

Press release: Rare bird eggs importation prevented by Border Force at Heathrow

The detection was made on 26 June when officers stopped a man who had arrived on a flight from South Africa. When the man was questioned and searched, 19 bird eggs were found concealed within a body belt, as well as two newly-hatched vultures.

Border Force specialist officers identified that the eggs were protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Although the exact species are yet to be identified, the eggs are known to be from South African birds of prey including vultures, eagles, hawks and kites.

Officers ensured that both the eggs and the live chicks were kept warm and quickly transported to the Heathrow Animal Reception Centre, managed by the City of London Corporation. City Corporation staff ensured that the chicks were cared for and the unhatched eggs were incubated. The live chicks and the eggs have since been moved to a specialist facility.

Following the incident, a 56-year-old Irish national was arrested and the investigation passed to the National Crime Agency (NCA). He has since been bailed pending further enquiries.

Grant Miller, head of the national Border Force CITES team at Heathrow, said:

My officers are experts in their field and will seize anything that contravenes CITES regulations. In this case, by preventing the smuggling attempt they have also ensured that the birds and eggs received the immediate care and attention that they needed.

The frontline work of my team, alongside close working with enforcement partners such as the NCA and National Wildlife Crime Unit, is key to tackling the international illegal wildlife trade which does so much environmental damage and threatens the survival of endangered animals and plants.

The importation of endangered species into the UK is strictly controlled by CITES, which is an international agreement covering more than 35,000 species of animals and plants. The Heathrow-based Border Force CITES team are specialist officers who work across the UK and who are recognised as world leaders in their field.

Anyone with information about activity they suspect may be linked to smuggling and trafficking of any kind should call the UK hotline on: (0)800 59 5000.