

The EU-TWIX database

The database centralises data on wildlife trade seizures submitted by EU enforcement agencies (i.e. the police, Customs, environmental inspection services and CITES Management Authorities) in six EU languages. Access to the database is internet-based and exclusively granted to designated enforcement officials who are provided with access codes. In May 2007, the database held over 16,000 seizure cases and counted over 320 users from all 27 EU Member States. Each agency has a Focal Point, who is the only official able to enter data online, thereby avoiding data duplication. For customs data, transfer takes place via the World Customs Organisation (WCO) for the majority of EU Member States. The database also holds information on forensics institutes, rescue centres and wildlife experts, and prices of wildlife specimens in trade. So far, the database has mainly been used for monitoring trends in illegal trade, which enables agencies to increase their efficiency in detecting this trade.

The EU-TWIX mailing list

The electronic mailing list allows quick and efficient sharing of information between designated enforcement officials on seizures, and to exchange experience and expertise on illegal wildlife trade matters. Currently (May 2007), the mailing list connects more than 320 enforcement officials from all 27 EU Member States, plus Croatia, Switzerland and Montenegro. The mailing list has already facilitated investigations, one of which led to a seizure of dendrobate frogs at Paris-Orly airport in March 2006. The major benefit of the mailing list is in stimulating a level of international information exchange and co-operation that would not otherwise take place.



[Photo Simon Milledge / TRAFFIC]

[Photo Belgian Customs (GAD Zaventem)]

[Photo French Customs – DG Douane]

CITES and the European Union

As EU membership has expanded from ten Member States in 1981 to 27 by 2007, the magnitude of the EU market for wildlife products has also increased. Worth millions of Euros, the trade includes live animals, ornamental plants, tropical woods, food, leather, ivory, tourist curios and wildlife-based medicines. A significant proportion of the wildlife trade is illegal and threatens the survival of species in the wild. CITES is implemented in the EU through a common legal framework, the European Wildlife Trade Regulations, which are applicable in all Member States. Each Member State is responsible for enacting national legislation, appointing CITES Management and Scientific Authorities, enabling seizure and confiscation of illegal specimens and laying down the penalties for illegal wildlife trade.

More information

about the European Wildlife Trade Regulations and the application of CITES in the EU can be found at www.eu-wildlifetrade.org and www.ec.europa.eu/environment/cites/home_en.htm.



agriculture, nature and food quality

EU-TWIX is a joint initiative of the Belgian Federal Police, Customs and CITES Management Authority, and TRAFFIC Europe. The EU-TWIX Administrator, based at TRAFFIC Europe, co-ordinates EU-TWIX on behalf of the four project partners. This project has received funding from the European Commission, Defra (The UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) and the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality.

Info

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EU-TWIX: An Internet tool to assist the EU in the fight against wildlife trade crime



EU-TWIX

– the **European Union Trade in Wildlife Information eXchange** – is a tool developed to facilitate

information exchange

and international co-operation between law enforcement officials across the European Union (EU). It has been operational since October 2005. EU-TWIX consists of two complementary components: a database and a mailing list.

Why EU-TWIX?

The EU is one of the largest and most diverse markets for wildlife and wildlife products, whose trade is controlled by CITES (The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). The abolition of internal border controls in the EU's single market in the early 1990s has provided new avenues for transboundary wildlife trade crime. New smuggling methods and routes are actively sought out by offenders to avoid detection, making countries with weak border controls ideal targets. International co-operation between the 27 EU Member States is therefore vital.



EU TWIX
TRADE IN WILDLIFE INFORMATION EXCHANGE

How EU-TWIX has helped enforcement officials in the EU combat illegal wildlife trade

1 Assessment of current illegal trade (Belgium)

The Belgian Customs, Federal Police and CITES Management Authority are using the database to assess patterns of illegal imports into Belgium in order to determine enforcement priorities. For example, it is helping them identify the species most commonly detected as being traded into Belgium illegally, the commercial trade routes used, and the methods of dissimulation and of detection. [Photo Belgian Customs (GAD Zaventem)]

2 Help with identifying seized specimens (Croatia)

In April 2007, the Croatian CITES Management Authority seized 175 chameleons and 10 Radiated Tortoises, all species native to Madagascar. A request was sent to the mailing list asking for urgent assistance with identification of the seized animals and help in finding a suitable rescue centre. The German CITES Management Authority, the Belgian Police and a UK health inspector, confirmed the species involved. The specimens will be returned to Madagascar with the agreement of the Madagascan government. [Photo Neven Vrbanic]

3 Sharing of new identification techniques (Czech Republic)

In April 2007, the Czech Environmental Inspectorate shared news of a caviar seizure. They also recommended a quick and cheap technique for distinguishing real caviar from the fake, gelatine version – when dropped in hot water, fake caviar melts, whereas real caviar does not. [Photo Czech Environmental Inspectorate]

4 Assistance with the practical application of EU Wildlife Trade Regulations (Estonia)

Law enforcement agencies in several countries use the mailing list to clarify aspects of the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations. For example, following a seizure of traditional Asian medicines thought to contain CITES derivatives in March 2006, the Estonian Environmental Inspectorate asked for guidance on what judicial procedures were open to them without the necessity of carrying out laboratory analyses, which were not available to them. Responses were provided by the Hungarian and Cypriot CITES Management Authorities. [Photo Crawford Allan/TRAFFIC]

5 International co-operation leading to a seizure (France)

In April 2006, a joint investigation by the Belgian Federal Police and French Gendarmerie led to a seizure of dendrobate frogs at Paris-Orly airport, where seven people were arrested upon arrival from French Guyana. The chief officers involved met through EU-TWIX and this speeded up the collaboration process and enabled a level of international co-operation that would not have taken place otherwise. [Photo Gendarmerie, OCLAESP]

6 Increased efficiency at detecting illegal trade (France)

The French Customs use the database to identify seizures in other EU Member States of goods that have passed through France undetected. This helps them identify which detection methods to focus on and whether greater investment or modification of these methods is needed. It also makes them aware of the types of illegal trade previously undetected in France. [Photo French Customs - Marc Bonodot]

7 Stolen specimens alert (Germany and Austria)

On several occasions, officials have used the mailing list to warn their colleagues of the theft of CITES specimens in their own country. For example, in April 2006, the German CITES Management Authority informed other mailing list users of a theft of many CITES goods (mainly reptile and mammal species) on display in a local enforcement building. Two weeks later, 50 Hermann's Tortoises were stolen in Austria and the news reported by the Austrian CITES Management Authority. Thanks to the mailing list, enforcers will now be on the lookout for these stolen specimens. [Photo Czech Environmental Inspectorate]

8 Training of wildlife law enforcement officials (Hungary)

The Hungarian CITES Management Authority used the database as a source of information for training seminars given to wildlife law enforcement officials. They also used the mailing list to request x-ray photos of CITES goods from other EU Member States to help improve their skills in this area. [Photo Pol Meuleneire, GAD Zaventem]

9 Sharing resources and expertise (Latvia)

The Latvian CITES Management Authority discovered a trade in cosmetics claiming to contain Brown Bear extracts in Latvia and warned other EU Member States about it via the mailing list. Documents seized along with the products suggested bear extracts were present, but no laboratory analysis could be carried out due to lack of resources. UK Customs has offered to carry out forensic tests on the products for the Latvian CITES Management Authority. [Photo Latvian CITES Management Authority]

10 Rapid sharing of seizures information (Lithuania)

At the end of January 2007, the Lithuanian CITES Management Authority shared news of recent seizures of bottles containing alcohol and CITES-listed species (snakes, scorpions, seahorses, ginseng etc.). This triggered a wide-ranging debate via the mailing list which confirmed the species involved and highlighted that trade in these products is widespread across the EU. [Photo Czech Environmental Inspectorate]

11 Information exchange reveals the scope of illegal trade (The Netherlands)

Information exchange via the mailing list about a reptile seizure which took place in Croatia made the Dutch General Inspection Service aware of the involvement of Dutch traders in the illegal international trade of reptiles. They requested nominal information from the Belgian Police which is now helping them to monitor this illegal trade, and may lead to a full investigation. The database is also helping to retrieve data on illegal trade going through The Netherlands. [Photo WWF-Canon/Tanya Petersen]

12 Sharing information on seized products (Slovakia)

In March 2007, the Slovak Environmental Inspectorate became aware that Chinese-produced medicinal products containing extracts of Dendrobium orchids were being sold in pharmacies countrywide, and asked for further information on this trade via the mailing list. The UK Customs sent extensive additional information and warned others that a different version of the same product, which does not list Dendrobium orchids in the ingredients' list, was also in circulation. [Photo UK Customs]

13 More caution in issuing CITES permits (Spain)

The Spanish CITES Management Authority analyses the database to determine which species from which countries are most prevalent in illegal trade. In practice, this enables them to increase their enforcement efficiency, and also be more cautious when granting CITES import and export permits. [Photo TRAFFIC]

14 International co-operation during investigations (UK)

In January 2006, the UK CITES Management Authority sought assistance from the French Gendarmerie during an investigation into an internet-perpetrated fraud. The illegal trader, with a French-based email address, had offered CITES specimens to a UK tour company. The French Gendarmerie traced the name of the illegal trader and his address in West Africa. The case turned out to be a fraud scam, rather than a wildlife crime. [Photo TRAFFIC]

