Quick scan of illegal wildlife trade from Latin America to Europe

ifaw

Acknowledgements

Project Leads: Ilaria Di Silvestre, Polen Cisneros.
If you have any questions, please contact idisilvestre@ifaw.org.

Contributors: Pauline Verheij/EcoJust.

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

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A male slate-colored seedeater in Colombia.

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Executive summary

This report has examined the illegal trade in Latin American species of amphibians, birds, mammals, and reptiles to Europe, based on seizures reported in the media between 2017 and 2023, a survey to assess online trade in these species in Europe, and interviews with Dutch and Spanish law enforcers. This is a snapshot to provide an initial idea of the situation, although further research would be needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding. However, the data collected provides a useful indication of key trafficking routes, traffickers' profiles and modus operandi, species affected, and online trade in these species.

The report's key findings include:

Species affected

- Between 2017 and 2023, a total of 34 wildlife seizures were identified in or en route to Europe and Russia. These 34 seized shipments affected 2,495 wild animals of 69 different species, including 36 bird species, 23 reptile species, eight amphibian species, and two mammal species. Of these, only 25% (17 species) of concerned species are listed in CITES, the other 75% are only protected by domestic laws in the source countries.
- Amphibians were the most seized class with 59% (1,280 specimens), followed by birds with 29% (641 specimens), reptiles with 12% (254 specimens), and mammals (2 specimens). The species most targeted included poison dart frogs from Colombia, Panama, and Brazil; songbirds from Cuba, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Suriname; and endemic reptiles from Mexico and Brazil.
- 30% of the Latin American species identified in seizures between 2017 and 2023 are endemic (including 12 reptile species, seven amphibian species, and two bird species). This finding corroborates previous reports which have highlighted that traffickers operating in Europe are increasingly targeting less monitored endemic non-CITES-listed species.
- The online survey provided evidence that Latin American birds and reptiles trafficked to Europe are readily sold online and in high demand with breeders and pet owners.
- As such, European demand for rare and/or endemic species poses a significant threat to already vulnerable species. For instance, the illegal trade of harlequin poison frogs (*Oophaga histrionica*) and Lehmann's poison frogs (*Oophaga lehmanni*), both endemic to Colombia, to Europe has contributed to such severe imperilment that the species are now IUCN-classified as critically endangered.

Main source and destination countries

- Most shipments were seized in or en route to the Netherlands, Germany, and Russia. However, looking at the number of animals seized, Germany is by far the most significant destination country in this study, followed by Russia and Spain.
- As for source countries in Latin America, the highest numbers of seizures were reported for Suriname, Brazil, and Mexico. The highest numbers of animals seized originated from Colombia, Panama, and Mexico.

▼ A red-eyed tree frog.

Live animal trade

Some 94.1% of the seized wildlife destined for Europe concerned live animals. This confirms that the European exotic pet trade is a key driver for illegal wildlife trade from Latin America.

Inadequate criminal justice responses

European countries' criminal justice responses to smuggling of illegally sourced, non-CITES wildlife specimens are inadequate. In most if not all European countries, non-CITES-listed species are not covered by national wildlife protection laws. As a result, smuggling of these species is often a low priority, and penalties are non-existent or significantly lower than for smuggling of CITES-listed species (usually limited to fines based on violation of Customs, animal welfare, or veterinary legislation). The low risk involved in smuggling non-CITES species is an incentive for traffickers to target these species.

Modus operandi

Most seizures identified between 2017 and 2023 concerned individuals (sometimes traders/hobbyists, often mules) caught with illicit wildlife in their luggage or on their body. In addition, several parcels containing live animals and/or parts and products were seized. However, European law enforcers indicate that the large bulk of illicit wildlife from Latin America is brought in through air cargo imports by legitimate industry players, with the use of fraudulent documents and abusing loopholes in EU legislation.

Europe as a transit and source

- In addition to the 34 seizures destined for Europe, two seizures were identified of wildlife transiting in Europe en route to Asia, confirming Europe's role as a transit point for illicit wildlife trade from Latin America. These two seizures likely represent just a fraction of wildlife trafficked via Europe, as transit shipments tend to receive little attention in most European countries, and transit seizures are rare as a result.
- Europe is also a source for (exotic) wildlife trafficked to Latin America, as was evidenced by two seizures of wildlife from Europe destined for Latin America. These seizures, too, most likely represent just a small segment of the actual volume of illicit trade from Europe to Latin America.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to decision makers:

- The findings from this report highlight the need for stricter EU legislation obliging Member States to adequately penalise smugglers of illegally sourced wildlife species that are not listed in CITES; this would significantly strengthen law enforcement deterrence.
- Additional research should be conducted to understand the scale and nature of illicit cargo imports of Latin American wildlife into Europe by legitimate industry players. This is also pertinent given the alleged abuse of exemptions provided under the European ban on wild bird imports, increasing the risk of the introduction of bird diseases into the EU.
- In cooperation with various stakeholders, including NGOs and the private sector, a demand reduction campaign should be designed and launched, based on consumer behaviour science and using appropriate messaging, to target consumers of live exotic pets with the aim of reducing demand for rare and/or endemic wildlife species in Europe.
- The development and implementation of a centralised EU wildlife trade data collection system is crucial to ensure consistent data collection across Member States, to provide relevant information on imported and exported wildlife species, and to share trade data in cross-national platforms enabling better coordination of intelligence. Similar to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's LEMIS database, such a system would collect information on all wildlife species, including both CITES-listed and non-CITES-listed species, entering or leaving the EU, allowing analysis and early detection of trends in (illegal) wildlife trade to and from the EU.

▲ A car trunk with 216 turquoise-fronted Amazon chicks, seized in January 2021, Santiago del Estero province, Argentina.

▲ A beryl-spangled tanager.

Section 1

Introduction

Introduction

Latin America harbours an incredible level of biodiversity. Seven Latin American countries feature in the top 20 of the world's most biodiverse countries: Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Bolivia.[1] Unfortunately, this biodiversity is under severe threat. The decline of species in Latin America and the Caribbean is higher than anywhere else on earth. A recent study 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%.[2] Illegal overexploitation of wildlife is an important driver for species loss which exacerbates threats from habitat loss and degradation, invasive species and disease, and climate change.

Illegal wildlife exploitation in Latin America has long been underrepresented compared to some other regions in the world. While in recent years the issue has started to receive more attention, 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 on the scale of illegal wildlife exploitation is scarce.

To aid in addressing this knowledge gap, in 2023, IFAW conducted a study on poaching and trafficking of reptiles, birds, mammals, and amphibians in the 18 Spanish-speaking countries of the Americas (Hispanic America) between 2017 and 2022. A report detailing the study's findings was published in December 2024.[3] Among other things, the study confirmed existing reports that Europe is a key destination for wildlife trafficked from Latin America, in particular reptiles, birds, and amphibians.

In addition, in July 2024, IFAW published a new report spotlighting Latin America and the Caribbean's role in shark trade.[4]

To better understand Europe's role as a destination for wildlife trafficked from Latin America, particularly non-CITES-listed species, IFAW conducted a quick scan to more closely examine the illegal wildlife trade from Latin America to Europe. This report presents key findings from this quick scan.

Methodology

The following methods were used to collect relevant information.

Collection and compilation of seizures

Seizure data were collected and compiled in an Excel seizure database. The following data sources were used:

- The media reports on seizures of wildlife smuggled from Hispanic America (the 18 Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America) to Europe between 2017 and 2022, which were collected as part of the above-mentioned IFAW study of Wildlife Crime in Hispanic America.
- Additional seizures of Latin American wildlife smuggled to Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands between 2017 and 2023, extracted from the Robin des Bois 'On the Trail' Bulletins numbers 16-40.[5]
  - These five European countries were selected because of their known relevance as destination and/or transit countries for illicit Latin American wildlife.
  - This part of the seizure research broadened the scope to wildlife trafficked from Latin America (i.e., also including wildlife from Brazil, Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana, and Belize) to get a better understanding of the relevance of these countries in the illegal trade to Europe.
  - Seizures that took place in 2023 were included in the database to obtain as much relevant data as possible.
  - Unfortunately, it was not possible to conduct in-depth research of seizures in/from Brazil, French Guiana, Guyana, and Belize reported in local media. Therefore, the seizures identified are purely indicative of the illegal wildlife trade entering Europe from Latin America.

Seizures destined for Russia were included in the seizure data collection because Europe is a key transit point for Hispanic American wildlife smuggled to Russia; furthermore, there are known links between Russian and European wildlife consumer markets, with Russian traffickers engaged in selling illicit wildlife sourced from Latin America (among other global destinations) to European buyers.[6]

▼ Sedated tiger cub seized at the Mexico-US border in May 2018

Photo: © US Customs and Border Patrol

Photo: © Bogota Ministry of Environment

Caveat

It is important to note that the seizure data identified in the media by this quick scan represent only a small fraction of the actual illegal wildlife trade volume entering, transiting, or leaving the EU. In the first place, it is generally acknowledged that border control agencies intercept only a small percentage of illicit commodities that are trafficked across borders. In addition, governments do not report all seizures to the media. Furthermore, it is likely that not all relevant media reports were identified through this quick scan.

It should also be noted that the quick scan had to depend on seizures reported in the media as there is currently no centralised database for imports and exports of non-CITES-listed wildlife affecting the EU. Nor are such data available at Member States' levels.

The purpose of this research was to better understand Europe's role as a destination for non-CITES wildlife trafficked from Latin America; consequently, TRACES and EU-TWIX databases, which only monitor the trade and trafficking of CITES-listed species, have not been consulted, as they would have skewed the results in favour of CITES specimens.

Online survey

An online survey was undertaken of Terraristik.com and Vogelmarkt.net to obtain a snapshot of the availability of reptile, amphibian, and bird species from Latin America that were identified in the seizures.[7] The survey also included the following reptile species/genus at risk from trafficking on the basis of previous multi-year investigations on wildlife trafficking to and in the EU:[8]

- *Anolis chamaeleonides* and *Sphaerodactylus* species from Cuba
- *Phrynosoma* species
- *Sceloporus* species
- *Bothrops* species from Brazil
- *Xenosaurus newmanorum*

Due to time and capacity constraints, it was necessary to make a selection of species to be included in the survey. This resulted in a list of 55 species (two amphibian species, 29 bird species, and 24 reptile species). Most of these species are not CITES-listed, except for the following five species: Mexican alligator lizard (*Abronia graminea*), banded arboreal alligator lizard (*Abronia taeniata*), red-eyed tree frog (*Agalychnis callidryas*), giant horned lizard (*Phrynosoma asio*), and regal horned lizard (*Phrynosoma solare*). These were included in the survey because they have been heavily trafficked and were recently listed under CITES.

Mammals were not included in the online survey as only two CITES-listed mammal species were identified in two seizures:
1. Jaguar (*Panthera onca*, CITES I), involving a skin and skull shipped from Venezuela to Spain which was seized in Germany;
2. South American fur seal (*Arctocephalus australis*, CITES II), involving a skull shipped to Germany from Uruguay.

The survey took place on 17, 22, 23, and 24 May 2024 and focused on Terraristik.com and Vogelmarkt.net. Terraristik is Europe's most used commerce platform for live reptiles and amphibians; Vogelmarkt.net is a Dutch-language trade platform for live birds used by bird breeders and traders from around Western Europe.

For each species that was found to be advertised, the following information was captured: date of identification; forum; weblink and Wayback archive link; location of advertiser; text/summary of the advertisement; class, scientific, and English common species names; and quantity of specimens advertised.

Interviews with European law enforcers

A face-to-face interview was conducted with a law enforcer from the Netherlands (Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety), and a written interview was conducted with a law enforcer from the Guardia Civil in Spain to obtain their perspectives on species most targeted, key trafficking routes, modus operandi, and bottlenecks in tackling illegal trade from Latin America. Key observations from these two law enforcers are referred to in the report to provide context and insights to enrich the desk research.

The German Bundesamt für Naturschutz (Federal Agency for Nature Conservation) was also approached for an interview, but after an initial positive response, no further communication was received from them.

▲ Peruvian authorities seized a white-tailed deer head, a whole skin without a crocodile head and two dissected boastrictor skins in Piura.

Photo: © Gendarmería Nacional Argentina CC BY 4.0

▲ Officials carrying out routine vehicle checks in Argentina intercepted a man and a woman with two cardboard boxes full of 'lumps of moving fabric' determined to be 35 jacket turtles, a lagoon turtle, 126 scuerzos, two yacaré, and a snake, November 2021.

Section 2

Results

Results

2.1 Analysis of seizure data

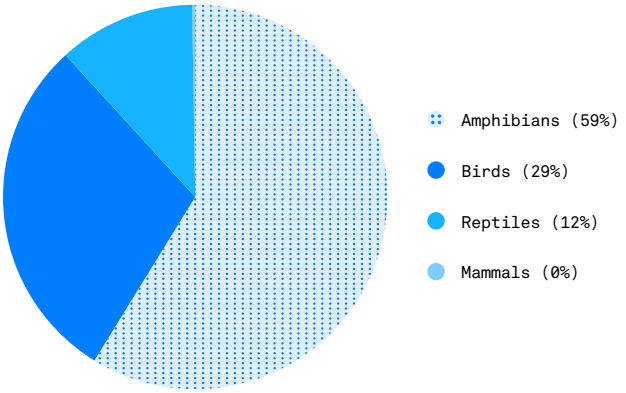
A total of 38 wildlife seizures were identified between 2017 and 2023. This included 34 seizures of wildlife destined for Europe (including Russia), two seizures of wildlife transiting in Europe en route to Asia, and two seizures of wildlife from Europe destined for Latin America. This section presents key findings from the seizure analysis.

2.1.1 Europe as a destination for wildlife trafficked from Latin America

The 34 seized shipments destined for Europe between 2017 and 2023 affected 2,495 wild animals of 69 different species. Some 94.1% concerned live animals (2,350 specimens), 5.4% were dead and taxidermied animals (135 specimens), and 0.5% were parts and products (10 specimens). The high percentage of live animals confirms that the European exotic pet trade is a key driver for illegal wildlife trade from Latin America.

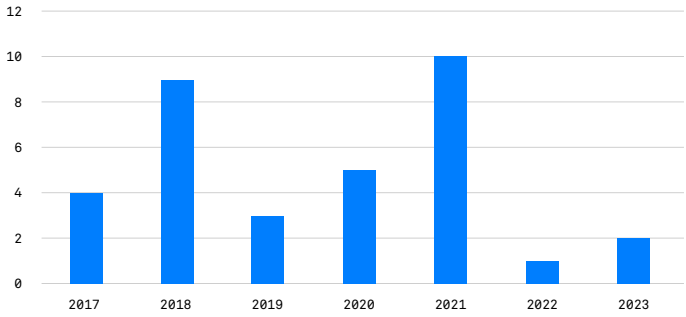
Amphibians were the most seized class with 59% (1,280 specimens), followed by birds with 29% (641 specimens), reptiles with 12% (254 specimens), and mammals (2 specimens). For 320 specimens seized in Brazil from a Russian trafficker in 2021, the media reports failed to specify the class and (sub)species, so these were not included in the analysis.[9]

Figure 1: Latin American wildlife trafficked to Europe 2017–2023



2.1.1.1 Number of seizures reported in the media

Figure 2: Number of seizures of Latin American wildlife destined for Europe 2017–2023



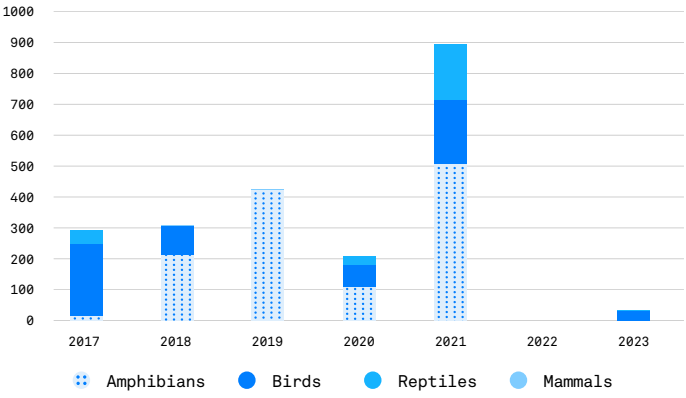
2.1.1.2 Number of animals involved

The graphs below show the numbers of amphibians, birds, reptiles, and mammals (live, dead/taxidermied, and parts and products) affected by seizures en route to or in Europe between 2017 and 2023.

The seizure data appear to suggest that wildlife trafficking from Latin America to Europe dropped significantly since 2021. The drop in seizures could indicate a reduction in illicit trade due to successful law enforcement interventions against a major amphibian trafficking ring (led by a Slovakian woman and her American husband), as well as a prolific Russian amphibian, reptile, and invertebrate trafficker, in 2020 and 2021, respectively. However, it is also possible that in 2022 and 2023, law enforcement agencies were less effective in detecting illicit shipments or that traffickers used different routes and/or methods.

	Amphibians	Birds	Reptiles	Mammals	**Total**
2017	16	238	41	0	**295**
2018	216	92	3	1	**312**
2019	426	0	0	1	**427**
2020	112	71	26	0	**209**
2021	510	206	182	0	**898**
2022	0	0	1	0	**1**
2023	0	34	1	0	**35**
Total	1,280	641	254	2	

Figure 3: Number of animals from Latin America seized en route to/in Europe 2017–2023



2.1.1.3 Key destination countries

Based on numbers of seizures identified, the Netherlands, Germany, and Russia are the most significant destination countries for Latin American wildlife.

However, looking at the numbers of animals seized that were destined for these countries, Germany is by far the most significant, followed by Russia and Spain.

Figure 4: Destination countries for Latin American wildlife trafficked to Europe (number of seizures)

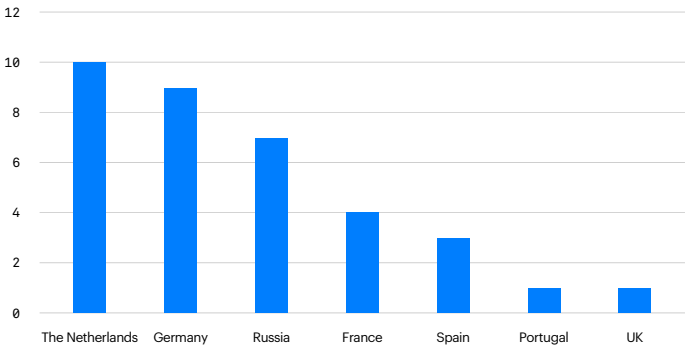
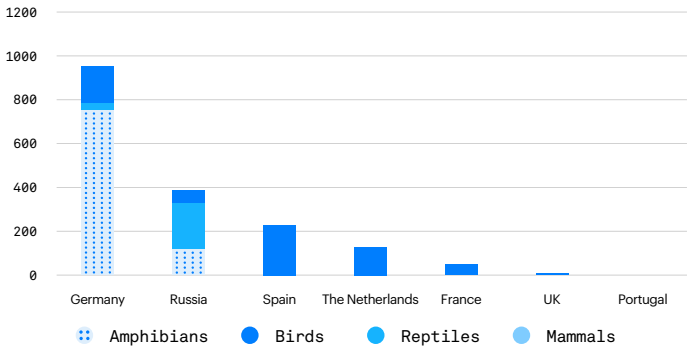


Figure 5: Destination countries for Latin American wildlife trafficked to Europe (number of animals)



The graph above shows that, in this study, Germany is the main destination for Latin American amphibians; Russia for reptiles; and Spain, the Netherlands, and France for birds. The following observations must be taken into consideration:

- The peak for Germany is mainly caused by the high numbers of amphibians that were seized in or en route to Germany (752 in total, all poison dart frogs, in three different seizures). Poison dart frogs are relatively easy to smuggle in large numbers due to their small size, with specimens commonly hidden in photographic rolls stashed in suitcases.
- The high number of seized reptiles and amphibians that were destined for Russia can be largely explained by the activity of a Russian citizen who was implicated in one seizure in the Netherlands in 2017 and two seizures in Brazil in 2021. After he was caught for the second time in one year in Brazil, he was sentenced to 11 years in prison.
- Portugal was implicated as a destination for one seizure concerning 31 parrot eggs, which a man tried to smuggle from Brazil strapped to his body.[10] As these concerned eggs, they were not recorded as number of specimens in the database.

The seizure is relevant, however, as it confirms Portugal's role as a destination for wild bird eggs from Latin America. In the past, there have been several seizures of eggs of parrots, macaws, and toucans from Latin America headed for Portugal.[11]

▼ Man with bird eggs strapped on his body. He was arrested in Manaus, Brazil, in May 2018 and intended to fly to Portugal.

https://amazonasatual.com.br/homem-e-preso-no-aeroporto-de-manaus-com-ovos-de-animais-silvestres/

2.1.1.4 Key source countries

As the graph below shows, the highest numbers of seizures were reported for Suriname, Brazil, and Mexico.

The highest numbers of seized animals originated from Colombia, Panama, and Mexico.

Figure 6: Latin American source countries for wildlife trafficked to Europe (number of seizures)

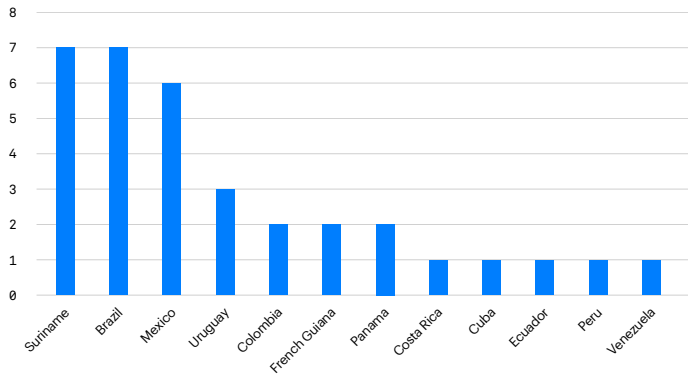
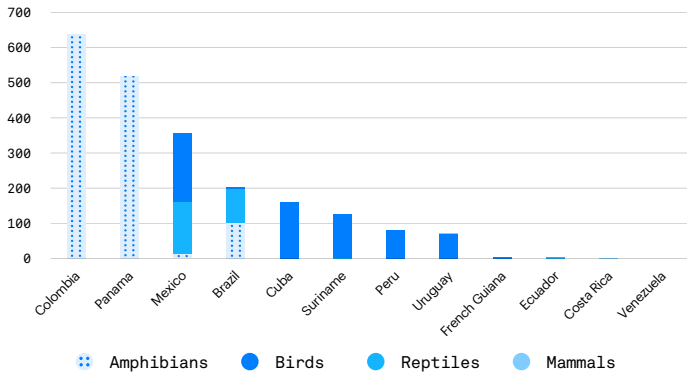


Figure 7: Latin American source countries for wildlife trafficked to Europe (number of animals)



As the graph shows, Colombia and Panama are key source countries for amphibians, Mexico is predominantly a source for songbirds and reptiles, and Brazil for reptiles and amphibians. Cuba, Suriname, Peru, and Uruguay are mainly suppliers of songbirds destined for the caged-bird trade. It should be noted the Spanish authorities have highlighted the emergence of Uruguay as a main point of export favoured by traffickers due to the country's weak legal framework, low sanctions applied to wildlife trafficking, and low levels of control, which seem to be weaker than in any of the neighbouring countries.

2.1.1.5 Species targeted

The illegal trade in Latin American species often involves rare and/or endemic species which are in high demand in European pet markets. Research on the exotic pet trade indicates that novelty and scarcity are among the key factors that attract specialist demand and higher values. Species that are only found in a limited geographic range, particularly island endemic species, are inherently scarce and so are in demand from traders. Additionally, endemism allows for collectors to know exactly where to find a species. As trade diminishes supplies, the prices increase.[12]

Examples of affected species from Latin America include horned lizards (*Phrynosoma* spp.), alligator lizards (*Abronia* spp.), poison dart frogs (*Oophaga* spp.), tree frogs (*Agalychnis* spp.), and certain species of songbirds.

No fewer than 69 Latin American wildlife species were affected by the seizures that were identified. This included 36 bird species, 23 reptile species, eight amphibian species, and two mammal species. Of these, only 17 species (25%) were listed in CITES at the time of seizure.[13] Some 30% of the species trafficked to Europe (21 species) are endemic (including 12 reptile species, seven amphibian species, and two bird species). These findings highlight that European demand for rare and/or endemic species poses a significant threat to already vulnerable species.

A full list of the species identified, their CITES protection status, and whether they are endemic is included as Annex 1. In addition to the 69 Latin American species, the species list includes two species (lovebirds, *Agapornis* spp.; and budgerigars, *Melopsittacus undulatus*) which were trafficked from Spain to Latin America (for more on this reversed trafficking route, please see section 2.1.3).

Amphibians

Of the 1,280 amphibians seized from traffickers between 2017 and 2023, 1,158 specimens concerned poison dart frogs. Poison dart frogs are trafficked from Colombia and Panama to supply demand from collectors in Europe and Russia. While Germany is the key destination, illicit specimens find their way from there to hobbyists around Europe (and possibly beyond). 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 in captive breeding. The communities from which the specimens are extracted receive payments of less than a dollar per individual, while the value of these same frogs can reach several thousand euros or dollars when they reach their destination.[14]

Demand from European consumer markets poses a major threat to vulnerable Latin American amphibian and other wildlife species. For instance, the illegal trade of harlequin poison frogs (*Oophaga histrionica*) and Lehmann's poison frogs (*Oophaga lehmanni*), both endemic to Colombia, to Europe has contributed to such severe imperilment that the species are now IUCN-classified as critically endangered.

In 2022 and 2023, no seizures of amphibians from Latin America were identified in the media. It is possible that seizures occurred which were not detected or that traffickers have found new ways of smuggling this species to Europe, however, it is not unlikely that the apparent halt in amphibian seizures is related to successful law enforcement interventions in Germany, Panama, and Brazil in 2020 and 2021:

- In 2020, a Slovakian woman was arrested with 112 poison dart frogs in her hotel room in Hamm. The frogs were meant to be sold at the Terraristika Reptile Fair in Hamm. 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.[15] 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 using fraudulent CITES permits which declared the frogs to be captive bred and exported from Nicaragua, when in fact, they were shipped from Panama.[16]

- Possibly, this case sparked law enforcement interest in Panama, as a major seizure took place a year later in Panama in May 2021. Two Panamanians and a foreigner were arrested in Río Hato, Coclé Province, for the illegal collection and trafficking of amphibians and a total of 406 poison dart frogs and two red-eyed tree frogs seized.[17] There are a few farms in Panama licensed to breed amphibians. 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.[18]

- In June 2021, Brazilian authorities arrested a notorious Russian wildlife trafficker, who was caught several times (in 2017 and 2021) trying to smuggle frogs, reptiles, and invertebrates to Russia.[19]

However, demand persists, and traffickers continue to try their hand at smuggling poison dart frogs to Europe. 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 São Paolo, Brazil, via Panama, where she reportedly intended to sell/drop off the frogs.[20] Panama is a well-known hub for poison arrow frog trafficking to Europe.

Songbirds

Based on the seizure data, illegal bird trade to Europe mainly affects songbirds: a total of 634 specimens of 28 different species were seized in or en route to Europe. This represents 99% of all birds reported to be seized between 2017 and 2023. None of the species involved are CITES-listed. Most of the birds are smuggled alive (518 live specimens were recorded).

Latin American songbirds such as euphonias (*Euphonia* spp.), tanagers (*Tangara* spp.) and seed eaters (*Sporophila* spp.) are highly prized in the European caged-bird trade. Trafficking routes reflect old colonial links, with Spain mainly importing illicit songbirds from Cuba, Peru, Mexico, and Uruguay, and the Netherlands songbirds from Suriname.

Surinamese songbirds (*Sporophila* spp.) are commonly smuggled to the Netherlands in toothpaste boxes, toilet paper rolls, or hair rollers hidden in passenger cabin luggage, a treatment many birds don't survive. In the Netherlands, the birds command high prices and are used in bird singing contests by the Surinamese diaspora in the Netherlands.

As Customs controls in Suriname and the Netherlands are relatively efficient in intercepting songbird smugglers, it is possible that French Guiana (which neighbours Suriname) is used as an alternative smuggling route for songbirds destined for the Netherlands. This is evidenced by a seizure in March 2021 at Paris's Orly airport of four chestnut-bellied seed finches (*Sporophila angolensis*) from a person arriving from French Guiana.[21]

Latin American psittacids (parakeets, parrots, and macaws) and toucans are also known to be trafficked to Europe. This illicit trade is likely flying under the radar, however, with traffickers smuggling these species' eggs rather than live specimens. This modus operandi has been (and possibly continues to be) frequently used by Portuguese traffickers, as mentioned above. The seizure data show that Asian traffickers smuggle psittacid eggs to east Asia, using Europe as a transit point (please see section 2.1.2 for more detail on this trafficking route).

It should be noted that there is also a market for taxidermied birds. In April 2018, Peruvian Customs in Lima seized a parcel shipment with 84 dead Peruvian birds, three bat skulls, and one monkey skull preserved in salt. The parcel was addressed to a recipient in Russia and its contents were likely destined for a collector's scientific collection.[22]

▼ Eight dead Surinamese songbirds (part of a shipment of 33 birds) that a Dutchman attempted to smuggle out of Suriname in toothpaste boxes in his luggage, October 2021.

https://www.waterkant.net/suriname/2021/10/18/nederlander-probeert-33-zangvogels-te-smokkelen-uit-suriname/

Reptiles

The high diversity in (endemic) reptiles from Mexico and Brazil have made these countries key targets for European reptile traffickers. 12 of the 23 reptile species seized between 2017 and 2023 concerned endemic species.

For Mexico, this includes, for example, several subspecies of horned lizards (*Phrynosoma* spp.) and alligator lizards (*Abronia* spp.).

- 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, 10 had already died from suffocation inside the dolls. The parcels were only detected because of the smell of dead animals emanating from them.[23]

- 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.[24]

- 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, five alligator lizards, and 30 Guatemalan emerald spiny lizards (*Sceloporus taeniocnemis*). This last species is not CITES-listed and is endemic to Mexico and Guatemala.[25]

The illegal trade in horned lizards has grown exponentially in recent years, as the demand for these slow-moving reptiles for pets has skyrocketed in the European Union and Asia. Mexican conservationists have stated that most horned lizards sold in Mexico are illegal, and many times juveniles are taken from the wild to pass them off as captive bred.[26]

The Brazilian-sourced reptile trafficking incidents all concerned the same Russian trafficker, Kirill Kravchenko:

- In May 2017, Dutch Customs at Schiphol Airport seized 26 pit viper snakes (*Bothrops asper*), 11 lizards, and 16 frogs from Kravchenko who was transiting from Brazil to Russia.[27]

- In January 2021, Brazilian Customs at São Paolo's Guarulhos airport caught Kravchenko with 294 wild animals, including 61 reptiles (mainly lizards), 87 frogs, and 146 invertebrates in his luggage.[28]

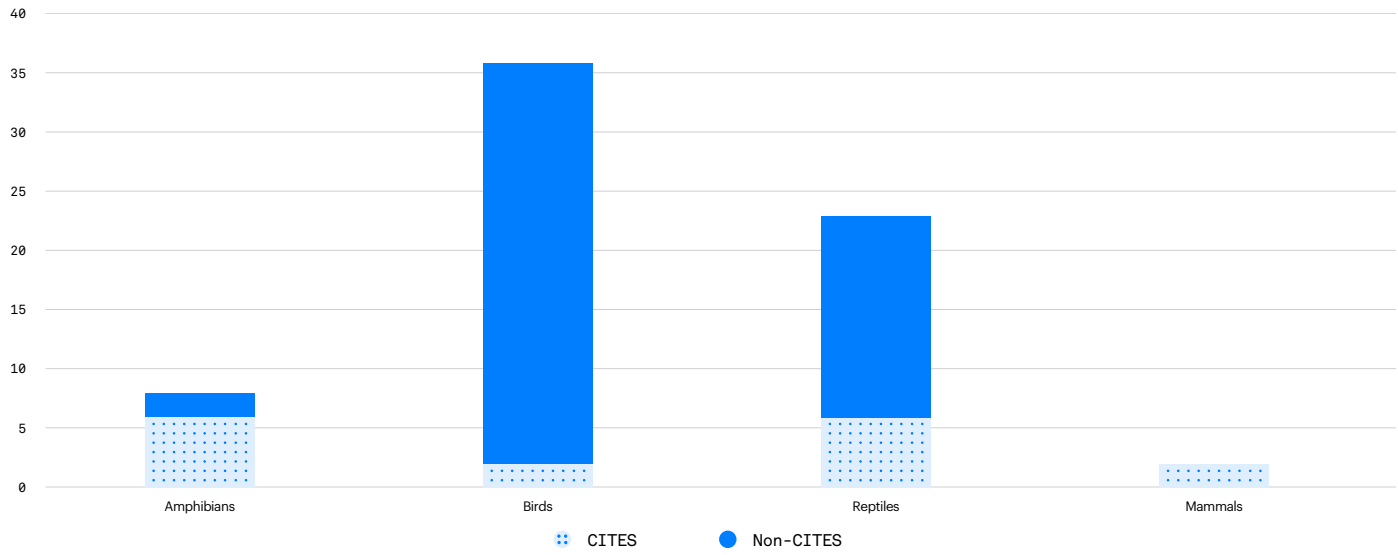
- Half a year later, in June 2021, Kravchenko was arrested in a hotel in Rio de Janeiro with 320 wild animals, including reptiles, frogs, and invertebrates in his luggage, which he allegedly intended to bring to Paraguay across the Brazilian border. He was arrested and sentenced to 11 years in prison. Since Kravchenko was put out of business, no seizures of reptiles from Brazil were recorded.

Dutch law enforcers find that small gecko species from Latin America, including *Gonatodes* and *Sphaerodactuylus* species (which include several endemic species) are very popular in the European market and frequently observed in Dutch reptile fairs. Furthermore, all horned reptile species, such as *Phrynosoma* species from Mexico, are popular.

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, the juveniles were marketed as captive bred in Europe, using forged documents to conceal their origin.[29]

▼ Brazilian spiny-tailed lizards seized from Russian trafficker Kravchenko in January 2021, São Paolo International Airport.

Figure 8: Number of species listed in CITES / not listed in CITES at the time of seizure



Mammals

Between 2017 and 2023, only two seizures were identified which concerned mammal species:

- In September 2018, German Customs at Leipzig International Airport seized a jaguar (*Panthera onca*, CITES Appendix I) skin and skull sent from Venezuela to Spain in a cargo shipment that was transiting in Germany.[30]
- In February 2019, German Customs in Taucha seized a parcel with the skull of a South American fur seal (*Arctocephalus australis*, CITES Appendix II) that was shipped from Uruguay.[31]

The sparsity of mammals in smuggling incidents to the EU appears to suggest that mammals are either less at risk of trafficking from Latin America to Europe or are being trafficked using methods that are less easily detected. Nonetheless, these two seizures provide an indication that parcel post is used to smuggle mammal parts and products. Furthermore, they indicate that there is demand in Europe for Latin American mammal parts and products.

2.1.1.6 Illegal trade in non-CITES-listed species

As mentioned above, only 25% of the 69 Latin American species trafficked to Europe were listed in CITES at the time they were seized.

The finding that the vast majority of wildlife species trafficked to Europe lack CITES protection and that many are endemic confirm findings from previous reports, including the Stolen Wildlife series by Pro Wildlife et al.[32] It also 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.[33]

Implications for criminal justice responses to trafficking of non-CITES species

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 non-existent or significantly lower than for smuggling of CITES-listed species. These are usually limited to fines based on violation of Customs, animal welfare, or veterinary legislation. 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.[34]

The law enforcers interviewed for this report explained how Spain deals with seizures of non-CITES species: if illicit non-CITES species are found, only veterinary and animal welfare legislation can be applied. Veterinary legislation restricts the power to seize to illegal bird shipments and certain cases of illegal animal imports. Purely veterinary irregularities within EU internal trade constitute only an administrative infringement and provide no legal power to seize the animals. The recent modification of the Spanish Penal Code (April 2023) which listed animal abuse (of any species, not only domestic/domesticated species) as a criminal violation, has made it easier to penalise wildlife traffickers for animal abuse.

2.1.1.7 Modus operandi

The interviewed European law enforcers note that professional traders involved in the trafficking use their legitimate business to traffic illegally sourced wildlife, taking advantage of their legal structures and logistics to circumvent the legislation. Involved hobbyists take advantage of their technical knowledge about taxonomy and science (some are biologists), as well as their closed circles of contacts.

Both wildlife breeders and professional traders trafficking wildlife make use of the 'services' offered by mules, while they control the entire process. They contact the poacher in the country of origin, organise the trip for the mule, and pay for the tickets and other expenses; in some cases, they travel with the mule on the same flights to check all the procedures.

All 'high-rank' wildlife traffickers know each other, as they commonly use closed networks that are not easy to enter. These high-level traffickers obtain the names of poachers and mules in countries of origin through others in the network, or they travel there themselves to make these connections. Given their knowledge of the distribution of species populations, they know very well where to go to poach certain species. Commonly, however, they don't poach the animals themselves.

Photo: © Gendarmería Nacional Argentina CC BY 4.0

▲ Juvenile white-faced capuchins seized in Guatemala that two Mexican men tried to smuggle to Mexico in January 2020.

CITES document fraud is widespread

European law enforcers flagged that CITES document fraud is probably the most extensive modus operandi used for illegal wildlife trade in Europe. For example, it has been observed for years that CITES documents that have been obtained for a certain (captive-bred) species are used to launder illegal specimens by claiming they are 'captive-bred' offspring from these licensed specimens. This type of fraud is easy because countries do not or rarely conduct analyses to prove the veracity of these 'captive-bred' certificates. It is also common for invoices or transfer certificates to refer to CITES permits that don't exist or, in case they do exist, concern permits which were issued for different species than those which the invoice or certificate pertain to. For instance, Guardia Civil recently had a case regarding a reptile species where the CITES permit which was referred to prove legality concerned the import of zebra skins.

Another common form of fraud is the laundering of specimens with microchips or rings belonging to legal specimens which, once they die, are replaced by illegally sourced specimens. There is also duplication of rings or microchips.

Seizures represent just a fraction of the illicit trade

Looking at the numbers of seizures reported in the media between 2017 and 2023 and the number of animals involved, one could be forgiven for thinking the illegal wildlife trade from Latin America to Europe is not very significant. However, these seizures represent just a fraction of the actual illicit trade volume. In the first place, as noted in the caveat in section 1, many wildlife seizures are not reported to the media and the limited scope of this quick scan did not allow an in-depth collection and analysis of all relevant media reports on wildlife seizures for the entire EU. In addition, 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.

Illegal cargo imports

The law enforcers interviewed for this study pointed out—based on intelligence—that the large quantities of illicit wildlife are not brought in by people (often mules) smuggling reptiles, amphibians, or birds in suitcases. Rather, the bulk arrives by cargo, using major, registered dealers. These traders allegedly import shipments with hundreds of animals at a time, either mixing legal and illegal specimens or using fraudulent documents to conceal the illegal origin of the animals. In some cases, these imports concern CITES-listed species, but the majority are not protected by CITES. For instance, there is a trader based in a western European country who systematically imports shipments of wild (non-CITES) birds. The accompanying documents state they are meant for European zoos, abusing an exemption from the wild bird import ban provided in EU legislation.[35] Instead, he allegedly sells them commercially the moment they arrive in the EU.

According to law enforcers, there have been many cargo exports from Mexico and Peru that have entered the EU through Frankfurt Airport, which are finally distributed to the rest of Europe (including Spain). Slovakia and the Czech Republic, and Ukraine before the Russian invasion, have also been identified as entry points for Europe. Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic commonly appear as alleged origins of 'captive-bred' species which have been trafficked to Europe.

In addition to cargo, parcel post has become increasingly significant as a means for smuggling wildlife into Europe. Unfortunately, detection is very challenging due to the huge amount of commodity movements between the two regions.

The Dutch law enforcer who was interviewed noted that large air cargo shipments are no longer flown into the Netherlands as KLM, the Netherlands's major airline company, has stopped carrying live wildlife cargo.

2.1.2 Europe as a transit for wildlife trafficked to Asia

Due to their geographical position, European airports are frequently used as a transit for Asian citizens smuggling Latin American wildlife to Asia.

- In October 2017, Taiwanese Customs seized 45 macaw eggs from a Taiwanese woman who had carried them in a thermal insulation device in her luggage from Paraguay, transiting at Schiphol Airport in the Netherlands.[36]

- In July 2018, French Customs at Paris's Charles de Gaulle airport seized 4,960 Hawksbill sea turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) shell scales that were in transit to Vietnam from Haiti.[37]

These two seizures represent just a fraction of wildlife trafficked via Europe. In most European countries, transit shipments receive little to no attention, and transit seizures are rare as a result.

For instance, an undercover investigation by Earth League International (ELI) focusing on jaguar parts trafficking by ethnic Chinese operating in Suriname found that Schiphol Airport in the Netherlands was a favoured transit point for smuggling jaguar parts and products from Suriname to China. Informants identified by ELI stated, 'The Amsterdam airport is not like the US, as all checked luggage for transfer passengers will go from one plane to the next directly in the airport without going through X-ray machines like in the US. So, Amsterdam is totally lax as we can hide the illegal stuff like teeth in the checked luggage, and they will surely pass as well in Amsterdam on our way to China'.[38]

It should be noted that in some instances Dutch Customs do seize wildlife in transit. For instance, in September 2021 Dutch Customs made a significant seizure of 145 reptiles and amphibians (mainly non-CITES, mostly endemic species) that a Russian woman attempted to smuggle from Mexico to Russia in her suitcase. The seizure took place in the context of an international Interpol operation. The majority of the species present in this seizure were not found in any domestic Mexican seizures, suggesting these are traded to supply a niche foreign demand.[39,40]

2.1.3 Europe as a source for wildlife trafficked to Latin America

Europe is not only a destination country for Latin American wildlife. The 2024 Wildlife Crime in Hispanic America study has identified frequent seizures of exotic species native to Africa and Asia destined for the pet trade in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, and Mexico. The seized animals included several species of pythons, chameleons, bearded dragons, leopard geckos, *Mali uromastyx*, Russian tortoises, African grey parrots, cockatoos, budgerigars, lovebirds, African lions, and tigers. The study suggested that, based on seizure data and existing research[41], the US and Europe are likely sources for exotic wildlife trafficked in Hispanic America.[42]

Two incidents, involving 98 animals, were identified of wildlife being smuggled to Latin America from Europe:

- One seizure took place at São Paolo's Guarulhos International Airport (Brazil) in September 2017 and concerned 18 snakes and 12 lizards (species not identified) found in the luggage of a Brazilian man arriving from Madrid, Spain. Upon being arrested, the man claimed he bought the animals for 800 euros in Portugal and that he did not intend to sell them. The law enforcement officers, however, established that the suspect advertised wild animals on social media. The reptiles were in precarious conditions, wrapped in women's socks and inside plastic containers. The man received a fine of more than R$100,000 (around €17,500).[43]

- The other seizure occurred in July 2019 at Tenerife North International Airport (Spain) and concerned 68 lovebirds (*Agapornis* spp.), budgerigars (*Melopsittacus undulatus*), and other exotic bird species hidden in 11 rudimentary metal mesh cages in two suitcases belonging to a Colombian citizen who was about to board an international flight. The media report did not state where the man was flying to, but it can be assumed it was his home country, Colombia. Lovebirds and budgerigars are frequently seized in various Hispanic American countries, including Colombia.[44] The cages with the birds were hidden among raw spaghetti, presumably to prevent detection of noises and smells. Nonetheless, the smuggling attempt was foiled because Guardia Civil officers at the airport heard bird sounds emanating from the suitcases. Several birds had already suffocated when they were found. Of the 68 birds, 21 concerned CITES-protected species, including 11 birds listed in CITES Appendix I. The other 47 birds concerned species that are freely available but lacked documentation to prove their origin.[45]

These two incidents most likely represent just a small segment of the actual volume of illicit trade from Europe to Latin America.

▼ Lovebirds seized from luggage of a Colombian man at Tenerife North International Airport, July 2019.

https://www.laprovincia.es/videos/sucesos/2015/07/27/detectan-CO-aves-ocultas-maletas-812555S5.html

2.2 Online survey findings

An online survey was conducted to obtain a snapshot of the availability of selected reptile, amphibian, and bird species from Latin America that were reported to be seized between 2017 and 2023.

The survey took place on 17, 22, 23, and 24 May 2024 and focused on Terraristik.com and Vogelmarkt.net. Terraristik is Europe's most used commerce platform for live reptiles and amphibians; Vogelmarkt.net is a Dutch-language platform for the trade in live birds used by bird breeders and traders from around Western Europe.

Annex 2 provides an overview of the survey results. For each species, a summary is provided of when and where the specimens were seized, in addition to the survey findings.

The survey found advertisements for 25 of the 55 selected species (12 reptile species; 10 bird species; two amphibian species), including four CITES-listed species. This section discusses the key findings, including the nationality of the traders, the species identified, and any indications of possible illegal trade. For each class (reptiles, birds, amphibians), one advert is highlighted as a case study.

2.2.1 Trade in selected reptile species on Terraristik.com

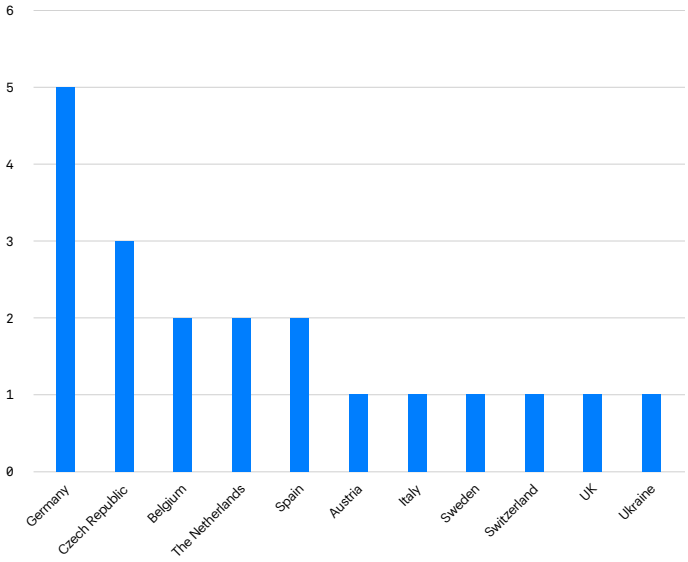
Twenty reptile traders advertising selected reptile species were identified, based in 11 European countries. With five traders, representing 25% of all traders, Germany was the most represented country for reptile traders, confirming this country's key role in the (illegal) reptile trade. These were followed by Czech Republic (three traders), Belgium, the Netherlands, and Spain (each two traders). The remaining nationalities identified (Austria, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, and Ukraine) each concerned one trader.

There were several, clearly professional, reptile traders advertising their stocklists in premium adverts on Terraristik, listing large numbers of species (sometimes dozens).

Most sellers specify that their advertised specimens are captive bred (CB), and in which year. Some fail to include this information, leaving open the possibility that these are wild-caught specimens.

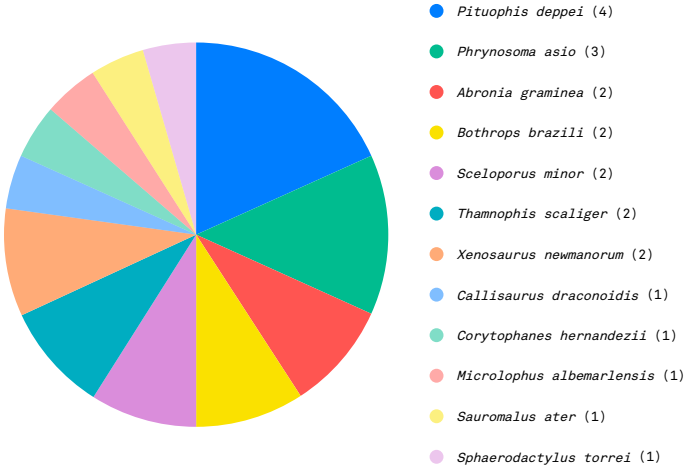
Together, these traders offered for sale 12 reptile species (out of the 24 reptile species selected for the survey).

Figure 9: Nationality of reptile traders identified in survey



Reptile species advertised on Terraristik

Figure 10: Number of adverts for selected reptile species on Terraristik, May 2024



The survey identified 25 adverts for 12 of the 24 selected reptile species. *Pituophis deppei* and *Phrynosoma asio* were the most advertised species, with four and three adverts, respectively.

Three of these 12 species are listed in CITES. *Abronia graminea* and *Phrynosoma asio* were listed in CITES Appendix II in 2023, and *Sphaerodactylus torrei* is listed in CITES Appendix III along with all other Cuban *Sphaerodactylus* subspecies.

Of the 12 selected reptile species advertised on Terraristik in May 2024, nine are endemic:

- *Abronia graminea* (Mexican alligator lizard—endemic to Mexico)*
- *Microlophus albemarlensis* (Galápagos lava lizard—endemic to the Galápagos)
- *Phrynosoma asio* (giant horned lizard—endemic to Mexico)**
- *Pituophis deppei* (Mexican pine snake—endemic to Mexico)*
- *Sceloporus minor* (minor lizard—endemic to Mexico)
- *Sphaerodactylus torrei* (Barbour's least gecko—endemic to Cuba)
- *Thamnophis scaliger* (short-tail alpine garter snake—endemic to Mexico)*
- *Xenosaurus newmanorum* (Newman's knob-scaled lizard—endemic to Mexico)**
- *Callisaurus draconoides* (zebra-tailed lizard—endemic to Mexico and Southwest US)*

This confirms the preference of European reptile hobbyists for endemic reptiles. It also confirms Mexico as a major source country for these reptiles, in addition to Cuba and Ecuador's Galápagos.

* Listed as species at risk in category "Threatened" (A) by the Mexican government
** Listed as species at risk in category "Subject to special protection" (Pr) by the Mexican government

The legal basis for this is the Mexican norm for protection of flora and fauna species native to Mexico: NOM-052-SEMARNAT.[46] In accordance with Article 420 of Mexico's Código Penal (Criminal Code), capture of and commercial activity with wild animals and plants, which are endemic, in danger of extinction, threatened, rare, or subject to special protection, is prohibited without proper permit. Legal commercial exports for species covered by NOM-052 are exceptional and limited to few species and specimens.

Case study: trade in Galápagos lava lizards by Ukrainian trader

An advertisement was identified by BION Terrarium Center, a Ukrainian reptile trading company based in Kyiv which offers large amounts of lizards and geckos for sale on Terraristik. The ad was posted early 2024 and includes five juvenile Galápagos lava lizards, see screenshot below. Ecuador does not permit export of this species endemic to Galápagos, therefore, any specimens offered for sale originate from illegal stock. This species was also observed for sale on Terraristik in November 2021.

BION has previously been implicated in illegal reptile trade activity. In December 2015, German authorities seized more than 130 reptiles and amphibians from a hotel room in Hamm, which presumably were meant to be sold to visitors of the Terraristika reptile fair. The animals were in the possession of three Ukrainian citizens, representatives of two companies (BION Terrarium Center and Ekzo Ltd) based in Kyiv. BION's company owner showed fake trading papers for the animals. The company has reportedly imported thousands of reptiles into Europe over a period of decades, including from Madagascar.

Sources: https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/wie-seltene-reptilien-nachdeutschland-geschmuggelt-werden-a-1201984.html

Advert: https://web.archive.org/web/20240508142527/https://www.terraristik.com/tb/kaufen-und-verkaufen/uroplatus-uromastyx-eublepharis-correlophus-tiliqua/a1011947/

▲ Lava lizard on a rock in the Galápagos.

2.2.2 Trade in selected bird species on Vogelmarkt.net

Some 15 bird traders were identified, from six countries. All six countries are in Western Europe, which suggests demand for exotic birds for the caged-bird trade is mainly centred in this part of Europe. It is also possible, however, that Vogelmarkt.net mainly caters to a Western European audience and that Eastern European bird traders use different platforms.

Apart from traders offering birds for sale or exchange, several ads were recorded from individuals asking to buy or exchange birds, specifying whether they were looking for females or males. It is apparent that the bird species identified are rare in the trade and attract a niche audience looking to breed them.

Most ads were from Dutch and German individuals (four each). In addition, there were three Belgian individuals, two Spanish, one Portuguese, and one Danish.

Bird species offered/asked for sale on Vogelmarkt.net in May 2024

Advertisements were identified for 10 of the 29 bird species that were selected for the survey. For five of these species, two unique ads were found, for the others, just one advertisement per species was identified (see below).

Of the 10 bird species identified on Vogelmarkt.net, one is endemic, the *Priotelus temnurus* (Cuban trogon, endemic to Cuba). None are listed in CITES.

Figure 11: Nationality of bird traders identified in survey

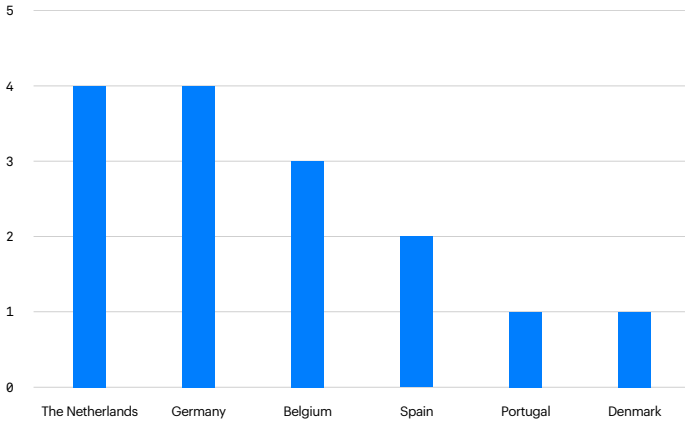
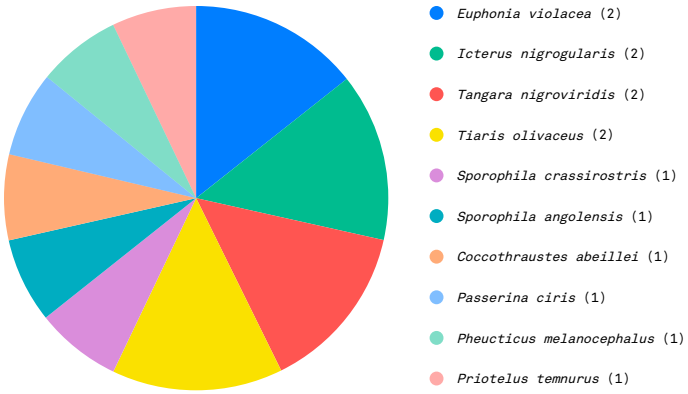


Figure 12: Number of adverts for selected bird species offered/asked for sale on Vogelmarkt.net in May 2024



Case study: advertisement for beryl-spangled tanagers on Vogelmarkt.net

On 21 May 2024, a Belgian breeder offered two pairs of beryl-spangled tanagers (*Tangara nigroviridis*) for sale on Vogelmarket.net.[1] According to the Songbirds in Trade Database, all specimens of this species found in trade are wild-caught. The species is considered hard to breed in captivity; furthermore, there is no knowledge of this species being bred in captivity.

In the advert, the trader claims the specimens are 'fully in order'. However, given the assessment by the Songbirds in Trade Database and the fact that the species is known to be trafficked, it is quite possible that the birds offered for sale by the Belgian trader are (illegally) wild-caught specimens and/or originate from illegally sourced specimens.

Advert: https://web.archive.org/web/20240522141049/https://www.vogelmarkt.net/add_detail.asp?ber_id=1496776&rub=6

▶ A lined seedeater perched on a branch.

2.2.3 Trade in selected amphibian species on Terraristik.com

The two amphibian species selected for the survey were both found to be advertised on Terraristik in May 2024.

Three advertisements were identified for red-eyed tree frog (*Agalychnis callidryas*, CITES-listed since 2023) and one advertisement for Mexican leaf frog (*Agalychnis dacnicolor*, not CITES-listed). Two sellers were from the Netherlands, one from France, and one from Germany.

Red-eyed tree frogs are very popular in the global pet trade and widely bred in captivity. The species was listed in CITES Appendix II after it was overexploited (and trafficked) for decades.[47]

Mexican leaf frogs are endemic to Mexico. This rare species is considered difficult to breed, so much so that Cotswold Wildlife Park, a zoo in the United Kingdom, proudly announced in 2023 to have successfully bred Mexican leaf frogs, stating they were only the second zoological collection in history to have achieved success in breeding these rare amphibians.[48]

Case study: sale of Mexican leaf frogs on Terraristik.com

In August or September of 2023, a French trader offered Mexican leaf frog tadpoles (*Agalychnis dacnicolor*) for sale on Terraristik. Given that this species is known to be trafficked from Mexico, it is possible this seller's specimens originate from illegally sourced specimens.

Advert: https://web.archive.org/web/20240522135853/https://www.terraristik.com/tb/kaufen-und-verkaufen/agalychnis-dacnicolor-tadpoles/a999746/

▶ A blue poison dart frog.

▲ Bird market in Paris, France.

Section 3

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions and recommendations

This report has examined the illegal trade in Latin American species of amphibians, birds, mammals, and reptiles to Europe, based on seizures reported in the media between 2017 and 2023, a survey to assess online trade in these species in Europe, and interviews with Dutch and Spanish law enforcers. Although further research would be needed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the situation, the data collected provide useful insight into key trafficking routes, traffickers' profiles and modus operandi, species affected, and online trade in these species.

The following key conclusions emerge from the report:

First and foremost, the data confirm research by others that the European pet market for live amphibians, birds, and reptiles from Latin America is mainly focused on acquiring rare and/or endemic, non-CITES-listed species.

Only 25% of the species seized from illicit shipments destined for Europe between 2017 and 2023 concerned species listed in CITES. European criminal justice responses to the illicit influx of non-CITES species are inadequate, as the trade in the large majority of non-CITES species is not regulated in the EU. As a result, smuggling of non-CITES-listed species is often a low priority and penalties are non-existent or significantly lower than for smuggling of CITES-listed species.

The weakness of European countries' criminal justice responses, and therefore the low risk involved in smuggling non-CITES species, is an incentive for traffickers to target these species.

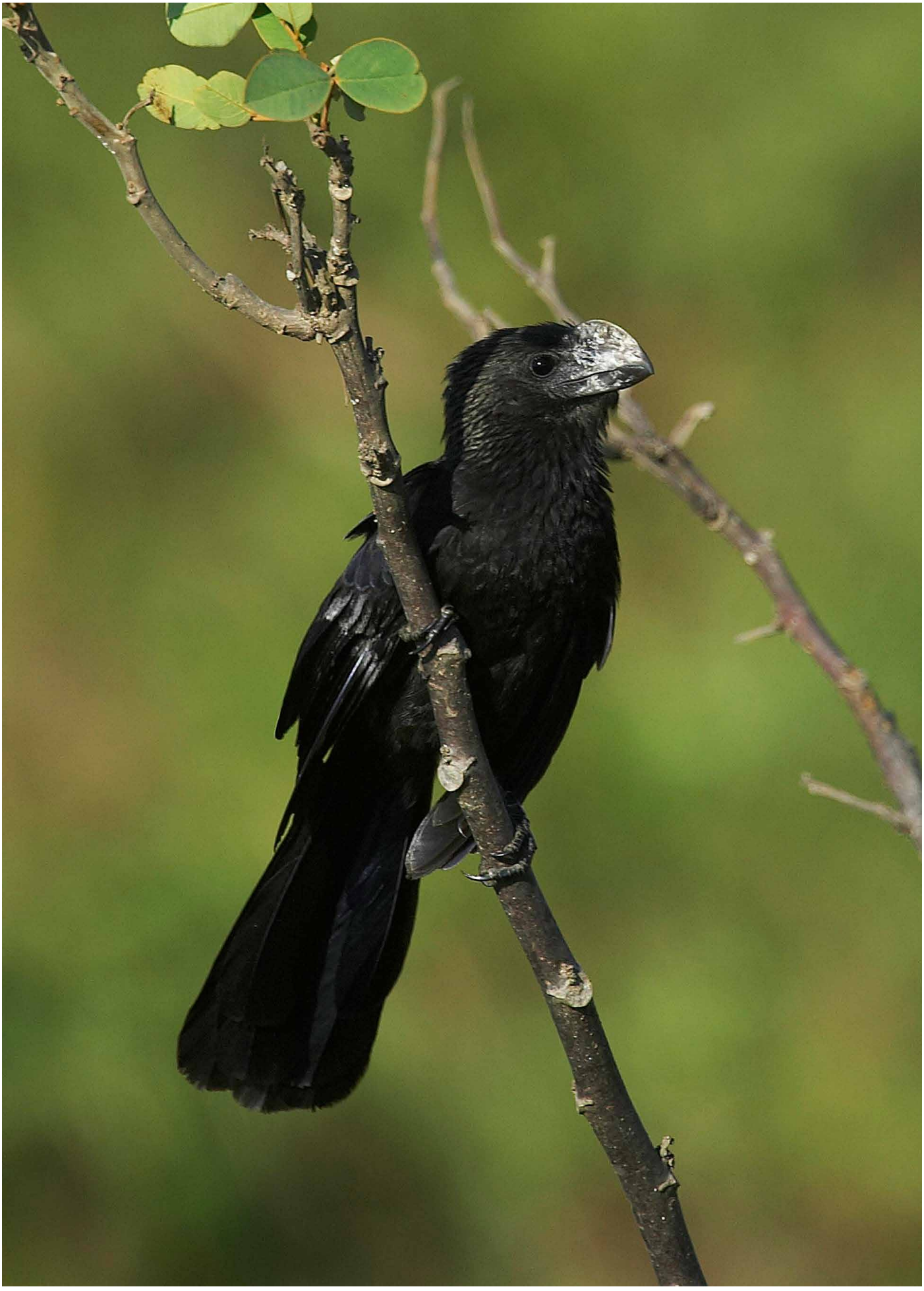
While most seizures identified between 2017 and 2023 concerned individuals caught with illicit wildlife in their luggage or on their body, interviewed European law enforcers indicate that the large bulk of illicit wildlife from Latin America is imported through cargo imports by legitimate industry players, with the use of fraudulent documents and abusing loopholes in EU legislation. This implies that the seizure data collected for this report represent just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the numbers of specimens being trafficked.

The following recommendations are made to decision and policy makers:

- The findings from this report highlight the need for stricter EU legislation obliging Member States to adequately penalise smugglers of illegally sourced wildlife species that are not listed in CITES, significantly strengthening law enforcement deterrence.
- Conduct additional research to understand the scale and nature of illicit cargo imports of Latin American wildlife into Europe by legitimate industry players. This is also pertinent given the alleged abuse of exemptions provided under the European ban on wild bird imports—increasing the risk of the introduction of bird diseases into the EU.
- In cooperation with various stakeholders, including NGOs and the private sector, design and launch a demand reduction campaign based on consumer behaviour science and using appropriate messaging to target consumers of live exotic birds and reptiles with the aim of reducing demand for rare and/or endemic wildlife species from Latin America and other key regions such as Africa and Asia.
- The development and implementation of a centralised EU wildlife trade data collection system is crucial to ensure consistent data collection across Member States, to provide relevant information on imported and exported wildlife species, and to share trade data in cross-national platforms enabling better coordination of intelligence. Similar to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's LEMIS database, such a system would collect information on all wildlife species, including both CITES-listed and non-CITES-listed species, entering or leaving the EU, allowing analysis and early detection of trends in (illegal) wildlife trade to and from the EU.

▼ Argentinian officials seized 387 wild birds hidden among a load of olives in a cargo truck, July 2023.

Photo: © Gendarmería Nacional Argentina CC BY 4.0



▲ Groove-billed ani (Crotophaga sulcirostris) on a branch in Los Lianos in Venezuela.

▲ SERFOR seizes 24 specimens of taxidermized wildlife in Junin, Peru.

Section 4

Annexes

Annex 1:

Wildlife species seized 2017-2023

This annex lists the 69 Latin American wildlife species that were identified in shipments seized in or en route to Europe between 2017 and 2023. In addition, the list includes two species (lovebirds, *Agapornis* sp.; and budgerigars, *Melopsittacus undulatus*) which were trafficked from Spain to Latin America.

Amphibians

Species (Latin name)	Species (Common name)	CITES-listed Y/N	Endemic Y/N
Agalychnis callidryas	Red-eyed tree frog	II (2023)	Y
Agalychnis dacnicolor	Mexican leaf frog	N	Y
Dendrobates auratus	Green and black poison dart frog	II (1987)	N
Oophaga histrionica	Harlequin poison frog	II (1987)	Y
Oophaga lehmanni	Lehmann's poison frog	II (1987)	Y
Oophaga pumilio	Strawberry poison dart frog	II (1987)	Y
Oophaga sylvatica	Little devil poison dart frog	II (1987)	Y
Oophaga vicentei	Vicente's poison frog	II (1987)	Y

Birds

Species (Latin name)	Species (Common name)	CITES-listed Y/N	Endemic Y/N
Agapornis spp. (trafficked to LatAm)	Lovebird	II (except *A. roseicollis*)	N
Anisognathus somptuosus	Blue-winged mountain tanager	N	N
Aphelocoma ultramarina	Transvolcanic jay	N	Y
Apodidae	Swift	N	N
Bucconidae	Puffbird	N	N
Cathartes burrovianus	Lesser yellow-headed vulture	N	N
Chlorornis riefferii	Grass-green tanager	N	N
Coccothraustes abeillei	Hooded grosbeak	N	N
Eubucco bourcierii	Red-headed barbet	N	N
Euphonia elegantissima	Elegant euphonia	N	N
Euphonia violacea	Violaceous euphonia	N	N
Galbulidae	Jacamar	N	N
Graydidascalus brachyurus	Short-tailed parrot	II (2005)	N
Icterus nigrogularis	Yellow oriole	N	N
Lepidocolaptes sp.	Woodcreeper	N	N
Melanerpes	Woodpecker	N	N

Birds (cont.)

Species (Latin name)	Species (Common name)	CITES-listed Y/N	Endemic Y/N
Melopsittacus undulatus	Budgerigar	N	N
Mimus polyglottos	Northern mockingbird	N	N
Momotus mexicanus	Russet-crowned motmot	N	N
Passerina ciris	Painted bunting	N	N
Pheucticus melanocephalus	Black-headed grosbeak	N	N
Pipridae	Manakin	N	N
Ramphastos vitellinus	Channel-billed toucan	II	N
Spinus psaltria	Lesser goldfinch	N	N
Sporophila americana	Wing-barred seedeater	N	N
Sporophila angolensis	Chestnut-bellied seed finch	N	N
Sporophila bouvreuil	Copper seedeater	N	N
Sporophila castaneiventris	Chestnut-bellied seedeater	N	N
Sporophila crassirostris	Large-bellied seed finch	N	N
Sporophila minuta	Ruddy-breasted seedeater	N	N
Sporophila schistacea	Slate-coloured seedeater	N	N
Tangara nigroviridis	Beryl-spangled tanager	N	N
Tangara philipsi	Sira tanager	N	Y
Tangara vassorii	Blue and black tanager	N	N
Tiaris olivaceus	Yellow-faced grassquit	N	N
Trochilidae	Hummingbird	N	N
Trogon melanurus	Black-tailed trogon	N	N
Tyrannidae	Flycatcher	N	N

Mammals

Species (Latin name)	Species (Common name)	CITES-listed Y/N	Endemic Y/N
Arctocephalus australis	South American fur seal	II (1977)	N
Panthera onca	Jaguar	I (1975)	N

Reptiles

Species (Latin name)	Species (Common name)	CITES-listed Y/N	Endemic Y/N
Abronia graminea	Mexican alligator lizard	II (2017)	Y
Abronia taeniata	Banded arboreal alligator lizard	II (2017)	Y
Barisia rudicollis	Rough-necked alligator lizard	N	Y
Bothrops asper	Fer-de-lance	N	N
Callisaurus draconoidis	Zebra-tailed lizard	N	Y
Chelonoidis carbonarius	Red-footed tortoise	II (2017)	N
Chelonoidis denticulatus	Brazilian giant tortoise	II (2017)	N
Conolophus subcristatus	Galápagos land iguana	II (1975)	Y
Conopsis nasus	Largenose earth snake	N	Y
Corytophanes hernandezii	Hernandez's helmeted basilisk	N	N
Crotalus molossus	Black-tailed rattlesnake	N	N
Crotalus ravus	Mexican pygmy rattlesnake	N	Y
Crotaphytus collaris melanomaculatus	Eastern collared lizard	N	N
Dipsosaurus dorsalis sonoriensis	Desert iguana	N	N
Iguana iguana	Green iguana	II (1977)	N
Paleosuchus	Caiman	II	N
Phrynosoma asio	Giant horned lizard	II (2023)	Y
Phrynosoma solare	Regal horned lizard	II (2023)	N
Pituophis deppei	Mexican pine snake	N	Y
Sauromalus ater	Common chuckwalla	N	N
Sceloporus taeniocnemis	Guatemalan emerald spiny lizard	N	Y
Thamnophis scaliger	Short-tail alpine garter snake	N	Y
Xenosaurus tzacualtipantecus	Zacualtipán knob-scaled lizard	N	Y

Annex 2:
Online survey results

CB = Captive Bred

Amphibians

Species Latin	Species English	CITES Y/N	IWT background based on media reports	Survey findings
Agalychnis callidryas	Red-eyed tree frog	II (2023)	Seized in Panama from foreign traffickers in 2021	Various ads for this species were observed. The following were recorded: 1. One ad from Dutch seller, quantity/sex not specified 2. One ad from German seller offering own CB specimens, quantity/sex not specified 3. One ad for 20 CB juveniles (Nicaraguan) from Dutch seller
Agalychnis dacnicolor	Mexican leaf frog	N	Seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	1. One ad for unspecified number of tadpoles by French seller

Birds

Species Latin	Species English	CITES Y/N	IWT background based on media reports	Survey findings
Anisognathus somptuosus	Blue-winged mountain tanager	N	Seized in Peru from passenger flying to France in 2020	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Aphelocoma ultramarina	Transvolcanic jay	N	Seized in Mexico from passenger flying to France in 2018	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Cathartes burrovianus	Lesser yellow-headed vulture	N	Seized in Peru (taxidermied), destination Russia, in 2018	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Chlorornis riefferii	Grass-green tanager	N	Seized in Peru from passenger flying to France in 2020	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Coccothraustes abeillei	Hooded grosbeak	N	Seized in Mexico from passenger flying to France in 2018	1. One ad for one female specimen from Dutch seller of special bird breeds. Seller claims all birds are legitimate and ringed according to the law

Birds (cont.)

Species Latin	Species English	CITES Y/N	IWT background based on media reports	Survey findings
Eubucco bourcierii	Red-headed barbet	N	Seized in Peru from passenger flying to France in 2020	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Euphonia elegantissima	Elegant euphonia	N	Seized in Mexico from passenger flying to France in 2018. Taxidermied *Euphonia* sp. were seized in Peru from parcel destined for Russia in 2018	1. One ad from Dutch buyer looking for a female specimen
Euphonia violacea	Violaceous euphonia	N	Seized in Suriname from passenger flying to the Netherlands in 2021. Taxidermied *Euphonia* sp. were seized in Peru from parcel destined for Russia in 2018	1. One ad from German seller looking for females, can exchange with males 2. One ad from Dutch buyer looking for unspecified number of this species, preferably pairs. Kinship no problem
Icterus nigrogularis	Yellow oriole	N	Seized in Peru (taxidermied) from parcel destined for Russia in 2018	1. One ad from Danish buyer looking for male specimen 2. One ad from 2023 from German buyer looking for female specimen hatched between 2021-2023
Melanerpes	Woodpecker	N	Seized in Peru (taxidermied) from parcel destined for Russia in 2018	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Melopsittacus undulatus	Budgerigar	N	Seized in Spain from Colombian passenger likely flying to Colombia in 2019	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Mimus polyglottos	Northern mockingbird	N	Seized in Mexico from passenger flying to France in 2018	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Momotus mexicanus	Russet-crowned motmot	N	Seized in Mexico from passenger flying to France in 2018	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Sporophila angolensis	Chestnut-bellied seed finch	N	Seized in French Guiana from passenger flying to Paris in 2021. Seized in Suriname from passengers flying to the Netherlands in 2021 and 2023	1. One ad from Spanish seller offering a pair and 2 female specimens, CB 2023
Sporophila crassirostris	Large-bellied seed finch	N	Seized in Suriname from passenger flying to the Netherlands in 2023	1. One ad from Dutch seller offering ringed male

Birds (cont.)

Species Latin	Species English	CITES Y/N	IWT background based on media reports	Survey findings
Passerina ciris	Painted bunting	N	Seized in Mexico from passenger flying to Germany in 2017	1. One ad from a German buyer looking for male specimen
Pheucticus melanocephalus	Black-headed grosbeak	N	Seized in Mexico from passenger flying to Germany in 2017 and from passenger flying to France in 2018	1. One ad from Belgian buyer looking for male specimen
Priotelus temnurus	Cuban trogon	N	Seizures in Cuba indicate this endemic species (the national bird of Cuba) is targeted by traffickers	1. Two ads from a Spanish buyer: a) looking for female 1-3 years old with closed ring and DNA, or to trade against his male specimen b) looking for breeders of Cuban trogons
Spinus psaltria	Lesser goldfinch	N	Seized in Mexico from passenger flying to France in 2018	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Sporophila americana	Wing-barred seedeater	N	Seized in Suriname from passengers headed for the Netherlands in 2021 and 2023	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Sporophila bouvreuil	Copper seedeater	N	Seized in Suriname from passengers headed for the Netherlands in 2021 and 2023	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Sporophila castaneiventris	Chestnut-bellied seedeater	N	Seized in Suriname from passengers headed for the Netherlands in 2021 and 2023	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Sporophila minuta	Ruddy-breasted seedeater	N	Seized in Suriname from passengers headed for the Netherlands in 2021 and 2023	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Sporophila schistacea	Slate-colored seedeater	N	Seized in Suriname from passengers headed for the Netherlands in 2021 and 2023	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Tangara nigroviridis	Beryl-spangled tanager	N	Seized in Peru from passenger flying to France in 2020. According to the Songbirds in Trade Database, little is known about captive breeding of this species, and all specimens originate from the wild	1. One ad from a Belgian seller offering 2 pairs. Seller states the birds are rare and are 'fully in order' 2. One ad from a German buyer asking for a female specimen
Tangara philipsi	Sira tanager	N	Seized in Peru from passenger flying to France in 2020	No advertisements identified on the survey days

Birds (cont.)

Species Latin	Species English	CITES Y/N	IWT background based on media reports	Survey findings
Tangara vassorii	Blue and black tanager	N	Seized in Peru from passenger flying to France in 2020	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Tiaris olivaceus	Yellow-faced grassquit	N	Seized in Mexico from passenger flying to France in 2018	1. One ad from a Portuguese buyer looking for one male and two female specimens 2. One ad from a Belgian buyer looking for any number of this species
Trogon melanurus	Black-tailed trogon	N	Seized in Peru (taxidermied) from parcel destined for Russia in 2018	No advertisements identified on the survey days, but search for this species led to two ads from a Spanish buyer looking for Cuban trogons (*Priotelus temnurus*), see above

Reptiles

Species Latin	Species English	CITES Y/N	IWT background based on media reports	Survey findings
Abronia graminea	Mexican alligator lizard	II (2017)	Seized In Mexico from parcel destined for Germany in 2020; seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	1. One ad for a female specimen from a Belgian seller 2. One ad for a male specimen from a Czech seller
Abronia taeniata	Banded arboreal alligator lizard	II (2017)	Seized in Mexico from parcel destined for Germany in 2020; seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	No ads identified for this subspecies, but several ads were observed for other *Abronia* subspecies: *A. mixteca, A. campbelli, A. aurita.* Several people were looking to trade against Abronias). Only a few made reference to CITES
Anolis chamaeleonides	Short-bearded anole	III (Cuba)	Suggested by Dr. Sandra Altherr. No quota have been set for this species so any trade is considered suspicious	No advertisements identified on survey days, although ads for several other *Anolis* subspecies were observed
Barisia rudicollis	Rough-necked alligator lizard	N	Seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	No advertisements identified on the survey days

Reptiles (cont.)

Species Latin	Species English	CITES Y/N	IWT background based on media reports	Survey findings
Bothrops asper	Terciopelo	N	Seized in the Netherlands from a passenger flying from Brazil to Russia in 2017	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Bothrops brazili	Brazil's lancehead	N	Suggested by Dr. Sandra Altherr for reasons of suspected illegal trade	1. One ad for one male specimen, CB 2018, from Swiss seller 2. One 2-year-old ad for one male specimen, CB 2019, from UK seller
Callisaurus draconoidis	Zebra-tailed lizard	N	Seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	1. One ad for five male CB specimens from Spanish seller
Conopsis nasus	Largenose earth snake	N	Seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Corytophanes hernandezii	Hernandez's helmeted basilisk	N	Seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	1. One 2-year-old ad for two male specimens from German seller 2. One ad from Swedish seller for a pair, CB 2019. Produced six eggs in 2021. Asking price 400 euro
Crotalus molossus	Black-tailed rattlesnake	N	Seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Crotalus ravus	Mexican pygmy rattlesnake	N	Seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Crotaphytus collaris melanomaculatus	Black-spotted collared lizard	N	Seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	Multiple ads for sale of *Crotaphytus collaris* were observed, but none for the *melanomaculatus* subspecies
Dipsosaurus dorsalis sonoriensis	Desert iguana	N	Seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	One ad identified for *Dipsosaurus dorsalis* (not recorded) but none for the *sonoriensis* (Sonora desert) subspecies
Microlophus albemarlensis	Galápagos lava lizard	N	Endemic to Galápagos, never legally exported so any trade suspicious	1. One ad from Ukrainian seller for five hatchlings

Reptiles (cont.)

Species Latin	Species English	CITES Y/N	IWT background based on media reports	Survey findings
Phrynosoma asio	Giant horned lizard	II (2023)	Seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	1. One 9-month-old ad from Spanish seller offering three young pairs and two adult pairs, all with import permit 2. One 2-year-old ad from Czechian seller offering three males and four females CB 12/2021 (so before CITES listing). 400€/one. 350€/one for three and more 3. One 3-year-old ad (so before CITES listing) from Belgian seller offering a pair
Phrynosoma solare	Regal horned lizard	II (2023)	Seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	No advertisements identified on the survey days
Pituophis deppei	Mexican pine snake	N	Seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	1. One ad from a German seller for one female *P. deppei jani*, CB 2023, €120/animal 2. One ad from an Italian seller for three male *P. deppei jani*, CB 2021 3. One ad from German seller for *P. deppei jani* (nr and sex unspecified), CB 2023, 300€/pair 4. One 9-month-old ad from German seller for *Pituophis deppei jani* CB 2023 for a pair of *Pituophis deppei jani*. 300€ for the pair
Sauromalus ater	Common chuckwalla	N	Seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	1. Two ads from a Spanish professional seller offering large amount of reptile species, including: a) five hatchlings *Sauromalus ater granite* CB 2021; b) one male *Sauromalus ater* red back (no mention of CB)
Sceloporus taeniocnemis	Guatemalan emerald spiny lizard	N	Seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	No advertisements identified, however, various ads for *Sceloporus minor* were observed, a species endemic to Mexico. This species was therefore added to the survey

Reptiles (cont.)

Species Latin	Species English	CITES Y/N	IWT background based on media reports	Survey findings
Sceloporus minor	Minor lizard	N	Endemic to Mexico, included in the survey as various ads found on Terraristik	Various advertisements identified, two of these were recorded: 1. One is from the same Spanish seller offering *Sauromalus ater* sp., this ad is for two pairs of *S. minor* 2. One ad from a Czech seller offering a male specimen CB 2023
Sphaerodactylus spp. from Cuba		III (Cuba)	Suggested by Dr Sandra Altherr. No quota have been set for this genus so any trade is considered suspicious	One ad for a *Sphaerodactylus* subspecies (*S. torrei*) was identified; this species was added to the survey and the ad recorded (see below)
Sphaerodactylus torrei	Barbour's least gecko	III (Cuba)	No quota have been set for this endangered species so any trade is considered suspicious	1. One ad from a German seller offering one male specimen from own captive breeding (2023)
Thamnophis scaliger	Short-tail alpine garter snake	N	Seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	1. One 6-month-old ad from a Dutch *Thamnophis* breeder offering various subspecies, incl. *T. scaliger* (number and sex not specified) 2. One ad with a stocklist from another Dutch professional seller with various premium ads on Terraristik. The list includes *T. scaliger* (quantity and sex not specified)
Xenosaurus newmanorum	Newman's knob-scaled lizard	N	Species endemic to Mexico. Suggested by Dr. Sandra Altherr for reasons of suspected illegal trade	1. One 9-month-old ad from a German seller offering one male and three female specimens (no mention of captive breeding) 2. One ad from an Austrian seller offering two males and four females CB 2023
Xenosaurus tzacualtipantecus	Zacualtipán knob-scaled lizard	N	Seized in the Netherlands from passenger flying from Mexico to Russia via the Netherlands in 2021	No advertisements identified on the survey days

Photo: © Christoph Moning, CC BY 4.0

▲ A wing-barred seedeater in Suriname.

Section 5

Endnotes

Endnotes

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

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

3. https://www.ifaw.org/international/resources/wildlife-crime-hispanic-america-report

4. https://www.ifaw.org/press-releases/report-latin-america-caribbean-role-shark-trade

5. https://robindesbois.org/en/a-la-trace-bulletin-dinformation-et-danalyses-sur-le-braconnage-et-la-contrebande/. These quarterly bulletins by Robin des Bois, a French NGO, are a reliable source of information on wildlife seizures reported in the media globally.

6. See e.g., Altherr, S (2014): Stolen Wildlife – Why the EU needs to tackle smuggling of nationally protected species. Pro Wildlife, Munich, Germany: https://www.prowildlife.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2014-stolen-wildlife-report.pdf

7. Terraristik is Europe's most used trade platform for reptiles and amphibians; Vogelmarkt.net is a Dutch-language online bird trade platform used by bird breeders and traders from around Western Europe.

8. See e.g., Altherr, S.; Di Silvestre, I; C Swabe, J. (2022): Stolen Wildlife IV: The EU – a destination for wildlife traffickers. Pro Wildlife, IFAW, HSI Europe (eds.); Munich (Germany), The Hague (Netherlands), Brussels (Belgium). Available at: https://d1jyxxz9imt9yb.cloudfront.net/resource/1331/attachment/original/Stolen_Wildlife_IV.pdf

9. The unidentified wildlife specimens concerned 320 frogs, lizards, spiders, scorpions, and beetles seized in Brazil in June 2021 from a notorious Russian wildlife trafficker, Kirill Kravchenko. https://www.svis.law.hku.hk/post/russian-wildlife-smuggler-is-sentenced-to-11-years-in-brazil-one-of-the-charges-is-involvement-in

10. At the time of seizure the bird species could not be identified (https://amazonasatual.com.br/homem-e-preso-no- aeroporto-de-manaus-com-ovos-de-animais-silvestres/), but DNA barcoding revealed that the eggs were from short-tailed parrots (Graydidascalus brachyurus, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12686-021-01209-4

11. E.g., in 2011 and 2013 (https://www.portugalresident.com/bird-eggs-seized/ and https://www.portugalresident.com/woman-arrested-with-60-parrot-eggs/). Also see https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/27/world/europe/rare-birds-macaws-trafficking-brazil on the Brazil-Portugal psittacid egg trafficking route.

12. Sandra Altherr and Katharina Lameter, 'The Rush for the Rare: Reptiles and Amphibians in the European Pet Trade', Animals 10, no. 11 (10 November 2020): 2085, https://doi.org/10.3390/ani10112085.

13. Red-eyed tree frogs (*Agalychnis callidryas*), Giant horned lizards (*Phrynosoma asio*), and Regal horned lizards (*Phrynosoma deppei*) were listed in CITES in 2023 due to concerns over illegal/unsustainable overexploitation.

14. 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.

15. Wild poison dart frogs build up toxins in their skins through their diet of insects in their natural environment, whereas the frogs lose their poison in captivity.

16. 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

17. https://miambiente.gob.pa/tres-detenidos-por-trafico-ilegal-de-anfibios/

18. https://phys.org/news/2022-11-panama-illegal-trafficking-animals.html

19. https://www.svis.law.hku.hk/post/russian-wildlife-smuggler-is-sentenced-to-11-years-in-brazil-one-of-the-charges-is-involvement-in

20. 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/

21. https://robindesbois.org/wp-content/uploads/ON_THE_TRAIL_32.pdf

22. https://www.inforegion.pe/250646/callao-decomisan-84-aves-que-iban-a-exportarse-a-rusia-ilegalmente/

23. https://www.heute.at/s/tierschmuggel-lebende-eidechsen-in-puppen-eingenaeht-100115779

24. https://www.e-consulta.com/nota/2021-01-30/seguridad/decomisan-6-dragoncitos-escondidos-en-un-peluche

25. https://nos.nl/artikel/2407745-honderden-illegale-vogels-en-gesmokkelde-reptielen-in-beslag-genomen

26. Méndez, E. and Olivera, A. (2022). Merciless markets: how wildlife trafficking threatens Mexico's biodiversity. Center for Biological Diversity, November 2022. https://biologicaldiversity.org/campaigns/Mexico-wildlife- trafficking/pdfs/Mexico-wildlife-trafficking-report-English.pdf

27. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/04/man-arrested-at-airport-with-snakes-frogs-and-lizards-in-backpack

28. https://insightcrime.org/news/how-many-creepy-crawlies-trafficker-hide-their-luggage/; https://noticias.uol.com.br/colunas/josmar-jozino/2021/07/20/russo-trafico-de-animais-silvestres.htm

29. 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.

30. http://www.nau.ch/news/europa/zollner-entdecken-jaguarfell-in-paket-aus-venezuela-65434679

31. https://www.taucha-kompakt.de/2019/zollamt-taucha-stellt-seebaeren-schaedel-sicher/

32. Altherr, S (2014): Stolen Wildlife – Why the EU needs to tackle smuggling of nationally protected species. Pro Wildlife, Munich, Germany: https://www.prowildlife.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2014-stolen-wildlife-report.pdf

and subsequent reports Stolen Wildlife II: https://www.prowildlife.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/stolen-wildlife-ii-2016.pdf;

Stolen Wildlife III: https://www.prowildlife.de/wp- content/uploads/2022/01/stolen-wildlife-iii.pdf;

and Stolen Wildlife IV: https://d1jyxxz9imt9yb.cloudfront.net/resource/1331/attachment/original/Stolen_Wildlife_IV.pdf

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34. 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.

Also see https://robindesbois.org/wp-content/uploads/ON_THE_TRAIL_34.pdf, page 67.

35. The EU has banned the import of wild birds into the EU with a few exceptions, including the import of birds intended for zoos, circuses, amusement parks or experiments. The basis for this is Regulation (EU) 2016/429 of 9 March 2016 on transmissible animal diseases and amending and repealing certain acts in the area of animal health ('Animal Health Law'), see: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/429/oj.

36. https://hk.on.cc/tw/bkn/cnt/news/20171019/bkntw-20171019200210871-1019_04011_001.html

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38. Crosta, A. et al (2023). Unveiling the criminal networks behind jaguar trafficking. IUCN/Earth League International, 2023. https://www.iucn.nl/app/uploads/2023/04/Unveiling-the-criminal-networks-behind-jaguar-trafficking-in-Suriname_ELI_IUCN-NL-final.pdf

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International Fund
for Animal Welfare

Quick scan of illegal wildlife
trade from Latin America
to Europe

EU Office
3 Avenue des Arts
1210 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32(2)22309717

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