



◀ Shipment of ivory intercepted at Brussels airport, Belgium.

Source: Belgian Customs (GAD Zaventem)

EU-TWIX Anniversary: *Ten Years of Success!*

In October 2015, EU-TWIX (European Union – Trade in Wildlife Information eXchange) is celebrating ten years of effective facilitation of information exchange on illegal wildlife trade in the European Union (EU).

Established in October 2005 as a joint initiative of the Belgian Federal Police, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora¹ Management Authority (CITES MA) and Customs, and TRAFFIC, EU-TWIX has been facilitating the monitoring of illegal wildlife trade by providing a platform for information exchange and communication, now engaging over 840 wildlife enforcement officials across 36 European countries². It is noteworthy that since its establishment the EU-TWIX network experienced an almost six-fold increase in the number of users—just over 150 officials were connected when the tool was launched in 2005 (TRAFFIC, 2015).

Together with enforcement officials from over 100 European enforcement agencies including Customs, police, environmental inspection services, CITES MAs, and veterinary and phytosanitary inspection services, staff from the European Commission (EC) and seven international organizations³ are also part of the EU-TWIX network. Importantly, several prosecutors and judges are also connected, thereby ensuring that necessary players along the enforcement chain are informed and connected.

Over the past ten years, EU-TWIX has proven to be successful in keeping all the agencies responsible for the implementation and enforcement of the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations (EUWTR) within the EU and CITES legislation for neighbouring European countries connected. Its mailing list, seizures database and four directories allow users to find quickly the relevant contacts and up-to-date information on rescue centres, wildlife experts, laboratories and prices of specimens/items in trade.

With over 500 enforcement-related messages exchanged via the forum in 2014, the access-restricted EU-TWIX mailing list is a particularly successful component of the EU-TWIX tool. It is used daily by enforcement officials to communicate quickly and efficiently with colleagues across Europe. The sharing of ‘Seizure Alerts’ is one of the many types of information that is regularly exchanged via the mailing list. Such alerts are usually produced by European agencies to inform others about significant seizures taking place in their country and to keep enforcement officials informed about emerging wildlife trade trends in the EU on a continuous basis.

As a result of the messages exchanged via the EU-TWIX mailing list, at least 13 investigations related to illegal wildlife trade in the EU were triggered in 2014 alone.

In addition, the EU-TWIX mailing list is widely used by enforcement officials to seek assistance with species identification. Given the great variety of knowledge and expertise amongst EU-TWIX users, quick identification support—usually within one to two hours—is provided,

¹CITES is an international agreement between governments that aims to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. Source: <https://www.cites.org>. ²The 28 EU Member States plus Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, Turkey and the Ukraine. ³The CITES Secretariat, Eurojust, Europol, the EU Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law (Impel), INTERPOL, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the World Customs Organization (WCO).

Tigernet is an online database of records on mortality of Tigers and other key wildlife species across India, established by the Indian government’s National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and TRAFFIC. Compilation and analysis of such data is valuable as a management tool for Tiger conservation in India.

‘Africa-TWIX’ (working name only): EU-TWIX is currently being replicated in Central Africa, with a pilot project implemented in the following countries: Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo and Gabon. This project is looking at establishing a mailing list to enable agencies in the region to communicate among themselves, as well as a seizures database to hold seizures data for the four countries.



RADIATED TORTOISE *Astrochelys radiata*

Information exchange via the EU-TWIX mailing list about a seizure of Radiated Tortoises *Astrochelys radiata* from Madagascar that took place in Croatia made the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority aware of the involvement of Dutch traders in the illegal international trade of reptiles (an example taken from the EU-TWIX information leaflet, available on www.traffic.org/enforcement-reports/traffic_pub_enforce5.pdf).

helping officials decide whether they should seize a shipment or not, for example.

In August 2014, EU-TWIX reached the landmark of 40 000 records from the 28 Member States in its secure database of illegal wildlife seizures, covering the period 2000 to present (TRAFFIC, 2014). Being the second-most important component of the EU-TWIX tool, the database represents an EU-wide repository of seizures data submitted by individual enforcement agencies and provides a unique opportunity for monitoring trade trends at national and EU-levels.

In addition to this, analysis of the database supports EU enforcement agencies and international organizations in monitoring trends in illegal wildlife trade and the implementation of threat assessments for a variety of species and commodity groups including ivory, rhinoceros horns, tortoises and exotic birds (TRAFFIC, 2014).

Experience gained through the running of EU-TWIX has already been shared beyond Europe, as both the EU-TWIX mailing list and database have been used as best models for other communication systems such as the ‘Tigernet’ online database (TRAFFIC, 2014). Furthermore, the EU-TWIX system is being replicated in other regions of the world, for example through the new ‘Africa-TWIX’ project for enforcement agencies to be piloted for countries of central Africa, which officially started in September 2015.

After ten years of operation the EU-TWIX tools and network continue to expand, and are widely recognized and appreciated by the European enforcement community for supporting efforts to stop the illegal trade of wildlife in the EU.

EU-TWIX has received funding from the European Commission (DG Environment and DG Home Affairs) and the Governments of Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland and the UK. The ‘AFRICA-TWIX’ project is supported by the German Polifund project, implemented by GIZ on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the German Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB).

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Kristina Rodina, Programme Support Officer, TRAFFIC; E-mail: kristina.rodina@traffic.org
Vinciane Sacré, EU-TWIX Project Manager, TRAFFIC; E-mail: vinciane.sacre@traffic.org

EU accedes to CITES

On 8 July 2015, the European Union (EU) became a full member of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), the first regional economic integration organization (REIO) to do so.

“The accession of the EU as a single Party to CITES is another milestone reached in long-term efforts to ensure consistent implementation of CITES across all Member States that began with the adoption of common EU Wildlife Trade Regulations in 1984,” said Katalin Kecse-Nagy, TRAFFIC’s Acting Regional Director for Europe.

The EU Wildlife Trade Regulations, which are directly applicable in all EU Member States, provide the legal framework through which CITES is implemented throughout the EU.

Accession to CITES legally binds the EU to implement and enforce the Convention, which should lead to further improvements in the effectiveness of CITES implementation in the Member States.

“The development is also timely as the EU moves towards adoption of an ‘Action Plan against wildlife trafficking’ to guide the region’s effective contribution towards international efforts to curb the global poaching crisis,” said Kecse-Nagy.