THE ROUTES PARTNERSHIP
From Take Off to Touch Down
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Cover image: Eastern Black Rhinoceros, Kenya © Ola Jennersten / WWF-Sweden
The USAID Reducing Opportunities for Unlawful Transport of Endangered Species (ROUTES) Partnership was established in October 2015, bringing together transport and logistics companies, government agencies, development groups, law enforcement and conservation organizations to eliminate wildlife trafficking from the air transport supply chain.

The illegal wildlife trade (IWT) is estimated to be the fourth largest illegal trade following drugs, counterfeit goods, and human trafficking. Traffickers use air transport as a relatively low risk, high profit means of illegally transporting wildlife from source to consumer. Though the interception and arrest of wildlife traffickers is the responsibility of law enforcement, the many thousands of air transport staff operating along the supply chain (e.g. cabin crew, baggage screeners, and others), with the proper means, are uniquely placed to support law enforcement by identifying and reporting any wildlife trafficking suspicions. Industry leaders can help to champion this and other solutions by integrating wildlife trafficking prevention into policies, strategies and practices, for long-term action to combat wildlife trafficking.

This report provides an overview of ROUTES’ achievements and impact during its six years of implementation and explores how that impact can be sustained in future.

### Core Partners

- Airports Council International (ACI)
- The Center for Advanced Defense Studies (C4ADS)
- Freeland (until December 2019)
- International Air Transport Association (IATA)
- TRAFFIC
- WWF
- U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- U.S. Department of State
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

A note on the COVID-19 pandemic

The outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020 had a devastating impact on the air transport industry, causing a 90% reduction in passenger traffic and mass layoffs within the industry. Many companies were unable to engage with ROUTES. However, the new global awareness of the potential links between wildlife trafficking and zoonoses reinforced the case for the air transport industry to take action. Having benefited from ROUTES’ support to integrate wildlife trafficking prevention into their priorities and practices, as the situation started to improve in early 2021 the industry was well positioned to resume their efforts, resulting in significant and lasting achievements in the final year of the Partnership.
**ROUTES Partnership Main Achievements Timeline**

**Mar** - The United for Wildlife (UfW) Transport Taskforce launches the Buckingham Palace Declaration. ACI and IATA sign among 40 companies.

**Sept** - ROUTES conducts its first training workshops for staff of Vietnam Airlines and South African Airways.

**Nov** - ROUTES conducts the first wildlife trafficking gap assessment, at Maputo International Airport, Mozambique.

**Jan** - the ROUTES website is launched.

**Jun** - first IWT awareness installation set up at OR Tambo International Airport, South Africa.

**May** - ROUTES releases the report *Flying Under the Radar*.

**Jul** - IATA Live Animal Regulations become the first of many areas of airline policies to incorporate IWT.

**Apr** - the ACI Wildlife Trafficking Prevention Taskforce is established. By the end of ROUTES, it had 36 members, representing 176 airports.

**Nov** - ROUTES completes its suite of role-specific training materials.

**2015**

**2016**

**2017**

**2018**

ROUTES conducted a long series of trainings, which overall totalled:

- **9** airlines
- **9** airports
- **2** ground handling companies
- **1600+** staff

ROUTES released five further major reports discussing trends of IWT in aviation and other topics such as its links to other crimes and public health.

Eight wildlife trafficking gap assessments were conducted with the World Customs Organization:
- Maputo, Mozambique
- Hanoi, Vietnam
- Entebbe, Uganda
- Nairobi, Kenya
- Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- Doha, Qatar
- Johannesburg, South Africa
- Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
ROUTES was influential in the formation of a number of other IWT prevention taskforces and alliances worldwide:

- Brazilian airlines working group
- Mexican airlines working group
- Southern Africa Transport Task Force

Airlines certified by close of ROUTES:
- Air Canada
- Air Canada Rouge
- Finnair
- South African Airways
- Qatar Airways

13 more committed to completing by end of 2022

May - the IATA IWT Guidance Manual is published to support best practice among airlines and support assessment against IEnvA IWT module

Jun - Qatar Airways becomes the first airline to be certified on the new IATA IEnvA IWT module

Jul - the ICAO Facilitation Panel unanimously endorses the proposal by ACI and IATA of a new recommended practice, for member states to have clear procedures and reporting systems for IWT prevention

Aug - report Animal Smuggling in Air Transport and Preventing Zoonotic Spillover released in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Sep - ACI launch the Wildlife Trafficking Prevention Airports Excellence (APEX) assessment

Sep - Wildlife Sentinel, an anonymous IWT reporting app for aviation staff, is launched with Crime Stoppers International

Jun - ACI Europe, representing 500+ airports in 45 countries, includes IWT prevention in their first Sustainability Strategy for Airports

Apr - ACI Airports Wildlife Trafficking Awareness videos are launched

Dec - work commences to develop software for detection of illegal wildlife products in airport x-ray screening systems - see p. 12

Passenger Check-In, Passenger Screener, Cabin Crew, Cargo Acceptance, Cargo & Baggage Screener, Ground Handler

Toolbox talks, presentations, e-modules

Languages: EN, ES, FR, PT, ZH

120+ reports of suspicious activity within the first two months
When the USAID ROUTES Partnership began in October 2015, very little analysis existed on wildlife trafficking in air transport. Throughout the Partnership, to inform ROUTES’ strategy as well as actions needed by industry, C4ADS gathered data on publicly reported seizures of key wildlife groups – ivory, rhino horn, pangolin, other mammals, birds, reptiles and marine products – to build the first ever global database on wildlife trafficking in air transport.

ROUTES’ reports provide in-depth analyses of wildlife trafficking in different geographies and highlight the links between wildlife trafficking and important public issues, including the links with zoonotic disease and the convergence between wildlife trafficking and other trafficking crimes. Industry and governments have used these reports to inform decision making and target priority regions and strategies for public investment and action. Participants in the public ROUTES Close Out Meeting cited the reports and analytics as being some of the most useful resources produced by ROUTES.
The ROUTES Dashboard

ROUTES launched the Wildlife Trafficking Data Dashboard in May 2019 in response to the demand from the aviation industry for up-to-date information to help make strategic decisions. The Dashboard enables users to easily interact with data and create maps and graphics specific to location, flight route, transport method, and wildlife of interest. A Route Risk Tool was also developed to help industry users pinpoint routes that are at particular risk of being exploited by wildlife traffickers.

Wildlife Trafficking Gap Assessments at Airports

In 2016, IATA and the World Customs Organization (WCO) co-developed a wildlife trafficking gap assessment tool to identify vulnerabilities to wildlife trafficking within airports, in departments such as human resources, technology, risk management and investigations. ROUTES carried out assessments at eight major airports worldwide and shared the assessment reports and recommendations with government and aviation stakeholders to help build capacity to combat wildlife trafficking. ACI incorporated the collated recommendations into a guidance document for member airports, and the WCO disseminated the recommendations widely in its 2018 Illicit Trade Report.
ROUTES partners engaged with a diverse range of stakeholders across the air transport supply chain, including airlines, airports, ground handling companies and industry associations, focusing on those with operations along wildlife trafficking routes within and between Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East.

ROUTES developed targeted materials to increase the aviation industry’s attention on wildlife trafficking and make it as easy as possible for stakeholders to take action. Over the years, the partners developed a vast repository of resources, becoming the primary source of support for aviation to combat wildlife trafficking.

“ROUTES was a game changer for ACI in terms of bringing the necessary resources and expertise so we could support our member airports better understand their role in helping to prevent this complex and transnational crime.”

- Juliana Scavuzzi, Senior Director, Sustainability, Environmental Protection, and Legal Affairs at ACI World
Building momentum

Increasing Awareness and Industry Motivation

With limited awareness of the extent of wildlife trafficking among air transport stakeholders prior to ROUTES, a great deal of engagement and relationship building was required before companies felt willing and confident to take action. ROUTES used a range of approaches including broad communications by ACI, IATA and other engaged associations; presentations by partners at industry events; webinars; online communications such as social media around international wildlife days; and outreach by Freeland, TRAFFIC and WWF to individual companies. ROUTES also promoted the development of United for Wildlife (UfW)’s Regional Task Forces and encouraged companies to sign the Buckingham Palace Declaration (BPD).

“67 airlines signing the Buckingham Palace Declaration, representing over one third of global traffic, is an amazing achievement and would not have occurred in the absence of ROUTES.”

- Jon Godson, Assistant Director, Aviation Environment, IATA

United for Wildlife’s Transport Task Force’s Buckingham Palace Declaration (BPD)

Launched in March 2016, the BPD contains 11 strategic actions that signatories must commit to with the aim of reducing wildlife trafficking in supply chains. The BPD is a great incentive for stakeholders to commit to action, with the support of ROUTES’ resources to fulfil the commitments.
From Engagement to Action

ROUTES’ engagement efforts and supporting resources generated a wave of aviation stakeholders taking action to integrate combating wildlife trafficking as a priority within their company or organization. Actions included public or internal communications and staff training workshops, and more long-term efforts such as integrating ROUTES’ materials within existing training platforms, strengthening internal and supplier policies and establishing reporting mechanisms.

“The endorsement of the training materials by major aviation industry associations helped to ensure that the relevance of this issue is recognised within the industry.”

- Claire Beastall, Training and Capacity Building Coordinator, TRAFFIC

Countries where ROUTES training and adoption of ROUTES training materials occurred over the span of ROUTES
Supporting Stakeholder Collaboration

The gap between industry and law enforcement action

Prior to ROUTES, air transport staff did not have any standardized or consistent protocols to report suspicious criminal activities to law enforcement, and there were no feedback channels to enable staff to learn the outcomes of their reports or seizure information. These were barriers both to reporting and to industry motivation to act and meant many opportunities to combat wildlife trafficking were lost. ROUTES developed solutions to fill this gap and provided tools and systems to improve communications between the air transport sector and law enforcement.

Improving multi-stakeholder collaboration

With ROUTES’ support and influence, several key aviation industry stakeholders and the leading associations, IATA and ACI, engaged more closely with initiatives and institutions related to wildlife trafficking. For example, from 2017, IATA was able to regularly attend the INTERPOL Wildlife Crime Working Group meetings, the first time a transport association had been invited. Multi-stakeholder collaboration provided new opportunities for mutual understanding, cooperative practices, and building of trust between sectors.

In February 2020, ROUTES and UfW co-convened a Southern Africa regional workshop in Johannesburg, South Africa, bringing together transport companies, customs and security, government, and conservation stakeholders to establish a Southern Africa Transport Task Force to combat wildlife trafficking. The workshop enabled the different sectors to build new relationships and identify steps to strengthen collaboration. Since then, multiple regional Task Forces were established that can carry forward the objectives of ROUTES and benefit from its multiple resources and lessons learned.

In August 2021, ROUTES hosted a multi-country, multi-stakeholder workshop to bring together transport, government, law enforcement and conservation organizations from Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico to discuss wildlife trafficking. This was the first time for many attendees to meet other stakeholders in their industry and develop solutions collaboratively. ROUTES partners helped the participants to design three country-specific action plans and establish support for continued national-level meetings and action for the future. ROUTES also facilitated the establishment of Brazilian and Mexican multi-stakeholder working groups, which now meet regularly.

“ROUTES has served as a valuable and unique resource, not only for facilitating engagement and collaboration but for supporting companies to implement measures to combat wildlife trafficking through its comprehensive set of training and guidance materials.”

- Ian Cruickshank, Transport Taskforce Manager, United for Wildlife

The nationalities and sectors involved in the collaborative action planning workshop

Country
- Mexico
- International
- Ecuador
- Colombia
- Brazil

Sector of work
- Airport
- Conservation
- Government
- Airline
- Law enforcement
- Other
Innovative Technology

ROUTES developed novel technological solutions to provide synthesized data and analytics to industry (e.g., the ROUTES Dashboard) and support data sharing between transport and law enforcement. These were the first of their kind for the air transport sector, and two critically important tools include:

**Reporting technology**

ROUTES and Crime Stoppers International (CSI) jointly developed a novel mobile reporting app, Wildlife Sentinel, to empower air transport staff to anonymously report suspicions of wildlife trafficking to law enforcement. The app is available in English, Spanish and Portuguese on Android and iOS mobile platforms. Within the first two months over 120 reports were submitted to CSI via the app.

**Automated x-ray detection of trafficked wildlife in baggage**

ROUTES supported and coordinated the development of an algorithm to detect priority wildlife products in baggage screening x-ray systems at airports, through analyzing the x-ray data generated for aviation security purposes. The algorithm development by Sandia National Laboratories, USA, with funding by USAID, achieved excellent accuracy rates in detecting target wildlife products. Once proven successful through repeat testing in practice, this technology has the potential for expansion to detect a broader range of smuggled wildlife products and other illicit goods.

**Anti-corruption**

Wildlife traffickers often use insider knowledge and connections to successfully move illegal goods through secure and controlled processes such as air transport clearance systems. Due to the highly lucrative nature of the illegal wildlife trade, both transport staff and law enforcement staff can be vulnerable to coercion and collusion by traffickers.

The technologies, awareness, policies, and training developed by ROUTES will help to reduce corruption in air transport. For example, the x-ray scanner autodetection technology reduces the need for manual review and decision making in detecting and reporting trafficked wildlife, by automatically alerting enforcement rather than relying on human intervention. The anonymous reporting app is enabling staff to report wildlife trafficking, and indicate suspicions of corruption, without fear of repercussion.
Interception of wildlife trafficking

ROUTES achieved outstanding results with the aviation industry in their efforts to raise awareness, train staff, integrate wildlife trafficking prevention into policies and collaborate with others. The ability and confidence of transport staff to identify and report wildlife trafficking increased and law enforcement was able to respond effectively.

A December 2020 survey of BPD signatory airlines found that at least six seizures had been made following airline staff’s reports to law enforcement, resulting in two prosecutions. For example:

In March 2018, a Kenya Airways employee, who had recently attended a ROUTES training, helped to intercept three bags of pangolin scales, concealed among wood shavings, bound for Hong Kong.

In September 2021, 3,493 shark fins and 117 kilograms of fish swim bladders were seized at El Dorado International Airport, Colombia, following a report from a transport company. The airport staff had attended the ROUTES stakeholder workshop and the Airport had made ROUTES training compulsory for any transport staff coming into the airport. These measures were key to achieving this successful seizure.

“[The pangolin scales seizure] was one of the success stories we had, and it was nice because we were right in the middle of the training sessions.”
- Linda Itindi, Former Manager of Industrial Safety and Environment, Kenya Airways

Raising industry voices

Wildlife trafficking was a peripheral issue for the transport industry until initiatives such as ROUTES and the UfW BPD built momentum to engage in the challenge. Measures to combat wildlife trafficking became increasingly well adopted by the air transport industry; many aviation stakeholders showed great leadership through their effective action. ROUTES partners celebrated those champions and shared their achievements across the industry through press releases, media articles, case studies, and ‘spotlight’ videos.
The increasing commitment and action to combat wildlife trafficking within the industry is extremely promising for longer-term practice. However, sustained action and impact requires the industry’s integration of the issue into its systems. Key highlights of the institutionalization achieved by ROUTES include:

**Industry-wide**
The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) is the United Nation’s (UN) specialized agency responsible for the regulation of international civil aviation. Achieving change at this level can take years of advocacy. In July 2021, ROUTES achieved one of the greatest assurances of long-term action against wildlife trafficking: the ICAO Facilitation Panel unanimously endorsed a proposal by ACI and IATA to adopt the following recommended practice under the UN Convention on International Civil Aviation:

“Contracting States should ensure that procedures are in place to combat wildlife trafficking, including clear reporting systems and relevant competent authorities’ points of contact for airport and airline operators.”

Pending final approval by the ICAO Council, the recommended practice establishes some of ROUTES’ critical recommendations and paves the way for widespread and long-term uptake of the ROUTES-supported reporting app.

**Sector by sector**
Under ROUTES, both IATA and ACI developed specific guidance documents and recommended practices supporting their respective members to institutionalize wildlife trafficking prevention. Both industry associations also established accompanying assessment programs for guiding, monitoring and demonstrating their efforts – critical for incentivizing long-term and continual improvement in wildlife trafficking prevention practices:

1. IATA developed an ‘Illegal Wildlife Trade Module’, aligned with the BPD commitments, for independent assessment and certification of airlines, both as part of the IATA Environmental Assessment (IEnvA) program and as a standalone assessment for BPD signatories.
2. ACI developed a ‘Wildlife Trafficking Prevention Virtual Assessment’ within its Airport Excellence (APEX) peer assessment program, to support improved practices within airports.

**Regional**
In November 2020, over 20 associations, representing the entire European aviation sector, announced a commitment to collaborate with the European Union on a framework for sustainable and resilient recovery after the pandemic. The framework includes action against wildlife trafficking. The increased attention paid to combating wildlife trafficking in this context was heavily influenced by ROUTES and its partners’ efforts on awareness raising and industry leader engagement.

“Being part of an industry collaboration gave us our best opportunity for lasting impact and a standardized approach to IWT prevention within the sector.”

- Afsoon Namini, Director, Private Sector Engagement, World Wildlife Fund
Sustaining ROUTES’ Impact and Support

Beyond the horizon
ROUTES helped to generate passion, commitment and initiative within the industry to combat wildlife trafficking. ROUTES’ tools, insights and resources will enable air transport stakeholders to continue to work towards their goals beyond the end of the Partnership.

- The ROUTES Dashboard will remain as a platform for access to data and graphics of wildlife trafficking trends between 2009 and 2021. The data from the dashboard was also transferred to the TRAFFIC Wildlife Trade Portal for continued industry access to up-to-date data and visuals in the future.
- CSI will host the Wildlife Sentinel reporting app in the long term and is exploring opportunities to incorporate other types of trafficking as well as adapt it for transport industries beyond aviation.
- ROUTES partners secured funding to deploy the automated x-ray detection technology in selected airports to establish and refine it further.
- IATA will continue to support its members to take action and work towards assessment and accreditation, with a dedicated wildlife trafficking prevention page on the IATA website and links to the ROUTES resources.
- The ACI Wildlife Trafficking Prevention Task Force will continue to hold regular calls for airport members to discuss wildlife trafficking issues. The ACI videos and other resources will remain on the ACI wildlife trafficking webpage and training platform.
- The Southern Africa and other regional Transport Task Forces supported by UfW will continue to leverage ROUTES’ resources. The task forces will ensure a globally coordinated and multi-sectoral approach that builds from the learning and tools provided by ROUTES.
- The national-level cross-sectoral collaborations and working groups established across Latin America have action plans and resources for implementation, and the support of WWF, TRAFFIC and other national and regional NGOs brought into the collaboration by ROUTES.
- The ROUTES website, with all ROUTES’ resources, will be hosted on the USAID Biodiversity Links website, with additional links from the TRAFFIC website to key resources.

“As efforts continue beyond ROUTES, continued analyses and communication of wildlife trafficking trends will grow increasingly important to understand the relevance and impact of specific approaches to combat the crime.”
- Faith Hornor, Program Director, Environmental Crimes, C4ADS
Lessons Learned and Conclusions

ROUTES partners placed great emphasis on learning, to understand the challenges and opportunities within its collaboration with the air transport sector, and to maximize effectiveness and set a path for others for the future. Some key lessons were learned:

How best to encourage and enable the air transport sector to take action?

- Use tailored evidence to show how wildlife trafficking affects each particular stakeholder
- Understand the motivations of the stakeholder and that every stakeholder is different
- Seek industry leaders to help influence stakeholders from within their sector
- Provide simple solutions for action with accompanying guidance, resources and support
- Support stakeholders to gain recognition of their efforts

What are the strengths and challenges of working within a collaborative partnership?

- Having representatives of each stakeholder group within the partnership ensures buy-in to interventions and positive outcomes for all, as long as a common vision and priorities are agreed at the start.
- Each partner brings their own expertise, experience and networks, which ensures the most informed and effective approach to a multi-faceted challenge, although jointly developed outputs can take longer to produce.
- Industry partners’ networks and communication channels facilitate outreach and engagement and can help to predict and respond rapidly to any emerging issues within the stakeholder environment.

The ROUTES Partnership began when there was very little awareness of the nature and scale of wildlife trafficking within the air transport industry. From that starting point, ROUTES partners secured recognition at the highest executive and regulatory levels of the importance of combating wildlife trafficking in air transport. ROUTES supported action and impact among many critically important aviation stakeholders worldwide and put vital systems in place to ensure that action continues long into the future.

Thanks to all of ROUTES’ collaborators, the work will continue to reduce opportunities for unlawful transport of endangered species.

“ROUTES has shown the power of collaboration and reflects what can be achieved when different voices and expertise are brought together to address a problem. The solutions developed will be relevant for years to come.”
- Michelle Owen, ROUTES Lead, TRAFFIC

“We must not squander ROUTES’ legacy - let’s build and scale from here. We have the knowledge and right approaches to make transport sector leadership the norm in preventing wildlife trafficking globally.”
- Crawford Allan, ROUTES Oversight, TRAFFIC
Resources from ROUTES

The ROUTES website and all resources will continue to be available post close of ROUTES. The USAID Biodiversity Links website will highlight ROUTES on its Completed Projects page.

Guidance

- ACI Combatting Wildlife Trafficking Handbook (English, Spanish and Portuguese)
- ACI Buckingham Palace Declaration (BPD) Guidance for Airports: to assist members in interpreting the BPD commitments for airport-led action
- Sustainable Development Goals Guidance - how the aviation industry can contribute to SDGs 3, 14, 15 and 17 (available in Spanish)
- Reducing Wildlife Trafficking in Aviation - recommendations for relevant stakeholders on how to mitigate against wildlife trafficking threats at airports
- Wildlife Seizure Press Releases: A Best Practice Guide - recommendations on how to effectively communicate wildlife seizures made within the aviation industry
- Health and Safety Factsheet - how to minimize health and safety risks if you find trafficked wildlife

Training Materials

- ACI Combatting Wildlife Trafficking e-module (Chinese, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese)
- General awareness presentations for all regions of the world (half-day and 1 hour versions)
- Role-specific e-modules, presentations and toolbox talks for key personnel (Chinese, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese)
- ACI Wildlife Trafficking Awareness Videos (in 6-minute and 12-minute versions)
- IATA general awareness video.

Data and Information

- Data on wildlife trafficking in aviation 2009-2021 is available on the ROUTES Dashboard.
- Dashboard data and functionality has been integrated into the TRAFFIC Wildlife Trade Portal, where it will continue to receive updates.
- ROUTES reports:
  - Flying Under the Radar
  - In Plane Sight
  - Runway to Extinction
  - Taking Off (English, Spanish)
  - Shared Skies
  - Animal Smuggling in Air Transport and Preventing Zoonotic Spillover (English, Spanish)

Assessment

- ACI Wildlife Trafficking Prevention Virtual APEX Assessment Programme
- IATA Environmental Assessment (IEnvA) IWT module, also available for non-IEnvA registered airlines. Supported by the IATA Illegal Wildlife Trade Guidance Manual.

Reporting
