



Illegal Trade in Wildlife

Fact Sheet

Background

Transnational criminal groups are exploiting the interconnected air transport system to trade wildlife illegally. Although the duty for apprehending and prosecuting these offenders rests with national enforcement authorities, airline staff can be an important source of intelligence and contribute to halting this illegal trade.

The international illegal wildlife trade (excluding timber and fisheries) is estimated to be worth between \$7 billion and \$23 billion¹ a year, making it the fourth largest illegal global trade (after drugs, counterfeiting and human trafficking) and covers a broad range of endangered species.

This trade poses a significant threat for many endangered animals, with the latest data from conservation organizations revealing the critical status of many iconic species. Tigers, elephants, rhinoceros, some of the other big cats and pangolins are of particular concern. This illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products not only threatens the survival of many endangered species but also strengthens criminal networks, poses risks to global health, and threatens nature-based tourism and the communities which depend on it.

COVID-19 has demonstrated aviation's extreme vulnerability to pandemics. The trafficking of wildlife by-passes health checks at borders and presents a threat of disease transmission to both animals and humans. The nature and scale of wild caught animal product (bushmeat) smuggling by passengers is not well known. However, surveys at four airports in Europe and seizures in the US indicate that hundreds of tonnes are illegally imported in baggage each year. Although not all concealed bushmeat is sourced from protected species, it is often poorly preserved and avoids sanitary checks

Wildlife trafficking is dependent on an interconnected logistics and transport network, involving air, land and seaports, passenger and cargo airlines, shipping companies, express couriers, postal companies, and freight forwarders. Its high value has a potential corrupting influence on officials and aviation employees and hence may represent a secondary threat to aviation security.

IATA Activities

- IATA's focus has been on raising awareness of this issue with airlines and other aviation stakeholders and encouraging partnerships with enforcement authorities.
- The aim of IATA's involvement is to support enforcement authorities in the identification and reporting of suspicious passenger behavior and unusual shipments.
- In 2015, IATA's DG participated in the Duke of Cambridge's [United for Wildlife Transportation Taskforce](#) with the CEOs of Emirates and Kenya Airways and a number of other leaders from the transport, logistics and conservation sectors.
- Since then, some 67 airlines have signed the Declaration of the United for Wildlife International Taskforce on the Transportation of Illegal Wildlife Products. Signatories from the aviation community also include Airports Council International (ACI), African Airlines Association (AFRAA), Association of South Pacific Airlines (ASPA), Airlines for Europe (A4E), Airlines Association of Southern Africa (AASA) and some airports.
- IATA strengthened its cooperation with the Secretariat of the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora \(CITES\)](#) and signed a [Memorandum of Understanding \(MoU\)](#) at the 71st IATA AGM in 2015 to work closely with the organization to reduce illegally traded wildlife and ensure safe and secure transport of legally traded wildlife.

¹ [The rise of environmental crime: A growing threat to natural resources, peace, development and security.](#)

- The IATA 72nd AGM in Dublin in 2016 unanimously endorsed a [Resolution](#) denouncing the illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products and pledging to partner with government authorities and conservation organizations in the fight against traffickers of endangered species.
- IATA and ACI signed an annex to an existing MoU at the 73rd IATA AGM in 2017 to include the development and promotion of measures to assist in combatting the trade.
- IATA joined with a consortium of international conservation organizations as a Core Member of the [US Agency for International Development](#) (USAID) Reducing Opportunities for Unlawful Transport of Endangered Species (ROUTES) Partnership. This was a five-year partnership to support the transport sector with information on high-risk species, routes and concealment methods, awareness raising activities with staff, passengers and cargo customers and the facilitation of the reporting of suspected traffickers and suspicious cargo. IATA's involvement in the ROUTES Partnership included the development of an independent standalone wildlife certification and airline staff reporting tool.
- IATA added an illegal wildlife module to its [IATA Environmental Assessment \(IEnvA\) program](#) and five airlines have now been independently assessed and certified to have met this new Standard.

A ROUTES report highlights the risk of zoonotic disease spill-over from bushmeat smuggled by passengers and in cargo consignments and the important role airlines can play in reducing the risk of future pandemics. IATA is now developing initiatives that can support enforcement authorities including human and animal health agencies, in minimizing this risk. In January 2020, IATA initiated an award winning² joint passenger awareness campaign with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) based on minimising the risk of spreading an animal pandemic (African Swine Fever) which could serve as an exemplar for future activities.

- IATA launched an e-learning module for aviation staff, originally developed by Etihad Airways in collaboration with the USAID Wildlife TRAPS Project, highlighting the important role front-line workers in the industry can play to catch wildlife traffickers.
- IATA is also working on a pilot project with an enforcement authority in Southern Africa on the automated detection of illegal wildlife concealed in baggage using a machine-learning algorithm as well as raising awareness with enforcement authorities of advances in aviation digitization and automation that could provide additional source of digital intelligence. A number of other IATA governing bodies have adopted appropriate policies such as:
 - The adoption by the Joint Passenger Services Conference (JPSC) of a Recommended Practice (RP) on raising passenger awareness of the illegal wildlife trade and an additional RP on the carriage of prohibited wildlife in baggage.
 - An addition to the Live Animals Regulations (LAR) which came into effect on 6 July 2017
 - Guidance on the safe handling of escaped animals in the cabin included in the next reissue of the Cabin Safety Best Practice Guide
 - Information text added to the IATA Ground Operations Manual

More info: www.iata.org/wildlife

² <https://www.empreintes.aacc.fr/palmares-2020/>
June 2022