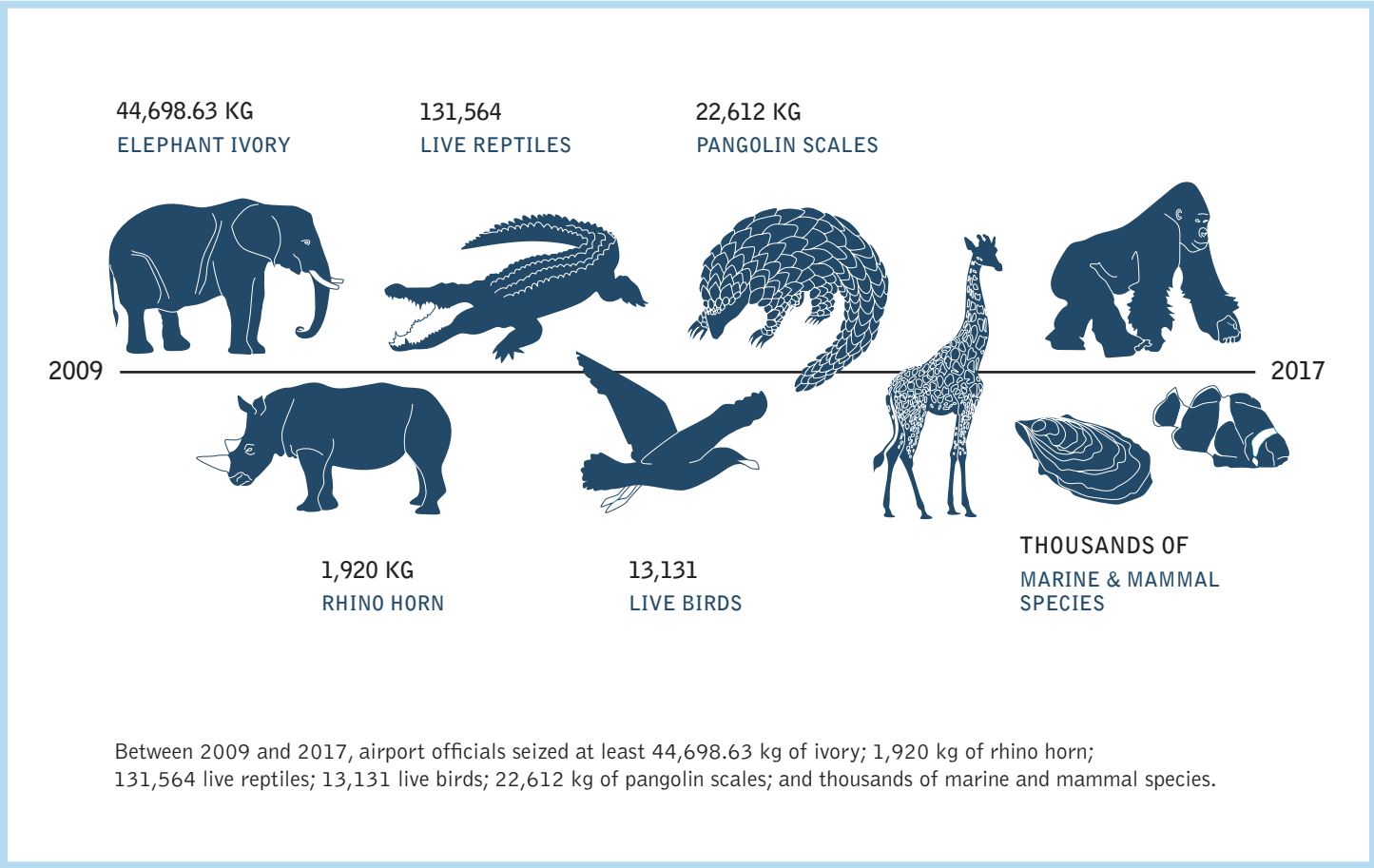


Wildlife Seizure Press Releases: A Best Practice Guide

Wildlife trafficking represents one of the primary threats to species and biodiversity around the world, representing an estimated \$7 to 23 billion in illegal sales each year. As cultures, economies, and transportation systems have become increasingly interconnected, wildlife trafficking networks have too, benefiting from increasing access to source zones in the Southern Hemisphere and markets in regions such as Asia. The air transport industry in particular provides traffickers with a transport option that is faster, often safer for live animals, and sometimes more economical than traditional land or maritime routes.

The following guide and press release templates provide recommendations for Customs, enforcement agencies, and the private sector to more effectively communicate wildlife seizures made within the aviation industry.



Between 2009 and 2017, airport officials seized at least 44,698.63 kg of ivory; 1,920 kg of rhino horn; 131,564 live reptiles; 13,131 live birds; 22,612 kg of pangolin scales; and thousands of marine and mammal species.

Why Are Wildlife Seizure Press Releases Important?

In order to prevent the continued exploitation of the air industry, governments, the private sector, and civil society require information – how, when, and where are wildlife and wildlife products trafficked? Are they more likely to be found in checked baggage or in air freight shipments? Without data, counter-trafficking strategies will be based on little more than intuition.

Providing seizure information publicly can help encourage civil society organizations to analyze the data contained within press releases, pinpointing emerging wildlife trafficking trends and hotspots that enforcement can use to proactively target trafficking attempts. **To this end, it is worth noting that the more information a press release contains, the higher the quality of analysis produced using that information.**

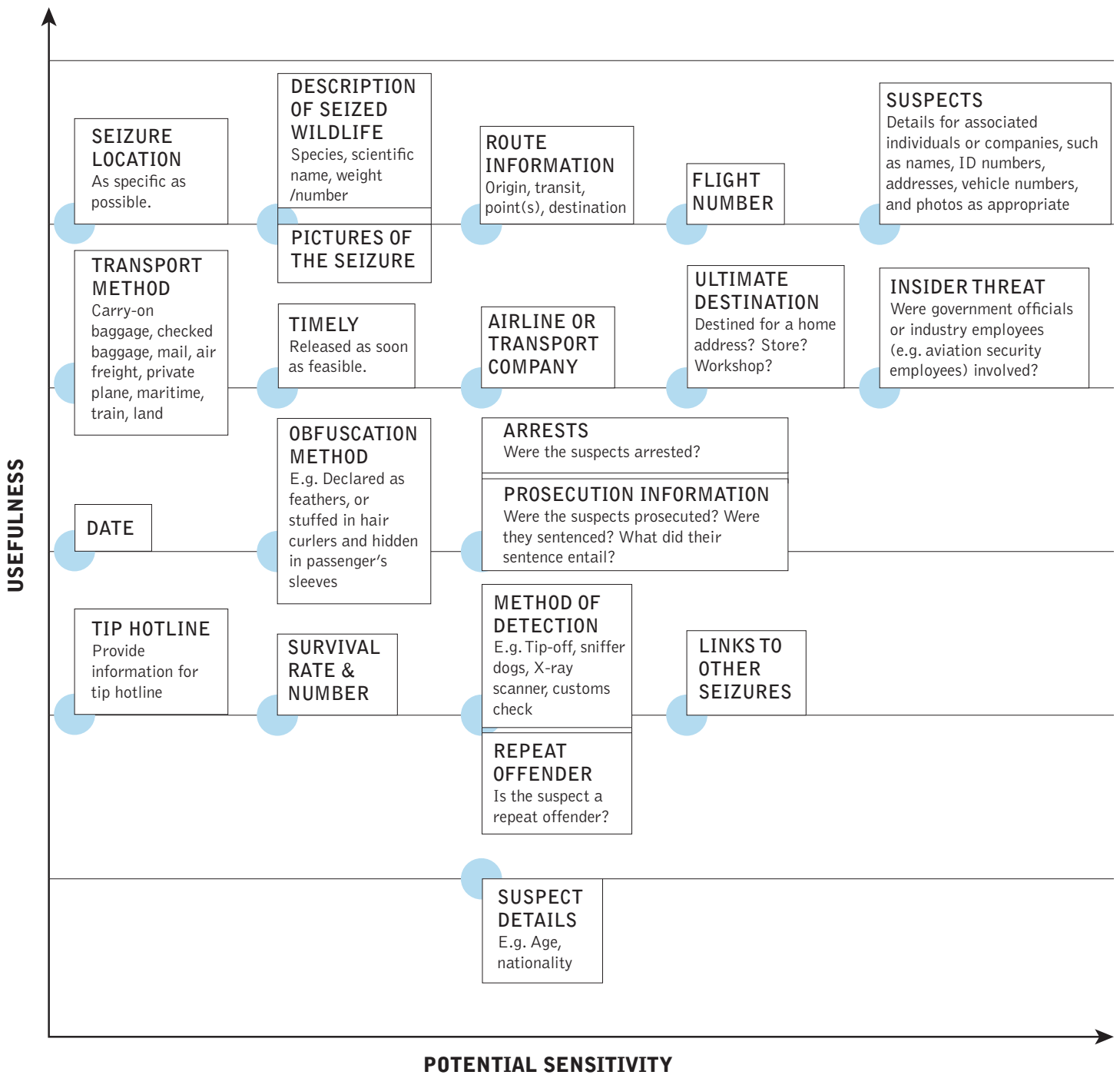
Seizure press releases published by government authorities help ensure that officials retain control of the narrative and messaging associated with a particular seizure, reducing the spread of potentially inaccurate seizure information by the press. Press releases can also provide a space for Customs and enforcement agencies to highlight other enforcement successes (i.e. a summary of other recent seizures, or an overview of changing trends in response to enforcement), and can underscore the relevant agency’s dedication to transparency. In this way, seizure reports can have a deterrent effect on wildlife traffickers, who may come to recognize a certain airport as being particularly adept at stopping wildlife trafficking.

Furthermore, industry, the public sector, and foreign governments are often unaware of the extent to which wildlife trafficking affects them because wildlife seizure information is infrequently published. Consistently disseminating wildlife seizure information in the form of press releases can therefore both educate industry and the public and inform foreign government agencies of seizures relevant to their countries.

What Constitutes a “Good” Wildlife Seizure Press Release?

The best press releases are distributed soon after the seizure itself by the agency or organization responsible for confiscating wildlife and contain as much detail as is possible to share publicly without adversely affecting ongoing investigations. This helps ensure that public seizure information is accurate and encourages the dissemination of successful seizure reports by media outlets, which can help highlight the effectiveness of law enforcement’s counter-wildlife trafficking strategies. If a press release by a government agency is not possible, sharing a written summary of seizure information with reporters and involved parties (e.g. airlines) is a suitable alternative.

The table below displays the components of an ideal press release, ranked by usefulness and potential sensitivity (i.e. the likelihood the information is sensitive and cannot be released due to ongoing investigations).



The usefulness of most components will vary depending on what the data is used to determine. The ranking of components is approximate given space constraints.

What Constitutes a “Good” Wildlife Seizure Press Release?

SOME ADDITIONAL TIPS

- **Include tip-off origin:** When a seizure has occurred as the result of a tip-off, it is advisable to include at least a generalized description of the tip-off origin in the press release for the seizure (e.g. airport police, cabin crew, check-in staff). This can help the aviation industry determine which groups have received adequate training and are proactively working to prevent trafficking activity, and which groups could benefit from more awareness raising and training programs. Publishing this information can also encourage further tip-offs in the future, as it confirms that authorities are acting on information provided to them by industry and through tip hotlines.

- **Provide prosecution information:** Include as much information as possible in regard to consequences for suspected traffickers and their accomplices. If the inclusion of prosecution and sentencing information will delay the dissemination of a press release, include this information in a second press release or in an update to the original.

Releasing prosecution outcomes, particularly in conjunction with repeat offender information, can help officials determine whether wildlife trafficking legislation is effective and serving as a meaningful deterrent for potential traffickers. This information also helps illustrate dedication to counter-wildlife trafficking efforts. Furthermore, releasing prosecution outcomes may serve as a deterrent in and of itself.

- **Provide background information:** Whenever possible, provide additional background information relevant to the seizure. Referencing the last seizure of the same species or wildlife product, for instance, will help the press and the public differentiate between similar seizures, and can help highlight enforcement successes. Other relevant information could include the last successful prosecution associated with a similar past seizure, or whether any traffickers involved in the current seizure have a past criminal history.

- **Hold a press conference:** Consider holding a press conference in conjunction with press releases for journalists and other interested parties to attend. To encourage attending journalists to cover the seizure in their publications, relevant government spokespersons should describe the events leading up to the seizure and the seizure itself in some detail. Journalists should be able to view and photograph the seized wildlife or wildlife products if possible.

Holding a press conference for certain seizures will amplify the effects of the press release, showcasing and broadcasting news of the successful interdiction of illegal wildlife by the relevant authorities, and helping officials to disseminate an accurate and up-to-date description of the seizure.

- **Disseminate the press release through social media:** To ensure high viewership and substantial media coverage, news of each seizure should be shared along with a link to the relevant press release through the relevant agency’s social media accounts. Twitter, Facebook, and Weibo increase the reach of each press release substantially, and provide many more opportunities for the media to pick up news of a seizure and create their own articles to disseminate the press release even further. Including photos in the release and in associated social media posts will increase uptake significantly.
- **Avoid reporting bias:** In many countries, wildlife seizures are only publicly reported if they are deemed interesting (e.g. the seizure is unusually large, or involves live animals). This skews both seizure analyses and public perception, potentially directing attention away from the most common and persistent types of wildlife trafficking towards the more unusual.

Wildlife seizure press release protocols should ensure the release of information on as many seizures as possible to portray an accurate picture of actual seizure rates.

Wildlife Seizure Press Release Template - Air Freight or Mail

Press Release

**[COUNTRY NAME OR SEIZING AUTHORITY] SEIZES [TYPE OF PRODUCT OR PRODUCTS] [INDICATE IF THIS IS AN UPDATE TO A PREVIOUS PRESS RELEASE]
[DATE OF PRESS RELEASE]**

[PHOTO OR PHOTOS OF THE SEIZED PRODUCT OR PRODUCTS]

[SEIZING AUTHORITY] seized [QUANTITY AND/OR WEIGHT] of [LIVE ANIMAL(S) OR PRODUCT(S)] with an estimated value of [APPROXIMATE VALUE] at [LOCATION OF SEIZURE] on [DATE OF SEIZURE] that was intended to be shipped to [FINAL DESTINATION].

Officers discovered the [SEIZED PRODUCT(S)] through [METHOD OF DETECTION] in [ITEM OR ITEMS IN WHICH SEIZED GOODS WERE HIDDEN] that originated in [PLACE OF ORIGIN] and were moved to [LOCATION OF SEIZURE] via [TRANSIT LOCATION(S)] on [FLIGHT NUMBER AND/OR AIRLINE]. The officers then discovered [QUANTITY AND/OR WEIGHT] of [PRODUCT OR PRODUCTS SEIZED] that had been concealed in [OBFUSCATION METHOD].

After further investigation, officers arrested [NAMES OF INDIVIDUALS ARRESTED] ([ADDITIONAL DESCRIPTIVE DETAILS ABOUT THOSE ARRESTED]) in [LOCATION OF ARREST] on [DATE OF ARREST].

[IF ADDITIONAL SEIZURES WERE MADE] The officers seized a further [QUANTITY AND/OR WEIGHT] of [LIVE ANIMAL(S) OR PRODUCT(S) SEIZED] in [LOCATION OF ADDITIONAL RELATED SEIZURES] on [DATE(S) OF ADDITIONAL RELATED SEIZURES].

[INDICATE IF THE INVESTIGATION IS ONGOING OR IF THERE IS A RELATED PROSECUTION AND HOW TO FIND FURTHER INFORMATION].

Under [LOCAL LAW], [A DESCRIPTION OF THE POSSIBLE PUNISHMENT FOR WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING].

Members of the public may report suspected smuggling or wildlife trafficking activities through [HOTLINE NUMBER] or by contacting [EMAIL OR SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT].

Wildlife Seizure Press Release Template - Checked Luggage or Passenger Items

Press Release

**[COUNTRY NAME OR SEIZING AUTHORITY] SEIZES [TYPE OF PRODUCT OR PRODUCTS] [INDICATE IF THIS IS AN UPDATE TO A PREVIOUS PRESS RELEASE]
[DATE OF PRESS RELEASE]**

[PHOTO OR PHOTOS OF THE SEIZED PRODUCT OR PRODUCTS]

[SEIZING AUTHORITY] seized [QUANTITY AND/OR WEIGHT] of [LIVE ANIMAL(S) OR PRODUCT(S)] with an estimated value of [APPROXIMATE VALUE] at [LOCATION OF SEIZURE] on [DATE OF SEIZURE] on the way to [FINAL DESTINATION].

Officers discovered the [SEIZED PRODUCT(S)] through [METHOD OF DETECTION] in [ITEM OR ITEMS IN WHICH SEIZED GOODS WERE HIDDEN] of a [SUSPECT NATIONALITY] passenger [NAME] who left from [PLACE OF ORIGIN] and arrived in [LOCATION OF SEIZURE] via [TRANSIT LOCATIONS] on [FLIGHT NUMBER AND/OR AIRLINE]. The officers discovered [QUANTITY AND/OR WEIGHT] of [PRODUCT OR PRODUCTS SEIZED] that had been concealed in [OBFUSCATION METHOD]. The officers then arrested [NAMES OF INDIVIDUALS ARRESTED] ([ADDITIONAL DESCRIPTIVE DETAILS ABOUT THOSE ARRESTED]) and charged him/her/them with [DESCRIPTION OF CHARGES]. The suspects are due in court on [DATES].

[IF ADDITIONAL SEIZURES WERE MADE] The officers seized a further [QUANTITY AND/OR WEIGHT] of [LIVE ANIMAL(S) OR PRODUCT(S) SEIZED] in [LOCATION OF ADDITIONAL RELATED SEIZURES] on [DATE(S) OF ADDITIONAL RELATED SEIZURES].

[IF THE SUSPECTS ARE REPEAT OFFENDERS] Passenger [NAME OR OTHER DESCRIPTIVE DETAIL] had been arrested previously on [DATES] in [LOCATIONS] in possession of [QUANTITY AND/OR WEIGHT OF LIVE ANIMAL(S) OR PRODUCT(S)].

[INDICATE IF THE INVESTIGATION IS ONGOING OR IF THERE IS A RELATED PROSECUTION AND HOW TO FIND FURTHER INFORMATION].

Under [LOCAL LAW], [A DESCRIPTION OF THE POSSIBLE PUNISHMENT FOR WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING]. Members of the public may report suspected smuggling or wildlife trafficking activities through [HOTLINE NUMBER] or by contacting [EMAIL OR SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNT].

Wildlife Seizure Press Release: Real World Example

SEIZED PRODUCTS ARE CLEARLY STATED, INCLUDING WEIGHT

IMPORTANT DETAILS INCLUDING A DESCRIPTION OF THE SUSPECT, THE INVOLVED AUTHORITY, ROUTE, METHOD OF DETECTION, OBFUSCATION METHOD, MODE OF TRANSPORT, AND ARREST

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES MENTIONED

RELEVANT LAW AND ASSOCIATED PENALTY

CLEAR MENTION OF TIP HOTLINES

HONG KONG CUSTOMS' WEBSITE IS EASILY NAVIGABLE AND PRESS RELEASES ARE READILY AVAILABLE

PHOTO OF SEIZED PRODUCTS

SEIZURE AUTHORITY & SEIZURE DATE ARE CLEARLY STATED

PRESS RELEASE POSTED SAME DAY AS SEIZURE

Home
Welcome Message
About Us
Enforcement
Trade Facilitation
Passenger Clearance
Cargo Clearance
Consumer Protection
Trade Controls
Electronic Services
Statistics
Customs Notices
Publications and Press Releases
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Press Releases

Hong Kong Customs seizes suspected rhino horn and worked ivory (with photo)

6 June 2018

Hong Kong Customs today (June 6) seized about 5.9 kilograms of suspected rhino horn and 410 grams of suspected worked ivory with an estimated market value of about \$1.2 million at Hong Kong International Airport.

Customs officers intercepted a 40-year-old male passenger at the airport this morning. He arrived in Hong Kong from Johannesburg, South Africa.

During Customs clearance, the batch of suspected rhino horn and suspected worked ivory were found concealed inside three food packing boxes in his check-in suitcase. The man was then arrested.

The case was handed over to the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department for follow-up investigation.

Under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting an endangered species without a licence is liable to a maximum fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years.

Members of the public may report any suspected smuggling activities to the Customs 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).

Hong Kong Customs today (June 6) seized about 5.9 kilograms of suspected rhino horn and 410 grams of suspected worked ivory with an estimated market value of about \$1.2 million at Hong Kong International Airport.

Source: www.customs.gov.hk/en/publication_press/press/index_id_2195.html

Are There Any Countries with Good Press Release Protocols That Can Serve as a Model?

No country consistently publishes seizure press releases that include all of the key components mentioned above, but a few countries produce press releases that include some or most of the components.

The following table provides a list of countries that either consistently or periodically report wildlife seizure data in the form of public press releases. The list is not meant to be exhaustive.

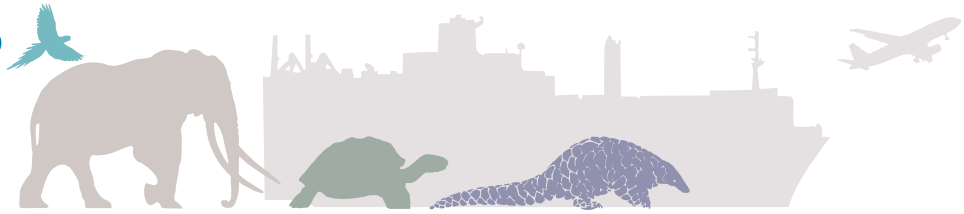
COUNTRY	STRENGTHS	ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT
<p>HONG KONG (CHINA)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently publish press releases the day of or soon after seizures Always contain a description of the seized wildlife, including weight or number Generally include photos Include route information, transport method, arrests, and other relevant information Often provide prosecution information or a note that an investigation is ongoing Always include tip hotline information Press releases are well-organized within an easily searchable, online database Always mention whether the seizure was the result of a tip-off, risk assessment, or other detection method 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No mention of airlines or flight numbers Often only generic descriptions of suspects
<p>AUSTRALIA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish press releases soon after seizures Publish press releases soon after sentencing, including a reference back to initial seizure press release Always contain a description of the seized wildlife, including weight or number Always include detailed charges and sentencing information for each suspect Always include tip hotline information Always include media contact information Always include multiple clear photos, sometimes including X-ray images Sometimes include video Include route, transport method, and obfuscation information Include some relevant background information on suspects and previous seizures Include some explanation about reasons behind the trafficking of seized species Press releases are detailed and well-organized within a searchable, online database 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No mention of airlines or flight numbers

(Chart continues on the next page)

COUNTRY	STRENGTHS	ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT
SOUTH AFRICA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish press releases soon after seizures • Always contain a description of the seized wildlife, including weight or number • Sometimes include photos • Include route information, transport method, arrests, and other relevant information • When possible, provide prosecution information or a note that an investigation is ongoing • Press releases are organized within an online database 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only publish wildlife seizure press releases occasionally • Structure of online press release database could be improved to be more intuitive • No tip hotline information • No mention of airlines or flight numbers • Only generic descriptions of suspects
UNITED STATES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press releases are detailed • Customs and Border Protection (CBP): Always contain a description of the seized wildlife, including weight or number; generally include photos; occasionally include transport method and other relevant information; press releases are well-organized within an easily searchable, online database • Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS): Always contain a description of the seized wildlife; generally include photos; always provide prosecution information and detailed description of suspect(s); press releases are well-organized within an easily searchable, online database that includes DOJ press releases and relevant media articles • Department of Justice (DOJ): Always provide detailed description of suspect(s); always provide fairly detailed information on trafficking methods; always provide information on investigation that led to prosecution; always provide detailed information on prosecution and sentencing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seizure press releases are distributed by at least three different agencies (CBP, FWS, and DOJ), potentially creating confusion and complicating data collection • CBP: Only publish wildlife seizure press releases occasionally, only include some relevant information, no tip hotline information, no mention of airlines or flight numbers • FWS: Press releases are generally only published after prosecution is complete, and so often primarily relate to prosecution, rather than to seizures; only include some relevant information; no tip hotline information; no mention of airlines or flight numbers • DOJ: Press releases are only published after prosecution is complete, and so relate to prosecution, rather than to seizures; seized wildlife descriptions are lacking; rarely include photos; online press release database could be more intuitive and more easily searchable; no tip hotline information • Frequency and thoroughness of DOJ prosecution press releases suggest that many seizures are not being reported by CBP or FWS
CHINA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press releases are detailed • Generally include photos • Share substantial information with news outlets that report seizures as well • Seizure reports are often posted on social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links to press releases expire • Seizures are explained in a narrative format that can create confusion; more could be done to point to important seizure information (e.g. transport method, obfuscation method) • Jurisdictions sometimes report seizures separately (i.e. seizures are not always reported by one agency in a centralized manner) • Often only generic descriptions of suspects
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seizure reports are occasionally released publicly by media outlets • UAE officials sometimes publish their CITES reporting documents which can include specific seizure information • Hold press conferences to report on wildlife seizures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media outlets generally release seizure details instead of government agencies • UAE officials generally report only aggregated seizure data at press conferences, preventing the identification of individual seizures

ROUTES

Reducing Opportunities
for Unlawful Transport of
Endangered Species



The USAID Reducing Opportunities for Unlawful Transport of Endangered Species (ROUTES) Partnership brings together transport and logistics companies, government agencies, development groups, law enforcement, conservation organizations, academia and donors to disrupt wildlife trafficking activities, and forms a key element of the concerted international response to addressing wildlife poaching and associated criminal activities worldwide.

At the heart of ROUTES is a core group of partners collaborating with the U.S. Government and the transport sector that includes Airports Council International (ACI), the Center for Advanced Defense Studies (C4ADS), the International Air Transport Association (IATA), TRAFFIC and WWF.

For resources referenced in this document or for more information visit:

www.routespartnership.org



info@routespartnership.org



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