

AN OVERVIEW OF SEIZURES OF
**CITES-LISTED
WILDLIFE**

IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2023



TRAFFIC



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Blue and Gold Macaw (*Ara ararauna*)

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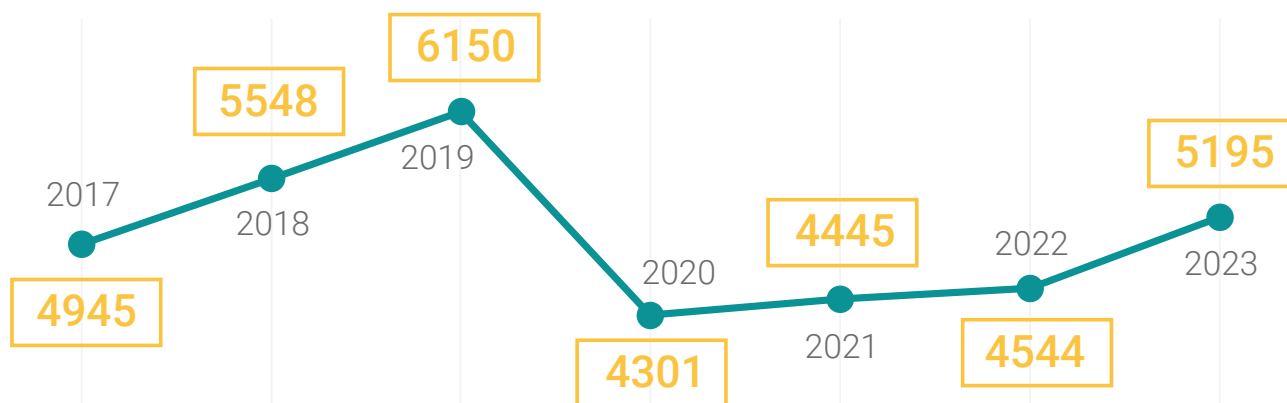
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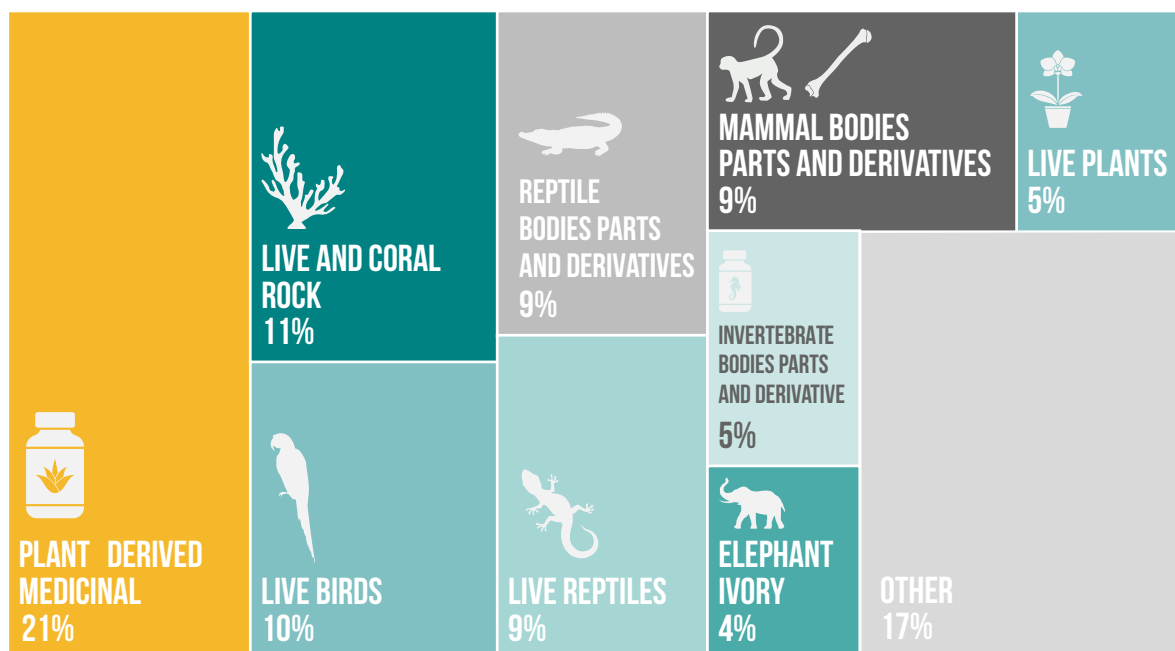
References
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OVERVIEW: 2023 EU CITES-RELATED SEIZURES AT A GLANCE*

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



The main commodity groups seized in the EU in 2023 based on the
NUMBER OF RECORDS



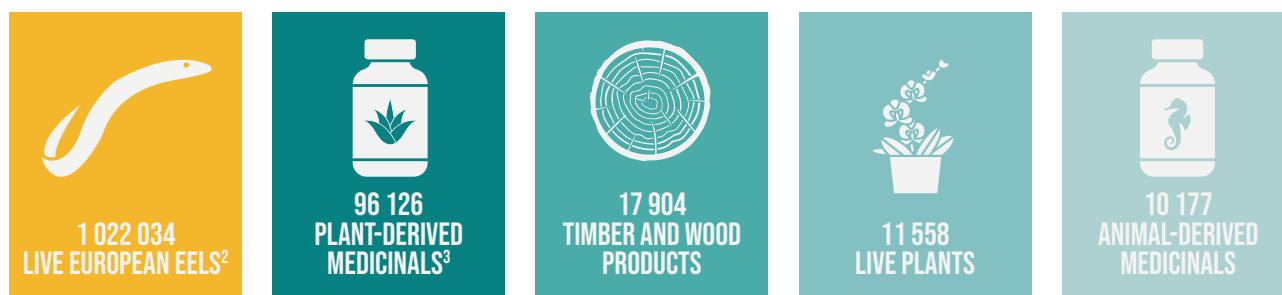
Bird bodies, parts, and derivatives 4%
Sturgeon caviar 4%
Animal-derived medicinal 4%
Live eels 1%
Live mammals 1%
Fish bodies, parts and derivatives < 1%
Ivory (other) < 1%
Live invertebrates < 1%
Timber and wood products < 1%

Live amphibians < 1%
Plant parts and derivatives < 1%
Coral parts and derivatives < 1%
Live fish < 1%
Bird eggs < 1%
Eel bodies, parts and derivatives < 1%
Reptile eggs < 1%
Amphibian bodies, parts and derivatives < 1%

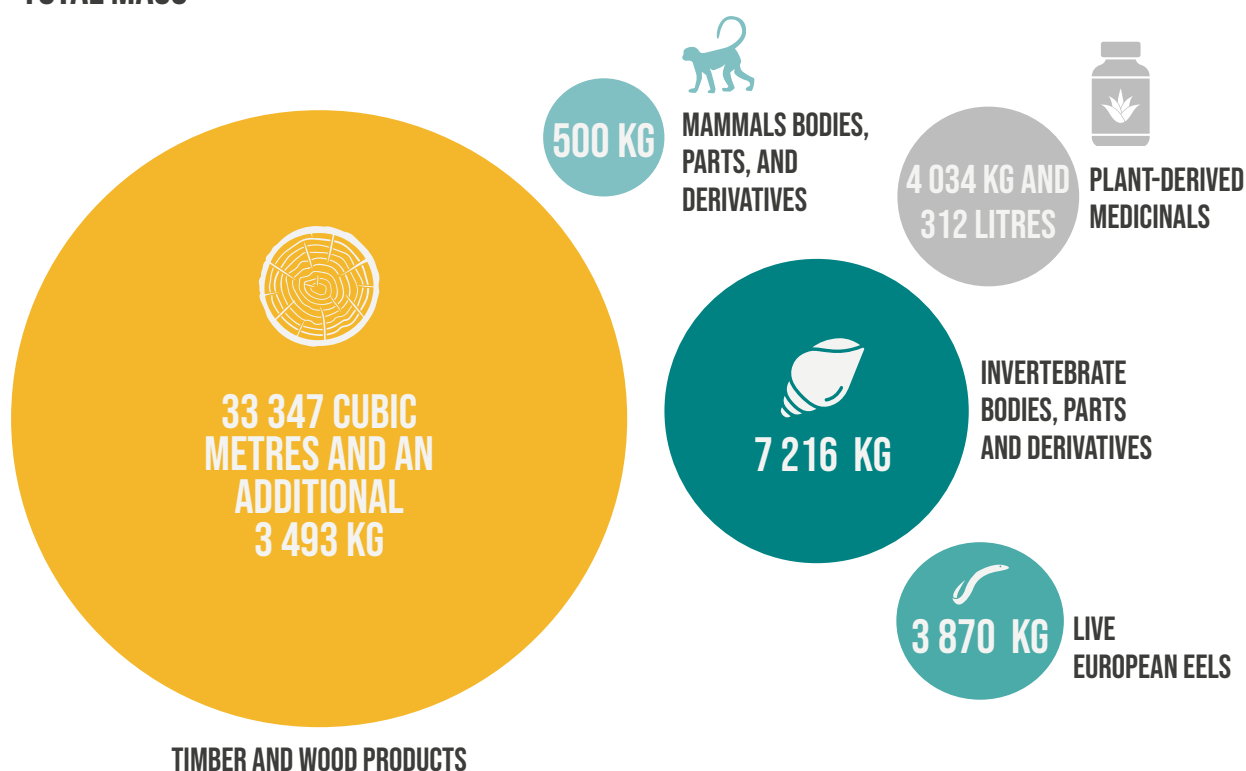
***FIGURES BASED ON DATA AVAILABLE AT THE TIME OF ANALYSIS^{1*}**

¹Data extracted from the European Trade in Wildlife Information eXchange platform September 2024.

Top CITES commodities seized in the EU, based on the **NUMBER OF SPECIMENS**



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



²This figure is based on a total of six reported seizure records that involved eels, all reported by the number of specimens (i.e., number of live individuals or fingerlings). Four out of these six reported records did not indicate measurements of live eels by their mass, which is the preferred reporting unit in accordance with CITES guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual illegal trade reports. Overall, approximately 94% of live eel seizure records in 2023 were reported by mass (kg), rather than by number.

³In some cases, reported quantities of plant and animal derived medicinals concerned the total amount of product seized, rather than the actual amount of CITES-listed species'.

OVERVIEW: 2023 EU CITES-RELATED SEIZURES AT A GLANCE*

DESTINATIONS AND LOCATIONS

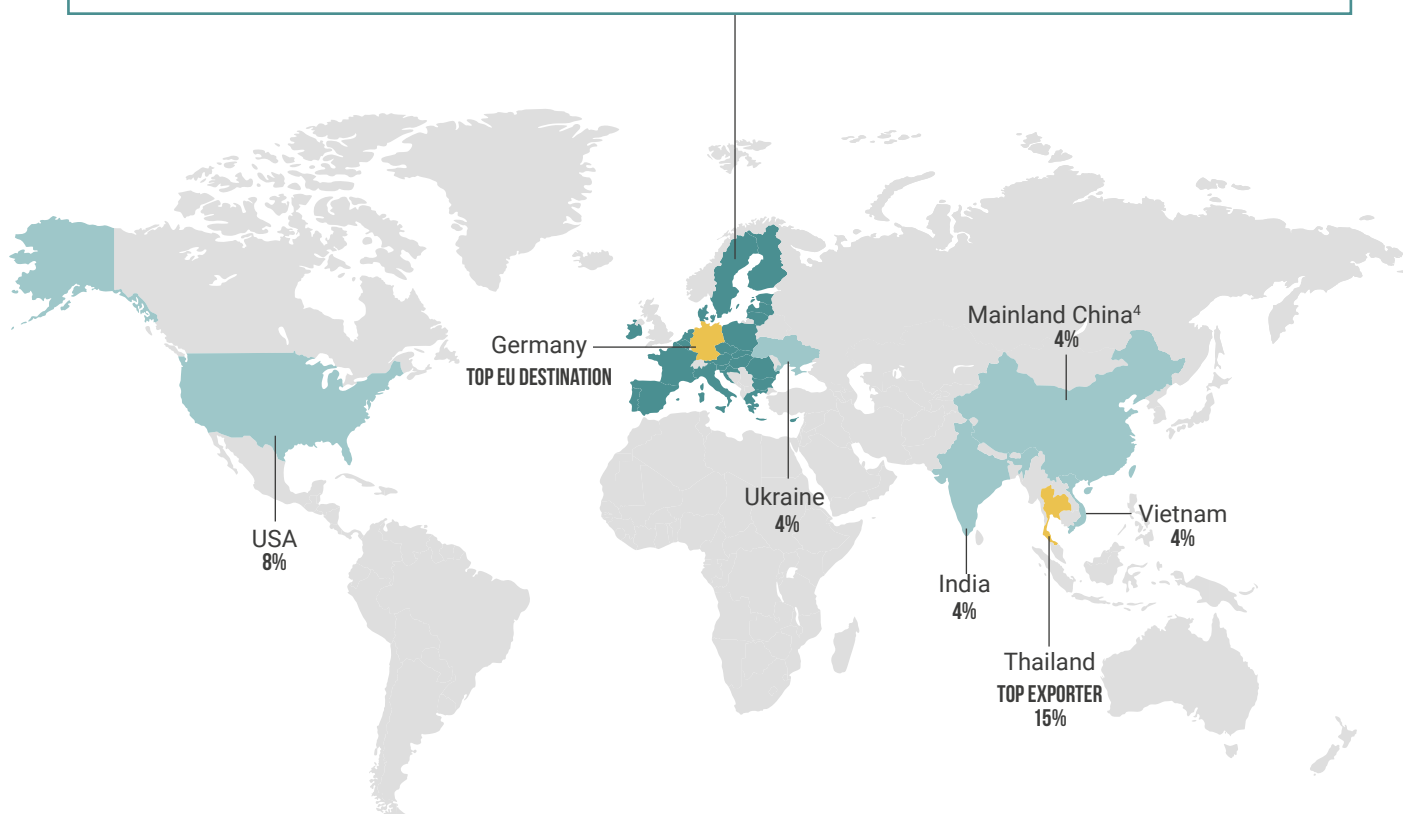
of CITES-listed commodities to the EU in 2023

EU SPOTLIGHT

4% OF ALL REPORTED SEIZURE RECORDS WITH A KNOWN EXPORTER WERE INVOLVED IN INTRA-EU TRADE.

86% OF ALL REPORTED SEIZURE RECORDS WERE DESTINED FOR THE EU IN 2023.

50% OF THE CASES DESTINED FOR COUNTRIES OUTSIDE THE EU SAW THE EU ACT AS A STOP-OVER OR TRANSIT POINT.

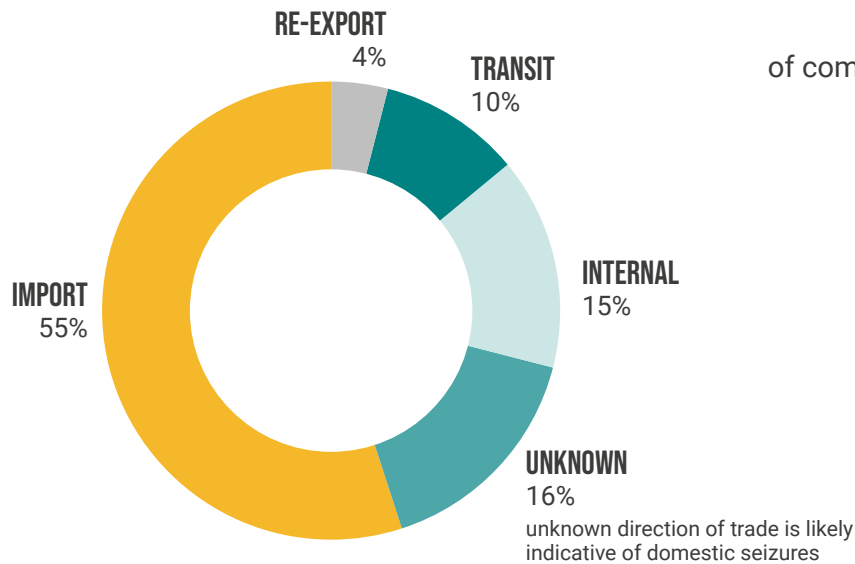


TOP EXPORTERS OF CITES-LISTED COMMODITIES SEIZED IN THE EU IN 2023.

EU MEMBER STATES.

⁴ Mainland China (excluding Taiwan, and Hong Kong SAR) is used in accordance with the names of countries and territories listed in the Annual Illegal Trade Reports (AITR) and in line with the CITES guidelines for the preparation and submission of the CITES AITRs. This reference should not be interpreted as reflecting any official position of the European Union with regard to the legal status of any country or territory, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

THE POINT OF SEIZURE of commodities seized in the EU



MODES OF TRANSPORT



Note: mode of transport was reported as unknown for 21% of records and an additional 11% reported transport as not applicable. These were likely domestic seizures

A close-up photograph of an Aardwolf (Proteles cristata) looking directly at the camera. The animal has a greyish-brown face with dark eyes and a dark nose. Its large, upright ears are visible. The background is dark and out of focus.

INTRODUCTION

THIS BRIEFING PROVIDES AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE TRENDS BASED ON SEIZURES OF CITES-LISTED SPECIES REPORTED BY EUROPEAN UNION (EU) MEMBER STATES IN 2023.

Aardwolf (Proteles cristata)

The briefing, produced under a Service Contract with the European Commission, analyses seizures which took place at external borders (e.g. airports, postal centres, maritime ports, land boundaries) and internal locations (e.g., private premises, markets and shops, fairs, exhibitions, auction houses). Reported seizure data - while not indicative of the complete picture of illicit activities - does provide valuable insight into illegal wildlife trade patterns, allowing authorities to monitor trends and tailor interventions to address priority risks.

In recent years, the world has undergone significant changes that have redefined the political landscape and disrupted the flow of goods, while also undermining global economic, public health and environmental security. The reference to this particular timeframe reflects the cumulative impact of recent global disruptions—from the COVID-19 pandemic and economic shocks to rising geopolitical tensions. The Global Risks Report (World Economic Forum, 2025) identified environmental issues, such as biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse, as the most significant long-term risks, indicating the potential for severe environmental deterioration over the next decade. Meanwhile, state-based armed conflict and extreme weather events remain the most pressing immediate risks globally. In this context of escalating global challenges - including climate change, geopolitical instability, and environmental degradation - wildlife trafficking has become an increasingly urgent issue.

Globally, the legal trade in wild animals and plants supports the livelihoods of an estimated one in five people, supplying essential resources such as food, energy, and medicine (IPBES, 2022; CBD, 2018; UNEP-WCMC & JNCC, 2021). Yet wildlife trafficking undermines this trade, threatening biodiversity, destabilising ecosystems, and fuelling organised crime — with an estimated value of up to USD 23 billion per year (UNEP, 2016).

Europol's latest 2025 Serious and Organised Crime Threats Assessment (SOCTA) further underscores the urgent need for the EU to act on wildlife trafficking, revealing how criminal networks are exploiting the EU as a major hub for wildlife trafficking. These networks leverage online platforms, operate across borders, and are marked by a high level of expertise in navigating market dynamics, regulations, and their access to global networks of buyers and sellers.

With 2025 marking the 10th anniversary of the EU's accession to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) on 8 July 2015, the EU is at a pivotal moment to reaffirm and strengthen its global leadership in combating wildlife trafficking. This milestone coincides with a crucial period in the EU's political and environmental agenda – the new von der Leyen II European Commission's legislative term (2024-2029) and the continued implementation of the European Green Deal, including the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.

During the von der Leyen I Commission's term (2019-2024), the EU stepped up its efforts through the revised [EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking](#) (2022-2027), which outlines actions to combat wildlife trafficking both within the EU and in collaboration with international partners. 2025 marks the mid-point of the Action Plan's implementation, leaving just two years to accelerate progress and deliver on its commitments.

Additionally, key legislative measures, including the Environmental Crime Directive, the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, and the Deforestation-Free Products Regulation contribute to the EU's aim of restoring biodiversity by 2030 and addressing environmental crime.

The EU plays a central role in the global wildlife trade – not only as a major destination and transit point, but also as a source of certain wildlife products, such as

sturgeon and European eel. This is largely due to the region's diverse markets and its geographic position along key global trade routes. However, the EU is also significantly affected by illegal wildlife trade, both within and across its borders. Wildlife trafficking involving commercial entities and individuals continues to bring wild species and their derivatives into, through, and from EU Member States. As such, the coming years represent a strategic window of opportunity for the EU to reinforce its position as a global standard setter and play a decisive role in tackling the drivers and impacts of unsustainable and illicit wildlife trade.

The scale of the problem is reflected in the data: According to the latest World Wildlife Crime Report (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2024), about a third of all recorded wildlife seizures worldwide between 2015 and 2021 occurred in Europe. In 2023 alone, EU Member States made nearly 5 200 seizures (at the time of

reporting), involving more than one million specimens. A substantial portion of these specimens - 86% - were European eels, with most live eels recorded by weight.

In parallel, the EU has made legislative and enforcement advances, including coordinated actions under the revised EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking. Encouragingly, the Global Organised Crime Index shows that the resilience scores of most EU Member States have improved, reflecting stronger national capacities to prevent, disrupt and respond to organised crime threats.

This briefing explores key findings from the 2023 seizures, and notable changes overtime. It highlights emerging, significant, and recurring trafficking routes, high-risk species, and explores the effectiveness of current EU policies aimed at combating this illegal trade, to inform strategies to fight wildlife trafficking in the EU.



Spur-thighed Tortoise (*Testudo Graeca*)

ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS

BACON	Baggage actions
BPD	Bodies, parts, and derivatives
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CITES	Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora
EDGE	Evolutionarily Distinct and Globally Endangered species
EU	European Union
EUDR	European Union Deforestation-Free Products Regulation
EUROPOL	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation
EU-TWIX	Europe Trade in Wildlife Information eXchange
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organisation
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
JNCC	Joint Nature Conservation Committee
SOCTA	Europol's Serious and Organised Crime Threats Assessment
UNEP-WCMC	United Nations Environmental Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre
UNODC	United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime
WCO	World Customs Organisation

TERMS

Seizure record Seizures involving different taxa/items are separated and treated as distinct “seizure records” (to allow a quantitative EU-level analysis of data). As a result, the number of registered seizure cases reported is lower than the number of “seizure records” analysed.

Internal A seizure made within a Member States domestic borders/inland.

Additional mass Sum of the weight for the seizure records where the number of specimens was not reported

REPORTED CITES-RELATED SEIZURES INVOLVING THE EU

A TOTAL OF 5 195 SEIZURE RECORDS REPORTED BY THE EU MEMBER STATES WERE ANALYSED FOR 2023, WITH **GERMANY** (25%), **FRANCE** (21%), THE **NETHERLANDS** (14%), AND **SPAIN** (13%) ACCOUNTING FOR NEARLY THREE-QUARTERS OF TOTAL EU RECORDS (FIGURE 1).

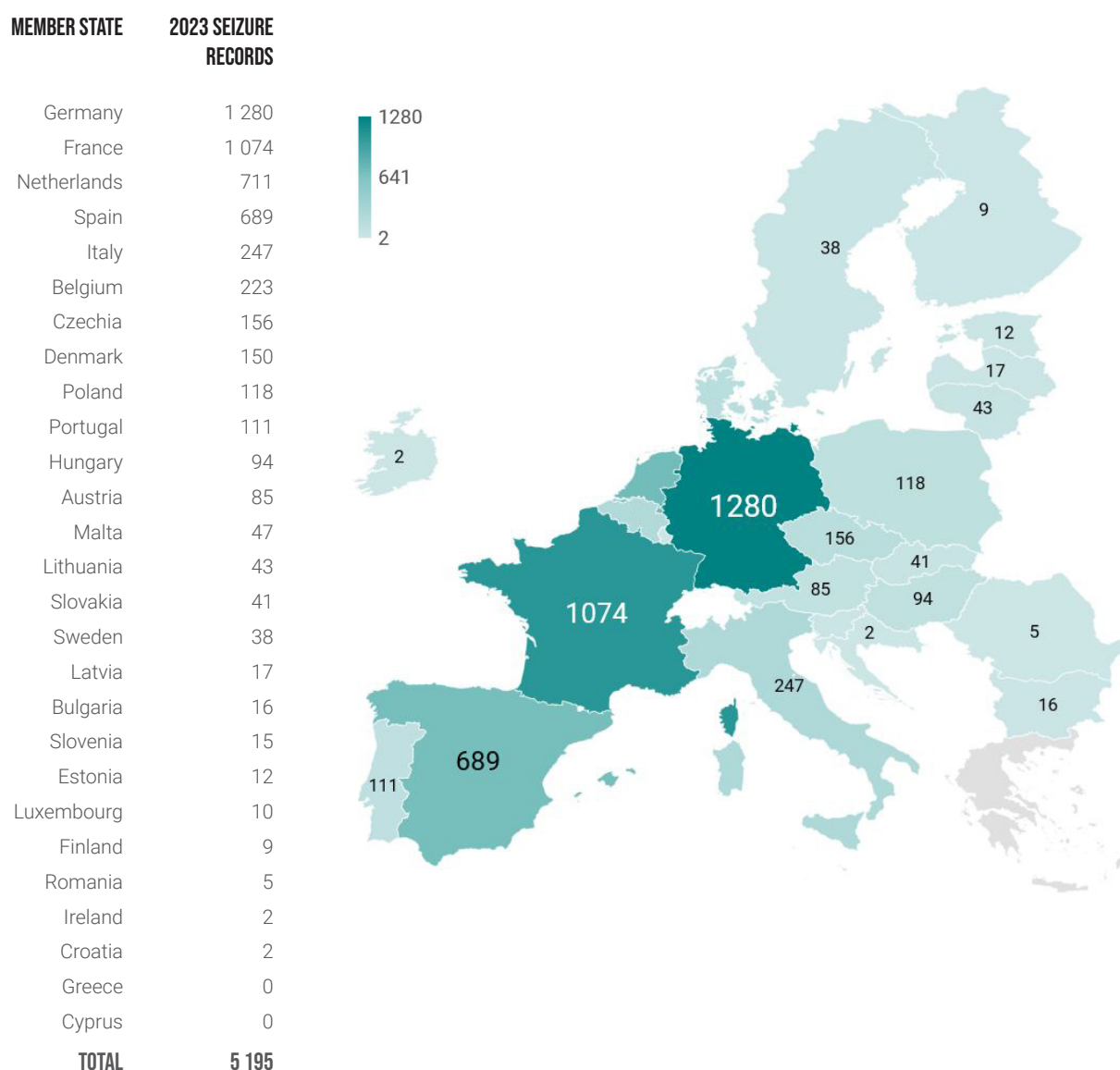


FIGURE 1

Distribution of seizure records across the EU Member States, based on the total seizure records reported and analysed for 2023. Source: EU-TWIX database.

Note: The designations of geographical entities in this map and publication, and the presentation of the material, do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of TRAFFIC or its supporting organisations or the European Commission concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

THE MAIN TYPES OF COMMODITIES SEIZED IN THE EU

This chapter is structured by first providing an overview of the scale of the wildlife trafficking problem in Europe, and then takes a closer look at specific commodity groups and enforcement challenges.

Overview

An array of over 600 000 live animals and 10 000 live plants, 33 350 cubic metres of timber, 16 000 body parts and derivatives (including foods such as caviar, meat and soup), over 100 000 items and an additional 796 kg and 154 litres of medicinal products, ornamental pieces including nearly 5 000 corals, and over 1 300 items and an additional 80 kg of elephant ivory, and other products were intercepted by enforcement agencies throughout the EU in 2023.

- **574 different CITES-listed species were seized in the EU in 2023, of which 489 were fauna and 85 species were flora.** It is important to note that these figures represent an absolute minimum number of seized species, as around 45% of EU seizure records (2 319) were not reported to species-level. This means that additional species may have been involved but were not specified in the reports. For example, some groups – such as Stony corals (*Scleractinia*), cacti (*Cactaceae*), orchids (*Orchidaceae*), and sturgeon and paddlefish (*Acipenseriformes* (all App I/II; Annex A/B), - are CITES-listed at higher taxonomic levels (order or family), and are therefore often not reported down to the species level in official records.
- Of these 574 CITES-listed species seized in the EU in 2023, **88 species were seized for the first time in 2023** within the assessment period of 2017 – 2023.
- Notably, several of these were visually striking or exotic species, such as:
 - Three look-alike poison frog species: Mimic Poison Frog (*Ranitomeya imitator*), Blessed Poison Frog (*Ranitomeya benedicta*), and Fantastic

Poison Frog (*Ranitomeya fantastica*), all protected under Annex B of the [EU Wildlife Trade Regulation](#).

- Three look-alike tarantula species: Antilles Pinktoe Tarantula (*Caribena versicolor*, Annex C), Sri Lankan Ornamental Tarantula (*Poecilotheria fasciata*, Annex B), and Wessel's Tiger Ornamental Tarantula (*Poecilotheria tigrinawesseli*, Annex B).
- In contrast, **111 species were seized consistently each year during the seven-year period (2017-2023) in the EU.** For instance:
 - Over 1 000 live African Grey Parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*, Annex A).
 - Over 4 200 live Hermann's Tortoises (*Testudo hermanni*, Annex A).
 - 67 live Lions (*Panthera leo*, Annex A/B).
- For several of these consistently seized species, both live animals and animal-derived products were involved. One striking case is the Blue and Gold Macaw (*Ara ararauna*, Annex B). Between 2017 and 2023, EU authorities seized:
 - 299 live macaws (including 34 live birds in 2023 alone),
 - 567 feathers, often used for ceremonial headdresses,
 - Five bodies, and
 - One garment.
- **In 2023, birds represented the group with the highest number of different species seized** in the EU, with 196 distinct CITES-listed bird species recorded. This is just below the peak of 200 bird species seized in the EU in 2020.
- Of the 196 species seized in 2023:
 - Nearly 40% were classified as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List, with stable or increasing populations (Figure 2).

574
different
CITES
species
seized in EU
in 2023

88
species
were seized in
the EU for the
first time

- o **26% were also listed as Least Concern but had decreasing or unknown population trends.**
- o **About 24% were considered Threatened or Near Threatened.**
- o Just over 10% had no assessment or were classified as Data Deficient, meaning there is not enough information to determine their conservation status.

IUCN RED LIST CONSERVATION STATUS OF FAUNA SPECIES SEIZED IN THE EU IN 2023

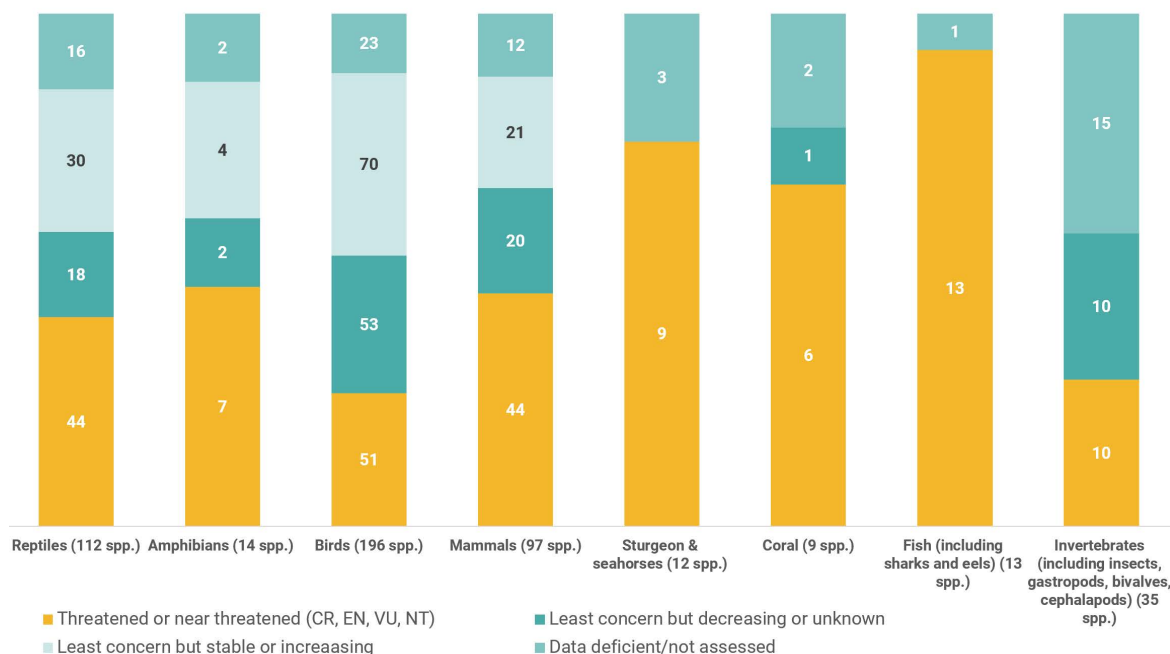


FIGURE 2

IUCN Red List conservation status for individual species of reptiles, amphibians, birds, mammals, sturgeon and seahorses, corals, other fish, and invertebrates, recorded in seizure in 2023. Source: IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, based on EU-TWIX data.

Live animals

Between 2017 and 2023, EU Member States seized over 10 000 live birds, reflecting the scale and persistence of illegal bird trade in the region. In 2023 alone, **nearly 1 200 live birds were seized**, accounting for 10% of all EU wildlife seizures that year.

- Parrots made up 60% of these live bird seizures in 2023. Species included the African Grey Parrot (Annex A), Fischer's Lovebird (*Agapornis fischeri*), and Black-masked Lovebird (*Agapornis personatus*), both listed under Annex B.
- **These seizures were reported by 18 different EU Member States, underscoring the widespread nature of this illegal trade across the region.** The high number of seizures likely reflects in part the impact of targeted enforcement

actions and joint operations carried out to disrupt wildlife trafficking networks.

Many of these birds are assumed to be destined for the exotic pet trade, one of the largest illegal wildlife trade sectors in the EU. Wild animals are often illegally captured and smuggled from their countries of origin to be sold as exotic pets.

- **In 2023, a total of 1 055 records involved the illegal trade of nearly 3 500 live animals were assumed to be destined for the pet trade. This figure made up 28% of all fauna seizure records, compared to 22% in 2022.**

The European Pet Organisation estimates that private households across the EU keep



10 000 live birds have been seized by EU Member States between 2017-2023

as many as 1 000 different bird species, along with 2 000 species of reptiles and amphibians, and up to 2 000 species of ornamental fish. However, these figures likely underrepresent the full scale of the issue, as many specimens in trade go undetected.

Traffickers are increasingly targeting endemic and non-CITES listed species - particularly birds – in an attempt to bypass existing international legal frameworks and avoid law enforcement attention (Europol, 2021).

In response to these growing concerns, the European Commission commissioned an exploratory study in late 2023, published in May 2025, to assess the need, added value, and feasibility of criminalising all trade in illegally sourced wildlife across the EU. The study confirms that such trade often escapes regulatory oversight, especially when non-CITES species are involved. While this type of trade is not currently regulated or systematically recorded at the EU level, the study acknowledges it is likely extensive and facilitated by online platforms and links to organised crime.

Beyond conservation concerns, the trafficking of wild species for the pet trade also presents serious public health and biosecurity risks. Illegally traded animals often bypass essential veterinary inspections, increasing the risk of spreading diseases or introducing invasive species that could harm native European ecosystems (Lockwood *et al.* 2019).

The EU is home to some of the world's largest reptile fairs, for example the Terraristika Hamm Fair in Germany, and Terraria Houten in the Netherlands, which attracts reptile enthusiasts and sellers. While the events themselves are legal, illegal activities and private transactions can still take place in and around these global meeting points. To combat this, it is crucial to raise awareness among traders about the required CITES documentation and encourage buyers to verify the origins of the animals they acquire. These steps are key to reducing illegally traded species at fairs.

- **In 2023, reptiles were the most frequently seized group of live animals in**

the EU, with seizure volumes approaching levels seen before the COVID-19 pandemic. Authorities intercepted nearly 2 000 CITES-listed live reptiles, across 463 seizure cases in 15 different EU Member States.

- **The majority of these seizures involved turtles and tortoises** (1 618 individuals), including **Hermann's Tortoise** (*Testudo hermanni*) and **Spur-thighed Tortoise** (*Testudo graeca*), both of which are strictly protected under Annex A. These two species have consistently been the most commonly seized reptiles in recent years. **Most trade activity concerned exports from North African countries (e.g. Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco) to Mediterranean nations like Spain and Italy.** Despite this, the bulk of seizures occurred within the EU, often at private homes, suggesting issues with unlawful ownership rather than cross-border trafficking.

These species are popular amongst hobbyists and reptile enthusiasts. Given their long lifespan, ownership documents – such as regular photo documentation or certificates – are frequently missing, lost or never created, making it difficult to verify their legal origin. Encouraging responsible pet ownership and keeping is essential to reducing demand for illegally acquired animals.

- Authorities also seized **830 live Ball Pythons** (*Python regius*, App. II/ Annex B) since 2017 - another reptile species appearing regularly in annual reports.
- While small-scale seizures may not signal a clear trend, it is noteworthy that **ten species of live lizards (*Sauria*) were identified in EU seizure data for the first time in 2023 (based on the assessed period of 2017 to 2023).** Among them was the **critically endangered Antanosy Day Gecko** (*Phelsuma antanosy*, App. II/ Annex B), originally from Madagascar, but intercepted in Germany after being exported from Ethiopia.

28%
of all fauna
seized in the
EU in 2023
assumed to be
destined for
the pet trade

**sharp
increase
from 20%
to 82%**
of live
amphibians
seized involving
Poison Frogs

- **Seizures of live amphibians peaked in 2023**, with over 130 live amphibians seized across 28 records – up significantly from just 15 amphibians the previous year before.
- By far, **Poison Frogs were the amphibian taxa most often trafficked, making up 82% of live amphibians seized, a sharp increase from 20% in 2022.** Species identified included the Green and Black Poison Frog (*Dendrobates auratus*) and the Dyeing Poison-Arrow Frog (*Dendrobates tinctorius*), both listed under Appendix II/Annex B. Additionally, **four other Poison Frog species appeared in EU seizure records for the first time.**
- Alongside the frogs, authorities also seized 23 live Axolotls in 2023 – another species consistently seized each year in the EU.
- **In 2023, 105 live mammals were seized across 11 EU Member States, mainly detected at private premises. Over half of the animals were primates**, belonging to five different families. This included species from the *Callitrichidae* family, such as the **Common Marmoset** (*Callithrix jacchus*, Appendix II/Annex B), the only primate to appear in EU seizure data every year.
- **Carnivores made up 44% of the total mammals intercepted (50 animals) in 2023, with nearly half of those involving wild cats such as Caracal** (*Caracal*

caracal) and **Tiger** (*Panthera tigris*, Appendix I/Annex A). **In 2023 alone, five live tigers were seized in private homes in Slovakia and Czechia** - another species appearing regularly in annual reports (although no seizures were reported in 2022).

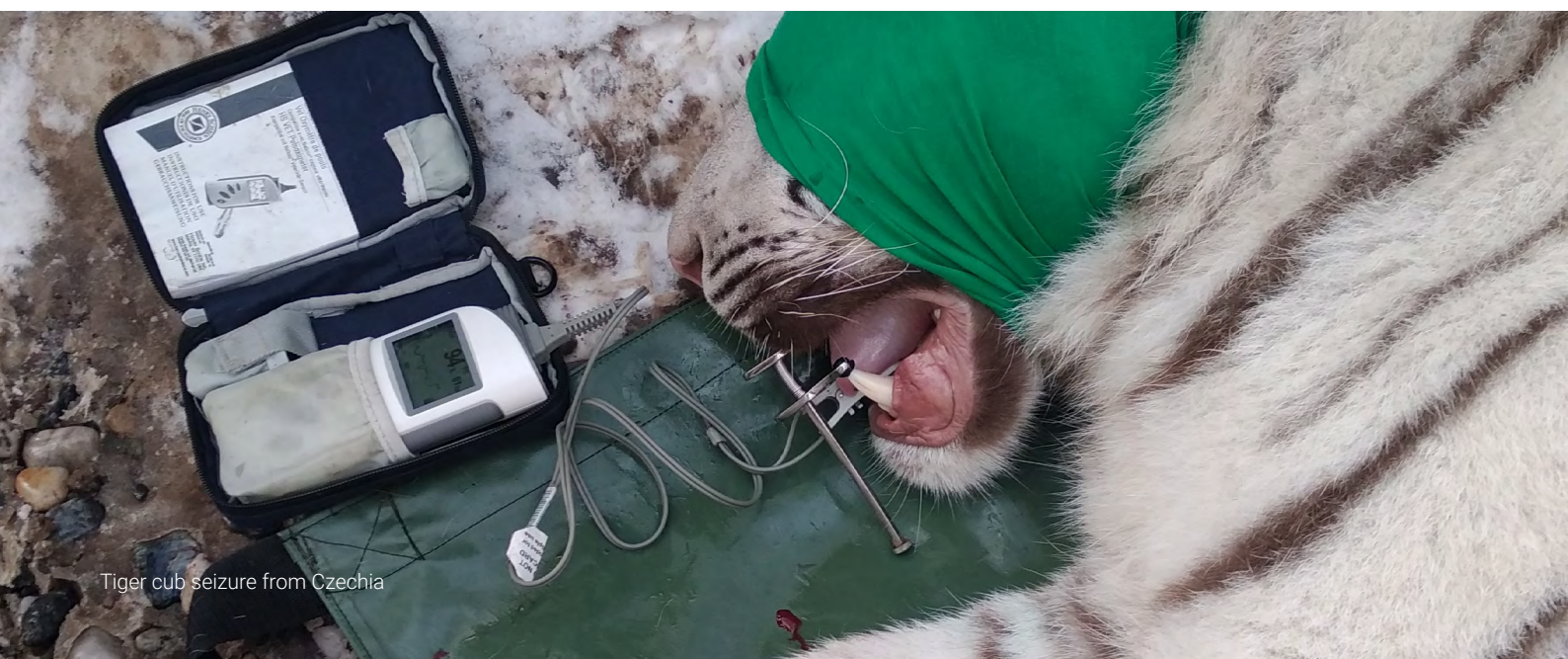
In response to ongoing concerns about tiger trade, the EU has developed specific [guidance on captive-born and bred tigers](#), with the primary goal of ensuring that tigers kept in captivity are properly managed, and that their breeding and trade do not contribute to illegal wildlife trafficking.

- **Servals** (*Leptailurus serval*, Appendix II/Annex B) also feature prominently in recent data, with **40 individuals recorded in seizures between 2017 and 2023, reflecting continued interest in exotic felines as pets.**

The volume and variety of live animals seized across the EU can make it difficult to ensure proper care and housing. The 2022 revised EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking acknowledges this challenge and includes measures aimed at improving access to care for confiscated animals. These include expanding networks of specialised rescue centres, enhancing their capacity, and ensuring that decisions on the care and disposal of wildlife follow established international guidance.



Over half
of live mammals
seized in 2023
were primates



Tiger cub seizure from Czechia

Plant-derived medicinals

Europe plays a major role in the global trade of wild plants used for health, food, and well-being. In 2023, the region imported approximately 219 000 tonnes of medicinal and aromatic plants, with a total value of EUR 1.3 billion. Germany was the largest importer, accounting for more than 30% of the EU's legal intake (CBI, 2023).

For the purposes of this analysis, “medicinal products” are understood to include a broad range of items: health and food supplements, cosmetics and aromatic plants not necessarily used as medicine, and plant parts or derivatives intended for medicinal or well-being uses⁴.

- **Plant-derived medicinal products were the most frequently seized commodity type in 2023** (see Figure 3). Authorities recorded **96 126 items seized, along**

with approximately 736 kg and 71 litres of additional material. These seizures represented 21% of all records related to wildlife products that year.

- However, only about one-fifth (21%) of the seized plant-derived medicinal products were clearly described by reporting authorities as such. **More than half were declared as ‘extracts’,** with the rest mostly labelled as ‘derivatives’ and ‘chips’.

This lack of clear categorisation, combined with the fact that many of these products are usually transported and packaged as pills or capsules, makes it difficult to detect the presence of CITES-listed species unless they are specifically named on the ingredients list⁵.

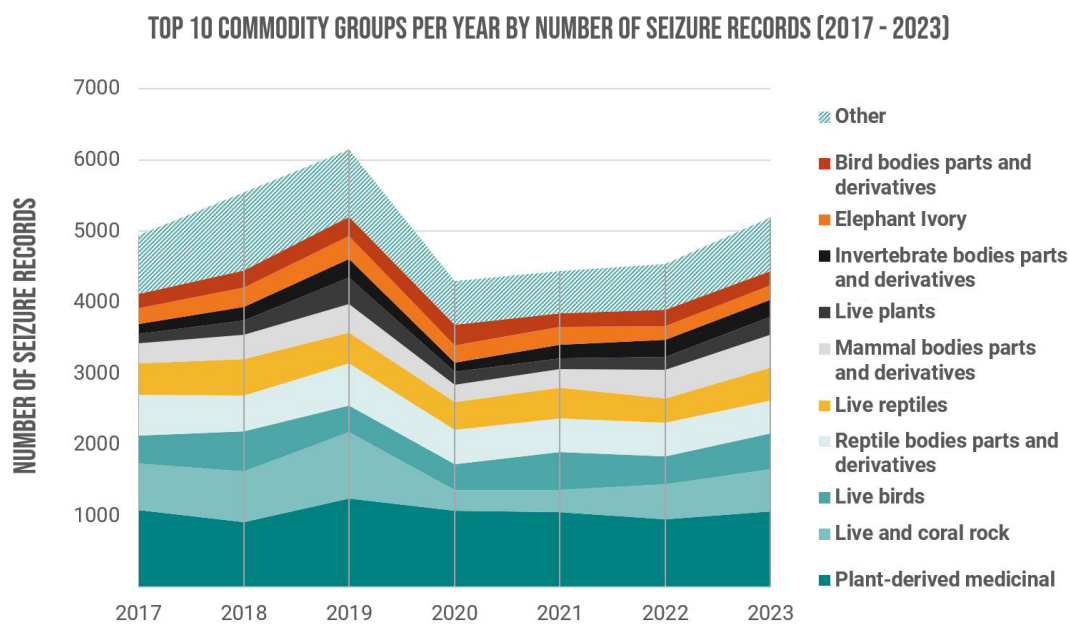


FIGURE 3

Stacked area chart visualising the total number of seizure records overtime (2017 – 2023) for the top 10 commodity groups seized in the EU. Each commodity's total records seized are stacked on top of the other

⁴ In line with the CITES definition of medicinal and aromatic plants <https://cites.org/eng/prog/medplants>.

⁵ Under EU law, medicinal products labelled as containing a species listed in the Annexes under the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations may be treated as containing that particular species and may be seized without the need for DNA testing beforehand. The present briefing and analysis therefore cannot distinguish between items that are verified to contain Annex-listed species and those that only claim to do so on their packaging.



Turbinicarpus Cacti

Many of these plant-derived medicinals are seized due to the lack of accompanying CITES permits. One of the **underlying factors for this non-compliance** - of what could otherwise be legitimate trade - **is a lack of awareness from private buyers of CITES permit requirements**. These buyers typically order low volume - low value products online, but the high frequency of which creates a considerable administrative burden for authorities with limited resources. It is not known what proportion of buyers were aware they were breaking EU law. Other factors of non-compliance include the associated low risk versus the perceived high effort to comply with CITES permitting processes⁶.

- CITES-listed plants in supplement form seized in the EU are **typically derived from Cacti, Costus Root** *Saussurea costus* (App. I/Annex A) and **African Cherry** *Prunus africana* (App. II/Annex B), the latter found in formulas including androgen blockers, prostate and cardiovascular support and even products claiming 'life extension'.

- The majority of these commodities were exported from Thailand (34%), the USA (18%) and India (11%), destined for consumers in Germany (41%), the Netherlands (24%) and the Czechia (6% of records).** One notable shipment intercepted at a Belgian port involved 9 600 packages (weighing 1 920 kg) of Orchid extract (known as Salep, a flour made from the tubers of orchid, often mixed to make a drinks). The shipment was exported from Jordan and destined for Germany.
- Of the 86 plants reported to species-level in 2023, 45% were Data Deficient or not assessed by the IUCN Red List, 34% Threatened or Near Threatened, 14%Least Concern with stable or increasing populations, and 7% listed as Least Concern but with a decreasing or unknown population status (Figure 4).

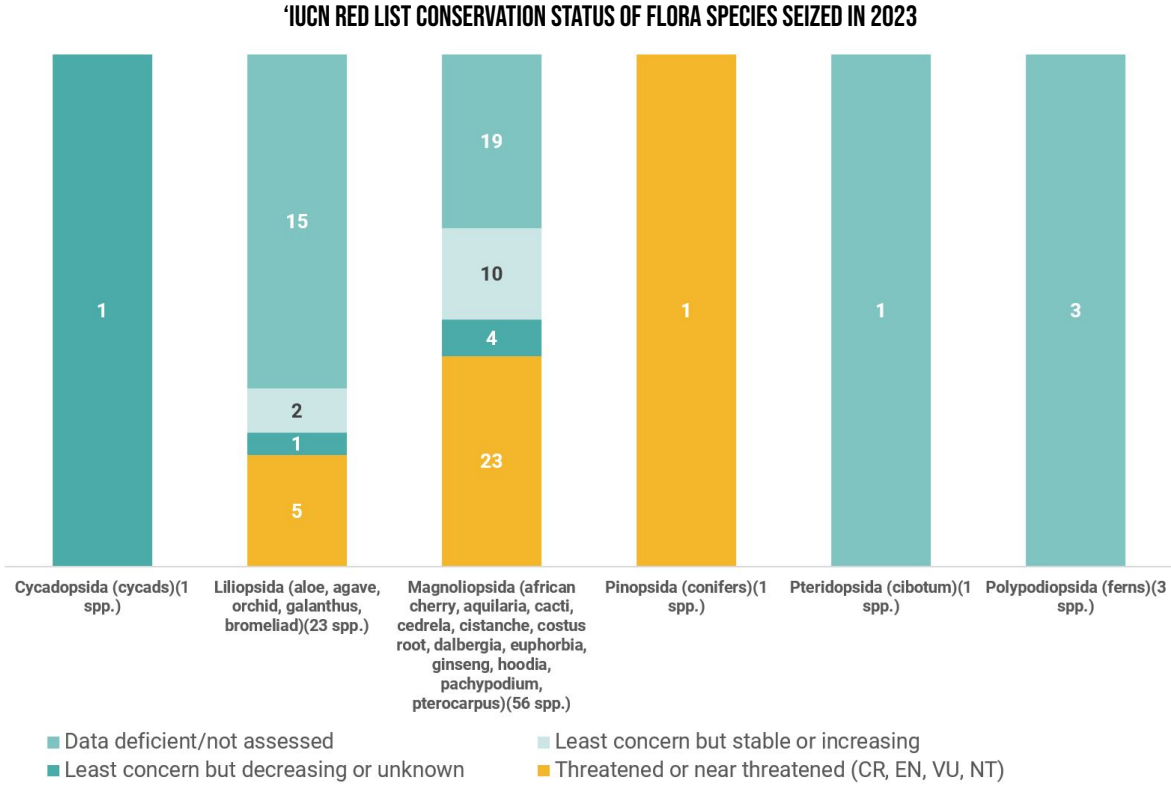


FIGURE 4
 IUCN Red List conservation status for individual species of classes of flora recorded in seizure in 2023. Source: IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, based on EU-TWIX data.

⁶ For more information, see chapter six of the World Wildlife Trade Report expands on the drivers of seizures involving Appendix II species, including for plants (CITES Secretariat, 2022).

Corals

- Due to increased tourist traffic, **seizures of coral** (mostly stony corals – App II/Annex B) **continued in the EU in 2023, with 285 kg and an additional 2 264 coral pieces seized** across more than 600 records.
- **Over one third of coral seizures were reported by Germany**, following by France, Denmark (both 15%), Spain (6%) and Hungary (6%), **mostly made on import to the EU in passenger luggage**.
- Exporters of coral - that was then seized in the EU - were numerous in 2023, with **84 different exporting countries implicated in seized corals** (live and rock coral as well as parts and derivatives). Namely, **Egypt (9%), Thailand (8%), Indonesia (7%), the Maldives (5%) and Mauritius (5%)**.
- **Only one coral species was found to be consistently seized in the EU between 2017 and 2023, known as Blue Coral *Heliopora coerulea* (App. II/Annex B)**. However coral seizures were typically reported only to order level Scleractinia. Based on seizures in 2023, **two-thirds of coral reported to species-level were classified as Threatened or Near Threatened** by the IUCN red list status and the remainder Data Deficient/not assessed or Least Concern but decreasing or unknown population trends (Figure 2).

84
exporting
countries
have been
implicated in
seized corals in
EU



Parts and derivatives including wild meat

- Between 2017 and 2023, on average, **27% of total records seized in the EU involved animal bodies, parts, and derivatives** (excluding medicinals and ivory). In 2023, **two-thirds of these records involved seized reptile and mammal body parts and derivatives**.
- **For reptile derivatives, over half of shipments involved leather products (mostly crocodile and python)**. A total of 9% of reptile shipments involved meat, mostly species of the Crocodylia and Sauria order, or bodies (12%). Seizures described as 'bodies' could constitute meat, or non-meat products such as taxidermy.
- **For mammal derivatives, the highest share of seized shipments was meat (33% - including Collared Peccary *Pecari tajacu* [App. II/Annex B] from Suriname and Curacao seized in the Netherlands, and Minke Whale**



Saguinus imperator - Emperor Tamarin

Balaenoptera acutorostrata [App. I/Annex A] from Norway seized in Germany). In fact, cetacean seizures in 2023 were the highest in seven years (Figure 5).

Greenland to Denmark was the other main trade route for cetaceans seized in 2023.

- In 2023, **60% of primate derivative shipments were exported from Cameroon, most of which were seized in France and destined for the USA.** France seized over 400 primate bones (mostly jaws and skulls) following this trade route in 2023.
- **Primates were the most seized group of mammal derivatives, second only to carnivores** (like *Panthera*, *Lynx* and *Ursus* spp.) Approximately **20% of carnivore records involved Leopard *Panthera pardus*** (App I/Annex A), **mostly involving seizures of claws.**
- After felines, bears (Ursidae) were the next largest family of carnivore derivatives (30%) seized in 2023. Namely, the American Black Bear *Ursus americanus* (App. II/Annex B), and Brown Bear *Ursus arctos* (App I,II/Annex A). **The share of total mammal derivatives seized in the EU involving carnivores decreased from 57% in 2019 to 32% in 2023.** Nonetheless, **six species of carnivore were new to EU seizures in 2023, ranging from an**

Aardwolf *Proteles cristata* (App. III/Annex C) bone and trophy to a Fossa skull *Cryptoprocta ferox* (App. II/Annex B).

- **Of all the parts and derivatives seized, invertebrates accounted for the largest quantity (based on mass), with over 9 500 specimens and an additional 4 687 kg across nearly 250 records.** Despite this, invertebrate bodies, parts, and derivatives (BPD) made up less than 1% of the total specimens seized, with the vast majority of specimens - 86% - involving live European eel specimens.
- Invertebrate BPDs tended to be **high-volume lower frequency shipments.** **Approximately 60% of invertebrate BPD involved Queen Conch *Strombus gigas*** (App. II/Annex B) **meat and shells.**
- The Netherlands was the EU Member State that most frequently seized Queen Conch, which were mostly exported from Overseas Countries and Territories like Curacao. France, however, seized the largest volumes of Queen Conch, with the largest single shipment weighing 1264 kg, originating from Guadeloupe.
- In 2023, approximately **180 kg of fish bodies, parts and derivatives and an additional 84 specimens were also seized.**

White meat', such as that from whale, shark and queen conch – both aquatic invertebrates and marine mammals - alongside terrestrial wild meat demonstrates the variety of CITES listed animal meat seized in the EU. There is growing evidence that substantial quantities of illegal wild meat are entering Europe each year, posing a risk to biodiversity and local food systems, as well as human, animal and ecosystem health. Some species traded for their meat may carry high-risk infectious diseases, including Cercopithecines spp.

(baboons, macaques, vervet monkeys, and relatives) and reptiles such as Siamese Crocodile *Crocodylus siamensis* (App. I/Annex A) and Saltwater Crocodile *C. porosus* (App. I,II/Annex A,B) (UNEP-WCMC & JNCC, 2021), all of which were seized in the EU in 2023. Certain zoonoses, previously eradicated from Europe, are now re-entering through wildlife trade. For example, traces of the monkeypox virus and African Swine Fever virus were discovered in wild meat samples in Belgium (Gombeer *et al.* 2018 & Garigliany *et al.* 2018).

MAMMAL BODY PARTS AND DERIVATIVES SEIZED OVERTIME IN THE EU

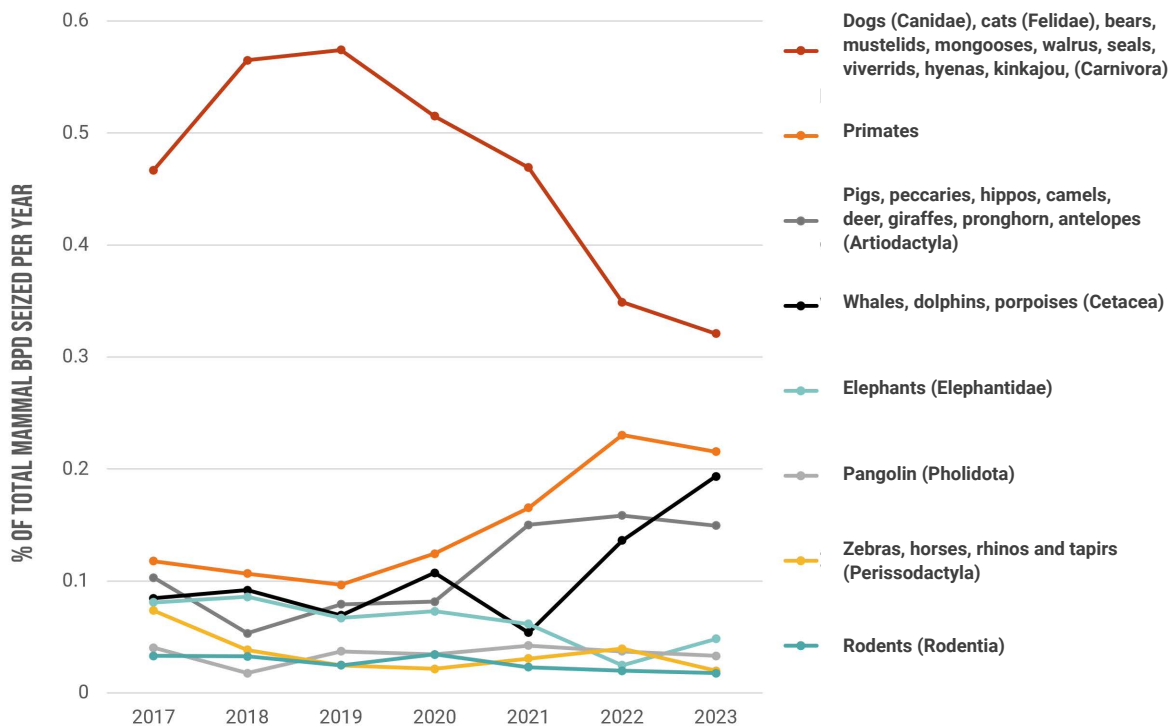


FIGURE 5
composition of seized mammal body parts and derivatives overtime (2017 – 2023).

CASE STUDY 1: TIMBER TRAFFICKING

The first Global Tree Assessment against the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species revealed that **more than one in three tree species worldwide are at risk of extinction** (IUCN, 2024). While the legal and sustainable timber trade is vital to national economies with over 2000 commercial timber species in existence (FAO, 2010), unsustainable logging poses a threat to the survival of the species, ecosystems and economic development.

In addition to the CITES controls, the EU have been implementing the EU Timber Trade Regulations (EUTR) for timber species. The EU Regulation on Deforestation Free products (EUDR), which was adopted in June 2023

and is coming into force in December 2025, builds on the EUTR requirements and marks an important turning point in the global effort to combat deforestation. The regulation will affect all EU trading partners and redefines how timber and other at-risk commodities are globally traded.

Accurately identifying timber commodities and products subject to the regulation will be vital to support efforts demonstrating legality and traceability on the ground. Another challenge for the EUDR and CITES authorities is declared timber volumes, which often have weight discrepancies to account for the natural shrinkage of wood.



Timber and wood products seized by EU in 2023 roughly equivalent to

40 fully loaded Boeing 737 passenger jets

Key facts on EU seizures of timber and wood products in 2023

- Timber was the highest-ranking commodity seized in the EU, based on the total mass, with 33 347 cubic metres and an additional 3493 kg of timber/wood products seized in the EU in 2023. To give perspective, **the total mass of timber and wood products seized in 2023 is roughly equivalent to 40 fully loaded Boeing 737 passenger jets.**
- **52% of the seizures were manufactured finished products (such as furniture)**, while sawn wood made up 15%, wood carvings (12%), logs (6%), veneer (9%), and timber (6%).
- **Over half of the wood seized belonged to rosewood *Dalbergia* species** (App. II/Annex B), primarily harvested and traded for crafting traditional furniture and musical instruments. **North Indian Rosewood *Dalbergia sissoo*** (App II/Annex B), and **Brazilian Rosewood *Dalbergia nigra*** (App. I/Annex A) were consistently found in EU seizures, with **India and Madagascar as the main exporters** in 2023. **Cedar woods (*Cedrela* spp.) also rose in significance**, making up 15% of timber seizures, compared to 12% in 2022 and none in previous years.
- 12 EU Member States seized 33 shipments of CITES-listed timber species.
- **Timber and wood products made up over 40% of seizure records at EU maritime ports**, based on the total number of reported items.

CASE STUDY 2: FISH PRODUCTS

Total seizures of CITES-listed fish in the EU in 2023 were as follows.

- **Live fish** – 7020 live fish and an additional 398 kg (the latter Russian Sturgeon, *Acipenser gueldenstaedtii*; App. II/Annex B).
- **Sturgeon caviar**: 250 kg and an additional 1 154 caviar specimens.
- **Fish bodies, parts, and derivatives (excluding eels, caviar, and medicinals)**: 182 kg and an additional 83 specimens.
- **Live eels**: 3870 kg and an additional 151 158 specimens.
- **Eel bodies, parts and derivatives**: 37 kg and an additional 13 specimens.
- **Fish-derived medicinals**: 6 565 specimens and an additional 1.2 L and 0.5 kg. Ca. **76% involved seahorses** *hippocampus* spp. (App. II/Annex B), mostly bodies and medicines. Ca. **21% involved sturgeon** (mostly cosmetics). The remainder involved 180 specimens of **oil from the Great White Shark** *Carcharodon carcharias* (CITES App. II/Annex B) **mostly reported as bodies and medicines** seized by Germany.



Shortfin mako (*Isurus oxyrinchus*)

Coastal and deep-water sharks are used for their liver oil. Deep-water sharks are preferred by the fishing industry as they have relatively large livers (up to 10-25% of animal weight) with significant quantities of liver oil (10-70% of liver weight).

- Although **fish body parts and derivatives** (eels and caviar not included – for more on these, refer to the last paragraph of case study 2 and all of case study 3) represented only around 1% of EU records in 2023, this commodity group **ranked higher by mass**, with 180 kg seized in 2023.
- A total of **43 seizure records** involving fish body parts and derivatives were reported in 2023, 70% of which were from **sharks and rays** *Elasmobranchii* spp. (mostly Shortfin mako *Isurus oxyrinchus* (App. II/Annex B)), and 30% from ray-finned fishes *Actinopterygii* spp.
- **Largetooth Sawfish** *Pristis pristis* (Annex A) was the only fish species from which parts (the rostrum) were seized year on year in the EU between 2017 and 2023.

The Largetooth Sawfish has the highest-ranking score of any species on the [EDGE](#) list, a scientific framework to identify the world's most Evolutionarily Distinct and Globally Endangered (EDGE) species. Given its critical status and continued illegal trade of its rostrum, strengthened enforcement efforts are crucial to ensure the survival of this evolutionarily distinct species.

- Fish body parts and derivatives seizures were reported by **nine Member States**: France, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland, Bulgaria, Austria, and Hungary. **France** reported half of these seizure records, followed by Germany (14%), and Spain (12%). Most of the seizures were made on **import** (53%) and internally (33%) in locations such as **airports** (28%), **mail centres** (23%), market/shops (21%), and private premises (7%). The most commonly seized product types were **sawfish rostrum** (19%), bones (16%), teeth (12%), and bodies (12%).
- Another commodity group seized in 2023 linked to fish products is **caviar** *Acipenseriformes* spp. In 2023, EU Member States reported 196 seizure records

involving 250 kg and an additional 1 154 caviar specimens.

- The taxa seized by EU Member States were as follows: European Sturgeon *Acipenser sturio* (App. I/Annex A), Beluga Sturgeon *Huso huso* (App. II/Annex B), and Russian Sturgeon *Acipenser gueldenstaedtii* (App. II/Annex B). However, 96% of caviar records were **reported only to order-level *Acipenseriformes***.
- The highest number of seizure records was reported at **airports** (68%) and mail centres (23%) and the main known countries of export (based on number of records) were **Ukraine** (43%), Russian Federation (12%), Turkey (4%) and Azerbaijan (3%). Seizures were mostly reported by France (46%), Spain (22%), Germany (8%), Austria (8%), and Denmark (5%).

According to the IUCN Red List, **two-thirds of sturgeon and paddlefish species are critically endangered, considered to be the world's most threatened species group** (WWF CEE, 2022).



Sturgeon caviar

CASE STUDY 3: EUROPEAN EELS

European eel trafficking is a multifaceted crime that involves wildlife trafficking, document fraud, tax evasion, and money laundering among other types of crime (Europol, 2024).

- In 2023, seizures of live eels represented just 1% of reported total EU seizure records. However, live eels were the **highest ranking commodity group by total specimens** (over a million eels⁸ reported, despite only six live eel seizure records being recorded by specimens) and **the fourth largest by total volume** (nearly 4000 kg reported by Member States).
- In 2023 **six Member States reported seizures of live eels: Portugal** (44% of seizure records), Spain (27%), France (23%), Belgium (3%), the Netherlands (2%), and Italy (2%). 2023 was the first year that

Belgium reported live eel seizures (within the assessed time period, 2017 – 2023).

- Regarding the direction of trade, 55% of seizures were made on **(re-)export from the EU**, 11% on import, 10% internally, and 2% in transit. The destination of 45% of seizure records was unknown. The main known countries of destination were **France** (11%), **Mainland China** (8%) and Senegal (6%).

For certain groups like **European eels, as well as sturgeon, seahorses, and sharks, the majority of species seized are Threatened or Near Threatened, according to the IUCN Red List (Figure 2)**. This contrasts with other commodity groups such as birds, where 40% of seized bird species are listed as Least Concern with stable or increasing population.

European Eel

To assess the varying levels of harm associated with different types of seizures (and their relative importance), the World Wildlife Crime Report (UNODC, 2024) emphasises both the direct and indirect consequences of illegal wildlife trade - on biodiversity, ecosystems, local communities, economies and global security. The report also stresses the threats to

public health (zoonotic disease transmission, and the spread of invasive species), as well as institutional harm caused by inadequate enforcement, corruption and weakening legal frameworks. This highlights an important point: not all wildlife seizures are equal in terms of their impact.

⁸ This figure is based on a total of six seizure records that involved eels reported by the number of specimens (number of live individuals or fingerlings). Four out of these six records did not report live eels by their mass, which is the preferred measurement in accordance with CITES guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES Annual Illegal Trade Reports. Ca. 94% of live eel records were reported by mass (kg).

TOP GLOBAL EXPORTERS TO THE EU IN 2023

In 2023, exports of CITES-listed species from 145 different countries/territories – or **78% of all CITES Parties** - were seized by the EU. This demonstrates the significance of the region in global trade chains. Out of these, 16 countries were EU Member States, whereby one Member State exported goods that were then seized by another Member State. The top countries from which CITES exports were seized in the EU in 2023 included **Thailand, the USA, Ukraine, mainland China, and India**.

This chapter highlights some key characteristics emerging from these seizures, including changes overtime where notable.

- **Brunei** exports were seized in the EU (specifically France) for the first time in 2023 within the assessed period (2017 – 2023). Brunei exported ca. 8 kg of elephant ivory tusks and feline skins.



THAILAND:

Since 2020, **Thailand has been the top country from which CITES exports are seized in the EU**. In 2023, 15% (532) of all EU seizure records with a known exporter involved Thailand. Thirteen Member States seized Thai exports in 2023.

Over half of specimens seized from Thailand in 2023 involved cacti extract, mostly intercepted at Frankfurt and the Hague mail centres. **10% of Thai exports involved Stony corals** transported by air and intercepted in Germany and Denmark (Figure 6).

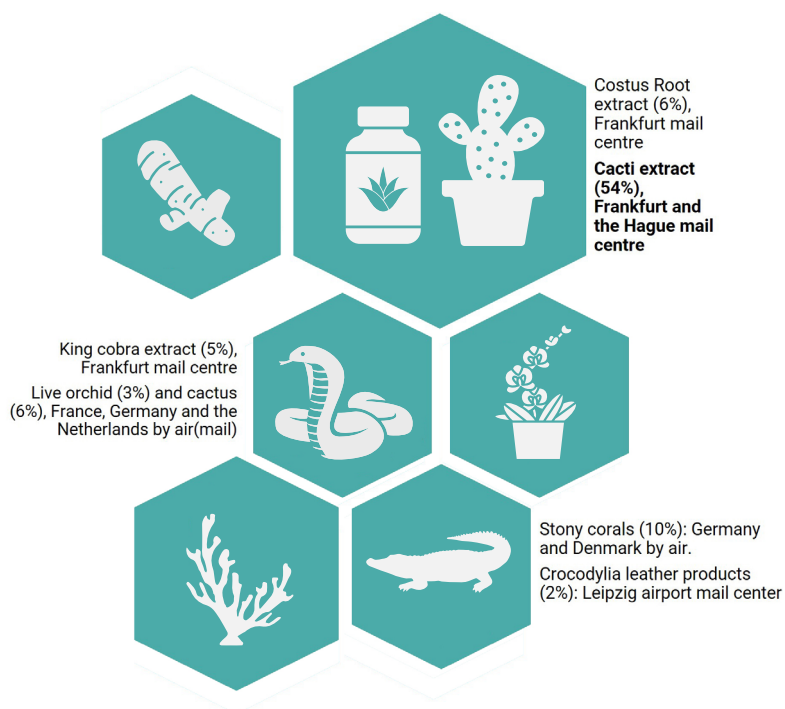


FIGURE 6

Top Thai commodities seized in the EU in 2023



King Cobra



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

In 2023, the USA exports made up 8% (300) of all EU seizure records with a known exporter, with 15 Member States seizing these exports.

African Cherry extract was the top USA export (27% of seized US exports in 2023 in the EU, specifically at Frankfurt and Schiphol mail centres. Similarly, 15% of USA exports seized in 2023 in the EU involved **cacti extract intercepted at Frankfurt mail centre**. Sturgeon cosmetics seized at Schiphol mail centre made up 6% of USA exports seized in 2023 in the EU (Figure 7).

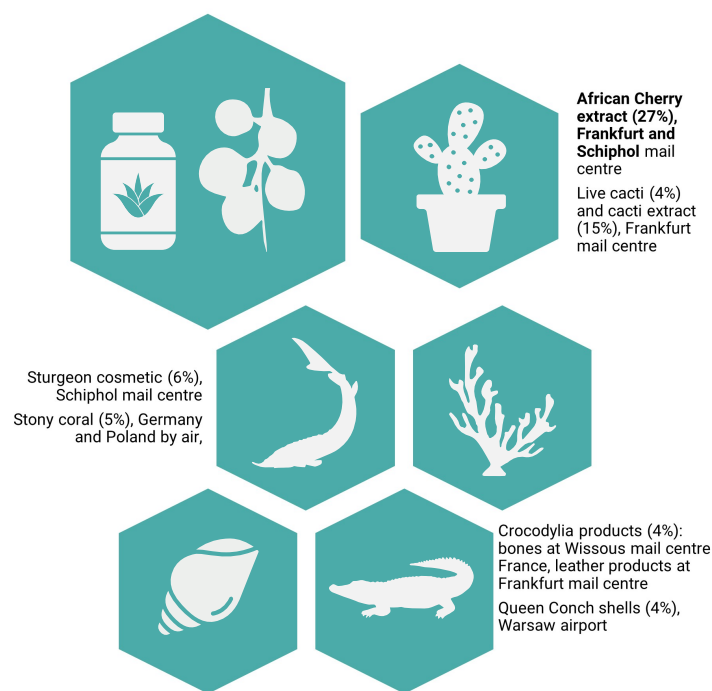
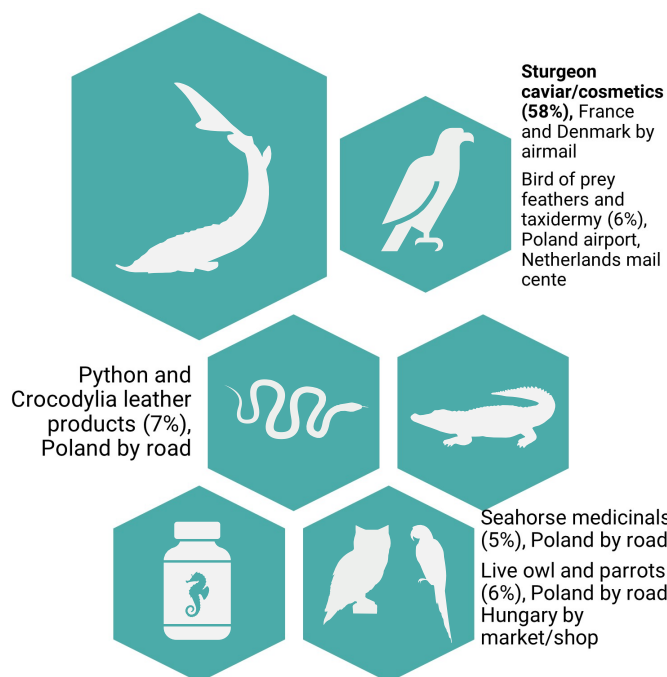


FIGURE 7

Top US commodities seized in the EU in 2023



UKRAINE

In 2023, Ukrainian exports made up 4% of all seizure records with a known exporter, with 11 Member States seizing Ukrainian exports.

58% of Ukrainian commodities seized in the EU involved sturgeon caviar or cosmetics, typically transported by airmail and intercepted by France and Denmark. Poland seized many of the Ukrainian exports transported by road, namely seahorse medicinals (5%), Python and Crocodylia leather products (7%) and live owls and parrots (6%). Other Member States to seize Ukrainian exports include Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Latvia, Austria, Slovakia, Belgium and Italy (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8

Top Ukrainian commodities seized in the EU in 2023



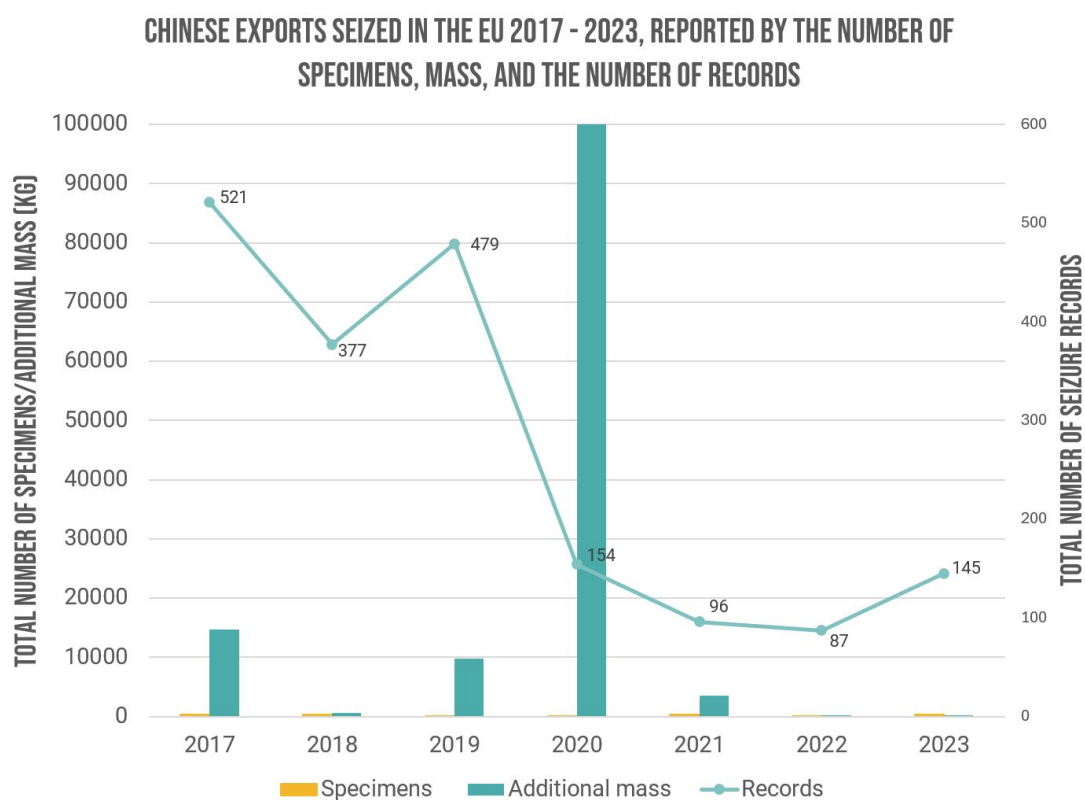
MAINLAND CHINA

In 2023, EU Member States reported the highest number of cases of CITES goods imported by the EU from China since 2020 (145 seizure records). However, this number remains below the number of seizures recorded before 2020 (Figure 9). Despite easing of Covid-19 rules, the data does not indicate the complete re-opening of

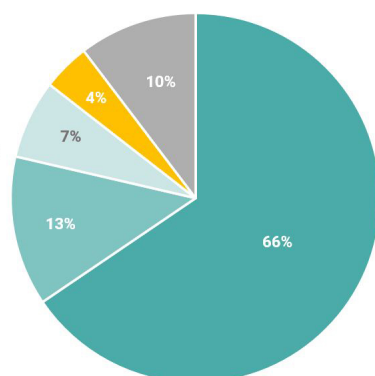
established trade routes, including flights to China. **Medicinals made up the vast majority of EU seizures of Chinese exports in 2023** (66% plant derived medicinals and 13% animal derived medicinals), mostly seized by the Netherlands, as well as mammal and reptile derivatives to a lesser extent.

FIGURE 9

(Above) Chinese exports seized in the EU 2017 - 2023 reported by number of specimens, mass, and number of records, and (below) composition of commodity groups that made up seizures of Chinese exports in 2023.



- Plant-derived medicinal
- Animal derived medicinal
- Reptile bodies parts and derivatives
- Mammal bodies parts and derivatives
- Others



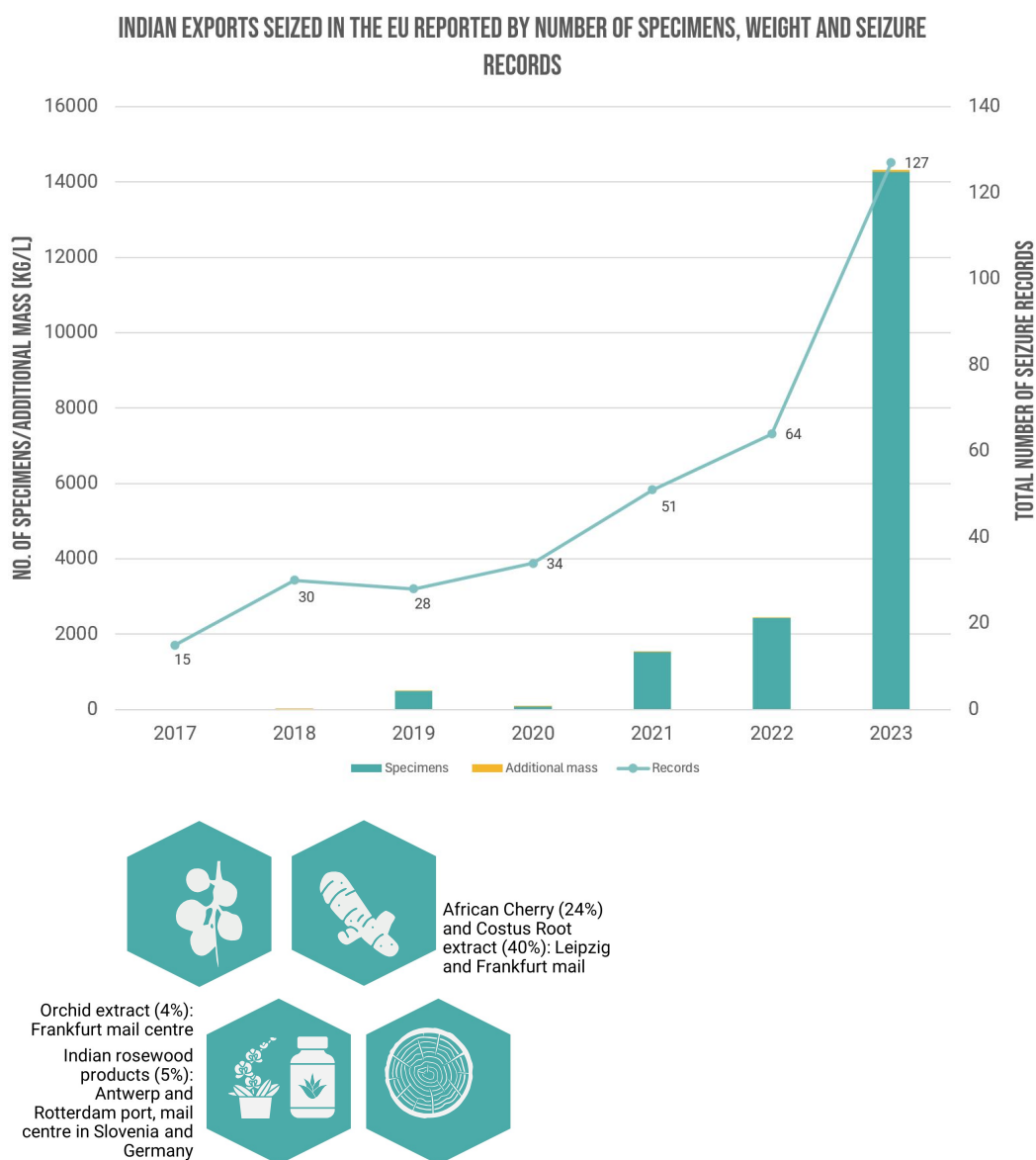


In 2023, Indian exports continued to increase as a proportion of the EU's total seized exports (from < 1% in 2017 to 4% in 2023). While these percentages appear small, this is in part because the EU seized exports from a significant number of different countries, and **India's percentage increase in seizure records is the highest of any of those exporters. The total number of specimens making up seized Indian shipments also rose notably** in 2023 (Figure 10). A total of 11 Member States seized Indian exports, of which Germany reported

the most. For instance, Leipzig and Frankfurt mail centres were top locations for detecting extracts from **Costus Root** (40% of total seized Indian exports in 2023) and African Cherry (24%). Orchid extract also made up 4% of Indian exports seized in the EU, also intercepted at Frankfurt mail centre. While plant-derived medicinals dominated Indian exports, the EU also seized Indian rosewood products (5%) at Antwerp and Rotterdam ports, mail centre in Slovenia and German mail centres.

FIGURE 10

(Above) Indian exports seized in the EU between 2017 - 2023, reported by number of specimens, weight and number of seizure records; and (below) composition of commodity groups that made up seizures of Indian exports in 2023.





Costus Root

TOP DESTINATIONS FOR EU SEIZURES IN 2023

In 2023, EU Member States reported **510 incidences of seizures destined for a total of 52 different (non-EU) countries**. In particular, the USA and the UK were frequent destinations for commodities seized upon export or while in transit through the EU. More than half of these seizures were made while in transit through

the EU, and 26% seized upon (re-) export from the EU. The remainder involved trade destined for EU Overseas Countries and Territories. For **86% of all EU seizures (with a known destination), other EU Member States were the destination**.



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Of the 510 seizure records destined for non-EU countries (accounting for 14% of records with a reported destination), the **USA was the leading destination**. EU seizures destined for the USA have incrementally increased year after year, from 6% of total seizures destined for non-EU countries in 2017 to nearly 30% in 2023.

The top commodity seized by the EU that was destined for the USA was **primate bones originating from Cameroon, seized in transit by France** (34%) (Figure 11). The other EU Member States seizing commodities destined for the USA were Germany (Costus Root extract from India and *Aquilaria* (App. II/Annex B) chips from the Middle East), the Netherlands (birds of prey taxidermy transported by mail from Ukraine) and Italy.

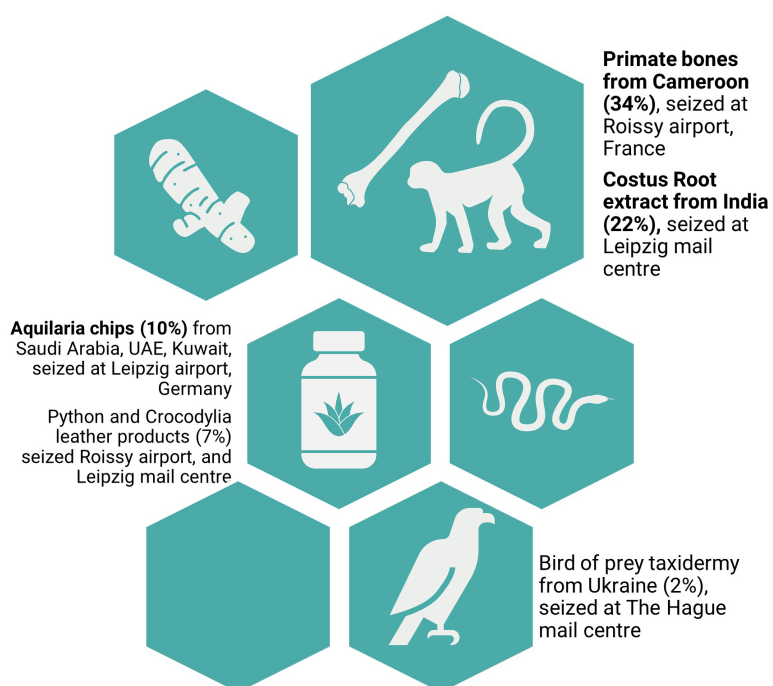


FIGURE 11

Top commodities seized in the EU destined for the USA



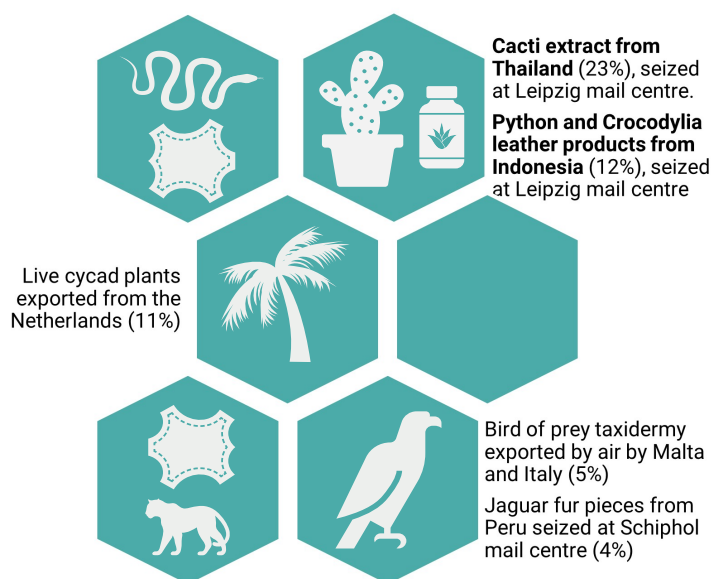
UNITED KINGDOM

In 2023, 13% of EU seizures destined for non-EU countries were destined for the UK. **EU seizures destined for the UK have shown an upward trend** over the assessed time period (2017-2023). This could be a result of more EU controls on UK goods in recent years due to Brexit.

Germany, Netherlands, France, Malta, Denmark and Italy all seized goods *en-route* to the UK in 2023. Namely, Cacti extract was seized at a German mail centre, sent from Thailand, and live cycad plants seized on export from the Netherlands to the UK (Figure 12).

FIGURE 12

Top commodities seized in the EU destined for the UK



MOROCCO

Morocco was the fourth most frequent non-EU destination of goods seized by Member States in 2023, making up 3% of EU seizure records destined for non-EU countries.

A total of 88% of EU records involving Morocco as a destination involved ***Aquilaria***

chips from the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE)) seized by Germany. Sturgeon caviar exported from France was also seized before arriving in Morocco, along with over 19 kg of live eels exported from Portugal to Morocco.

OTHER DESTINATIONS:

In 2023, there was a **notable increase in EU seizures of goods destined for Armenia**, from no seizures in 2021 and 2022 to **nearly 4 000 specimens seized across 20 records in 2023** (4% of seizures destined for non-EU countries). These seizures involved live plants (cacti, orchids, **Venus flytraps**, and **tropical pitcher plants**) intercepted on export from the **Netherlands** that were destined for Armenia.

Likewise, **the number of CITES specimens destined for Malaysia that were seized in the EU significantly increased in 2023**. This

included **13 live primates seized by Austria** in transit, as well as **over 400 000 live glass eels seized by Belgium** on export to Malaysia, due to stop-over *en-route* in Qatar and Viet Nam.

Conversely, EU seizures destined for mainland China continued to decrease in 2023, from over a third of total records with a known country of export in 2017, 15% in 2020, to only 2% in 2023.

INTERNAL⁹ CITES-RELATED SEIZURES IN THE EU

In 2023, a total of 709 internal seizures were reported by 17 EU Member States (France, Belgium, Portugal, Malta, Lithuania, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Denmark, Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia, Austria, Netherlands, Croatia), which represented 14% of the total seizure records (in 2022 internal seizures represented 9%). The main commodity types seized internally within the EU in 2023 (in order of importance based on the number of reported seizure records) were **live birds** (23%), **live reptiles** (19%), and **bird bodies, parts and derivatives** (12%).

A total of **308 live birds** were reported as seized internally, across **166 seizure records** in 2023. In terms of the number of seizure records, these seizures mainly involved **live parrots** Psittaciformes spp. (70%) and passerine birds Passeriformes spp. (15%). The **African Grey Parrot** was the most seized parrot species (comprising 33% of total internal parrot seizures). The **European Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis* (App. III/Annex C) was the most seized passerine bird (79% of total internal passerine bird seizures). **France and Portugal** were the primary reporting countries of the internal trade of live bird seizures, reporting 32% and 28% of internal seizures of live birds, respectively.

A total of **555 live reptiles** were reported as seized internally, across **135 seizure records** in 2023. Most seizure records involved **live turtles/tortoises** Testudinidae spp. (79%; App. I, II, III/Annex A, B, C) and **live snakes** Serpentes spp. (16%; I, II, III/Annex A, B, C). **Hermann's tortoise** *Testudo hermanni* (App. II/Annex A) was the most seized live turtles/tortoises (67% of total internal turtle/tortoise seizures), while **Ball Python** *Python regius* (29%; App. II/Annex B) was the most seized live snake.

There were **83 reported internal seizure records** involving **bird bodies, parts, and derivatives** (BPD), involving 327 specimens. **Birds of prey** Falconiformes spp. made up 51% of these seizure records, followed by **owls** Strigiformes spp. (23%) and **parrots** Psittaciformes spp. (8%). **France and Malta** reported 45% and 42% of these internal seizures of bird BPD, involving 37 and 35 specimens respectively.

⁹ Internal refers to a seizure made within a country's domestic borders/inland.



Passeriformes spp.



LOCATIONS AND METHODS OF TRANSPORT

The most frequently reported location where seizures occurred were **airports** with a total of **1584 seizure records** (31% of total). **France** reported the highest number of seizures at airports with 337 seizure records (64% of which occurred at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport), followed by the **Netherlands** (309 seizure records, 99% of them at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol) and Germany (282 seizure records, 31% of which at Frankfurt Main Airport).

Live and coral rock was the most frequently seized commodity group at these locations (31% of total records at airports), followed by plant-derived medicinals (13%), and mammal bodies parts and derivatives (12%).

Detection methods included routine inspections (36%), random checks (15%), and customs documentary checks (8%).

Transport via **air** (primarily air passengers (18% of records with a reported mode of transport) and **mail** (mainly air mail (18% of records with a reported mode of transport)) were the most commonly reported mode of transport of intercepted goods in the EU in 2023, accounting for 3 103 seizure records (59% of the total seizure records).

However, there were gaps in reporting as in 1 110 seizure records (21%), the transport details were reported as unknown.

CASE STUDY: MARITIME TRADE

Europe is one of the **densest port regions worldwide**, with over 1 500 maritime ports operating along approximately 70 000 km of the EU's coastline (Carpenter, 2012). According to the latest figures from the World Shipping Council (2023), **several EU ports rank among the top 30 world container ports** based on container traffic (measured in twenty-foot equivalent units [TEU]), namely: Rotterdam, the Netherlands (10th); Antwerp, Belgium (14th); Hamburg (18th), Piraeus, Greece (28th); and Valencia, Spain (30th).

- In 2023, EU Member States reported **242 seizures** (5% of total seizure records) at maritime ports. **Germany** reported the highest number of seizures at seaports with 74 seizure records (43% in Hamburg), followed by **France** (71 seizure records, 70% of them in Marseille) and **Spain** (39 seizure records, 62% of which in Valencia).
- The most frequently seized commodity group at seaports was **mammal bodies, parts, and derivatives** (35% of total seizure records at maritime ports), followed by **live reptiles** (18%) and elephant ivory (10%). Most seizure records involved the following species: **Dwarf minke whale** *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* (29% of seizure records; App. I, II/Annex A), **Algerian Tortoise** *Testudo graeca* (16%; App. II/Annex A), and **Sperm Whale** *Physeter macrocephalus* (7%; App. I/Annex A).

- By contrast, in 2023 only eight seizures involving timber and wood products were reported by Member States to have occurred at maritime ports (out of a total of 33 timber and wood product records). Seized species included: **Cedarwood** *Cedrela odorata* (three seizures; App. II/Annex B), **Dalbergia sissoo** (two seizures; App. II/Annex B) and **Handroanthus chrysanthus** (one seizure; App. II/Annex B). For two seizures, species were not reported.

However, the relatively low number of seizures at EU ports does not reflect the high legal trade volumes (in terms of tonnes of shipments loaded or unloaded) moving through these hubs – a disparity that conflicts with the global prominence and market share of several EU ports. This disparity does not suggest that there is little illegal wildlife trade moving through the ports but rather, that the illegal wildlife trade is not being intercepted or seizures are not reported.

This is relevant to timber and wood products, where seizures likely represent just the tip of the iceberg, given the scale and complexity of the global timber trade. This underscores the need for coordinated implementation between CITES and EUDR authorities once the regulation enters into force. Enhanced information sharing will be essential to ensure robust legality checks for the compliance of timber entering the EU.

DETAILS OF EU OPERATIONS AND KEY CITES-RELATED SEIZURES REPORTED BY EU MEMBER STATES IN 2023






Table 1 contains details of significant seizure records reported by EU Member States from January to December 2023.





Seizures were selected based on the following criteria:

- (i) seizures involving particularly large quantities of a commodity type; and
- (ii) seizures highlighting important illegal wildlife trade trends involving the EU (e.g., in terms of countries or species involved).

TABLE 1





Details of selected seizures reported by the EU Member States for 2023 arranged by commodity type (the country which reported the seizure records is shown in **bold**, and the EU Member States involved in the trade route are shown in CAPITALS).

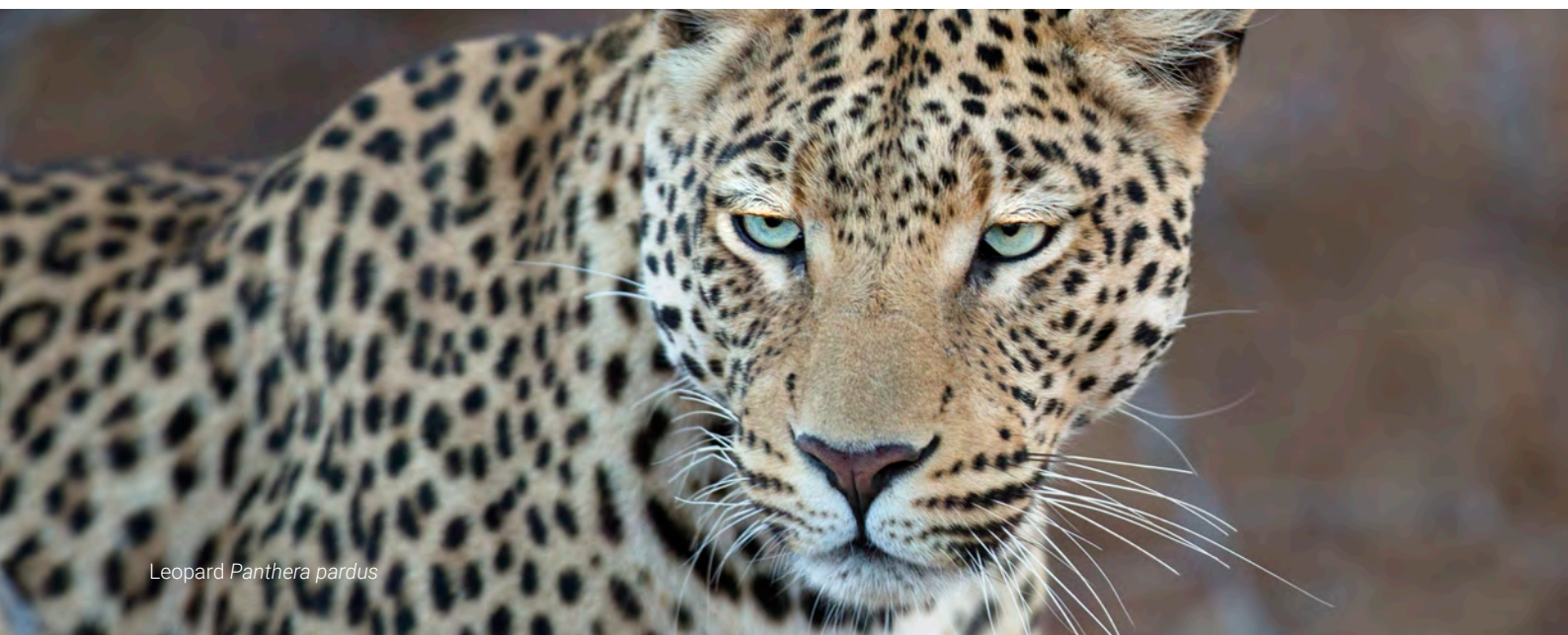
TRADE ROUTE			SPECIES AND QUANTITY SEIZED	DETAILS
EXPORT/ COUNTRY OF DEPARTURE	TRANSIT	DESTINATION		
MEDICINALS				
OPERATION SPOTLIGHT: Operation THUNDER (2 – 27 October 2023): Joint INTERPOL and World Customs Organisation (WCO) operation to tackle forestry and wildlife crime. More than 2 000 confiscations of CITES species and 500 arrests involving 133 countries. As part of this global operation, six live Golden-handed Tamarin <i>Saguinus midas</i> (App. II/Annex B) and 20 packages and 24 pieces of Desert-broomrape <i>Cistanche deserticola</i> (Annex II/Annex B) Traditional Asian Medicine products were confiscated by Czech Customs and Environmental Inspectorate.				
Thailand	→ GERMANY →	SWEDEN	 830 SPECIMENS OF EXTRACT containing cacti <i>Cactaceae</i> spp. (App. II/ Annex B)	These specimens were intercepted in transit to Sweden by mail and detected during routine inspections at Leipzig Airport. (August 2023)
UAE	→	NETHERLANDS	 16.8 KG OF STURGEON <i>Acipenseriformes</i> spp. (App. II/ Annex B) powder	The specimens were exported from UAE by express carrier and were detected by customs documentary checks at Schiphol Airport. (February 2023)
CORALS				
		FRANCE	 14 KG OF STONY CORALS <i>Scleractinia</i> spp. (App. II/Annex B)	The stony corals were seized at a market/shop in Coufouleux. The country of origin of the specimens was unknown and the goods were detected following intelligence/ investigation. (May 2023)
REPTILE BODIES, PARTS, AND DERIVATIVES				
OPERATION SPOTLIGHT: 56 BACON (baggage) actions organised at several Belgian border points. Controls of 942 passengers led to a total of 4 025 kg, 3 litres and 15 pieces of meat (products) and 3 539 kg, 4.5 litres as well as 109 pieces of plant (products) seized				
		BELGIUM	  10 BODIES OF TORTOISES/TURTLES Testudinata spp. (App. I, II,III/Annex A,B,C)	The specimens were seized following a routine inspection to an antique dealer. The offender did not have a CITES permit. (July 2023)

TRADE ROUTE			SPECIES AND QUANTITY SEIZED	DETAILS
EXPORT/ COUNTRY OF DEPARTURE	TRANSIT	DESTINATION		
LIVE BIRDS				
		SPAIN	 50 BLACK-CHEEKED LOVEBIRDS <i>Agapornis nigrigenis</i> (App. II/Annex B)	The specimens were seized following a physical inspection in Gran Canaria . (November 2023)
LIVE REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS				
ROMANIA	➡	HUNGARY	 89 SPECIMENS OF HERMANN'S TORTOISE <i>Testudo hermanni</i> (App II/Annex A)	The specimens were seized in a private house in Hajdúsámson. The offender had no CITES permits . (July 2023)
MAMMAL BODIES, PARTS, AND DERIVATIVES				
Namibia	➡ Ethiopia ➡	AUSTRIA	 ONE GIRAFFE BONE <i>Giraffa Camelopardalis</i> (App. II/Annex B)	The specimen was found in a checked-in luggage at Vienna airport. The discovery was made with the help of a CITES detector dog trained to track down CITES items and their derivatives. (April 2022)
BIRD BODIES, PARTS, AND DERIVATIVES				
MALTA	➡	UK	 ONE BARN OWL <i>Tyto alba</i> (App. II/Annex A) and ONE SONG THRUSH <i>Turdus philomelos</i> (App. III/Annex C)	The bodies were seized at Malta International Airport on export to the UK. The specimens were seized following physical inspection of air passenger baggage. (September 2023)

A seized consignment of bird taxidermy at Malta International Airport and an x-ray of the package which brought about the disclosure of the offence.



TRADE ROUTE			SPECIES AND QUANTITY SEIZED	DETAILS
EXPORT/ COUNTRY OF DEPARTURE	TRANSIT	DESTINATION		
INVERTEBRATE BODIES, PARTS, AND DERIVATIVES				
Bahamas	➔ USA ➔	ITALY	 5.7 KG OF QUEEN CONCH SHELLS <i>Strombus gigas</i> (App. II/Annex B)	<p>The meat was seized at Napoli – Capodichino airport. The specimens were by air and it was detected following a routine inspection.</p> <p>(March 2023)</p>
OPERATION SPOTLIGHT: Operation CINQUECENTO II (Spanish Guardia Civil): Ivory carvings from a variety of ivory-bearing species seized due to no documentation that proves legal possession (derived from elephant (<i>Elephantidae</i>), Hippopotamus, Sperm Whale <i>Physeter macrocephalus</i> (App. I/Annex A) and Killer Whale <i>Orcinus orca</i> (App. II/Annex A). The scale of the ecological damage caused was estimated at nearly EUR 7 million.				
		FINLAND	 52 SPECIMENS OF IVORY JEWELLERY	<p>The specimens were seized at Helsinki-Vantaa Airport. The ivory was carried in the personal baggage of an air passenger. The offender had no CITES permit.</p> <p>(June 2023)</p>
LIVE PLANTS				
Ecuador	➔	GERMANY	 74 ORCHIDS ORCHIDACEAE SPP. (App. I,II/ Annex A,B)	<p>The live plants were seized at München Airport mail centre. Goods travelled by express carrier and were detected by routine inspection.</p> <p>(February 2023)</p>
REPTILE BODIES, PARTS, AND DERIVATIVES				
OPERATION SPOTLIGHT: Operation LAKE: Coordinated by Europol, this operation targets the trafficking of European eels (<i>Anguilla anguilla</i>) and involved law enforcement agencies from over 30 countries (20 EU Member States). The operation from October 2022 to June 2023 resulted in authorities arresting 256 individuals involved in trafficking approximately 25 tonnes of live glass eels, valued at around EUR 13 million.				
PORTUGAL	➔ SPAIN ➔	FRANCE	 130 KG OF EUROPEAN EEL <i>Anguilla anguilla</i> (App. II/Annex B)	<p>Two vans with six suspects, travelling by road from Portugal to France were intercepted. Suspects transported equipment used in eel trafficking such as plastic pools, oxygenators and pumps, as well as 17 suitcases containing 130 kg of eels.</p> <p>(January 2023)</p>



Leopard *Panthera pardus*

ANNEX

The analysis of seizures is based on data submitted in the 2023 CITES Annual Illegal Trade Reports, reported by Member States to the EU-TWIX database. Some data still required clarification from Member States and so could not be included in the analysis.

To allow a quantitative EU-level analysis of seizure data, seizures involving different taxa or items were separated and treated as distinct 'seizure records'. As a result, the number of registered seizure cases reported is lower than the number of "seizure records" analysed (note: this briefing is based on the number of seizure records unless otherwise stated).

Trends in seizure records derived from this data should not be viewed as a complete picture of illegal activities taking place in the EU, only as indicating patterns of these illegal activities. This is because the countries in question and their agencies differ in their enforcement efforts, and also in their reporting and recording of information. The figures must be viewed as the minimum number of cases that occurred in the region over the assessed time period.

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Great White Shark *Carcharodon carcharias*

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