



# Journal of African Elephants

SPOTLIGHTING THE PLIGHT OF AFRICA'S ELEPHANTS



NEWS

## **Airlines and social media not doing enough to stop illegal wildlife trade**

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By Rupi Mangat, The East African

Buyers are being offered more than 200 species of animals threatened with extinction or declining population on social media platforms by illegal wildlife traders. The animals are then transported by air out of Africa and in some instance, by boat.

According to a report a September report by the World Animal Protection titled *Cargo of Cruelty*, species ranging from African grey parrots to bats, the big cats to bush babies, the great apes to nocturnal owls, and majestic eagles to little-known chameleons and tortoises are being advertised on social media on platforms like Instagram and Facebook.

Many of the animals captured and kept in cruel conditions, are threatened with extinction or have unknown or declining wild population trends. Once captured, they are left stressed and vulnerable to infection or death.

### ECommerce Platforms

The report confirms the enormity of the trade in wild animals from Africa for the exotic pet industry, transported in inhumane containers by airlines.



“Based on what I have seen during my online research into illegal wildlife advertisements, animals are being flown out of almost every country in Africa, Asia and Latin America by many different airlines,” said Patricia Tricorache, the Illegal Wildlife Trade expert based at the Colorado State University.

Ms Tricorache began tackling illegal trade in wildlife when alerted to two cheetah cubs held illegally at a restaurant in Ethiopia in November 2005, when working with the Cheetah Conservation Fund. At the time, little was known about the magnitude of this illegal trade. She began collecting data on illegal cheetah trafficking, which she later expanded with her research into cyber-commerce, where animals like cheetahs are advertised for sale on Instagram, Facebook and others.

“During my research into cheetah advertisements on social media and eCommerce platforms, I’ve come across many animals from all over Africa, including species listed on this report. Most of these were offered for sale in the Gulf States. This suggests that some of the most logical routes for these animals from Africa into the Middle East are Ethiopia, Egypt, Turkey or Saudi Arabia. Ethiopian Airlines, Turkish Airways, and Egypt Air ply routes in Africa so are all likely candidates for smuggling.”

The global supply of exotic pets is largely undocumented, and regulation is insufficient. The report documented animals such as tortoises, packed so tightly they struggle to fully extend their head and neck during the journey.

It’s not only the airlines smuggling live animals out. Ms Tricorache’s research reveals cheetah cubs out of Djibouti or Somalia/Somaliland are mostly transported by boat into the Middle East. Now, there are even unconfirmed reports of private jets out of Tanzania and Somaliland transporting cheetahs.

Spreading Viruses



The global wildlife trade is considered a leading cause of ecosystem collapse and biodiversity loss, and poses a huge biosecurity risks. More than 70 percent of zoonotic emerging infectious diseases are thought to originate from wild animals, with poor welfare conditions and proximity to people creating the ideal situation for viruses to mutate and spillover to humans like the coronavirus.

“People continue to be subjected to travel restrictions to stop the spread of disease. Hence, it’s shocking that wild animals of high biosecurity risk are being flown around the world, under the radar. We could have a Trojan horse situation as wild animals are known to pose disease risks. We need to stop pathogens spreading, and the most effective way is to stop them being placed on an aeroplane in the first place. The luxury exotic pet trade is a good place to start,” Dr Patrick Muinde, WAP’s wildlife campaigns manager said.

The illegal wildlife trade is one of the five most lucrative global crimes that include arms, drugs, laundering money and human trafficking. It’s valued between \$50 billion-\$150 billion per year, according to United for Wildlife.

<https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/airlines-and-social-media-not-stopping-illegal-wildlife-trade-3552506>

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