

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



Technical workshop on songbird trade and conservation management,
Bangkok (Thailand), 11 to 14 December 2023

ILLEGAL SONGBIRD TRADE AND CAPTIVE BREEDING OF SONGBIRDS IN EUROPE

1. This document has been prepared on behalf of the CITES observer organisation European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) with the support of Copenhagen Zoo and the University of Southern Denmark (SDU).
2. The document presents preliminary results from an upcoming publication on the illegal wild trade of songbirds in Europe to support the technical workshop on songbird trade and conservation management and Decisions 18.256 (Rev. CoP19) to 18.259 (Rev. CoP19).

Summary

- The publication demonstrates that a total of 911 native and non-native songbird species were found traded as wild-sourced specimens in the EU - likely imported illegally
- The songbird species that were traded include threatened and protected species
- Nearly half of the species were sold as wild-sourced specimens despite regional captive breeding in Europe

Introduction

The European Union is a significant consumer market for pet birds, with an estimated 37 million birds kept as pets in 2021 (FEDIAF, 2021). Live birds are frequently among the most seized wildlife commodities in EU confiscation reports (Engler & Parry-Jones, 2007; Mundy-Taylor, 2013; TRAFFIC, 2014, p. 201, 2021; van Uhm, 2016), which are primarily based on EU TWIX the official confiscation database of the European Union. However, this database only records species listed in the CITES Appendices or EU Wildlife Trade Regulation Annexes, resulting in substantial data gaps for non-regulated species, such as the large group of unlisted songbirds in the trade (Donald et al., 2023, Preprint; Species360, 2021).

The trade of wild birds in the EU is regulated by three legislations: the EU import ban on wild birds (Commission of the European Communities, 2007) which prohibits imports of wild birds, the EU Birds

Directive (Directive 2009/147/EC) which prohibits taking of native wild birds for the live trade, and the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations for the implementation of CITES in the EU. Therefore, most wild-sourced songbirds encountered in the European market have likely been imported unregulated and lack verification of legal acquisition. However, there is no legislation in place limiting the trade of illegally imported wild individuals once they have entered the EU single market (Heinrich et al., 2021).

Here, we present preliminary results from a study by Juergens et al. (in prep) where we studied records of wild-caught songbirds sold in the EU after 2006 from the Songbirds in Trade database (SiTDB) (Juergens et al., 2021). Additionally, we collated data on conservation status, protection schemes and geographical distribution for seized species as well as captive breeding in the EU.

Results

Wild-sourced songbird specimen on sale in the EU

We found 911 songbird species (13.7% of the order) belonging to 71 songbird families for which wild-sourced specimens were on sale in the EU (Fig. 1).

- Of these species, 752 were non-native and 159 species native to the EU representing 80.7% of the EU's native songbird diversity.
- The wild-sourced songbirds sold also included 30 (3.3%) globally threatened species according to the IUCN Red List: 5 Critically Endangered, 9 Endangered and 18 Vulnerable (Fig. 1; Tab. 1).
- Most traded species were Least Concern following the the global IUCN Red List, however, nearly a third (311 species) have decreasing population trends (Fig. 2).
- Only 22 of the species are CITES listed (App. I: 1, App. II: 20, App. III: 1) and 38 are listed under the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations (A:1, B: 20, C:1, D:16).
- The highest number of non-native species originated from Asia (51.4% species) followed by Africa (36.4 %) and the Americas (27.7%) (Fig 3).

Captive breeding in the EU

A total of 552 songbird species were found with records of captive breeding in the EU based on records in the SiTDB. This includes 72 species that were only traded from captive breeding sources and 480 species for which specimens were traded from both captive breeding and wild sources.

Conclusions & recommendations

Our results highlight a previously largely undocumented, unregulated, and potentially illegal trade of wild songbirds in the EU. While most of these species are not currently threatened, nearly a third have decreasing population trends with demand in Europe potentially playing a role in declines. Additionally, despite captive breeding being recorded by the SiTDB in the EU for nearly half of the identified species in the trade, wild-caught individuals were still traded. This may be due to lower prices of wild-caught specimens, demand being higher than can be supplied by captive breeding or wild-caught individuals being perceived as more attractive.

We recommend

- including the substantial and highly diverse trade in songbirds in the EU in the discussions at the CITES technical workshop that will be held in Bangkok, 11-14 December 2023

- further investigating the trade volumes of this potentially illegal but often openly conducted trade, using market surveys and analysing online trade, especially on social media
- review current legislation or introduce new legislation to make inner EU trade of illegally imported specimens punishable by law
- listing of highly traded and threatened species on Annex D or C of the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations to increase protection and monitoring of their trade in the EU

Limitations

The SiTDB used in this study has slight regional biases towards Southeast Asian species and northwestern EU Member States (e.g. Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark) and may be an underrepresentation of the actual diversity of illegal songbird trade in Europe. The data gathered does not contain trade volumes or frequencies. The final study contains a comparison to EU TWIX, the official confiscation database of the European Union, which is not available at this time due to missing publishing permissions.

Data availability

The data is based on the SiTDB published in Juergens et al. 2021. The newest version of the data used in this document can be found [here](#).

Tables & Figures

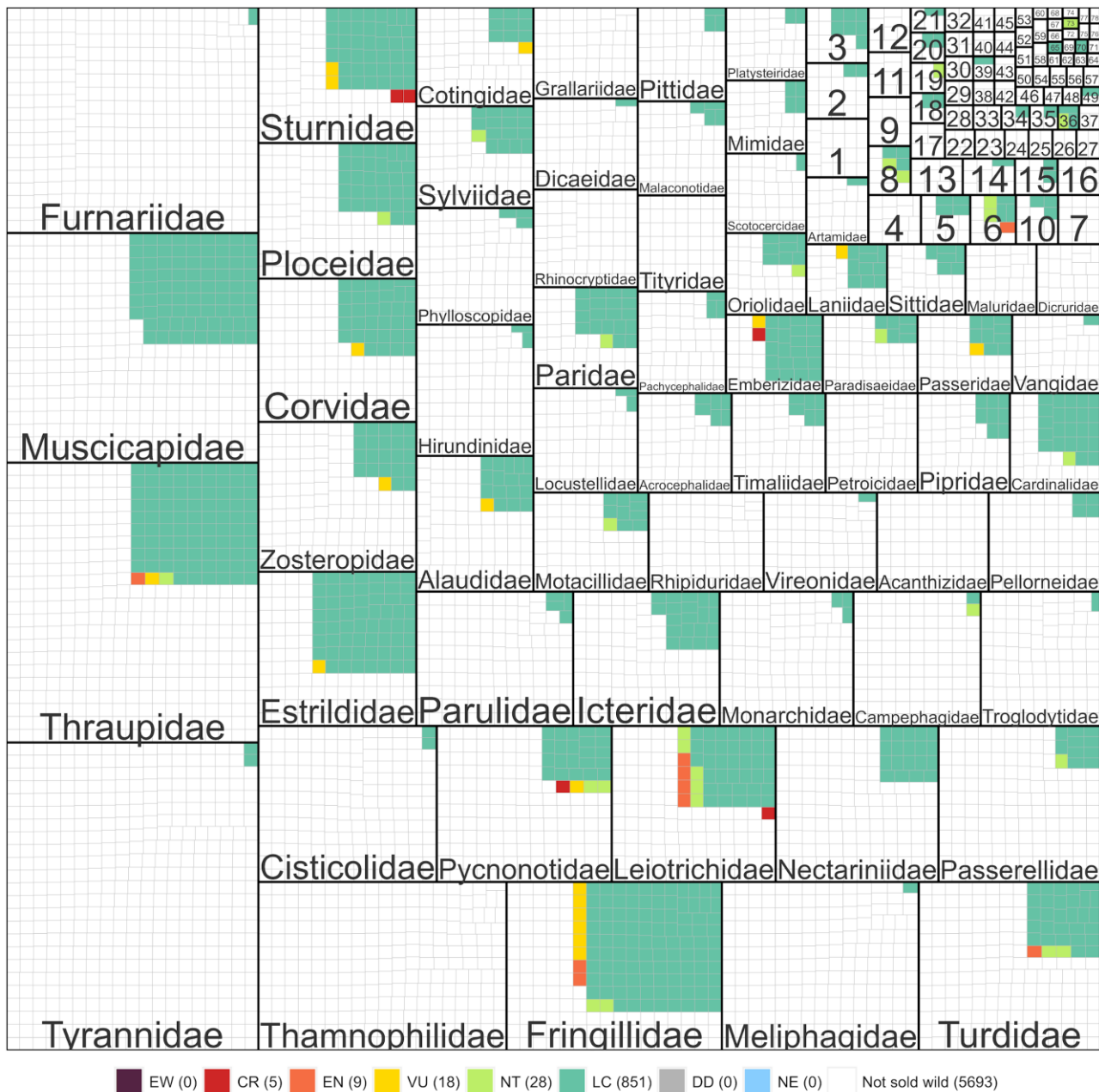


Figure 1 Treemap of songbird species found on sale as wild specimen and their IUCN Red List status highlighted among the 6659 extant songbird species (class Passeriformes). Each small square represents one species grouped by taxonomic family (larger squares). White squares represent species not found on sale as wild specimens in the EU. EW = Extinct in the Wild (purple) CR = Critically Endangered (red), EN = Endangered (orange), VU = Vulnerable (yellow), NT = Near Threatened (light green), LC = Least Concern (dark green), DD = Data Deficient (grey). Families with more than 24 species are labelled on the graph. Families with fewer than 24 species were assigned a number (1- 78) and listed below: 1: Macrosphenidae, 2: Ptilonorhynchidae, 3: Viduidae, 4: Polioptilidae, 5: Aegithalidae, 6: Chloropseidae, 7: Conopophagidae, 8: Eurylaimidae, 9: Formicariidae, 10: Prunellidae, 11: Bernieridae, 12: Cinclosomatidae, 13: Melanocharitidae, 14: Remizidae, 15: Certhiidae, 16: Stenostiridae, 17: Climacteridae, 18: Calcariidae, 19: Calyptomenidae, 20: Regulidae, 21: Cinclidae, 22: Pomatostomidae, 23: Psophodidae, 24: Aegithinidae, 25: Callaeidae, 26: Cnemophilidae, 27: Hylotiidae, 28: Melanopareidae, 29: Mitrospingidae, 30: Pardalotidae, 31: Phaenicophilidae, 32: Philepittidae, 33: Pnoepyidae, 34: Ptiliogonatidae, 35: Spindalidae, 36: Bombycillidae, 37: Dasyornithidae,

38: Falcunculidae, 39: Irenidae, 40: Modulatricidae, 41: Mohouidae, 42: Neosittidae, 43: Nicatoridae, 44: Oreoicidae, 45: Orthonychidae, 46: Paramythiidae, 47: Acanthisittidae, 48: Atrichornithidae, 49: Buphagidae, 50: Calyptophilidae, 51: Chaetopidae, 52: Corcoracidae, 53: Hylocitreidae, 54: Machaerirhynchidae, 55: Melampittidae, 56: Menuridae, 57: Picathartidae, 58: Promeropidae, 59: Teretistridae, 60: Donacobiidae, 61: Dulidae, 62: Elachuridae, 63: Eulacestomidae, 64: Eupetidae, 65: Hypocoliidae, 66: Ifritidae, 67: Nesospingidae, 68: Not recorded, 69: Notiomystidae, 70: Panuridae, 71: Peucedramidae, 72: Pityriasiidae, 73: Platyllophidae, 74: Rhagologidae, 75: Rhodinocichlidae, 76: Sapayoidae, 77: Urocynchramidae, 78: Zeledoniidae. Based on Juergens et al. (*in prep*).

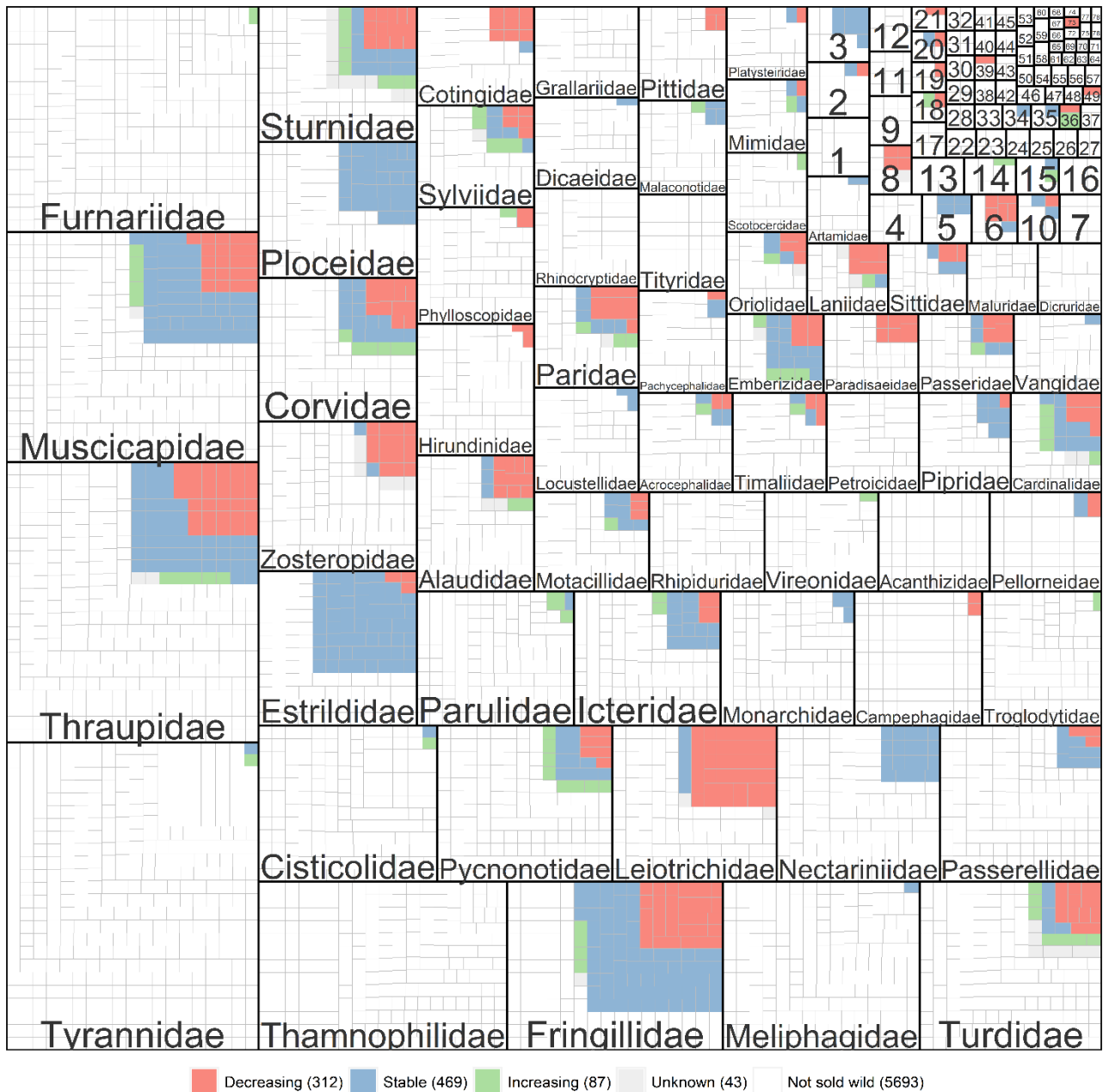


Figure 2 Treemap of songbird species found on sale as wild specimen and their population trend based on the IUCN Red List highlighted among the 6659 extant songbird species (class Passeriformes). Each small square represents one species grouped by taxonomic family (larger squares). White squares represent

species not found on sale as wild specimen in the EU. Decreasing (red), Stable (blue), Increasing (green), Unknown (grey). Families with more than 24 species are labeled on the graph. Families with fewer than 24 species were assigned a number (1-78) and listed below: 1: Macrosphenidae, 2: Ptilonorhynchidae, 3: Viduidae, 4: Polioptilidae, 5: Aegithalidae, 6: Chloropseidae, 7: Conopophagidae, 8: Eurylaimidae, 9: Formicariidae, 10: Prunellidae, 11: Bernieridae, 12: Cinclosomatidae, 13: Melanocharitidae, 14: Remizidae, 15: Certhiidae, 16: Stenostiridae, 17: Climacteridae, 18: Calcariidae, 19: Calyptomenidae, 20: Regulidae, 21: Cinclidae, 22: Pomatostomidae, 23: Psophodidae, 24: Aegithinidae, 25: Callaeidae, 26: Cnemophilidae, 27: Hyliotidae, 28: Melanopareiidae, 29: Mitrospingidae, 30: Pardalotidae, 31: Phaenicophilidae, 32: Philepittidae, 33: Pnoepyidae, 34: Ptiliogonatidae, 35: Spindalidae, 36: Bombycillidae, 37: Dasyornithidae, 38: Falcunculidae, 39: Irenidae, 40: Modulatricidae, 41: Mohouidae, 42: Neosittidae, 43: Nicatoridae, 44: Oreocidae, 45: Orthonychidae, 46: Paramythiidae, 47: Acanthisittidae, 48: Atrichornithidae, 49: Buphagidae, 50: Calyptophilidae, 51: Chaetopidae, 52: Corcoracidae, 53: Hylocitreidae, 54: Machaerirhynchidae, 55: Melampittidae, 56: Menuridae, 57: Picathartidae, 58: Promeropidae, 59: Teretistridae, 60: Donacobiidae, 61: Dulidae, 62: Elachuridae, 63: Eulacestomidae, 64: Eupetidae, 65: Hypocoliidae, 66: Ifritidae, 67: Nesospingidae, 68: Not recorded, 69: Notiomystidae, 70: Panuridae, 71: Peucedramidae, 72: Pityriasisidae, 73: Platylphidae, 74: Rhagologidae, 75: Rhodinocichlidae, 76: Sapayoidae, 77: Urocynchramidae, 78: Zeledoniidae. Based on Juergens et al. (*in prep*).

Table 1 Threatened species identified on sale wild-sourced in the EU after 2006, their IUCN Red List Status, breeding difficulty, reported EU captive breeding, EU Birds Directive Annex and protection in the international trade under CITES and the EU Wildlife Trade Regulation. Based on Juergens et al. (*in prep*).

Species	Family	Red List Status	Breeding Difficulty	EU Captive Breeding	Protection in Int. Trade
<i>Garrulax rufifrons</i>	Leiotrichidae	CR	normal		Not protected
<i>Gracupica jalla</i>	Sturnidae	CR	normal		Not protected
<i>Pycnonotus zeylanicus</i>	Pycnonotidae	CR	normal		CITES + EU WTR
<i>Acridotheres melanopterus</i>	Sturnidae	CR	normal		Not protected
<i>Emberiza aureola</i>	Emberizidae	CR	hard		Not protected
<i>Chloropsis media</i>	Chloropseidae	EN	challenging		Not protected
<i>Crithagra flavigula</i>	Fringillidae	EN	normal		Not protected
<i>Leiothrix laurinae</i>	Leiotrichidae	EN	hard		Not protected
<i>Sporophila maximiliani</i>	Thraupidae	EN	normal		Not protected
<i>Trochalopteron ngoclinhense</i>	Leiotrichidae	EN	hard		Not protected
<i>Garrulax bicolor</i>	Leiotrichidae	EN	hard	yes	Not protected
<i>Trochalopteron yersini</i>	Leiotrichidae	EN	hard	yes	Not protected
<i>Spinus cucullatus</i>	Fringillidae	EN	normal	yes	CITES + EU WTR
<i>Acridotheres cinereus</i>	Sturnidae	VU	normal		Not protected
<i>Acridotheres javanicus</i>	Sturnidae	VU	normal		Not protected
<i>Amandava formosa</i>	Estrildidae	VU	hard	yes	CITES + EU WTR
<i>Cephalopterus penduliger</i>	Cotingidae	VU	challenging		CITES + EU WTR

Species	Family	Red List Status	Breeding Difficulty	EU Captive Breeding	Protection in Int. Trade
<i>Crithagra xantholaema</i>	Fringillidae	VU	normal		Not protected
<i>Emberiza rustica</i>	Emberizidae	VU	hard		Not protected
<i>Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus</i>	Corvidae	VU	hard		Not protected
<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>	Laniidae	VU	hard		Not protected
<i>Passer italiae</i>	Passeridae	VU	normal		Not protected
<i>Pyrrhula murina</i>	Fringillidae	VU	hard		Not protected
<i>Pyrrhula waterstradti</i>	Fringillidae	VU	hard	yes	Not protected
<i>Tangara fastuosa</i>	Thraupidae	VU	hard	yes	CITES + EU WTR
<i>Zosterops melanurus</i>	Zosteropidae	VU	hard		Not protected
<i>Rubigula dispar</i>	Pycnonotidae	VU	normal	yes	Not protected
<i>Serinus syriacus</i>	Fringillidae	VU	hard		Not protected
<i>Hesperiphona vespertina</i>	Fringillidae	VU	hard	yes	Not protected
<i>Spinus yarrellii</i>	Fringillidae	VU	normal	yes	CITES + EU WTR

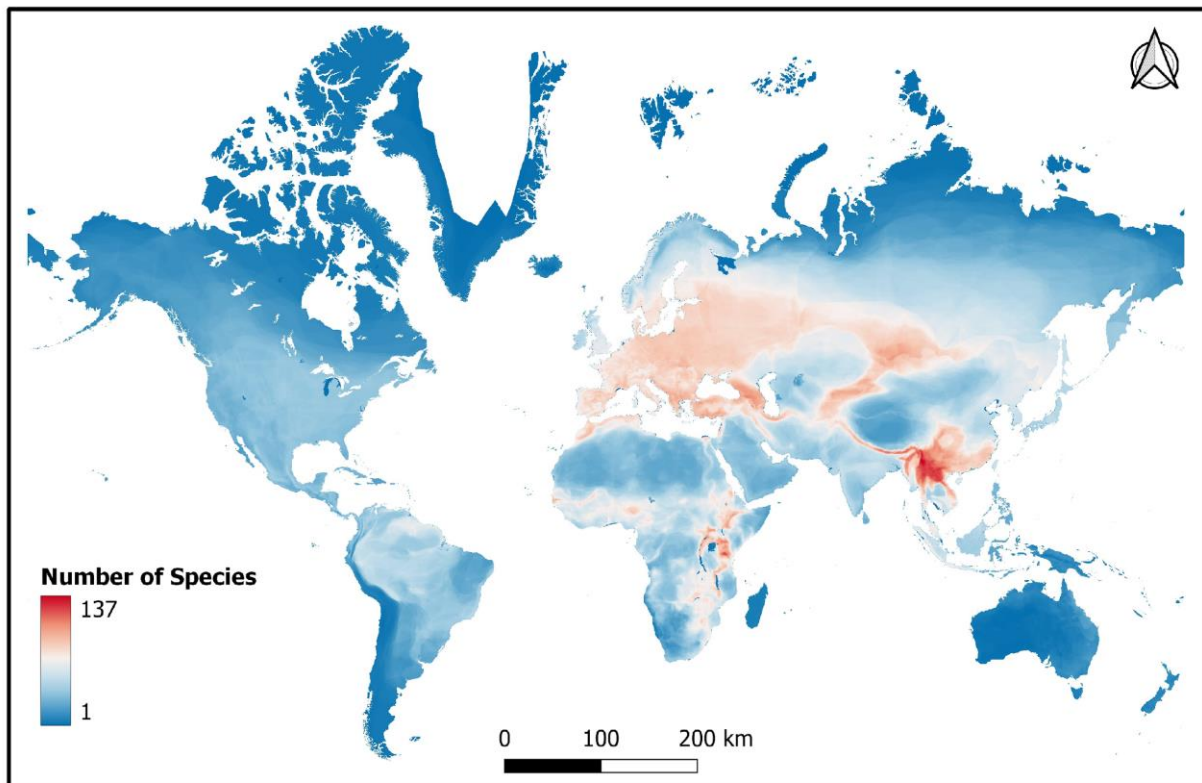


Figure 3 Distributions of species found on sale as wild specimens in the EU. Based on Juergens et al. (*in prep*).

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Recommended citation

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