

INTERCEPT

Monitoring the trade of exotic animals, wild meat and the pathogens they carry

DURATION

1/9/2022 – 1/12/2024

BUDGET

323 787 €

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Animals and animal products are imported on a daily basis into Belgium, some legally, some illegally. In Belgium, several government agencies at the federal level are competent to enforce laws aimed at preventing the illegal import of wildlife and exotic pets, banning the importation of undocumented meat (products) by passengers, avoiding the introduction of invasive alien species and the import of transmittable animal diseases. Each agency, however, currently works within its own framework and collects data tailored to its specific needs. A vital part of the action plan towards the fight against illegal import of exotic animals and wild meat, especially with the aim to reduce the risk of importing and spreading zoonotic pathogens, is to obtain a scientific evaluation of the situation of the exotic animal and wild meat trade based on a complete data collection.

In this project we are developing an operational and robust data collection workflow for the long-term monitoring of the import of exotic animals and wild meat into Belgium and of the associated health risks. Through literature reviews, close discussions with the relevant public authorities and institutions linked to public authorities, database construction and protocol trial runs, we aim:

- to increase the knowledge of the scale and diversity of the (illegal) trade in exotic animals and wild meat, and of its associated pathogens,
- to establish a centralized database of the incoming exotic animals and derived products imported into Belgium,
- to enable the sharing of this database among the different federal public services, agencies and other stakeholders,
- to establish optimized in-field protocols for data recording and biological sampling,
- to establish workflows for laboratory pathogen testing and species identification.

In this way, an efficient and durable work programme for monitoring the import of legal and illegal exotic animals and animal products will be established. Such a strategy will allow evaluating the impact of implemented measures concerning border controls and sensitization, and to obtain a data-driven, evidence-based assessment of the risk of emerging infectious diseases through this trade.

The project consists of nine work packages:

- WP 1: Exploring the current situation and future needs.
- WP 2: Coordination, project management and reporting.
- WP 3: Building a centralised database.
- WP 4: Establishing procedures for in-field data and sample collection.
- WP 5: Establishing and testing laboratory procedures for species identification.
- WP 6: Establishing and testing laboratory procedures for pathogen detection.
- WP 7: Finalising the entire workflow.
- WP 8: Data Management.
- WP 9: Valorisation, dissemination, exploitation of results.

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CONTACT INFORMATION

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