



World Organisation
for Animal Health

2nd Webinar

Wildlife Health Network – Europe

10 April 2024, 10:00 – 12:00 CET Online

Meeting report



World Organisation
for Animal Health
Founded as OIE

10 April 2024
10:00 CET

Webinar

Wildlife Health Network Europe

Wildlife Trade in Europe

Speakers

Ilaria Di Silvestre - IFAW

Wildlife trade situation in Europe and needed EU actions against wildlife trafficking

Sophie Gryseels - Institute of Natural Sciences
INTERCEPT Project

Photo: Sophie Gryseels

Monitoring the legal and illegal import of exotic animals, wild meat and the potential pathogens they carry into Belgium from non-EU countries

WOAH Wildlife Health Programme

Wildlife Health Framework



Summary

The 2nd Webinar for the Wildlife Health Network in Europe was held online the 10 of April 2024 at 10:00 CET. The meeting had a total of 25 participants, including 2 guest speakers, 16 National Focal Points for Wildlife (FPW) (Europe and Central Asia) and country representatives, 3 guest participants, 2 English-Russian interpreters, and 2 WOAAH staff members. The recording of the webinar was watched later by 8 FPW. The webinar aimed to provide to the Focal Points for Wildlife knowledge through two presentations. The first Guest Speaker, [Ilaria Di Silvestre](#), Head of EU Policy and Campaigns – IFAW, presented the current situation and challenges of wildlife trade in the region, the role of the cyber-enabled wildlife trade, EU actions and legal resources to act against wildlife trafficking (CITES, Environmental Crime Directive, the Digital Services Act, and the EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking), the loopholes in the EU legislation, Policy Solutions like the establishment of shared and detailed databases, the collaboration with adequate rescue centers and zoos, and the development of an IFAW e-learning module for the training of personnel handling of confiscated wild animals. The second Guest Speaker, [Sophie Gryseels](#), researcher at the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, shared a success multisectoral work story at country level (Belgium) through the presentation of the INTERCEPT project. INTERCEPT aims to increase the knowledge on the overall wildlife trade exchange and the national market in Belgium to later develop proper recommendations to the ministers to develop policies accordingly. Sophie explained the procedures for the collection of samples from animals and animal products that enter in Belgium through Brussels airport, the collaborative work between customs, veterinary services, researchers, CITES and governmental authorities, the DNA analyses performed for the identification of species traded as well as the pathogens they may carry, the preliminary results obtained that included the analyses of more than 300 samples of which 30% belonged to wild animals of which 20% were identified as species of conservation concern according to IUCN and CITES. The webinar was conducted in English with a simultaneous interpretation in Russian, and was recorded and posted on the share point of the group to be available for the members not able to be present.

Background


In 2020, The World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) has developed the [Wildlife Health Programme](#) to expand its work in wildlife health and invest itself in promoting the growth of surveillance systems for wildlife health at regional, national and international levels, and advocate WOAAH Members to re-evaluate the importance and visibility given to wildlife health in their countries. Through the [Wildlife Health Framework](#) the WOAAH aims to reinforce One Health strategies in order to respond to a global need to better manage risks from emerging diseases at the human-animal-ecosystem interface, whilst protecting wildlife. The framework recognises that animal health, balanced ecosystems, and biodiversity contribute to achieving One Health, and pursues two main objectives: the promotion of the risk management of disease emergence at the human-animal-ecosystems interface and the protection of wildlife health. In order to reach this goals, WOAAH has developed a **Wildlife Health Network** to build knowledge and awareness amongst national veterinary services about their role in better protecting wildlife health and strengthen WOAAH Members' capacity for early detection of pathogens in wildlife, wildlife surveillance and management systems, information management, risk assessment, and

implementation of mitigation measures. This approach will support the creation of an enabling environment and foster sustainable partnerships between veterinary services, wildlife management authorities and other relevant partners in public health, wildlife conservation and scientific academic bodies. In this context, the **WOAH Sub-Regional Representation in Brussels** organized a series of webinars to increase knowledge in different Wildlife Health and One Health topics, improve the interaction and create new connections between the members of the network, the National Focal Points of Wildlife in Europe (comprising 53 countries) and different wildlife health stakeholders, and strengthen the collaboration and connection between the members of the network.

Programme

10 April 2024 - online		
10:00	Opening remarks	Valeria C. Colombo WOAH SRR Brussels
10:10 – 11:00	Wildlife trade situation in Europe and needed EU actions against wildlife trafficking	Ilaria Di Silvestre Head of EU Policy and Campaigns- IFAW
11:00 – 12:00	Monitoring the legal and illegal import of exotic animals, wild meat and the potential pathogens they carry into Belgium from non-EU countries	Sophie Gryseels Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences - INTERCEPT Project

Presentations and Discussions

 Presentation **Opening remarks**: Valeria C. Colombo introduced the objectives of the webinar, the background of the guest speakers and some WOAHS updates related to the Wildlife Focal Points.

 Presentation **Wildlife trade situation in Europe and needed EU actions against wildlife trafficking**: Ilaria Di Silvestre presented a series of topics related with:

1. Wildlife trafficking in the region: the link with organized crime and corruption, threats to national security, and the risk to pathogen introduction. She also explained the role of EU as an intermediate route and final destination market of a number of legally and illegally traded protected species, for instance for exotic pets, food and traditional medicine, entertainments and trophies. There is a lack of information and control of the species traded in Europe. The cyber-enabled wildlife trade was highlighted as one of the biggest challenges to control since its worldwide spread, poor regulation, and the ease of use and access that make it the biggest marketplace worldwide of live animals and products such as ivory, rhino horn, wild cats, among others.
2. EU Legislation and Policy: the international Convention CITES is implemented in the region and crucial, but covers only 1% of total wildlife species and the 20% of species that are in the trade. EU wildlife trade regulations is essentially to enforce CITES in the EU. The new revised Environmental Crime Directive since 2024 included an increase of sanctions to illegal trade. New legislation addressing the online trade of different products including

wildlife, the Digital Services Act, now includes a clear role of NGOs to report wildlife trade crimes. The revised EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking establishes a roadmap of actions for the coming 5 years for the EU member states to fight wildlife trafficking, and promotes the integration of the One Health approach in the fight of wildlife trafficking, however is not legally binding. In this context, the loopholes in the EU legislation were discussed like the gaps in the regulation of trade for non-CITES species, the unregulated exotic pet trade in the region and the entrance of invasive alien species with the conservation consequences related. The species' import and movement database's insufficiency was mentioned, with a highlight on the non-CITES species. The challenges and gaps of the management of confiscated live wild animals linked with the lack of adequate infrastructure and trained personnel.

3. Policy Solutions: new EU legislation is proposed to include illegally sourced non-CITES species that are not currently covered by the ongoing EU regulations. IFAW supports the adoption of EU Positive Lists to cover the unregulated exotic pet trade since works properly as a preventive tool, actually EU is implementing a feasibility study for the adoption of this legislation at EU level. IFAW is promoting the implementation of a complete database with data of all wildlife imports at species level traded like the "LEMIS-style" database applied in the US. In addition, the development of proper infrastructure and training for the correct management of confiscated live animals in rescue centres was highlighted and the efforts of IFAW on this were mentioned including citizens awareness to reduce the demand and the work in collaboration with other NGOs and online companies globally through the Coalition to End Trafficking Online.

EU Legislation & policy:



- ▶ International law: CITES
- ▶ EU wildlife trade regulations: a set of EU laws implemented uniformly in all EU countries, to enforce the provisions of CITES
- ▶ Revised Environmental Crime Directive
- ▶ Digital Services Act

Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online

36 company partners across Americas, Asia, Europe and Africa

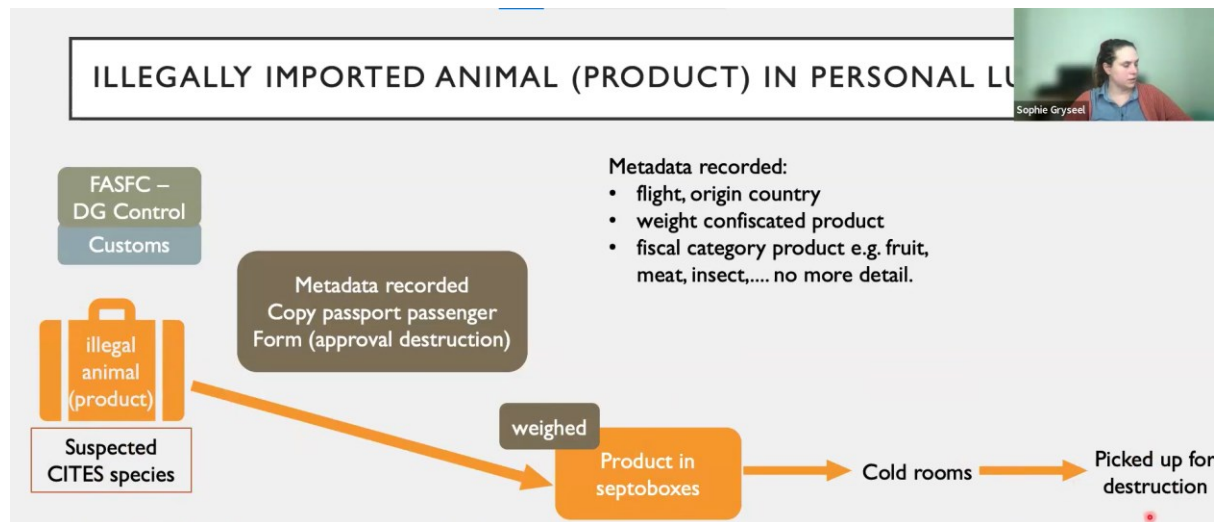


✚ Presentation **Monitoring the legal and illegal import of exotic animals, wild meat and the potential pathogens they carry into Belgium from non-EU countries**: Sophie Gryseels presented different aspects of the INTERCEPT project including:

1. The main objectives of the INTERCEPT project including the collection of data on the trade of animal species and wild meat, the pathogens they carry and the centralization of this information in Belgium. The project aims to increase the knowledge on the overall trade exchange and the national market in Belgium to later develop proper recommendations to the ministers to develop policies accordingly. The project is funded by Belspo and the Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment and includes the team work between the Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, the Royal Museum of Central Africa, BopCo, and Sciensano.
2. The entry pathways of live animals and their products to Belgium were described as legal commercial shipments (e.g. lobsters, domestic cats and dogs), this trade is quite well regulated and controlled, the information is available under request through TRACES NT. Legal and illegal non-commercial shipments through post packages, a description of the content is included and after a risk analyses some of them are opened to be checked, a database is available for analyses, however, there is no clear information on the percentage of packages that are controlled. Illegally through personal luggage, in Brussels airport customs officials perform routine controls on passengers. During regular control actions with officials from the Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain, they also check all luggage of several preselected flights. All the luggage with signs of a leaking content are checked. CITES officers are the responsible to follow-up an investigation for the implementation of legal actions if CITES species are found during the controls.
3. The procedures of the collection of samples at the airport were explained together with the flight number, quantity and description of the animal product are recorded. Until the date of the webinar, 327 samples were collected and DNA-based identification have been performed of which most of them are domestic animals (70% beef, pork) followed by wild animals (30%) composed mostly by rodents (cane rats and porcupines), and less frequent reptiles, primates

among others species considered vulnerable by IUCN and CITES. Through the DNA analyses is sometimes also possible to determine the origin of the traded animal.

4. Preliminary conclusions of the project included the positive interaction and workflow with government agencies, the DNA analyses are highly beneficial to obtain information on the animal species traded and their geographical origin, among the 30% of wild animals detected the 20% belong to species of conservation concern. Future plans include the integration and analyses of all the data to understand the magnitude of legal and illegal import, deeper DNA analyses for more precise species determinations, and the detection of potential pathogens present in the samples collected.



“BACON” CONTROL ACTIONS SAMPLING

- Sampling by our team
- All terrestrial vertebrate meat sampled
 - No fish
 - One sample per package
 - No discrimination of suspect domestic vs wild meat

• Sampling by our team

• All terrestrial vertebrate meat sampled

- No fish
- One sample per package
- No discrimination of suspect domestic vs wild meat

During the presentation, some discussions were held. The main topics discussed were:

- a. The current situation and availability of rescue centres for confiscated live animals in the EU member countries. It was mentioned that some countries have the appropriate facilities and trained personal to handle this situations while others need to improve. The support that the governments provide to this is quite diverse among countries.
- b. The challenges of managing a diverse number of species confiscated that have different needs for their correct handling. To address this issue, IFAW has developed an e-learning module training for enforcement authorities for the immediate handling of confiscated wild animals. Is a free access tool developed in several languages with access under request.
- c. Networking among rescue centres in the region should be established to enhance communication and allow collaboration among them. The European rescue centre and sanctuary association is working on that aspect but still more efforts are needed.
- d. The need of EU level certification of the rescue centres was discussed since there is no regulation to define the standards of rescue centres in the region. The actual legislation applies on zoos only. CITES gives accreditations to rescue centres, but is not mandatory. It was proposed to zoos to be more involved with the problematic from the educational point of view, and to provide shelter to animals confiscated.
- e. There is a need to extend the list of species and targeted pathogens included in the EU animal health certificate. Currently, the law predominantly focuses on domestic animals, with insufficient attention given to other animal groups such as amphibians and reptiles. Furthermore, the screening process does not include all potential pathogens that these animals might carry.

Conclusions

This meeting was the second webinar offered to the FPW to update their knowledge on the current situation of wildlife trade in the region, legal resources and challenges to address the problematic. In addition, a successful example of multisectoral collaborative work on the surveillance of wild animal trade and the potential pathogens they might carried was showcased. Through the discussions held, it was highlighted the need of communication and collaborative work with rescue centers for the appropriate management of confiscated wild animals, the training of personal to properly handle the wide range of wild species that are confiscated, and the development of a shared and easy access database to register and analyse the quantity and species under traffic in the region. Finally, through this webinar the FPW were able to expand their network of contacts. The webinar was also attended by the Speaker of the First Wildlife Health Webinar, Nuno Felipe Guimaraes, and our regional UNEP partner Pablo Sagredo Martin. This webinar series is aligned with the objectives and activities of the WOAHS Wildlife Health Programme.