

EU remains major hub for global trafficking of wild species, latest data shows



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Critically endangered eels, timber and medicinal plants are amongst the top commodities being seized in the EU, according to new TRAFFIC analysis of 2023 data.

The report, produced under a Service Contract with the European Commission, provides an in-depth analysis of illegal wildlife trade trends based on seizures reported by EU Member States to Europe Trade in Wildlife Information eXchange (EU-TWIX) system.

The illegal trade in wild species is a critical threat to biodiversity; valued at a staggering \$23bn each year, it devastates ecosystems and fuels crime.

Entitled *An Overview of Seizures of CITES-Listed Wildlife in the European Union: January to December 2023*, the new report underscores the urgent need for enhanced enforcement, public awareness and international collaboration to combat wildlife trafficking.

It also highlights the role of the EU as a global leader in addressing illegal wildlife trade, particularly through legislative measures such as the revised EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking (2022–2027), the Environmental Crime Directive (*[Environmental Crime: Five years for the EU to turn the tide! - Wildlife Trade News from TRAFFIC](#)*), and the upcoming EU Regulation on Deforestation-Free Products.

“EU remains a significant market for wildlife trafficking, as commercial entities and individuals continue to smuggle wild species and their products into, through, and from EU Member States, - Anastasiya Timoshyna, Director of TRAFFIC’s European Programme Office. The report highlights key trends, species in trade, enforcement efforts, and areas for policy attention in this landmark year for the region, with the CITES CoP20, and the 20th anniversary of EU-TWIX on the horizon.”

The analysis was carried out by TRAFFIC, leading global NGO on wildlife trade.

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Report author(s):
Kathy Rock & Jon Gracia

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key findings

Key Findings:

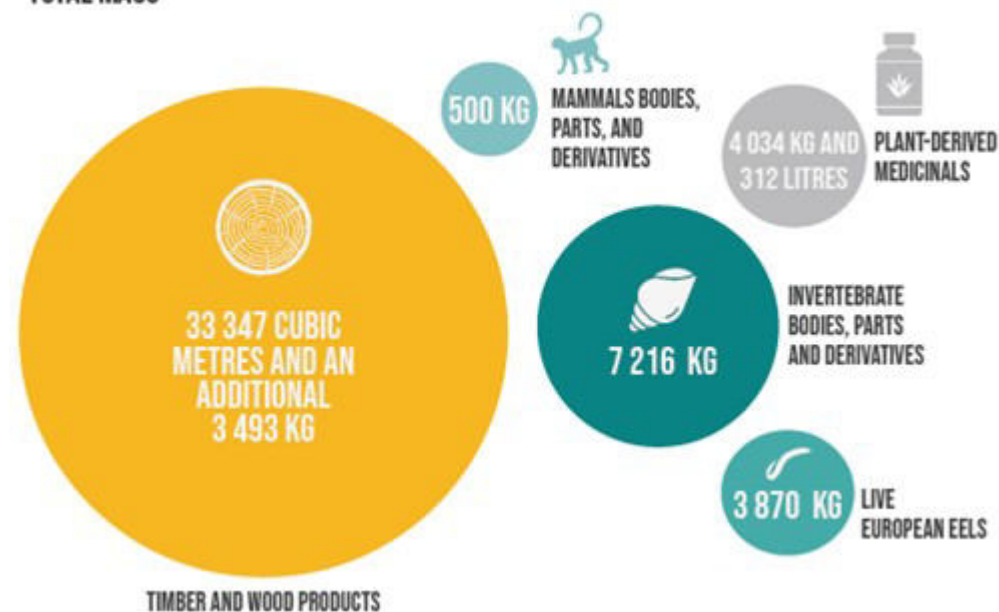
- **Scale of Seizures:** Nearly 5,200 seizure records were reported in 2023, involving over one million specimens (including over 600 000 live animals and 10 000 live plants). Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Spain accounted for nearly 75% of all EU seizure records. This total number of seizure records has risen from approx 4,550 a year earlier, but is lower than the 2019 high of 6,150.

(While not indicative of the complete picture of illicit activities – reported seizure data does provide valuable insight into illegal wildlife trade patterns, allowing authorities to monitor trends and tailor interventions to address priority risks.)

THE NUMBER OF SEIZURE RECORDS REPORTED BY EU MEMBER STATES,
at the time of analysis since 2017



Top CITES commodities seized in the EU, based on the
TOTAL MASS



- **Top Commodities:** European eels dominated seizures by specimen count, while timber ranked highest by total mass, with over 33,000 cubic meters seized. Other frequently seized items included plant-derived medicinals, live birds, reptiles, and coral.

28% of all fauna seizure records were assumed to be destined for the exotic pet trade, one of the largest illegal wildlife trade sectors in the EU.

- **Emerging Trends:** 88 species were seized for the first time in 2023, including visually striking poison frogs and look-alike tarantula species. Birds represented the group with the highest number of species seized, with 196 distinct species recorded.
- **Global Trade Routes:** The EU remains a major hub for wildlife trafficking, with 86% of seized goods destined for the EU. The USA and UK were frequent destinations for commodities destined for a country beyond the EU. Top exporters included Thailand, the USA, Ukraine, mainland China, and India.

Enforcement Highlights:

- **Operation Spotlight:** EU Member States participated in global enforcement actions such as Operation THUNDER, which resulted in over 2,000 confiscations and 500 arrests worldwide.
- **Internal Seizures:** 709 internal (domestic) seizures were reported, with live birds and reptiles being the most frequently intercepted commodities.
- **Detection Points:** Airports and mail centres were the primary locations for seizures, while maritime ports emerged as key detection points for high-mass shipments like timber.

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About European Commission

The European Commission promotes the general interest of the EU by proposing and enforcing legislation as well as by implementing policies and the EU budget.

About EU-TWIX (European - Trade in Wildlife Information eXchange)

The EU-TWIX database contains centralised data on seizures and offences reported by all 27 EU Member States, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. The EU-TWIX database has been developed to assist national law enforcement agencies, including CITES Management Authorities and prosecutors, in their task of detecting, analysing and monitoring illegal activities related to trade in fauna and flora covered

by the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).