One of the most serious environmental crimes, wildlife trafficking encompasses all stages in the supply chain, from taking wild fauna from its habitat, to trading, importing, exporting, processing, possessing, obtaining and consuming of these species.

Driven by an extraordinary low-risk/high-profit ratio, the trafficking of endangered species is estimated to generate over EUR 4.4 billion in profits globally per year (2011).

GLOBAL DEMAND

Because the global demand for such commodities is high, whether as luxury items or for use in traditional medicine, this illicit trade attracts transnational organised crime networks.

While in its character and its scale this trade resembles other types of global criminal activities, such as trafficking in drugs, human beings, firearms and counterfeit goods, it benefits nonetheless from lower levels of awareness, lower risks of detection and lower sanction levels.

TRANSIT POINT

The EU is a major transit point for the illegal trade in wildlife, in particular between Africa and Asia. In 2013, 1468 seizures (more than half with an international dimension) were reported by 15 EU countries. The main types of commodities seized were medicines (derived from both plants and animals), ivory, corals and live reptiles. The European fashion industry accounts for 96% of the trade in python skins.

A KEY PARTNER

Europol works with a number of partner agencies against this illegal and often cruel and inhuman trade.

The EU itself is at the forefront of the fight against the illegal wildlife trade, both domestically and globally. It is a key player in implementing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), having adopted strict trade rules in this area.

The European Commission works closely with Member States to strengthen the enforcement of those rules. Cooperation takes place through the EU Enforcement Group, which gathers law enforcement officers from all Member States, as well as Europol, Eurojust, Interpol, the World Customs Organisation, and the CITES Secretariat.

OPERATIONS

In 2015 Europol supported Operation COBRA III, the largest-ever coordinated international law-enforcement operation targeting the illegal trade in endangered species. The operation recovered a huge amount of wildlife contraband, including over 12 tonnes of elephant ivory and at least 119 rhino horns.

Europol supported the operation by facilitating operational information exchange and coordinating the activities of police, customs, forestry and other law enforcement authorities from 25 Member States.

European seizures included five rhino horns, 11439 living and dead specimens, almost 2000 parts and products and over six tonnes of timber, plants and animal parts.

In addition, 100000 pills of traditional Asian medicine were confiscated. Several individuals were arrested and investigations were triggered in many countries.
GLOBAL ACTION AGAINST WILDLIFE CRIME: 4 400 REPTILES SAVED FROM CRIMINAL HANDS

OVER 50 PROTECTED BIRDS DESTINED TO BE TRADED ON THE ILLEGAL MARKET RESCUED IN ITALY

EUROPE’S BIGGEST ILLEGAL TURTLE FARM DISMANTLED

3.4 TONNES OF SEIZED GLASS EELS REINTRODUCED INTO THEIR NATURAL HABITAT

WILDLIFE CRIME: EUROPEAN SEIZURES AND ARRESTS IN GLOBAL OPERATION THUNDERSTORM

GLASS EEL TRAFFICKERS EARNED MORE THAN EUR 37 MILLION FROM ILLEGAL EXPORTS TO ASIA

MORE THAN 600 SMUGGLED REPTILES FOUND IN SPAIN: 9 PEOPLE ARRESTED
News/Press Release

Illegal Trade in Endangered Species: 29 Arrests and Over 2,000 Animals Seized in International Operation Sukazu

EU Law Enforcement Step Up Efforts to Protect the Environment – 48 Arrested for Trafficking Endangered Species

Europol and Wildlife Justice Commission Team Up Against Environmental Crime

17 Arrested for Smuggling Glass Eels Worth EUR 10 Million

Annual Review