



Best practices and model measures to combat wildlife crime linked to the Internet

Version: November 2024¹

Background:

Information provided by Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) partner agencies as well as other relevant organizations or experts in response to [Notification to the Parties No. 2024/046](#) of 13 March 2024 and in accordance with paragraph 17 a) and 18 of Resolution Conf. 11.3 (Rev. CoP19) on *Compliance and enforcement*, highlight a diverse range of measures in place and activities undertaken, and indicate that some Parties have already made commendable progress to combat wildlife crime linked to the Internet.

Information provided by Parties.

Parties that responded to Notification 2024/046 include China, Colombia, Czech Republic, the European Union, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Trinidad and Tobago, South Africa, and the United States of America. Other relevant and interested stakeholders such as non-governmental organizations and universities also provided information to the Secretariat. The information received, highlights the following:

1) Best practices

a) Best practices and model domestic measures for *addressing* wildlife crime linked to the Internet.

- Establishment of national platforms for collaboration among different governmental departments to strengthen efforts on combating wildlife crime linked to the Internet.
 - Formation of national task forces for preventing and combating illegal wildlife trade online.
 - Establishment of wildlife cyber-crime units comprising game wardens along with police services, working in collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to monitor online platforms for illegal sale of species listed under CITES.
- Regular monitoring and surveillance of online platforms for illegal wildlife trade with clear guidelines and protocols for investigating and prosecuting online wildlife crime.
 - National authorities monitoring the Internet for illegal trade notify relevant enforcement entities about specific transactions that should be subjected to further surveillance and inspection.
 - National authorities respond to citizen's reports and complaints about publications of any suspicious wildlife trade on social networks and/or internet pages.
 - Agreements put in place between government and private sector for the removal from commercial platforms of advertisements on specimens, parts, and derivatives of wildlife of illegal or unknown origin.
- Leveraging open-source intelligence gathering techniques to collect intelligence and evidence to expose illegal wildlife trade activities, disrupt the financial networks, and protect species from exploitation.
 - Conduct regular evaluation of measures deployed to expose wildlife crime linked to the Internet, to ensure that these measures remain current and respond to any new or emerging trends.
 - Careful monitoring, analysis, and correlation of publicly available information from various online sources.

¹ All feedback received has been analyzed and compiled together with previous iterations of this document, available on the page on [wildlife crime linked to the Internet on the CITES Website](#). This version (2024) should be seen as complementary and includes relevant information received in response to Notification [No. 2017/036](#) by Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America and [Notification No. 2020/31](#) by Cambodia, Canada, China, the European Union, Malta, New Zealand and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. For additional details, see [version of August 2019](#) or [version of 2021](#).

- Monitor and conduct analysis of suspicious financial transactions, online marketplaces, social media, forums and discussion boards, the dark web, news and media, reports and where relevant, databases on legal trade.
- Educational campaigns to raise awareness among the public about wildlife crime linked to the Internet and how it could be addressed.

b) Best practice models that pertain to the *regulation* of online marketplaces and social media platforms

- Encourage the creation of networks and alliances of enterprises operating online, to promote and facilitate the adoption of “zero-tolerance” policies regarding wildlife crime linked to the Internet and platform agreements that prohibits the sale of wildlife specimens of suspicious or illegal origin. Under such policies, members of the network/alliance commit to strictly review and promptly delete information of an unlawful nature, monitor, and address suspicious users or offenders, and actively support and cooperate with law enforcement agencies.
- Ensure that cyber patrols are conducted by law enforcement institutions and in collaboration with private sector entities that operate in e-commerce.
- Conduct searches on online marketplaces and social media platforms using key words known to be used for CITES-listed species illegally traded online.

2) Legislation and methodologies

a) *National legislation and other domestic measures put in place to address wildlife crime linked to the Internet.*

- Adoption of laws for the protection of wild animals and plants, with specific provisions that can be applied in the case of illegal wildlife trade online.
- E-commerce laws to regulate e-commerce platform operators and oversee the business activities within their platforms, including the control and prevention of wildlife crime linked to the Internet.
- Adoption of legislation that makes it compulsory to prior to posting of any specimen of wild animal and/or plant for trade, provide online platform providers with a written notice on the availability of CITES documents and any other documents required by law.
- Make it obligatory for operators of online marketplaces to set, publish and implement conditions for trading in CITES-listed specimens.
- Adoption of national action plans against wildlife trafficking, that includes addressing wildlife crime linked to the Internet.

b) *Methodologies that may assist in regulating legal online commerce and addressing wildlife crime linked to the Internet.*

- Initiating joint operations at national level to combat illegal trade in wildlife, which include a specific focus on wildlife crime linked to the Internet.
- Establishment of information exchange mechanisms and action protocols for institutions in charge of monitoring compliance, taking into consideration the respective mandates of each institution.
- Launch of online wildlife crime investigator programs to detect, report, investigate block and delete information related to wildlife crime linked to the Internet.
- Development of specific standards to be applied by online platforms to detect and address wildlife crime linked to the Internet.
- Creation of a group of “dedicated individuals” trained in searching for information related to illegal wildlife trade on the Internet.
- Promote and expand the use of artificial intelligence (AI) technology to combat wildlife crime linked to the Internet.
- Targeted monitoring and investigations of social media groups to collect evidence, using algorithms and AI.
- Conducting research to identify illegal wildlife trade flows via the Internet and inform investigations.
- Targeted investigations which may include covert investigations, to address wildlife crime linked to the Internet.
- Undertaking analysis of mobile phones, computers, and data storage devices utilizing digital forensics to extract and secure evidence.
- Monitoring online platforms to ensure that suspicious or illegal content are swiftly removed by these platforms once they were notified of such content.

Information provided by ICCWC partners²

ICCWC supports efforts to detect, investigate and address wildlife crime linked to the Internet. Information provided by ICCWC partner agencies is summarized below:

1) Targeted activities to enhance responses to wildlife crime linked to the Internet.

a) Interagency Task Forces

Efforts to foster better cooperation between wildlife enforcement agencies, customs and police cybercrime units should be encouraged. Interagency platforms can be established and used for sharing best practices and intelligence and to coordinate joint operations targeting wildlife crime linked to the Internet. Existing interagency cooperation has led to a number of successful results (see a [case example](#)).

b) Data analysis, monitoring, and use of technology

- Implement advanced technologies like AI and machine learning to monitor online platforms for illegal wildlife trade activities. For example, using AI to scan for keywords and images related to wildlife trafficking on social media.
- Collect and analyze data from various sources, including online platforms, to identify trends and hotspots for illegal wildlife trade.

c) Cyber-alerts

Cyber-alerts are used by INTERPOL to compile information on wildlife cases linked to the internet. Information gathered are analyzed to generate reports highlighting the main findings and these are shared with national enforcement agencies, informing them about, for example:

- Common keywords and popular hashtags that have been used on social media platforms and linked to social media influencers advertising on behalf of commercial entities.
- Tactics frequently employed by sellers to evade detection, like misspelling scientific names and cross-posting.
- Information about payment channels and international shipping companies identified through information reported by online platforms and geolocation services, providing further insights into transport modes and routes.

d) Global operations

For global law enforcement operations, such as the Thunder series of operations (for example [Thunder 2023](#)), includes pre-operational activities. Participating countries draw upon a variety of open-source data, including known webpages and online marketplaces to gather additional information and enhance the risk profiling process. Activities also include a focus on identifying CITES-listed species in illegal trade on digital and online platforms.

2) Tools, resources, and support available.

Tools and resources

- [Wildlife Crime Linked to the Internet: Practical Guidelines for Law Enforcement Practitioners](#) (INTERPOL, 2021)
- E-learning course on “*Best Practices in Investigating Cyber-enabled Wildlife Crimes*” (INTERPOL, May 2023). The course introduces law enforcement officers to the fundamentals of investigating illegal wildlife trade online. The self-paced course available via the [INTERPOL Virtual Academy](#) platform is designed to enhance investigative skills through interactive learning activities ranging from concept

² Additional best practices/model measures reported previously by ICCWC partners are detailed in previous reports. Ongoing or planned initiatives and support are included here. For additional details, see [version of August 2019](#) or [version of 2021 or additional information available on the](#) page on [Wildlife crime linked to the Internet on the CITES Website](#).

explanations, how-to demonstrations, real-world case studies, recommendations from well-experienced practitioners to knowledge assessments.

Support available and training activities.

- [Notification to the Parties No. 2022/075](#) of 19 October 2022 provides information on [support available through INTERPOL](#) to assist Parties in addressing wildlife crime linked to the Internet.
- INTERPOL offers open-source training for investigators: This training assists investigators to recognize illegal online trade in wildlife and to understand the digital methodologies used by wildlife traffickers for data and information collection.
- Training of law enforcement and judiciary by UNODC and INTERPOL on detecting and prosecuting wildlife crimes facilitated by digital means. It includes understanding how to navigate the dark web and other covert digital marketplaces.
- Risk assessment and risk indicator training by WCO and UNODC: Training to Develop and/or refine risk indicators specific to wildlife crime linked to the Internet and incorporate these indicators into broader risk assessment frameworks used by customs.
- The [ICCWC Menu of Services](#): provides an indicative list and relevant information of the training courses, tools, and services available through ICCWC partner agencies.