New analysis released: An Overview of Seizures of CITES-Listed Wildlife in the EU in 2021

Wednesday 14 June, 2023

**This briefing aims to provide an overview of all CITES-related seizures reported by the Member States of the European Union[1]
(EU) for the 12 months from January to December 2021.**

This briefing is based on all seizures reported by the EU Member States which have taken place both at EU external borders (postal centres, airports, maritime ports, and land boundaries) and at internal locations within an EU Member State (e.g. private premises, market/shops, fair/exhibition/show/auction houses).

In 2021, of the 27 EU Member States, 24 provided data on seizures that occurred in 2021[2]. The EU Member States reported a total of 4137 seizures in 2021, with Germany, France, Spain, and the Netherlands accounting for 68% of 2021 seizures. This means there was a 4% increase in seizures in 2021 compared to 2020.

Top Commodity Groups in 2021

The top commodity groups seized in the EU in 2021 were, in order of the number of reported seizure records, medicinals (derived from plants and animals), live birds, reptile bodies, parts, and derivatives, live reptiles and amphibians, live coral and coral rock, elephant ivory and mammal bodies, parts, and derivatives.

Thailand and the United States of America, Ukraine, Indonesia and Switzerland were the top five main countries of departure of illegal wildlife trade entering the EU in 2021. An increasing proportion of shipments were transported through the postal system, with 31% of total seizures occurring at mail centres in 2021 compared to 29% in 2020, while seizures in airports dropped from 21% to 15%.

Alongside the headline numbers, the report uncovered potentially emerging trends: an increasing number of invertebrate bodies, parts, and derivatives seized in the EU overseas territories, mainly Queen Conch *Strombus gigas* (App. II), and increasing seizures of sturgeon caviar *Acipensiformes spp.* (App. I, II).

Impact of COVID-19

Restrictions (either a continuation of 2020 restrictions or new restrictions in response to new variants) continued to impact law enforcement action, which likely contributed to the reduced seizure rates compared to pre-COVID-19 pandemic times.

At this time, less trade triggered by COVID-19 associated disruptions to air transport, closures of shops, and other modes of transporting or selling goods is also likely to be a contributing factor to this decline, both in terms of fewer tourist seizures and impacting wildlife trafficking dynamics, in some cases affecting the scale of the operation of trafficking networks due to fewer opportunities for illegal trade.

Conclusions should be drawn with this in mind.

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Notes

The quantitative analysis of these seizures (‘Reported CITES-related Seizures involving the EU’ and ‘Brief Comparison to 2020’) and examples of seizures (‘Details of Key CITES-related Seizures Reported by the EU Member States in 2021’) are based on seizure records submitted in the 2021 CITES Annual Illegal Trade Reports (including information on prosecutions) submitted to the EU-TWIX[3] database by the EU Member States.

It is important to note that any change in the number of seizures reported over the years and any patterns in illegal wildlife trade observed from the seizure data may be due to varying levels of enforcement efforts, which could differ over time by the various EU Member States. These do not necessarily indicate shifts in demand or changes in illegal wildlife trade dynamics.

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1. The Member States of the EU in 2021: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.
2. Cyprus, Luxembourg, and Slovakia reported no seizures in 2021.
3. European – Trade in Wildlife Information eXchange—the system includes a database of CITES seizures in the EU (https://eu-twix.org/).

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