

Border Force seizes hundreds of endangered species products

As part of a major international operation to tackle illegal wildlife trade in October, Border Force officers across the UK successfully seized hundreds of products containing endangered species of plants and animals, as well as other items listed on CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species Wildlife Fauna and Flora).

Operation Thunder led to Border Force officers seizing 250 items including live animals and corals, products including python skin and turtle shell, elephant tusks and ivory goods, as well as health products claiming to be slimming supplements containing cactus and orchid extracts and crocodile blood.

The illegal wildlife trade is a haven for international organised criminals: it is the fourth biggest illegal trade in the world, worth over an estimated £15 billion annually. The international operation was co-led by the World Customs Organisation (WCO) and INTERPOL and involved police, customs, environment, wildlife and forestry agencies from 111 countries.

The Heathrow-based Border Force CITES team are recognised as world leaders in their field. Samantha Trackman, a Higher Officer in the Border Force CITES enforcement team who coordinated the UK's response, said:

Our yearly participation in the global Operation Thunder series highlights our commitment to tackle wildlife crime, which has a devastating environmental impact.

This operation is a crucial part of a global response to a global issue. The trade in endangered species is driven by organised crime groups, and the movement of banned animal products is key to how they operate.

This is why Border Force's specialist CITES officers will continue their vital work at the border to prevent the importation and exportation of endangered animals and plants, as well as working alongside enforcement partners such as the National Wildlife Crime Unit, police and scientific authorities from across the UK to eradicate this ruthless and exploitative trade.

Border Force is responsible for frontline detection and seizure of items covered by the CITES convention, which regulates the trade in endangered animals and plants. The endangered species trade is strictly controlled under CITES, and Border Force plays an important role in preventing the illegal importation, exportation and transshipment of these goods.

Anyone with information about activity they suspect may be linked to

smuggling and trafficking of any kind should call the UK hotline on: +44
(0)800 59 5000.