded where large numbers of birds were smuggled in private tourist buses, which were apparently chartered for this purpose, suggesting the involvement of organized crime networks. Noteworthy are two seizures of recently captured songbirds that took place in 2018 on the same federal highway from Tepic to Guadalajara. On 15 March, 172 songbirds were seized from a passenger bus⁷⁸³, and on 6 April another 767 songbirds were seized from a private tourist bus.⁷⁸⁴ The second seizure was the result of an investigation by the Federal Police and PROFEPA following the seizure in March.

Sales on social media

Media, NGOs, and academics have reported on the surge in illegal online wildlife trade in Mexico. This includes a 2022 report by Center for Biological Diversity (CBD), which describes how Facebook and other social media platforms allow wildlife to be routinely bought and sold illegally without limits or regulations. It notes that wildlife trafficking in Mexico is out of control and that there is little political will to address it.⁷⁸⁵

⁷⁸⁰ <https://www.lado.mx/n.php?id=9816728>. Accessed 11 September 2023.

⁷⁸¹ <https://www.e-consulta.com/nota/2021-01-30/seguridad/decomisan-6-dragoncitos-escondidos-en-un-pelucho>. Accessed 11 September 2023.

⁷⁸² <https://imagenagropecuaria.com/2020/rescatan-a-12-ejemplares-de-guacamaya-verde-en-mazatlan/>. Accessed 11 September 2023.

⁷⁸³ <https://www.gob.mx/profepa/prensa/asegura-profepa-172-aves-en-portaequipajes-de-camion-de-pasajeros-viajaban-de-navarrit-a-jalisco>. Accessed 18 September 2023.

⁷⁸⁴ <https://www.debate.com.mx/mexico/decomisan-767- trafico-aves-paquete-autobus-navarrit-jalisco-liberan-20180407-0233.html>.

Accessed 18 September 2023.

⁷⁸⁵ Olvera, D. (2021). Entregan aves en peligro de extinción en todo México y se piden por WhatsApp. Sin Embargo, 14 March 2021. Available at: <https://www.noroeste.com.mx/inndaga/entregan-aves-en-peligro-de-extincion-en-todo-mexico-y-se-piden-por-whatsapp-YC620405>.

Accessed 19 September 2023.

Méndez, E. And Olivera, A. (2022). Merciless Markets: How wildlife trafficking threatens Mexico's biodiversity. Center for Biological Diversity, November 2022.

Salas-Picazo, R.I., Ramírez-Bravo, O.E. (2023). The role of social media groups on illegal wildlife trade in four Mexican states: A year-long assessment. In: *Global ecology and Conservation*, Vol. 45, September 2023.

Given these reports, it is worrying that only six seizures (just over 1% of all seizures recorded) were identified between 2017 and 2022 in which wild animals had been advertised or purchased online. Of these six incidents, three seizures resulted from online investigative work.

- ▶ In May 2017, four men were wanted for killing a jaguar in the state of Yucatán and offering its skin for sale online.⁷⁸⁶
- ▶ In January 2018, a tiger cub was seized during routine inspection of the courier and parcel area at Oaxaca airport and a man arrested, who said he had purchased it online.⁷⁸⁷
- ▶ In May 2018, ten orange-fronted parakeet chicks were seized in Mazatlán, Sinaloa, from a man who had offered them for sale online.⁷⁸⁸
- ▶ Also in May 2018, three parrot chicks were seized in Mérida, Yucatán, from a man who had offered them for sale on Facebook.⁷⁸⁹
- ▶ In November 2018, a juvenile Morelet's crocodile was seized in Durango that had escaped its owner. He later claimed he had bought it online.⁷⁹⁰
- ▶ In February 2020, 35 orange-fronted parakeet chicks were seized in Sierra Madre Occidental that were offered for sale online. Sierra Madre Occidental is the distribution area of this species.⁷⁹¹

Until early 2019, there was reportedly a special team within PROFEPA dedicated to investigating illegal wildlife trade on social media. Following the change of administration in 2018, however, this group was disbanded.⁷⁹²

Convergence

Several studies have reported that organized crime groups in Mexico primarily involved in drugs and human trafficking have branched out into the illicit wildlife trade to diversify their sources of revenue. Mexican criminal groups are allegedly selling legal and illegal wildlife products to Chinese traders in exchange for fentanyl and methamphetamine, which they send to the United States, Europe, and elsewhere.⁷⁹³

This study identified nineteen incidents where wild animals were seized along with other illegal commodities such as drugs (marihuana, cocaine, methamphetamine); stolen vehicles; illegal weapons and ammunition; and proceeds of crime such as vehicles and luxury jewellery. However, most of these incidents (13 seizures) took place in ranches or homes of members of organized crime syndicates, and concern wild animals kept as pets or in private zoos. As discussed above, big cats and other rare and exotic wildlife are favoured status symbols for Mexican drug traffickers.

As a 2017 study on organized crime and the illicit wildlife trade in Mexico suggested, the prevalence of exotic animals and private zoos on cartel property might be indicative not just of private ownership of

⁷⁸⁶ Robin des Bois On the Trail no.17 p.65 https://robindesbois.org/wp-content/uploads/ON_THE_TRAIL_17.pdf.

⁷⁸⁷ <https://oaxacadiaadia.com/?p=54118>. Accessed 18 September 2023.

⁷⁸⁸ <https://www.diariodelsur.com.mx/mexico/sociedad/aseguran-10-pericos-frente-naranja-que-se-ofertaban-por-internet-1686408.html>. Accessed 18 September 2023.

⁷⁸⁹ <https://progresoahoy.com/noticias/decomisa-profepa-loros-que-un-joven-vendia-en-facebook-10101528/>

⁷⁹⁰ <https://www.elsoldedurango.com.mx/policiaca/ah-pa-animales-primero-fue-un-tigre-ahora-aseguran-cocodrilo-en-durango-2633788.html>. Accessed 18 September 2023.

⁷⁹¹ <https://meganews.mx/nacional/aseguran-pericos-de-frente-naranja-suman-44-en-10-dias/>

⁷⁹² Méndez, E. And Olivera, A. (2022). Merciless Markets: How wildlife trafficking threatens Mexico's biodiversity. Center for Biological Diversity, November 2022.

⁷⁹³ Barth, T.P. (2017). Organized crime and the illicit wildlife trade in Mexico. Baker Institute, May 2017; Felbab-Brown, V. (2022). China-linked wildlife poaching and trafficking in Mexico; Earth League International and John Jay College of Criminal Justice (2023). Environmental Crime Convergence.

these animals by cartel leaders, but also of involvement in their trafficking.⁷⁹⁴ This study could not verify this, however. While indications of organized crime involvement were identified in many incidents where large numbers of wild animals were seized that require a sophisticated level of organisation to collect, transport, and market, media reports on seizures seldom contain information about organized crime networks and/or convergence with trafficking of other illicit commodities.

Transboundary trafficking routes

Mexico > USA, Europe, and China

Based on the seizures identified, Mexico appears to be the largest illegal exporter of wildlife to the USA and Europe compared to the other 17 Hispanic American countries that are part of this study. Between 2017 and 2022, 23 seizures of wildlife originating from Mexico were recorded in countries outside Mexico. Of these, two occurred in China; one in Germany; one in The Netherlands; and 19 in the USA, most of them at USA border crossings with Mexico. Several of these seizures were discussed above in the key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes section.

The following USA border crossing points were involved in the 20 seizures recorded between 2017 and 2022: San Ysidro, California (five seizures); Brownsville/Gateway, Texas (four seizures); Hidalgo, Texas (three seizures); Columbus, New Mexico (one seizure); Otay Mesa, California (one seizure); El Paso/Paso del Norte, Texas (one seizure); and Progreso, Texas (one seizure). For two seizures at the USA-Mexican border the exact location could not be identified.

USA > Mexico

Mexico is not only a source of wildlife trafficked abroad. A few seizures were recorded which highlight how wildlife is smuggled into Mexico from the USA:

- ▶ In June 2020, Mexican Customs at Monterrey International Airport in Nuevo León seized a parcel arriving from the USA with a severely dehydrated emerald tree boa (*Corallus caninus*), a species native to the rain forests of South America.⁷⁹⁵
- ▶ In December 2020, US authorities at the Hidalgo-Reynosa International Bridge seized more than 70 reptiles including chameleons, geckos, snakes, and frogs that an American citizen attempted to smuggle into Mexico by car.⁷⁹⁶
- ▶ In August 2022, US authorities at the Hidalgo-Reynosa International Bridge arrested three Mexican men attempting to smuggle more than 160 reptiles, amphibians, and insects into Mexico in a van, involving a mixture of South American and African species (including ten ball pythons and eight Jackson's chameleons).⁷⁹⁷

Central America > Mexico

There have been several wildlife seizures in Mexico and Guatemala that reveal wildlife trafficking routes from Central America to Mexico.

- ▶ In April 2019, a Guatemalan woman was arrested in Guatemala at the border with Mexico for attempting to smuggle nine baby monkeys and five baby sloths into Mexico.⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹⁴ Barth, T.P. (2017). Organized crime and the illicit wildlife trade in Mexico. Baker Institute, May 2017.

⁷⁹⁵ <https://voxpopuli.com.mx/2020/06/rescatan-a-una-boa-esmeralda-abandonada-en-aeropuerto-de-monterrey/>

⁷⁹⁶ <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/local-media-release/cbp-officers-discover-undeclared-reptiles-hidalgo-international-bridge>

⁷⁹⁷ <https://www.justice.gov/enrd/page/file/1542701/download>

⁷⁹⁸ <https://www.chiapasparalelo.com/noticias/chiapas/2019/04/detienen-a-mujer-que-trafficaba-monos-cara-blanca-y-osos-perezosos/>.

Accessed 4 September 2023.

- ▶ In January 2020, two Mexican men were arrested on the Pan-America Highway in Guatemala for attempting to smuggle 13 baby Panamanian white-faced capuchins and three choco toucans to Mexico. The animals were not native to Guatemala and are believed to have originated from Honduras or Nicaragua.⁷⁹⁹

Mexico <> Guatemala <> Belize

Media have reported on cross-border trafficking of scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*) between Mexico (Quintana Roo state), Belize, and Guatemala. In 2017, an expert estimated that around 500 scarlet macaws are captured in Belize annually and trafficked to Guatemala and Mexico.⁸⁰⁰ This study identified a seizure in August 2017 of six scarlet macaws (along with two military macaws, four white-fronted amazons, and one keel-billed toucan) from a car in Motozintla, Chiapas, close to the border with Guatemala. The birds could well have originated from Guatemala.⁸⁰¹

Mexico > Chile

In September 2018, Mexican police seized 21 American bullfrogs and seven scorpions from a parcel at a courier company in Mexico City that were destined for Chile.⁸⁰²

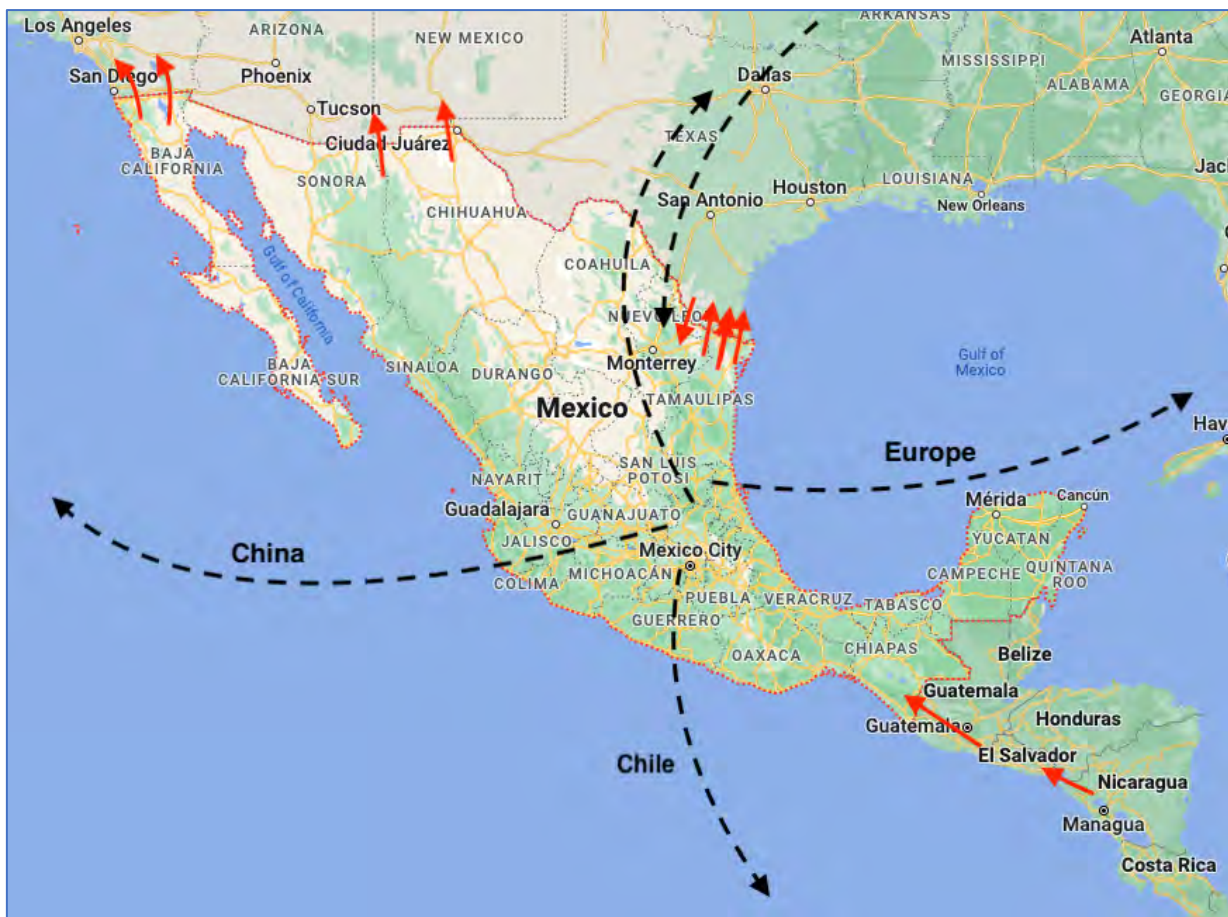


Figure 96: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes to/from Mexico based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022

⁷⁹⁹ <https://www.prensalibre.com/ciudades/guatemala-ciudades/decomiso-de-13-monos-evidencia-presencia-de-bandas-transnacionales-de-trafico-de-animales-en-guatemala/>. Accessed 4 September 2023.

⁸⁰⁰ <https://www.expedientequintanaroo.com/2017/03/quacamayas-en-riesgo-trafico-gran.html>. Accessed 4 September 2023.

⁸⁰¹ <https://www.miambiente.com.mx/sustentabilidad1/rescata-profepa-aves-en-peligro-de-extincion-en-chiapas/>. Accessed 5 September 2023.

⁸⁰² <https://www.sopitas.com/noticias/rescatan-ranas-alacranes-paqueteria-cdmx/>. Accessed on 18 January 2024.

Law enforcement efforts

The United Mexican States (Estados Unidos Mexicanos) is a federal republic composed of 32 federal entities: 31 states and Mexico City, an autonomous entity. The Federal Attorney for Environmental Protection (Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente, PROFEPA) is responsible for ensuring compliance with environmental regulations and enforcing Mexico's environmental laws, which include the General Wildlife Law of 3 July 2000 (Ley General de Vida Silvestre).⁸⁰³ PROFEPA is a decentralized administrative body of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, SEMARNAT).⁸⁰⁴ The Federal Police (Policía Federal) and National Guard (Guardia Nacional) also have an important role in tackling wildlife trafficking.

In 2023, a Mexican legal expert highlighted that environmental policy in Mexico has suffered a setback under the current administration, which came to office in 2018. Mexico is accused of holding a double standard regarding environmental law enforcement, in which even actions that have been coerced by organized crime are not sanctioned, either due to lack of will or due to lack of budget to strengthen environmental protection in the country. Mexican citizens have filed numerous complaints to the Commission for Environmental Cooperation of the Mexico-United States-Canada Treaty (Tratado entre México, Estados Unidos y Canadá, T-MEC) concerning inadequate enforcement of environmental laws by PROFEPA.⁸⁰⁵

This criticism is confirmed by NGO research, which has reported that wildlife trafficking has increased because PROFEPA lacks the operational capacity to conduct inspections due to budget cuts in the environmental sector.⁸⁰⁶

Analysis of seizures and poaching incidents between 2017 and 2022 suggests law enforcement efforts to address the trade are mostly reactive. Most seizures take place in response to citizen's reports of illegal situations, prompting authorities to undertake inspections. Seizures of wildlife smuggled by road or air usually occur as part of routine inspections, with specimens more often than not identified by coincidence when law enforcement officers detect noises of animals from luggage, parcels, or car trunks. There appear to be very few proactive, intelligence-led law enforcement actions. This is also apparent in law enforcement responses to illegal online trade, which is significant in Mexico. Yet, as mentioned above in the key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes section, few interceptions were recorded of specimens offered for sale online.

It is telling that Mexico's biggest seizure ever, on 26 November 2020, occurred on the basis of a citizen's complaint. On that day, the Guardia Nacional seized 15,785 reptiles, birds, and insects⁸⁰⁷ from two homes in Iztapalapa, Mexico City, which belonged to a family that allegedly has been involved in wildlife trafficking for several years.⁸⁰⁸

⁸⁰³ https://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/146_200521.pdf. Accessed on 12 September 2023.

⁸⁰⁴ <https://www.gob.mx/profepa/que-hacemos>. Accessed on 29 February 2024.

⁸⁰⁵ <https://practiceguides.chambers.com/practice-guides/environmental-law-2023/mexico/trends-and-developments>. Accessed on 29 February 2024.

⁸⁰⁶ Méndez, E. And Olivera, A. (2022). Merciless Markets: How wildlife trafficking threatens Mexico's biodiversity. Center for Biological Diversity, November 2022.

⁸⁰⁷ Including 14449 mud turtles (*Kinosternon* sp.); 307 alligator lizards (*Abronia* sp.); 209 crocodiles; 69 toucans, military macaws, orange-fronted parakeets, parrots, and songbirds; 40 snakes; 15 iguanas; and an unidentified number of Gila monsters (*Heloderma suspectum*).

⁸⁰⁸ <https://www.excelsior.com.mx/comunidad/estos-son-los-animales-rescatados-tras-decomiso-historico-en-iztapalapa/1419311>. Accessed on 12 September 2023.

The deterrent effect of law enforcement in Mexico is furthermore impacted by the low rate of arrests associated with wildlife poaching and trafficking. Out of the total of 519 seizure and poaching incidents reported to take place in Mexico between 2017 and 2022, a total of 109 people were reportedly arrested in 56 incidents. Therefore, only 11% of seizure and poaching incidents reported by the media resulted in arrests. This is well below the regional average of 27%.

Meanwhile, media reports frequently mention that suspects ran off and abandoned their wildlife contraband upon seeing law enforcers arrive, or that no owner could be identified for wildlife shipments smuggled by road. While this study found no evidence of this, it is not unlikely that in some instances perpetrators paid bribes to avoid being arrested.

A final issue of concern is that Mexico lacks sufficient governmental facilities to care for seized wildlife. In recent years, 11 of the 13 designated governmental rescue facilities, the Centres for the Conservation and Research of Wildlife (Centros para la Conservación e Investigación de la Vida Silvestre, CIVS), were reportedly shut down due to budget cuts within the federal government. As of 2022, only two Centres for Wildlife Conservation and Research remained in operation. One is in Los Reyes La Paz, in the state of Mexico, and the other is in Villa Tututepec de Melchor Ocampo, in Oaxaca. In 2020, the two shared a joint budget of just 1.4 million pesos (US\$70,000). The Centres can only receive animals for a short time to assess their health status and decide whether they can be released into the wild or require placement in one of the Management Units for the Conservation of Wildlife (Unidades de Manejo para la Conservación de la Vida Silvestre, UMA) or Facilities that Manage Wildlife (Instalaciones que Manejen Vida Silvestre fuera de su hábitat natural, PIMVS). Sometimes seized animals are left in the care of the alleged offenders.⁸⁰⁹

Due to the lack of capacity on the government side, seized wild animals almost always end up in farms, zoos, or private collections that are registered as UMA or PIMVS. However, it is increasingly common for these facilities to sell species that are not covered by their registration with SEMARNAT, violating the General Wildlife Law. As such, these facilities allegedly play a key role in wildlife trafficking in Mexico. As there is no central system to monitor the status of seized wildlife, PROFEPA loses sight of animals after they are sent to a UMA or PIMVS. A disturbing statistic is that PROFEPA did not know what happened to 97% of the 127,045 animals and plants that it had seized totalling approximately 123,290 animals) between January 2015 and April 2022.⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰⁹ Méndez, E. And Olivera, A. (2022). Merciless Markets: How wildlife trafficking threatens Mexico's biodiversity. Center for Biological Diversity, November 2022.

⁸¹⁰ Ibid.

Nicaragua

Nicaragua

General overview

Eighteen seizures and three poaching incidents affecting a minimum number of 3,415 animals were recorded for Nicaragua between 2017 and 2022. Some 99.6% (3457 specimens) concerned live animals. One seizure, of 244 macaw and parrot eggs originating from Nicaragua, took place in China.

Of all animals involved in these incidents, 92.7% concerned reptiles (3,165 specimens); 3.8% birds (130 specimens); 2.3% amphibians (79 specimens); and 1.2% mammals (41 specimens).

Unique characteristics

- High volume of tortoises smuggled from El Salvador
- Marine turtles and iguanas poached for their meat and eggs
- Key source country for psittacids and primates trafficked abroad
- Trafficking of macaw and parrot eggs to East Asia
- Low seizure rate

It is important to note, however, that these findings are heavily skewed by one incident, a seizure of 3,091 tortoises in 2022. Overall, very few animals were reported to be seized or poached in Nicaragua between 2017 and 2022. This paucity of data makes it challenging to conduct a meaningful analysis as, clearly, they provide limited insight into illegal wildlife exploitation in this country.

Number of incidents reported in the media

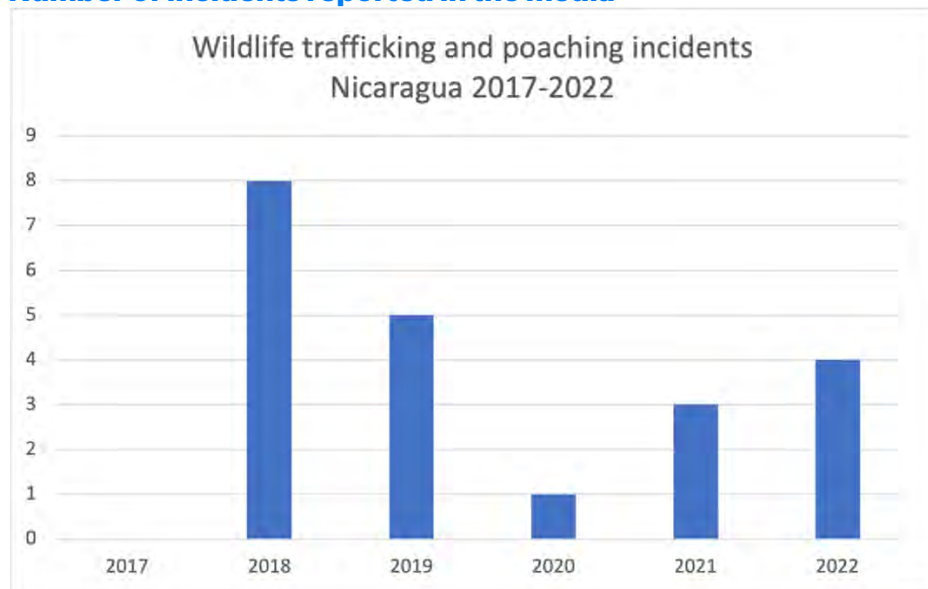


Figure 517: Wildlife trafficking and poaching incidents in/implicating Nicaragua between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

The annual number of seizures and poaching incidents in Nicaragua shows a somewhat erratic trend between 2017 and 2022. The peak in 2018 can be explained almost entirely by seven seizures of live marine turtles, marine turtle meat, and marine turtle eggs (see the species most targeted section).

Number of animals involved

The table and figure below show the numbers of reptiles, birds, amphibians, and mammals reported to be seized or poached in Nicaragua between 2017 and 2022.

Table 14: Number of animals seized or poached in Nicaragua between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Reptiles	0	52	13	0	4	3096	3165
Birds	0	0	125	0	5	0	130
Amphibians	0	79	0	0	0	0	79
Mammals	0	1	26	1	11	2	41
TOTAL	0	132	164	1	20	3098	

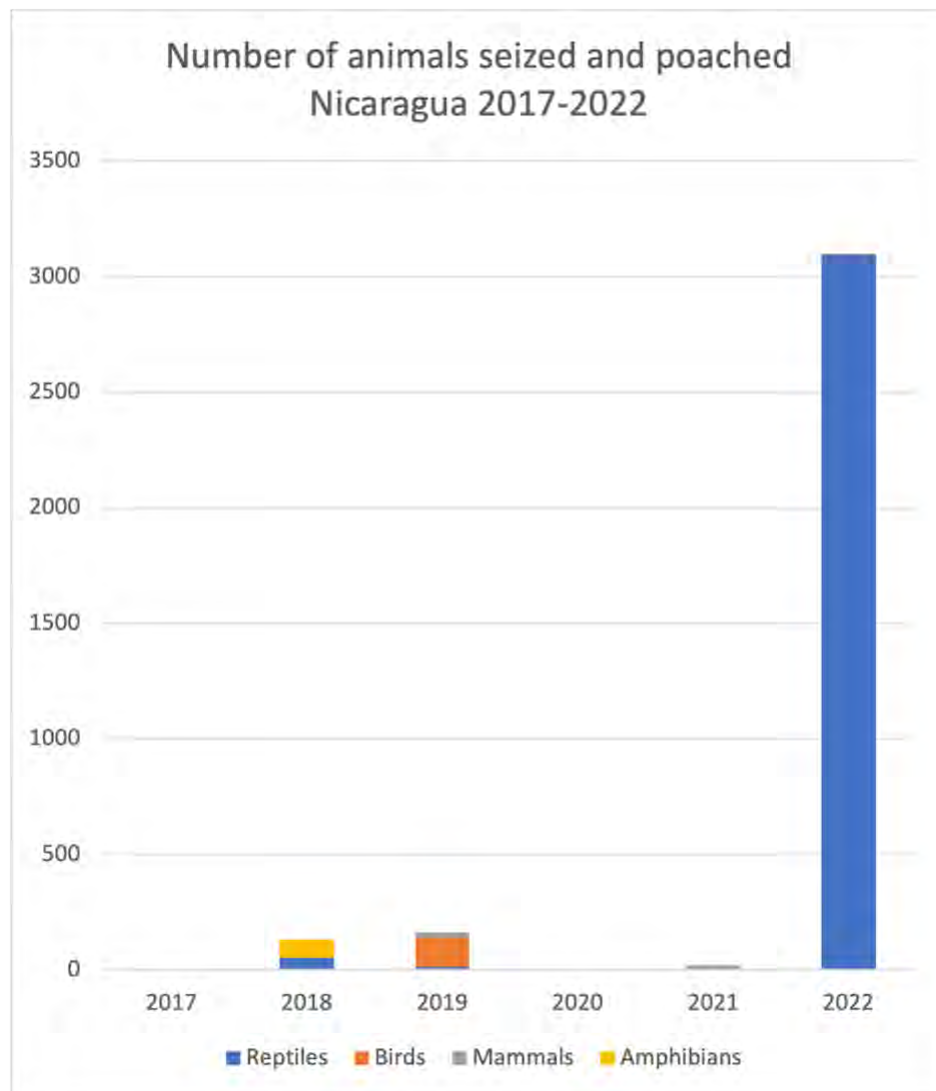


Figure 98: Number of animals seized or poached in Nicaragua between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Species most targeted

Reptiles

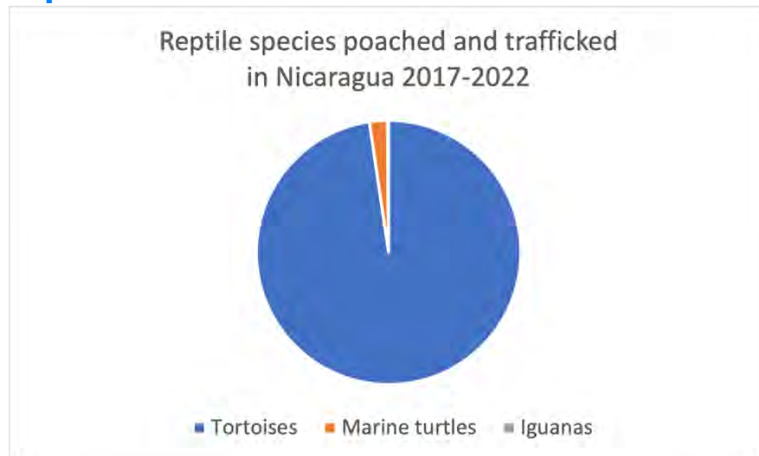


Figure 52: Reptile species poached and trafficked in Nicaragua between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

While 90.5% of all reptiles affected by poaching or trafficking between 2017 and 2022 concerned tortoises, these were all seized in one event. In December 2022, Nicaraguan authorities at the Cosigüina control post (based on the far western peninsula of Nicaragua) arrested a Nicaraguan man transporting 3,091 tortoises. The authorities identified them as Bolson tortoises (*Gopherus flavomarginatus*), and noted they had been smuggled from El Salvador, probably by sea given the location of the seizure.⁸¹¹ It is doubtful these were actually Bolson tortoises, however. Bolson tortoises, which are endemic to Mexico, are critically endangered, and listed in CITES Appendix I; recent estimates suggest that fewer than 2,000 Bolson tortoises remain in the wild.⁸¹²

Marine turtles in Nicaragua are targeted by poachers for their meat and eggs. Eleven incidents pertaining to poaching and trafficking of marine turtles were reported between 2017 and 2022, mostly involving green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*). One hawksbill sea turtle was seized (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), and in one incident olive ridley sea turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) eggs were seized. Sixty-six live marine turtles were seized, as well as 4,722 marine turtle eggs and 408.2 kg marine turtle meat. Most seizures (eight of the 11 incidents) were made at sea by the Nicaraguan navy, all of them in 2018 and 2019.

One incident in 2018 suggests involvement of organized crime groups in marine turtle egg trafficking in Nicaragua. During a weekend in August 2018, around 800 people entered the La Flor wildlife reserve to kill marine turtles and extract their eggs. Most came from the capital Managua, and were reportedly coordinated by members of the M-19 crime group from the municipality of San Juan del Sur. The police seized 3,852 eggs and arrested 17 people. It is unclear how many turtles were killed. Most of those arrested were members of the M-19 group, who reportedly had entered the reserve in coordination with criminal groups from the capital Managua.⁸¹³

⁸¹¹ <https://radio-corporacion.com/blog/archivos/169144/decomisan-mas-de-3-mil-tortugas-en-cosiguina/>. Accessed on 4 October 2023.

⁸¹² <https://tesf.org/project/bolson-tortoise/#:~:text=Population%20decline%20and%20contraction%20of,tortoises%20remain%20in%20the%20wild>. Accessed on 4 October 2023.

⁸¹³ <https://www.tn8.tv/sucesos/455107-17-detenidos-robar-huevos-matar-tortugas-reserva-flor-rivas/>. Accessed on 5 October 2023.

Between 2020 and 2022, only one marine turtle seizure (involving four live specimens) was reported, in 2021.

Turtle meat is part of the traditional diet of the Nicaraguan Caribbean communities. They are authorised to catch and consume green sea turtles in limited quantities for subsistence purposes based on a 2021 resolution by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (Ministerio del Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, MARENA).⁸¹⁴ This may have provided a loophole for illegal trade in marine turtle meat and eggs, however, as has been observed in other countries.⁸¹⁵

The last remaining reptile group that was seized between 2017 and 2022 in Nicaragua concerns iguanas. As elsewhere in Central America, consumption of iguana meat and eggs (of both black spiny-tailed iguanas and green iguanas) is popular in Nicaragua, particularly during Lent. In that period, iguana dishes are widely available in the markets of Managua⁸¹⁶, even though iguanas may not be hunted between January 1 and April 30 of each year.⁸¹⁷ Only one iguana seizure was identified, however, concerning five green iguanas (*Iguana iguana*) that a man was carrying with him in El Viego, Chinandega department, in September 2022.⁸¹⁸

Salvadoran media have reported that black spiny-tailed iguanas (*Ctenosaura similis*) are smuggled from Nicaragua to El Salvador, where they command a much higher price than in Nicaragua (see the key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes section).

Birds

Various seizures identified by this study, including in Costa Rica; El Salvador; Honduras; Mexico; Panama; and as far as China, implicate Nicaragua as a key source country for parakeets, parrots, and macaws trafficked abroad. Nicaraguan species seized abroad include pacific parakeets (*Psittacara strenuus*); crimson-fronted parakeets (*Psittacara finschii*); orange-chinned parakeet chicks (*Brotogeris jugularis*); red-lored amazons (*Amazona autumnalis*); yellow-naped amazons (*Amazona auropalliata*); and scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*). Further detail on these bird trafficking routes is provided in the key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes section.

Furthermore, media report widespread illegal bird sales in the streets and markets of Nicaragua's capital Managua, including of parrots, orange-fronted parakeets (*Aratinga canicularis*), and crimson-fronted parakeets.⁸¹⁹

It is, therefore, concerning that so few bird seizures were reported in Nicaragua between 2017 and 2022, as it implies that bird traffickers in Nicaragua enjoy complete impunity.

Only two seizures were identified in Nicaragua, involving a total of 130 red-lored amazons. One significant seizure happened in December 2019, when Nicaraguan navy officers at the Cosigüina

⁸¹⁴ <https://www.la-razon.com/la-revista/2022/09/23/caza-de-tortugas-para-gastronomia-tradicional-caribe-nicaraguense/>. Accessed on 5 October 2023.

⁸¹⁵ See e.g. Verheij, P. (2019). An assessment of wildlife poaching and trafficking in Bolivia and Suriname. IUCN NL, Amsterdam. Available at: <https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/49026>. Accessed on 5 October 2023.

⁸¹⁶ <https://www.tn8.tv/nacionales/537504-la-sopa-de-queso-pinol-iguana-gran-oferta-en-mercados-de-managua/>. Accessed on 6 October 2023.

⁸¹⁷ <https://radiocamoapa.com/2022/03/03/la-comercializacion-de-iguanas-esta-prohibida-en-nicaragua/>. Accessed on 6 October 2023.

⁸¹⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/1405009339602305/posts/con-el-compromiso-de-conservar-y-proteger-la-fauna-silvestre-en-conjunto-con-la-4790538831049322/2>. Accessed on 6 October 2023.

⁸¹⁹ <https://ondalocalni.com/noticias/1892-ciudadania-denuncia-vendedores-animales-silvestres/>. Accessed on 5 October 2023.

control post in the Chinandega department in the far eastern peninsula of Nicaragua arrested six people who were transporting 239 wild animals, including 125 red-lore amazons, 26 white-faced capuchin babies, and 79 unidentified amphibians to the coastal town of Potosí by car. From Potosí it is a relatively short distance by boat across the Gulf of Fonseca to the coasts of Honduras and El Salvador.⁸²⁰ In January 2021, five red-lore amazons along with eight white-faced capuchins were seized from a street vendor in Siuna, in the north of the country.⁸²¹

It is noteworthy that two of the most significant wildlife seizures that occurred in Nicaragua between 2017 and 2022 involved the exact same species combination. Possible explanations include that Nicaraguan red-lore amazons and white-faced capuchins may be sourced in the same region, trafficked along the same routes to markets where both species are in high demand, and/or involve the same criminal network(s) specializing in the trafficking of these species. In any case, it confirms existing research that has highlighted a convergence of parrot and primate trafficking.⁸²²

Nicaragua is not only a source for live psittacids. Eggs of Amazon parrots and macaws are also being trafficked to Asia. In March 2019, customs officers at West Kowloon railway station in Hong Kong SAR arrested a woman with 244 scarlet macaw and Amazon parrot eggs in her luggage. The eggs, which were detected through X-ray, were wrapped in paper and clothing, and marked with different colours and symbols. There was also special heat preservation equipment in her bag. The woman had completed a six-day journey from Nicaragua via North America, Europe, and Asia.⁸²³

Another seizure that occurred in the USA in 2023 highlights this same egg trafficking route from Nicaragua to Asia. In March 2023, a Chinese national arrived on a flight from Managua, Nicaragua, and was transferring in Miami to fly to Taiwan region. He had almost made it through customs, when a US Customs and Border Protection officer heard chirping noises coming from his carry-on. Upon inspection, 29 eggs parrot eggs were discovered, some of which had started to hatch. The birds turned out to be critically endangered yellow-naped amazons and red-lore amazons. American experts explained that these 29 rare parrots were worth more than US\$115,000 and are among the most trafficked Central American parrot species. Furthermore, experts estimate more than 90% of their nests are poached for the illegal pet trade.⁸²⁴

As recently as March 2024, Nicaragua was again implicated as a source for psittacid eggs smuggled to Taiwan region. The Panama National Police arrested three Taiwanese men at the airport of Tocumen with 240 macaw eggs in their luggage. The men had arrived by plane from Nicaragua and were bound for Taiwan region.⁸²⁵ In Taiwan region, Latin American parrots and macaws are in high demand. Prices for macaws exceed US\$3,185 for one specimen.⁸²⁶

⁸²⁰ <https://www.vostv.com.ni/nacionales/12018-ejercito-nicaragua-animales-pelgro-extincion/>. Accessed on 5 October 2023.

⁸²¹ <https://www.tn8.tv/departamentos/530973-por-el-cuido-fauna-liberan-monos-y-loras-en-el-caribe-norte/>. Accessed on 5 October 2023.

⁸²² Martin, R., Senni, C., D'cruze, N., & Bruschi, N. (2019). Tricks of the trade—legal trade used to conceal Endangered African grey parrots on commercial flights. *Oryx*, 53(2), 213-213. doi:10.1017/S0030605319000097.

⁸²³ <https://espanol.cgtn.com/n/BflcA-CAA-EAA/CGbHcA/p.html>. Accessed on 5 October 2023.

⁸²⁴ See: <https://thehill.com/homenews/ap/ap-u-s-news/ap-chirping-sounds-lead-airport-officials-to-bag-filled-with-smuggled-parrot-eggs/>; and <https://wsvn.com/news/local/miami-dade/fiu-researchers-search-for-permanent-homes-for-24-amazon-parrots-smuggled-into-mia-suspect-charged/>. Accessed on 6 October 2023.

⁸²⁵ <https://www.telemetro.com/nacionales/policia-nacional-detiene-tres-asiaticos-huevos-quacamaya-n5972320>. Accessed on 17 March 2024.

⁸²⁶ https://hk.on.cc/tw/bkn/cnt/news/20171019/bkntw-20171019200210871-1019_04011_001.html. Accessed on 15 February 2024.

Mammals

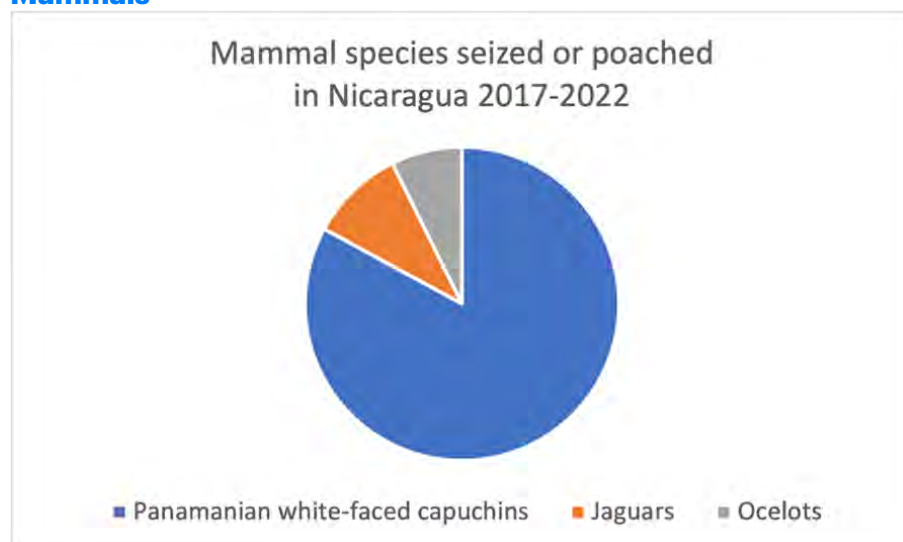


Figure 100: Mammal species seized or poached in Nicaragua between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

A total of 41 mammals were involved in four seizures and three poaching incidents reported in Nicaragua between 2017 and 2022. This included 34 Panamanian white-faced capuchins (*Cebus imitator*); four jaguars (*Panthera onca*); and three ocelots (*Leopardus pardalis*).

Panamanian white-faced capuchins, are listed in CITES Appendix II and are popular pets in North, Central, and South America; there is evidence of wide-scale poaching and trafficking to supply demand. White-faced capuchins originating from Nicaragua have been seized in Honduras, El Salvador, and Mexico (see the key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes section, below).

Only two seizures were reported in Nicaragua, in 2019 and 2021. The 2019 seizure involved no fewer than 26 white-faced capuchin babies and 125 red-lored amazons (as well as 79 unidentified amphibians)⁸²⁷; the 2021 seizure involved eight white-faced capuchins and five red-lored amazons.⁸²⁸ These seizures, and possible reasons for the convergence in the trafficking of these two species, are discussed above. The magnitude of the 2019 seizure clearly demonstrates the organized nature of this illicit trade. Given the location of the seizure, it is highly likely the monkeys were meant to be smuggled to neighbouring El Salvador and possibly further north to Mexico or the USA. It is also important to consider the significant impact of this illicit trade on wild populations: to obtain these 26 babies, their mothers and possibly other adult family members will have been killed.

Two jaguars were reportedly killed by poachers in 2020 and January 2021. In October 2020, a jaguar cub was beaten to death and its corpse exhibited as a trophy by villagers in Tuapí, a small indigenous community in the municipality of Puerto Cabezas in the North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region of Nicaragua.⁸²⁹ A few months later, a female jaguar was killed in the Dákura area, inhabited by indigenous communities, not far from Tuapí in the same region. The poaching of the latter jaguar (reportedly in retaliation for killing a work horse) only became evident when her two cubs were offered for sale on social media for US\$400 per specimen, causing an outcry among social media users. The director of

⁸²⁷ <https://www.vostv.com.ni/nacionales/12018-ejercito-nicaragua-animales-peligro-extincion/>. Accessed on 5 October 2023.

⁸²⁸ <https://www.tn8.tv/departamentos/530973-por-el-cuido-fauna-liberan-monos-y-loras-en-el-caribe-norte/>. Accessed on 5 October 2023.

⁸²⁹ <https://nicaraguainvestiga.com/nacion/36488-pobladores-bilwi-asesinan-jaguar-peligro-de-extincion/>. Accessed on 8 October 2023.

Nicaragua's National Zoo subsequently negotiated their release.⁸³⁰ According to the zoo director their intention was to take them to neighbouring country Honduras and sell them to a Chinese citizen.⁸³¹

In 2020, Costa Rica reported to the CITES secretariat (in response to CITES Notification 055/2020), that the land border between Nicaragua and Costa Rica is suspected to be a jaguar trafficking route.⁸³² No seizures were identified that could corroborate this.

Like jaguars, ocelots are victims of poaching in Nicaragua. In June 2022, an ocelot was slaughtered by a group of hunters with dogs.⁸³³ In October 2022, villagers killed an ocelot in retaliation for preying on their chickens.⁸³⁴ In both instances the killings became known after videos of the events went viral on social media.

Amphibians

Only one seizure of amphibians was reported in Nicaragua: 79 unidentified specimens were seized along with the 125 red-loreed amazons and 26 baby capuchin monkeys discussed above.⁸³⁵ It is not unlikely the amphibians were frogs. Latin American frog species such as tree frogs, poison dart frogs, and glass frogs are in high demand in pet markets of North America, Europe, and East Asia. There are several wildlife farms in Nicaragua which legally export large numbers of frogs to these regions, including red-eyed frogs (*Agalychnis callidryas*) and glass frogs (*Centrolenidae*).⁸³⁶ The existence of this legal wildlife trade flow offers opportunities for traffickers to supply illegally sourced specimens to existing markets.

⁸³⁰ <https://www.excelsior.com.mx/global/rescatan-a-dos-cachorros-de-jaguar-en-nicaragua-iban-a-venderlos/1429657>; <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/internacional/Fotos--Rescatan-dos-crias-de-jaguar-ofrecidos-en-redes-sociales-en-Nicaragua-20210127-Q105.html>. Accessed on 8 October 2023.

⁸³¹ <https://phys.org/news/2021-01-nicaragua-endangered-jaguar-cubs.html>. Accessed on 8 October 2023.

⁸³² https://cites.org/sites/default/files/articles/CITES_Study_on_Illegal_Trade_in_Jaguars%20.pdf. Accessed on 9 October 2023.

⁸³³ <https://nicaraguainvestiga.com/nacion/98235-cazadores-sacrifican-tigrillo-siuna/>. Accessed on 9 October 2023.

⁸³⁴ <https://nicaraguaactual.tv/asesinan-tigrillo-rondar-poblado-ciudad-dario-matagalpa/>. Accessed on 9 October 2023.

⁸³⁵ <https://www.vostv.com.ni/nacionales/12018-ejercito-nicaragua-animales-pelgro-extincion/>. Accessed on 5 October 2023.

⁸³⁶ <https://www.france24.com/es/minuto-a-minuto/20220707-ranas-boas-y-ara%C3%B1as-por-correo-el-negocio-de-exportaci%C3%B3n-de-animales-en-nicaragua>. Accessed on 10 October 2023.

Key geographical/ logistical trafficking nodes



Figure 101: Locations of seizures and poaching incidents in Nicaragua reported between 2017 and 2022

Sales in markets

Various media reports suggest that wildlife poached in Nicaragua's forests gets transported to the Mercado Oriental in the capital Managua, where the animals are sold to local buyers as well as to foreign traffickers who smuggle them out through blind spots in the borders with El Salvador (through the Gulf of Fonseca), Honduras, and Costa Rica. Some animals are shipped to consumer markets in the USA, Europe, and Asia. On one day in 2023, Nicaraguan investigative journalists of online magazine 'Divergentes' observed hundreds of wild animals, including white-faced capuchins, orange-fronted parakeets, songbirds, yellow-naped amazons, toucans, and macaws for sale in the market. A vendor informed them he accepted orders for scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*) and great green macaws (*Ara ambiguus*), both listed in CITES Appendix I, with delivery to the buyer's home or elsewhere. Great green macaws are listed by IUCN as 'Critically Endangered', meaning they face an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild. The National Police must be aware of this illicit trade, as they have an office in the market in charge of collecting taxes. A biologist working for MARENA was quoted as follows: 'The Police know that this illegal trade has operated in the Mercado Oriental for many years. MARENA is aware that all endangered species come to this market. They don't act because they have no interest.'⁸³⁷ Indeed, no seizures have been identified in this market, nor anywhere else in Managua.

⁸³⁷ E.g. <https://www.divergentes.com/trafico-animales-silvestres-nicaragua/>; <https://ondalocalni.com/noticias/1892-ciudadania-denuncia-vendedores-animales-silvestres/>. Accessed on 5 October 2023.

Sales on social media

Media report an increase of illegal wildlife sales on social media in Nicaragua.⁸³⁸ Only one incident concerning illegal wildlife sales on social media was recorded, however. In January 2021, two jaguar cubs were offered for sale for US\$400 per specimen by men who had reportedly killed their mother in retaliation for preying on livestock.⁸³⁹ This incident was discussed above in the species most targeted section.

Convergence

No incidents were identified where wildlife was seized jointly with other illicit commodities. However, the involvement of the M-19 crime group in poaching and trafficking of marine turtle eggs (discussed above in the species most targeted section) is significant, as it provides evidence that organized crime groups in Nicaragua are engaging in wildlife crime as an attractive enterprise, typically generating high profits at low risk of being caught, let alone prosecuted.

Transboundary trafficking routes

El Salvador ↔ Nicaragua

- ▶ In December 2021, Salvadoran authorities arrested four Nicaraguans and a Salvadoran taxi driver with 85 parrots and parakeets (among which 34 orange-fronted parakeets, 38 crimson-fronted parakeets, 30 Pacific parakeets, and four yellow-naped amazons), one white-faced capuchin monkey, one spider monkey, and one kinkajou that they were transporting in a taxi. The animals were smuggled by sea from Nicaragua to El Salvador through weak points in the border control in Playa Las Tunas, El Salvador.⁸⁴⁰
- ▶ In December 2022, Nicaraguan authorities at the Cosigüina control post arrested a Nicaraguan man transporting 3,091 tortoises. The authorities reported that they had been smuggled from El Salvador, probably by sea given the location of the seizure.⁸⁴¹
- ▶ In August 2022, three smugglers were arrested in Las Tunas, El Salvador, with 106 juvenile Pacific parakeets, 14 Amazon parrots, and one white-faced capuchin. The animals likely arrived by sea from Nicaragua.⁸⁴²
- ▶ In 2017, Salvadoran media reported that black spiny-tailed iguanas worth US\$2-3 in Nicaragua are smuggled to El Salvador and offered for sale at prices between US\$15 and US\$25.⁸⁴³

Nicaragua ↔ Honduras

- ▶ On 13 July 2023, the Honduran head of the internal border control post in Pavana, Choluteca, said in an interview in the Honduran newspaper El Heraldo that they had recently seized 12 white-faced capuchins, who he believed were smuggled from Nicaragua.⁸⁴⁴

⁸³⁸ <https://ondalocalni.com/noticias/1892-ciudadania-denuncia-vendedores-animales-silvestres/>. Accessed on 10 October 2023.

⁸³⁹ <https://www.excelsior.com.mx/global/rescatan-a-dos-cachorros-de-jaguar-en-nicaragua-iban-a-venderlos/1429657>; <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/internacional/Fotos--Rescatan-dos-crias-de-jaguar-ofrecidos-en-redes-sociales-en-Nicaragua-20210127-0105.html>. Accessed on 8 October 2023.

⁸⁴⁰ <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/Detienen-a-4-extranjeros-que-transportaban-ilegalmente-a-mas-de-80-loros-y-pericos-en-un-taxi-20211227-0019.html>. Accessed on 10 October 2023.

⁸⁴¹ <https://tesf.org/project/bolson-tortoise/#:~:text=Population%20decline%20and%20contraction%20of,tortoises%20remain%20in%20the%20wild>. Accessed on 4 October 2023.

⁸⁴² <https://revistaviatori.com/notas/rescatan-loros-en-el-salvador/>. Accessed on 4 October 2023.

⁸⁴³ <https://vanguardiasv.net/el-comercio-de-las-vidas-inocentes-lo-exotico-que-encierra-a-los-animales-parte-ii/2017/>. Accessed on 3 October 2023.

⁸⁴⁴ <https://www.elheraldo.hn/elheraldoplus/data/9352-animales-silvestres-decomisaron-a-trafficantes-BP14393345>. Accessed on 28 September 2023.

- ▶ Scarlet macaws and other wildlife are reportedly smuggled from La Mosquitia, Honduras, across the border to Nicaragua.⁸⁴⁵

Nicaragua > Costa Rica

This study identified two incidents where Nicaraguan citizens were arrested in Costa Rica for attempting to smuggle wildlife illegally sourced in Nicaragua.

- ▶ In April 2021, a Nicaraguan woman was arrested with two orange-chinned parakeet chicks in her handbag. One chick was close to suffocation. Entering Costa Rica illegally, the woman had carried them on the bus coming from Los Chiles, on the Costa Rica/Nicaragua border and was heading for Quesada.⁸⁴⁶
- ▶ In September 2022, two were men arrested in Los Chiles near the border with Nicaragua for attempting to smuggle a juvenile margay from Nicaragua by car.⁸⁴⁷

In addition, in June 2019, a Costa Rican carried three orange-chinned parakeet chicks across the border in Peñas Blancas, Costa Rica, and surrendered them to Costa Rican border officials. He claimed he had bought them for US\$30 from a Nicaraguan man who offered them for sale on the Nicaraguan side of the border.⁸⁴⁸

Nicaragua > Asia

Seizures in Hong Kong SAR (2019), and Miami (2023), discussed in the species most targeted section, indicate that Nicaraguan macaw and Amazon parrot eggs are being trafficked to Asia.

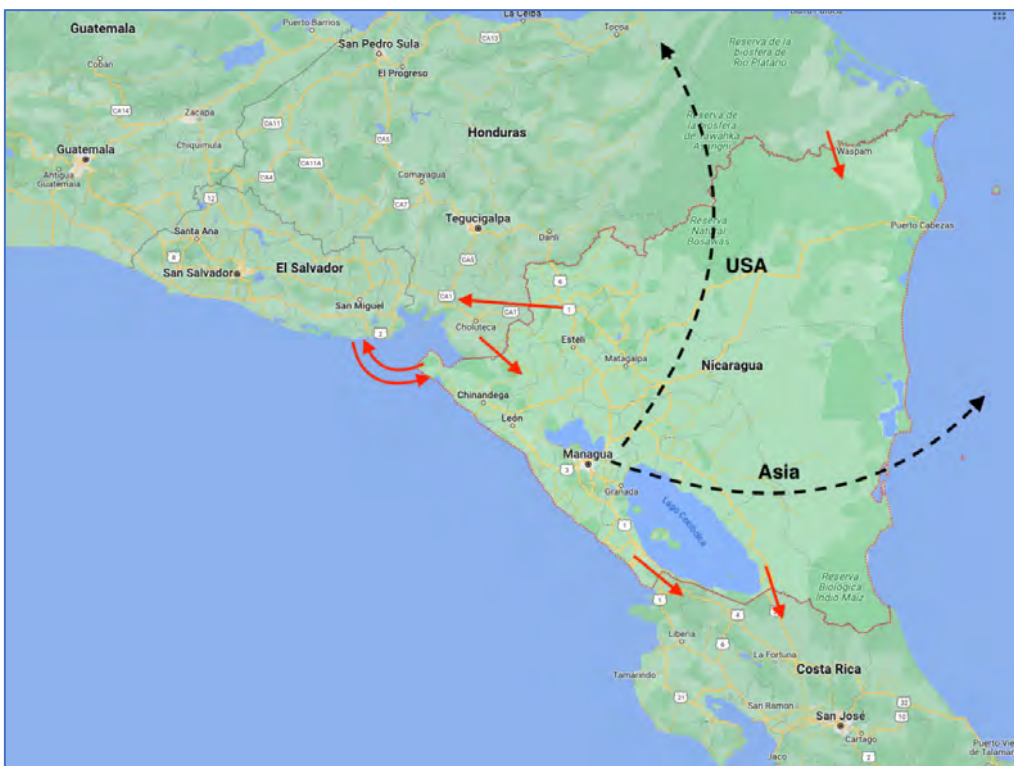


Figure 102: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes to/from Nicaragua based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022

⁸⁴⁵ <https://news.mongabay.com/2019/07/la-mosquitia-dangerous-territory-for-scarlet-macaws-in-honduras/>. Accessed 25 September 2023.

⁸⁴⁶ <http://www.mundoguanacaste.com/index.php/noticias-en-guanacaste/1750-rescatan-a-pichones-de-perico-que-estaban-a-punto-de-asfixiarse>. Accessed on 10 October 2023.

⁸⁴⁷ <https://ameliarueda.com/nota/detienen-dos-hombres-transportaban-caucel-noticias-costa-rica>. Accessed on 10 October 2023.

⁸⁴⁸ https://www.facebook.com/ahoranoticiasr/posts/1425336910954747/?paipv=0&eav=AfavFOW98r_X0GC9p3SaNKheCshD8uYiU3_08KDdJPoxccqe6t0sshR3Qt5W8ODS5Qs&_rdr. Accessed on 10 October 2023.

Law enforcement efforts

During the study period, media reported that 27 people were arrested in five incidents; i.e. 25% of the 20 seizures and poaching incidents reported in Nicaragua resulted in arrest. Seventeen of the 27 arrests took place during a massive marine turtle egg poaching event in 2018.

Nine of the 20 seizure and poaching incidents mentioned above resulted from routine patrols by the Nicaraguan navy; eight of these incidents involved seizures of live marine turtles or marine turtle eggs.

Various sources—as well as seizures in neighbouring countries, Mexico, and China identified by this study—point to Nicaragua’s key role in the supply of wildlife, particularly psittacids, and as a destination and transit country. And yet, hardly any birds or other terrestrial wildlife have been seized from traffickers between 2017 and 2022. Based on this, it appears wildlife trafficking is not a law enforcement priority in Nicaragua. Some sources report that corruption of government officials, including police and army, is facilitating wildlife traffic in the country.⁸⁴⁹

⁸⁴⁹ <https://ocindex.net/2023/country/nicaragua>. Accessed on 5 October 2023.

Panama

Panama

General overview

For Panama, 72 seizures and three poaching events were recorded between 2017 and 2022, affecting a minimum number of 845 animals. Some 93% of these concerned live animals (790 specimens). One of the 75 incidents occurred outside Panama: 112 poison dart frogs originating from Panama were seized in Germany in March 2020 (discussed in species most targeted section, below).

Unique characteristics

- Poison dart frogs trafficked to Europe
- Trafficking of ball pythons for domestic pet market
- Reptiles, including marine turtles, iguanas, and caimans targeted for consumption

Amphibians make up 62% of all animals involved in these incidents, followed by reptiles (16%), birds (15%), and mammals (7%). The high percentage of amphibians is, however, heavily skewed by two seizures of 520 amphibians in 2020 and 2021 (including the one in Germany). The other three species groups were involved in seizures and poaching events much more frequently throughout the 2017–2022 timeframe, albeit in much lower numbers.

Actual seizures and poaching incidents in Panama are higher than suggested by these study findings, which are based on media reports. For instance, between January and September 2022, Panama's Attorney General's Office had recorded 19 wildlife trafficking cases and 14 poaching incidents.⁸⁵⁰

Number of incidents reported in the media

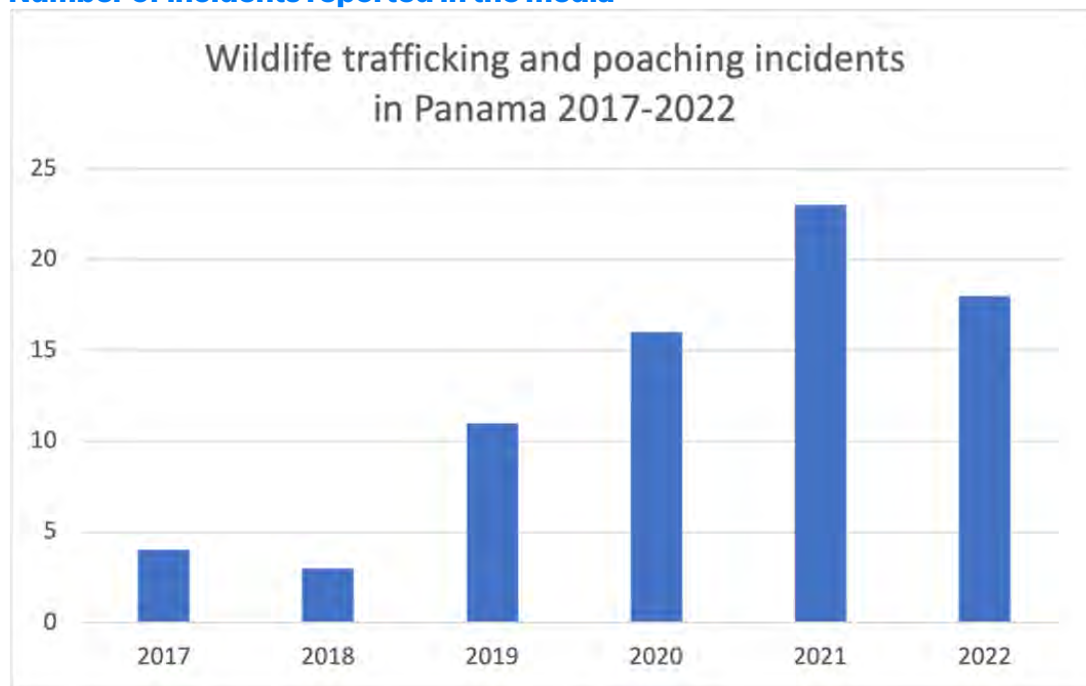


Figure 103: Wildlife trafficking and poaching incidents in Panama between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

⁸⁵⁰ <https://phys.org/news/2022-11-panama-illegal-trafficking-animals.html>. Accessed on 24 October 2023.

Number of animals involved

The graphs below show the numbers of amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals reported to be seized or poached in Panama between 2017 and 2022.

Table 15: Number of animals seized or poached in Panama between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Amphibians	0	0	0	112	408	0	520
Reptiles	13	0	21	2	93	6	135
Birds	0	19	24	24	4	55	126
Mammals	3	0	16	9	21	15	64
TOTAL	16	19	61	147	526	76	

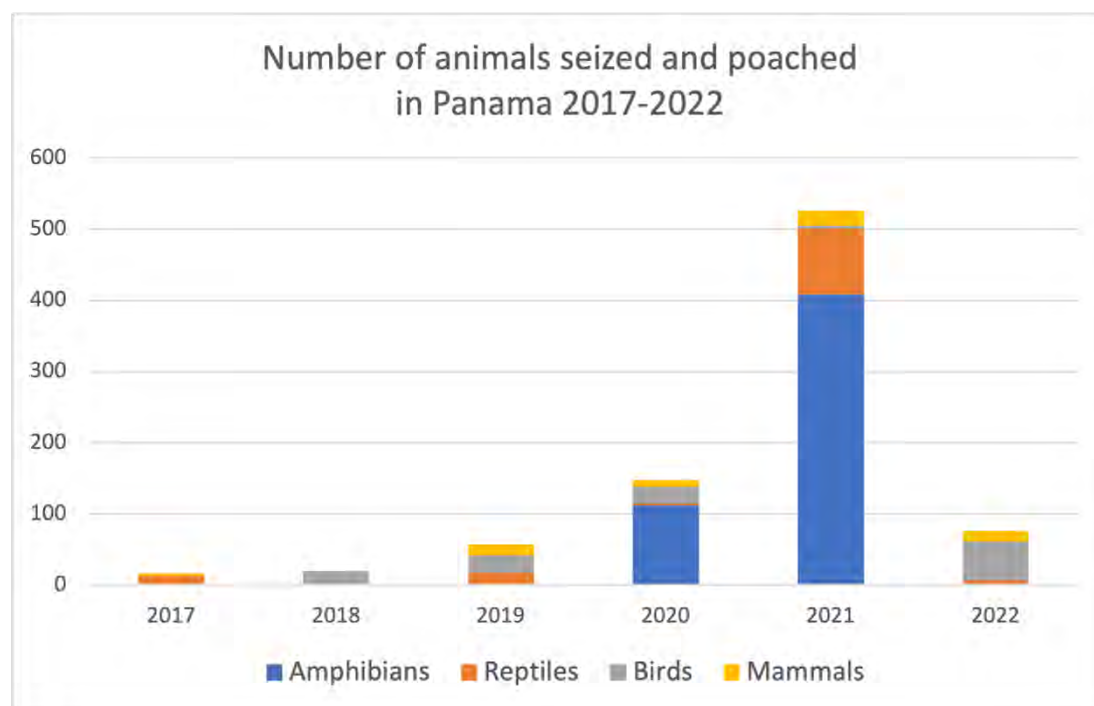


Figure 104: Number of animals seized or poached in Panama between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Species most targeted

Amphibians

As mentioned above, 520 amphibians were seized in two significant seizures in 2020 and 2021. Some 518 of these concerned poison dart frogs, which are in high demand in American and European pet markets: strawberry poison dart frogs (*Oophaga pumilio*); Vicente's poison frogs (*Oophaga vicentei*); and green and black poison dart frog (*Dendrobates auratus*). The remaining two specimens concerned red-eyed tree frogs (*Agalychnis callidryas*). The first three of those species have been listed in CITES Appendix II since 1987, while red-eyed tree frogs were listed in CITES Appendix II in 2023. The two seizures are discussed below.

In March 2020, German authorities seized 108 strawberry poison dart frogs and four Vicente's poison frogs on suspicion that they were wild-caught in Panama and imported into the EU illegally. The frogs were seized from a hotel room in the German city of Hamm, where they were held by a known Slovakian

exotic amphibian trader. The frogs were meant to be sold at the Terraristika Reptile Fair in Hamm. The market value of this shipment of frogs was estimated at around €25.000.⁸⁵¹ The Hamm fair is well-known for attracting reptile and amphibian traffickers from across Europe. It has been described as ‘the biggest real-life marketplace for reptile traffickers who have learned to exploit the European Union’s weak laws and lack of enforcement to sell high-value, endangered, and protected species’.⁸⁵²

The German authorities’ suspicion that the frogs were taken from the wild was proven correct, as further research on the frogs established that all but one had the toxins in their skin typical to wild specimens.⁸⁵³ Subsequent media reports on the matter revealed that the Slovakian trader and her American husband had trafficked hundreds of wild poison dart frogs from Panama for sales to European collectors. Over a period of several years, the couple had imported the frogs on fraudulent CITES permits that declared the frogs to be captive bred and exported from Nicaragua, when in fact they were shipped from Panama.⁸⁵⁴

This case may have sparked law enforcement interest in Panama, as a major seizure took place a year later in Panama, in May 2021. Two Panamanians and one foreigner were arrested in Río Hato, Coclé province, for the illegal collection and trafficking of amphibians. The operation was the result of a long, multi-agency investigation. A total of 408 frogs were seized, including 376 strawberry poison dart frogs, 30 green and black poison dart frogs, and two red-eyed tree frogs.⁸⁵⁵

There are one or more farms in Panama licensed to breed amphibians. Some have reportedly been engaged in trafficking wild specimens, however. In 2022, media reported that the government had closed down some ‘ghost farming’ operations, which were found to be collecting frogs from the wild and selling them as captive bred. An expert interviewed on this matter said wildlife traffickers go to residents of rural areas who have very little income and offer payment per frog.⁸⁵⁶

⁸⁵¹ <https://www.presseportal.de/blaulicht/pm/116257/4549762>.

⁸⁵² <https://news.mongabay.com/2019/05/the-worlds-biggest-reptile-fair-is-also-a-hub-for-traffickers/>. Accessed on 22 October 2023.

⁸⁵³ Wild poison dart frogs build up toxins in their skins through their diet of insects in their natural environment, whereas poison dart frogs lose their poison in captivity.

⁸⁵⁴ <https://vsquare.org/frog-smugglers-in-slovakia-illegal-trade-in-endangered-animals-worth-millions/>; <https://www.bazg.admin.ch/bazg/de/home/aktuell/forumz/nah-dran/geschuetzte-froesche-in-die-schweiz-geschmuggelt.html>. Accessed on 22 October 2023.

⁸⁵⁵ <https://www.miambiente.gob.pa/tres-detenidos-por-trafico-ilegal-de-anfibios/>. Accessed on 23 October 2023.

⁸⁵⁶ <https://phys.org/news/2022-11-panama-illegal-trafficking-animals.html>. Accessed on 23 October 2023.

Reptiles

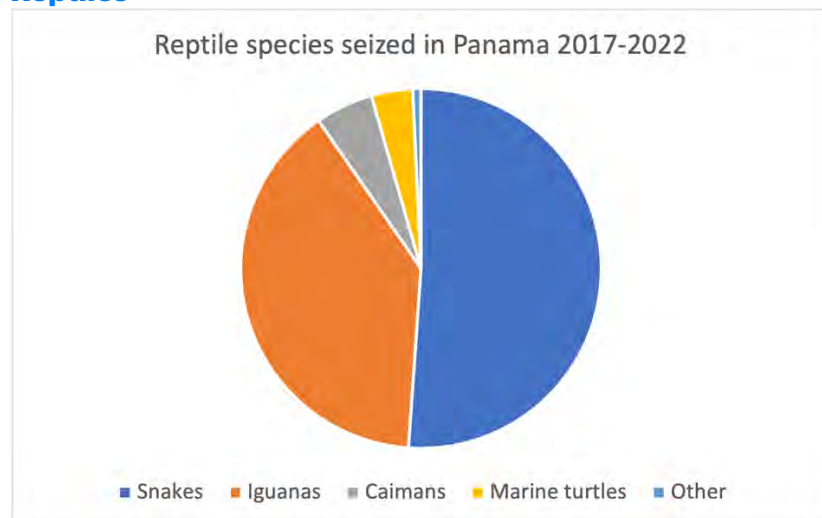


Figure 535: Reptile species seized or poached in Panama between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Some 135 reptiles were involved in seizures or poaching incidents between 2017 and 2022. Of those, 88% (116 specimens) were alive; the rest concerned dead specimens or parts/products of reptiles.

Sixty-nine snakes were seized in three incidents in 2021. However, just one specimen, a boa constrictor, was native to Panama. The other 68 snakes were ball pythons (*Python regius*), a popular snake species in the pet trade, which are native to West Africa.⁸⁵⁷ The ball pythons were seized in two different incidents from a location in Panama City, following an investigation by the National Police and the Ministry of Environment. The authorities stated the animals were in the country illegally, and as they are not native to Panama, can cause damage to native species. The media report provided no details on the circumstances behind these seizures, such as who the perpetrator was, where the snakes came from, why they were kept in the location they were found in, and where they were intended to go. Given the quantity, however, it must be assumed they were held by a professional breeder and/or trader and meant to be sold, either in Panama or abroad.⁸⁵⁸

After snakes, green iguanas (*Iguana iguana*) are the most seized reptile species in Panama. They are poached for their meat and eggs.⁸⁵⁹ The species is heavily overexploited as their meat is practically the only source of protein for many poor communities in rural Panama, and their eggs are considered an aphrodisiac.⁸⁶⁰ A total of 53 iguanas (40 alive, 13 dead) were seized in eight incidents. No seizures were identified of iguana eggs.

Caimans are also targeted for their meat. Three seizures were identified, involving four live specimens and the parts of three dead specimens. All specimens concerned spectacled caimans (*Caiman crocodilus*). The four live specimens (juveniles) were seized from a residence in Chiriquí province in

⁸⁵⁷ <https://www.panamaamerica.com.pa/sociedad/decomisan-treinta-serpientes-piton-bola-en-parque-lefevre-1188660>. Accessed on 24 October 2023.

⁸⁵⁸ <https://www.panamaamerica.com.pa/sociedad/decomisan-treinta-serpientes-piton-bola-en-parque-lefevre-1188660>. Accessed on 24 October 2023.

⁸⁵⁹ <https://ipsnoticias.net/1999/03/ambiente-panama-extrema-medidas-de-proteccion-de-la-iguana-verde/>. Accessed on 24 October 2023.

⁸⁶⁰ <https://ipsnoticias.net/1999/03/ambiente-panama-extrema-medidas-de-proteccion-de-la-iguana-verde/>. Accessed on 24 October 2023.

May 2019 along with 24 other wild animals. It is unclear whether they were meant for the live animal trade or part of an illegal zoo.⁸⁶¹

Marine turtles in Panama are targeted for their eggs, meat, and shell. A total of 17,580 eggs were reported to be seized in 11 incidents between 2017 and 2021. As, on average, marine turtles lay 110 eggs per clutch, a minimum of 160 nests was raided to obtain these eggs.⁸⁶² In addition, parts of five specimens were seized in four incidents. This includes two seizures of hawksbill turtle shell plates. Fifteen plates were seized from a Costa Rican citizen who had purchased them in Panama and attempted to smuggle them to Costa Rica.⁸⁶³ Twelve plates were seized from an air parcel shipped from the Bocas del Toro province to Panama City.⁸⁶⁴ Bocas del Toro is a region where hawksbill turtles are known to be exploited for their shells, which are used to create tortoiseshell objects such as bracelets, earrings, and guitar picks for tourists. Moreover, in the region there is a belief that tortoiseshell objects give good luck, as well as help with the bio-energetic balance.⁸⁶⁵

Poaching of marine turtles and their eggs reportedly increased significantly during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the Bocas del Toro province. An expert stated that the mass slaughter of marine turtles takes place between May and August, coinciding with the nesting season for hawksbill turtles and green turtles.⁸⁶⁶

Marine turtle species identified in the seizures and poaching incidents between 2017 and 2022 include green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*); olive ridley sea turtles (*Lepidochelys Olivacea*); and hawksbill sea turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). Authorities have been criticized for inadequate enforcement of laws in place to protect marine turtles.⁸⁶⁷ Interestingly though, in March 2023 a new law, pushed for by marine turtle conservationists, was adopted that guarantees sea turtles the legal right to live and have free passage in a healthy environment.⁸⁶⁸

⁸⁶¹ https://www.tvn-2.com/nacionales/provincias/encuentran-animales-cautiverio-residencia-chiriqui-video_1_1279190.html. Accessed on 24 October 2023.

⁸⁶² <https://conserveturtles.org/information-sea-turtles-frequently-asked-questions/>. Accessed on 17 October 2023.

⁸⁶³ <https://www.panamaamerica.com.pa/provincias/decomisan-15-piezas-de-tortuga-carey-un-ciudadano-costarricense-en-paso-canoas-1125816>. Accessed on 23 October 2023.

⁸⁶⁴ <https://www.miambiente.gob.pa/decomisan-12-placas-de-caparazones-de-tortuga-carey-en-el-aeropuerto-internacional-marcos-a-gelabert-en-albrook/>. Accessed on 23 October 2023.

⁸⁶⁵ Ministerio de Ambiente de Panamá (2017). Diagnóstico de la Situación de las Tortugas Marinas en Panamá y Plan de Acción Nacional para su Conservación, 2017-2021. Accessible at: https://marviva.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/DIAGNO_1.pdf. Accessed on 23 October 2023.

⁸⁶⁶ <https://www.midiario.com/nacionales/aumenta-el-consumo-de-tortugas-en-medio-de-la-pandemia-en-panama/>. Accessed on 23 October 2023.

⁸⁶⁷ <https://coronadoconciergepanama.com/protecting-sea-turtles/>. Accessed on 23 October 2023.

⁸⁶⁸ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-solutions/2023/08/26/leatherback-turtle-nature-rights-panama/>; <https://scrippsnews.com/stories/sea-turtles-get-legal-rights-in-panama/>. Accessed on 23 October 2023.

Birds

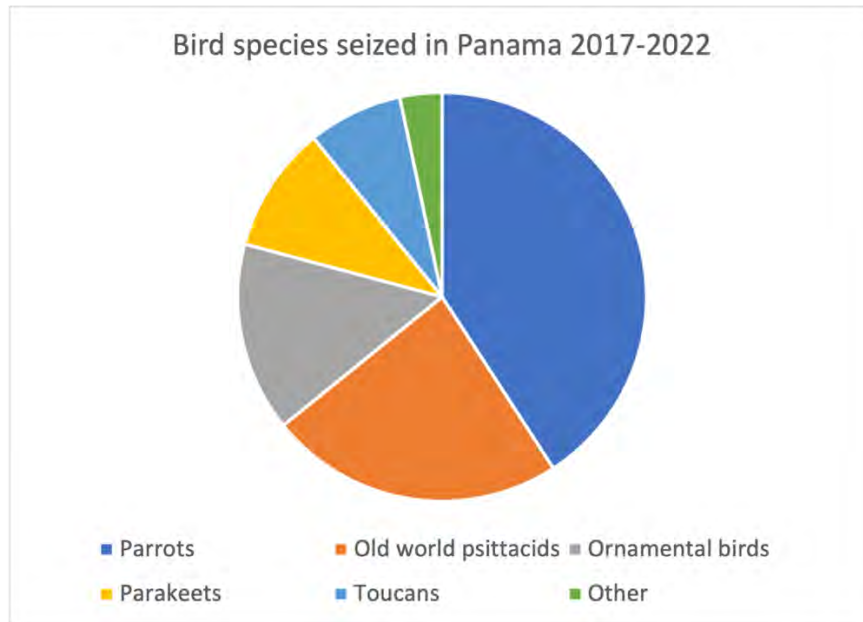


Figure 106: Bird species seized in Panama between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Parrots are the most seized bird species in Panama. The 49 parrots seized in ten incidents between 2017 and 2022 included 29 red-lored amazons (*Amazona autumnalis*); 13 red-crowned amazons (*Amazona viridigenalis*); four blue-headed parrots (*Pionus menstruus*); two yellow-crowned amazons (*Amazona ochrocephala*); and one yellow-headed amazon (*Amazona oratrix*). The red-crowned amazons are an endangered species listed in CITES Appendix I; the other species are listed in CITES Appendix II. Two seizures are noteworthy as they provide indications of significant levels of trade:

- ▶ Nineteen red-lored amazons were seized in May 2018 during a routine police patrol from a man who was offering them for sale on the Pan-American highway.⁸⁶⁹
- ▶ Thirteen red-crowned amazons, an endangered species, were seized along with 15 other wild animals from a residence in Chiriquí province, following an anonymous tip.⁸⁷⁰

There appears to be a market for old world psittacids in Panama, as three seizures were identified of birds not native to Latin America. This included budgerigars (*Melopsittacus undulatus*, four specimens) native to Australia; cockatiels (*Nymphicus hollandicus*, five specimens) also native to Australia; and rosy-faced lovebirds (*Agapornis roseicollis*, 19 specimens), native to southwestern Africa. All three species breed well in captivity and are common household pets in many countries around the world.

Two seizures of a total of 16 ornamental birds were recorded between 2017 and 2022, including nine black-bellied whistling ducks (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) and seven eared doves (*Zenaida auriculata*).

In addition, two golden-hooded tanagers (*Stilpnia larvata*) and eight unidentified birds were seized along with two Central American squirrel monkeys from a house near the border with Costa Rica.

⁸⁶⁹ <https://www.panamaamerica.com.pa/judicial/linces-rescatan-loros-y-detienen-al-que-intento-venderlos-en-chepo-1105180>. Accessed on 24 October 2023.

⁸⁷⁰ https://www.tyn-2.com/nacionales/provincias/encuentran-animales-cautiverio-residencia-chiriqui-video_1_1279190.html. Accessed on 24 October 2023.

Mammals

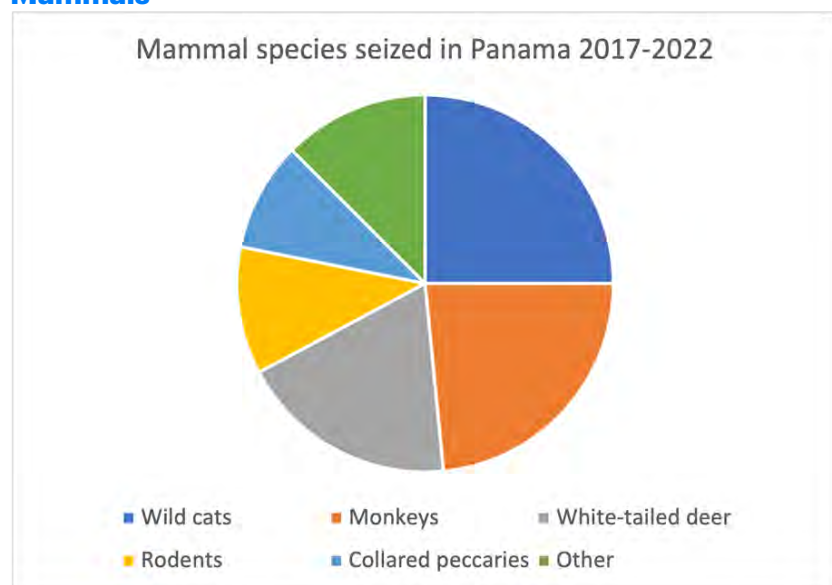


Figure 547: Mammal species seized or poached in Panama between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Sixty-four mammals were reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022. This included 28 live and 31 dead specimens, and the skins and meat of three more specimens.

Wild cats made up 25% of the mammals involved in these incidents. This included 12 dead jaguars (*Panthera onca*); three ocelots – two cubs, one skin (*Leopardus pardalis*); and one jaguarundi cub (*Herpailurus yagouaroundi*).

Jaguars in Panama have come increasingly into conflict with humans. While 54% of their original distribution area has been lost due to logging and agricultural expansion, competition with hunters for their natural prey has increased, forcing them to turn to domesticated animals for food and creating a source of conflict with humans. Between 1998 and 2022, a total of 377 jaguars were assessed to be killed in conflict situations.⁸⁷¹ In 2019, Fundación Yaguará Panamá reported that ten jaguars had been poached in rural areas in the first six months of that year.⁸⁷²

Jaguar poaching incidents usually only make the news when a video of an illegal jaguar killing surfaces on social media. Such a video, of a jaguar being attacked by dogs, believed to have happened in Darién province, was reported in the media in June 2019.⁸⁷³

No incidents were identified to indicate commercial trade in jaguar parts, but this doesn't mean such trade is not happening under the radar.

Monkeys are popular pets in Panama.⁸⁷⁴ Fifteen monkeys were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022, including the following species: one azuero howler (*Alouatta coibensis trabeata*); one Panamanian night monkey (*Aotus zonalis*); one black-headed spider monkey (*Ateles fusciceps*); two

⁸⁷¹ <https://www.metrolibre.com/nacionales/miambiente-aclara-situacion-de-los-felinos-en-panama-ante-conflictos-reportados-con-humanos-OBML224846>. Accessed on 24 October 2023.

⁸⁷² <https://www.telemetro.com/nacionales/2019/06/15/jaguares-ilegalmente-panama-incidencia-comarcales/1015608.html>. Accessed on 24 October 2023.

⁸⁷³ <http://elsiglo.com.pa/panama/buscan-criminales-mataron-jaguar-area-darien/24125566>. Accessed on 24 October 2023.

⁸⁷⁴ <https://phys.org/news/2022-11-panama-illegal-trafficking-animals.html>. Accessed on 24 October 2023.

Geoffroy's spider monkeys (*Ateles geoffroyi*); two red-faced spider monkeys (*Ateles paniscus*); three Panamanian white-faced capuchins (*Cebus capucinus*); three Geoffroy's tamarins (*Saguinus geoffroyi*); and two Central American squirrel monkeys (*Saimiri oerstedii*).

All but two of these monkeys were seized from what appeared to be private pet owners. In one instance, a Geoffroy's spider monkey was seized from a traveling circus due to animal welfare violations. In the other instance, a Geoffroy's tamarin was seized along with 27 other wild animals from a property believed to be either an illegal zoo or a storage site for illegal sales.

White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) are targeted for their meat by poachers. Ten dead specimens were reported to be seized; two specimens were seized that were held as pets.

Other mammal species frequently seized from poachers are rodents (six lowland pacas, one Central American agouti) and collared peccaries (six specimens).

Key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes

Type of incident ● Poaching ● Seizure

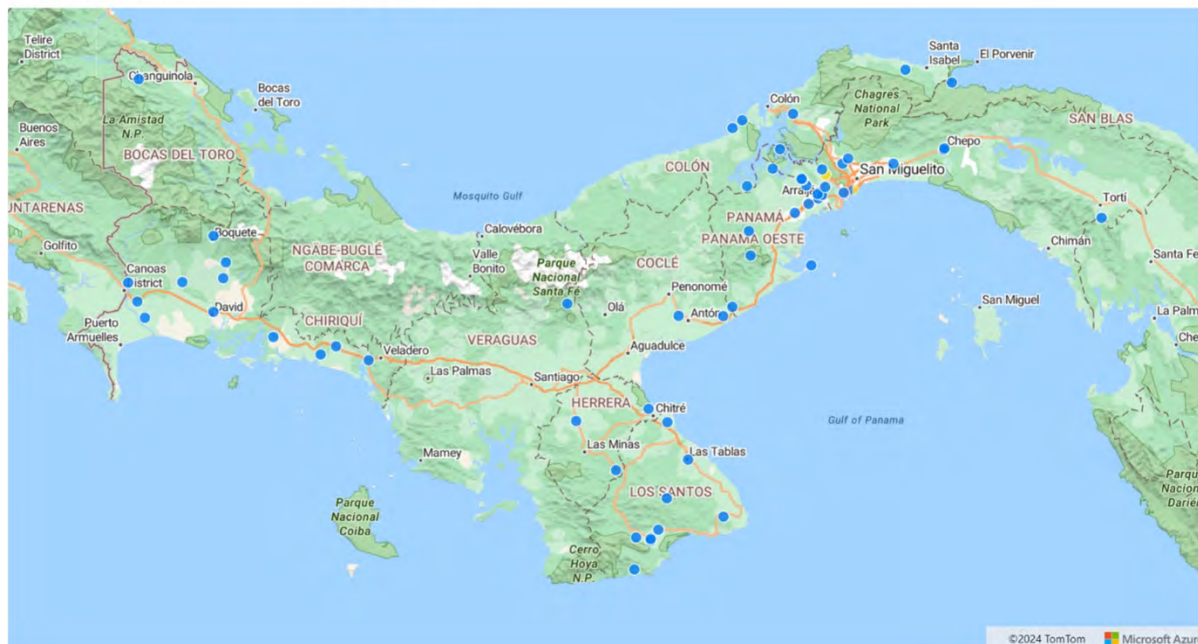


Figure 558: Locations of seizures and poaching incidents in Panama reported between 2017 and 2022

The majority of incidents recorded for Panama concerned seizures of wildlife from poachers or private pet owners. No seizures were made from sales outlets such as street markets or shops, making it difficult to assess by which commercial channels wildlife is supplied to consumers in Panama. Two incidents were identified that highlight informal sales of wildlife occurring along highways and town roads. Poachers also sell wild animals to consumers directly, as evidenced by an incident in June 2021, where a red-faced spider monkey was seized from a person who claimed he had bought it from indigenous people.⁸⁷⁵

⁸⁷⁵ <https://www.miambiente.gob.pa/rescatan-mono-arana-negro-en-cautiverio-en-la-comunidad-de-la-nicora-de-chepo/>. Accessed on 25 October 2023.

Sales on social media

No incidents were found where wild animals were offered for sale on social media in Panama.

Convergence

No incidents were identified where wildlife was seized jointly with other illicit commodities and/or in circumstances that might indicate convergence with other types of organized crime. There was one incident, in May 2020, where soldiers at a checkpoint arrested three individuals with a live amazon chick, a dead iguana, firearms, ammunition, and a chainsaw. The media report provides no information about why the poachers were carrying a chainsaw. Perhaps it was to cut trees to make a temporary poacher's camp and/or to cut down nesting trees to access parrot nests, but it is also possible the poachers were looking for valuable timber in the forest in addition to poaching wildlife.⁸⁷⁶

Transboundary trafficking routes

Panama's strategic location connecting North and South America has historically made it a key transit and storage point for the vast majority of drugs travelling from Colombia to the USA. It is also a destination and transit for human trafficking as well as minerals, particularly illegal gold coming from Colombia. Panama is the main port of entry for illicit firearms from the USA and Central America in transit to South America, mainly Colombia, due to its status as a free port and its strategic location. Local and foreign criminal groups, including from Mexico, are heavily present in the country.⁸⁷⁷

Given the above and the known existence of wildlife trafficking routes leading from South America through Central America to North America, one would expect evidence of transboundary wildlife trafficking across the land borders with Colombia and Costa Rica. Yet only one incident was identified concerning trafficking to Costa Rica (see below). No seizures were recorded on the Panama-Colombia border. State presence in this border area—which consists of a roadless, impenetrable jungle known as the Darién Gap—is limited however, a factor that has turned this region into a crime hub.⁸⁷⁸

Panama > Costa Rica

The land border between Panama and Costa Rica sees frequent trafficking of contraband, including drugs, humans, and timber. Both Panama and Costa Rica are key hubs for cocaine exports to Europe.⁸⁷⁹

It is likely that the border is frequented by wildlife traffickers too, however just one incident was identified highlighting transboundary smuggling between Panama and Costa Rica: 15 hawkbill shell plates were seized from a Costa Rican citizen who had purchased them in Panama and attempted to smuggle them to Costa Rica.⁸⁸⁰

Panama > Europe (Germany)

The seizure in Germany in 2020 of the 112 poison dart frogs originating from Panama highlights that Panama attracts foreign wildlife traffickers keen to make a profit by exploiting legal loopholes to obtain rare wildlife and sell these to collectors in markets such as Europe.

⁸⁷⁶ <https://www.miambiente.gob.pa/realizan-decomiso-de-especies-de-fauna-en-puesto-de-control-de-chepo/>. Accessed on 25 October 2023.

⁸⁷⁷ <https://ocindex.net/country/panama>. Accessed on 25 October 2023.

⁸⁷⁸ <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/the-predatory-economy-thriving-in-panamas-darien-gap/>

⁸⁷⁹ <https://insightcrime.org/es/noticias/panama-costa-rica-pasos-claves-cocaina-europa/>; <https://es.euronews.com/2019/07/31/costa-rica-y-panama-desmantelan-una-red-internacional-de-trafico-de-migrantes>; <https://www.panamaamerica.com.pa/nacion/trafico-ilegal-de-madera-panamena-479121>. Accessed on 17 October 2023.

⁸⁸⁰ <https://www.panamaamerica.com.pa/provincias/decomisan-15-piezas-de-tortuga-carey-un-ciudadano-costarricense-en-paso-canoas-1125816>. Accessed on 23 October 2023.



Figure 5609: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes from Panama based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022

Law enforcement efforts

The arrest rate is high in Panama: 78 people were arrested in 38 incidents, i.e. 51% of the 74 seizures and poaching incidents reported to take place in Panama between 2017 and 2022 resulted in arrest. This is much higher than the regional average of 27%. Ten of these incidents concerned poaching or trafficking of marine turtle eggs/parts; the others concerned terrestrial species.

In 32 incidents (86%) the arrestees were poachers. The remaining five incidents were for illegal sales (3); illegal possession (2); and illegal transport (1).

No statistics were found on prosecution of wildlife crime in Panama, so it is unclear what percentage of suspects is successfully prosecuted following arrest. Two incidents were found where suspects were sanctioned. In one case, in September 2018, a bus driver was fined US\$7,678 for illegally transporting more than 4,700 marine turtle eggs poached from 45 nests.⁸⁸¹ In another incident, in July 2019, a man was sentenced to 66 months in prison for poaching a white-tailed deer and a lowland paca, and illegal possession of an unregistered firearm.⁸⁸² This is a relatively high sentence for a poaching case, certainly in comparison to the punishment the bus driver received. Given this, and the high rate of arrests for poaching, it appears Panama's criminal justice system is predominantly focused on tackling wildlife poaching.

Although there are indications of significant levels of organized wildlife trafficking in the country, particularly of amphibians and birds, law enforcement interventions mainly happen in response to anonymous tips or during routine patrols.

Panama's Ministry of the Environment (Ministerio de Ambiente) engages in awareness raising and encourages the population to report the trafficking of protected species through a dedicated hotline 311, social media, or the reporting function on the website www.miambiente.gob.pa.

⁸⁸¹ <https://www.prensa.com/provincias/sancionan-a-conductor-de-bus-por-7-mil-por-trafico-de-huevos-de-tortuga-en-los-santos/>. Accessed on 24 October 2023.

⁸⁸² <https://www.panamaamerica.com.pa/provincias/condenan-un-ciudadano-cinco-anos-de-carcel-por-caza-ilegal-en-panama-oeste-1138747>. Accessed on 23 October 2023.

Paraguay

Paraguay

General overview

For Paraguay, a minimum number of 261 wild animals were involved in 36 seizures and 11 poaching incidents reported in the media between 2017 and 2022. One of the seizures occurred in Taiwan region, in October 2017, when a Taiwanese woman was arrested with 45 macaw eggs in her luggage.

Unique characteristics

- Domestic psittacid trafficking
- Macaw egg trafficking to East Asia
- Caiman skins trafficked to Argentina
- Monkeys poached for pet trade
- Significant poaching for bushmeat
- Low arrest rate

Sixty-four per cent of the animals involved in these incidents concerned birds (166 specimens). Reptiles made up 19% (50 specimens) and mammals 17% (45 specimens). No amphibians were reported to be seized or poached in Paraguay between 2017 and 2022. This doesn't mean Paraguayan amphibians are not being trafficked, however. There are 82 amphibian species in Paraguay and some of these appear to be in demand abroad. For instance, in March 2013, US authorities at the Miami airport seized 2,240 toads, frogs, and tarantulas from the luggage of a woman arriving from Paraguay. She presented a falsified export permit.⁸⁸³

Of the 261 animals that were seized or poached, 81% concerned live animals; 13.5% were dead specimens; 5% parts and products; and 0.5% meat.

Number of incidents reported in the media

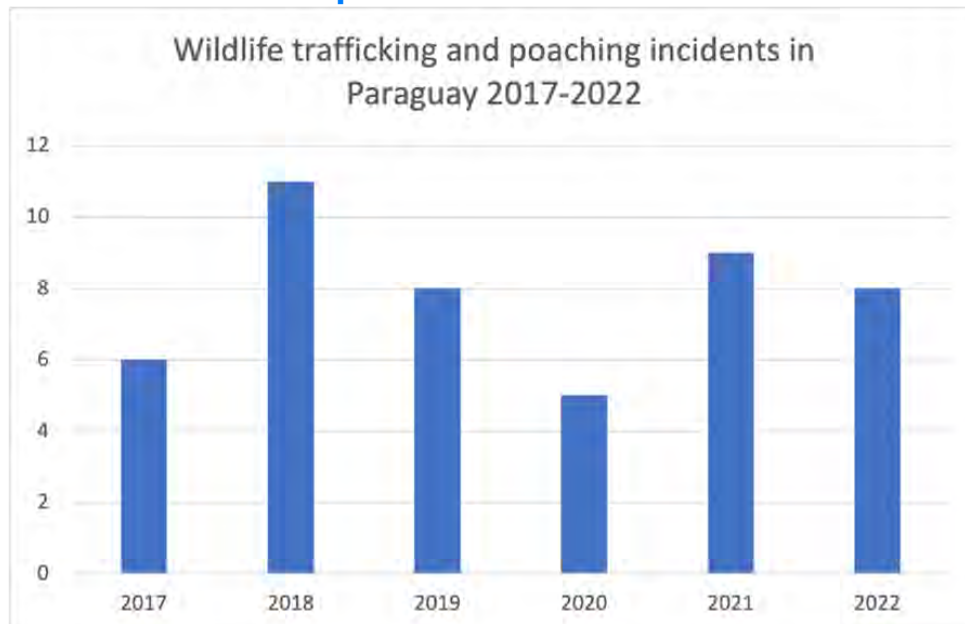


Figure 110: Wildlife and poaching incidents in/implicating Paraguay between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

⁸⁸³ <https://www.abc.com.py/especiales/fin-de-semana/red-de-traffic-de-animales-silvestres-al-descubierto-546895.html>. Accessed on 15 February 2024.

Number of animals involved

The table and figure below show the numbers of birds, reptiles, and mammals reported to be seized or poached in Paraguay between 2017 and 2022.

Table 16: Number of animals seized or poached in Paraguay between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Birds	13	56	44	2	15	36	166
Reptiles	0	13	35	0	2	0	50
Mammals	3	6	18	4	6	8	45
TOTAL	16	75	97	6	23	44	

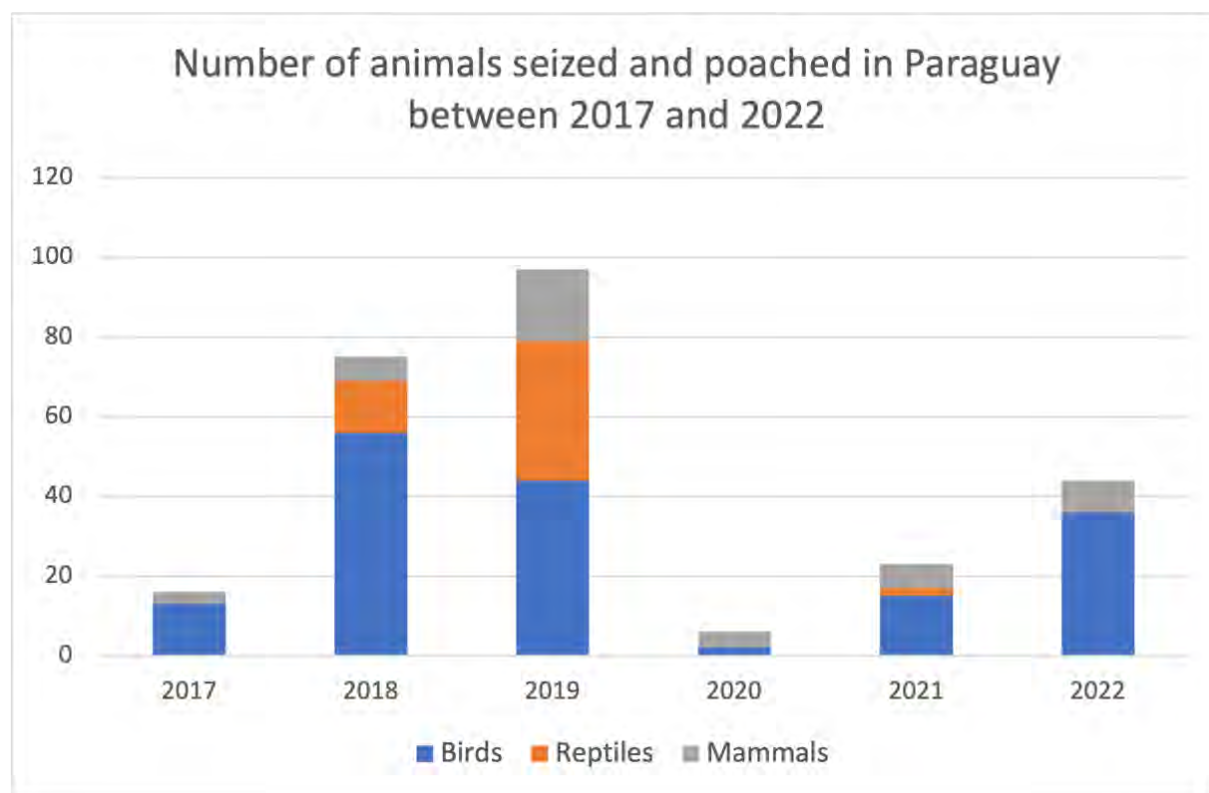


Figure 111: Number of animals seized or poached in Paraguay between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Species most targeted

Birds

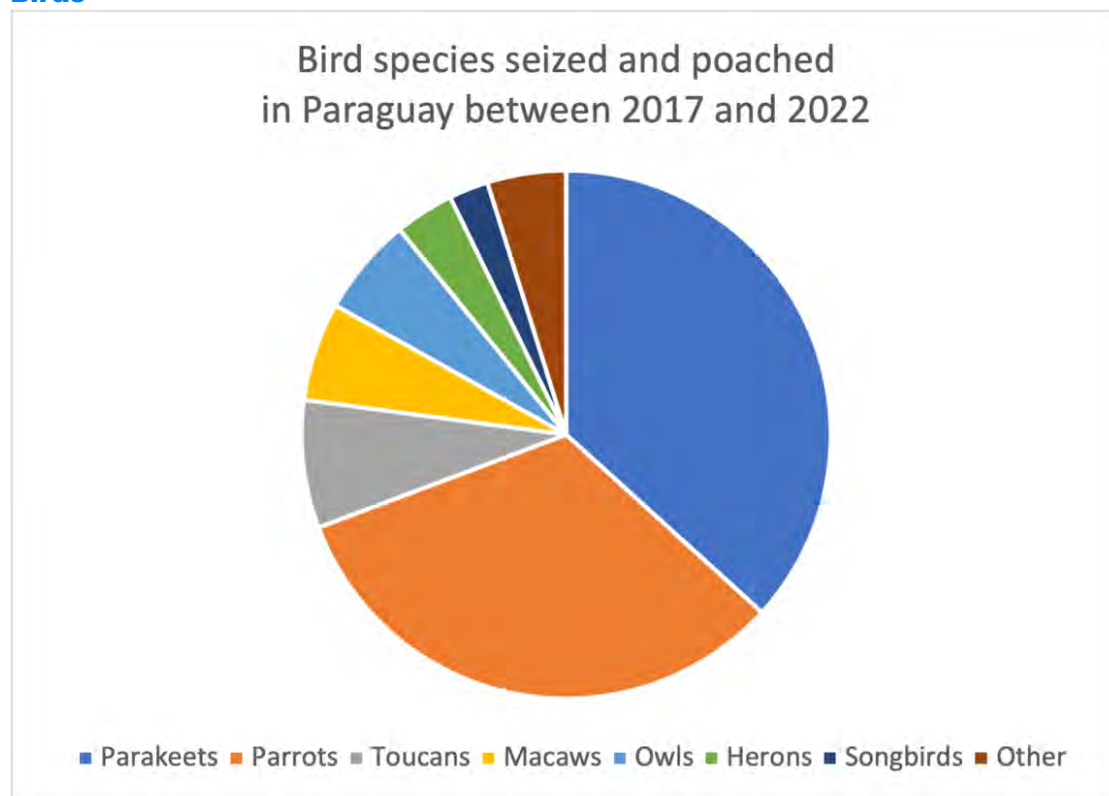


Figure 112: Bird species seized or poached in Paraguay between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

The two main hubs for the illicit bird trade in Paraguay are the capital Asunción and San Lorenzo, a suburb of Asunción. Between 2017 and 2022, 77% of the 166 birds seized or poached in Paraguay were seized in these two cities.

Psittacids are the most targeted bird species in Paraguay, representing 75% of all birds reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022. The majority are parakeets (37%) and parrots (33%), while macaws make up 6%.

A total of 61 parakeets of five different species were recorded in illegal trade, including: 19 nanday parakeets (*Aratinga nenday*); 13 monk parakeets (*Myiopsitta monachus*); 10 yellow-chevrons parakeets (*Brotogeris chiriri*); four white-eyed parakeets (*Psittacara leucophthalmus*); four blue-crowned parakeets (*Aratinga acuticaudata*); and 11 unidentified parakeets. All these parakeet species are common in Paraguay and classified by IUCN as 'Least Concern'.

The illegal trade in parakeets appears to be dominated by low-level sellers, often indigenous people. Some 76% of all parakeets were offered for sale in the streets and market of San Lorenzo; the remaining 24% of parakeets were offered for sale in Asunción. Quantities range between one and seven specimens.

Two incidents were recorded where parakeets were dyed with oxygen peroxide, presumably to make them resemble a higher-value exotic species.

- ▶ In May 2017, five parakeets (including three nanday parakeets, two blue-crowned parakeets, and one unidentified specimen) were seized in the municipal market of San Lorenzo. Some had their feathers dyed, probably with hydrogen peroxide.⁸⁸⁴
- ▶ In May 2018, two white-eyed parakeets were seized in San Lorenzo whose feathers had been dyed with hydrogen peroxide to resemble another species. One of them did not survive the abuse. The veterinarian who treated the birds pointed out that the hydrogen peroxide used by bird sellers causes eye damage. Some develop eye ulcers and may even lose sight due to the burn. The animal is also left in a state of shock due to the mistreatment. In addition, when parrots are caught as adults, their stress is so high that many stop eating and starve to death.⁸⁸⁵

This practice was also observed in Argentina, Bolivia, and Peru.

A total of 54 parrots were reported to be seized, involving at least four species: cobalt-rumped parrotlets (*Forpus xanthopterygius*, 24 specimens); turquoise-fronted amazons (*Amazona aestiva*, 14 specimens); scaly-headed parrots (*Pionus maximiliani*, seven specimens); and blue-headed parrot (*Pionus menstruus*, one specimen). Another eight parrots were seized whose species was not specified.

Except for the turquoise-fronted amazons, these parrot species are classified as 'Least Concern' by IUCN. Turquoise-fronted amazons are classified as 'Near Threatened'. This species is heavily trapped in Paraguay for the cage-bird trade and its habitat is undergoing a decline in extent and quality, largely due to conversion to agriculture.⁸⁸⁶

Like parakeets, parrots are generally offered for sale in small quantities in the markets and streets of Asunción and San Lorenzo, often by indigenous people.

The largest seizure occurred in November 2022 in Encarnación, when 24 cobalt-rumped parrotlet chicks (one of which was dead) were seized from an indigenous woman who was selling the birds in the parking lot of a service station, in the presence of her children. The seizure was instigated by a citizen's complaint.⁸⁸⁷

Parrots are sold not only locally in Paraguay, but also trafficked abroad. In September 2016, the Guardia Civil in Madrid, Spain, arrested a Chinese man with seven newly hatched turquoise-fronted amazon chicks and 11 eggs of the same species in his luggage. The man was travelling from Paraguay to Hong Kong SAR via Madrid and Amsterdam. In his bag was a hard drive as a power source, a fan, and a heating system controlled by a thermostat to provide the optimal temperature for the eggs and chicks.⁸⁸⁸

Ten macaws were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022, including five hyacinth macaws (*Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*, CITES Appendix I); two red and green macaws (*Ara chloropterus*, CITES Appendix II); one blue and yellow macaw (*Ara araurana*, CITES Appendix II); one scarlet macaw (*Ara macao*, CITES Appendix I); and a blue-headed macaw (*Primolius couloni*, CITES Appendix I).

⁸⁸⁴ <https://www.ip.gov.py/ip/rescatan-a-loros-que-eran-vendidos-de-manera-ilegal-en-mercado-de-san-lorenzo/>

⁸⁸⁵ <https://www.ultimahora.com/tinen-el-plumaje-unos-loros-maracana-n1147535>. Accessed on 14 Feb. 2024.

⁸⁸⁶ BirdLife International (2024) Species factsheet: *Amazona aestiva*. Available at <https://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/turquoise-fronted-amazon-amazona-aestiva>. Accessed on 14 Feb. 2024.

⁸⁸⁷ <https://www.masencarnacion.com/articulo/rescatan-loros-que-vendia-mujer-indigena--sus-pequenos-hijos-encarnacion>. Accessed on 14 February 2024.

⁸⁸⁸ <https://www.elmundo.es/madrid/2016/09/08/57d1334922601da85a8b4672.html>. Accessed on 15 February 2024.

The most significant seizures relate to the five hyacinth macaws which were seized in two different incidents:

- ▶ In October 2018, a man was arrested for offering two hyacinth macaws for sale in Asunción.⁸⁸⁹
- ▶ In October 2021, three hyacinth macaw chicks in Asunción were seized and four people arrested following an undercover sting by MADES and the police. The chicks were offered for sale on social media for 6 million guaranies (US\$826) each.⁸⁹⁰ In April 2022, the men were sentenced to a fine of 800 million guaranies (US\$110,000).⁸⁹¹ Hyacinth macaws are among the world's most expensive macaw species, commanding prices of between US\$8,000 and US\$10,000.⁸⁹² Some USA-based sellers even ask prices of US\$20,000⁸⁹³ and US\$28,000.⁸⁹⁴

The presence of hyacinth macaws in illegal trade is concerning as this species is classified as 'Vulnerable' by IUCN, meaning the species is at a high risk of extinction as a result of rapid population declines of 30–50% over the previous ten years. Throughout the 1980s, the species suffered major declines as an estimated 10,000 birds were illegally captured for the pet trade and widespread habitat destruction and hunting caused a further reduction in numbers. In 2016, the population was estimated at 4,300 mature individuals. Hyacinth macaws are resident to Bolivia, Brazil, and Paraguay. The majority of the population is in the Pantanal, the floodplain in Brazil that extends into northeast Paraguay and southeast Bolivia.⁸⁹⁵

Blue and yellow macaws are virtually extinct in Paraguay and scarlet macaws are not native to Paraguay. The two specimens of these species were stolen in January 2020 from Asunción's botanical garden, likely to sell them in the black market.⁸⁹⁶

The relatively low number of trafficked macaws is not representative of the level of illegal exploitation of macaws in Paraguay. This is apparent from macaw seizures outside Paraguay. To begin with, ten blue and yellow macaws originating from Paraguay were seized from an illegal hatchery in Funes, Argentina in 2018.⁸⁹⁷ This seizure suggests macaws from Paraguay are smuggled to Argentina for the purpose of captive breeding and sales.

In addition, macaw eggs are being smuggled from Paraguay to Asia, using similar modus operandi as described above for the trafficking of parrot eggs to Asia. In October 2017, customs at Taiwan region's Taoyuan airport arrested a Taiwanese woman with 45 fertilised macaw eggs (species unclear) in her luggage, using a thermal insulation device to keep the eggs warm. The woman had travelled via Amsterdam airport in The Netherlands. The Taiwan region media report stated that macaws are highly popular in Taiwan region, with prices exceeding NT\$100,000 (US\$3,185) for one specimen. The market value of the 45 fertilised eggs was estimated at NT\$3 million (US\$95,485).⁸⁹⁸ Other sources reported that the woman had stated that she had an uncle in Paraguay, and that the man was later found to be

⁸⁸⁹ <https://www.ultimahora.com/rescatan-asuncion-guacamayos-azules-peligro-extincion-n2775221.html>

⁸⁹⁰ <https://www.ultimahora.com/rescatan-3-guacamayos-azules-peligro-extincion-asuncion-n2968900>. Accessed on 14 February 2024.

⁸⁹¹ https://robindexbois.org/wp-content/uploads/ON_THE_TRAIL_36.pdf. Accessed on 14 February 2024.

⁸⁹² <https://www.herebird.com/hyacinth-macaw-prices/>. Accessed on 15 February 2024.

⁸⁹³ <https://goldencockatoo.com/products/macaw-hyacinth?variant=12667274297421>. Accessed on 15 February 2024.

⁸⁹⁴ <https://www.birdbreeders.com/birds/hyacinth-macaw>. Accessed on 15 February 2024.

⁸⁹⁵ BirdLife International. 2016. *Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2016: e.T22685516A93077457.

<https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2016-3.RLTS.T22685516A93077457.en>. Accessed on 14 February 2024.

⁸⁹⁶ <https://www.hoy.com.py/nacionales/roban-dos-guacamayos-del-jardin-botanico-no-descartan-que-aves-terminen-en-el-mercado-negro>.

Accessed on 14 February 2024.

⁸⁹⁷ <https://www.lt10.com.ar/noticia/236110--diez-guacamayos-que-estan-en-la-ciudad-volveran-a-paraguay>

⁸⁹⁸ https://hk.on.cc/tw/bkn/cnt/news/20171019/bkntw-20171019200210871-1019_04011_001.html. Accessed on 15 February 2024.

one of the main traffickers of macaws, parrots, toucans, and even raptors from South America to China.⁸⁹⁹

There is evidence to suggest that the eggs were sourced in Brazil, and that Paraguay serves as a transit point for the trafficking of Brazilian hyacinth macaws to Asia. Following the seizure in Taiwan region, Brazilian authorities discovered that Hyacinth macaw eggs (and in some instances adult specimens) are smuggled from Bela Vista in Brazil's Mato Grosso do Sul state across the Apa river to the Paraguayan city of Bella Vista Norte.⁹⁰⁰

The trafficking of macaw eggs from Paraguay continues. On 3 October 2023, authorities at Asunción's Aeropuerto Internacional Silvio Pettirossi arrested two Taiwanese men with around 40 macaw eggs in their luggage. The eggs, which were contained in an incubator, were detected by a scanner during a routine inspection. Realising that they were going to be discovered, the men proceeded to destroy the eggs in an attempt to get rid of the evidence. According to the authorities the men had arrived from Ciudad del Este in the Tri-Border Area with Brazil and Argentina. The town is situated by the Paraná river and connected by bridge to Brazil. It had yet to be determined whether the eggs came from the Alto Paraná area in Paraguay or from Brazil. The men were aiming to board a flight to Panama. Given the fact that to date all Asian psittacid egg smugglers were headed for Asia, it is likely that they would travel to Asia from Panama.⁹⁰¹ It is encouraging that the Paraguayan authorities detected the smugglers before they were able to leave the country. Furthermore, the men were prosecuted and sentenced to one year imprisonment and a fine equivalent to 600 days.⁹⁰²

Seizures analysis by others has also highlighted the trafficking of psittacid eggs from Paraguay to Asia, including to Thailand and Taiwan region, via Amsterdam, The Netherlands.⁹⁰³

Based on the above, it is evident one or more Asian criminal networks are systematically trafficking parrots and macaws from Paraguay to Asia.

⁸⁹⁹ <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/12/brazils-blue-macaws-golden-lion-tamarins-back-in-traffickers-sights/>

⁹⁰⁰ <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/12/brazils-blue-macaws-golden-lion-tamarins-back-in-traffickers-sights/>

⁹⁰¹ <https://npy.com.py/2023/10/detienen-a-taiwaneses-por-supuesto-trafico-ilegal-de-huevos-de-guacamayo/>. Accessed on 20 February 2024.

⁹⁰² Pers. Comm. Iván Marecos, Ministerio del Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible, 21 February 2024.

⁹⁰³ C4ADS (2018). In Plane sight. Wildlife trafficking in the air transport sector. Available at: <https://routespartnership.org/industry-resources/publications/in-plane-sight>. Accessed on 15 February 2024.

Reptiles

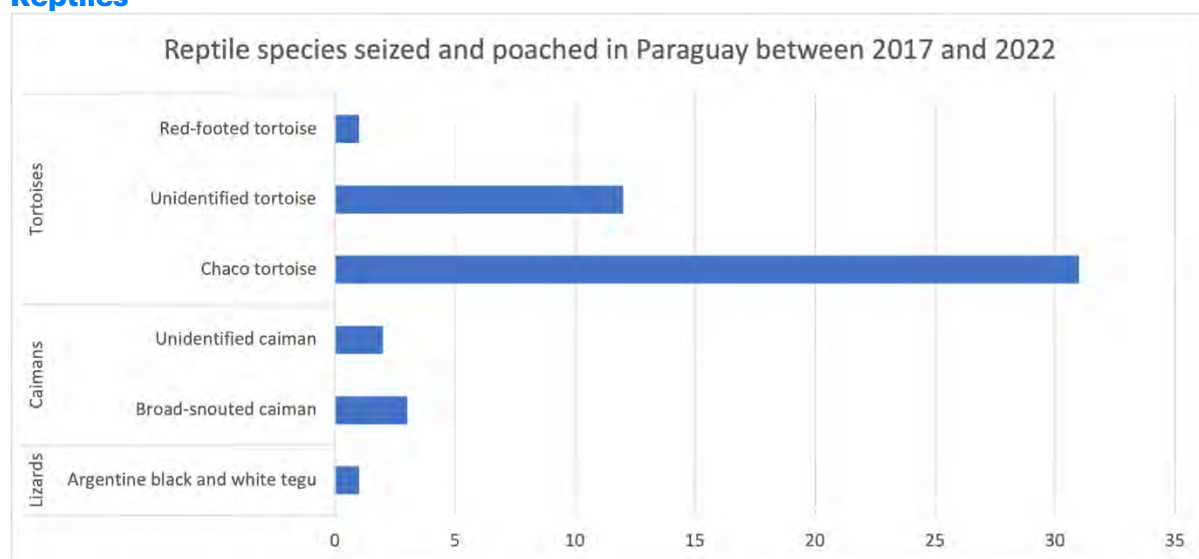


Figure 5713: Reptile species seized or poached in Paraguay between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Of the 50 reptiles involved in seizures and poaching incidents reported between 2017 and 2022, 88% (44 specimens) concerned tortoises seized in five incidents.

Most of these (31 specimens) were Chaco tortoises (*Chelonoidis chilensis*). One specimen was a red-footed tortoise (*Chelonoidis carbonaria*), while for 12 specimens the species was not specified. Chaco tortoises and red-footed tortoises are the only tortoise species native to Paraguay, so it is likely the 12 unidentified specimens belonged to either of these two species.

Chaco tortoises take their name from the Chaco desert regions of Argentina and Paraguay where their range extends from Bolivia east to Paraguay and into parts of Argentina. The species is heavily affected by illegal trade across its range. It was last assessed in 1996 as 'Vulnerable' by IUCN⁹⁰⁴ and has been listed in CITES Appendix II since 1997.

The 31 Chaco tortoises identified by this study were all seized in December 2019 in Mercado 4 of Asunción. In that same intervention, authorities also seized a red-footed tortoise and 28 birds, mainly parrots and parakeets. The animals were in very poor conditions, crammed into cardboard boxes, and displayed for sale in the market.⁹⁰⁵

There are three species of caiman in Paraguay: the broad-snouted caimans (*Caiman latirostris*); yacare caiman (*Caiman yacare*); and Cuvier's dwarf caiman (*Paleosuchus palpebrosus*). In the 19th century, the exploitation of these species for their skin was almost uncontrolled and many populations were decimated, especially broad-snouted caiman.⁹⁰⁶ In the mid-80s, Paraguay was the global leader in caiman skin exports, relying entirely on illegal, wild-caught specimens.⁹⁰⁷ Apart from their skin, caimans are also hunted for their meat.

⁹⁰⁴ Tortoise & Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group. 1996. *Chelonoidis chilensis*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 1996: e.T9007A12949680. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.1996.RLTS.T9007A12949680.en>. Accessed 8 Feb. 2024.

⁹⁰⁵ <https://cdn-www.lanacionpy.arcpublishing.com/pais/2019/12/19/rescatan-tortugas-loros-y-cotorras-del-mercado-4/>

⁹⁰⁶ Scott, N.J. et al (1990). Distribution, habitats, and conservation of the caimans (*Alligatoridae*) of Paraguay. *Vida Silvestre Neotropical*. 2(2):43-51. Available at: https://agrilife.org/fitzgerald/files/2012/07/Scott_etal_1991_Alligatoridae.pdf. Accessed on 15 February 2024.

⁹⁰⁷ <https://operationthonapa.com/an-international-smuggling-ring-driven-by-gross-80s-fashion-55ac5d3136e0>. Accessed on 15 February 2024.

Five caimans were involved in three seizure incidents identified between 2017 and 2022, including three broad-snouted caimans (*Caiman latirostris*) and two unidentified caiman specimens. The first incident happened in September 2018, when a cargo of wild meat, including the meat of two caimans, was seized from a fisherman in Asunción who was offloading the meat from his boat, probably to take it to the market. The fisherman said the meat came from the Chaco.⁹⁰⁸ Another incident concerned a product made of broad-snouted caiman leather seized in April 2019 in Itauguá, a city on the edge of Asunción.⁹⁰⁹ The third incident concerned a seizure in May 2019 of wild meat, including of two broad-snouted caimans, that was offered for sale along Route 3 near General Isidoro Resquín in central Paraguay.⁹¹⁰

Caiman seizures in Argentina provide evidence of significant caiman skin trafficking between Argentina and Paraguay. In February 2020, the Argentine Gendarmería Nacional seized 82 broad-snouted caiman skins from a car driven by a Paraguayan citizen near the town of Formosa, Formosa province, on the border with Paraguay. The press release provided no information about the direction in which the man was headed. However, given the location of the seizure he must have been either arriving from or headed for Paraguay. In February 2023, a cargo of 352 caiman skins was seized from a parcel delivery company vehicle near Tatané, a village just south of Formosa.⁹¹¹

Mammals

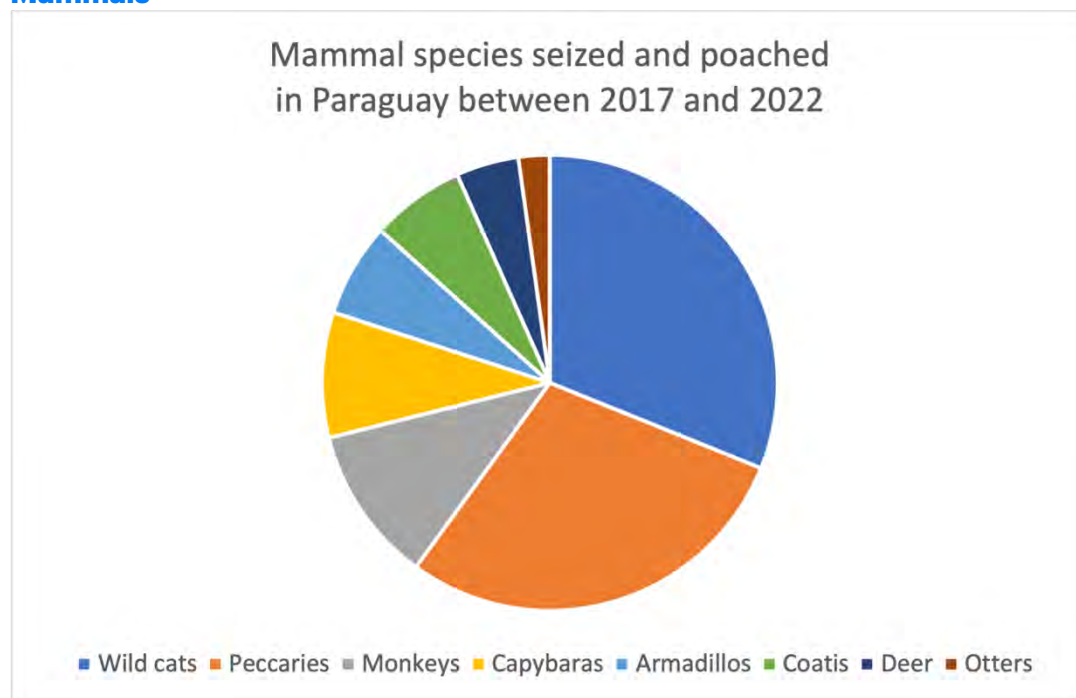


Figure 5814: Mammal species seized or poached in Paraguay between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Of the 45 mammals reported to be seized or poached in Paraguay between 2017 and 2022, 31% (14 specimens) were wild cats. These included eight jaguars (*Panthera onca*); five pumas (*Puma concolor*); and one jaguarundi (*Puma yagouaroundi*).

⁹⁰⁸ <https://www.ultimahora.com/decomisan-carne-animales-silvestres-asuncion-n2747578.html>. Accessed 8 Feb. 2024.

⁹⁰⁹ <https://www.mades.gov.py/2019/04/12/intervienen-y-rescatan-aves-silvestres-del-mercado-municipal-de-itaugua/>

⁹¹⁰ <https://www.mades.gov.py/2019/05/22/decomisan-animales-silvestres-faenados-comercializados-sobre-la-ruta-3/>

⁹¹¹ <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/noticias/envian-352-cueros-de-yacare-dentro-de-encomiendas>. Accessed 8 Feb. 2024.

Persecution and trafficking of wild cats

As elsewhere across its range, in Paraguay jaguars are killed out of fear and retaliation for preying on livestock. Poaching incidents usually become public after images are shared on social media. Most incidents remain unknown, however, as most poachers hide the animals they kill for fear of prosecution. The illegal killing exacerbates the threats posed to the species by habitat loss due to deforestation. Currently, it is unknown how many jaguars remain in Paraguay.⁹¹²

This study identified six poaching incidents between 2017 and 2022 that resulted in the death of eight jaguars. In most cases, incidents became public after images were shared on social media. Four incidents occurred in the Chaco, while one was in the Canindeyū department in eastern Paraguay and another in San Cristóbal district, Alto Paraná department in the southeast of Paraguay.

The most significant incident was reported in June 2022, when MADES started an investigation after photos representing three dead jaguars were circulated on social media. The jaguars were believed to be killed on a ranch in Boquerón department, the Chaco. According to information that reached the authorities, a person had offered 500,000 guaranies for each dead jaguar.⁹¹³

According to a Paraguayan jaguar biologist, some ranchers offer rewards of up to 2 million guaranies (around US\$285) to kill a jaguar that threatens their livestock. For pumas, the reward is allegedly between 500,000 and 1 million guaranies.⁹¹⁴

No seizures were identified of jaguar parts being offered for sale. However, in one incident recorded in May 2022 in the Canindeyú department, photos emerged of a jaguar that had been killed and its skin removed, possibly to sell on the black market.⁹¹⁵

Like jaguars, pumas are frequent victims of human-wildlife conflict in Paraguay. Three poaching incidents that killed three pumas were identified between 2017 and 2022. In addition, in August 2021 two newborn puma cubs were seized that were offered for sale in Filadelfia, Boquerón, the Chaco.⁹¹⁶

An incident that caused great indignation happened in September 2019, when a puma exhausted from fleeing the fires that raged across the Chaco at that time was cornered by a farm labourer and killed by repeated blows with a wooden pole.⁹¹⁷

Trafficking of primates

Monkeys are poached for the pet trade and for food. Of the five monkeys that were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022, four were black-and-gold howler monkeys (*Alouatta caraya*); the fifth was an Azara's capuchin (*Sapajus cay*). Three specimens were seized from private homes where they were kept as pets, the other two specimens (both babies) were offered for sale in Mercado 4 of Asunción and on social media respectively.

The monkey baby that was offered for sale on social media (a black-and-gold-howler) was seized in June 2021 along with three great horned owl chicks after social media users filed complaints with the

⁹¹² <https://www.abc.com.py/nacionales/2022/06/14/mades-investiga-supuesta-caza-ilegal-de-yaguarettes-en-el-chaco/>

⁹¹³ Ibid.

⁹¹⁴ Ibid.

⁹¹⁵ <https://www.ultimahora.com/cazan-y-matan-un-yaguarete-canindeyu-n3003808>. Accessed on 16 February 2024.

⁹¹⁶ <https://www.lanacion.com.py/pais/2021/08/14/rescatan-a-dos-cachorros-de-puma-en-el-chaco/>. Accessed on 16 February 2024.

⁹¹⁷ <https://www.lanacion.com.py/pais/2019/09/13/a-palazos-matan-a-puma-que-huia-de-incendios/>. Accessed on 16 February 2024.

authorities. They arrested a woman who had advertised the animals on WhatsApp. She had asked 500,000 guaranies (US\$69) for the monkey and 600,000 guaranies (US\$82) for the owl chicks.⁹¹⁸

Azara's capuchin monkeys occur in eastern Paraguay. The species has lost 58% of its suitable habitat in Paraguay, mainly due to agrarian and urban expansions. The species' situation is considered critical as its remaining habitat is being fragmented and degraded and the distance between fragments is increasing.⁹¹⁹ It is hunted for food by the Aché indigenous tribe of Canindeyú department and used in local medicine to treat coughs, pain, anthrax, and skin afflictions, and to increase intelligence. It has long been used in the region for biomedical research in laboratories.⁹²⁰

Black-and-gold howler monkeys are threatened across their range by loss of suitable habitat, subsistence hunting, and population extirpations caused by disease.⁹²¹ Nonetheless, it is reportedly still widespread across Paraguay except for the most arid areas of the Dry Chaco. It is hunted for food, including by the Aché indigenous tribe of Canindeyú department and around the city of Pilar in Ñeembucú department.⁹²²

Trafficking of bushmeat

Demand for bushmeat is a key driver for the illegal hunting of mammals in Paraguay. Species affected include peccaries, capybaras, armadillos, deer, primates, and coatis.

In remote areas of Paraguay people hunt wildlife for their subsistence out of necessity as they lack access to commercial meat sources. Research in the northern Dry Chaco of Paraguay has found that wildlife hunting is still largely opportunistic and limited to immediate family use due to a lack of market forces and constraints on refrigeration capacity in the region. The researchers highlighted that this pattern may soon change given rapid deforestation, and an associated and growing road network providing greater access both to wildlife resources and commercial bushmeat markets. Although hunting without a permit is illegal, the trip and expense of acquiring a permit is beyond the capacity of most residents, and enforcement in the region is lacking.⁹²³

Six seizures of wild meat were identified which demonstrated that bushmeat, including from the Chaco, is sold commercially.

Peccaries were the most represented mammal species in these bushmeat seizures, with a minimum of 13 specimens (two dead, and 11 butchered), including one white-lipped peccary (*Tayassu tajacu*); seven collared peccaries (*Pecari tajacu*); and five unidentified peccary specimens. Peccaries are highly valued by hunters. The Paraguayan Chaco, which is part of the Gran Chaco ecoregion that Paraguay shares with Bolivia, Brazil, and Argentina, hosts all three extant peccary species: the Chacoan peccary (*Catagonus wagneri*), endemic to the Gran Chaco; white-lipped peccary (*Tayassu tajacu*); and collared

⁹¹⁸ <https://www.lanacion.com.py/pais/2021/06/27/mades-frena-venta-de-mono-y-lechuzas-una-mujer-queda-tras-las-rejas/>. Accessed on 15 February 2024.

⁹¹⁹ Smith, R.L., Lusseau, D. The Hooded Capuchin Monkey (*Sapajus cay*) is Vulnerable in Paraguay and at Least Near Threatened Globally According to Red List Criteria. *Int J Primatol* 45, 259–281 (2024). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10764-023-00400-8>. Accessed on 15 February 2024.

⁹²⁰ Smith, P. et al (2021). Paraguayan Primatology: Past, Present and Future. *Primate Conservation*. 35:1-22. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349440118_Paraguayan_Primatology_Past_Present_and_Future. Accessed on 16 February 2024.

⁹²¹ Bicca-Marques, J.C. et al (2021). *Alouatta caraya*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2021: e.T41545A190414715. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2021-1.RLTS.T41545A190414715.en>. Accessed on 16 February 2024.

⁹²² Ibid.

⁹²³ Saldívar-Bellassai, S. et al (2021). Hunting practices and harvest of peccaries in the northern Paraguayan Dry Chaco, *Biological Conservation*, Vol. 256, 2021, 109059. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2021.109059>. Accessed on 16 February 2024.

peccary (Pecari tajacu). The Chacoan peccary (known locally as tagúa) is considered endangered, yet it is one of the most commonly harvested of the three peccary species.⁹²⁴ In addition to hunting, this species' survival is threatened by severe habitat loss driven by agricultural expansion. The Chaco's dry forests are affected by some of the highest rates of deforestation worldwide, having lost 20.2% (9.5 million ha) of its total forest cover between 2000 and 2019. Western Paraguay is the most affected region and has the highest rate of deforestation and forest cover loss.⁹²⁵

Key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes

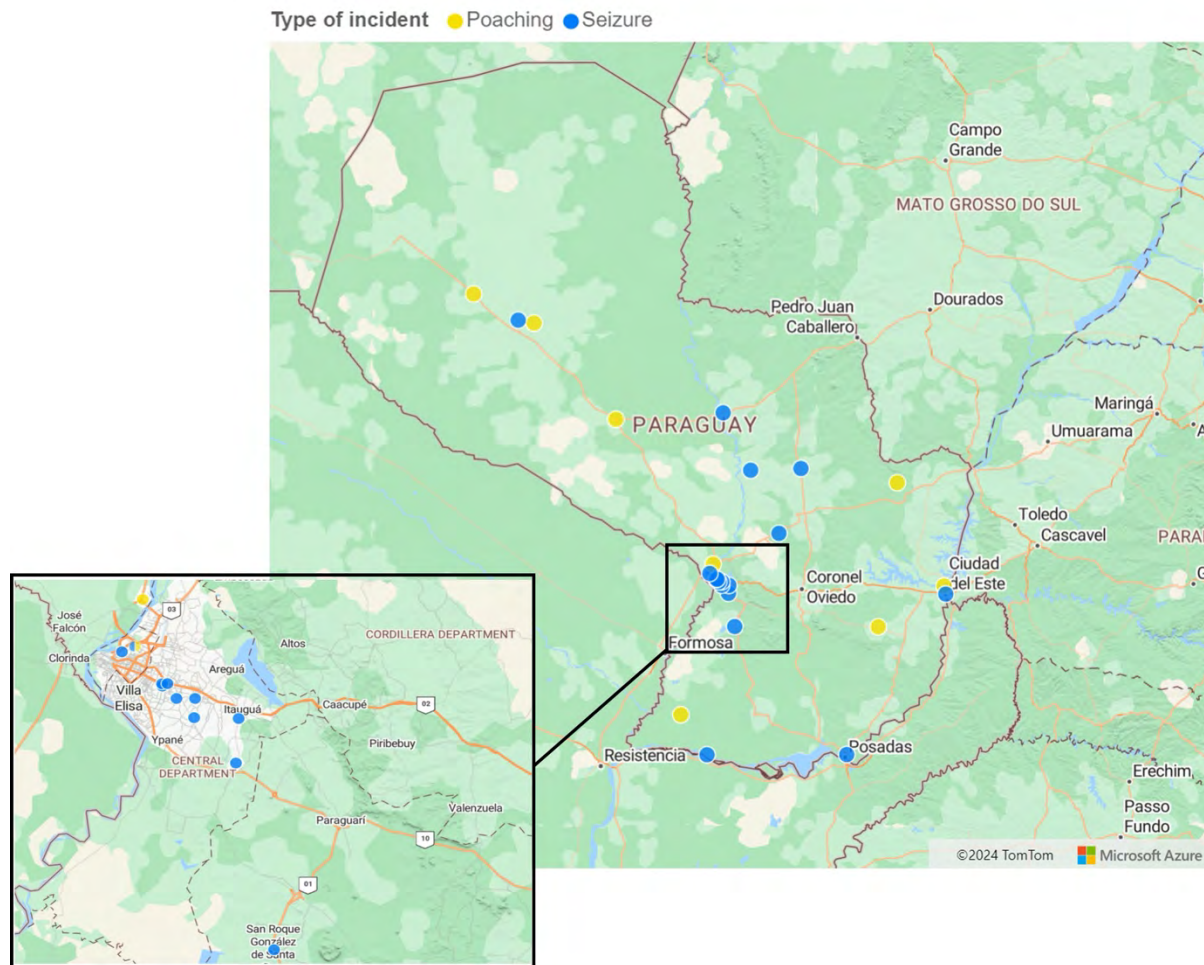


Figure 115: Locations of seizures and poaching incidents in Paraguay reported between 2017 and 2022

Sales in markets and streets

The two main hubs for the illicit wildlife trade in Paraguay are the capital Asunción and San Lorenzo, a suburb of Asunción. With 11 seizures identified for each city, together they account for nearly 50% of all seizures reported between 2017 and 2022. As noted above in the species most targeted section, 77% of the birds seized or poached in Paraguay between 2017 and 2022 were seized in these two cities.

Of the 35 seizures that were reported in Paraguay, at least 18 incidents concerned illicit sales in markets or from street vendors, i.e. more than 50%.

⁹²⁴ Ibid.

⁹²⁵ Romero, S.G.S. et al (2023). Impacts of national governments on the forest cover loss in Paraguayan Chaco between 1999 and 2021, *Journal for Nature Conservation*, Vol. 75, 2023, 126472. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jnc.2023.126472>. Accessed on 16 February 2024.

In Asunción, Mercado 4 has long been known as the biggest hotspot for illegal wildlife trade. At least four seizures in 2018 and 2019 of birds, reptiles, and mammals discussed above were reported in this market. No seizures were reported here after 2019, which indicates that either illegal trade in this market has decreased, or law enforcement authorities are focusing less on this market.

The six seizures reported in the municipal market of San Lorenzo all occurred in 2017, 2018 and 2019, which suggests similar changes in trade dynamics and/or law enforcement effort.

It is possible that some illegal trade has moved to social media.

Transportation modes

Only a few seizures were reported of illicit wildlife shipments being transported from one location to another. Yet these still provide some insight into the transportation modes used by wildlife traffickers in Paraguay.

Transport by river

One seizure was recorded of a shipment of bushmeat that was transported by boat from the Paraguayan Chaco to Asunción on the Paraguay river, highlighting the significance of river transport for wildlife smuggling. The Paraguay and Paraná rivers are important infrastructural nodes for moving goods and people in Paraguay. They are part of the Paraguay-Paraná Hidrovía, a river network which crosses Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina, where it opens into the Atlantic Ocean. The Hidrovía is also used by cocaine traffickers, who hide cocaine in licit cargo for transport to Europe.⁹²⁶

Transport by road

One seizure was recorded of an illicit shipment of bushmeat that was transported in a car, in Cerrito, Departamento Ñeembucú.⁹²⁷ Cerrito is a small town on the Paraná river, which forms the border with Argentina. Given that Argentinian authorities have seized two shipments of bushmeat sourced in Argentina that were headed for Paraguay (including one in Ituzaingó, a town on the Paraná river near Cerrito), it is not unlikely the bushmeat seized in Cerrito came from Argentina.

Transport by air

As discussed above, Paraguay is a known source of parrot and macaw eggs trafficked to Asia using passenger air transport. Several egg smugglers were intercepted in transit or destination countries. The year 2023 saw the first successful interception of macaw egg smugglers in Paraguay, suggesting the country has increased its vigilance of wildlife traffickers flying out of Paraguay.

Sales on social media

Four seizures were reported where wildlife was being offered for sale on social media. All four seizures occurred in 2021. These included:

- ▶ A southern river otter (*Lontra provocax*) seized in June 2021 in Capiatá.⁹²⁸
- ▶ A black-and-gold howler monkey baby and three owl chicks seized in June 2021, also in Capiatá.⁹²⁹

⁹²⁶ <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/paraguay-under-threat-from-organized-crime/>. Accessed on 19 February 2024.

⁹²⁷ <https://eltrueno.com.py/2019/04/29/incautan-piezas-de-animales-silvestres-en-cerrito/>. Accessed 19 February 2024.

⁹²⁸ <https://www.lanacion.com.py/pais/2021/06/27/mades-frena-venta-de-mono-y-lechuzas-una-mujer-queda-tras-las-rejas/>. Accessed on 19 February 2024.

⁹²⁹ Ibid.

- ▶ Two tortoises and two parakeets seized in August 2021 in Itá.⁹³⁰
- ▶ The three hyacinth macaw chicks that were seized in Asunción, October 2021.⁹³¹

The scale of illegal online wildlife trade in Paraguay is unclear as little research seems to have been done on this. Given trends in other Latin American countries and globally, it is to be expected that in Paraguay, too, the internet is increasingly important as a marketplace for illicit wildlife sales.

Convergence

In February 2022, two red and green macaws (*Ara chloropterus*) and two toco toucans (*Ramphastos toco*) were seized from the home of a suspected drug trafficker in the town of 25 de Diciembre, Departamento de San Pedro, during a large anti-drugs crime operation targeting several suspects. In another suspect's home in San Roque González, Departamento Paraguari, two live capybaras were seized.⁹³² There are no indications that these suspected drug traffickers were engaged in wildlife trafficking, and it is most likely the animals were kept as pets.

No other incidents were identified between 2017 and 2022 that suggest a convergence between wildlife trafficking and other types of serious crime in Paraguay. However, given the increasing presence of organized crime networks in Paraguay it is possible that organized crime networks involved in trafficking drugs, weapons and other illicit goods are also earning profits from trafficking wildlife. The trafficking of macaws by Asian crime networks could present such opportunities for convergence.

Transboundary trafficking routes

Argentina ↔ Paraguay

Argentina reported several seizures which suggest frequent wildlife trafficking between Argentina and Paraguay.

- ▶ In September 2021 and June 2022, the Argentine navy seized two large shipments of capybara meat in Paraná from boats destined for Paraguay via the Paraná river.⁹³³
- ▶ In September 2022, the Argentine Gendarmería in Ituzaingó seized axis deer parts (three skins, one head and one pair of antlers) destined for Paraguay from a vehicle during road inspection.⁹³⁴
- ▶ In 2018 (which month is unclear), ten blue and yellow macaws originating from Paraguay were seized from an illegal hatchery in Funes.⁹³⁵
- ▶ In November 2022, two juvenile capuchin monkeys and a baby black-and-gold howler monkey were seized in Formosa province on the Argentina-Paraguay border. They were destined for Buenos Aires.⁹³⁶
- ▶ In February 2020, the Argentine Gendarmería seized 82 broad-snouted caiman skins from a car driven by a Paraguayan citizen near the town of Formosa, on the border with Paraguay.
- ▶ In February 2023, a cargo of 352 caiman skins was seized from a parcel delivery company vehicle near Tatané, a village just south of Formosa.⁹³⁷

⁹³⁰ <https://www.lanacion.com.py/pais/2021/08/14/rescatan-a-dos-cachorros-de-puma-en-el-chaco/>

⁹³¹ <https://www.ultimohora.com/rescatan-3-guacamayos-azules-peligro-extincion-asuncion-n2968900.html>

⁹³² <https://www.abc.com.py/nacionales/2022/03/01/narcomascotas-las-victimas-colaterales-del-operativo-a-ultranza/>

⁹³³ <https://www.radiodos.com.ar/115238-incautaron-200-kilos-de-carne-de-carpincho-que-iban-a-paraguay>

⁹³⁴ <https://www.elterritorio.com.ar/noticias/2022/09/28/763649-gendarmeria-secuestro-restos-de-ciervo-axis-en-ituzaingo>

⁹³⁵ <https://www.lt10.com.ar/noticia/236110--diez-guacamayos-que-estan-en-la-ciudad-volveran-a-paraguay>

⁹³⁶ <https://www.tiktok.com/@opinionfrontal/video/7156939604170444038>. Accessed on 11 February 2024.

⁹³⁷ <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/noticias/envian-352-cueros-de-yacare-dentro-de-encomiendas>. Accessed 8 Feb. 2024.

Brazil > Paraguay

No seizures were identified of wildlife smuggled from Brazil to Paraguay, but Brazilian authorities have reportedly established that hyacinth macaw eggs (and in some instances adult specimens) are smuggled from Bela Vista in Brazil's Mato Grosso do Sul state across the Apa river to the Paraguayan city of Bella Vista Norte.⁹³⁸

Paraguay > Asia

Multiple seizures in Asia, Europe, and Paraguay of macaw and parrot eggs smuggled to Asia from Paraguay suggest that one or more Asian criminal networks operating out of Paraguay are trafficking high-value parrots and macaws to east Asia. This study identified the following incidents:

- ▶ In September 2016, the Guardia Civil in Madrid, Spain, arrested a Chinese man with seven newly hatched turquoise-fronted amazon chicks and 11 eggs of the same species in his luggage. The man was travelling from Paraguay to Hong Kong SAR via Madrid and Amsterdam.⁹³⁹
- ▶ In October 2017, Customs at Taiwan region's Taoyuan airport arrested a Taiwan region woman with 45 fertilised macaw eggs in her luggage. The woman had travelled via Amsterdam airport in The Netherlands.⁹⁴⁰
- ▶ In October 2023, two Taiwan region men were arrested at the airport of Asunción with around 40 macaw eggs in their luggage. They intended to fly to Panama and would most likely travel on to Asia from there.⁹⁴¹

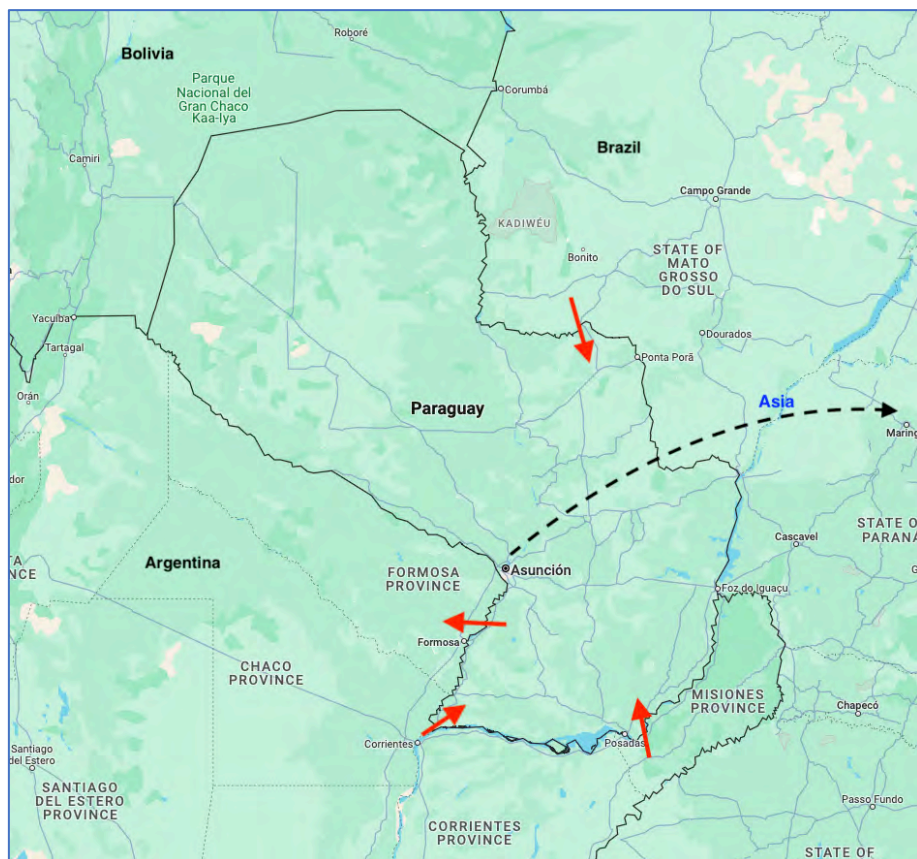


Figure 116: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes to/from Paraguay based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022

⁹³⁸ <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/12/brazils-blue-macaws-golden-lion-tamarins-back-in-traffickers-sights/>

⁹³⁹ <https://www.elmundo.es/madrid/2016/09/08/57d1334922601da85a8b4672.html>. Accessed on 15 February 2024.

⁹⁴⁰ https://hk.on.cc/tw/bkn/cnt/news/20171019/bkntw-20171019200210871-1019_04011_001.html. Accessed on 15 February 2024.

⁹⁴¹ <https://npy.com.py/2023/10/detienen-a-taiwaneses-por-supuesto-traffic-ilegal-de-huevos-de-guacamayo/>. Accessed on 20 February 2024.

Law enforcement efforts

The primary mandate for tackling wildlife poaching and trafficking lies with Paraguay's Ministry for the environment and sustainable development (Ministerio del Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible - MADES).⁹⁴²

The National Police and National Customs Directorate are also mandated to intercept illegal wildlife shipments. Since 2019, there is a governmental animal welfare directorate (Dirección Nacional de Defensa, Salud y Bienestar Animal – DNDSyBA) with a rescue department (Departamento de Decomiso Rescate e Intervención) which supports anti-wildlife trafficking operations.⁹⁴³

Paraguay's prosecutors' office has a specialised environmental crimes unit responsible for prosecuting pollution crimes as well as fisheries, wildlife, and forest crimes (Unidad Especializada Delitos Ambientales).⁹⁴⁴

Looking at the incidents recorded for Paraguay, it appears illegal wildlife trade in this country is mainly practised by low level actors, often members of indigenous communities offering for sale relatively small quantities of wildlife. Frequent seizures in neighbouring Argentina however highlight significant levels of illegal trade in high value species between these two countries, including macaws, monkeys, and caiman skins. Moreover, Paraguay has emerged as a source for macaw and parrot eggs smuggled to Asia by Asian smugglers, with seizures made in Spain, Taiwan region, Thailand, Hong Kong SAR, and most recently in Paraguay. These incidents indicate that high-level wildlife criminals are operating in Paraguay with apparent impunity.

Wildlife law enforcement in Paraguay appears to be mainly reactive, with most seizures taking place in response to citizen's complaints and/or during routine inspections. Furthermore, few people are arrested for wildlife crimes. A total of eight people were arrested in four incidents reported between 2017 and 2022. This means that only 8.5% of incidents reported in Paraguay resulted in arrest, which is well below the regional average of 27%.

The penalty for poaching and trafficking wildlife species declared endemic or threatened with extinction is imprisonment of between 1 and 5 years and a fine of between 500 to 1,000 minimum wages.⁹⁴⁵

Wildlife traffickers who get caught reportedly soon relapse, indicating that law enforcement deterrence is low. In 2019, the director of Mercado 4 in Asunción (a major hotspot for illegal wildlife trade) explained in an interview that controls are carried out from time to time and complaints are filed in case of any irregularity. However, although the sale of wild animals is prohibited by ordinance, 'these people stop selling for a while and then start again'. The Director of the Animal Welfare Directorate highlighted that wildlife sellers are often indigenous people who bring the animals from the Chaco to the capital, often in inhumane conditions. They depend on this trade for their livelihoods. He also noted that they are always in the same location, but they change people.⁹⁴⁶ In addition, there is little respect for law enforcers. Market merchants reportedly protect each other and tend to resist any type of intervention

⁹⁴² <https://www.mades.gov.py/>. Accessed on 13 February 2024.

⁹⁴³ <https://bienestaranimal.gov.py/institucion/>. Accessed on 12 February 2024.

⁹⁴⁴ <https://www.ministeriopublico.gov.py/unidad-especializada-de-delitos-ambientales->. Accessed on 13 February 2024.

⁹⁴⁵ Ley N° 716/96 que sanciona delitos contra el medio ambiente: <http://www.bacn.gov.py/leyes-paraguayas/2426/ley-n-716-sanciona-delitos-contra-el-medio-ambiente>

⁹⁴⁶ <https://independiente.com.py/crueldad-como-negocio-rentable/>. Accessed on 13 February 2024.

that occurs in the place, and law enforcers are sometimes met with aggression. For instance, in April 2022, San Lorenzo Animal Protection officers were attacked with stones when they seized seven parakeets from an illegal vendor.⁹⁴⁷

Corruption is another factor that may be facilitating wildlife crime in Paraguay. Corruption is reportedly deeply rooted, with police officers and officials in state services commonly demanding bribes. Paraguay's law enforcement agencies have also been accused of involvement in criminal activities, including drug trafficking and smuggling.⁹⁴⁸ In 2015, sources reported that wildlife sellers in Asunción's Mercado 4 authorities paid bribes to the authorities to avoid confiscation.⁹⁴⁹

It is important to note that in recent years important steps have been taken to strengthen Paraguay's capacity to fight wildlife crime and to enhance collaboration with neighbouring countries.⁹⁵⁰ In May 2022, Paraguayan law enforcement and judiciary officers conducted a self-assessment of Paraguay's response to wildlife and forest crime using the Indicator Framework developed by the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) in a workshop hosted by MADES and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).⁹⁵¹ Furthermore, a National Strategy to Combat Illegal Trafficking in Wildlife in Paraguay 2023 – 2033 (Estrategía Nacional sobre Combate al Tráfico Ilegal de Fauna Silvestre en Paraguay) was developed jointly by officials from various public institutions and civil society organisations, together with police and military personnel of Paraguay.⁹⁵² In 2023, as part of this strategy numerous training sessions and educational campaigns were implemented, including transboundary workshops between Paraguay, Bolivia, Argentina, and Brazil.⁹⁵³ Actions were furthermore initiated to strengthen the legal framework.⁹⁵⁴

It has been reported that organized crime levels in Paraguay have increased in recent years. Foreign criminal actors, particularly Brazilian gangs, are extensively involved in Paraguay's local trade in illicit goods such as drugs, weapons, and counterfeit goods. Chinese mafia organisations are also leading operations in Paraguay, primarily in the Tri-Border Area of Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina.⁹⁵⁵ It is not unlikely that some of these foreign criminal actors engage in trafficking wildlife sourced in Paraguay. Some evidence to this effect emerged from an INTERPOL operation conducted in October 2023 with the aim of tackling wildlife and forest crime in the Tri-Border area of the Alto Paraguay department (Operation Bahía Negra). The operation led to 23 arrests, eight of which were 'linked to an Asian transnational criminal network involved in global wildlife trafficking'. Authorities reported that the initiative established how trafficking in human beings, firearms, drugs, stolen vehicles, and counterfeit goods converge geographically with illegal timber and wildlife trafficking along these routes.⁹⁵⁶ No further detail on this operation could be found online. The Asian connection is also apparent from several interceptions since 2016 of Asian parrot and macaw egg smugglers travelling from Paraguay to Asia, as discussed in the species most targeted section (Birds).

⁹⁴⁷ <https://www.abc.com.py/nacionales/2022/04/22/proteccion-animal-de-san-lorenzo-rescata-a-varias-aves-en-medio-de-pedradas/>. Accessed on 14 February 2024.

⁹⁴⁸ https://ocindex.net/assets/downloads/2023/english/ocindex_profile_paraguay_2023.pdf. Accessed on 13 Feb. 2024.

⁹⁴⁹ <https://news.mongabay.com/2015/12/organized-crime-role-in-latin-american-wildlife-trade-hidden-in-shadow/>

⁹⁵⁰ <https://www.mades.gov.py/2023/09/14/realizan-talleres-para-combatir-el-trafico-de-la-vida-silvestre/>

⁹⁵¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-government-unodc-support-paraguay-against-environmental-crimes>. Accessed on 12 February 2024.

⁹⁵² <https://www.senado.gov.py/index.php/noticias/noticias-comisiones/12420-la-conaderna-analiza-propuestas-legislativas-de-orden-ambiental-2023-10-16-16-12-25>. Accessed on 13 February 2024.

⁹⁵³ https://www.arp.org.py/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3819:buscan-reducir-la-caza-ilegal-y-el-trafico-de-fauna-silvestre&catid=16&Itemid=116

⁹⁵⁴ <https://ministeriopublico.gov.py/nota/medio-ambiente-fiscalia-participo-de-taller-de-capacitacion-y-elaboracion-de-protocolos-interinstitucionales-8419>. Accessed on 13 February 2024.

⁹⁵⁵ https://ocindex.net/assets/downloads/2023/english/ocindex_profile_paraguay_2023.pdf. Accessed on 13 Feb. 2024.

⁹⁵⁶ <https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2023/Organized-crime-groups-pushing-environmental-security-to-tipping-point>. Accessed on 13 February 2024.

Peru

Peru

General overview

For Peru, 198 seizures and 14 poaching incidents were recorded between 2017 and 2022, affecting a minimum number of 13,167 wild animals. Some 85% concerned live specimens, with the balance comprised of 10% dead specimens, and 5% taxidermies, parts, and products of wild animals, or meat.

For 332 wild animals that were kept as pets, including opossums, squirrels, toads, Sechuran foxes, turtles, monkeys, birds, and deer that were seized in Piura in December 2022, the media failed to specify the numbers of specimens for each species nor their class (birds, mammals, or reptiles).⁹⁵⁷ Therefore, these 332 specimens were not included in the analysis in this section.

For the remaining 12,835 animals, 62% concerned amphibians (7,936 specimens); 26% were birds (3397 specimens); and reptiles and mammals both made up 6% (780 and 722 specimens respectively).

Actual numbers of wild animals seized in Peru are much higher than media reports suggest. On average, around 5,000 wild animals are seized annually.⁹⁵⁸ In 2017, however, 10,398 wild animals were reported to be seized.⁹⁵⁹

It is noteworthy that Peru's legal wildlife exports, including both CITES-listed and non-CITES listed species, are huge. Loreto, in the Peruvian Amazon where most of the wildlife is sourced, is a major hub. For example, according to information from Aeropuertos del Perú, between 2019 and 2021, 1,071,000 live specimens of wildlife were transported from Loreto's airport (Coronel FAP Francisco Secada Vignetta International Airport in Iquitos).⁹⁶⁰

Unique characteristics

- High volume of seized wildlife
- Traditional medicine drives trafficking of amphibians and other wildlife
- Poaching of psittacids, monkeys, and other mammals for pet trade
- Taxidermy trafficking to supply domestic and international demand
- Jaguar parts trafficking including to Asia
- Increased bushmeat trafficking
- Proactive law enforcement
- Low arrest rate
- Strong laws and policies

⁹⁵⁷ <https://www.inforegion.pe/302351/piura-rescatan-332-animales-silvestres-criados-como-mascotas-o-adquiridos-ilegalmente/>. Accessed on 12 December 2023.

⁹⁵⁸ <https://andina.pe/agencia/noticia-biodiversidad-peligro-cada-ano-se-rescatan-5000-especimenes-fauna-silvestre-851233.aspx>. Accessed on 12 December 2023.

⁹⁵⁹ <https://andina.pe/agencia/noticia-en-2017-se-incautaron-10398-animales-silvestres-todo-pais-713258.aspx>

⁹⁶⁰ <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/entre-2019-y-2021-se-transportaron-mas-de-un-millon-de-ejemplares-de-fauna-silvestre-desde-loreto/>. Accessed on 12 December 2023.

Number of incidents reported in the media

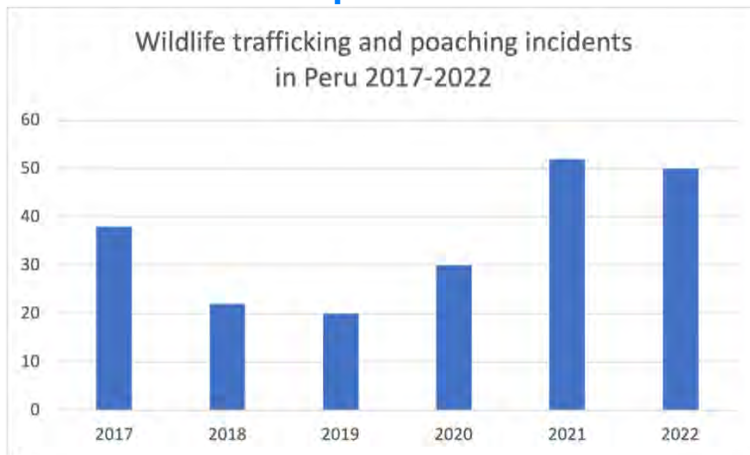


Figure 117: Wildlife trafficking and poaching incidents in Peru between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Number of animals involved

The table and figure below show the numbers of amphibians, birds, reptiles, and mammals seized or poached in Peru between 2017 and 2022.

Table 17: Number of animals seized or poached in Peru between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Amphibians	1530	1205	2731	0	2384	86	7936
Birds	1093	684	1146	69	248	157	3397
Reptiles	125	379	26	85	73	92	780
Mammals	171	45	53	340	54	59	722
TOTAL	2919	2313	3956	494	2759	394	

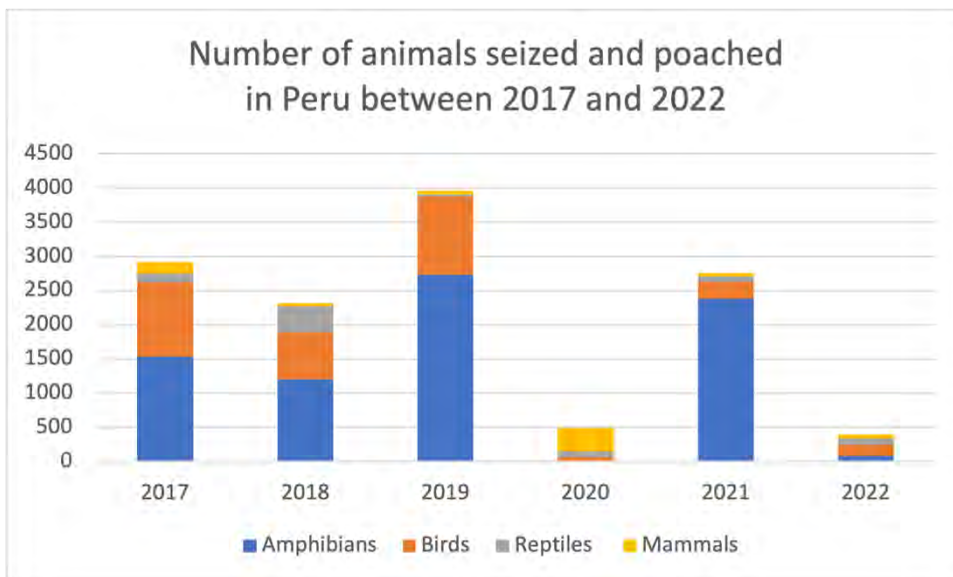


Figure 118: Number of animals seized or poached in Peru between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

The table and figure above show that the numbers of animals seized have reduced sharply since 2019. However, the number of seizures and poaching incidents reported in the media have increased in that same time frame. Therefore, the average number of animals seized per intervention has decreased. The reasons for these seemingly contradictory trends are unclear. Possible explanations include: reduced law enforcement effectiveness (e.g. due to decreased allocation of resources); reduced illegal trade volumes due to increased law enforcement efforts; and/or criminals changing tactics in response to successful law enforcement interventions (e.g. by using different routes, different smuggling methods, or shipping wildlife in lower numbers).

Species most targeted

Amphibians

Amphibians in Peru are heavily impacted by an illegal trade fuelled by the shamanistic belief that they can cure diseases and act as an aphrodisiac. Fourteen seizures, involving a total of 5,776 Titicaca water frogs (*Telmatobius culeus*) and 2,160 South American toads (*Rhinella* sp.) were reported between 2017 and 2022, mostly from markets or natural medicine shops. Four seizures concerned illicit shipments being transported in buses.

Titicaca water frogs are an endangered species endemic to the Lake Titicaca basin in the Andean highlands of Bolivia and Peru. Regulations in Peru and Bolivia prohibit the removal of this amphibian from its habitat, but this has not stopped the trade.⁹⁶¹ They are captured for food and for use in medicinal products. The medicinal use includes use as an aphrodisiac and to treat various ailments, such as memory loss, impotence, and asthma, in Peru and Bolivia. The species is traded whole and fresh, desiccated, as leather, as a juice, or as flour. According to Serfor, the new form of trafficking is the sale of dry frogs, which are more difficult to detect in their inspections. Most commercial sale is for domestic consumption in Peru and Bolivia, but there is also evidence of illegal exports to markets in the USA, Canada, Europe, Brazil, and Japan.⁹⁶²

Four seizures are highlighted below to illustrate the volume of the illicit trade in this species:

- ▶ In July 2018, a joint law enforcement operation seized 1,071 Titicaca water frogs (including 630 dead specimens); 134 Peru coast toads; and parts and taxidermies from 34 mammals and reptiles from five stalls in the Hierba II shopping centre in Lima, following a citizens' complaint to the Alerta Serfor app. Five sellers were arrested.⁹⁶³
- ▶ In January 2019, another joint law enforcement operation seized 152 Titicaca water frogs, 60 toads, parts and taxidermies from 50 mammals and reptiles, and 14.17 kg palo santo wood from 10 stands in the same Hierba Santa I and II shopping centres in Lima.⁹⁶⁴
- ▶ In June 2019, 2,517 Titicaca water frogs were seized during a routine inspection from a bus that was headed for Lima and came from Puno, where they had been poached. They were dehydrated and in bad shape, not surprisingly, as by the time they were seized they had already spent more than 20 hours in the wooden crates they were hidden in.⁹⁶⁵

⁹⁶¹ <https://radioluisdefuentes.com/especiales/rescatan-en-el-alto-a-cria-de-rana-gigante-traida-del-titicaca-esta-especie-es-unica-en-el-mundo-y-en-peligro-critico-de-extincion/>. Accessed on 11 December 2023.

⁹⁶² IUCN SSC Amphibian Specialist Group. 2020. *Telmatobius culeus*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2020. Available at: <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2020-2.RLTS.T57334A178948447.en>. Accessed on 12 December 2023.

⁹⁶³ <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/decomisan-animales-silvestres-disecados-que-eran-comercializados-en-la-parada/>

⁹⁶⁴ <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/decomisan-mas-de-400-partes-de-animales-silvestres-disecados-en-la-victoria/>

⁹⁶⁵ <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/rescatan-mas-de-2-mil-ranas-gigantes-que-iban-a-ser-usadas-para-hacer-juugo/>

- ▶ In May 2021, 1,745 Titicaca water frogs were seized from a truck at a Customs checkpoint in the town of Puno. The accompanying document claimed the shipment contained fish.⁹⁶⁶

There are 94 species of South American toads, 29 of which occur in Peru.⁹⁶⁷ For 1625 of the toads seized between 2017 and 2022 media reports failed to specify the species. The remaining 535 concerned cane toads (*Rhinella marina*, 400 specimens); Peru coast toads (*Rhinella limensis*, 134 specimens); and warty toads (*Rhinella spinulosa*, 1 taxidermy). Similar to Titicaca water frogs, the toads are mainly trafficked domestically to be used as ingredient for extracts or shakes in the belief that they cure diseases and act as aphrodisiac.⁹⁶⁸ Eleven taxidermied specimens were seized. Significant seizures include:

- ▶ In July 2017, 1,520 toads (*Rhinella* sp.) were seized from a bus owned by the company Turismo Dos Mil. They came from Piura and were headed for Lima. None of the passengers took responsibility for the cargo.⁹⁶⁹
- ▶ In March 2021, 400 South American cane toads (*Rhinella marina*) headed for Lima were seized from a bus owned by the same company Turismo Dos Mil. The seizure was the result of an intelligence operation by Serfor, the police, and the agricultural ministry (Ministerio de Desarrollo Agrario y Riego - MIDAGRI). The frogs were found next to the driver, hidden in two bags in a narrow drawer. The bus driver, the co-driver and an assistant were arrested.⁹⁷⁰

The fact that the same bus company was used in both seizures, with the 2021 seizure clearly implicating the driver, provides evidence that bus companies in Peru are involved in/facilitating the trafficking of South American toads, and most likely other wildlife.

⁹⁶⁶ <https://www.losandes.com.pe/2021/05/13/decomisan-cargamento-de-mas-de-1700-ranas-del-titicaca-que-eran-transportadas-ilegalmente/>. Accessed on 11 December 2023.

⁹⁶⁷ <https://www.mdpi.com/2673-6500/1/3/15>. Accessed on 11 December 2023.

⁹⁶⁸ <https://www.gob.pe/institucion/serfor/noticias/350882-en-piura-rescatan-400-sapos-en-bus-que-iba-a-lima-donde-son-preparados-en-extractos>. Accessed on 11 December 2023.

⁹⁶⁹ <https://rpp.pe/peru/lambayeque/decomisan-mas-de-1500-sapos-que-iban-a-ser-preparados-en-extractos-noticia-1064251>. Accessed on 12 December 2023.

⁹⁷⁰ <https://www.gob.pe/institucion/serfor/noticias/350882-en-piura-rescatan-400-sapos-en-bus-que-iba-a-lima-donde-son-preparados-en-extractos>. Accessed on 12 December 2023.

Birds

For 148 of the 3,397 birds that were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022, the species was not specified, so these were not included in this analysis of illegal bird trade in Peru.

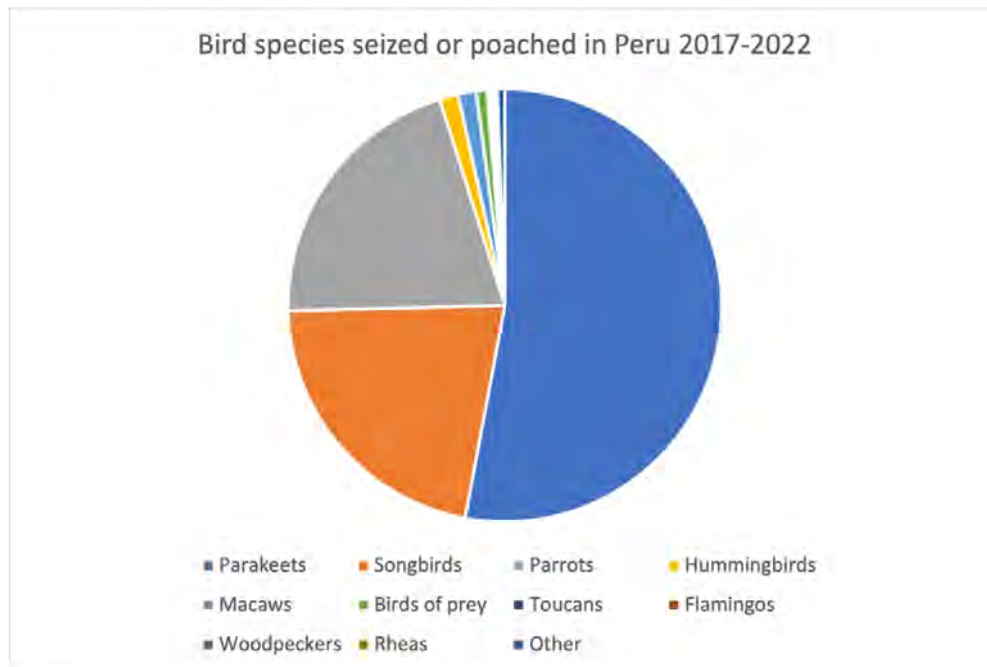


Figure 119: Bird species seized or poached in Peru between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Peru is home to more than 15% of the world's bird species: an astonishing 1,861 in total, 138 of them found nowhere else on Earth.⁹⁷¹ This makes Peru a target for international bird traffickers. Domestic demand for wild-caught native birds is also high. Some 65 different bird species were reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022.

Research into the domestic parrot trade in Peru and southern Ecuador has found that local poaching is widespread across rural areas of Peru and Ecuador. Markets provide only a small fraction of pets (approximately 14%) to rural areas, whereas most of them are directly poached by pet owners or by neighbours who sell the poached parrots locally or nearby. This poaching and trade system predominates in the Andean region and the coastal regions of Tumbes (Peru) and Guayas (Ecuador), where most poached parrots remain in the same areas. In Amazonian areas, poached parrots often remain as local pets but are also traded to other rural areas and regions. The research also confirmed that some parrots poached in remote Amazonian areas by indigenous people are transported by middlemen through rivers to small Amazonian markets. These parrots are then sold locally, distributed to other rural areas, or transported to markets of coastal cities such as Lima, mostly to supply the urban demand. This domestic parrot trade seems to operate since pre-Columbian times, following routes from Amazonian areas to Andean mountains or even coastal areas similar to trafficking routes recorded for parrots and other wildlife such as primates.⁹⁷²

⁹⁷¹ <https://www.birdlife.org/news/2022/01/13/new-growth-in-peru/>

⁹⁷² Romero-Vidal, P. et al (2023). Poaching sources and trade routes in Peru and Ecuador warn of the unsustainable rural demand for preferred parrot species. *Conservation Science and Practice*,5(7). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.12936>. Accessed on 28 November 2023.

Peru is the only Andean-Amazon country that allows the trapping and export of wild birds from 101 species, five of them psittacids listed in CITES Appendix II. Most bird species that Peru considers legal for trade are relatively common (non-CITES) species that are not included in the country's official endangered species list, which bans commercial use of those listed as threatened. The country also has a few bird breeding farms, with most of their outputs destined for the international market.⁹⁷³ In 2019, however, a Serfor official stated that the legal export of birds in Peru was practically nil, but acknowledged that illegal exports are a concern.⁹⁷⁴

A 2018 TRAFFIC study has highlighted Peru as the centre of the illegal bird trade in the region, functioning both as a recipient and source of wild birds trafficked to and from its neighbouring countries Ecuador, Brazil, Bolivia, and Chile. The study reported that open bird sales have diminished significantly in Peru since the 1990s. This was attributed to law enforcement actions targeting markets, prompted by NGO-pressure on authorities. The study noted that shop owners were still selling wildlife upon request, however. Macaws, parrots, primates, and other species are kept hidden in rooms inside the shops or stored somewhere nearby to keep them away from the authority's view.⁹⁷⁵

Trafficking of psittacids

Like in most other countries in this study, psittacids are the most targeted bird species in Peru. 75% of all birds reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022 were psittacids. Parakeets were the most seized psittacids (1720 specimens), followed by parrots (667 specimens) and macaws (44 specimens).

The top 3-psittacid species targeted by traffickers in Peru, making up 95% of all psittacids reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022 are:

- ▶ White-winged parakeets (*Brotogeris versicolorus*) - 1609 specimens (66%) seized in 17 seizures.
- ▶ Pacific parrotlets (*Forpus coelestis*) - 603 specimens (25%) seized in seven seizures.
- ▶ Red-masked parakeets (*Psittacara erythrogenys*) - 92 specimens (4%) seized in seven seizures.

These three species are often seized together, particularly red-masked parakeets and pacific parrotlets. Furthermore, most specimens (87%) were seized in just four shipments (three in 2017, one in 2019), transported on buses headed for Lima. Two of these shipments included all three species:

- ▶ On 23 January 2017, 230 white-winged parakeets, 120 pacific parrotlets and 30 red-masked parakeets were seized at the Mócupe checkpoint on highway 1N (Panamericana Norte) from a public bus going to Lima from Chiclayo (capital of Lambayeque).⁹⁷⁶
- ▶ Two weeks later, on 6 February 2017, 116 pacific parrotlets, 96 white-winged parakeets and 30 red-masked parakeets were seized on the same highway, at the same checkpoint, also from a public bus.⁹⁷⁷

The timing of the shipments, the use of the same transport method, the volume, and same combination of species suggest that a criminal network based in northeast Peru is (or was) systematically trafficking large shipments of birds to Lima. Pacific parrotlets and red-masked parakeets are native to the dry forest of the northern coast of Peru, i.e. the regions of Tumbes, Piura, and Lambayeque. White-winged

⁹⁷³ Ortiz-von Halle, B. (2018). Bird's-eye view: Lessons from 50 years of bird trade regulation & conservation in Amazon countries. TRAFFIC, Cambridge, UK. Available at: <https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/11517/birds-eye-view.pdf>. Accessed on 11 December 2023.

⁹⁷⁴ <https://blogs.elespectador.com/medio-ambiente/mongabay-latam/del-comercio-legal-al-trafico-aves-panorama-lo-sucedo-seis-paises-amazonicos>. Accessed on 11 December 2023.

⁹⁷⁵ Ortiz-von Halle, B. (2018). Bird's-eye view: Lessons from 50 years of bird trade regulation & conservation in Amazon countries. TRAFFIC, Cambridge, UK. Available at: <https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/11517/birds-eye-view.pdf>. Accessed on 11 December 2023.

⁹⁷⁶ <https://es.mongabay.com/2017/01/loros-trafico-peru/>. Accessed on 13 December 2023.

⁹⁷⁷ <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/chiclayo-intentaban-transportar-ilegalmente-a-lima-mas-de-240-aves-silvestres/>

parakeets are Amazonian and are probably sourced in Loreto or Ucayali.⁹⁷⁸ The fact that these three species were found in two major shipments, means they were collected from different places and joined together in one location, possibly Chiclayo. Chiclayo is reportedly a major hub for wildlife trafficking in the northeast.⁹⁷⁹ The bus drive from Chiclayo to Lima takes at least 13 hours, a long time for birds crammed together in small boxes.

Another noteworthy seizure happened in March 2019, when 1100 white-winged parakeets; 14 orange-winged amazons (*Amazona amazonica*); and 11 blue and yellow macaws (*Ara araurana*) were seized from a provincial bus headed for Lima from the Amazonian city of Pucallpa in the east, a 15-hour drive. 51 parakeets had died by the time they were seized. The two drivers and a woman were arrested, and the bus confiscated.⁹⁸⁰

White-winged parakeets and pacific parrotlets are considered common species and classified as 'least concern' by IUCN. Red-masked parakeets are classified as 'near-threatened' as they are suspected to have a small population, which has suffered some severe local declines primarily owing to trapping.⁹⁸¹ All three species are listed in CITES Appendix II.

Sellers deceiving customers by dyeing birds to make them resemble a different species
Several incidents were recorded where sellers dyed birds to pass them off as another species, presumably to obtain a higher price, a practice also observed in Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay.

- ▶ In December 2017, two white-winged parakeets were seized in the mercado Virgen de Chapi, Arequipa. The seller had dyed their heads red to pass them off as red-masked parakeets.⁹⁸²
- ▶ In March 2020, 12 pacific parrotlets were seized from a street vendor in Mollendo, Isaly province. The heads of the birds were dyed yellow. One bird had not survived the treatment.⁹⁸³
- ▶ In June 2022, 10 birds seized that were sold as pets in the Feria Tradicional of Chupaca province, including four pacific parrotlets whose heads were dyed yellow.⁹⁸⁴

Trafficking of songbirds

Peruvian songbirds are targeted for the pet trade and trade in taxidermies. Of the 704 songbirds reported to be seized in Peru between 2017 and 2022, 91.5% (644 specimens) were saffron finches (*Sicalis flaveola*). These were seized in five seizures (three in 2017, one in 2018, and one in 2021). The most significant seizure was in January 2018. A total of 581 saffron finches were seized from an interprovincial bus in Puno, a city in the south near the border with Bolivia. The bus came from Piura, in the northeast and was headed for Bolivia, where they were meant to be marketed. They were hidden in 16 small cages without food and water. A hundred birds had already died, not surprising given that the bus drive from Piura to Puno takes over 38 hours.⁹⁸⁵

⁹⁷⁸ <https://es.mongabay.com/2017/01/loros-trafico-peru/>. Accessed on 13 December 2023.

⁹⁷⁹ <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/chiclayo-intentaban-transportar-ilegalmente-a-lima-mas-de-240-aves-silvestres/>

⁹⁸⁰ <https://peru.wcs.org/es-es/WCS-Peru/Noticias/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/11964/Duro-golpe-contra-el-trafico-ilegal-de-aves-silvestres-en-Ucayali.aspx>. Accessed on 13 December 2023.

⁹⁸¹ BirdLife International (2023). IUCN Red List for birds, <http://datazone.birdlife.org>. Accessed on 13 December 2023.

⁹⁸² <https://rpp.pe/peru/actualidad/rescatan-a-dos-pihuichos-que-eran-vendidos-en-mercado-de-arequipa-noticia-1094215>

⁹⁸³ Robin des Bois On the Trail nr. 28, page 46. https://www.robindesbois.org/wp-content/uploads/ON_THE_TRAIL_28.pdf. Accessed on 13 December 2023.

⁹⁸⁴ <https://www.gob.pe/institucion/serfor/noticias/625535-junin-serfor-recupera-10-aves-que-eran-comercializadas-ilegalmente-como-mascotas> Accessed on 13 December 2023.

⁹⁸⁵ <https://www.servindi.org/actualidad-noticias/01/02/2018/serfor-rescata-mas-de-580-aves-boton-de-oro-de-procedencia-ilegal-en>. Accessed on 13 December 2023.

This study did not identify any seizures of saffron finches that might indicate illegal trade to neighbouring Brazil. Law enforcers in Brazil frequently seize Peruvian saffron finches, however. A particularly large seizure happened in 2011, in Água Clara, province of Mato Grosso do Sul (near the Brazilian border with Bolivia), involving 1,005 Peruvian saffron finches.⁹⁸⁶ Various studies have highlighted the trafficking of saffron finches from Peru to Brazil. The Peruvian subspecies *Sicalis flaveola valida* is in demand in Brazil because they are bigger and more aggressive than the Brazilian subspecies - they are very territorial and fight to the death for space and hierarchy. They are trafficked to Brazil to be hybridised with the local subspecies. Their bigger and more aggressive offspring is used in illegal saffron finch fighting competitions, with men placing bets (similar to dog and cock fighting).⁹⁸⁷ Brazilian bird owners and ring runners sharpen the beaks of two male birds and attach a minuscule metal hook to one of their legs before putting them together in a small cage, riling them up by playing a recording of a saffron finch call, or placing a female finch in the cage with them or next to them.⁹⁸⁸

Peruvian songbirds are also trafficked to Europe, as became evident in January 2020, when a Belgian man was intercepted at Lima's Jorge Chávez International Airport with 20 live birds in his suitcase that he intended to take to France via Madrid, Spain. The birds (18 specimens of five different tanager subspecies and two red-headed barbets) had an estimated worth of more than US\$ 1,000 in the EU. Authorities noted that the man had travelled to and from Peru several times already. Furthermore, between 2015 and 2020, Peruvian authorities had detected bird trafficking up to four times a year on flights to Spain, France, Belgium, and Russia.⁹⁸⁹

While the above case concerned live birds, Peruvian birds are also targeted for the illegal taxidermy trade. In April 2018, Customs officers at Lima Cargo Talma warehouses in Callao seized a parcel destined for the city of Tyumen in Russia containing 84 dead Peruvian birds, three bats and a monkey preserved in salt.⁹⁹⁰ They identified the suspicious package through X-ray. The animal remains were packed in a cardboard box together with camping equipment sent via the Peruvian Postal Services (Serpost). The Russian individual who had delivered the parcel for shipping had left the country shortly before the seizure. The birds were likely destined for a collector's scientific collection. An expert noted that the birds were very well selected, representing a sample of Peru's fauna from the montane environments and on the border with the low jungle. They had been carefully cut open to remove their organs, leaving only the skin and feathers.⁹⁹¹ The individuals responsible for this shipment knew what they were doing, therefore. A Serfor expert later confirmed that everything in this seizure indicated that the species were captured on request.⁹⁹² None of the species in the shipment were CITES-listed.

This seizure was not the first instance of Peruvian birds being killed to meet demand by foreign collectors. A three-year under-cover investigation 'Operation Journey' by the US Fish & Wildlife Service that started in 2011 revealed a criminal network involved in poaching protected birds and trafficking their carcasses to supply an underground bird trophy market in the USA. The network, involving traders

⁹⁸⁶ <https://oeco.org.br/noticias/25003-canarios-peruanos-apreendidos-no-ms/>. Accessed on 13 December 2023.

⁹⁸⁷ Charity, S. and Machado Ferreira, J. (2020). Wildlife trafficking in Brazil. TRAFFIC International, Cambridge, United Kingdom. Available at: https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/13031/brazil_wildlife_trafficking_assessment.pdf. Also see Ortiz-von Halle, B. (2018). Accessed on 13 December 2023.

⁹⁸⁸ <https://e360.yale.edu/features/an-illicit-trade-in-brazil-is-sending-tiny-songbirds-to-their-deaths>

⁹⁸⁹ <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/trafico-de-fauna-ciudadano-belga-intento-sacar-aves-por-el-aeropuerto-jorge-chavez/>; <https://www.reuters.com/article/peru-aves-idLTAKBN1ZF2RR>. Accessed on 13 December 2023.

⁹⁹⁰ Species included in the shipment: hummingbirds (45); flycatchers (3); black-tailed trogons (2); manakins (2); motmots (2); woodcreepers (2); woodpecker (1); yellow oriole (1); jacamar (1); euphonia (1); lesser yellow-headed vulture (1); puffbird (1); swift (1).

⁹⁹¹ <https://trome.com/actualidad/callao-decomisan-84-animales-disecados-iban-exportar-ilegalmente-rusia-fotos-82550>

⁹⁹² <https://blogs.elespectador.com/medio-ambiente/mongabay-latam/del-comercio-legal-al-trafico-aves-panorama-lo-sucedo-seis-paises-amazonicos>. Accessed on 11 December 2023.

in the USA and a Peruvian safari company, catered to American hunters who came to Peru with lists of birds they wanted to kill or have killed for them. Some clients were prolific—one Alaska man acquired some 5,000 mounted birds, many of which he had taxidermied himself.⁹⁹³

Andean condors (*Vultur gryphus*) in Peru are threatened by illegal killing by herdsmen who perceive them as a threat to their livestock; the pet trade; and trade in their parts in artisanal markets. In addition, they are used in so-called Yawar Fiestas (blood festivals), where a live Andean condor is tied to the back of a bull. The ritual is meant to symbolize the triumph of indigenous culture over colonial influence. The condor rides the symbol of Spanish virility and is then released, while the bulls are often slaughtered. However, the birds are often injured and killed, sparking fears for the species' survival in Peru. The practice is banned, but fiestas continue to be held in rural areas – up to 55 a year.⁹⁹⁴ During the last census in 2022, 301 Andean condors were counted in 16 of Peru's 24 departments.⁹⁹⁵

This study identified three live specimens that were kept in captivity and one specimen that was found in critical state due to poisoning. In addition, two carcasses were seized in May 2017 in artisanal fairs in Puno and Juliaca along with taxidermies and parts of Andean hairy armadillos, Andean foxes, Darwin's rheas, turtles, vizcachas, and toads.⁹⁹⁶

Reptiles

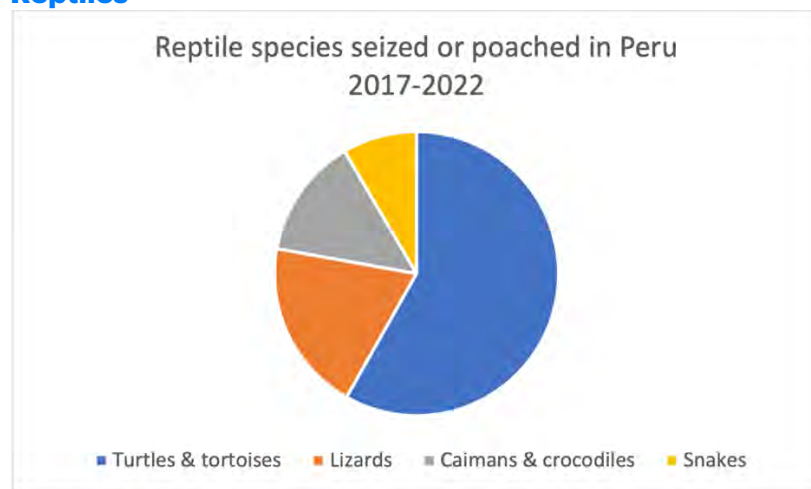


Figure 5920: Reptile species seized or poached in Peru between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Trafficking of testudinae

The reptiles most affected by poaching and illegal trade in Peru are testudinae. A total of 454 turtles and tortoises were seized, representing 58% of all reptiles reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. The graph below shows yellow-spotted river turtles are the most seized, followed by Arrau turtles; yellow-footed tortoises; and red-footed tortoises.

⁹⁹³ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/fake-taxidermists-brought-down-illegal-bird-traders>. Accessed on 14 December 2023.

⁹⁹⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/29/condor-peru-bull-fight-andes>. Accessed on 14 December 2023.

⁹⁹⁵ https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/per/C3%BA-c3%B3ndor_per/C3%BA-cuenta-al-menos-con-301-ejemplares-de-c3%B3ndor-andino-seg/C3%BAn-primer-censo/48114266

⁹⁹⁶ <https://www.servindi.org/actualidad-noticias/13/05/2017/en-operativo-conjunto-rescataron-animales-silvestres-que-eran>. Accessed on 14 December 2023.

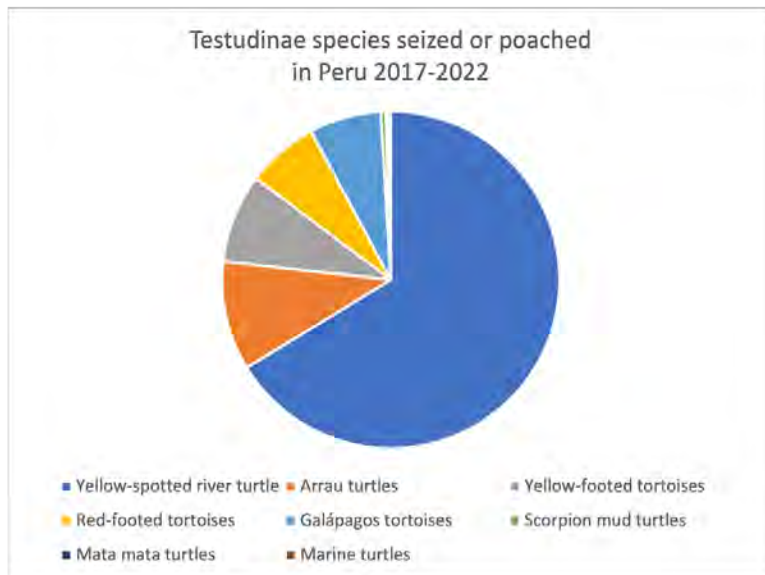


Figure 121: Testudinae species seized or poached in Peru between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

In Peru, yellow-spotted river turtles (*Podocnemis unifilis*) are mainly targeted for their meat and eggs, which make up an important part of the diet of local communities in the Peruvian Amazon. They are also popular in the global pet markets. The species has been listed in CITES Appendix II since 1975. Peru legally exports huge quantities of captive bred and ranched yellow-spotted river turtle hatchlings. According to the CITES trade database, Peru reported exports of 1,902,470 live specimens between 2017 and 2022, mainly to China and Hong Kong SAR.⁹⁹⁷

Management programs have been set up to protect the species from (illegal) overexploitation, providing labour to indigenous communities and revenues from legal sales, but there are allegations that these projects are used as a cover for turtle trafficking and that illegally sourced specimens are laundered into the legal trade.⁹⁹⁸ This was confirmed in December 2023, when Customs officials at Lima's airport seized a shipment of 4,001 river turtles (mostly *Podocnemis unifilis*, with over 400 *Podocnemis expansa*) that were destined for Indonesia. The CITES export documents for the shipment were not in order, as they wrongly identified the species of some of the animals and the age of others. A CITES export permit had been issued for *P. unifilis* of between one and three years, but the turtles seized were much younger.⁹⁹⁹ This seizure highlights that traffickers are abusing the CITES system to traffic illicit specimens under the guise of legal trade.

Most seizures of yellow-spotted river turtles reported between 2017 and 2022 (279 specimens in total) happened in markets and concerned relatively small quantities. There was one significant seizure, in July 2018. Peruvian Customs at the Carpitas checkpoint in the northeastern Tumbes region seized 199 yellow-spotted river turtle hatchlings (11 dead) from the trunk of a bus headed for the city of Tumbes further north, on the border with Ecuador.¹⁰⁰⁰ It is not unlikely the turtles were meant to be smuggled to Ecuador.

⁹⁹⁷ <https://trade.cites.org/>

⁹⁹⁸ <https://insightcrime.org/investigations/peru-tortoise-traffickers-operate-under-veiner-of-legality/>

⁹⁹⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-67771166>. Accessed on 20 December 2023,

¹⁰⁰⁰ <https://www.milenio.com/virales/fauna/rescatan-peru-200-crias-tortuga-maletero-autobus;>

<https://elcomercio.pe/peru/tumbes/tumbes-rescatan-199-taricayas-puesto-control-fronterizo-noticia-536784-noticia/>. Accessed 15 December 2023.

In addition, 10,802 yellow-spotted river turtle eggs were seized. This is related to one seizure, in September 2022, from a vehicle on the road between Yurimaguas, a river town in Loreto, northeastern Peruvian Amazon, and Tarapoto. The eggs were hidden in 15 buckets of salted fish.¹⁰⁰¹

Arrau turtles (*Podocnemis expansa*) are also trafficked, though in much lower numbers. Two seizures were recorded, involving 44 specimens. The most significant incident was in October 2020, when 41 Arrau turtles were seized in the river port of Pucallpa. They were transported on a river boat coming from the Reserva Nacional Pacaya Samiria in Loreto. Three people were arrested, who claimed the animals were meant to be taken to Chile.¹⁰⁰²

Galápagos tortoises (*Chelonoidis nigra*), endemic to Ecuador's Galápagos islands, are smuggled to Peru across the land border. In April 2017, 29 Galápagos tortoise hatchlings (two dead), wrapped in plastic and hidden in a box, were seized from an international bus on the Piura-Sullana highway in Peru. The bus came from the Tumbes region which borders Ecuador. A police official stated the tortoises may have been destined for trade in Lima, but that it was more likely they were meant to be transported from Lima to another destination by sea or air. 'We think it is an international network of illegal species trade. Each of the 29 turtles had a code'.¹⁰⁰³

Investigative journalists in Ecuador have reported that the port of Callao in Peru is a key hub for the trafficking of iguanas, tortoises, and other protected wildlife from the Galápagos to Europe and Asia by sea (see the Ecuador section).¹⁰⁰⁴

Mata mata turtles (*Chelus fimbriata*) are a large species of freshwater turtle found in the Amazon and Orinoco River basins. Juvenile matamata turtles are traded in large volumes in international pet markets, including in the United States, Europe, and Asia.¹⁰⁰⁵ In 2023 the species, along with *Chelus orinocensis*, was listed in CITES Appendix II over concerns of the impacts of illegal trade on wild populations.¹⁰⁰⁶

Peru reported only one seizure of a mata mata turtle carapace in December 2021. On the other hand, Peru's neighbour Colombia is struggling to contain the illegal trade in mata mata turtles. A total of 6,163 mata mata turtles were reported to be seized in this country between 2017 and 2022. There is evidence that a significant portion is trafficked to Peru via Leticia, a city in the far south of Colombia's Amazon, near the border with Peru. Trafficking to Peru has been fuelled by the existence of a legal export market for ranched and captive bred mata mata turtles in Peru.¹⁰⁰⁷ In Peru, wild-caught illegal specimens from Colombia are laundered into this legal trade, or at least, this was the case before the species was listed in CITES. It remains to be seen whether the CITES listing will succeed in protecting wild populations from poaching and trafficking.

¹⁰⁰¹ <https://www.gob.pe/institucion/mpfn/noticias/650236-intervienen-vehiculo-que-transportaba-mas-de-10-mil-huevos-de-tortugas-taricaya-prohidos-en-su-venta>. Accessed on 14 December 2023.

¹⁰⁰² <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/pucallpa-decomisan-41-tortugas-charapas-que-pretendian-ser-llevadas-a-chile/>

¹⁰⁰³ <https://es.mongabay.com/2017/04/peru-tortugasgalapagos-extincion-ecuador/>. Accessed on 3 December 2023.

¹⁰⁰⁴ <https://en.bitacoraec.com/post/where-are-the-pink-iguanas-of-galapagos>. Accessed on 30 November 2023.

¹⁰⁰⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/51800323>. Accessed on 29 October 2023.

¹⁰⁰⁶ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/E-CoP19-Prop-22-R1.pdf>. Accessed on 29 October 2023.

¹⁰⁰⁷ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/E-CoP19-Prop-22-R1.pdf>. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

Trafficking of other reptile species

Lizards in Peru are poached for the pet trade as well as for medicinal/shamanistic purposes. A total of 153 lizards were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. Most of these (121 specimens = 79%) are from one seizure in a shop in Peru, in April 2018. There, law enforcers seized 77 Cajamarca whorl-tailed iguanas (*Stenocercus imitator*); 35 Green-spotted whorl-tailed iguanas (*Stenocercus chlorostictus*); eight green iguanas (*Iguana iguana*); and one giant ameiva (*Ameiva ameiva*), also a lizard species. Both whorl-tailed iguana species are endemic to Peru. In addition, there were two white-winged parakeets (*Brotogeris versicolurus*) and four boa constrictors (*Boa constrictor*).¹⁰⁰⁸

In October 2022, 17 live lizards (species not specified) were seized along with other dead and live wild animals from a stall in Puno selling natural remedies.¹⁰⁰⁹ In that same month, five lizards in jars were seized along with various wildlife parts and stuffed wildlife specimens that were used in shamanistic rituals in Arequipa.¹⁰¹⁰ Both Puno and Arequipa are in southern Peru.

Nineteen seizures involving caimans and crocodiles (103 and four specimens, respectively) were reported between 2017 and 2022. These concerned 10 live specimens, 27 dead specimens, 10 kg of meat, 47 heads/skulls, 20 taxidermies, and one tail. Most seizures were in markets, shops, or restaurants. Both spectacled caimans (*Caiman crocodilus*) and black caimans (*Melanosuchus niger*) were found in illegal trade.

Parts, taxidermies, and live specimens of snakes are frequently seized in shops or market stalls selling natural remedies or objects used for shamanistic purposes. Just three species were identified in illegal trade between 2017 and 2022:

- ▶ Green anacondas (*Eunectes murinus*). Four seizures were reported involving skulls, heads, skins, and tails of 26 green anacondas.
- ▶ Boa constrictors (*Boa constrictor*). Some 14 seizures were reported involving 25 boa constrictors (17 live specimens; skins, heads, tails, and taxidermies of seven specimens; and one dead specimen). Live boa constrictors are also sold as pets or used as tourist attractions.
- ▶ Peru slender snakes (*Tachymenis peruviana*). Two seizures were reported involving 11 specimens in jars and two live specimens.

¹⁰⁰⁸ <https://agroideas.gob.pe/2018/04/09/pnp-y-serfor-decomisan-128-animales-silvestres-en-tienda-de-cercado-de-lima/>.

¹⁰⁰⁹ <https://andina.pe/agencia/noticia-puno-serfor-y-policia-nacional-rescatan-a-17-animales-silvestres-cautiverio-913666.aspx>. Accessed on 17 December 2023.

¹⁰¹⁰ <https://larepublica.pe/sociedad/2022/10/14/arequipa-incautan-partes-de-animales-silvestres-utilizadas-en-rituales-de-chamanismo-lrsd>. Accessed on 17 December 2023.

Mammals

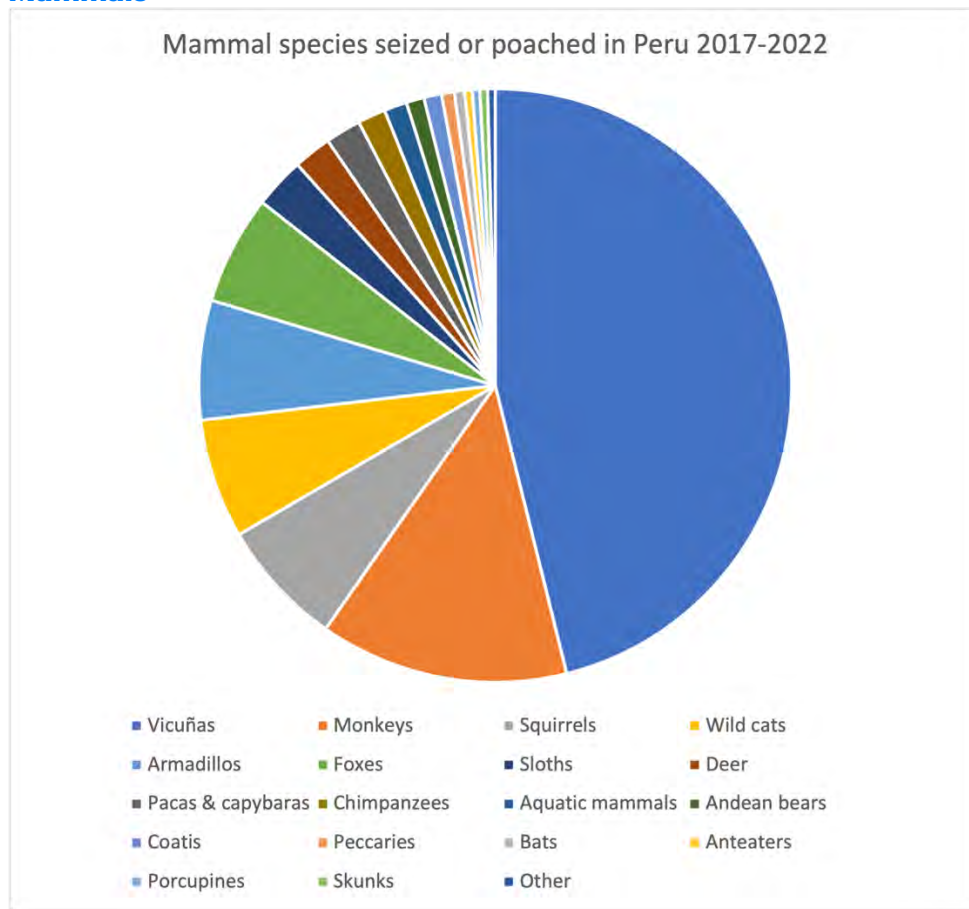


Figure 122: Mammal species seized or poached in Peru between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Mammals in Peru are poached for meat, wool, or other parts; the pet trade; retribution in human-wildlife conflicts; or taxidermy (or use of their parts) for medicinal/shamanistic/folkloristic purposes. Of the 722 mammals reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022, 49% were dead (355 specimens); 34% were alive (244 specimens); 15.5% concerned parts and products (112 specimens); and 1.5% were seized in the form of meat (11 specimens).

Vicuña poaching

Most of the dead mammals were vicuñas (*Vicugna vicugna*), the small camelid species that inhabit the Andean mountains of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru. Between 2017 and 2022, at least 333 carcasses, stripped of their skins and some partially dismembered, were found. One event occurred in September 2017, when 23 vicuña cadavers were found in the Andean zone of Tacna, near the borders with Bolivia and Chile.¹⁰¹¹ Three mass slaughter events were reported in 2020:

- ▶ In January 2020, more than 50 vicuña carcasses were discovered by shepherds in the district of Huancaraylla, Víctor Fajardo Province, Department of Ayacucho.¹⁰¹²
- ▶ In January-February 2020, at least 60 vicuñas were found to be poached in the district of Sacsamarca, Huanca Sancos Province, and District of Huancaraylla, Víctor Fajardo Province, Department of Ayacucho.¹⁰¹³

¹⁰¹¹ <https://diariocorreo.pe/edicion/tacna/cazadores-furtivos-mataron-23-vicunas-771021/>. Accessed on 18 December 2023.

¹⁰¹² Robin des Bois. On The Trail 28, page 73: https://www.robindesbois.org/wp-content/uploads/ON_THE_TRAIL_28.pdf

¹⁰¹³ Robin des Bois. On The Trail 28, page 73: https://www.robindesbois.org/wp-content/uploads/ON_THE_TRAIL_28.pdf

- ▶ In May 2020, around 200 vicuñas were found bleeding to death and with almost 70% of their skins torn off in several districts located in the south of Ayacucho: Pichccachuri, Sol de los Andes, Cabana Sur, Taqracocha, Totorá, and Illapatas. The poachers reportedly took advantage of the lack of vigilance during the COVID-19 lockdown.¹⁰¹⁴

After unsustainable hunting for their wool had decimated vicuña populations to around 10,000 individuals, they have rebounded after protection measures were put in place, including regulating community-based harvest and trade of vicuña fibre.¹⁰¹⁵ According to the 2012 census, there are now more than 200,000 vicuñas in Peru. Ayacucho has the largest population (62,133 specimens), and Ayacucho is also the department with the highest poaching numbers. Between 2015 and 2019, 946 vicuñas were poached in Ayacucho, while 257 specimens were killed in the other departments.¹⁰¹⁶

Trafficking of primates

Peru harbours 71 species of monkeys, eight of which are endemic. All are at risk from trafficking. Hunters typically kill adult monkeys for consumption and the bushmeat trade, while simultaneously capturing their young to sell to the domestic or international pet trade. The most endangered species are targeted for the pet trade because, being rare, they earn the biggest profits. Researchers have estimated that up to 200,000 Peruvian monkeys end up in the bushmeat or pet trade annually.¹⁰¹⁷

This study identified a total of 109 monkeys of at least 15 different species involved in 55 seizures reported between 2017 and 2022 (see Figure 60 below). Clearly, these represent only a very small fraction of actual numbers of monkeys poached from the wild.

Some 100 live specimens (92%) were seized alive. Of these, 78 were offered for sale as pets, were kept as pets, or had escaped from or been abandoned by their owner; seven were used as tourist attractions; and four were seized from a rescue centre that did not have the required documentation. Most monkeys that were seized from illegal sellers were offered for sale in markets, but sales on social media were also recorded in two instances (see the key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes section). A noteworthy seizure highlighting the scale of the live monkey trade happened in December 2017, when anti-drug trafficking police (Departamento Antidrogas, DEPAMDRO,) found 19 baby Ecuadorian squirrel monkeys (*Saimiri cassiquiarensis macrodon*) during an inspection of an interprovincial bus headed for Arequipa from Lima. The man who was carrying them had a history of animal abuse in Piura.¹⁰¹⁸

¹⁰¹⁴ <https://larepublica.pe/sociedad/2020/05/18/ayacucho-mas-de-200-vicunas-fueron-asesinadas-por-cazadores-furtivos-durante-cuarentena-mdga>; <https://es.mongabay.com/2020/06/vicunas-caza-furtiva-covid-19-conservacion-peru/>

¹⁰¹⁵ https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/prog/Livelihoods/case_studies/2022/CITES_%26_livelihoods_fact_sheet_Vicu%C3%B1a%20Peru.pdf

¹⁰¹⁶ <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/ayacucho-unas-200-vicunas-fueron-asesinadas-por-cazadores-durante-estado-de-emergencia/>.

Accessed on 18 December 2023.

¹⁰¹⁷ <https://news.mongabay.com/2015/12/200000-of-perus-primates-trafficked-for-pet-trade-or-bushmeat-yearly/>

¹⁰¹⁸ <https://www.huachos.com/detalle/rescatan-19-monos-titi-de-manos-de-trafficante-iban-ser-vendidos-en-arequipa-noticia-5719>. Accessed on 18 December 2023.

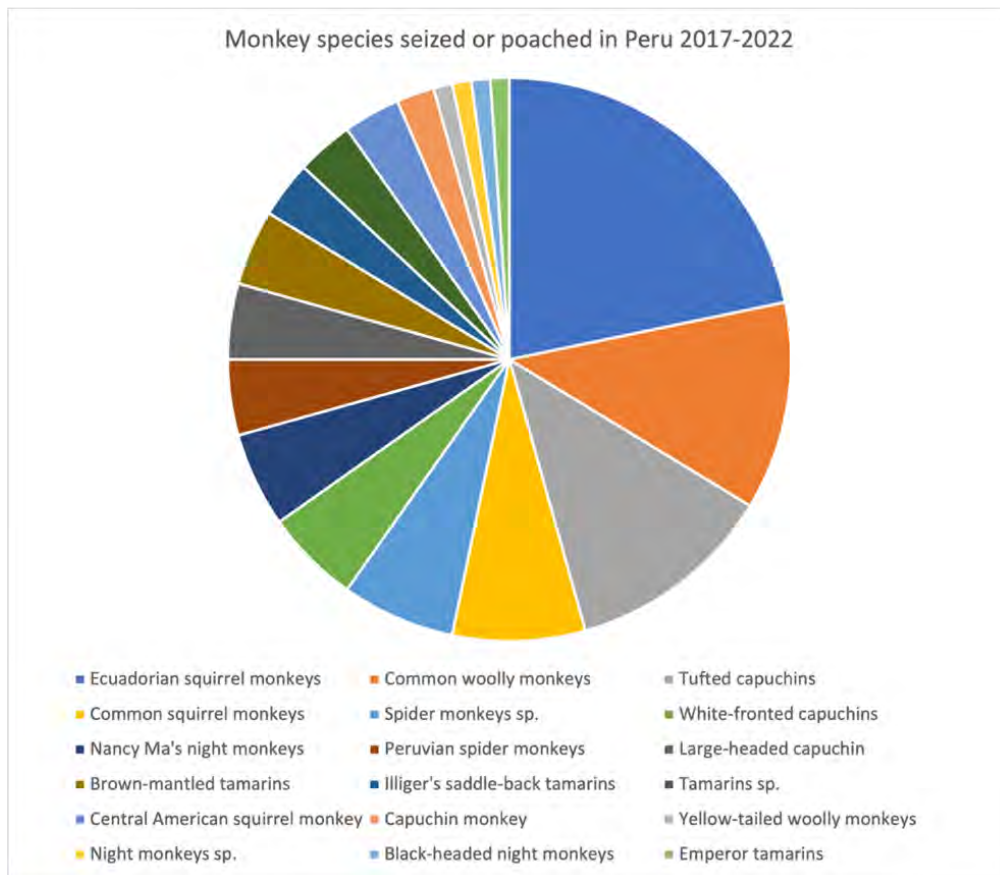


Figure 603: Monkey species seized or poached in Peru between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Live monkeys are also smuggled by air. In April 2017, a baby tufted capuchin (*Cebus apella*) was seized at Cuzco's Alejandro Astete airport from the luggage of a passenger who was flying from Puerto Maldonado, Madre Dios, to Lima, via Cuzco.¹⁰¹⁹

In the Peruvian Amazon, monkeys are hunted for their meat. In April 2019, parts of a spider monkey (*Ateles* sp.) were seized in the Mercado Modelo in Puerto Maldonado, Madre de Dios.¹⁰²⁰ In January 2021, the parts of four spider monkeys were seized in the Mercado de Belén in Iquitos.¹⁰²¹ It should be noted that trafficking of monkey meat has reduced significantly since the wildlife law in 1976 prohibited commercialization of monkey meat. Research into wild meat sales in major markets in Iquitos found that the trade of primate meat diminished sharply since 1987, decreasing to 0.8% of the overall biomass traded in 2013 and 2014, and 2017 and 2018.¹⁰²²

Furthermore, a seizure of ten tamarin legs from a natural remedy shop in Lima in January 2019 suggests monkey parts are used for shamanistic purposes.¹⁰²³

The trafficking of monkeys has serious implications for public health. In a recent study, researchers tested 388 monkeys that had been trafficked in nine Peruvian cities and found a total of 32 disease

¹⁰¹⁹ <https://www.tn8.tv/america-latina/416969-rescatan-peru-mono-encerrado-maleta-pasajera-avion/>

¹⁰²⁰ <https://www.inforegion.pe/259249/decomisan-carne-de-mono-en-mercado-de-puerto-maldonado/>

¹⁰²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/IQARV/photos/a.110326273854115/271025047784236/?type=3>

¹⁰²² Mayor, P. et al (2022). Wild meat trade over the last 45 years in the Peruvian Amazon. *Conservation Biology*.36(2):e13801. Available from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cobi.13801>. Accessed on 22 Dec. 2023.

¹⁰²³ <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/decomisan-mas-de-400-partes-de-animales-silvestres-disecados-en-la-victoria/>

pathogens in their blood, saliva, and faecal samples. These pathogens included mycobacteria, which cause tuberculosis, and parasites that cause Chagas disease, malaria, and various gastrointestinal ailments. Human malaria and tuberculosis killed more than two million people in 2020 alone. Throughout the entire trafficking route, from the forest to markets through to households, humans exposed to these animals are at constant risk of infection. What is more, trafficked and rescued monkeys are at risk of being infected by zoonotic human pathogens which, if they are released back into the wild, may spread to and endanger free-ranging populations.¹⁰²⁴

Peruvian monkeys are, apparently, also in demand from foreign taxidermy collectors. In April 2018, Customs at Lima Cargo Talma warehouses in Callao seized the carcass of an emperor tamarin (*Saguinus imperator*) along with 84 dead Peruvian birds and 3 dead bats, all preserved in salt. The animals were hidden in a suitcase destined for Russia. This incident was already discussed above under Birds, where it was noted that those responsible appeared very knowledgeable of Peru's fauna as well as how to preserve dead specimens.¹⁰²⁵

Squirrels feature high on the list of mammals seized or poached between 2017 and 2022 due to one incident. In February 2017, 50 Guayaquil squirrels (*Sciurus stramineus*) were seized along with 267 Pacific parrotlets (*Forpus coelestis*); 25 saffron finches (*Sicalis flaveola*); and eight red-masked parakeets (*Aratinga erythrogenys*). The animals were crammed in cardboard boxes hidden in the hold of an interprovincial bus coming from Sullana province that was headed for Lima. The bus was meant to pass through Trujillo, where they would be collected by traffickers to market them. The seizure was the result of a joint action by Customs, the Piura Environment Division of the National Police and Serfor.¹⁰²⁶ Guayaquil squirrels are endemic to Ecuador and Peru. Locally, they are hunted for food. They are frequently captured and available worldwide in the pet trade, with captive individuals reported from locations as distant as Japan.¹⁰²⁷

Persecution and trafficking of wild cats

A total of 47 wild cats were reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022. Most affected were ocelots, followed by jaguars and pumas. Live wild cats are exploited for the pet trade and use in tourist attractions. Ocelot, jaguar, and puma parts, such as skins, skulls, and claws, are sold as taxidermies, handicrafts, and objects for shamanistic rituals. Jaguars and pumas, lastly, are persecuted in human-wildlife conflicts. As Figure below shows, most wild cats were seized alive (22 specimens), followed by parts, products, and taxidermies (17 specimens) and dead specimens (8).

¹⁰²⁴ Mendoza A.P. et al. (2024). Diversity and prevalence of zoonotic infections at the animal-human interface of primate trafficking in Peru. *PLoS ONE*. 19(2): e0287893. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0287893>. Accessed on 10 February 2024.

¹⁰²⁵ <https://www.inforegion.pe/250646/callao-decomisan-84-aves-que-iban-a-exportarse-a-rusia-ilegalmente/>

¹⁰²⁶ <https://www.elregionalpiura.com.pe/index.php/region-piura/150-piura/19084-piura-rescatan-pericos-loros-y-ardillas-que-iban-a-ser-comercializados-ilegalmente-en-lima-y-trujillo>. Accessed on 19 December 2023.

¹⁰²⁷ Merrick, M.J. et al (2012). *Sciurus stramineus* (Rodentia: Sciuridae). *Mammalian Species*, 44(1):44-50. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/mspecies/article/44/894/44/2642999>. Accessed on 19 December 2023.

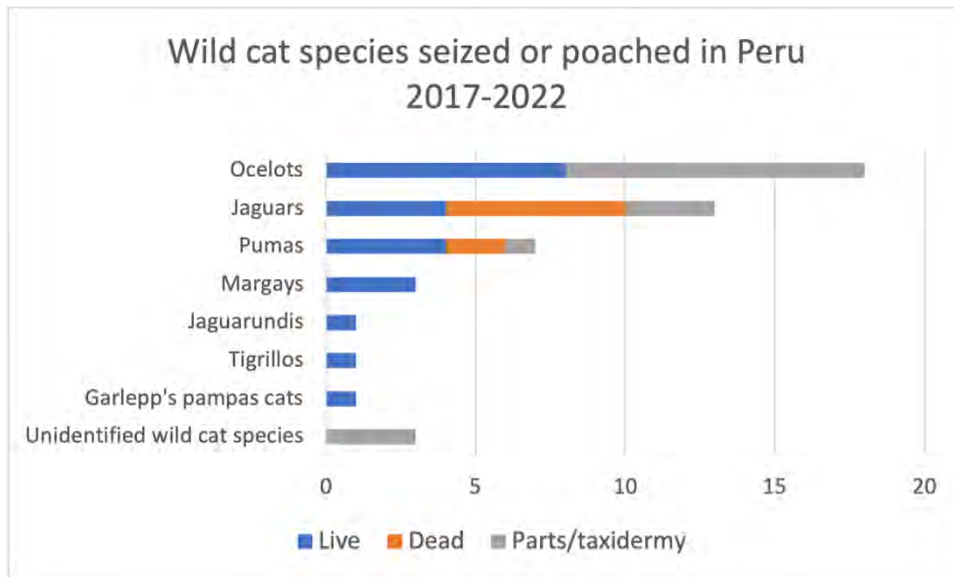


Figure 124: Wild cat species seized or poached in Peru between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Of the 18 ocelots (*Leopardus pardalis*) reported to be seized, there were eight live specimens and parts or products of another ten specimens. The live ocelots were kept as pets or seized from traffickers, except for two specimens that were seized in the southern city of Juliaca, in August and September 2022. In August 2022, an ocelot was seized that had escaped from one of the local natural health shops, known for selling protected wildlife.¹⁰²⁸ In September 2022, a live ocelot was seized in the mercado de Juliaca from a person selling herbal ointments and rubs.¹⁰²⁹ In addition, five ocelot skins, two skulls, ocelot claws, and a blowgun containing ocelot skin were seized in different seizures from restaurants, tourist attractions, and shops selling shamanistic items and natural remedies.

With an estimated 22,210 jaguars (*Panthera onca*), Peru hosts the second largest population of jaguars in Latin America, after Brazil.¹⁰³⁰ Yet, illegal killing and trafficking of their parts is a significant threat to this species. Thirteen jaguars were reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022: six specimens were killed by poachers; four live jaguar cubs were seized; and a taxidermied head, a skin, and a blowgun containing jaguar skin were seized. Noteworthy incidents include:

- ▶ In March 2017, a parcel containing a jaguar skin, a puma head, and a caiman head was seized in the warehouse of a courier company in Tarapoto, in a joint operation of Peru's anti-drug squad Depotad, Customs, and the prosecutors' office. The parcel had been shipped from Pucallpa.¹⁰³¹
- ▶ In June 2020, a female jaguar was killed in San Pablo de Huashalao, Iquitos, after allegedly attacking a boy who wanted to pet her two cubs. Of the two cubs, only one could be rescued.¹⁰³² Jaguars are frequently killed out of fear or alleged retaliation for preying on local communities' livestock, facts which usually only become known when perpetrators post images on social media.

¹⁰²⁸ <https://diariocorreo.pe/edicion/puno/juliaca-rescatan-a-tigrillo-que-estaba-en-cautiverio-noticia/>

¹⁰²⁹ <https://diariocorreo.pe/edicion/puno/rescatan-a-tigrillo-y-boa-en-mercado-de-juliaca-noticia/>

¹⁰³⁰ Jędrzejewski, W. et al. (2018). Estimating large carnivore populations at global scale based on spatial predictions of density and distribution - Application to the jaguar (*Panthera onca*). PLoS ONE 13(3): e0194719. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0194719>. Accessed on 19 December 2023.

¹⁰³¹ <https://viatetelevision.pe/34893/decomisan-cabeza-lagarto-disecado-piel-otorongo>

¹⁰³² <https://www.servindi.org/actualidad-noticias/03/03/2022/como-liberar-un-jaguar-en-peru>

The jaguar parts reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022 are just a fraction of actual trade volumes. For instance, research carried out between 2018 and 2019 in Iquitos, Pucallpa, Puerto Maldonado, and Puno found 102 jaguar parts for sale.¹⁰³³ According to Serfor, around 110 jaguar specimens were seized in Peru between 2010 and 2020.¹⁰³⁴ Seizure data indicate that Iquitos, the capital of Loreto, is the biggest hotspot for jaguar trafficking. In 2021, journalists who visited markets in this city found sellers openly offering jaguar parts for sale in the mercado de Belén and the artisanal mercado Anaconda.¹⁰³⁵ This confirmed earlier reports by other journalists in 2018, who found parts of 24 jaguars, including 44 jaguar fangs, four skulls, five skins, and 70 claws for sale in the markets of Iquitos. Jaguar-human conflicts are exacerbated by excessive wildlife poaching for the bushmeat trade. In Iquitos alone, 345 tons of bushmeat are sold each year.¹⁰³⁶ Jaguars confronted with a reduced prey base often turn to livestock to sustain themselves.

In the Peruvian Amazon, jaguar parts are believed to have various medicinal and magical properties. The head or canines of jaguars, embedded in the earth during planting, are believed to promote a good harvest; jaguar paws are believed to drive away evil from homes; jaguar fists or claws are used to rub race horses' legs; jaguar fat is used to rub fighting cocks to enhance their stamina, and men use it as an aphrodisiac. Jaguar fat is also believed to help against rheumatism and arthritis.¹⁰³⁷

Demand from Asia is a major driver for jaguar poaching and trafficking. Asian criminal networks operating in Peru and Ecuador are allegedly procuring jaguar parts in Peru and trafficking these to Asia by air as well as by sea. This includes hiding jaguar parts in timber containers shipped to China.¹⁰³⁸

Pumas (Puma concolor) fall victim to the same threats as discussed above for jaguars and ocelots. Of the seven specimens identified by this study, four were alive; two were found dead; and one puma head was seized. Noteworthy incidents include:

- ▶ In December 2019, two puma cubs were offered for sale in the port of Sepahua, Atalaya province (Ucayali).¹⁰³⁹
- ▶ In October 2017, an adult puma was rescued alive after it had been captured and shot at by local residents in Ocoña district, Camaná province (Arequipa).¹⁰⁴⁰
- ▶ In February 2017, local community members in Yorocco, Huacullani district (Puno) killed a puma that they held responsible for killing alpacas and sheep.¹⁰⁴¹

Andean hairy armadillos (*Chaetophractus nationi*) are hunted and sold as both live and taxidermied specimens in fairs and markets for use in folkloristic witchcraft rituals. This includes New Year rituals, where armadillos are kept in small buckets or cardboard boxes and poorly fed whilst they are constantly manipulated in cleansing rituals, causing much stress to these nocturnal animals. Taxidermied specimens are also used for these rituals. Armadillos are furthermore targeted for their shell, which is

¹⁰³³ <https://caretas.pe/medio-ambiente/trafico-salvaje/>. Accessed on 19 December 2019.

¹⁰³⁴ https://gestion.pe/peru/trafico-ilegal-de-fauna-silvestre-amenaza-a-mas-de-300-especies-en-peru-noticia/#google_vignette. Accessed on 19 December 2019.

¹⁰³⁵ <https://convoca.pe/especial/el-trafico-del-jaguar-no-se-detiene-en-la-selva-del-peru-durante-la-pandemia-del>

¹⁰³⁶ <https://es.mongabay.com/2018/09/trafico-ilegal-jaguars-peru-iquitos/>. Accessed on 19 December 2019.

¹⁰³⁷ <https://convoca.pe/especial/el-trafico-del-jaguar-no-se-detiene-en-la-selva-del-peru-durante-la-pandemia-del>

¹⁰³⁸ Crosta, A. et al (2022). The criminal networks behind jaguar trafficking. IUCN/Earth League International, 2022. Available at: <https://www.iucn.nl/app/uploads/2022/11/IUCN-NL-Operation-Jaguar-Summary-Report-2022.pdf>. Accessed on 27 December 2023.

¹⁰³⁹ <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/trafico-de-fauna-rescatan-dos-cachorros-de-puma-que-iban-a-ser-vendidos-en-ucayali/>. Accessed on 19 December 2019.

¹⁰⁴⁰ <https://www.connuestroperu.com/consumidor/ecologia/54873-serfor-rescata-puma-en-arequipa-que-habria-sido-atacado-por-gente-del-distrito-de-ocona>. Accessed on 19 December 2019.

¹⁰⁴¹ <https://www.facebook.com/HBAnoticias/photos/a.570376853026996/1428699650528041/?type=3>

used to produce charangos, a traditional South American guitar that uses an armadillo shell as a soundbox.¹⁰⁴²

This study identified 47 specimens that were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022, including 38 taxidermies, eight live specimens, and the legs of one specimen. The most significant seizure happened in May 2017, when 23 taxidermied armadillos and four live armadillos were seized along with a large quantity of other wildlife (live, parts, and products, including Andean condors, Andean foxes, Darwin's rhea, vizcacha tails, turtle shells, and toads) that was being offered for sale in the Juliaca and Puno craft fairs. Two Bolivian citizens and one Peruvian citizen were arrested.¹⁰⁴³ Juliaca and Puno are cities in southern Peru near the Bolivian border. Bolivia has a similar culture of utilization of Andean hairy armadillos, and Bolivian sellers are known to come to Peru to sell traditional handicrafts, some of which are made from wild animals.¹⁰⁴⁴

Foxes are frequently seized in Peru, involving both live specimens and parts and products. Most affected are Andean foxes (*Lycalopex culpaeus*), who are targeted for folkloristic/witchcraft rituals. A total of 34 specimens were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022, including: six live specimens and the parts and products of 38 specimens: 50 legs, 22 tails, two skins, and one taxidermy. Two of the live specimens were fox cubs found in January 2022 and November 2022, both in Arequipa, whose tails had been cut off. The latter did not survive its injuries. Fox tails are cut off for magical ritual purposes, due to the traditional belief that possession of a fox tail attracts good luck.¹⁰⁴⁵

A total of nine Sechuran foxes (*Pseudalopex sechurae*) were reported to be seized in three different seizures, including seven live specimens (six cubs, one juvenile) and 2 taxidermies.

Sloths are targeted for the pet trade. Twenty live specimens were reported to be seized in ten incidents between 2017 and 2022, including three Brown-throated three-toed sloths (*Bradypus variegatus*); one Hoffman's two toed sloth (*Choloepus hoffmanni*); and 16 unidentified specimens. Ten sloths were offered for sale in markets or were being transported to where they would be sold. For example, in December 2017, the police, acting on information received, seized four sloths that were being carried in a sack by a group of people along the road in Tarapoto, San Martín. The group abandoned the sloths when they saw the police arrive.¹⁰⁴⁶ Eight sloths were seized that were kept in tourist attractions; two others were kept as pets. Most seizures occurred in Amazonian regions, including Loreto, Madre de Dios, and San Martín.

Significant numbers of mammals are poached for bushmeat consumption and trade. Species affected by the bushmeat trade include terrestrial species such as lowland pacas, peccaries, red brocket deer, and opossums, as well as marine mammals such as dolphins. Some 777.50 kg of bushmeat was seized in eight different seizures reported between 2017 and 2022. This included meat from red brockets (*Mazama americana*), lowland pacas (*Cuniculus paca*), dusky dolphins (*Lagenorhynchus obscurus*), collared peccaries (*Peccari tajacu*), opossums (*Didelphis marsupialis*), and capybaras (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*).

¹⁰⁴² <https://es.mongabay.com/2017/01/peru-armadillos-rescate-especies-amenazadas/>.

¹⁰⁴³ <https://www.servindi.org/actualidad-noticias/13/05/2017/en-operativo-conjunto-rescataron-animales-silvestres-que-eran>. Accessed on 20 December 2023.

¹⁰⁴⁴ <https://www.gob.pe/institucion/serfor/noticias/214569-minagri-decomisa-quirquinchos-plumas-de-suri-y-sapos-en-feria-de-puno>.

Accessed on 20 December 2023.

¹⁰⁴⁵ <https://elbuho.pe/2022/02/arequipa-rescatan-cria-de-zorro-hallada-con-la-cola-cortada-para-rituales-esotericos/>.

¹⁰⁴⁶ <https://canaln.pe/peru/tarapoto-rescatan-osos-perezosos-cuando-iban-vendidos-n261175>. Accessed on 22 Dec. 2023.

Indigenous peoples in Peru, who make up around 26% of the total population, are by law allowed to hunt wildlife for subsistence on land that belongs to the community.¹⁰⁴⁷ The government has authorised the sale of bushmeat from areas with planned sustainable wildlife management laws enacted in 1976 (nr. 21147), 2000 (nr. 27308), and 2011 (nr. 29763). Implementation and enforcement of these laws have been inadequate, however. Thus, illegal sale of wild meat remains the norm, and significant volumes of bushmeat are sold to urban consumers. A 2022 study on wild meat trade in the Peruvian Amazon analysed data from surveys carried out in the most important urban markets of Iquitos, Peru, between 1973 and 2018. The study found that wild meat sales increased significantly at a rate of 6.4 tons/year since 1973, paralleling urban population growth. They reached their highest numbers in 2018 (442 tons). The Mercado de Belén accounted for 65.2–68.2% of the total biomass sold, and the Mercado Modelo made up the difference.¹⁰⁴⁸

A last note in this section on mammals relates to 11 chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*) that were reported to be seized in February 2020 from a zoo, along with a manatee baby, and dozens of wildlife parts (skulls, skins, feathers). The zoo, based in Tres de Noviembre, Loreto (near the Brazilian border), catered to tourists recruited by Colombian tourism agencies. The seizure was based on intelligence and part of a joint law enforcement operation involving ten different agencies. The media report makes no mention of how the chimpanzees got there. It is, however, somewhat doubtful that the animals were chimpanzees, as the media report contains a photo of a black primate with a long tail, which is clearly not a chimpanzee.¹⁰⁴⁹

¹⁰⁴⁷ https://www.inei.gob.pe/media/MenuRecursivo/publicaciones_digitales/Est/Lib1539/libro.pdf. Accessed 22 Dec. 2023.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Mayor, P. et al (2022). Wild meat trade over the last 45 years in the Peruvian Amazon. *Conservation Biology*. 36(2):e13801. Available from: <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cobi.13801>. Accessed on 22 Dec. 2023.

¹⁰⁴⁹ <https://elcomercio.pe/peru/loreto/loreto-rescatan-a-once-chimpances-y-un-manati-recien-nacido-que-estaban-en-zoologico-turistico-fotos-noticia/>. Accessed on 19 December 2023.

Key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes

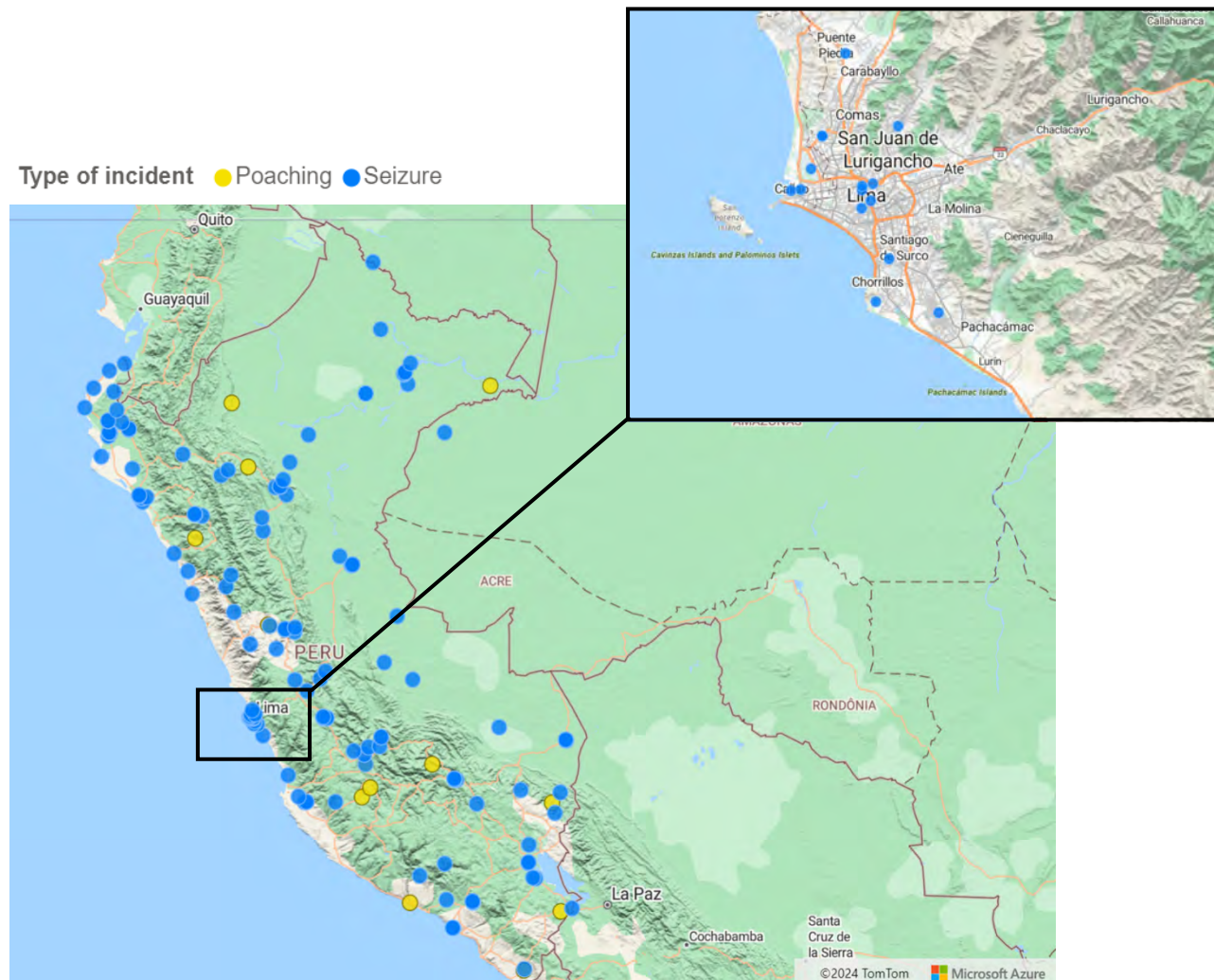


Figure 125: Locations of seizures and poaching incidents in Peru reported between 2017 and 2022.

Lima is the central hub

There is no doubt Peru's capital Lima is the central wildlife trafficking hub in Peru, acting as an arrival and market site for many trafficked species, in addition to being the gateway to international destinations. This study identified 13 seizures of wild animals that were for sale, stocked in warehouses, or found abandoned in Lima. In addition, 11 shipments seized elsewhere in the country were destined for Lima.

In 2019, authorities reported that from January to October 2019, 1,558 live wild animals and 1,726 dead animals (lifeless specimens and dissected bodies or remains) were seized in Lima during 93 operations carried out in the markets, at the checkpoints at the three main entrance roads to Lima (Panamericana Sur, Panamericana Norte, and the Carretera Central), at the Jorge Chávez International Airport, and at the port of Callao. According to the head of the Environment Department of Peru's National Police, criminal organisations bring wildlife to Lima from different parts of the country and take them, by sea or air, to other parts of the world such as Europe, North America, and Asia.¹⁰⁵⁰

¹⁰⁵⁰ <https://caretas.pe/medio-ambiente/trafico-salvaje/>. Accessed on 12 December 2023.

According to the National Police, trafficking networks operate storage locations in Lima where wildlife is kept for subsequent distribution. The black wildlife market is reportedly concentrated in Lima's Villa El Salvador district, the San Juan de Lurigancho district, and the surroundings of the Mercado Central.¹⁰⁵¹

Other cities that reported multiple seizures between 2017 and 2022 include:

- ▶ East Peru, Peruvian Amazon region: Iquitos in the far northeast, the main city in the Peruvian Amazon; Yurimaguas, in the central northeast; and Puerto Maldonado, in the southeast. All three cities are in the Peruvian Amazon and well connected by road to coastal Peru, where the majority of the population resides. Illegal wildlife is transported along these roads to markets in Lima and other major towns like Arequipa and Chiclayo.
- ▶ Northwest Peru: Cajamarca, northern highlands (Andes); Chiclayo; and Piura. Piura, a major city located in the Sechura desert and on the PanAmerican highway, is near the border with Ecuador.
- ▶ South Peru, Andes region: Arequipa; Juliaca; and Puno. Puno is on Lake Titicaca.

SERFOR reports that most wildlife seizures take place in the regions of Moquegua, Tacna, and Puno in the south; Lima in the central west where the capital Lima is located; and San Martín, in the northeast Peruvian Amazon.¹⁰⁵²

Trafficking by interprovincial bus

Roads remain the favoured means to smuggle wildlife. In some cases, the quantities of wild animals smuggled by road are astonishing. This study identified 9,116 wild animals that were seized from shipments smuggled by road, representing 69% of all wildlife reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. These included 6,182 amphibians (Titicaca water frogs and toads); 2,631 birds; 230 reptiles; and 73 mammals.

Interprovincial buses are by far the most popular road transportation method. Of the 18 shipments smuggled by road that were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022, twelve were seized from interprovincial buses; the others were seized from cars, trucks, or vans. Ten of the 18 shipments were headed for Lima.

Trafficking by boat

As there are few roads in large parts of the Amazon, rivers are the only means of transport. Boats are used to carry wildlife from the forest to markets in Amazonian urban areas and beyond. The huge expanse of Amazon forest and its river networks is difficult to police, of course. Only two seizures were identified that involved river transport, both in Pucallpa, a city in eastern Peru located on the banks of the Ucayali river. Pucallpa has an airport and road connections to coastal Peru, including Lima. In January 2021, two blue and yellow macaws were seized along with 1,200 board feet of illegal, sawn timber in the river port of Pucallpa.¹⁰⁵³ In October 2020, 41 Arrau turtles were seized from a river boat coming from Loreto.¹⁰⁵⁴

¹⁰⁵¹ <https://larepublica.pe/sociedad/2020/07/13/animales-exoticos-mafias-trafican-especies-a-traves-de-redes-sociales-pnp-serfor> .

Accessed on 22 December 2023.

¹⁰⁵² <https://andina.pe/agencia/noticia-en-2017-se-incautaron-10398-animales-silvestres-todo-pais-713258.aspx>

¹⁰⁵³ <https://www.inforegion.pe/281733/ucayali-rescatan-animales-silvestres-que-eras-trasladados-ilegalmente/>

¹⁰⁵⁴ <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/pucallpa-decomisan-41-tortugas-charapas-que-pretendian-ser-llevadas-a-chile/>

Trafficking by air

Four seizures were identified that demonstrate wildlife is also smuggled by air, both domestically and internationally:

- ▶ In April 2017, a baby capuchin was seized from a suitcase at Cusco's Alejandro Astete airport, which a passenger intended to take to Lima from Puerto Maldonado.¹⁰⁵⁵
- ▶ In July 2017, during a joint law enforcement action at the airport of Iquitos, authorities seized bushmeat, blowguns containing macaw feathers, pieces of ocelot and jaguar skins, bottles containing stuffed butterflies, and piranha head key chains from the luggage of domestic and foreign tourists.¹⁰⁵⁶
- ▶ In April 2018, a parcel destined for Russia containing 84 dead Peruvian birds, three dead bats, and a dead monkey were seized at Lima's Cargo Talma warehouses in Callao.¹⁰⁵⁷
- ▶ In January 2020, 20 live wild birds were seized at Lima's Jorge Chávez International Airport from the luggage of a Belgian man who was flying to France via Madrid, Spain.¹⁰⁵⁸

Smuggling of illicit wildlife through air parcel post is likely a lot more common than the one seizure of the parcel destined for Russia suggests. For instance, in 2021, media reported that sellers of jaguar parts in Iquitos advise buyers to ship them using a courier agency, as items such as fangs are likely to be detected by the airport's X-ray.¹⁰⁵⁹

Sales in markets

Wild animals and their parts and products are widely sold in markets across Peru. Twenty-two seizures were identified concerning illegal wildlife sales in markets. The top four markets based on these seizures are:

- ▶ Mercado El Vado, Yurimaguas, Loreto region (four seizures)
- ▶ Mercado de Belén, Iquitos, Loreto region (three seizures)
- ▶ Mercado/Feria de Alasitas, Juliaca, Puno region (three seizures)
- ▶ Mercado Modelo, Puerto Maldonado, Madre de Dios region (two seizures)

The Mercado de Belén in Iquitos is generally considered the largest open-air market for the sales of wildlife in the Peruvian Amazon. It reportedly serves not only local urban consumers, but also international wildlife traffickers. A wide range of wild animals is reportedly sold here, including parrots, primates, sloths, boas, pacas, alligators, jaguars, ocelots, turtles, and tortoises.¹⁰⁶⁰

Wildlife is also sold in the streets. Three seizures were recorded that involved such illegal street sales: in Iquitos; Mollendo (south Peru, on the coast); and Zarumilla, in Peru's far northwest on the border with Ecuador.

¹⁰⁵⁵ <https://www.tn8.tv/america-latina/416969-rescatan-peru-mono-encerrado-maleta-pasajera-avion/>

¹⁰⁵⁶ <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/aeropuerto-de-iquitos-decomisan-carne-de-monte-y-artesantias-hechas-con-animales-silvestres/>.

Accessed on 22 December 2023.

¹⁰⁵⁷ <https://www.inforegion.pe/250646/callao-decomisan-84-aves-que-iban-a-exportarse-a-rusia-ilegalmente/>

¹⁰⁵⁸ <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/trafico-de-fauna-ciudadano-belga-intento-sacar-aves-por-el-aeropuerto-jorge-chavez/>. Accessed on 22 December 2023.

¹⁰⁵⁹ <https://convoca.pe/especial/el-trafico-del-jaguar-no-se-detiene-en-la-selva-del-peru-durante-la-pandemia-del>

¹⁰⁶⁰ <https://conexionambiental.pe/el-trafico-ilicito-de-fauna-silvestre-en-el-mercado-de-belen-iquitos/>

Sales on social media

Four seizures were reported between 2017 and 2022 that related to illegal sales on social media:

- ▶ In February 2019, a black-chested buzzard eagle (*Geranoaetus melanoleucus*) that was offered for sale on social media was seized in Cajamarca.¹⁰⁶¹
- ▶ In June 2020, an Illiger's saddle-back tamarin (*Leontocebus illigeri*) that was offered for sale on social media was seized, also in Cajamarca, following a citizen's report.¹⁰⁶²
- ▶ In July 2020, a police sting operation led to the seizure in Lima's Villa El Salvador district of seven white-winged parakeets and three red-masked parakeets that were offered for sale on social media.¹⁰⁶³
- ▶ Also in July 2020, acting on intelligence, police seized 15 white-winged parakeets and an Illiger's saddle-back tamarin that were going to be sold on social media. They were found in a house in the San Juan de Lurigancho district of Lima, which was believed to be a storage location for illicit wildlife.¹⁰⁶⁴

It is not coincidental that three of the four seizures occurred in 2020. Authorities saw a surge in illegal online wildlife trade during the COVID-19 pandemic. Movement restrictions during the lockdown period, enhanced street patrols, and border closures prompted wildlife traffickers to move online. The police has observed illegal online advertisements of macaws and other wild birds, lizards, monkeys, turtles, boa constrictors, and jaguar fangs and skins.¹⁰⁶⁵ In 2021, Peruvian journalists found four advertisements for jaguar skins openly for sale in Iquitos-centred Facebook groups.¹⁰⁶⁶

Convergence

There is evidence of convergence between wildlife and timber trafficking in Peru. Two incidents were identified between 2017 and 2022 in which illicit wildlife was transported/sold jointly with illicit timber.

- ▶ In January 2019, 410 live and stuffed wild animals were seized along with 14.17 kg of palo santo wood from ten stalls selling traditional remedies in La Victoria, Lima. Palo santo (*Bursera graveolens*) is critically endangered in Peru due to illegal overexploitation and its commercialization prohibited.¹⁰⁶⁷
- ▶ As mentioned above, in January 2021, two blue and yellow macaws were seized that were transported on a boat along with 1,200 board feet of illegal, sawn timber in the river port of Pucallpa, capital of the Ucayali region in the eastern Peruvian Amazon that borders Brazil.¹⁰⁶⁸

Peru is a major source for illegal timber. Deforestation in Peru reportedly hit historic levels during the COVID-19 pandemic, with most of the timber trade being illegal, generating hundreds of millions of dollars for trafficking networks.¹⁰⁶⁹ Fraud and corruption are rife in this sector; moreover, timber shipments and timber logistical networks are used to smuggle cocaine.¹⁰⁷⁰ This study did not identify such convergence between wildlife and drugs trafficking.

¹⁰⁶¹ <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/cajamarca-rescatan-aguila-que-era-ofertada-en-redes-sociales/>

¹⁰⁶² <https://larepublica.pe/sociedad/2020/06/19/cajamarca-rescatan-a-mono-que-ofrecian-por-redes-sociales-serfor>

¹⁰⁶³ <https://andina.pe/agencia/noticia-alerta-traffic-ilegal-fauna-silvestre-se-traslada-a-redes-sociales-durante-pandemia-805126.aspx>.

Accessed on 22 December 2023.

¹⁰⁶⁴ <https://andina.pe/agencia/noticia-alerta-traffic-ilegal-fauna-silvestre-se-traslada-a-redes-sociales-durante-pandemia-805126.aspx>.

Accessed on 22 December 2023.

¹⁰⁶⁵ <https://larepublica.pe/sociedad/2020/07/13/animales-exoticos-mafias-traffican-especies-a-traves-de-redes-sociales-pnp-serfor>.

Accessed on 22 December 2023.

¹⁰⁶⁶ <https://convoca.pe/especial/el-traffic-del-jaguar-no-se-detiene-en-la-selva-del-peru-durante-la-pandemia-del>

¹⁰⁶⁷ <https://www.gob.pe/institucion/serfor/noticias/214553-serfor-decomisa-mas-una-tonelada-de-palo-santo-ilegal-en-vivienda-de-piura>.

Accessed on 22 December 2023.

¹⁰⁶⁸ <https://www.inforegion.pe/281733/ucayali-rescatan-animales-silvestres-que-eras-trasladados-ilegalmente/>

¹⁰⁶⁹ <https://ocindex.net/country/peru>

¹⁰⁷⁰ <https://wildlifejustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Crime-Convergence-Report-2021.pdf>

Transboundary trafficking routes

Seizures identified by this study demonstrate that Peru is a major hub for wildlife trafficking in the region, acting as a source, destination, and transit point. This reflects Peru's role in transnational trafficking of drugs, humans, and arms. Peru is a transit country for weapons trafficked from the USA and Mexico to Ecuador and Colombia. Organized crime groups engaged in human and drugs trafficking have taken control of Peru's northern border with Ecuador and southern borders with Bolivia and Chile.¹⁰⁷¹

Peru <> Ecuador

- ▶ In April 2017, 29 Galápagos tortoise hatchlings from Ecuador were seized from a bus headed for Lima. Peruvian authorities believed they were meant to be shipped abroad from Lima.¹⁰⁷²
- ▶ In July 2018, Peruvian Customs in the northeastern Tumbes region seized 199 yellow-spotted river turtle hatchlings from a bus headed for the city of Tumbes on the border with Ecuador.¹⁰⁷³ It is likely the turtles were meant to be smuggled to Ecuador.
- ▶ In November 2018, Ecuadorian law enforcers seized 46 grey-cheeked parakeets and three red-masked parakeets, which were believed to be destined for sales in Peru.¹⁰⁷⁴

Colombia > Peru

- ▶ Peruvian traffickers are sourcing Colombian wildlife and timber in the tri-border area in the Amazon where the borders of Peru, Colombia, and Brazil meet, abusing lax government controls in this remote area. This was evidenced in August 2022, when the Colombian navy and police in the Colombian Amazon arrested two Peruvians and seized 12 testudinae consisting of red-footed tortoises, Arrau turtles, and yellow-spotted river turtles; 72 turtle eggs; and 41 m3 of illicit timber from a Peruvian-registered boat.¹⁰⁷⁵
- ▶ Mata mata turtles from Colombia are trafficked to Peru via Leticia, a Colombian city in the tri-border area. Peru, unlike Colombia, allows sales and export of mata mata turtles and it is likely that Colombian turtles are laundered into legal trade in Peru.¹⁰⁷⁶

Peru <> Bolivia

- ▶ In May 2017, two Bolivians and a Peruvian citizen were arrested with a large quantity of illicit wildlife in the craft fairs of Juliaca and Puno, near the Bolivian border.¹⁰⁷⁷ Bolivian sellers are known to travel to Peru to sell traditional handicrafts, some of which are made from wild animals.¹⁰⁷⁸
- ▶ In January 2018, 581 saffron finches were seized from a bus in Puno, near the southern border with Bolivia. The birds were destined for markets in Bolivia.¹⁰⁷⁹

¹⁰⁷¹ <https://ocindex.net/country/peru>. Accessed on 27 December 2023.

¹⁰⁷² <https://es.mongabay.com/2017/04/peru-tortugasgalapagos-extincion-ecuador/>. Accessed on 3 December 2023.

¹⁰⁷³ <https://www.milenio.com/virales/fauna/rescatan-peru-200-crias-tortuga-maletero-autobus;https://elcomercio.pe/peru/tumbes/tumbes-rescatan-199-taricayas-puesto-control-fronterizo-noticia-536784-noticia/>.

¹⁰⁷⁴ <https://www.policia.gob.ec/policia-rescata-49-especies-de-vida-silvestre/>. Accessed on 27 November 2023.

¹⁰⁷⁵ <https://noticias.caracoltv.com/colombia/caen-trafficantes-de-animales-en-amazonas-los-pillaron-con-12-tortugas-en-peligro-de-extincion-rg10>

¹⁰⁷⁶ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/E-CoP19-Prop-22-R1.pdf>. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

¹⁰⁷⁷ <https://www.servindi.org/actualidad-noticias/13/05/2017/en-operativo-conjunto-rescataron-animales-silvestres-que-eran>. Accessed on 20 December 2023.

¹⁰⁷⁸ <https://www.gob.pe/institucion/serfor/noticias/214569-minagri-decomisa-quirquinchos-plumas-de-suri-y-sapos-en-feria-de-puno>.

Accessed on 20 December 2023.

¹⁰⁷⁹ <https://www.servindi.org/actualidad-noticias/01/02/2018/serfor-rescata-mas-de-580-aves-boton-de-oro-de-procedencia-ilegal-en>.

Accessed on 13 December 2023.

Peru > Brazil

Various studies have reported that Peruvian saffron finches are trafficked from Peru to Brazil, and Brazilian law enforcers frequently seize saffron finches smuggled from Peru.¹⁰⁸⁰

Peru > Chile

In October 2020, 41 Arrau turtles poached in Loreto were seized in the river port of Pucallpa. The smugglers claimed the animals were meant to be taken to Chile.¹⁰⁸¹

Peru > Europe (France)

In January 2020, a Belgian man was intercepted at Lima's International Airport with 20 live birds in his suitcase that he intended to take to France via Madrid, Spain. The man had visited Peru several times already. Furthermore, between 2015 and 2020, Peruvian authorities had detected bird trafficking up to four times a year on flights to Spain, France, Belgium, and Russia.¹⁰⁸²

Peru > Russia

In April 2018, Customs officers in Callao seized a parcel with 84 dead Peruvian birds, three bats, and a monkey preserved in salt that was destined for a city in Russia.¹⁰⁸³

(USA >) Peru > Asia

Although various sources have highlighted the trafficking of Peruvian wildlife to Asia, including of jaguar parts and products, this study did not identify any seizures of illicit wildlife shipments destined for Asia between 2017 and 2022. Two relevant seizures occurred in 2023, however.

- ▶ On 17 November 2023, authorities at Lima's Jorge Chávez airport seized 160 exotic animals including snakes, chameleons, frogs, turtles, and spiders from the suitcases of a Peruvian-American citizen transiting in Lima on a flight from Miami, USA, to Asia. Four animals were dead, and many others near suffocation. The animals belonged to species native to Africa and Latin America. Fifteen of the 160 specimens concerned species protected by CITES. The seizure is unusual as Latin American countries usually act as source, not transit, for wildlife trafficked to Asia.¹⁰⁸⁴
- ▶ In December 2023, Customs officials at Lima's airport seized an illicit shipment with fraudulent CITES export documents for 4,001 river turtles (mostly *Podocnemis unifilis*, with over 400 *Podocnemis expansa*) that were destined for Indonesia.¹⁰⁸⁵

¹⁰⁸⁰ See e.g. <https://oeco.org.br/noticias/25003-canarios-peruanos-apreendidos-no-ms/>. Accessed on 13 December 2023.

¹⁰⁸¹ <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/pucallpa-decomisan-41-tortugas-charapas-que-pretendian-ser-llevadas-a-chile/>

¹⁰⁸² <https://www.actualidadambiental.pe/trafico-de-fauna-ciudadano-belga-intento-sacar-aves-por-el-aeropuerto-jorge-chavez/>; <https://www.reuters.com/article/peru-aves-idLTAKBN1ZF2RR>. Accessed on 13 December 2023.

¹⁰⁸³ Species included in the shipment: hummingbirds (45); flycatchers (3); black-tailed trogons (2); manakins (2); motmots (2); woodcreepers (2); woodpecker (1); yellow oriole (1); jacamar (1); euphonia (1); lesser yellow-headed vulture (1); puffbird (1); swift (1).

¹⁰⁸⁴ <https://andina.pe/agencia/noticia-fauna-silvestre-rescatan-160-animales-durante-intervencion-aeropuerto-jorge-chavez-964959.aspx>.

Accessed on 27 December 2023.

¹⁰⁸⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-67771166>. Accessed on 20 December 2023,



Figure 126: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes to/from Peru based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022

Law enforcement efforts

The main agencies responsible for addressing wildlife crime in Peru are the National Police (Policía Nacional), the national forestry and wildlife service (Servicio Nacional Forestal y de Fauna Silvestre, SERFOR), and the special environmental prosecutors' office (Fiscalía Especializada en Materia Ambiental, FEMA). The FEMA was created in 2008 to prevent and investigate environmental crimes, coordinating with other agencies: SERFOR, OSINFOR (Organismo de Supervisión de los Recursos Forestales y de Fauna Silvestre), National Police and Customs. There is a FEMA office in each region of Peru.¹⁰⁸⁶

Peru has taken various measures to tackle wildlife trafficking in the country and regionally. In 2017, Peru launched its National Strategy to Reduce Illegal Wildlife Trade in Peru (2017–2027) with the aim of reducing wildlife crime, in coordination with different institutions at the national and subnational levels and with the participation of NGOs, experts, and academia.¹⁰⁸⁷ This was followed in 2019 by the Lima Declaration on Illegal Wildlife Trade, a statement accepted by 21 countries and promoted by the government of Peru to fight illegal wildlife trade across the region.¹⁰⁸⁸

¹⁰⁸⁶ <https://www.oefa.gob.pe/cofema/>. Accessed on 11 December 2023.

¹⁰⁸⁷ <https://www.serfor.gob.pe/portal/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PRESENTACION-DE-LA-ESTRATEGIA-NACIONAL-PARA-REDUCIR-EL-TRAFICO-ILEGAL-DE-FAUNA-SILVESTRE.pdf>. Accessed on 11 December 2023.

¹⁰⁸⁸ https://cites.org/sites/default/files/esp/news/pr/2019/Declaracion-de-Lima-04.10_PM_esp.pdf. Accessed 11 Dec. 2023.

SERFOR has an app called 'Alerta SERFOR' that citizens can use to report suspected wildlife and forest crime activities.¹⁰⁸⁹ SERFOR and other Peruvian authorities also implement activities to raise awareness.¹⁰⁹⁰

In November 2022, Peru adopted a new law with the aim of enhancing the fight against the illegal trade in wild flora and fauna. New provisions were added to the Criminal Code (articles 308-B, 308-D, and 309) to provide the state with the tools to adequately investigate and penalize the illegal wildlife trade. Whoever acquires, sells, transports, stores, imports, exports, or re-exports in an unauthorised manner, genetic resources of species of wild flora and fauna, will be punished with a maximum custodial sentence of three years or five years.

If there is participation as a member of a criminal organisation, as provided for in the last article of article 309 of the Criminal Code, the investigation and prosecution are governed by the provisions of Law 30077, Law Against Organized Crime. The new law allows judges, prosecutors, and police to conduct financial investigations as part of wildlife crime investigations and extends the preparatory investigation period to up to 36 months compared to the eight months allowed in a common process. The custodial sentence is between 11 and 20 years when the offender acts as a member of a criminal organisation.¹⁰⁹¹ The law faced backlash in congress after it was passed, with some lawmakers claiming, among other things, that it unfairly targeted artisanal fishermen who fish out of season. However, repeal efforts have failed so far.¹⁰⁹²

The seizures and poaching incidents recorded between 2017 and 2022 reveal that Peruvian law enforcement agencies frequently undertake intelligence-led, joint operations focusing on illegal wildlife sales and wildlife smuggling. However, the rate of arrests in wildlife crime cases appears low. According to the media reports identified, 42 people were arrested in 14 cases between 2017 and 2022. This means that only 7% of the 212 wildlife poaching and trafficking incidents reported between 2017 and 2022 resulted in arrest. Such a low rate of arrests is likely to have a negative impact on the deterrent effect of Peru's law enforcement interventions.

Unfortunately, wildlife law enforcement effectiveness is hampered by political and economic instability. Peru has had seven presidents between 2018 and 2022. The economic instability has led to cuts in the budgets assigned to government institutions, impacting on Peru's ability to clamp down on wildlife poaching and trafficking. Meanwhile wildlife trafficking and illegal logging are on the rise, much of it at the hands of organized crime groups that know how to circumvent environmental regulations.¹⁰⁹³ Corruption is a concern too, with low-paid officers often accepting bribes to provide protection to wildlife traffickers and permit the transport of illegally sourced wildlife.¹⁰⁹⁴

¹⁰⁸⁹ <https://appweb.serfor.gob.pe/alertaserfor/>. Accessed on 11 December 2023.

¹⁰⁹⁰ <https://elbocon.pe/trends/mira-como-puedes-denunciar-la-venta-ilegal-de-animales-serfor-policia-municipalidad-de-lima-trafico-de-animales-nnda-nnlt-noticia/>. Accessed on 11 December 2023.

¹⁰⁹¹ <https://www.huachos.com/detalle/rescatan-tigrillo-mono-guacamayos-que-estaban-en-cautiverio-en-una-vivienda-en-chincha-noticia-14936>; and <https://lpderecho.pe/ley-elevar-penas-contra-trafficantes-flora-fauna-silvestre/>. Accessed on 11 December 2023.

¹⁰⁹² <https://news.mongabay.com/2022/12/fighting-wildlife-trafficking-in-peru-qa-with-prosecutor-alberto-caraza/>

¹⁰⁹³ <https://news.mongabay.com/2022/12/fighting-wildlife-trafficking-in-peru-qa-with-prosecutor-alberto-caraza/>

¹⁰⁹⁴ <https://ocindex.net/country/peru>. Accessed on 11 December 2023.

Uruguay

Uruguay

General overview

Twenty-six seizures and one poaching incident were recorded for Uruguay between 2017 and 2022, affecting a minimum number of 1,233 wild animals. Two of the 26 seizures concerned illicit wildlife that was shipped from Uruguay and seized abroad in Spain and Germany.

Of the seized wildlife, 89% were live specimens, with the balance comprised of 10.5% dead specimens, and 0.5% parts and meat.

Unique characteristics

- High levels of songbird trafficking
- Demand for non-native wildlife trafficked from Argentina and Brazil
- Growing demand for pet monkeys
- Limited enforcement effort
- Weak laws
- Strong cultural bias toward hunting

Birds are by far the most affected species group, accounting for 89% of all wildlife seized or poached in Uruguay between 2017 and 2022. Reptiles made up 7%, and mammals 4%. No amphibians were reported to be seized or poached, although illegal trade in amphibians does reportedly occur.¹⁰⁹⁵

Actual numbers of seized wildlife are higher, as not all seizures are reported in the media, and it is likely that not all reported seizures were identified by this study. For example, between 2017 and 2019, Uruguay's environmental inspection agency (Dirección Nacional de Medio Ambiente, DINAMA) reportedly seized 2,581 specimens belonging to 109 species. Some 81% of the seized specimens in that timeframe were native, while 19% were exotic (not native to Uruguay).¹⁰⁹⁶

Number of incidents reported in the media

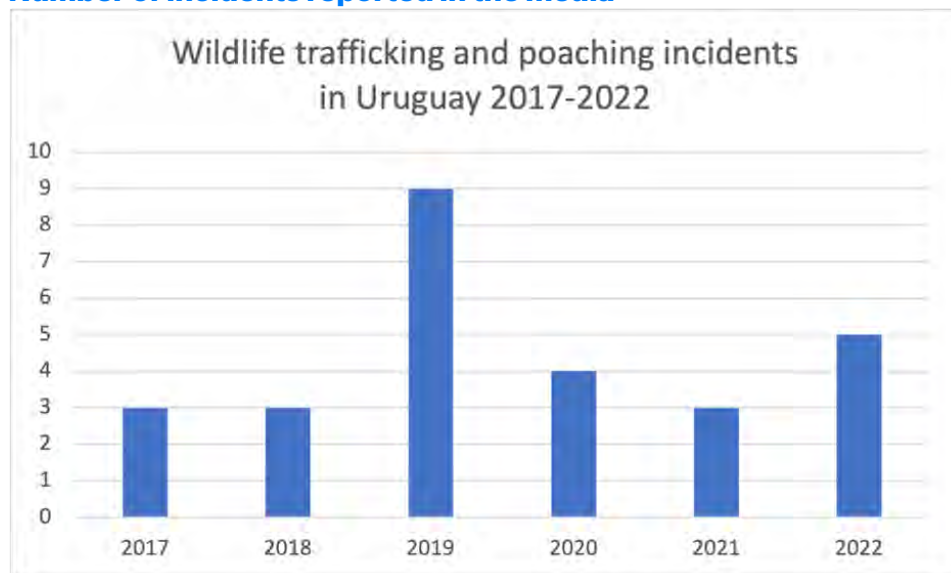


Figure 12761: Wildlife trafficking and poaching incidents in/implicating Uruguay between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

¹⁰⁹⁵ <https://www.elpais.com.uy/que-pasa/uruguay-en-la-ruta-del-trafico-animal>. Accessed on 22 February 2024.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Dabezies, J.M. et al (2023). Caracterización del mercado ilegal de fauna en Uruguay. Available at: <https://www.gub.uy/ministerio-interior/comunicacion/publicaciones/caracterizacion-del-mercado-ilegal-fauna-uruguay>. Accessed on 23 February 2024.

Number of animals involved

The table and figure below show the numbers of birds, reptiles, and mammals reported to be seized or poached in Uruguay between 2017 and 2022. This includes the seizures of 70 songbirds in Spain in 2017 and a fur seal skull in Germany in 2019.

Table 18: Number of animals seized or poached in Uruguay between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Birds	210	17	779	60	31	0	1097
Reptiles	0	0	82	0	1	0	83
Mammals	0	22	9	7	2	13	53
TOTAL	210	39	870	67	34	13	

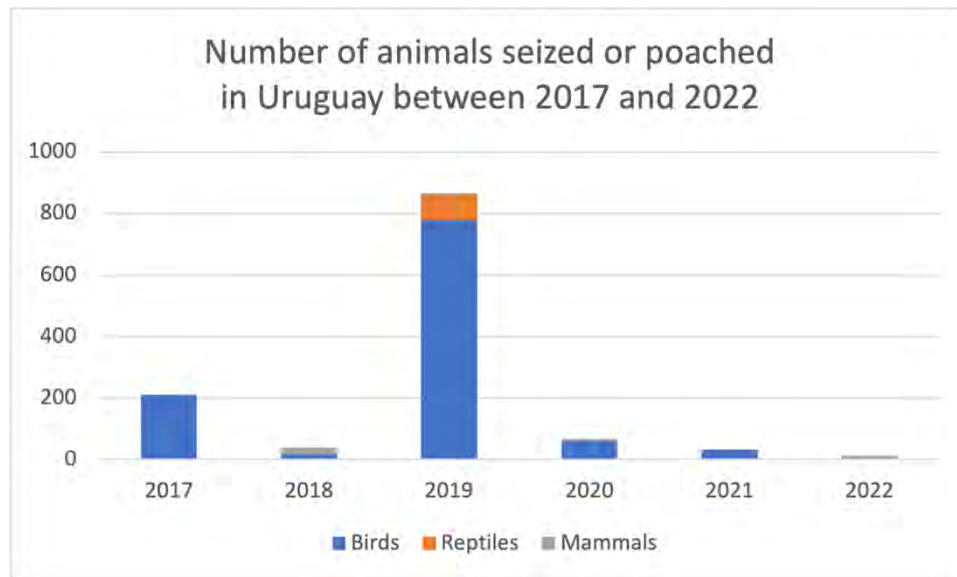


Figure 128: Number of animals seized or poached in/originating from Uruguay between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Species most targeted

Birds



Figure 129: Bird species seized in/originating from Uruguay between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Songbirds are by far the most trafficked bird species in Uruguay. At least a thousand specimens were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022, representing 91% of all birds seized and 81% of all wildlife seized. Unfortunately, it was not possible to determine exactly which species are trafficked, nor their numbers, as most media reports of songbird seizures provided little detail on the species concerned. Most reports simply stated the total number of songbirds seized, sometimes mentioning some of the species involved. This was the case for six seizures involving a total of 540 songbirds.

A study on the illegal wildlife market in Uruguay that was published in 2023 lists the 10 most seized wildlife species in Uruguay between 2017 and 2019.¹⁰⁹⁷ Included in this top 10 are the following eight songbird species:

- ▶ Saffron finch (*Sicalis flaveola*)
- ▶ Red-crested cardinal (*Paroaria coronata*)
- ▶ 'Pinzones' (various subspecies)
- ▶ Diademed tanager (*Stephanophorus diadematus*)
- ▶ Golden-billed saltator (*Saltator aurantiirostris*)
- ▶ Double-collared seedeater (*Sporophila caerulescens*)
- ▶ Grassland yellow finch (*Sicalis luteola*)
- ▶ Black-and-rufous warbling finches (*Poospiza nigrorufa*)

These species were also identified by this current study of media reports of wildlife seizures between 2017 and 2022. In addition, the current study also recorded the following songbird species in illegal trade:

- ▶ Yellow cardinal (*Gubernatrix cristata*)
- ▶ Ultramarine grosbeak (*Cyanocompsa brissonii*)
- ▶ Red-pileated finch (*Coryphospingus cucullatus*)
- ▶ European goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)
- ▶ Hooded siskin (*Spinus magellanicus*)
- ▶ Chestnut seedeater (*Sporophila cinnamomea*)
- ▶ Marsh seedeater (*Sporophila palustris*)
- ▶ Rusty-collared seedeater (*Sporophila collaris*)
- ▶ Atlantic canary (*Serinus canaria*)
- ▶ Tanagers (*Tangara* sp.)

It is not surprising that red-crested cardinals and saffron finches are among the most targeted songbird species. These two species are also in the top three of trafficked songbird species in neighbouring Argentina, which has a similar culture of songbird trapping for the cagebird trade.

The current study, too, identified saffron finches as the most seized bird species. This is due to one incident in June 2019, when three Uruguayan men were arrested for attempting to smuggle 350 saffron finches to Argentina via Puente San Martín, the bridge that connects the towns of Fray Bentos in Uruguay and Puerto Unzué in Argentina. Sadly, 72 finches were dead at the time of seizure.¹⁰⁹⁸

¹⁰⁹⁷ Dabezies, J.M. et al (2023). Caracterización del mercado ilegal de fauna en Uruguay. Available at: <https://www.gub.uy/ministerio-interior/comunicacion/publicaciones/caracterizacion-del-mercado-ilegal-fauna-uruguay>. Accessed on 23 February 2024.

¹⁰⁹⁸ <https://www.montevideo.com.uy/Noticias/Trafico-de-animales-Prefectura-evito-la-salida-de-350-aves-nativas-a-Argentina-uc720827>. Accessed on 23 February 2024.

Apart from in Uruguay, saffron finches are also heavily trafficked in other Latin American countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, and Peru (see elsewhere in this report).

Uruguayan songbirds are not only in demand in Argentina, but also in Europe. In November 2017, Spanish Customs at Pamplona's Noáin airport arrested a man arriving from Uruguay, via Madrid, with 70 songbirds in his suitcase. None of the birds survived the stress, suffocation, and lack of food and water; 32 birds were dead on arrival, the rest died soon after.¹⁰⁹⁹

Two yellow cardinals were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. Most likely there were more seizures since, as mentioned above, the species was not specified for 540 seized songbirds. Unfortunately, many more are trafficked without being detected. An indication of the scale of the trade is provided by an incident that occurred in October 2023. Argentinian authorities arrested three Argentinians intent on entering Uruguay in Gualeguaychú, near the border with Uruguay, with 117 birds, including 95 yellow cardinals and 22 black siskins.¹¹⁰⁰ Yellow cardinals, which are listed in CITES Appendix II, were formerly widespread and common throughout much of Argentina and Uruguay. However, the species has declined rapidly due to constant and chronic exploitation as a songbird for the cagebird market, compounded by habitat loss. Between 1,000 and 2,000 mature individuals remain in the wild in Argentina, in small and fragmented populations.¹¹⁰¹

Songbird trapping is a common practice in Uruguay. Traditionally, bird trappers would use another bird as a decoy or 'pega-pega', a glue that traps the birds when they land on it. The glue is a cruel method: many birds end up with injured wings or legs, lose part of their plumage or simply die. The birds that survive this treatment are sold. In recent times, poachers have started using mist nets, which are almost invisible to birds and thus highly effective in catching them. Mist nets are a common resource among scientists, but today it is much more accessible to poachers.¹¹⁰²

After songbirds, parrots are the most affected by illegal trade. A total of 69 parrots were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. This includes one turquoise-fronted amazon (*Amazona aestiva*, CITES Appendix II) seized from a farm owned by organized crime suspect Marcelo Balcedo (see below under 'Macaws') in January 2018, and 68 parrots that were seized during INTERPOL Operación Amazonas in June 2019. This operation led the police to intercept two Uruguayans with 68 Amazon parrots, 40 canaries, three toucans, and four marmosets in their car. The animals had been smuggled from Argentina by boat on the Río Negro. The media reports did not specify the parrot species, but a video taken of the animals during the operation showed at least 28 turquoise-fronted amazons. Probably there were more.¹¹⁰³ For more on Operación Amazonas, please see the law enforcement efforts section.

¹⁰⁹⁹ <https://www.noticiasdenavarra.com/sociedad/2017/12/07/intervenidas-aeropuerto-noain-70-aves-2579964.html>. Accessed on 23 February 2024.

¹¹⁰⁰ <https://www.elmiercolesdigital.com.ar/interceptan-importante-contrabando-de-fauna/>. Accessed on 23 January 2024.

¹¹⁰¹ BirdLife International (2024) Species factsheet: *Gubernatrix cristata*. Available at <http://datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet/yellow-cardinal-gubernatrix-cristata>. Accessed on 23 January 2024.

¹¹⁰² <https://www.elpais.com.uy/que-pasa/uruguay-en-la-ruta-del-trafico-animar>. Accessed on 22 February 2024.

¹¹⁰³ <https://www.icndiario.com/2019/06/uruguay-interpol-intercepta-a-una-red-internacional-de-trafico-de-especies-protegidas/>; <https://www.teledoce.com/telemundo/nacionales/trafico-de-animales-en-uruguay-dos-operativos-cientos-de-ejemplares-exoticos-y-miles-de-dolares/>. Accessed on 21 February 2024.

Turquoise-fronted amazons are ‘a species in continuous traffic’ in Uruguay, according to DINAMA.¹¹⁰⁴ The 2023 study of Uruguay’s illegal wildlife market lists turquoise-fronted amazons as the sixth most seized species between 2017 and 2019.¹¹⁰⁵

Argentina is without doubt the main source for any turquoise-fronted amazons found in Uruguay, as this species is not native to Uruguay and is trafficked heavily in Argentina. This study identified turquoise-fronted amazons as the most trafficked bird species in Argentina, with 1,623 specimens reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022.

Five macaws were reported to be seized. This includes:

- ▶ A blue and yellow macaw (*Ara araurana*) and a red and green macaw (*Ara chloropterus*) that were seized in January 2018 from a farm in Punta del Este owned by Argentinian trade unionist Marcelo Balcedo who was wanted by Argentina for trafficking of weapons, ammunition, and explosives; money laundering; and criminal association. During the raid, authorities also seized a turquoise-fronted amazon; 14 Rheas (*Rhea sp.*); five capybaras (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*); five llamas (*Lama glama*); and two alpacas (*Vicugna pacos*). Authorities believed he intended to create a private zoo.¹¹⁰⁶ In March 2020, a human corpse, US\$400,000 cash, and ammunition were found at Balcedo's farm.¹¹⁰⁷
- ▶ Two juvenile blue and yellow macaws smuggled from Argentina that were seized in June 2019 during INTERPOL Operación Amazonas.
- ▶ An adult blue and yellow macaw that was seized along with 30 native and non-native songbirds from a suspected bird trafficker’s home in Melo in April 2021.¹¹⁰⁸

While the pet trade is clearly a key driver for poaching and trafficking of birds in Uruguay, Uruguayan birds are also targeted for the trade in taxidermies. In October 2023, the USA’s Department of Justice announced the indictment of two men for illegally importing hundreds of taxidermy bird mounts and thousands of eggs from countries around the world, including Uruguay, between 2016 and 2020. The items were sold on online websites and shipped by air mail.¹¹⁰⁹

¹¹⁰⁴ <https://www.gub.uy/presidencia/comunicacion/noticias/animales-incautados-finca-balcedo-fueron-trasladados-bioparque-durazno-parque>. Accessed on 24 February 2024.

¹¹⁰⁵ Dabezies, J.M. et al (2023). Caracterización del mercado ilegal de fauna en Uruguay. Available at: <https://www.gub.uy/ministerio-interior/comunicacion/publicaciones/caracterizacion-del-mercado-ilegal-fauna-uruguay>. Accessed on 23 February 2024.

¹¹⁰⁶ <https://www.gub.uy/presidencia/comunicacion/noticias/animales-incautados-finca-balcedo-fueron-trasladados-bioparque-durazno-parque>. Accessed on 26 February 2024.

¹¹⁰⁷ <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/sociedad/encuentran-cadaver-chacra-uruguay-marcelo-balcedo-nid2339602/>; <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/politica/el-gobierno-argentino-pide-uruguay-no-le-nid2473851/>. Accessed 26 February 2024.

¹¹⁰⁸ https://www.radiomontecarlo.com.uy/articulos/articulos_masinfo.php?secc=articulos&id=76417&path=0.2308.

¹¹⁰⁹ <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-indictment-against-two-men-trafficking-protected-birds>. Accessed on 24 February 2024.

Reptiles

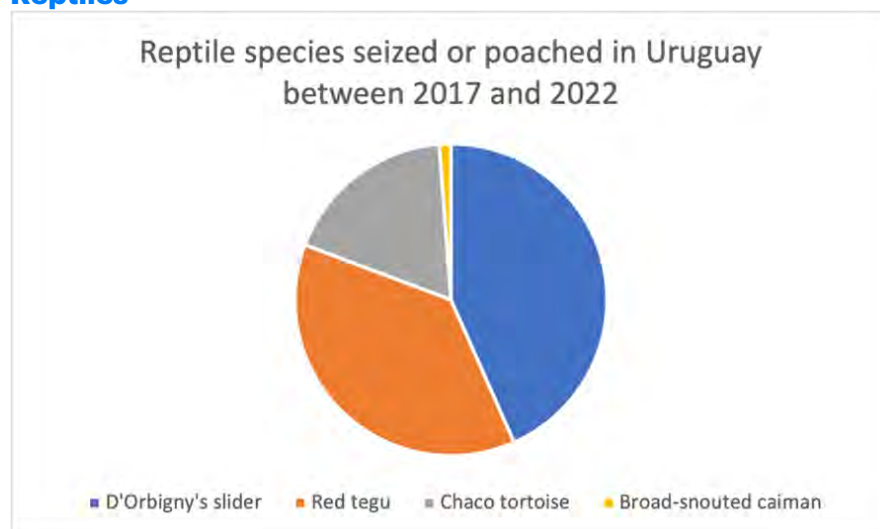


Figure 62: Reptile species seized or poached in Uruguay between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Only two incidents related to poaching and trafficking of reptiles were identified between 2017 and 2022. In April 2021, a broad-snouted caiman (*Caiman latirostris*) was killed by two men in April 2021, and in June 2019, 82 live reptiles were seized as part of Operación Amazonas. During the raid in the home of one of the traffickers arrested in this operation, authorities seized 36 D'Orbigny's slider hatchlings (*Trachemys dorbigni*); 31 red tegu hatchlings (*Salvator rufescens*, CITES Appendix II); and 15 juvenile Chaco tortoises (*Chelonoidis chilensis*, CITES Appendix II).¹¹¹⁰

Although no other reptile seizures were identified between 2017 and 2022, this significant seizure demonstrates that there is demand for reptiles as pets in Uruguay, both native and non-native. The animals were most likely sourced in Argentina, except perhaps for the D'Orbigny's sliders, which are found in Uruguay as well as southern Brazil and northeastern Argentina. Red tegus are a lizard species native to western Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay; Chaco tortoises are native to the Chaco region in Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay.

D'Orbigny sliders were reportedly the third most seized species in Uruguay between 2017 and 2019.¹¹¹¹ It is noteworthy that Chaco tortoises are the most trafficked reptile species in Argentina, with 463 specimens reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. The incessant poaching, in addition to habitat loss, has resulted in significant decline of this species' populations in Argentina.

¹¹¹⁰ <https://www.subrayado.com.uy/dos-detenido-traffic-animales-exoticos-y-600-ejemplares-recuperados-n535859>. The numbers listed here are estimates based on the video in the media report, as no quantities were provided.

¹¹¹¹ Dabezies, J.M. et al (2023). Caracterización del mercado ilegal de fauna en Uruguay. Available at: <https://www.gub.uy/ministerio-interior/comunicacion/publicaciones/caracterizacion-del-mercado-ilegal-fauna-uruguay>. Accessed on 23 February 2024.

Mammals

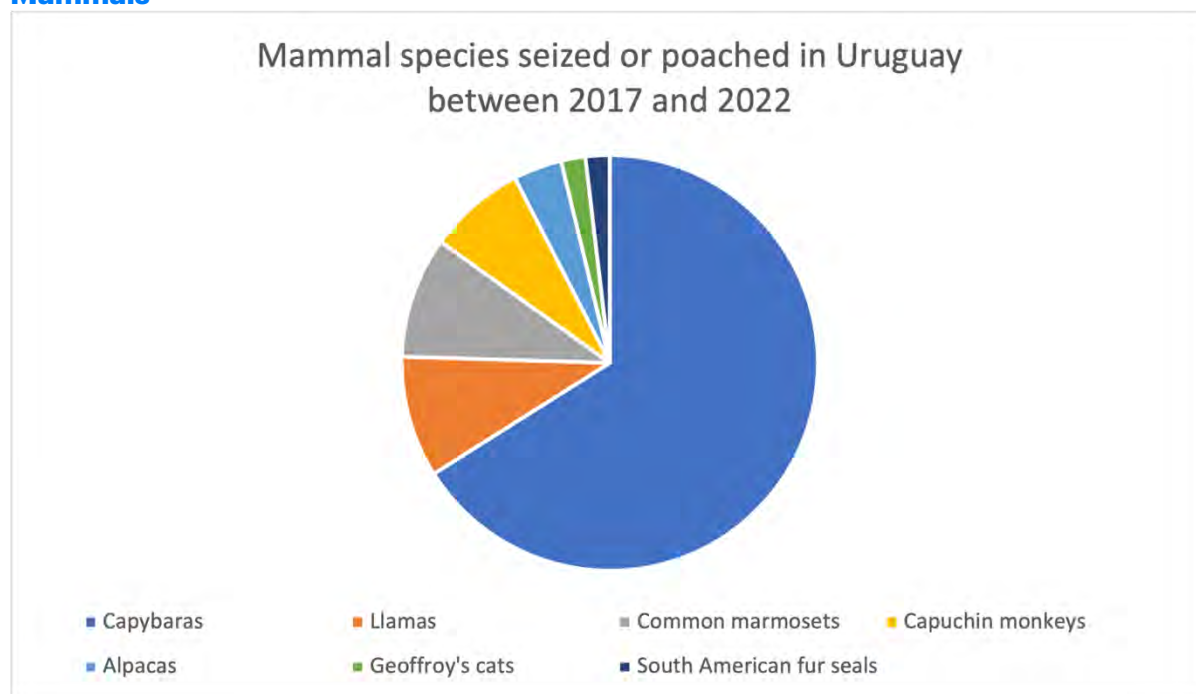


Figure 63: Mammal species seized or poached in Uruguay between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Of the 53 mammals reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022, 66% (35 specimens) concerned capybaras (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*). Six specimens were alive; the others were dead specimens and/or slaughtered meat. Capybaras are the largest rodents in the world. Although it is illegal to hunt this species, they are poached for their valuable meat and skins to such an extent that hunting has become the main threat to this species in Uruguay.¹¹¹²

The 35 capybaras represent just a fraction of the mammals that were poached between 2017 and 2022. Poaching of capybaras, as well as deer, seals, armadillos, herons, birds of prey, and other species is reportedly rampant in Uruguay. According to experts, 99.9% of the hunting is in violation of the regulations in force in the country. A key driver is the impunity afforded by the lack of enforcement. The Ministry of the Environment does not have dedicated fauna inspection personnel, nor sufficient capabilities to follow up on complaints. One expert lamented that the ‘immense majority’ of the Police, ‘if they are not hunters, are not dedicated to enforcing the wildlife law.’¹¹¹³ For more on law enforcement efforts in Uruguay, please see the law enforcement efforts section.

An example of the lack of compliance with Uruguay’s hunting laws was demonstrated in August 2017, when the government, after years of preparation, released 100 live peccaries, which were extinct in Uruguay. A few hours later, social media showed hunters with dogs hunting these peccaries. Three of the hunters were apprehended in August 2017.¹¹¹⁴

Uruguay has an avid hunting culture, and the country actively promotes itself as a hunting destination for foreign hunters. In April 2022, the Uruguayan government loosened its hunting regulations (Law

¹¹¹² <https://lagunascostas.org.uy/en/destinations/carpincho-eng/>. Accessed on 27 February 2024.

¹¹¹³ <https://www.elpais.com.uy/informacion/sociedad/caza-ilegal-en-uruguay-falta-de-recursos-impide-control-efectivo-del-ministerio-de-ambiente>. Accessed on 27 February 2024.

¹¹¹⁴ <https://www.gub.uy/presidencia/comunicacion/noticias/fueron-detenido-tres-responsables-identificados-cazar-pecaries-liberados>. Accessed on 27 February 2024.

9,481 of 1935 on ecology and protection of indigenous fauna, and decree 164 of 1996) with a new decree that allows for issuing more permits for hunters to kill exotic animals and for hunting at night for certain species, which was prohibited before. Furthermore, hunting permits will be issued regardless of the type of weapon used, and it will no longer be mandatory to have a justification from the owner or occupant of the property where hunting will take place. Animal welfare and nature conservation organisations have criticized the new legislation, claiming it will weaken legal protection of wildlife.¹¹¹⁵

Nine monkeys were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. This included five common marmosets (*Callithrix jacchus*) and four capuchin monkeys (*Cebus apella*). Four of the marmosets were seized from traffickers during Operación Amazonas in June 2019, while one specimen was seized by the police from someone who kept it as a pet in February 2020, in response to an alert by the NGO Coendú.¹¹¹⁶ Three of the four capuchin monkeys were seized from people who kept them as pets (including a suspected drug trafficker based in Montevideo). The fourth capuchin monkey was seized from someone who offered it for sale online.¹¹¹⁷

In 2020, a spokesperson for DINAMA stated that they were seeing an increase in the trafficking of common marmosets and capuchin monkeys from Argentina and Brazil. DINAMA believes the increase in cases in Uruguay corresponds to a global trend of keeping exotic animals as pets. Monkeys sell for between 500 and 1000 dollars in the illegal market, most of it conducted on social media. Authorities are concerned about the growing demand for pet monkeys as they carry infectious diseases that can be transmitted to humans. In other countries where the problem of 'mascotismo' is more widespread, pet monkeys have been found with malaria, dengue, rabies, and AIDS, diseases that are often not detected because the animals have an illegal origin and are not subject to the necessary sanitary controls.¹¹¹⁸

Worthy of mention, lastly, is the seizure by German Customs of the skull of a South American fur seal (*Arctocephalus australis*, CITES Appendix II) in February 2019 at the airport of Taucha, Germany. The skull had been shipped by air parcel post from Uruguay.¹¹¹⁹ This seizure and the example of Uruguayan bird taxidermies trafficked to the USA mentioned above, highlight that Uruguayan wildlife is being taxidermied and trafficked to foreign destinations. It seems likely they are advertised on Uruguayan websites and/or social media of Uruguayan individuals and shipped abroad by air.

¹¹¹⁵ <https://www.montevideo.com.uy/Noticias/El-decreto-que-flexibilizo-la-caza-en-Uruguay-no-permite-cazar-carpinchos-ni-quazubiras-uc821846>. Accessed on 27 February 2024.

¹¹¹⁶ <https://www.montevideo.com.uy/Ciencia-y-Tecnologia/Trafico-de-animales-Policia-incauto-un-mono-titi-que-fue-trasladado-al-Parque-Lecoq-uc744940>. Accessed on 27 February 2024.

¹¹¹⁷ <https://www.montevideo.com.uy/Ciencia-y-Tecnologia/Preocupa-a-las-autoridades-el-creciente-trafico-de-monos-en-Uruguay-uc713454>. Accessed on 28 February 2024.

¹¹¹⁸ <https://www.montevideo.com.uy/Ciencia-y-Tecnologia/Preocupa-a-las-autoridades-el-creciente-trafico-de-monos-en-Uruguay-uc713454>. Accessed on 21 February 2021.

¹¹¹⁹ <https://www.taucha-kompakt.de/2019/zollamt-taucha-stellt-seebaeren-schaedel-sicher/>. Accessed on 27 Feb. 2024.

Key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes

Type of incident ● Poaching ● Seizure

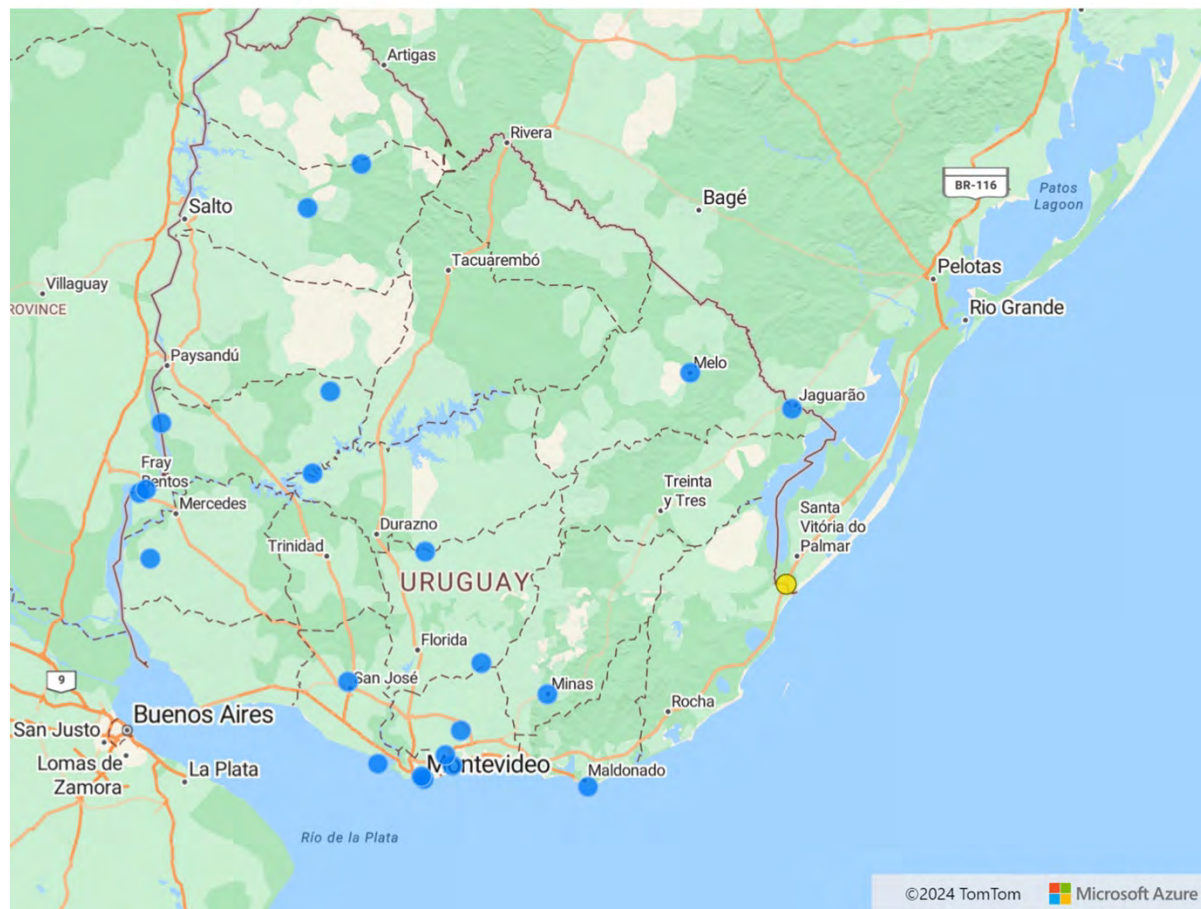


Figure 132: Locations of seizures and poaching incidents in Uruguay reported between 2017 and 2022.

The seizure data reported between 2017 and 2022 provide little insight into key wildlife trafficking routes in Uruguay. Most seizures that were identified occurred in private residences of wildlife poachers and traffickers. Four seizures concerned animals kept as pets. No seizures were reported from physical sales points such as markets or pet shops.

Trafficking by road, boat, and air

Six seizures were identified that concerned wildlife smuggled by road using private vehicles.

- ▶ The seizure of 68 Amazon parrots, 40 canaries, four toucans, and four marmosets in June 2019 from two Uruguayan men as part of Operación Amazonas. The car they were driving was intercepted at km 35 of Ruta 5. Ruta 5 is one of the most important highways in the country, connecting Montevideo in the south with Rivera in the north and passing through the centre of the country. The animals had allegedly entered Uruguay from Argentina by boat on the Río Negro. The Río Negro is the most important river in Uruguay, entering the country from Brazil and flowing into the Río Uruguay.
- ▶ Four incidents were recorded where poachers were intercepted with dead capybaras/capybara meat in their vehicles during road inspections. Two seizures occurred in January 2018 and November 2021 in the Cerro Largo department in eastern Uruguay, near the border with Brazil; the two other seizures occurred in the Florida department in central Uruguay in September and December 2022.
- ▶ The seizure, in June 2019, of the 350 saffron finches from a car at the Puente San Martín.

- ▶ It is well-known that wildlife is frequently smuggled between Argentina and Uruguay, yet Uruguay reported only one seizure at the border with Argentina: the 350 saffron finches headed for Argentina that were seized from a car at Puente San Martín, the bridge across the Río Uruguay. The bridge is certainly an important wildlife trafficking node. In October 2023, three Argentinians intent on entering Uruguay were arrested with 117 songbirds in their car in Gualeguaychú, the Argentinian town nearest to Puente San Martín.¹¹²⁰

Given that Uruguay and Argentina are separated by the Río Uruguay, it is to be expected that wildlife is smuggled across by boat.

Wildlife is smuggled out of Uruguay by air, as the seizures in Spain and Germany and the taxidermy case in the USA demonstrate. However, no seizures were reported at any of Uruguay's international airports. This lack of vigilance on the side of the authorities is likely abused by wildlife traffickers.

Montevideo key trafficking hub

Research has highlighted that demand for wildlife is strongly concentrated in the capital Montevideo, where 60% of the country's population lives.¹¹²¹ However, only three seizures were reported in Montevideo department.

Illegal wildlife sales are reportedly common in Montevideo's fairs, such as Piedras Blancas or Tristán Narvaja. No seizures were reported at these or other sales points in Montevideo. According to experts you can find everything at these fairs: 'from foxes to birds of prey, turtles, and invertebrates'.¹¹²²

On social media people frequently complain about the lack of controls in these fairs. For example, in December 2020, someone posted photos of two owls offered for sale in the Piedras Blancas fair, commenting 'We have reported these situations on countless occasions. Particularly at the Piedras Blancas Fair. It's tremendous.'¹¹²³

Sales on social media

Illegal online wildlife trade has increased significantly in Uruguay and plays an important role in the increasing illegal wildlife trade in the country. According to authorities, wildlife is mainly sold in closed Facebook groups.¹¹²⁴ The online traffic affects both native species and species smuggled from other countries. For instance, sources have reported that a yellow-billed toucan (not native to Uruguay) was offered for more than US\$5,400 on an online sales platform in Uruguay.¹¹²⁵

DINAMA lacks the capacity and expertise to monitor the internet and investigate wildlife traffickers operating online. To fill the gap, NGOs like Coendú and Aves Uruguay monitor the online trade and report any suspicious activities to the authorities. Coendú has a team of investigators dedicated to

¹¹²⁰ <https://www.elmiercolesdigital.com.ar/interceptan-importante-contrabando-de-fauna/>. Accessed on 23 January 2024.

¹¹²¹ Dabezies, J.M. et al (2023). Caracterización del mercado ilegal de fauna en Uruguay. Available at: <https://www.gub.uy/ministerio-interior/comunicacion/publicaciones/caracterizacion-del-mercado-ilegal-fauna-uruguay>. Accessed on 23 February 2024.

¹¹²² <https://www.elpais.com.uy/que-pasa/uruguay-en-la-ruta-del-trafico-animar>. Accessed on 22 February 2024.

¹¹²³ <https://twitter.com/gascossia/status/1343274656711794688/photo/1>. Accessed on 28 February 2024.

¹¹²⁴ <https://www.montevideo.com.uy/Ciencia-y-Tecnologia/Preocupa-a-las-autoridades-el-creciente-trafico-de-monos-en-Uruguay-uc713454>. Accessed on 22 February 2024.

¹¹²⁵ <https://www.elobservador.com.uy/nota/trafico-ilegal-de-animales-aumenta-la-demanda-de-uruguayos-por-mascotas-de-especies-raras-202391194450>. Accessed on 23 February 2024.

exploring social media to search for wildlife traffickers. Unfortunately, DINAMA is unable to follow up on all complaints.¹¹²⁶

This study identified two seizures of wild animals that were offered for sale online:

- ▶ In January 2018, following citizen's complaints, a Geoffroy's cat (*Leopardus geoffroyi*) was seized from a woman in Dolores who advertised it on Facebook.¹¹²⁷
- ▶ In February/March 2019, a capuchin monkey was seized that had been offered for sale online.¹¹²⁸

Convergence

Two incidents were recorded that provide indications of convergence between wildlife crime and other forms of serious, organized crime in Uruguay.

- ▶ In January 2018, various birds and mammals were seized from a ranch owned by Argentinian trade unionist Marcelo Balcedo, who is wanted by Argentina for trafficking of weapons, ammunition, and explosives, as well as for money laundering and criminal association. Later that year, a human corpse, US\$400,000 cash and ammunition were found at the farm.¹¹²⁹ The animals were believed to be part of his private zoo, a hobby not uncommon with high-level criminals.
- ▶ In May 2020, the Special Brigade for the Repression of Rustling (Brigada especial para la Represión del Abigeato) of the town of Canelones seized 1,000 kg of beef and capybara meat as well as 25 kg marihuana, weapons, and 2 freezers, following an under-cover sting instigated by an anonymous complaint about cattle rustling in Canelones department.¹¹³⁰

Transboundary trafficking routes

Argentina ↔ Uruguay

- ▶ In June 2019, Uruguayan Customs at Puente San Martín on the border with Argentina arrested three people for attempting to smuggle seized 350 saffron finches to Argentina.¹¹³¹
- ▶ In June 2019, the Uruguayan police seized over 100 wild animals that were smuggled from Argentina as part of INTERPOL Operación Amazonas.¹¹³²
- ▶ In October 2023, three Argentinians intent on entering Uruguay were arrested in Gualaguaychú, near the border with Uruguay, with 117 birds, including 95 yellow cardinals and 22 black siskins.¹¹³³

¹¹²⁶ <https://www.elpais.com.uy/que-pasa/uruguay-en-la-ruta-del-trafico-animar>. Accessed on 28 February 2024.

¹¹²⁷ <https://www.montevideo.com.uy/Ciencia-y-Tecnologia/Liberaron-al-gato-montes-que-intentaron-comercializar-en-Dolores-a-fines-de-enero-uc676487>. Accessed on 28 February 2024.

¹¹²⁸ <https://www.montevideo.com.uy/Ciencia-y-Tecnologia/Preocupa-a-las-autoridades-el-creciente-trafico-de-monos-en-Uruguay-uc713454>. Accessed on 28 February 2024.

¹¹²⁹ <https://www.gub.uy/presidencia/comunicacion/noticias/animales-incautados-finca-balcedo-fueron-trasladados-bioparque-durazno-parque>; <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/sociedad/encuentran-cadaver-chacra-uruguay-marcelo-balcedo-nid2339602/>;

<https://www.lanacion.com.ar/politica/el-gobierno-argentino-pide-uruguay-no-le-nid2473851/>. Accessed on 28 February 2024.

¹¹³⁰ <https://diariouruguay.com.uy/diario-uruguay/tres-personas-que-comercializaban-clandestinamente-animales-faenados-en-canelones-fueron-procesados/>. Accessed on 28 February 2024.

¹¹³¹ <https://www.montevideo.com.uy/Noticias/Trafico-de-animales-Prefectura-evito-la-salida-de-350-aves-nativas-a-Argentina-uc720827>.

Accessed on 11 February 2024.

¹¹³² https://www.minterior.gub.uy/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6836. Accessed on 11 Feb. 2024.

¹¹³³ <https://www.elmiercolesdigital.com.ar/interceptan-importante-contrabando-de-fauna/>. Accessed on 23 January 2024.

Uruguay > Europe

- ▶ In November 2017, the Guardia Civil at Noáin airport in Pamplona, Spain, arrested a man arriving from Uruguay via Madrid with a suitcase filled with 70 songbirds.¹¹³⁴
- ▶ In February 2019, Customs officers at the airport of Taucha, Germany seized a South American fur seal skull that had been shipped by air parcel post from Uruguay.¹¹³⁵

Uruguay > USA

In 2023, two men were indicted in the USA for illegally importing hundreds of taxidermied birds and thousands of eggs from around the world, including Uruguay, between 2016 and 2020.¹¹³⁶



Figure 133: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes to/from Uruguay based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022

Law enforcement efforts

Uruguay reports few wildlife seizures. On average, only 4.5 incidents per year were recorded. The numbers of seized/poached animals are also low and show a declining trend, with the exception of the peak seen in 2019. In June 2019, the Uruguayan police launched Operación Amazonas as part of the international INTERPOL operation Thunderball. On June 6th they intercepted a car driven by two Uruguayans with wildlife that had been smuggled from Argentina by boat on the Río Negro. In the trunk of the car were crates and boxes with 68 Amazon parrots, 40 canaries, three toucans, and four

¹¹³⁴ <https://www.noticiasdenavarra.com/sociedad/2017/12/07/intervenidas-aeropuerto-noain-70-aves-2579964.html>

¹¹³⁵ <https://www.taucha-kompakt.de/2019/zollamt-taucha-stellt-seebaeren-schaedel-sicher/>. Accessed on 27 Feb. 2024.

¹¹³⁶ <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-indictment-against-two-men-trafficking-protected-birds>. Accessed on 24 February 2024.

marmosets. The men were arrested and subsequently a house belonging to one of them was raided, where up to 500 specimens of different species of birds, reptiles, and mammals were seized. The operation was based on an investigation by the police's Department of Special Investigations (Departamento de Investigaciones Especiales), which had identified a criminal network that smuggled live animals from Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina in addition to sourcing wildlife native to Uruguay and selling these through the internet and in local markets.¹¹³⁷

Operación Amazonas provided evidence of substantial levels of organized wildlife crime in Uruguay. It also showed the results that can be achieved by dedicating capacity and expertise to identify, investigate, and disrupt wildlife crime networks. While it is unlikely that the illegal activities identified in Operación Amazonas were incidental, it seems the crackdown in 2019 was a one-off law enforcement operation that received little or no follow-up. Therefore, it may be concluded that more effort is needed to tackle wildlife crime in Uruguay.

A 2023 study funded by Uruguay's Ministry of Interior on the illegal wildlife market in Uruguay revealed the existence of international trafficking of several species to satisfy the demand of foreign and local pet owners and collectors. The largest market is internal, however, and dominated by native birds, mostly captured from their habitats in rural areas of the country and sold at fairs and veterinary clinics and through social media or e-commerce platforms. On the other hand, a proliferation of 'rare' pets was evident, such as African hedgehogs, snakes, turtles and other reptiles, rats, mice, ferrets, spiders, and tropical birds, among others, in accordance with global trends. Demand is strongly concentrated in the capital Monte Video, where 60% of the country's population lives. Social media were found to play an important role in the increasing wildlife traffic. The study found that Uruguay is ill-equipped to deal with the problem, due to weak laws, lack of expertise among control agencies, lack of a specialised prosecutors' office, lack of resources, and a lack of rehabilitation facilities where seized animals can be taken.¹¹³⁸

The following state institutions have responsibilities in controlling wildlife trafficking in Uruguay: the Ministry of the Environment through DINABISE, the National Naval Prefecture, the General Directorate of Customs, the Ministry of the Interior through the National Police and the INTERPOL National Central Bureau (Ley 16320). DINABISE (Dirección Nacional de Biodiversidad y Servicios Ecosistémicos, formerly DINAMA), is the institution responsible for wildlife management in Uruguay (including CITES) and acts as a control institution. It has a specific unit dedicated to this task, unlike the other institutions.¹¹³⁹

The capacity of DINABISE is insufficient, however. In February 2020, a spokesperson for DINAMA (as it was still called then) stated that they were seeing an increase in the illegal wildlife trade but that there were more cases than they could control. In 2023, the director of DINABISE acknowledged that they do not have specific inspection personnel for fauna, and that the inspection capacity of the Ministry of the Environment is practically non-existent. Nor does it have sufficient capabilities to follow up on complaints. Eventually, a technical specialist comes out to look at a particular issue, but there are no officials in the street conducting inspections. NGO experts have criticized the fact that wildlife law

¹¹³⁷ <https://www.icndiario.com/2019/06/uruguay-interpol-intercepta-a-una-red-internacional-de-trafico-de-especies-protegidas/>; <https://www.teledoce.com/telemundo/nacionales/trafico-de-animales-en-uruguay-dos-operativos-cientos-de-ejemplares-exoticos-y-miles-de-dolares/>. Accessed on 21 February 2024.

¹¹³⁸ Dabezies, J.M. et al (2023). Caracterización del mercado ilegal de fauna en Uruguay. Available at: <https://www.gub.uy/ministerio-interior/comunicacion/publicaciones/caracterizacion-del-mercado-ilegal-fauna-uruguay>. Accessed on 23 February 2024.

¹¹³⁹ Dabezies, J.M. et al (2023). Caracterización del mercado ilegal de fauna en Uruguay. Available at: <https://www.gub.uy/ministerio-interior/comunicacion/publicaciones/caracterizacion-del-mercado-ilegal-fauna-uruguay>. Accessed on 23 February 2024.

enforcement in Uruguay largely depends on non-governmental organisations and private persons complaining about suspected illegal activities.¹¹⁴⁰

There is no specialised environmental crime unit in the National Police, nor (as noted above) in Uruguay's public prosecutors' office. In 2023, the public prosecutors' office however revealed plans to strengthen the capacity of prosecutors to prosecute environmental crimes, e.g. by establishing a specialised unit and/or providing training to all prosecutors.¹¹⁴¹

The general public is urged to report on illicit situations through an online form.¹¹⁴² In 2019, DINAMA received 175 complaints regarding illegal wildlife exploitation. This included 57 complaints for illegal possession, 76 for illegal sale, 40 for poaching, and 22 for illegal trade on social media.¹¹⁴³

When native wild animals are seized, they are rehabilitated and released back into their habitat. Non-native animals are taken to rescue centres where they spend the rest of their lives in captivity as Uruguay does not have mechanisms to return them to their country of origin.¹¹⁴⁴

The rate of arrests is relatively high in Uruguay. A total of 25 people were arrested in 10 incidents. This means that 40% of the 25 wildlife poaching and trafficking incidents recorded in Uruguay between 2017 and 2022 resulted in arrest.

Even so, wildlife crime has been a very low risk activity in Uruguay to date. At the time of writing this section (February 2024), wildlife trafficking is considered a basic infraction, with penalties restricted to fines of between 10 and 2,000 adjustable units (UR - which is an index linked to average wages).¹¹⁴⁵ This is soon to change, as in June 2023 the Uruguayan senate, after years of discussing, approved a bill incorporating environmental crimes into the country's penal code. The bill criminalises air, water, and soil pollution, contamination by toxic waste, and crimes against biodiversity. Prospective prison sentences range from three months to 12 years.¹¹⁴⁶ This is in line with the commitments Uruguay and 20 other states made under the 2019 Lima Declaration on Illegal Wildlife Trade. The Lima Declaration included the recognition of wildlife poaching and trafficking as serious crimes in national legislation and regulations, and the need to apply penalties and fines that are consistent with the serious nature of the crime.¹¹⁴⁷

Even so, strengthened legislation will only be meaningful if it is enforced. This will require allocation of sufficient resources to relevant criminal justice agencies, building capacity, and ensuring strategic application of resources to dismantle criminal networks engaged in wildlife trafficking in Uruguay.

¹¹⁴⁰ <https://www.elpais.com.uy/informacion/sociedad/caza-ilegal-en-uruguay-falta-de-recursos-impide-control-efectivo-del-ministerio-de-ambiente>. Accessed on 23 February 2024.

¹¹⁴¹ <https://www.montevideo.com.uy/En-Perspectiva/Evaluan-posibilidad-de-una-Fiscalia-especializada-en-delitos-ambientales-dijo-Amarilla-uc856103>. Accessed on 23 February 2024.

¹¹⁴² <https://www.ambiente.gub.uy/denuncias/etapas/ejecutar/23447>. Accessed on 22 February 2024.

¹¹⁴³ <https://www.elobservador.com.uy/nota/como-internet-se-transformo-en-una-forma-de-trafficar-animales-de-forma-ilegal-en-uruguay-20208165055>. Accessed on 22 February 2024.

¹¹⁴⁴ <https://www.montevideo.com.uy/Ciencia-y-Tecnologia/Trafico-de-animales-Policia-incauto-un-mono-titi-que-fue-trasladado-al-Parque-Lecoq-uc744940>. Accessed on 22 February 2024.

¹¹⁴⁵ <https://www.elpais.com.uy/que-pasa/uruguay-en-la-ruta-del-traffic-animales>. Accessed on 22 February 2024.

¹¹⁴⁶ <https://dialogochino.net/en/climate-energy/388977-how-latin-america-is-using-the-law-to-fight-environmental-crime/>

¹¹⁴⁷ https://lamejorreceta.ins.gob.pe/sites/default/files/2020-12/Lima%20Declaration_4.oct_2019_1.pdf.

Venezuela

Venezuela

General overview

Twenty seizures and eight poaching incidents were recorded for Venezuela between 2017 and 2022, affecting a minimum number of 189 animals. Some 67% of these concerned live animals (127 specimens). Five of the 20 seizures concerned shipments originating from Venezuela that were seized abroad: in Aruba; Curaçao (two seizures); Trinidad & Tobago; and Germany.

Birds are by far the most affected species group, accounting for 84% of all seized or poached animals. Next are mammals with 13%; reptiles with 2%; and amphibians with 1%.

Unique characteristics

- Surge in wildlife poaching for consumption and (foreign) pet trade fuelled by economic crisis
- High levels of psittacid trafficking
- Songbird trafficking
- Limited enforcement effort

Number of incidents reported in the media

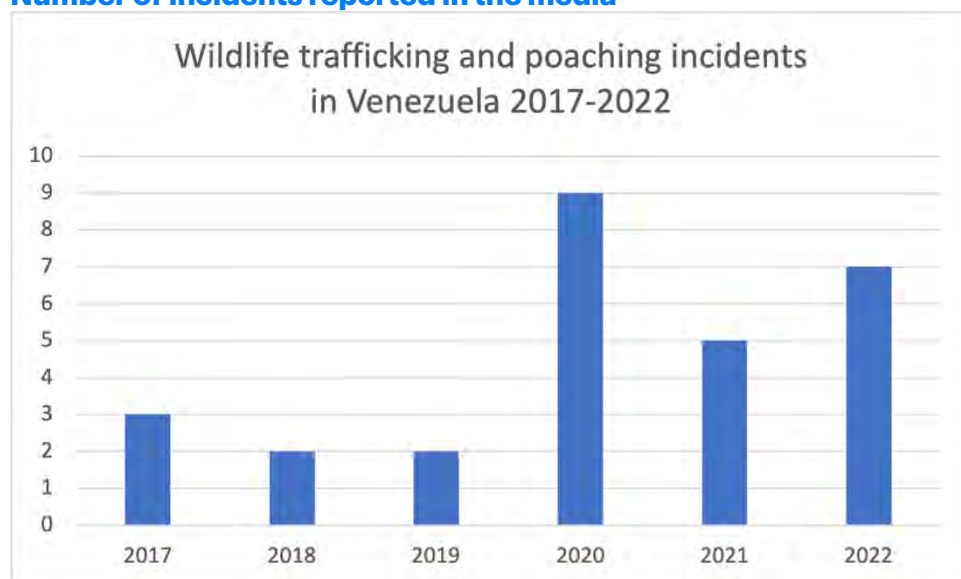


Figure 134: Wildlife trafficking and poaching incidents implicating Venezuela between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Number of animals involved

The table and figure below show the numbers of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians seized or poached in Venezuela between 2017 and 2022.

Table 19: Number of animals seized or poached in/originating from Venezuela between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	TOTAL
Birds	1	0	0	66	7	86	160
Mammals	4	1	1	7	2	9	24
Reptiles	0	1	1	0	2	0	4
Amphibians	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	5	2	2	73	12	95	

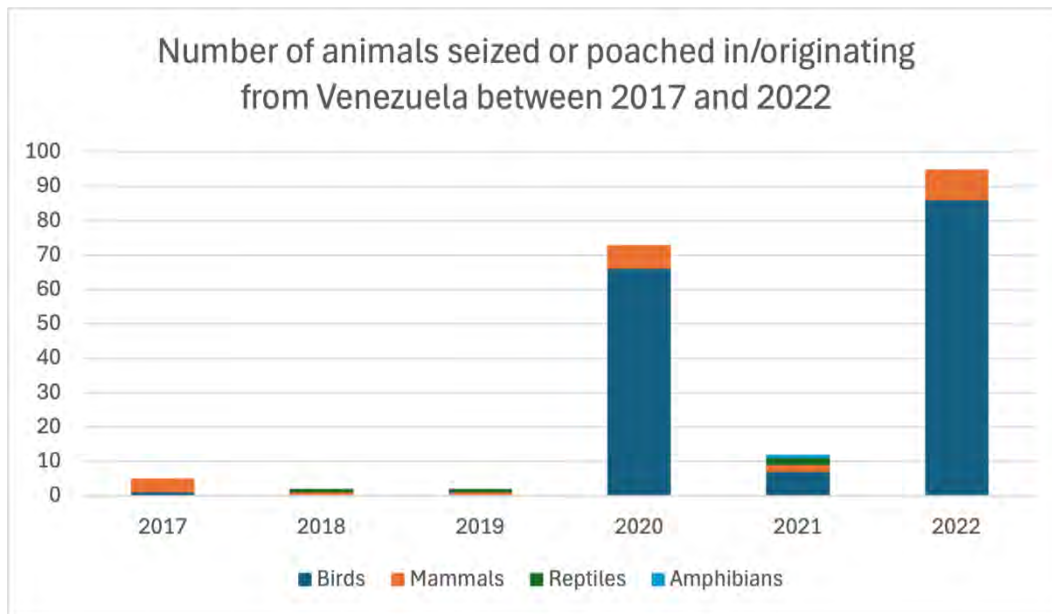


Figure 64 Number of animals seized or poached in/originating from Venezuela between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

These numbers are not at all reflective of actual levels of wildlife crime in Venezuela. Several sources report high levels of poaching and illegal wildlife trade, fuelled by Venezuela’s economic and humanitarian crisis, and lack of government control.¹¹⁴⁸ Hunger in the country has increased the poaching of wildlife for consumption, including of manatees, deer, collared peccaries, iguanas, dolphins, flamingos, and marine turtles. Locals, struggling to survive, also engage in poaching protected wildlife for the domestic and international pet trade, including parrots, macaws, and monkeys.

In-depth research of Venezuela’s illegal wildlife trade has estimated that more than 900,000 wild animals of 426 different species are trafficked per year in Venezuela, with a net worth of over US\$321 million. Birds comprised 74% of the trade.¹¹⁴⁹

¹¹⁴⁸ <https://ocindex.net/country/venezuela>. Accessed on 21 November 2023.

¹¹⁴⁹ <https://news.mongabay.com/2015/10/trafficked-tropical-animals-the-ghost-exports-of-venezuela/>. Accessed on 21 November 2023.

Species most targeted

Birds

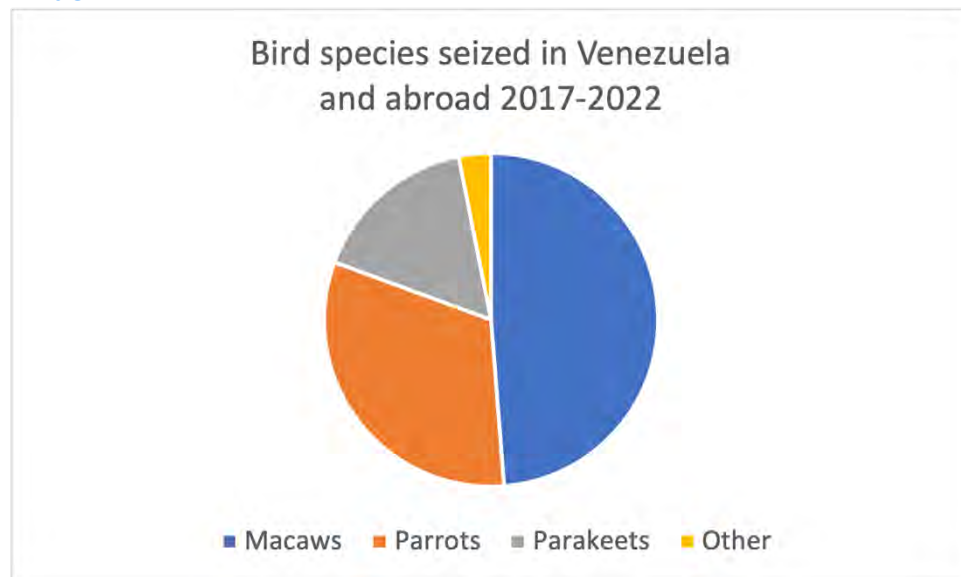


Figure 136: Bird species seized in/originating from Venezuela between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

This study identified a total of 160 Venezuelan birds seized from the hands of traffickers in eight incidents. Some 50% were seized in the territorial waters of Aruba, Curaçao, and Trinidad and Tobago by the coast guards of these countries. This clearly demonstrates the significance of demand from foreign markets for Venezuelan birds. Sadly, of the 80 birds seized abroad, 47 were dead, all due to drowning as traffickers threw them overboard when coast guard patrols detected them (see below).

Trafficking of psittacids

Trafficking of psittacids, particularly parrots and macaws, is huge business in Venezuela and appears to be a well-organized criminal enterprise. Venezuela harbours 50 species endemic psittacids, making it a target for traffickers.

Some 97% of all birds seized or poached concerned psittacids. This included 78 macaws, 51 parrots, and 26 parakeets that were seized from traffickers between 2017 and 2022 in Venezuela and abroad. Many media reports failed to specify the species involved in these seizures. As a result, for 22 macaws, 20 parrots, and all 26 parakeets, the subspecies remains unclear.

The graph below shows the subspecies of the remaining 87 parrots and macaws whose species was identified. Based on the seizure data, the top 3 psittacids found in illegal trade are: military macaws (*Ara militaris*, 24 specimens); black-headed parrots (*Pionites melanocephalus*, 22 specimens); and scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*, 21 specimens).

Venezuelan parrot and macaw species seized in Venezuela and abroad 2017-2022

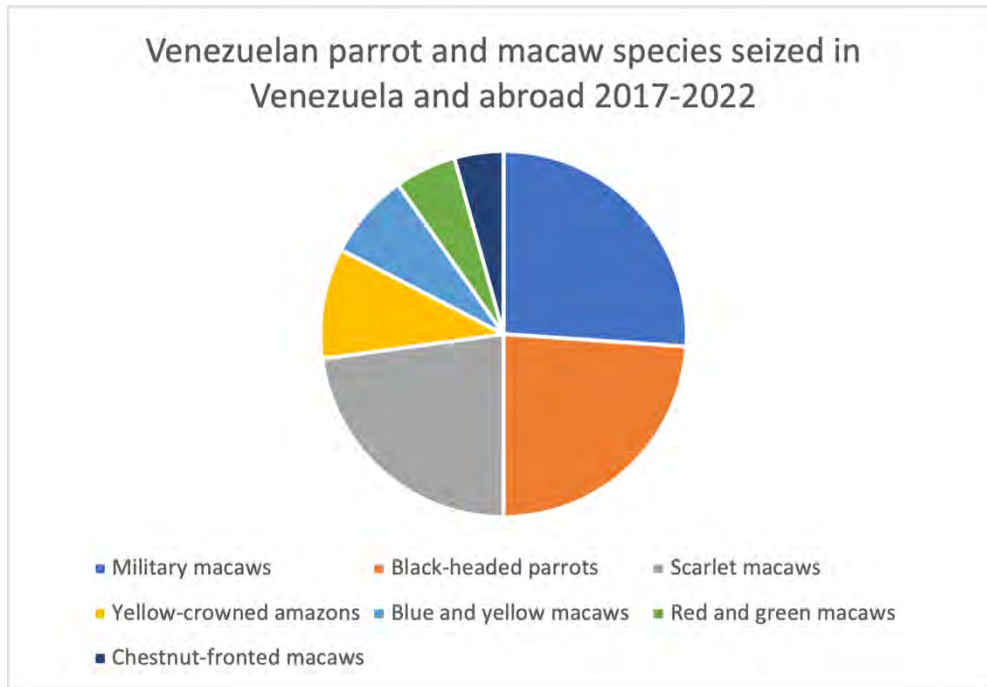


Figure 137: Venezuelan parrot and macaw species seized in/originating from Venezuela between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

As mentioned above, many birds are seized in the territorial waters of Aruba, Curaçao, and Trinidad and Tobago. Smugglers sometimes ruthlessly throw their illicit cargo overboard when they are detected.

This happened in June 2020, when the coast guard of Trinidad and Tobago intercepted a vessel arriving from Venezuela with five parrots, 20 macaws, and 22 black-headed parrots (*Pionites melanocephalus*). Most of the birds had drowned by the time the coastguard arrived and others died soon after.¹¹⁵⁰

It is noteworthy that there are frequent interceptions of vessels from Venezuela smuggling wildlife and humans to the Dutch Antilles, highlighting a convergence between wildlife and human trafficking. In August 2020, the Aruban coast guard and police intercepted a boat carrying 26 parakeets, two monkeys, and 22 Venezuelans. In September 2021, the coast guard of Curaçao seized a boat containing two macaws and 18 Venezuelans. A few months later, in December 2021, the coast guard of Curaçao seized a boat with 5 parrots, two macaws, and 33 Venezuelan citizens, coming from the Venezuelan mainland (state of Falcón).¹¹⁵¹

A significant incident occurred in October 2022, when police officers seized a truck containing an illegal shipment of 60 wild birds (including 50 macaws, nine yellow-crowned amazons, and one king vulture) and two giant anteaters that was headed for the Simón Bolívar International Airport in Maiquetía, La Guaira state, from where they would be transported to Dominican Republic. The officers discovered the animals during a routine inspection when they heard sounds from the truck. The shipment included 18 military macaws, which are listed in CITES Appendix I and are prohibited from commercial international trade. A journalist investigated the case and established that the animals came from a wildlife farm operated by a commercial company engaged in the 'reproduction, breeding, marketing, import, export, exchange, and use of exotic birds and mammals.' At the time of the seizure the company was already being investigated for suspected illegal trade by another of its farms. The

¹¹⁵⁰ <https://www.aporrea.org/pachamama/n355810.html>. Accessed on 22 November 2023.

¹¹⁵¹ <https://www.elnacional.com/mundo/guardia-costera-de-aruba-intercepto-a-22-balseros-venezolanos-que-llevaban-animales-exoticos/>. Accessed on 22 November 2023.

company reportedly has close ties with the government, including the responsible ministry Dirección de Diversidad Biológica of the Ministerio de Ecosocialismo (Minec).¹¹⁵²

Around the world, facilities such as wildlife farms and zoos that engage in captive breeding and sales of wildlife are well-known avenues for wildlife traffickers to launder illegally sourced wild animals into the legal trade.¹¹⁵³

More recently, on 25 August 2023, the Attorney General's office initiated an investigation into an alleged bird smuggling network. The day before, many dozens of macaws and toucans were seized from a warehouse on the Petare-Santa Lucía highway in response to complaints from social media users.¹¹⁵⁴

A 2017 study on illegal trade in psittacids in Venezuela estimated that from 1981 to 2015, some 641,675 psittacids were trafficked in Venezuela for both the domestic and international trade, with illicit activity increasing continuously since 1981. The species most detected in illegal trade was yellow-crowned amazon (*Amazona ochrocephala*), followed by brown-throated parakeet (*Aratinga pertinax*); orange-winged amazon (*Amazona amazonica*); yellow-shouldered amazon (*Amazona barbadensis*); blue and yellow macaw (*Ara ararauna*); and red and green macaw (*Ara chloropterus*). Interestingly, the study found a difference between species trafficked abroad and those affected by domestic trade. For international markets, large parrots, including the widespread and common *Amazona ochrocephala*, and large macaws (two *Ara* species) are exported from Venezuela. The most attractive species (large body size, colourful and with the ability to imitate human speech), such as amazons and macaws, are more likely to be exported, therefore. Another important finding of this study was that half of the species involved in international trade were not native to Venezuela (e.g. *Amazona albifrons*, *Amazona aestiva*, *Psittacara mitratus*, and *Pionus tumultuosus*), suggesting that Venezuela could be an important transit country for the trade in parrot species from Central America and other South American countries. The domestic market was more focused on parakeets (*Aratinga* and *Brotogeris* spp.), small parrots (*Pionus* spp.) and parrotlets (*Forpus* spp.).¹¹⁵⁵

Trafficking of songbirds

Of the 160 birds reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022, only two were songbirds: a Venezuelan troupial (*Icterus icterus*), the national bird of Venezuela, and a masked cardinal (*Paroaria nigrogenis*), which were seized along with a Harris' hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) from a man and woman who were offering them for sale in foreign currency in Barquisimeto, in June 2020.¹¹⁵⁶

There is, however, substantial smuggling of Venezuelan songbirds to markets abroad. Important destinations for seed finches (*Sporophila* spp.) include Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Suriname. Songbird competitions are deeply ingrained traditions in these countries, which have been continued by diaspora residing in the USA and The Netherlands. Demand for Venezuelan finches is driven by the

¹¹⁵² Boon, L. (2023). Este negocio se cobra en especies. Armando Info, 10 September 2023. Available at: <https://armando.info/este-negocio-se-cobra-en-especies/>. Accessed 13 September 2023.

¹¹⁵³ Se e.g. Lyons, J.A. and Natusch, D.J. (2011). Wildlife laundering through breeding farms: Illegal harvest, population declines and a means of regulating the trade of green pythons (*Morelia viridis*) from Indonesia. *Biol. Conserv.* 2011, 144, 3073–3081.

¹¹⁵⁴ El Pitazo, 25 August 2023. Ministerio Público investiga presunta red de contrabando de aves en el municipio Sucre. <https://elpitazo.net/sucesos/ministerio-publico-investiga-presunta-red-de-contrabando-de-aves-en-el-municipio-sucre/>. Accessed 13 September 2023.

¹¹⁵⁵ Sanchez-Mercado, A. et al (2017). Illegal trade of the Psittacidae in Venezuela. *Oryx*. 2020;54(1):77-83. Available from: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/oryx/article/illegal-trade-of-the-psittacidae-in-venezuela/BOF55926F5297AFF486FA77969C878AC>. Accessed on 21 November 2023.

¹¹⁵⁶ <https://ultimasnoticias.com.ve/noticias/sucesos/detienen-a-pareja-por-vender-aves-exoticas/>. Accessed on 21 November 2023.

fact that local songbird populations are nearly extirpated in these countries. In Trinidad, some can sell for up to US\$5,000.¹¹⁵⁷ An example that highlights the scale of this trade dates from 2009. A boat from Venezuela sailed to Trinidad carrying around 1,000 wild animals, including over 500 chestnut-bellied seed finches (*Sporophila angolensis*), 300 grey seedeaters or Picoplat songbirds (*Sporophila intermedia*), an assortment of monkeys, and 400 pounds of wild meat. The case only came to light because four police officers from Trinidad intercepted the boat at gunpoint and stole the shipment, which was estimated to be worth about \$500,000.¹¹⁵⁸

Another songbird species, red siskins (*Spinus cucullatus*, known in Venezuela as ‘cardelitos’) is in high demand locally as well as internationally, including in Colombia, Brazil, the Caribbean (Curacao, Aruba, and Cuba), the USA, Europe, and Asia. Social network analysis has found that specialist networks are poaching at least 70 specimens per year from the wild in western Venezuela alone.¹¹⁵⁹ This offtake is driving the species to extinction; approximately 1,000 specimens are still left in a few isolated pockets in Venezuela. There is also a small population in Guyana. Red siskins are legally protected in Venezuela, listed in CITES Appendix I, and are classified as endangered by the IUCN.¹¹⁶⁰ The high demand for red siskins is due to a particular genetic quality. When mated with a canary, a female siskin produces fertile red canaries, which are highly varied and prized in the global pet trade.¹¹⁶¹

Mortality is high in siskins and seed eaters poached for the songbird trade. Hunters catch them using glue placed on a tree next to an artificial decoy. Once trapped, the tiny birds are stowed in pockets and bags for transport to buyers. The birds’ survival chances after just 12 hours without food are very low. They have an extremely accelerated metabolism as they feed on seeds and must eat at all hours. If they are rescued from traffickers, they must be given a glucose shot, hydration, and warmth to stop the animal losing energy trying to regulate its temperature.¹¹⁶²

A key source for Venezuelan parrots, macaws, and songbirds is the state of Delta Amacuro on the northeast coast, bordering Guyana, and just a short boat ride from Trinidad and Tobago. The state harbours a great variety of wildlife and hundreds of river channels that have encouraged trafficking to Trinidad, not only of wildlife but also of drugs and humans. Members of indigenous communities in this state poach birds and other wildlife and sell them to traffickers from Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana who reportedly visit the area every two weeks, usually on pre-order.¹¹⁶³

One incident was recorded of two men who were stopped at a military checkpoint in San Juan de los Cayos, Falcón, with an injured American flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) in their car that they had poached.¹¹⁶⁴ Flamingos are hunted for food in the Las Peonías lagoon, in the northwestern state of Zulia.¹¹⁶⁵ Fishermen furthermore smuggle flamingo chicks to the Dutch Antilles, from where they are reportedly taken to Florida.¹¹⁶⁶

¹¹⁵⁷ <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/noticias-del-dia/aves-trafficadas-venezuela-trinidad/>. Accessed on 21 November 2023.

¹¹⁵⁸ <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna30588932>. Accessed on 21 November 2023.

¹¹⁵⁹ Sánchez-Mercado et al. (2019). Social network analysis reveals specialized trade in an Endangered songbird. *Animal Conservation* 23(2), April 2020. Available from: <https://zslpublications.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/acv.12514>. Accessed on 21 November 2023.

¹¹⁶⁰ Smithsonian Global, Red Siskin Initiative: <https://global.si.edu/projects/red-siskin-initiative-0>. Accessed on 21 November 2023.

¹¹⁶¹ <https://news.mongabay.com/2015/10/trafficked-tropical-animals-the-ghost-exports-of-venezuela/>. Accessed on 21 November 2023.

¹¹⁶² <https://news.mongabay.com/2015/10/trafficked-tropical-animals-the-ghost-exports-of-venezuela/>. Accessed on 23 November 2023.

¹¹⁶³ <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/noticias-del-dia/aves-trafficadas-venezuela-trinidad/>. Accessed on 21 November 2023.

¹¹⁶⁴ <https://www.lapatilla.com/2017/03/22/detienen-a-dos-personas-por-caza-de-flamencos-para-presunto-consumo-en-falcon/>. Accessed on 21 November 2023.

¹¹⁶⁵ <https://diariocorreo.pe/peru/venezuela-cazan-flamencos-para-consumo-humano-ante-escasez-de-alimentos-738883>. Accessed on 21 November 2023.

¹¹⁶⁶ <https://news.mongabay.com/2015/10/trafficked-tropical-animals-the-ghost-exports-of-venezuela/>. Accessed on 22 November 2023.

Mammals

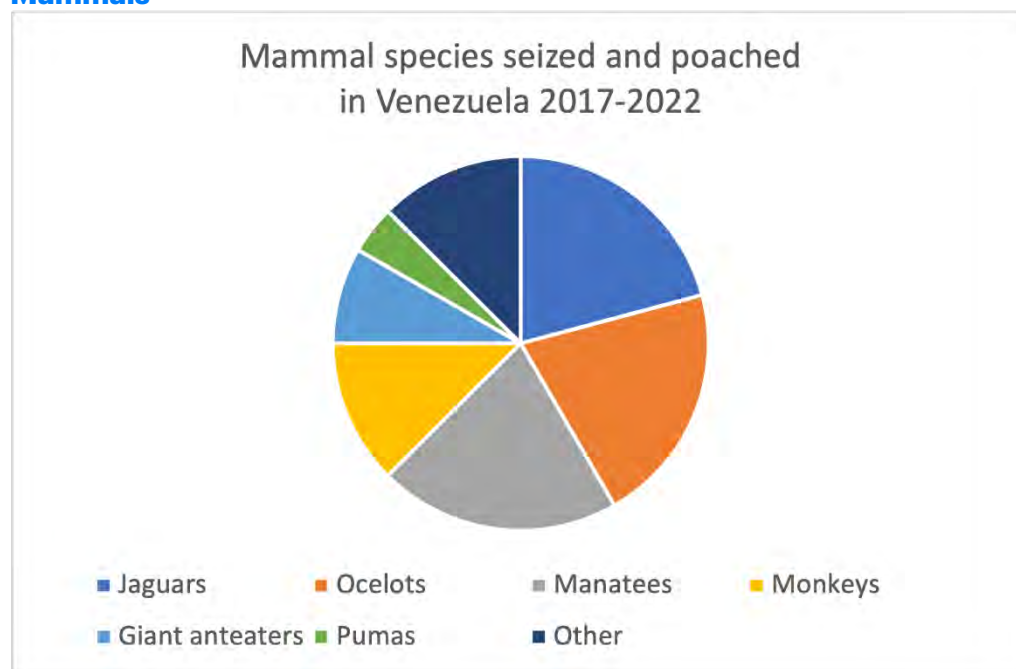


Figure 138: Mammal species seized or poached in Venezuela between 2017 and 2022, based on media reports

Like elsewhere in Latin America, jaguars (*Panthera onca*) in Venezuela are threatened by poaching. Five specimens were involved in four seizures and poaching incidents reported between 2017 and 2022. One incident occurred abroad, at Leipzig airport, Germany, in September 2018, when German Customs seized a jaguar skin and skull from an air cargo shipment originating from Venezuela which was destined for Spain. The parts were identified through X-ray after Customs selected the shipment as suspicious.¹¹⁶⁷

Curiously, the three jaguar poaching incidents in Venezuela were all reported in June and July of 2020, all in the far western state of Zulia. In June 2020, a man was arrested in Santa Barbara de Barinas for killing a jaguar after he had posted images of the dead animal slung on his motor bike on social media.¹¹⁶⁸ In July 2020, five men were arrested in Barinas for illegal possession of two jaguar cubs¹¹⁶⁹ (the men may have killed the cubs' mother), and four men were arrested in Sur del Lago in possession of the skin of a jaguar they had allegedly killed¹¹⁷⁰.

One wonders why no jaguar killings were reported at other times and in other parts of Venezuela, as jaguars also occur in the east, central north, and south of the country.¹¹⁷¹

Research of human-jaguar conflicts in Venezuela has found that subsistence/commercial hunting for their parts is the main driver for jaguar killing in Venezuela (responsible for 52% of human-caused mortality), more so than retaliatory killing in response to jaguar attacks on people's livestock (which is

¹¹⁶⁷ <https://www.nau.ch/news/europa/zollner-entdecken-jaguarfell-in-paket-aus-venezuela-65434679>. Accessed on 22 November 2023.

¹¹⁶⁸ <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/hombre-mato-a-un-jaguar-en-barinas-y-lo-exhibio-como-trofeo/>

¹¹⁶⁹ <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/detuvieron-a-cinco-personas-en-barinas-por-contrabando-y-caza-de-jaguar/>

¹¹⁷⁰ <https://www.laverdad.com/sucesos/169458-capturan-a-cuatro-cazadores-de-jaguar-en-el-sur-del-lago.html>

¹¹⁷¹ Jędrzejewski, W. et al (2011). Jaguar conservation in Venezuela against the backdrop of current knowledge on its biology and evolution. *Interciencia*. 36. 954. Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/220033215_Jaguar_conservation_in_Venezuela_against_the_backdrop_of_current_knowledge_on_its_biology_and_evolution. Accessed on 22 November 2023.

responsible for 38% of human-caused mortality). Jaguars are also killed because of public fear, attacks on pets, by trophy hunters, and in car accidents.¹¹⁷²

Ocelots (*Leopardus pardalis*) are also affected by poaching out of retaliation, for their skin, and for the pet trade. Five specimens were reported to be seized or poached, involving two live specimens kept as pets, two dead specimens, and one skin.

West-Indian manatees (*Trichechus manatus*) are threatened by indiscriminate poaching for their meat.¹¹⁷³ Five specimens were reported to be seized or poached, including two dead adults, two dead juveniles, and one live juvenile. The species is listed as critically endangered by IUCN and listed in CITES Appendix I. Manatees are found on the Venezuelan coasts, the Llanos, Lake Maracaibo, and especially in the Orinoco Delta, where the largest population of this species is believed to be.¹¹⁷⁴

Various sources report that baby monkeys are commonly poached from the wild and sold as pets domestically and abroad. The most exploited species are reportedly howler monkeys and capuchin monkeys.¹¹⁷⁵ However, only three specimens were reported to be seized, in two smuggling attempts intercepted by the Aruban and Curacaoan coast guards in 2021 and 2022 (mentioned above under 'Birds'). The species were not specified.

Wildlife poaching has reportedly surged during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Venezuela's Delta Amacuro state, wildlife once common in the Orinoco Delta, such as parrots, macaws, manatees, and deer are reaching the point of being extirpated to supply demand from Trinidad and Guyana. Collared peccary meat is also in high demand and driving unsustainable poaching. Indigenous communities (mainly Warao) confess that foreign buyers pay them in US dollars, allowing them to survive the economic hardship they are facing.¹¹⁷⁶

Reptiles

Only four reptiles were reported to be seized or poached between 2017 and 2022: two juvenile spectacled caimans (*Caiman crocodylus*); an anaconda (*Eunectes* sp.); and an unidentified tortoise.

One of the spectacled caimans was seized in December 2019 from a man who was carrying it in a bag in the streets of Caracas,¹¹⁷⁷ the other in July 2021 from the home of criminal boss 'El Koki' in La Cota, Caracas¹¹⁷⁸. The tortoise was seized in December 2021 by the coast guard of Curacao along with five parrots and two monkeys.¹¹⁷⁹ The anaconda was poached in the Orinoco River, Bolívar state, in December 2018. The fact became known when photos of the dead snake strapped to a car went viral.¹¹⁸⁰

¹¹⁷² Jędrzejewski, W. et al (2017). Human-jaguar conflicts and the relative importance of retaliatory killing and hunting for jaguar (*Panthera onca*) populations in Venezuela. *Biological Conservation*, Volume 209. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2017.03.025>. Accessed on 22 November 2023.

¹¹⁷³ <https://eldiario.com/2020/11/30/venta-ilegal-animales-silvestres-caracas/>. Accessed on 22 November 2023.

¹¹⁷⁴ <http://www.minec.gob.ve/minea-delta-amacuro-resguardo-manati-hembra/>. Accessed on 22 November 2023.

¹¹⁷⁵ <https://www.slideshare.net/gastondan/trfico-de-animales-en-venezuela>. Accessed on 24 November 2023.

¹¹⁷⁶ <https://www.raisg.org/en/radar/venezuela-contrabando-de-animales-en-delta-amacuro-amenaza-a-varias-especies/>

¹¹⁷⁷ <https://www.ntn24.com/noticias-actualidad/un-caiman-en-bulevar-de-caracas-detenido-hombre-que-llevaba-al-reptil-en-un-bolso-113588>. Accessed on 23 November 2023.

¹¹⁷⁸ <https://www.laprensalarara.com.ve/nota/33403/2021/07/rescatan-a-caiman-bebe-en-guarida-de-el-koki>. Accessed on 23 November 2023.

¹¹⁷⁹ <https://www.elnacional.com/mundo/guardia-costera-de-aruba-intercepto-a-22-balseros-venezolanos-que-llevaban-animales-exoticos/>.

Accessed on 23 November 2023.

¹¹⁸⁰ Robin des Bois On the Trail no. 23 p. 30 https://robindesbois.org/wp-content/uploads/ON_THE_TRAIL_23.pdf. Accessed on 23 November 2023.

Poaching and trafficking of reptiles and their parts and products is a concern, however. Spectacled caimans are targeted not only for the pet trade, but also for their skins. Colombia's leather goods industry is a key destination. This became apparent in March 2017, when Colombian authorities in La Guajira, bordering Zulia state, seized 906 spectacled caiman skins that had been smuggled from Venezuela. This was the largest ever seizure of caiman skins in Colombia. The skins were valued at 72,480,000 pesos (approximately US\$18,000).¹¹⁸¹

Snakes are the most common reptile species for sale in Maracaibo's Mercado Las Pulgas. They are sold as pets, for artisanal use of their skin, or to be used in religious cults.¹¹⁸²

Turtles and tortoises are also trafficked, including slider turtles (*Trachemys* sp.) and red-footed tortoises (*Chelonoidis carbonaria*).¹¹⁸³ The latter are frequently observed for sale in the streets of Catia, Caracas.¹¹⁸⁴

Consumption of iguanas is not a tradition in the country, yet hunger has reportedly driven Venezuelans to hunting iguanas and other wild animals. The state of Zulia, the richest in the nation, is paradoxically where the greatest number of malnourished people are reported.¹¹⁸⁵

Marine turtles are seriously threatened as poaching has surged in the last decade, fuelled by poverty. Marine turtle meat, shell, and other products, such as exotic dishes, are sold in markets across the country, while turtle nests are looted for their eggs. Marine turtles are a protected species in Venezuela, but the Organic Law of indigenous peoples and communities (Ley orgánica de pueblos y comunidades indígenas) states that indigenous peoples and communities have the right to sustainable use and exploitation of the environment and biodiversity. 'The waters, flora, fauna and all the natural resources found in their habitat and lands may be used by the indigenous peoples and communities for their development and traditional activities'. According to activists, this law provides a loophole for illegal trade and overexploitation, especially in the coastal areas, as traffickers buy the marine turtle parts from indigenous community members. The Gulf of Venezuela and the border with Colombia are the hotspots for illegal sale, with great demand internationally. The issue is so politically sensitive that activists are afraid to speak up.¹¹⁸⁶

Amphibians

Only one amphibian was reported to be seized between 2017 and 2022. This concerned a baby Mexican axolotl (*Ambystoma mexicanum*, CITES Appendix II), which was found in a bag under an image of the Virgin of Carmen in a church somewhere in Venezuela.¹¹⁸⁷ Axolotls, native only to the freshwater of Lake Xochimilco and Lake Chalco in the Valley of Mexico, are listed as 'Critically Endangered' on IUCN's Red List. It is believed between 50 and 1,000 mature individuals survive in the wild.¹¹⁸⁸ It is unclear how and why the axolotl ended up in a church in Venezuela. A Venezuelan wildlife veterinary expert who was called in to care for the animal suggested that it had been bred in captivity by someone in Venezuela.

¹¹⁸¹ <https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/otras-ciudades/detectan-traffic-de-pieles-de-babilla-en-frontera-65756>. Accessed on 30 October 2023.

¹¹⁸² <https://www.animanaturalis.org/n/44716/mercado-ilegal-de-fauna-silvestre-prolifera-en-maracaibo>

¹¹⁸³ <https://www.slideshare.net/gastondan/trfico-de-animales-en-venezuela>

¹¹⁸⁴ <https://eldiario.com/2020/11/30/venta-ilegal-animales-silvestres-caracas/>

¹¹⁸⁵ <https://www.cibercuba.com/videos/noticias/2017-11-29-u43231-e43231-venezolanos-cazan-iguanas-paliar-hambre>. Accessed on 22 November 2023.

¹¹⁸⁶ <https://elestimulo.com/venezuela/2018-11-07/la-caza-ilegal-de-tortugas-crece-sin-control-desde-2014/>

¹¹⁸⁷ <https://www.atb.com.bo/2021/11/19/rescatan-en-venezuela-a-un-bebe-de-ajolote-mexicano-en-peligro-critico-de-extincion-que-fue-abandonado-en-una-iglesia/>

¹¹⁸⁸ <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/1095/53947343>

Key geographical/logistical trafficking nodes

Type of incident ● Poaching ● Seizure

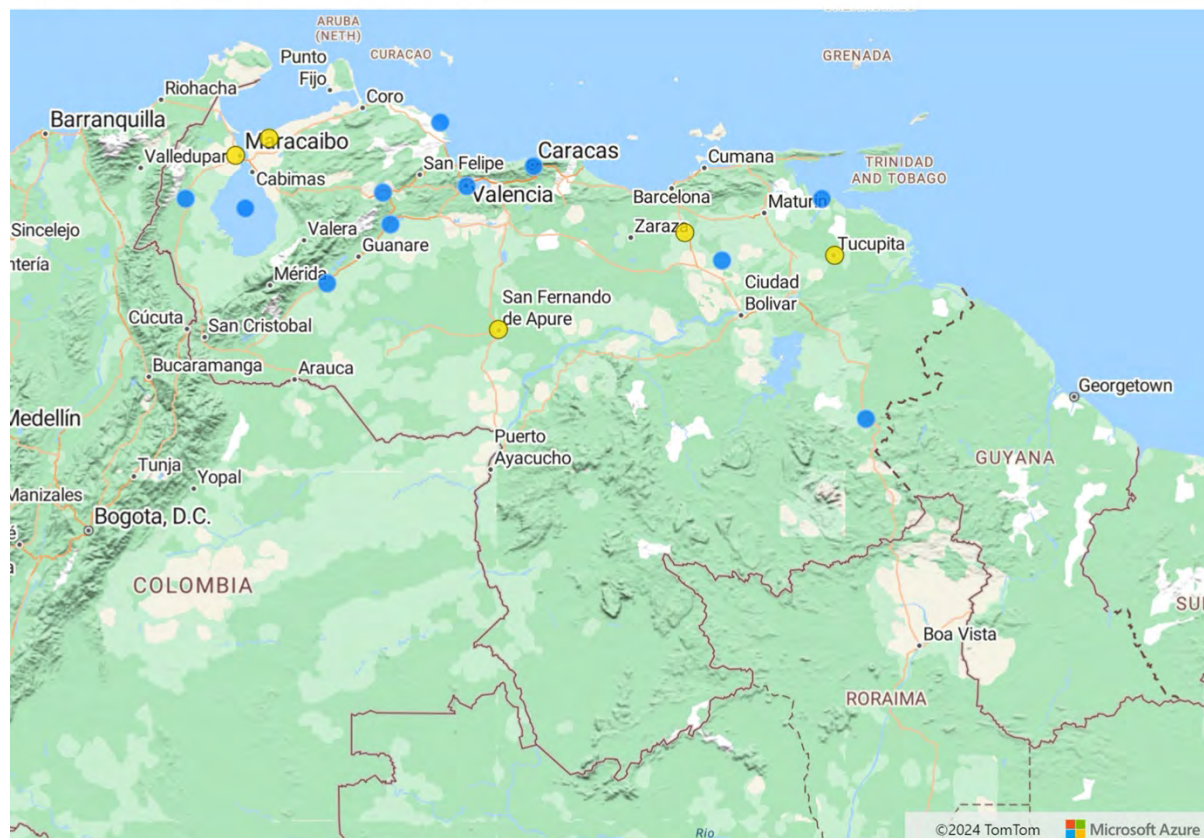


Figure 139: Locations of seizures and poaching incidents in Venezuela reported between 2017 and 2022

Sales in markets and along roads

No seizures were found related to wildlife sales in physical outlets such as markets and shops. However, a major hotspot for illegal wildlife sales is the Mercado de Las Pulgas, in Maracaibo, Venezuela's second-largest city and the capital of the state of Zulia. Wildlife traffickers operate with impunity here, allegedly facilitated by major organized crime syndicates. Macaws and monkeys are the most sold species in this market.¹¹⁸⁹

Wildlife is also commonly sold along roads. A well-known hub for such street sales is the neighbourhood of Catia in Caracas. Here, people offer wild animals like birds and turtles piled up in small cages along busy sidewalks.¹¹⁹⁰ In 2021, social media users decried the sales of macaws and parrots in the streets of Catia. A street vendor was filmed offering a macaw for US\$80 and a black-headed parrot for US\$60.¹¹⁹¹

Wild animals sold in streets and markets to impulsive buyers passing by generally live short lives, as people usually lack the knowledge required to provide them with adequate care.¹¹⁹²

¹¹⁸⁹ <https://www.animanaturalis.org/n/44716/mercado-ilegal-de-fauna-silvestre-prolifera-en-maracaibo;>
<https://news.mongabay.com/2015/10/trafficked-tropical-animals-the-ghost-exports-of-venezuela/>. Accessed on 22 November 2023.

¹¹⁹⁰ <https://eldiario.com/2020/11/30/venta-ilegal-animales-silvestres-caracas/>. Accessed on 22 November 2023.

¹¹⁹¹ <https://www.todosahora.com/noticias-de-venezuela/denuncian-venta-de-guacamayas-en-catia-por-70-dolares/>. Accessed on 21 November 2023.

¹¹⁹² <https://eldiario.com/2020/11/30/venta-ilegal-animales-silvestres-caracas/>. Accessed on 22 November 2023.

Trafficking by road

Roads remain the most common route used by traffickers, domestically and across the nearly 5,000 km border that Venezuela shares with Colombia, Brazil, and Guyana. The few seizures identified by this study were made during routine inspections. For example, in March 2020, six military macaws and ten parrot chicks (species unidentified) were seized in the town of Freites, state of Anzoátegui, from a public bus during a routine inspection. The bus came from Maturin and was headed for Valencia, a distance of nearly 700 km, illustrating the distances travelled by trafficked wild animals.¹¹⁹³

Trafficking by boat

Wildlife is also smuggled out by sea from Venezuela's porous 2,800 km coastline. Several seizures discussed in this section have highlighted that wildlife is systematically smuggled to the Caribbean on boats. Reportedly, wildlife is also smuggled in containers on cargo ships leaving Puerto La Cruz, an Eastern Venezuelan seaport.¹¹⁹⁴

Trafficking by air

Two incidents were recorded which highlight that Venezuelan wildlife has been trafficked by air to Dominican Republic and Europe (also see below under Transboundary trafficking routes). This confirms other reports that wildlife is smuggled abroad by air. Songbirds, for example, are reportedly smuggled inside gift boxes with small breathing holes cut into them. They pass through airport security as hand luggage because the birds aren't detected by x-ray machines, as their bones are hollow. The birds are hidden from sunlight throughout the journey to keep them from singing.¹¹⁹⁵

Sales on social media

The dissemination of advertisements related to the sale of wild fauna and flora has been prohibited in Venezuela since September 2013.¹¹⁹⁶ Illegal online wildlife trade is therefore acknowledged to be a matter of concern in the country, yet no seizures were identified of wild animals trafficked online.

Convergence

As noted above, this study has identified three seizures of boats carrying Venezuelan wildlife and migrants to Aruba and Curaçao, indicative of a convergence between human and wildlife trafficking. As continued economic, political, and humanitarian crises in Venezuela have urged more than seven million Venezuelans to flee the country, many become victims of sex and labour trafficking. The Caribbean islands are known destinations for wildlife and humans smuggled from Venezuela. A human trafficking network is operating between Venezuela and Caribbean countries, with members of the Maduro regime allegedly complicit. Media sources have reported the Maduro regime charged US\$300 to US\$400 to allow the departure of boats transporting trafficking victims to nearby Caribbean islands.¹¹⁹⁷

Transboundary trafficking routes

Seizures identified by this study illustrate that Venezuela is a major source for wildlife trafficked by land to Colombia, by sea to several Caribbean islands, and by air to Dominican Republic. Other sources also

¹¹⁹³ https://www.robindesbois.org/wp-content/uploads/ON_THE_TRAIL_28.pdf. Accessed on 22 November 2023.

¹¹⁹⁴ <https://news.mongabay.com/2015/10/trafficked-tropical-animals-the-ghost-exports-of-venezuela/>. Accessed on 22 November 2023.

¹¹⁹⁵ <https://news.mongabay.com/2015/10/trafficked-tropical-animals-the-ghost-exports-of-venezuela/>

¹¹⁹⁶ <https://www.animanaturalis.org/n/venezuela-prohibe-publicidad-relacionada-con-la-venta-fauna-a-traves-de-internet>

¹¹⁹⁷ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/venezuela/>

point to Brazil, Guyana, Suriname as key destinations, including for songbirds.¹¹⁹⁸ It is likely that a portion of the wildlife that reaches the Caribbean is sent on to the USA, Europe, and possibly Asia.

Venezuela > Trinidad and Tobago

In June 2020, 47 birds were smuggled to Trinidad and Tobago from Venezuela.¹¹⁹⁹

Venezuela > Aruba

In August 2022, a boat with 26 parakeets, two monkeys, and 22 Venezuelans was intercepted in Aruba.¹²⁰⁰ The boat likely sailed from the nearby Venezuelan Paraguaná Peninsula, a smuggling route also used for gold and drugs.¹²⁰¹

Venezuela > Curaçao

In September 2021, a boat with two macaws and 18 Venezuelans was seized in Curaçao, followed by another boat with five parrots, a monkey, a tortoise, and 33 Venezuelans in December 2021.

Venezuela > Colombia

Colombia sees a constant, daily influx of thousands of Venezuelans seeking to sell contraband in Colombia to earn a livelihood. Colombian Customs officials are unable to control the influx across the 2,294 km border with Venezuela. The Colombian city of Cúcuta in the Colombian Department of Norte de Santander is a key entry point. Around 45,000 people cross the Simón Bolívar international bridge on foot every day, and the Táchira River, which divides the border between Venezuela and Colombia, is full of trails along which traffickers move day and night. The smuggling includes massive amounts of meat from domestic livestock, but trafficking of wild meat from iguanas and live wildlife has also been reported.¹²⁰²

Two seizures of wildlife smuggled from Venezuela were recorded in Colombia:

- ▶ In March 2017, 906 spectacled caiman skins from Venezuela were seized in the far northeast of Colombia, on the border between La Guajira department and Zulia state in Venezuela.¹²⁰³
- ▶ In August 2017, 34 red-footed tortoise hatchlings were seized from a Venezuelan man at Bogotá's bus terminal. The man had travelled 900 km by bus from the central Venezuelan state of Guárico to sell the tortoises in Cali.¹²⁰⁴

Venezuela > Dominican Republic

In October 2022, a truck with 60 wild birds and two giant anteaters was seized that was headed for Maiquetía's International Airport for transfer to Dominican Republic.¹²⁰⁵

¹¹⁹⁸ <https://news.mongabay.com/2015/10/trafficked-tropical-animals-the-ghost-exports-of-venezuela/>. Accessed on 22 November 2023.

¹¹⁹⁹ <https://www.aporrea.org/pachamama/n355810.html>

¹²⁰⁰ <https://www.elnacional.com/mundo/guardia-costera-de-aruba-intercepto-a-22-balseros-venezolanos-que-llevaban-animales-exoticos/>

¹²⁰¹ <https://cronicasdelcaribe.com/sociales/complices-en-trafico-de-oro-desde-venezuela-se-pelean-por-pago-de-indemnizacion/>;

<https://www.eluniversal.com/venezuela/30071/detenidos-lancheros-investigados-por-trafico-de-droga-y-personas-hacia-aruba>

¹²⁰² <https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/venezuela-contrabando-de-carne-a-colombia/534146/>;

<https://www.catorce6.com/denuncia/15411-la-frontera-colombo-venezolana-es-un-punto-critico-de-trafico-de-fauna-silvestre-universidad-nacional>. Accessed on 23 November 2023.

¹²⁰³ <https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/otras-ciudades/detectan-trafico-de-pieles-de-babilla-en-frontera-65756>

¹²⁰⁴ <https://www.elespectador.com/bogota/recuperan-en-bogota-34-tortugas-morrococoy-que-eran-transportadas-de-forma-ilegal-article-876689/>. Accessed on 1 November 2023.

¹²⁰⁵ <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/detenidos-dos-hombres-por-contrabando-de-fauna-silvestre-en-portuguesa/>

Venezuela > Europe (Spain)

In September 2018, German Customs seized a jaguar skin and skull from a freight shipment originating from Venezuela and destined for Spain.¹²⁰⁶

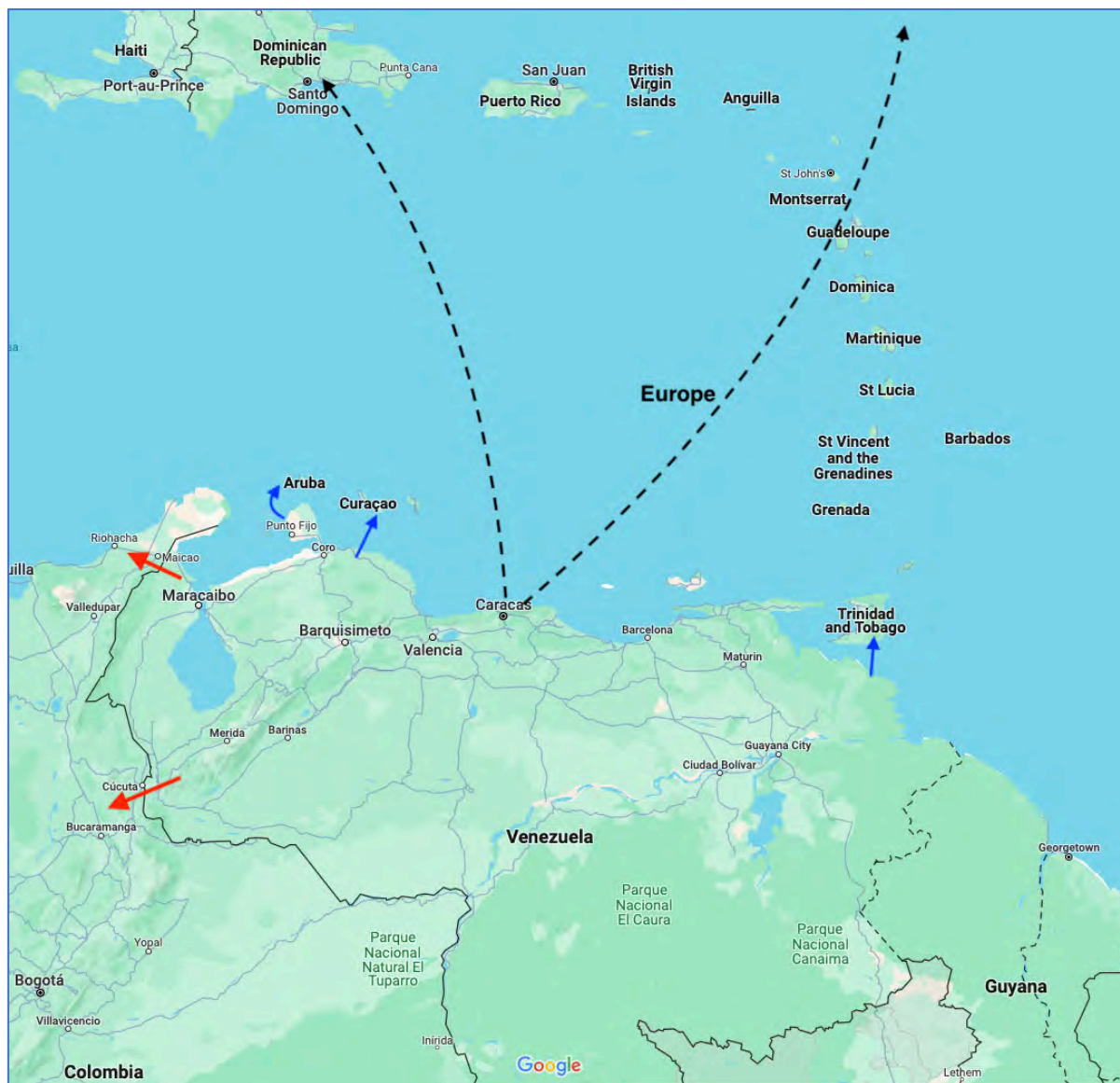


Figure 14065: Transboundary wildlife trafficking routes from Venezuela based on seizures reported between 2017 and 2022.

Law enforcement efforts

Twenty-four people were arrested in nine incidents. Therefore, 39% of the 23 seizures and poaching incidents reported in Venezuela between 2017 and 2022 resulted in arrest. This is much higher than the regional average of 27%. It can be called commendable that Venezuelan law enforcers are intercepting wildlife poachers and traffickers, given that Venezuela is considered a fragile state with high levels of organized crime, a lack of governance and lack of political will to dismantle criminal groups, and deep-rooted corruption, including in the criminal justice system.¹²⁰⁷

¹²⁰⁶ <https://www.nau.ch/news/europa/zollner-entdecken-jaguarfell-in-paket-aus-venezuela-65434679>

¹²⁰⁷ <https://ocindex.net/country/venezuela>. Accessed on 21 November 2023.

In 2019, according to the information provided by Attorney General Tarek William Saab to El Nacional, the public prosecutors' office registered 78 cases of wildlife poaching. An increase in cases was seen in 2020, as the number of wildlife poaching cases totalled 51 in the first half year. The highest number of cases was registered in the state of Delta Amacuro. Wildlife poaching cases are reportedly prosecuted in accordance with article 77 of the Environmental Criminal Law (Ley Penal del Ambiente), which provides prison terms of between three and five years or fines of between 3,000 UT (US\$54) and 5,000 UT (US\$89).¹²⁰⁸ No media reports were found of people successfully prosecuted, however.

¹²⁰⁸ <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/denuncias-de-maltrato-animal-y-caceria-furtiva-abren-paso-a-una-nueva-ley-penal-del-ambiente/>. Accessed on 21 November 2023.

Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion and recommendations

This study set out to compile and analyse data on wildlife seizures and poaching incidents reported in the media between 2017 and 2022 in the 18 countries of Hispanic America. It has succeeded in generating an unprecedented range of data, providing an important baseline to inform the understanding of illegal exploitation of reptiles, birds, mammals, and amphibians in Hispanic America. The following conclusions emerge from this study.

First and foremost, the data demonstrate that illegal wildlife exploitation is pervasive across Hispanic America, affecting a myriad of species and significant numbers of wildlife. As was noted several times throughout this report, the seizures and poaching data collected for this study represent just a fraction of actual levels of wildlife poaching and trafficking in Hispanic America. Even so, the data provide valuable insights concerning key trafficking hotspots and trafficking routes; species most affected; the high percentage of live animals trafficked; the significance of domestic versus foreign demand; drivers for poaching and trafficking; indications for organised crime involvement and crime convergence; and noteworthy trends, such as the rise in illegal online sales. The data also draw forth important considerations concerning the impacts of wildlife crime on species' conservation; animal welfare; public health; and the need to ensure adequate rescue and rehabilitation facilities. Finally, the data suggest that fighting wildlife crime is not a priority in most if not all Hispanic American countries, resulting in insufficient allocation for responsible law enforcement agencies. Although laudable successes against wildlife crime networks are reported in some countries, law enforcement responses to illegal wildlife exploitation are predominantly reactive and by and large fail to effectively disrupt and dismantle wildlife crime networks.

Recommendations

The following recommendations represent opportunities to more effectively fight wildlife poaching and trafficking in Hispanic America.

The governments of Hispanic America are urged to:

- ▶ Strengthen efforts to fight wildlife poaching and trafficking in line with the Lima Declaration on Illegal Wildlife Trade of 4 October 2019, which was adopted by all Hispanic American countries except for Cuba and Venezuela. The Declaration contains a holistic set of commitments to enhance responses to wildlife poaching and trafficking in Hispanic America and the Caribbean region, with an emphasis on:
 - ▶ Strengthening domestic laws, including by recognising wildlife poaching and trafficking as serious crimes and by addressing wildlife crime linked to the internet with effective penalties and sanctions.
 - ▶ Strengthening criminal justice responses to illegal wildlife trade, including by strengthening public institutions engaged in fighting wildlife poaching and trafficking; adopting financial investigation techniques; strengthening cross-border and regional cooperation; and leveraging innovative new technologies and tools that can facilitate the identification and control of illegal trade in wildlife species, their parts, and derivatives.
 - ▶ Raising public awareness and reducing consumer demand for wildlife, including by encouraging active participation by and close collaboration with indigenous peoples, local communities, civil society organisations, the private sector, and academia.

- ▶ Inasmuch as they are not covered by the Lima Declaration, Hispanic American governments are furthermore urged to implement the following specific measures:
 - ▶ Enhance monitoring and investigations of illegal online wildlife trade, including through partnerships with internet service providers, civil society organisations, and academia.
 - ▶ Adopt and apply dissuasive and proportionate penalties and sanctions.
 - ▶ Increase surveillance and controls of illegal trade in wildlife species that poses risks for zoonotic disease transmission, such as the trafficking of live monkeys and monkey parts.
 - ▶ Ensure that there are adequate facilities to rescue and rehabilitate and, where appropriate, provide long-term, expert care for live wild animals seized from poachers and traffickers.

Donor countries, agencies, and international financial institutions are urged to contribute to efforts by Hispanic American states to fight wildlife poaching and trafficking through the provision of funding and technical assistance in support of countries' national, cross-border, and subregional efforts.

International organisations and civil society organisations are urged to provide technical assistance in support of countries' national, cross-border and subregional efforts to address wildlife crime.

Annexes

Annex 1—Search terms used for data collection

English	Spanish search terms	In combination with
Wild animals	Animales silvestres	Rescatan
Wildlife	Vida silvestre, fauna silvestre	Decomisan
Wild birds	Aves silvestres	Secuestran
Birds	Aves	Incautan
Macaws	Guacamayas, parabas, guaras	Denuncian
Parrots	Loros, cotorras	Venta ilegal
Parakeets	Pericos, periquitos	Trafico ilicito
Songbirds	Pajaros cantores	Redes sociales
Toucans	Tucanes	Matan, mataron
Andean condor	Condor andino	Caza furtiva
Reptiles	Reptiles	Cazadores
Tortoises, turtles	Tortugas (marina, charapa, hicotea, motelo, taricaya)	Aeropuerto
Snakes, boa, python	Serpientes, boa, piton, culebra	Aduana
Caiman, crocodile	Caiman, cocodrilo, lagarto, babilla, yacare	
Iguanas	Iguanas	
Lizards	Lagartijas	
Frogs (poisonous)	Ranas (venenosas)	
Monkey	Mono	
Anteater, tamandua	Oso hormiguero	
Sloth, sloth bear	Oso perezoso	
Jaguar	Jaguar, yaguaraté, otorongo, tigre mariposa	
Tiger	Tigre	
Lion	Leon	
Puma	Puma	
Ocelot	Ocelote, tigrillo	
Tigrillo	Tigrillo	
Margay	Caucel, tigrillo	
Jaguarundi	Yaguarundi	
Fox	Zorro	
Armadillo	Quirquincho	
Vicuña	Vicuña	
Wild meat, bushmeat	Carne silvestre, carne de monte	
Eggs	Huevos (in combination with tortugas, iguanas, aves silvestres, loros, guacamayas)	
Cubs (wild cats)	Cachorros	
Hatchlings (bird)	Pichones	
Hatchlings (reptile)	Crías	

Annex 2—Wildlife species reported to be poached/trafficked in Hispanic America (2017-2022)

Latin name	CITES App. (date of listing)	English common name	Spanish common name
BIRDS			
<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>	II (2013)	Cooper's hawk	halcon; gavilán de cooper (MX)
<i>Accipiter striatus ventralis</i>		Plain-breasted hawk	gavilán de sierra (PE)
<i>Acridotheres cristatellus</i>		Crested myna	estornino crestado; mirlo moñudo (AR)
<i>Agapornis roseicollis</i>		Rosy-faced lovebird	inseparable de Namibia
<i>Aix galericulata</i>		Mandarin duck	Pato mandarin (DR)
<i>Amazona aestiva</i>	II (2005)	Turquoise-fronted amazon	loro hablador, loro paraguayo (AR, PY); loro amazonico frente azul (BO); lora (de) frente celeste, loro frente azul (SV)
<i>Amazona albifrons</i>	II (2005)	White-fronted amazon	loro frente blanca/cara blanca (CO, MX); loro/cotorra guayabera (MX); cotorra/lora frente blanca (SV)
<i>Amazona amazonica</i>	II (2005)	Orange-winged amazon	loro amazona amazónica, lora alianaranjada, loro curumare (CO); lora alinaranja, loro mejilla amarilla (EC); loro de alas naranjas (PE)
<i>Amazona auropalliata</i>	I (2003)	Yellow-naped amazon	perico frente amarilla/nuca amarilla (CO); lora nuca amarilla (SV); loro de cuello amarillo (GT)
<i>Amazona autumnalis</i>	II (2005)	Red-lored amazon	lora copete roja, loro de frente roja (SV); loro flor roja (CO); loro de cachete amarillo, loro mejillas amarillas, loro cochá, perico/cotorra cucha, amazona frentiroja (MX)
<i>Amazona farinosa</i>	II (2005)	Southern mealy amazon	loro verde (CR); loro aurora (PE); loro corona azul/cabeza azul (MX)
<i>Amazona festiva</i>	II (2005)	Festive amazon	loro lomo rojo (PE)
<i>Amazona finschi</i>	I (2005)	Lilac-crowned amazon	loro frente roja, loro corona lila, perico de corona lila, cotorra guayabera (MX)
<i>Amazona ochrocephala</i>	II (2007)	Yellow-crowned amazon	loro amazona, amazona real, loro real (CO), lora frentiamarilla (CO); loro frente amarilla (PE, DR); lora de cresta amarilla (HO)
<i>Amazona oratrix</i>	I (2003)	Yellow-headed amazon	perico frente verde; loro cabeza amarilla (MX); loro aurora de cabeza amarilla (PE); loro moña amarilla (PA)
<i>Amazona tucumana</i>	I (1990)	Tucumán amazon	loro alicero (AR)
<i>Amazona ventralis</i>	II (2005)	Hispaniolan amazon	cotorra (DR)
<i>Amazona viridigenalis</i>	I (1997)	Red-crowned amazon	loro tamaulipeco, loro de cabeza roja (MX); loro moña roja (PA)
<i>Amazona xantholora</i>	II (2005)	Yucatan amazon	loro yucateo (MX)
<i>Amazonetta brasiliensis</i>		Brazilian teal (duck species)	pato cutiri
<i>Anisognathus somptuosus</i>		Blue-winged mountain tanager	tangara boliviana
<i>Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus</i>	I (1987)	Hyacinth macaw	guacamayo azul (AR), paraba azul (BO)
<i>Aphelocoma ultramarina</i>		Transvolcanic jay	chara mexicana (MX)
<i>Apodidae sp.</i>		Swift	vencejo (PE)

<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	II (2013)	Golden eagle	águila real
<i>Ara ambiguus</i>	I (1985)	Great green macaw	lapa verde (CR)
<i>Ara araurana</i>	II (2005)	Blue and yellow macaw	guacamayo azul y amarillo (AR); guacamayo azul; gonzalo (CO); paraba azul (BO, DR); paraba amarilla (BO)
<i>Ara chloropterus</i>	II (2005)	Red and green macaw	guacamayo rojo (AR, DR, VZ), paraba roja (BO)
<i>Ara macao</i>	I (1985)	Scarlet macaw	guara roja (HO, SV); guacamaya roja (HO, SV, MX); paraba roja (BO); lapa roja (CR); guacamaya roja y amarilla; guacamaya bandera (CO, PA, VZ); guacamayo escarlata (PE)
<i>Ara militaris</i>	I (1987)	Military macaw	guacamaya verde; guacamayo militar (PE, MX); guara verde (SV)
<i>Ara rubrogenys</i>	I (1983)	Red-fronted macaw	paraba frente roja; paraba verde cabeza roja (BO)
<i>Ara severus</i>	II (2005)	Chestnut-fronted macaw	parabachi (BO), guacamaya caríseca (CO)
<i>Aratinga acuticaudata</i>	II (2005)	Blue-crowned parakeet	aratinga de cabeza azul (PY); loro calancate (AR)
<i>Aratinga canicularis</i>	II (2005)	Orange-fronted parakeet	perico catano (CR); perico/cotorrito/loro atolero, perico frente naranja/frentinaranja (MX); perica guayabera (GT); chocoyo (SV)
<i>Aratinga mitrata</i>	II (2005)	Mitred parakeet	loro frente roja (PE); loro cabeza roja (BO)
<i>Aratinga nana</i>	II (2005)	Olive-throated parakeet	perico pecho suizo, perico azteca, loro pechisucio (MX)
<i>Aratinga nenday</i>	II (2005)	Nanday parakeet	ñanday, loro cabeza negra; nandays nenday (PY)
<i>Aratinga pertinax</i>	II (2005)	Brown-throated parakeet	perico carisucio (CO), cotorra carisucia (CO)
<i>Ardea melanocephala</i>		Black-headed heron	garza negra
<i>Arremonops conirostris</i>		Black striped sparrow	tumba yegua (CO)
<i>Arremonops tocuyensis</i>		Tocuyo sparrow	canario guajiro (CO)
<i>Athene cunicularia</i>		Burrowing owl	lechuza de las vizcacheras (AR)
<i>Aulacorhynchus prasinus</i>		Emerald toucanet	tucaneta verde (MX)
<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>		Cedar waxwing	chinito (MX)
<i>Brotogeris chiriri</i>	II (2005)	Yellow-chevroned parakeet	catita; tui catita (PY)
<i>Brotogeris cyanopectera</i>	II (2005)	Cobalt-winged parakeet	pihuicho ala azul (PE)
<i>Brotogeris jugularis</i>	II (2005)	Orange-chinned parakeet	perico bronceado (CO); catalnica, periquito barbinaranja (SV); perico zapoyol (CR)
<i>Brotogeris pyrrhoptera</i>	II (2005)	Grey-cheeked parakeet	perico de mejilla gris (PE)
<i>Brotogeris sanctithomae</i>	II (2005)	Tui parakeet	perico tui (PE)
<i>Brotogeris versicolurus</i>	II (2005)	White-winged parakeet	pihuicho (ala amarilla), perico esmeralda (PE); perico ala amarilla (MX)
<i>Bubo virginianus</i>	II (2013)	Great horned owl	búho, búho virginianus (CO); búho cornudo (MX); ñakurutú (PY)
<i>Bucconidae sp.</i>		Puffbird	bucco (PE)
<i>Buteo albicaudatus</i>	II (1979)	White-tailed hawk	aguililla cola blanca, aguililla alas largas (MX)
<i>Buteo brachyurus</i>	II (2013)	Short-tailed hawk	gavilán colicorto
<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	II (2013)	Red-tailed hawk	halcón de cola roja (GT, MX), aguililla cola roja (MX)
<i>Buteo nitidus</i>	II (1979)	Gray-lined hawk	aguililla gris (MX)
<i>Buteo polyosoma</i>	II (2013)	Red-backed hawk	aguilucho (PE)

Buteo Swainsoni	II (2013)	Swainson's hawk	águila cuaresmera (CO)
Buteogallus meridionalis	II (2013)	Savanna hawk	gavilán sabanero
Cacatua alba	II (2005)	White cockatoo	cacatua alba (MX); cacatúa blanca (DR)
Cacatua galerita	II (2005)	Sulphur-crested cockatoo	cacatua galerita (MX)
Cacatua moluccensis	I (1990)	Salmon-crested cockatoo	cacatúa moluca (MX)
Cacicus solitarius		Solitary cacique	Cacique; boyero (AR)
Calamospiza melonocorys		Lark bunting	turco, gorrión ala blanca (MX)
Calocitta colliei		Black-throated magpie jay	urraca copetona cara negra (MX)
Calocitta formosa		White-throated magpie jay	urraca hermosa, urraca copetona, urraca cara blanca (MX)
Caracara cheriway	II (2013)	Northern crested caracara	caracara, quebrantahuesos (MX)
Caracara plancus	II (2013)	Crested caracara	halcón cara cara (MX)
Cardinalis cardinalis		Northern cardinal	cardenal, cardenal norteño, cardenal rojo (MX)
Cardinalis phoeniceus		Vermillion cardinal	cardenal guajiro, rey guajiro (CO)
Cardinalis sinuatus		Pyrrhuloxia	cardenal zaino (MX)
Carduelis carduelis	III (2021/22)	European goldfinch	cardelino, jilguero europeo (AR)
Carpodacus mexicanus		House finch	gorrion mexicano, pinzón mexicano (MX)
Casuaris sp.		Cassowary	casuarina (MX)
Catamenia analis		Band-tailed seedeater	piquito de oro, semillero (CO); piquito de oro (AR)
Cathartes burrovianus		Lesser yellow-headed vulture	gallinazo de cabeza amarilla (PE)
Catharus ustulatus		Swainson's thrush	zorzal (MX)
Chlorornis riefferii		Grass-green tanager	tangara verde esmeralda
Chrysolophus pictus		Golden pheasant	faisán dorado
Chrysomus icterocephalus		Yellow-hooded blackbird	turpial de agua
Coccothraustes abeillei		Hooded grosbeak	pico grueso encapuchados (MX)
Coccothraustes coccothraustes		Hawfinch	picogordo
Colaptes rupicola		Andean flicker	carpintero andino; pito (PE)
Colorhamphus parvirostris		Patagonian tyrant	viudita (AR, CL)
Columba palumbus		Common wood pigeon	paloma torcaza
Coragyps atratus		Black vulture	zopilote negro, golero (CO); gallinazo (EC)
Corvus corax		Common raven	cuervo (MX)
Corvus leucognahalus		White-necked crow	cuervo de la Española/cuervo de cuello blanco (DR)
Coryphospingus cucullatus		Red-pileated finch	corbata, brasita de fuego, soldadito crestirrojo (AR)
Coscoroba coscoroba		Coscoroba swan	cisne coscoroba (AR)
Coturnix coturnix		Common quail	codorniz común (AR)
Crax alberti	III (1988)	Blue-billed curassow	Paujil Pico Azul
Crax fasciolata		Bare-faced curassow	muitú (PY)

<i>Crax rubra</i>	III (1981/87/88)	Great curassow	Paujil (SV); hocofaisán (MX)
<i>Crypturellus obsoletus</i>		Brown tinamou	perdiz de monte
<i>Cyanocompsa brissonii</i>		Ultramarine grosbeak	reina mora (AR)
<i>Cyanocompsa parellina</i>		Blue bunting	zigolo blu
<i>Cyanocorax affinis</i>		Black-chested jay	carriqui pechi blanco (CO), pájaro Chau Chau (CO)
<i>Cyanocorax chrysops</i>		Plush-crested jay	urraca paraguaya
<i>Cyanocorax yncas</i>		Inca jay	chara verde, querequerre, urraca verde (MX)
<i>Cyanoliseus patagonus</i>	II (2005)	Burrowing parrot	loro barranquero
<i>Cyanoliseus patagonus bloxami</i>	II (2005)	Chilean burrowing parakeet	loro tricahue (CL)
<i>Cyanoloxia cyanoides</i>		Blue-black grosbeak	picogrueso negriazul
<i>Cygnus atratus</i>		Black swan	cisne negro (MX)
<i>Cygnus olor</i>		Mute swan	cisne blanco (MX)
<i>Cyclarhis gujanensis</i>		Rufous-browed peppershrike	juan chiviro (AR)
<i>Dendrocygna autumnalis</i>	III (1987)	Black-bellied whistling duck	pato putirí, pato cimarron, guichichi (BO, PA); pijije (GT)
<i>Diopsittaca nobilis</i>	II (2005)	Red-shouldered macaw	guacamayo ara nobilis (DR)
<i>Diuca diuca</i>		Diuca finch	diuka (AR)
<i>Dives warszewiczi</i>		Scrub blackbird	tordo de matorral
<i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>		Bobolink	charlatan (AR)
<i>Dromaius novaehollandiae</i>		Emu	emú común
<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>		Gray catbird	zorzal gato (AR)
<i>Egretta thula</i>		Snowy egret	garza blanca (MX)
<i>Elanus leucurus</i>	II (2013)	White-tailed kite	gavilán maromero; milano cola blanca (MX)
<i>Embernagra platensis</i>		Pampa finch	verdón (AR)
<i>Enicognathus leptorhynchus</i>	II (2005)	Slender-billed parakeet	loro choroy (CL)
<i>Eubucco bourcierii</i>		Red-headed barbet	barbudo cabecirrojo
<i>Eupherusa ridgwayi</i>		Mexican woodnymph	ave ninfa, ninfa Mexicana (MX)
<i>Euphonia cyanocephala</i>		Golden-rumped euphonia	tangará cabeza celeste
<i>Euphonia elegantissima</i>		Elegant euphonia	eufonia de capucha azul (MX); agüío (CR)
<i>Euphonia lanirostris</i>		Thick-billed euphonia	eufonia (PE)
<i>Falco hypoleucos</i>	II (2013)	Grey falcon	Halcon gris
<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	I (1977)	Peregrine falcon	halcon
<i>Falco ruficularis</i>	II (2013)	Bat falcon	halcón murcielaguero (CO)
<i>Falco sparverius</i>	II (2013)	American kestrel	cernícalo (PE); halcón cernícalo (MX)
<i>Forpus coelestis</i>	II (2005)	Pacific parrotlet	cotorrita de piura
<i>Forpus conspicillatus</i>	II (2005)	Spectacled parrotlet	perico/cotorra de anteojos, perico cascabelito (CO)
<i>Forpus cyanopygius</i>	II (2005)	Mexican parrotlet	periquito catarino (MX)

Forpus passerinus	II (2005)	Green-rumped parrotlet	perico hachero: perico (cola) verde (CO)
Forpus xanthopterygius	II (2005)	Cobalt-rumped parrotlet	cotorra; perico ala azul (SV)
Furnarius cinnamomeus		Pacific hornero	chilala
Furnarius rufus		Rufous hornero	hornero (AR)
Galbulidae sp.		Jacamar	jacamara (PE)
Geococcyx californianus		Greater roadrunner	correcamino (MX)
Geranoaetus melanoleucus	II (2013)	Black-chested buzzard eagle	águila mora, águila de Páramo (CO); águila mora (PE)
Glaucidium brasilianum	II (2013)	Ferruginous pygmy owl	caburé (PY)
Glaucidium jardinii	II (2013)	Andean pygmy owl	mochuelo (Andino) (CO)
Gnorimopsar chopi		Chopi blackbird	tordo chaqueño
Gubernatrix cristata	II (1987)	Yellow cardinal	cardenal amarillo
Guira guira		Guira cuckoo	pirrita (PY)
Haliaeetus leucocephalus	II (2013)	Bald eagle	águila calva
Heliodoxa jacula	II (1987)	Green-crowned brilliant	colibrí brillante frentiverde
Herpetotheres cachinnans	II (2013)	Laughing falcon	guaco
Icterus chrysater		Yellow-backed oriole	(turpial) toche; cacique de dorse amarillo (PE)
Icterus cucullatus		Hooded oriole	calandria, calandria turpial, bolsero cuculado (MX)
Icterus gularis		Altamira oriole	Calandria huasteca, turpial (MX)
Icterus icterus		Venezuela troupial	turpial guajiro
Icterus nigrogularis		Yellow oriole	turpial amarillo
Lamprotornis iris		Emerald starling	mirlo metalico
Lamprotornis superbus		Superb starling	mirlo tricolor
Lepidocolaptes sp.		Woodcreeper	trepatroncos (PE)
Leucocarbo bougainvillii		Guanay cormorant	cormorán guanay; guanay (PE)
Lonchura malacca		Tri-coloured munia	capuchino tricolor, aves ornamentales Monjes de la India (CO)
Lonchura oryzivora	II (1997)	Java sparrow	calafate (AR)
Lonchura striata domestica		Society finch	manón Australiana, capuchino del Japón (AR)
Lophonetta specularioides		Crested duck	pato crestado (PE)
Lophospingus pusillus		Black-crested finch	soldadito común, cardenal de la sierra (AR)
Lophura nycthemera		Silver pheasant	faisán plateado (MX)
Megascops trichopsis	II (2013)	Whiskered screech owl	tecolote bigotudo (MX)
Melanerpes candidus		White woodpecker	carpintero blanco
Melanerpes formicivorus		Acorn woodpecker	carpintero
Melanotis caerulescens		Blue mockingbird	mulato (MX)
Meleagris gallopavo mexicana		Gould's wild turkey	guajolote silvestre (MX)

Melopsittacus undulatus		Budgerigar	perico australiano; loro australiano (DR, MX); cata australiana, cotorra australiana (AR)
Melopyrrha nigra	III (2023)	Cuban bullfinch	semillero negrito (CU)
Mesembrinibis cayennensis		Green ibis	ibis verde
Metriopelia ceciliae		Bare-faced ground dove	jurkuta; paloma de los andes
Mimus gilvus		Tropical mockingbird	cenzone (MX)
Mimus polyglottos		Northern mockingbird	sinsonte (CO); cenzone, cenzone común (MX)
Molothrus bonariensis		Shiny cowbird	tordo (AR); yolofo (CO), golofio (CO)
Molothrus oryzivorus		Giant cowbird	
Momotus mexicanus		Russet-crowned motmot	Momoto mexicano (MX)
Myadestes melanops		Black faced solitaire	solitario carinegro/clarín de cara negra
Myadestes occidentalis		Brown-backed solitaire	jilguero, clarín (MX)
Myadestes unicolor		Slate-colored solitaire	clarín (MX)
Myiopsitta monachus	II (2005)	Monk parakeet	catita común, cotorra, cata argentina, loro verde común (AR); cotorro argentino, perico argentino (MX)
Northiella haematogaster	II (2005)	Eastern bluebonnet	perico cariazul (CO)
Numida meleagris		Helmeted guineafowl	gallina de guinea (MX)
Nyctibius griseus		Common potoo	urutaú (PY)
Nycticorax nycticorax		Black-crowned night heron	garza (PE)
Nymphicus hollandicus		Cockatiel	cacatillo
Odontophorus hyperythrus		Chestnut wood quail	
Ortalis canicollis		Chaco chachalaca	charata (AR)
Ortalis columbiana		Colombian chachalaca	guacharaca (CO)
Ortalis ruficauda		Rufous-vented chachalaca	guacharaca (CO)
Ortalis vetula	III (1981/87)	Plain chachalaca	pacharaca (EC); chachalaca (GT)
Parabuteo unicinctus	II (2013)	Harris's hawk	gavilán mixto (AR); gavilán acanelado; Aguillita de Harris (MX)
Paroaria capitata		Yellow-billed cardinal	cardenilla (AR)
Paroaria coronata	II (1987)	Red-crested cardinal	cardenal copete rojo, cardenal común (AR)
Paroaria dominicana		Red-cowled cardinal	dominicano (CO)
Paroaria nigrogenis		Masked cardinal	cardenal bandera alemana
Passer domesticus		House sparrow	gorrión común, chilero, pardal (MX)
Passerina amoena		Lazuli bunting	colorín pecho canela (MX)
Passerina caerulea		Blue grosbeak	pico gordo azul (MX)
Passerina ciris		Painted bunting	Mariposa; Mariposa sietecolores, Colorín sietecolores, gorrión arcoiris (MX)
Passerina cyanea		Indigo bunting	azulejo; azulillo (MX)
Passerina lelancherii		Orange-breasted bunting	colorín pecho naranja (MX)
Passerina versicolor		Varied bunting	colorín oscuro (MX)
Pavo cristatus	III (2014)	Indian peafowl	pavo real; pavorreal (MX)
Pavo muticus	II (1977)	Green peafowl	pavorreal cuello verde (MX)

<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>		Brown pelican	pelicano (HO)
<i>Penelope montagnii</i>		Andean guan	Pava de monte
<i>Penelope obscura</i>		Dusky-legged guan	pavo de monte, pavo oscura
<i>Penelope purpurascens</i>		Crested guan	cojolite (MX)
<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		Ring-necked pheasant	faisán de collar (MX)
<i>Pheucticus aureoventris</i>		Black-backed grosbeak	rey del bosque (AR)
<i>Pheucticus chysopeplus</i>		Yellow grosbeak	tigrillo real (MX)
<i>Pheucticus ludovicianus</i>		Rose-breasted grosbeak	degollado (CO); tigrillo degollado (MX)
<i>Pheucticus melanocephalus</i>		Black-headed grosbeak	pico grueso (MX)
<i>Phoenicopterus chilensis</i>	II (1983)	Chilean flamingo	parihuana (PE)
<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	II (1983)	American flamingo	Flamenco del Caribe/rojo/rosado(VE); flamenco rosado (MX)
<i>Phonipara canorus</i>		Cuban grassquit	tomeguin del pinar, semillero canoro (CU)
<i>Phrygilus fruticeti</i>		Mourning Sierra Finch	yal negro (AR)
<i>Phrygilus gayi</i>		Grey-hooded sierra finch	comesebo andino, boquense (AR)
<i>Piaya cayana</i>		Squirrel cuckoo	cuco ardilla común (MX)
<i>Pionites melanocephalus</i>	II (2005)	Black-headed parrot	loro chirricle, caique de cabeza negra (PE)
<i>Pionus chalcopterus</i>	II (2005)	Bronze-winged parrot	loro negro, loro catarnica (BO), lora maicera (CO)
<i>Pionus maximiliani</i>	II (2005)	Scaly-headed parrot	loro choclero (PY)
<i>Pionus menstruus</i>	II (2005)	Blue-headed parrot	cotorra cabeza azul, loro cabeziazul, loro cheja (CO); loro cabeza azul (EC, PE, PY); casanga (PA)
<i>Pionus senilis</i>	II (2005)	White crowned parrot	loro corona blanca; loro senil, loro cabeza de viejito, perico cabeza de viejo (MX)
<i>Pipraeidea bonariensis</i>		Blue and yellow tanager	naranjero (AR)
Pipridae		Manakin	saltarin (PE)
<i>Piranga flava</i>		Hepatic tanager	virreina
<i>Pitangus sulphuratus</i>		Great kiskadee	benteveo común (AR)
<i>Platycercus sp.</i>		Rosella	rosella
<i>Poospiza nigrorufa</i>		Black-and-rufous warbling finch	chilenito (AR); sietevestido (UY)
<i>Poospiza ornata</i>		Cinnamon warbling finch	monterita canela (AR)
<i>Poospiza torquata</i>		Ringed warbling finch	vizcachita, monterita de collar (AR)
<i>Porphyrio martinicus</i>		American purple gallinule	gallareta púrpura (EC)
<i>Porphyrospiza carbonaria</i>		Carbonated sierra finch	yal carbonero, fringilo carbonero (AR)
<i>Primolius auricollis</i>	II (2005)	Golden-collared macaw	maracaná cuello dorado (AR)
<i>Primolius couloni</i>	I (2003)	Blue-headed macaw	maracaná cabeza azulada
<i>Priotelus temnuris</i>		Cuban trogon	Tocororo (Cuba)
<i>Psittacara erythrogenys</i>	II (2005)	Red-masked parakeet	loro cabeza roja; loro de frente roja (PE)

Psittacara holochlorus	II (2005)	Green parakeet	perico verde mexicano, perico aliverde (MX)
Psittacara leucophthalmus	II (2005)	White-eyed parakeet	loro maracan (PE, PY); maracan ala colorada (PY)
Psittacara strenuus	II (2005)	Pacific Parakeet	perico barranqueo, chocoyo zapoyol, perico frente verde/verde (SV); perico centroamericano (MX)
Psittacara wagleri	II (2005)	Scarlet-fronted parakeet	perico frente roja (SV)
Psittacula finschii	II (2005)	Crimson-fronted parakeet	perico frente roja, perico frentirrojo
Psittacula krameri		Rose-ringed parakeet	cotorra de Kramer
Psittacus erithacus	I (2017)	African grey parrot	loro yaco africano; loro color gris (HO)
Pteroglossus castanotis	III (1992)	Chestnut-eared aracari	tucan (PE)
Ptiliogonys cinereus		Silky flycatcher	floricano (MX)
Pulsatrix perspicillata	II (2013)	Spectacled owl	bho oropopo/bho de anteojos (CR)
Ramphastos brevis		Choco toucan	tucn del Choc
Ramphastos sulfuratus	II (1992)	Keel-billed toucan	tucn pico iris; tucn pico de canoa, tucn real (MX)
Ramphastos toco	II (1992)	Toco toucan	tucn pico amarillo (PY)
Ramphastos tucanus	II (1992)	White-throated Toucan	tucn pecho blanco
Rhea americana	II (1992)	Greater rhea	suri, avestruz, andu; piyo (BO); and comn (PE)
Rhea pennata	II (2003)	Darwin's rhea	suri, avestruz, andu
Rhodinocichla rosea		Rosy Thrush-Tanager	rosita (CO)
Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha	I (1981)	Thick-billed parrot	cotorra serrana (MX)
Rhynchotus rufescens		Red-winged tinamou	colorada
Rupornis magnirostris	II (2013)	Roadside hawk	gavilan pollero
Saltator aurantirostris		Golden-billed saltator	pepitero de collar, picahueso, siete cuchillo (AR); rey del bosque comn (UY)
Saltator coerulescens		Greyish saltator	papayero (CO); trinca ferro (AR)
Saltatricula multicolor		Many-colored Chaco finch	pepitero chico, vira vira (AR)
Sarcoramphus papa	III (Honduras)	King vulture	rey zamuro (VZ)
Serinus canaria		Atlantic canary	canario (MX)
Sialia mexicana		Western bluebird	azulejo (MX)
Sicalis flaveola		Saffron finch	jilguero dorado (AR); dorado (UY); botn de oro, canario (costeo), canario coronado (CO); canario de pecho amarillo (BO)
Sicalis luteola		Grassland yellow finch	misto (AR, UY)
Spatula clypeata		Northern shoveler	pato cucharn (MX)
Spatula discors		Blue-winged teal	Pato de Florida (CU)
Spheniscus humboldti	I (1981)	Humboldt penguin	pingino de Humboldt
Spinus barbatus		Black-chinned siskin	cabecita negra austral (AR)
Spinus magellanicus		Hooded siskin	cabecita negra (AR, UY)
Spinus psaltria		Lesser goldfinch	jilguerito dominico, jilguero menor, jilguero aliblanca, cpita negra, chichimbacal (MX)
Spinus xanogastrus		Yellow-bellied siskin	jilguero ventriamarillo, mozotillo de monte
Spizaetus isidori	II (2013)	Black-and-chestnut eagle	guila crestada

<i>Spizaetus ornatus</i>	II (2013)	Ornate hawk-eagle	águila elegante
<i>Sporophila angolensis</i>		Chestnut-bellied seed finch	arrocero buchicastaño
<i>Sporophila caerulescens</i>		Double-collared seedeater	corbatita comun; gargantillo (UY)
<i>Sporophila cinnamomea</i>		Chestnut seedeater	capuchino boina gris (UY)
<i>Sporophila collaris</i>		Rusty-collared seedeater	corbatita dominó (AR); domino (UY)
<i>Sporophila crassirostris</i>		Large-billed seed finch	semillero rastrojero
<i>Sporophila funerea</i>		Thick-billed seed finch	arrocero piquigrueso, Arrocero Piquigrueso (CO)
<i>Sporophila intermedia</i>		Grey seedeater	espiguero gris, mochuelo (CO)
<i>Sporophila leucoptera</i>		White-bellied seedeater	corbatita blanco (AR)
<i>Sporophila lineola</i>		Lined seedeater	corbatita overo (AR)
<i>Sporophila minuta</i>		Ruddy-breasted seedeater	semillero pechirufus
<i>Sporophila nigricolis</i>		Yellow-bellied seedeater	espiguero capuchino
<i>Sporophila palustris</i>		Marsh seedeater	capuchino de pecho blanco (AR, UY)
<i>Sporophila ruficollis</i>		Dark-throated seedeater	capuchino garganta café (AR)
<i>Sporophila torqueola</i>		Cinnamon-rumped seedeater	setillero, espiguero collarejo (CR); semillero collajero (MX)
<i>Stephanophorus diadematus</i>		Diademed tanager	cardenal imperial (AR); cardenal azul (UY)
<i>Stilpnia larvata</i>		Golden-hooded tanager	tangara cabecidorada
<i>Strix virgata</i>	II (2013)	Mottled owl	búho café
<i>Struthio camelus</i>	I (1983)	Common ostrich	Avestruz
<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		Common starling	estornino (MX); estornino pinto (AR)
<i>Tachuris rubrigastra</i>		Many-colored rush tyrant	siete colores, sietecolores (AR)
<i>Taeniopygia guttata</i>		Zebra finch	diamante mandarin (AR)
<i>Tangara cyanicollis</i>		Blue-necked tanager	tangara real
<i>Tangara girola</i>		Bay-headed tanager	tangara cabecirrufa
<i>Tangara nigroviridis</i>		Beryl-spangled tanager	tangara de lentejuela
<i>Tangara phillipsi</i>		Sira tanager	
<i>Tangara vassorii</i>		Blue and black tanager	tangara azul y negra
<i>Thraupis episcopus</i>		Blue-gray tanager	azulejo CO)
<i>Thraupis sayaca</i>		Sayaca tanager	celestino (AR)
<i>Tiaris olivaceus</i>		Yellow-faced grassquit	tomaguin de la tierra (CU), semillero cariamarillo (CO); gallito (CR); semillero oliváceo (MX)
<i>Tinamus major</i>		Long-tailed wood partridge	gallina de monte (MX)
<i>Toxostoma curvirostre</i>		Curve-billed thrasher	cuitlacoche (MX)
Trochilidae sp.		Hummingbird	colibri; picaflor (PE)
<i>Trogon curucui</i>		Blue-crowned trogon	aurora, surucúa aurora (AR)
<i>Trogon melanurus</i>		Black-tailed trogon	trogon cola negra (PE)
<i>Trogon surrucura</i>		Surucua trogon	suruku'a (PY)

<i>Turdus amaurochalinus</i>		Creamy-bellied thrush	zorzal chalchalero (AR)
<i>Turdus assimilis</i>		White-throated thrush	mirlo garganta blanca (MX)
<i>Turdus chiguanco</i>		Chiguanco thrush	mirlo chiguanco, zorzal chiguanco (AR)
<i>Turdus falcklandii</i>		Austral thrush	zorzal patagónico (AR)
<i>Turdus fuscater</i>		Great thrush	mirla patiamarilla
<i>Turdus grayi</i>		Clay-colored thrush	primavera, mirlo (MX)
<i>Turdus migratorius</i>		American robin	mirlo primavera (MX)
<i>Turdus rufiventris</i>		Rufous-bellied thrush	zorzal colorado (AR)
<i>Turdus rufopalliatus</i>		Rufous-backed robin	zorzal dorsicanelo (MX)
<i>Turdus serranus</i>		Glossy-black thrush	mirla serrana
Tyrannidae sp.		Flycatcher	mosquero (PE)
<i>Tyto alba</i>	II (2013)	Barn owl	lechuza de campanario; lechuza común
<i>Tyto alba furcata</i>		Caribbean barn owl	lechuza blanco/buho (CU)
<i>Vanellus chilensis</i>		Southern lapwing	tero comun (AR)
<i>Volatinia jacarina</i>		Blue-black grassquit	pájaro chirrío, pirra (CO)
<i>Vultur gryphus</i>	I (1975)	Andean condor	cóndor andino
<i>Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus</i>		Yellow-headed blackbird	tordo cabeza amarilla (MX)
<i>Xenospiza baileyi</i>		Sierra Madre sparrow	gorrion serrano (MX)
<i>Zenaida asiatica</i>		White winged dove	paloma ala blanca
<i>Zenaida auriculata</i>		Eared dove	paloma torcaza (CO); totaqui, torcaza (BO)
<i>Zonotrichia capensis</i>		Rufous-coloured sparrow	pinche (CO); chingolo, chingolito (AR)
REPTILES			
<i>Abronia graminea</i>	II (2017)	Mexican alligator lizard	lagarto alicante terrestre, dragoncito (MX)
<i>Abronia taeniata</i>	II (2017)	Banded arboreal alligator lizard	escorpión arborícola de bandas, dragoncito (MX)
<i>Acrantophis dumerili</i>	I (1977)	Dumeril's boa	boa dumeril (MX)
<i>Acrochordus javanicus</i>		Elephant trunk snake	serpiente de agua (MX)
<i>Agkistrodon bilineatus</i>		Mexican cantil	cantil (MX)
<i>Alligator mississippiensis</i>	II (1983)	American alligator	lagarto del Mississipi (MX)
<i>Ameiva ameiva</i>		Giant ameiva	lagartija (PE)
<i>Anolis equestris</i>	III (2019)	Knight anole	lagartija anolis ecuestre (MX)
<i>Aspidites ramsayi</i>	II (1977)	Woma python	pitón woma (MX)
<i>Aspidoscelis</i> sp		whiptail lizard	lagartija huico
<i>Barisia imbricata</i>		imbricate alligator lizard	dragon enano, lagarto Alicante de las Montañas (MX)
<i>Barisia rudicollis</i>		Rough-necked alligator lizard	lagarto alicante cuello rugoso
<i>Basiliscus vittatus</i>		Brown basilisk	toloque rayado, basilisco marrón (MX)
<i>Bitis gabonica</i>		Gaboon viper	víbora Bitis Gabónica, víbora del Gabon
<i>Boa constrictor</i>	II (1987)	Boa constrictor	boa mantona, serpiente mantona (PE)
<i>Boa constrictor constrictor</i>	II	True red-tailed boa	boa de guyana (MX)

Boa constrictor occidentalis	I(1987)	Argentina boa	lampalagua (AR)
Boa imperator	II	Central American boa	boa constrictora (MX)
Bothriechis marchi		March's palm pit viper	tamagás verde (HO)
Bothriechis schlegelii		Eyelash viper	bocaracás, zumbadora de pestaña (HO)
Bothrops atrox		Common lancehead, fer-de-lance	equis del oriente (EC)
Cachryx defensor	II (2019)	Yucatán spiny-tailed iguana	iguana yucateca de cola espinosa (MX)
Caiman crocodilus	II (1983)	Spectacled caiman	caimán, babilla (CO); caimán de anteojos (EC); lagarto blanco, caiman blanco (PE)
Caiman crocodilus fuscus	II (1983)	Brown spectacled caiman	babilla
Caiman crocodilus yacare	II (1983)	Yacare caiman	lagarto (BO), yacaré, yacaré negro (AR), jakaré (PY)
Caiman latirostris	I (1975)/II (AR, 1997)	Broad-snouted caiman	yacaré overo (AR), jakaré (PY)
Callisaurus draconoidis		Zebra-tailed lizard	cachora arenera
Candoia carinata		Pacific ground boa	boa terrestre Salomón (MX)
Caretta caretta	I (1981)	Loggerhead sea turtle	caguama (CU)
Centrochelys sulcata	II (2017)	African spurred tortoise	tortuga sulcata
Chamaeleo calyptratus	II (1977)	Veiled chameleon	camaleón de Yemen/camaleón velado; camaleón de velo (MX)
Chamaeleo dilepis	II (1977)	Flap-necked chameleon	camaleón flap-necked (MX)
Chelonia mydas	I (1981)	Green sea turtle	tortuga verde
Chelonia mydas agassizii	I (1981)	Eastern Pacific green turtle	tortuga marina prieta (MX)
Chelonoidis carbonaria	II (2017)	Red-footed tortoise	tortuga morrocoy (CO); tortuga motelo (Peru); tortuga de patas rojas (EC, CL); tortuga pata roja (PY, MX)
Chelonoidis chilensis	II (2017)	Chaco tortoise	tortuga chaqueña (PY); tortuga de tierra argentina (AR)
Chelonoidis denticulata	II (2017)	Yellow-footed tortoise	tortuga morrocoy (CO); tortuga motelo (EC); tortuga de pata amarilla (PE)
Chelonoidis niger	I (1975)	Galapagos tortoise	tortuga Galápagos, tortuga gigante (EC)
Chelus fimbriata	II (2023)	Mata mata turtle	tortuga matamata, tortuga caripatúa
Chelydra acutirostris		South American snapping turtle	tortuga mordedora (EC)
Chelydra serpentina	II (2023)	Common snapping turtle	tortuga lagarto (MX)
Chironius flavopictus		Yellow-spotted whipsnake	serpiente látigo de cola larga (EC)
Claudius angustatus	II (2023)	Narrow-bridged musk turtle	almizclera, tortuga vampiro, chopontil (MX)
Coleonyx elegans		Yucatán banded gecko	cuija yucateca (MX)
Coluber mentovarius		Neotropical whip snake	culebra chirriadora neotropical
Coniophanes fissidens		Yellow belly snake, brown spotbelly	culebra vientre amarillo
Conolophus subcristatus	II (1975)	Galapagos land iguana	iguana dorada
Conopsis lineatus		Lined Toluca ground snake	serpiente gris (MX)

Conopsis nasus		Largenose earth snake	culebra gris (Nariz de Pala) (MX)
Corallus caninus	II (1977)	Emerald tree boa	boa esmeralda, serpiente boa tree (MX)
Corallus cookii	II (1977)	Cooke's Tree boa	boa arborícola (MXO)
Corallus ruschenbergerii	II (1977)	Common tree boa/central american tree boa	boa arborícola de Ruschenberger
Cordylus jonesii	II (2017)	Limpopo girdled lizard	
Corytophanus hernandezii		Hernandez's helmeted basilisk	turipache de montaña (MX)
Crocodylus acutus	I (2019); II (MX, CU, CO, 2019)	American crocodile	cocodrilo; cocodrilo de tumbes (PE); cocodilo de río (MX)
Crocodylus moreletii	I (2017); II (BZ, MX, 2017)	Morelet's crocodile	cocodrilo de pantano, cocodrilo mexicano (MX)
Crotalus atrox		Western diamondback rattlesnake	víbora de cascabel (MX)
Crotalus cerastes		Sidewinder	víbora de cascabel cuernitos
Crotalus durissus	III (HN, AT)	South American rattlesnake	serpiente cascabel (CO)
Crotalus durissus culminatus		Northwestern neotropical rattlesnake	víbora de cascabel (MX)
Crotalus molossus		Black-tailed rattlesnake	víbora de cascabel Cola Negra de Mohove
Crotalus rarus		Mexican pygmy rattlesnake	cascabel enana
Crotalus ruber		Red diamond rattlesnake	víbora de cascabel diamante
Crotalus scutulatus		Mohave rattlesnake	
Crotalus triseriatus		Dusky rattlesnake	víbora de cascabel transvolcanica
Crotaphytus collaris melanomaculatus		Eastern collared lizard	cachorón
Ctenosaura pectinata	II (2019)	Mexican/Western spiny-tailed iguana	iguana negra, iguana mexicana de cola espinosa (MX)
Ctenosaura similis	II (2019)	Black spiny-tailed iguana	garrobo (SV, HO, MX); iguana negra, iguana de órgano, garrobo (GT)
Cyclura cornuta	I (1981)	Rhinoceros iguana	iguana rinoceronte
Dermatemys mawii	II (1981)	Hickatee	tortuga blanca (MX, GT)
Dermodochelys coriacea	I (1977)	Leatherback sea turtle	tortuga tinglar (DR)
Dipsosaurus dorsalis sonoriensis		Desert iguana	cachorón güero
Drymarchon corais		Indigo snake	culebra negra (MX)
Drymarchon melanurus		Blacktail cribo	serpiente ekuneil, serpiente cola negra (MX)
Emydura Subglobosa		Mexican spotted wood turtle	tortuga payaso (MX)
Epicrates cenchria	II (1977)	Rainbow boa, boa arcoiris	boa arco iris
Epicrates maurus	II (1977)	Colombian rainbow boa	Boa Tornasol/boa de acero/boa arco iris colombiana
Eretmochelys imbricata	I (1981)	Hawksbill turtle	tortuga carey

<i>Eublepharis macularius</i>		Leopard gecko	gecko leopardo; gecko albino (MX)
<i>Eunectes murinus</i>	II (1977)	Green anaconda	anaconda
<i>Furcifer pardalis</i>	II (1977)	Panther chameleon	cameleón pantera (MX)
<i>Gopherus agassizii</i>	II (2017)	Desert tortoise	tortuga del desierto (MX)
<i>Gopherus berlandieri</i>	II (2017)	Texas tortoise	tortuga galápago tamaulipeco, tortuga de Texas, tortuga de Berlandier (MX)
<i>Gopherus flavomarginatus</i>	I (1979)	Bolson tortoise	tortuga llanero
<i>Heloderma horridum</i>	II (1975)	Mexican beaded lizard	Lagarto enchaquirado, lagarto de chaquira (MX)
<i>Heloderma suspectum</i>	II (1975)	Gila monster	monstruo de gila (MX)
<i>Iguana iguana</i>	II (1977)	Iguana	iguana verde
<i>Kinosternon acutum</i>	II (2023)	Tabasco mud turtle	tortuga casquito, pochitoque (MX)
<i>Kinosternon integrum</i>	II (2023)	Mexican mud turtle	tortuga casquito pecho quebrado mexicana (MX)
<i>Kinosternon leucostomum</i>	II (2023)	White-lipped mud turtle	tortuga casquito labios blancos, pochitoque (MX); tortuga bisagra (PE)
<i>Kinosternon scordioides</i>	II (2023)	Scorpion mud turtle	tortuga tapaculo; tortuga bisagra (PE); tortuga escorpión, tortuga casquito (MX)
<i>Laemantus serratus</i>		Serrated casquehead iguana	lemacto coronado (MX)
<i>Lampropeltis californiae</i>		California Kingsnake	serpiente rey negra, serpiente rey de california (MX)
<i>Lampropeltis getula</i>		Common king snake	culebra reina (MX)
<i>Lampropeltis triangulum</i>		Milk snake	culebra real corallilo (MX); falso coral (HO); falsa coral (AR)
<i>Lepidochelys olivacea</i>	I (1981)	Olive Ridley sea turtle	tortuga olivácea/golfina; tortuga parlama (GT, MX); tortuga lora
<i>Leptophis mexicanus</i>		Mexican parrot snake	culebra perico mexicana (MX)
<i>Lichanura trivirgata</i>	II (1977)	Desert rosy boa	boa rosy (MX)
<i>Liolaemus forsteri</i>		Forster's tree iguana	
<i>Liolaemus monticola</i>		Peak tree iguana	lagartija de los montes (MX)
<i>Macrochelys temminckii</i>	II (2023)	Alligator snapping turtle	tortuga caiman (PR, MX)
<i>Malayopython reticulatus</i>	II (1977)	Reticulated python	pitón reticulado (MX)
<i>Manolepis putnami</i>		Ridgehead snake	culebra cabeza surcada
<i>Masticophis flagellum</i>		Coachwhip	víbora chirrionera (MX)
<i>Melanosuchus niger</i>	I/II (2007)	Black caiman	caimán negro, lagarto negro (PE)
<i>Metlapilcoatlus olmec</i>		Olmecan pit viper	serpiente nauyaca de Los Tuxtlas (MX)
<i>Micrurus fulvius</i>		Eastern coral snake	serpiente rey de corallilo
<i>Morelia spilota</i>	II (1977)	Carpet python	Pitón carpeta, Pitón de alfombra (MX)
<i>Morelia viridis</i>	II (1977)	Green tree python	Pitón arborícola (MX)
<i>Ninia sebae</i>		Redback coffee snake	culebra de cafetal espalda roja (MX)
<i>Ophryacus undulatus</i>		Mexican horned pit viper	crótalo de pestañas (MX)
<i>Oxybelis fulgidus</i>		Green vine snake	bejuquillo verde (HO)
<i>Oxyrhopus petolarius</i>		Forest flame snake	falsa coral amazónica (EC)
<i>Pantherophis guttatus</i>		Corn snake	víbora de los maizales; serpiente de maiz, vibora cincuate (MX)

<i>Phrynosoma asio</i>	II (2023)	Giant horned lizard	camaleón de grandes cuernos
<i>Phrynosoma orbiculare</i>	II (2023)	Mountain horned lizard	camaleón de montaña (MX)
<i>Phrynosoma solare</i>	II (2023)	Regal horned lizard	camaleón real
<i>Phyllodactylus</i> sp.		Leaf-toed gecko	lagartija pequeña (MX)
<i>Physignathus cocincinus</i>	II (2023)	Chinese water dragon	dragón de agua (MX)
<i>Pituophis catenifer</i>		Pacific gopher snake	serpiente topera, serpiente maicera (MX)
<i>Pituophis deppei</i>		Mexican pine snake	culebra cincuate (MX)
<i>Pituphis lineaticollis</i>		Middle American gopher snake	culebra sorda sureña (MX)
<i>Podocnemis expansa</i>	II (1975)	Arrau turtle	charapa (BO); tortuga charapa pequeña (EC)
<i>Podocnemis unifilis</i>	II (1975)	Yellow-spotted river turtle	tortuga de río, peta de río, taricaya (Peru), tortuga terecay (CO); tortuga charapa grande (EC)
<i>Pogona vitticeps</i>		Central bearded dragon	dragón barbudo (MX)
<i>Python brongersmai</i>	II (1977)	Blood python	pitón sangre (MX)
<i>Python molorus bivitatus</i>	I (1975)	Burmese python	pitón birmano (MX)
<i>Python regius</i>	II (1977)	Ball python	Pitón Bola (MX)
<i>Rhinoclemmys areolata</i>	II (2023)	Furrowed wood turtle	tortuga de Monte Mojina, mojina (MX)
<i>Rhinoclemmys funerea</i>	II (2023)	Black wood turtle	tortuga negra
<i>Rhinoclemmys pulcherrima</i>	II (2023)	Painted wood turtle	tortuga dragón (MX)
<i>Salvator merianae</i>	II (1977)	Argentine black and white tegu	lagarto overo (AR)
<i>Salvator rufescens</i>	II (1977)	Red tegu	lagarto colorado
<i>Sauromalus ater</i>		Common chuckwalla	cachorón de roca
<i>Sceloporus malachitus</i>		Green spiny lizard	pichete espinoso (HO)
<i>Sceloporus taeniocnemis</i>		Guatemalan emerald spiny lizard	
<i>Senticolis triaspis</i>		Northern green rat snake	culebra ratonera (MX)
<i>Spilotes pullatus</i>		Yellow rat snake	serpiente tigre (HO, MX); mica (HO); serpiente chaykan
<i>Staurotypus salvinii</i>	II (2023)	Giant musk turtle	Tortuga Almizclera Crucilla
<i>Staurotypus triporcatus</i>	II (2023)	Mexican musk turtle	tortuga guao, tortuga tres lomos (MX)
<i>Stenocercus chlorostictus</i>		Green-spotted whorl-tailed iguana	lagartija verde (PE)
<i>Stenocercus imitator</i>		Cajamarca whorl-tailed iguana	lagartija (PE)
<i>Stenorrhina freminvillei</i>		Blood snake	alavranera de sangren; culebra Alacranera de sangren (MX)
<i>Symphimus mayae</i>		Yucatán white-lipped snake	culebra labios blancos (MX)
<i>Tachymenis peruviana</i>		Peru slender snake	culebra andina (PE)
<i>Terrapene carolina</i>	II (1995)	Box turtle	tortuga de caja (CO)
<i>Terrapene carolina mexicana</i>	II (1995)	Mexican box turtle	tortuga de caja mexicana (MX)

<i>Terrapene nelsoni</i>	II (1995)	Spotted box turtle	
<i>Testudo horsfieldii</i>	II (2017)	Russian tortoise	tortuga rusa (MX)
<i>Thamnophis eques</i>		Mexican garter snake	culebra de agua nómada mexicana (MX)
<i>Thamnophis scalaris</i>		Longtail alpine garter snake	culebra Listonada de Montaña Cola Larga (MX)
<i>Thamnophis scaliger</i>		Short-tail Alpine Garter Snake	
<i>Thamnophis sirtalis</i>		Common garter snake	serpiente listón (MX)
<i>Trachemys callirostris</i>		Colombian slider	tortuga hicotea, jicotea (MX)
<i>Trachemys dorbigni</i>		D'Orbigny's slider	tortuga morrocoyo (AR, UY)
<i>Trachemys ornata</i>		Ornate slider	jicotea occidental, jicotea ornada
<i>Trachemys scripta elegans</i>		Red-eared slider	tortuga japonesa, tortuga de orejas rojas (MX)
<i>Trachemys venusta</i>		Meso-American slider	tortuga pavo real, tortuga pavorreal (MX)
<i>Trimorphodon biscutatus</i>		Western lyre snake	culebra lira cabeza negra
<i>Trioceros ellioti</i>	II (1977)	Elliot's chameleon	camaleón Eliot (MX)
<i>Trioceros jacksonii</i>	II (1977)	Jackson's chameleon	camaleón de Jackson
<i>Uromastix maliensis</i>	II (1977)	Mali uromastyx	Uromastix mali
<i>Varanus exanthematicus</i>	II (1975)	Savannah monitor	monitor de la sabana, varano de la sabana (MX)
<i>Varanus niloticus</i>	II (1975)	Nile monitor	varano del nilo (MX)
<i>Xenosaurus tzacualtipantecus</i>		Zacualtipán knob-scaled lizard	
MAMMALS			
<i>Acinonyx</i>	I (1992)	Cheetah	
<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>		Impala	
<i>Alouatta caraya</i>	II (1977)	Black howler	mono carayá negro (AR); karaja hū, mono carayá negro (PY)
<i>Alouatta coibensis trabeata</i>	II (1977)	Azuero howler	mono aullador
<i>Alouatta pigra</i>	I (1975)	Yucatán howler monkey	mono saraguato negro, mono sarahuato (MX)
<i>Alouatta seniculus</i>	II (1977)	Colombian red howler	mono aullador
<i>Ammotragus lervia</i>	II (1983)	Barbary sheep	borrego berberisco (MX)
<i>Antilope cervicapra</i>	III (1975/2014)	Blackbuck	antilope negro indio; antilope de la India (AR)
<i>Aotus lemurinus</i>	II (1977)	Colombian night monkey	mono nocturno, mono marteja (CO)
<i>Aotus nancymae</i>	II (1977)	Nancy Ma's night monkey	mono nocturno musmuqui (PE)
<i>Aotus nigriceps</i>	II (1977)	Black-headed night monkey	
<i>Arctocephalus australis</i>	II (1977)	South American fur seal	lobo fino sudamericano (UY)
<i>Atelerix albiventris</i>		Four-toed hedgehog	erizo
<i>Ateles belzebuth</i>	II (1977)	White-bellied spider monkey	mono araña; mono maquisapa (PE)
<i>Ateles chamek</i>	II (1977)	Peruvian spider monkey	mono maquisapa araña, mono maquisapa negro (PE)

Ateles fusciceps	II (1977)	Black-headed spider monkey	mono araña de cabeza marron; mono araña de cabeza negra (HO)
Ateles geoffroyi	II (1977)	Central American spider monkey	mono araña
Ateles geoffroyi vellerosus	II (1977)	Mexican spider monkey	mono araña
Ateles geoffroyi yucatanensis	II (1977)	Yucatan spider monkey	mono araña
Ateles hybridus	II (1977)	Brown spider monkey	mono araña, marimonda del magdalena, choibo (CO)
Ateles paniscus	II (1977)	Red-faced spider monkey	mono araña negro
Bassariscus astutus		Ringtail	cacomixtle (MX)
Bassariscus sumichrasti		Cacomistle	cacomixtle (MX)
Bison bison		American bison	búfalo Americano (MX)
Blastocerus dichotomus	I (1975)	Marsh deer	ciervo de pantano, venado
Boselaphus tragocamelus	III (PK)	Nilgai	antilopo nilgo (MX)
Bradypus variegatus	II (1983)	Brown-throated three-toed sloth	oso perezoso de tres dedos (EC); oso perezoso, peleajo de tres dedos, oso perezoso de tres garras (PE)
Bubalus bubalis		Indian buffalo	
Cabassous unicinctus		Southern naked-tailed armadillo	armadillo de cola desnuda, armadillo centroamericano (GT)
Callithrix jacchus	II (1977)	Common marmoset	mono titi comun
Callithrix penicillata	II (1977)	Black-tufted marmoset	mono titi de pincel negro (MX)
Canis latrans		Coyote	Coyote
Capra sp.	I/II/III	Ibex	
Capromys pilorides		Desmarest's hutia	jutía conga (CU)
Catagonus wagneri	I (1987)	Chacoan peccary	tagúa (PY)
Cavia porcellus		Guinea pig	cabayo (AR)
Cebus albifrons	II (1977)	White-fronted capuchin	(machin de) cara blanca, mono de frente blanca (CO); mono machin blanco (PE)
Cebus apella	II (1977)	Tufted capuchin	caí, mono maicero (CO); mono machin negro (PE)
Cebus apella macrocephalus	II (1977)	Large-headed capuchin	mono machin negro (PE)
Cebus capucinus	II (1977)	Colombian white-faced capuchin	mono cara blanca, mono cariblanco; mono martin; mono capuchino (BO)
Cebus imitator	II (1977)	Panamanian white-faced capuchin	mono cariblanco
Cebus libidinosus	II (1977)	Black-striped capuchin	mono silbador/silvador
Ceratotherium simum	I (1975)/II	White rhinoceros	rinoceronte
Cerdocyon thous	II (1992)	Crab-eating fox	zorro sabanero
Cervus axis		Chital	ciervo axis (AR); venado axis
Cervus canadensis		Elk	
Cervus elaphus		Red deer	ciervo rojo
Chaetophractus nationi	II (1997)	Andean hairy armadillo	quirquincho
Chaetophractus villosus		Greater hairy armadillo	quirquincho peludo

Chaetopractus vellerosus		Screaming hairy armadillo	piche llorón (AR)
Chinchilla		Chinchilla	chinchilla
Chiroptera		Bat	murciélago (PE)
Chlorocebus sabaues	II (1977)	Green monkey	mono verde (MX)
Choloepus hoffmanni		Hoffman's two toed sloth	oso perezoso de dos dedos; oso perezoso de dos garras (PE)
Chrysocyon brachyurus	II (1975)	Maned wolf	aguará guazú (AR)
Coendou sp.		Porcupine	puercoespín (Peru)
Conepatus chinga rex		Molina's hog-nosed skunk	zorrino (PE)
Cuniculus paca	III (1987)	Lowland paca	conejo pintado; guagua (CO); guanta (EC); majas, picuro (PE); tepezcuintle (CR)
Dama dama	I (1977)	European fallow deer	gamo
Dasyprocta punctata	III (1987)	Central American agouti	ñeque (CO); guatusa (EC); añuje (PE); guatusa/cherenga (CR)
Dasypus novemcinctus		Nine-banded armadillo	armadillo; armadillo de nueve bandas (MX); tatú hu, tatú (BO)
Didelphis marsupialis		Common opossum	muca (PE); tlacuache (MX)
Didelphis virginiana		Virginia opossum	zarigüeya; tacuazin (GT); tlacuache (MX)
Elaphurus davidianus		Père David's deer	
Equus quagga		Plains zebra	
Hemitragus jemlahicus		Himalayan tahr	
Hippocamelus antisensis	I (1975)	Taruca	venado andino, taruca (PE)
Hippopotamus amphibius	II (1995)	Hippopotamus	hipopótamus (MX)
Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris		Capybara	carpincho (AR); chigüiro (CO); ronsoco (PE)
Inia geoffrensis	II (2003)	Amazon river dolphin	delfín rosado, bufeo (PE)
Kobus ellipsiprymnus		Waterbuck	
Kobus lechwe	II (1979)	Lechwe	
Lagenorhynchus obscurus	II (2003)	Dusky dolphin	delfín oscuro (PE)
Lagostomus maximus		Plains viscacha	viscacha
Lagothrix flavicauda	I (1983)	Yellow-tailed woolly monkey	mono choro de cola amarilla (PE)
Lagothrix lagotricha	II (1977)	Common woolly monkey	mono choro (PE)
Lagothrix poeppigii	II (1977)	Silvery woolly monkey	mono lanudo plateado, mono chorongo (EC)
Lama glama		Lama	llama
Lama guanicoe	II (1978)	Guanaco	guanaco
Lemuroidea	I	Lemur	lémur
Leontocebus illigeri	II (1977)	Illiger's saddle-back tamarin	mono titi
Leopardus garleppi	II (1977)	Garlepp's pampas cat	gato del desierto (PE)
leopardus geoffroyi	I (1992)	Geoffroy's cat	tigrillo; gato montes argentino (CL)
Leopardus guttulus	I (1990)	Southern tigrina	tirica

<i>Leopardus pardalis</i>	I (1990)	Ocelot	ocelote, manigordo (CR), tigrillo (CO), cunaguaro (VE); ocelote (MX)
<i>Leopardus tigrinus</i>	I (1990)	tigrillo/oncilla/northern tiger cat	tigrillo, tigrillo lanudo (CO); tigrillo (PE)
<i>Leopardus wiedii</i>	I (1990)	Margay	caucel; tigrillo (MX)
<i>Lontra longicaudis</i>	I (1975)	Neotropical otter	lobito de río (AR); nutria, perro de agua (MX)
<i>Lontra provocax</i>	I (1975)	Southern river otter	nutria de río
<i>Loxodonta africana</i>	I/II	African elephant	
<i>Lycalopex culpaeus</i>	II (1979)	Andean fox	zorro andino; zorro de páramo (EC); zorro culpeo (CL)
<i>Lycopalex griseus</i>	II (1979)	South American grey fox	zorro gris (AR)
<i>Lynx rufus</i>	II (1977)	Bobcat	gato montés, lince rojo (MX)
<i>Mazama americana</i>		Red brocket	venado colorado (EC)
<i>Mazama gouazoubira</i>		Common brown brocket	urina (BO)
<i>Melursus ursinus</i>	I (1990)	Sloth bear	oso perezoso
<i>Mephitis sp.</i>		Skunk	zorillo (MX)
<i>Mico sp.</i>		Amazonian marmoset	mico (EC)
<i>Mustela putorius furo</i>		Ferret	huron (MX)
<i>Myocastor coypus</i>		Nutria	coipo, nutria roedora (CL)
<i>Myrmecophaga tridactyla</i>	II (1975)	Giant anteater	oso bandera, oso hormiguero; oso palmero (VZ)
<i>Nasua narica</i>	III (1987)	White-nosed coati	pizote, mapache, antoon; cuchucho (EC)
<i>Nasua nasua</i>	III (1976)	Coati	coati, tejon (BO, MX); capiz, achuni, coatí (PE)
<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>	III (1981)	White-tailed deer	venado cola blanca
<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		European rabbit	conejo (AR)
<i>Oryx sp.</i>	I (O. Dammah, O. Leucoryx)	Oryx	
<i>Otaria flavescens</i>		South American sea lion	lobo de mar chusco (PE)
<i>Otospermophilus variegatus</i>		Rock squirrel	ardilla de tierra (MX)
<i>Ovis ammon polii</i>	II (2019)	Marco Polo sheep	
<i>Ovis aries musimon</i>		European mouflon	
<i>Ovis dalli</i>		Dall sheep	
<i>Ovis orientalis</i>		Asiatic mouflon	muflón (MX)
<i>Ozotoceros bezoarticus</i>	I (1975)	Pampas deer	ciervo pampero, ciervo de la pampa (AR)
<i>Pan troglodytes</i>	I (1977)	Chimpanzee	chimpancé
<i>Panthera leo</i>	II (2017)	Lion	leon
<i>Panthera leo persica</i>	I (2019)	Asiatic lion	leon asiático
<i>Panthera onca</i>	I (1975)	Jaguar	jaguar, yaguaraté (AR, PY), otorongo (PE), tigre mariposa (VE)
<i>Panthera pardus</i>	I (1975)	Leopard	leopardo
<i>Panthera pardus pardus</i>	I (1975)	African leopard	leopardo
<i>Panthera tigris</i>	I (1987)	Tiger	tigre

<i>Panthera tigris altaica</i>	I (1987)	Siberian tiger	tigre siberiano
<i>Papio hamadryas</i>	II (1977)	Hamadryas baboon	hamadriade, babuino hamadryas
<i>Pecari tajacu</i>	II (1997)	Collared peccary	kureí (PY), taitetú, pecarí de collar, chanco de monte (BO), javelina, saíno, báquiro; sajino (PE); coche de monte (GT)
<i>Petaurus breviceps</i>		Sugar glider	Petauro del Azúcar (MX)
<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>		Common warthog	
<i>Plecturocebus ornatus</i>	II (1977)	Ornate titi monkey	mono zocay (CO)
<i>Potos flavus</i>	III (1987)	Kinkajou	micoleón, martucha (MX), cusumbo (EC); microleón (GT, SV)
<i>Prionomys maximus</i>	I (1975)	Giant armadillo	pejichi (BO)
<i>Procyon lotor</i>		Common raccoon	mapache (MX)
<i>Pseudalopex sechurae</i>		Sechuran fox, Peruvian desert fox	zorro costeño
<i>Puda puda</i>	I (1975)	Southern pudu	puđú sureño (CL)
<i>Puma concolor</i>	I II (2019)	Puma	puma, leon de montaña (CO), leon americano (AR)
<i>Puma yagouaroundi</i>	I/II (1987)	Jaguarundi	yaguarundí, gato moro, gato colorado (PY); gato salvaje, leoncillo, onza (MX)
<i>Rangifer tarandus</i>		Reindeer	
<i>Rucervus duvaucelii</i>	I (1975)	Swamp deer	
<i>Rupicapra rupicapra</i>	II (2013)	Chamois	
<i>Saguinus fuscicollis</i>	II (1977)	Brown-mantled tamarin	mono pichico (PE)
<i>Saguinus geoffroyi</i>	I (1977)	Geoffroy's tamarin	mono tití, tamarino de Geoffroy (PA)
<i>Saguinus imperator</i>	II (1977)	Emperor tamarin	mono pichico emperador (PE)
<i>Saguinus leucopus</i>	I (1977)	White-footed tamarin	mono tití gris (CO)
<i>Saguinus midas</i>	II (1977)	Golden-handed tamarin	mono titi mano roja (DR)
<i>Saguinus oedipus</i>	I (1977)	Cotton-top tamarin	mono titi cabeza blanca, mono tití cabeza de algodón
<i>Saguinus tripartitus</i>		Golden-mantled tamarin	mono chicico dorado (EC)
<i>Saimiri cassiquiarensis macrodon</i>	II (1977)	Ecuadorian squirrel monkey	mono tití (PE)
<i>Saimiri oerstedii</i>	I (1975)	Central American squirrel monkey	mono ardilla; mono payaso (EC)
<i>Saimiri sciureus</i>	II (1977)	Common squirrel monkey	mono fraile (PE)
<i>Sapajus cay</i>	II (1977)	Azara's capuchin	
<i>Sapajus nigritus</i>	II (1977)	Black-horned capuchin	mono caí (AR)
<i>Sciurus aureogaster</i>		Mexican gray squirrel	ardilla común (MX)
<i>Sciurus colliaei</i>		Collie's squirrel	ardilla arbórea (MX)
<i>Sciurus stramineus</i>		Guayaquil squirrel	ardilla sabanera (EC)
<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>		Red squirrel	ardilla
<i>Solenodon paradoxus</i>		Hispaniolan solenodon	solenodonte (DR)
<i>Sus scrofa</i>		Wild boar	chancho salvaje (AR)
<i>Sylvilagus floridanus</i>		Eastern cottontail rabbit	conejo castellano, conejo de Florida (CO)

<i>Syncerus caffer</i>		African buffalo	
<i>Tamandua mexicana</i>	III (1981)	Northern tamandua	oso hormiguero
<i>Tamandua tetradactyla</i>		Collared anteater/Southern tamandua	oso hormiguero
<i>Tapirus bairdii</i>	I (1975)	Baird's tapir	danta (CR)
<i>Tapirus terrestris</i>	II (1975)	South American tapir	danta, tapir amazónico
<i>Taurotragus oryx</i>		Common eland	
<i>Tayassu pecari</i>	II (1997)	White-lipped peccary	majano, chanco de monte, Tañi Kati (PY), marrano báquiro (CO); guangana, huangana (EC, PE)
<i>Thomomys umbrinus</i>		Southern pocket gopher	tuza (Mexicana) (MX)
<i>Tolypeutes matacus</i>		Southern three-banded armadillo	mataco bola, quirquincho (AR)
<i>Tragelaphus imberbis</i>		Lesser kudu	
<i>Tragelaphus spekii</i>		Sitatunga	
<i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i>		Greater kudu	
<i>Tremarctos ornatus</i>	I (1977)	Spectacled bear, Andean bear	oso jucumari (BO), oso andino, oso de anteojos (PE, CO)
<i>Trichechus inunguis</i>	I (1975)	Amazonian manatee	manatí
<i>Trichechus manatus</i>	I (1975)	West Indian/North American manatee	manatí
<i>Urocyon cinereoargenteus</i>		Grey fox	zorro gris (GT, MX)
<i>Ursus americanus</i>	II (1992)	American black bear	oso negro (MX)
<i>Vicugna vicugna</i>	I/II (2019)	Vicuña	vicuña
<i>Zalophus californianus</i>		California sea lion	lobo marino (MX)

AMPHIBIANS

<i>Agalychnis callidryas</i>	II (2023)	Red-eyed tree frog	rana arborícola, rana verde de ojos rojos; rana ojos rojos (MX)
<i>Agalychnis dacnicolor</i>		Mexican leaf frog	ranita verduzca
<i>Ambystoma mexicanum</i>	II (1975)	Axolotl	ajolote mexicano
<i>Ambystoma velasci</i>		Plateau tiger salamander	ajolote/salamandra tigre de meseta (MX)
<i>Calyptocephalella gayi</i>	III (2011)	Helmeted water toad	rana chilena (CL)
<i>Ceratophrys cranwelli</i>		Cranwell's horned frog, pacman frog	escuerzo de cranwell, rana pacman (MX)
<i>Ceratophrys ornata</i>		Argentine horned frog	escuerzo, rana pacman (MX)
<i>Dendrobates auratus</i>	II (1987)	Green and black poison dart frog	rana venenosa verdinegra
<i>Dendrobates tinctorius</i>	II (1987)	Dyeing poison dart frog	rana flecha azul
<i>Dyscophus antongillii</i>	II (2017)	Madagascar tomato frog	rana tomate (MX)
<i>Hyla cinerea</i>		American green tree frog	rana arbórea verde (MX)

Lithobates catesbeianus		American bullfrog	rana catesbeianus; rana toro (AR)
Oophaga histrionica	II (1987)	Harlequin poison frog	rana arlequin (CO)
Oophaga lehmanni	II (1987)	Lehmann's poison frog	rana venenosa de Lehmann (CO)
Oophaga pumilio	II (1987)	Strawberry poison dart frog	rana flecha roja y azul/rana flecha venenosa
Oophaga sylvatica	II (1987)	Little devil poison dart frog	diablito, rana kiki (CO)
Oophaga vicentei	II (1987)	Vicente's poison frog	rana veneno de dardo de Vicente
Ranitomeya ventrimaculata	II (1987)	Reticulated poison frog	rana venenosa de jatunsacha
Rhinella limensis		Peru coast toad	sapo costero peruano
Rhinella marina		Cane toad	sapo comun, batracio (PE)
Rhinella spinulosa		Warty toad	sapo comun, batracio (PE)
Telmatobius culeus	I (2017)	Titicaca water frog	rana gigante del Titicaca
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