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## EU Wildlife Cybercrime Project

# Disrupting and dismantling wildlife cybercriminals and their networks in the European Union

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### AT A GLANCE



#### Geographical coverage :

EU-wide, with an emphasis on Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands.

#### Topic :

Wildlife trafficking in and via the EU using the internet and parcel delivery services.

#### Project coordinator :

WWF-Belgium, with grant-free support from TRAFFIC

#### Project partners :

IFAW, INTERPOL, the Belgian Customs, WWF France, WWF Hungary

#### Project advisors :

Belgian CITES Management Authority, eBay, European Commission, EUROPOL, French National Gendarmerie, INTERPOL, Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority

#### Donor :

European Union's Internal Security Fund-Police (DG HOME)

#### Duration :

February 2019 to January 2021

## CHALLENGE

Wildlife crime is one of the largest transnational criminal activities, estimated to be worth up to 23 billion USD per year<sup>1</sup>, behind other crimes such as drugs and human trafficking. It puts at risk the survival of thousands of species of animals and plants, accelerating the ongoing collapse of biodiversity. Historically, the sale of illegal wildlife took place in shops and other physical marketplaces. However, the growth of the internet and its accessibility has allowed wildlife traffickers to move online and gain access to a vast international marketplace, open all hours, where wildlife cybercriminals exploit the anonymity afforded to them.

Wildlife traffickers also use parcel delivery services to dispatch illegal wildlife products or specimens to buyers. The increasing volume of parcel delivery as a result of the growth of e-commerce represents a challenge for those enforcing the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations, especially for customs, as controls require significant resources and skills to detect parcels containing illegal wildlife.

Over the years, international organisations, government agencies, the business sector and the NGO community have been increasing their efforts to fight against wildlife crime. Nonetheless, since such crime is still widespread, existing efforts need to be adapted and scaled-up, including in Europe. The European Union (EU) is a major consumer of wildlife and wildlife products and also plays a role as source and transit region for wildlife trafficking. It thus has a significant role to play in reducing illegal trade. In 2016, the EU adopted the [Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking](#), an ambitious plan urging EU institutions and Member States to improve enforcement of legislation, to ensure stronger cooperation and more effective prevention. As a result, The EU and its Member States made environmental crime, including wildlife trafficking, one of their 10 priorities for the fight against organised and serious international crime between 2018 and 2021.

## WHAT DOES THE PROJECT AIM TO ACHIEVE ?

The objective of the project is to disrupt and deter criminals and their networks trafficking wildlife in, or via, the EU using the internet and parcel delivery services. An increased risk of detection, the removal of fraudulent adverts and accounts, as well as an intensification of seizures, will make it increasingly difficult for wildlife criminals to operate.

## HOW WILL THE PROJECT ACHIEVE ITS AMBITION ?

WWF, IFAW, INTERPOL and the Belgian Customs have joined forces to advance actions at four levels, with technical support from TRAFFIC on a grant-free basis. The project outcomes will benefit all EU Member States, with an emphasis on Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands.

## 1. Research and analysis

It is critical to understand how wildlife traffickers operate in order to hamper their business. The project team will strengthen their understanding of how wildlife criminals utilize and exploit the internet and parcel delivery services in Europe, drawing up recommendations, and thereby facilitating and fostering actions by law enforcement and the private sector.

### Deliverables:

- Study on illegal wildlife being sold online in Belgium and the Netherlands;
- Report on existing software options for automated monitoring of wildlife cybercrime;
- Report on search terms and code words for online monitoring;
- Study on control regimes and policies for handling parcels in Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands;
- Study on wildlife cybercrime cases.

## 2. Tools and training

Wildlife enforcement staff across EU Member States need to expand their set of skills and methods in order to detect wildlife trafficking online. Through this project, enforcement staff will benefit from tailored tools and training on best practice approaches to tackle wildlife cybercrime.

### Deliverables:

- Promotion of guidelines on best practices to detect and investigate cyber enabled wildlife crime;
- 2 trainings for at least 60 EU enforcement staff on wildlife cybercrime;
- Training material made available to law enforcement staff across Europe.

## 3. Investigations and operations

INTERPOL will facilitate and support intelligence-led investigations and operations addressing wildlife trafficking in, and via, the EU. The training provided through this project will enable EU authorities to undertake targeted online wildlife trade investigations and joint operations, hopefully resulting in an increase of seizures and prosecutions.

### Deliverables:

- Implementation of multi-agency investigations and operations;
- Operational analytical report for the above operations.

## 4. Building partnerships

Wildlife law enforcement in isolation cannot stop wildlife crime on the internet and transiting via parcel delivery services. The project team will engage online technology companies and parcel delivery companies in the EU to prevent traffickers from exploiting their services. This work builds on ongoing global efforts to bring companies together with conservation experts to find new solutions, such as the [Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online](#)<sup>2</sup> and the [ROUTES partnership](#)<sup>3</sup>.

### Deliverables:

- Information material for companies;
- Bilateral engagement with 10 online technology companies and 10 parcel delivery companies;
- One multistakeholder conference.



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<sup>1</sup> [Transnational Crime and the Developing World](#), Global Financial Integrity, 2017

<sup>2</sup> The Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online unites online technology companies across continents in partnership with WWF, TRAFFIC and IFAW to reduce wildlife trafficking online by 80% by 2020.

<sup>3</sup> ROUTES stands for Reducing Opportunities for Unlawful Transport of Endangered Species. This partnership brings together transport and logistics companies, government agencies, development groups, law enforcement, conservation organizations, and donors to disrupt wildlife trafficking by reducing the use of legal transportation supply chains.