

WILDLIFE TRADE

Forty years of CITES*Biol. Conserv.* **223**, 47–57 (2018)

Credit: Ainars Aunins / Alamy Stock Photo

International biodiversity trade can promote conservation and enhance livelihoods; for example, by providing income to ecosystem stewards where they harvest wild plants sustainably. However, trade also threatens wildlife populations of plants and animals, particularly when conducted illegally. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is the main international agreement to combat wildlife trafficking, and it has regulated the legal trade of biodiversity since 1975. This trade is rising, and its global patterns over time and space are hard to trace.

Michael Harfoot, from the UN World Conservation Monitoring Centre, UK, and colleagues reveal global-scale patterns of biodiversity trade since CITES came into force. They analysed over 16 million legal

international shipments made between 1975 and 2014, covering almost 30,000 species. During this period, trade quadrupled and most of it involved plants. The proportion of captive over wild specimens soared, especially reptiles. The authors discuss seven plausible explanations for this increase. Their analysis clearly shows the effects of new laws on animal trade in both the EU and Mexico. These regulations triggered the most dramatic geographical shifts observed, which correspond to birds; a trade from Africa (mostly Senegal) to Europe vanished; and important trade from Uruguay to Mexico emerged.

Aiora Zabala

Published online: 14 June 2018
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-018-0088-y>