



THE ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE from Latin America to the United States consists of live animals as well as animal parts and products. Trafficking live animals is a booming business involving pet stores, collectors and individuals seeking species from around the world. To better understand this trade, Defenders of Wildlife analyzed data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Law Enforcement Management Information System on wildlife shipments containing live animals exported from Latin America and denied entry to the United States from 2005 to 2014. Of the 13,235 shipments exported from Latin America to the United States in that time period, 5.8 percent contained live animals or animals that died during shipment, a total of 54,886 individual animals.

Top 5 Trade Routes by Volume

Together the top five trade routes by volume were used for 31,981 individual animals or 58.2 percent of the total number of illegally traded live animals. Miami was the port of entry for three of the top five trade routes indicating that it may be a hub for the illegal trade in live animals.

Table 1. Top 5 Trade Routes by Volume

Rank	Country of Export	Port of Entry	Number of Live Animals
1	Mexico	Houston, TX	15,518
2	Peru	Atlanta, GA	7,826
3	Colombia	Miami, FL	4,206
4	Paraguay	Miami, FL	2,642
5	El Salvador	Miami, FL	1,789

Top 5 Countries of Export by Volume

The top five countries of export by volume exported 76.6 percent of all the live animals in illegal trade from Latin America to the United States.

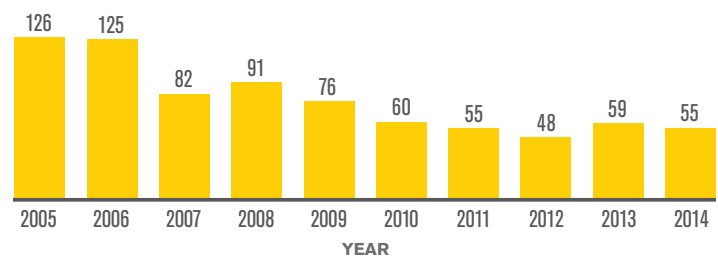
Table 2. Top 5 Countries of Export

Rank	Country of Export	Number of Live Animals	Percentage of Live Animals
1	Mexico	17,534	31.9%
2	Peru	10,238	18.6%
3	Colombia	7,952	14.4%
4	Costa Rica	3,906	7.1%
5	Paraguay	2,624	4.7%

Annual Trends

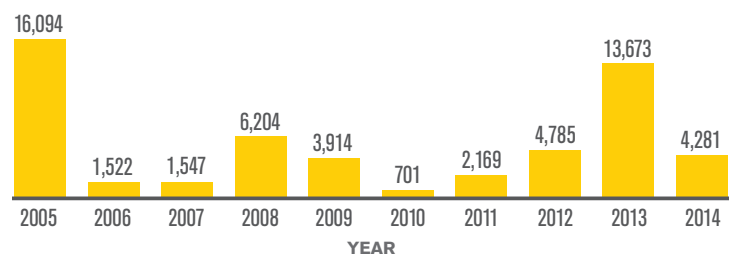
Live animal imports were denied entry every year from 2005 to 2014 (Figure 1). The number of shipments denied annually ranged from 48 to 126. The annual average was 77 shipments.

Figure 1. Number of Live Animal Shipments Denied Entry Annually 2005–2014



While the number of shipments containing live animals decreased between 2005 and 2014, the number of individual animals contained in denied shipments peaked in 2005 and again in 2013 (Figure 2). The number of individual animals denied entry ranged from a low of 701 to a high of 16,094.

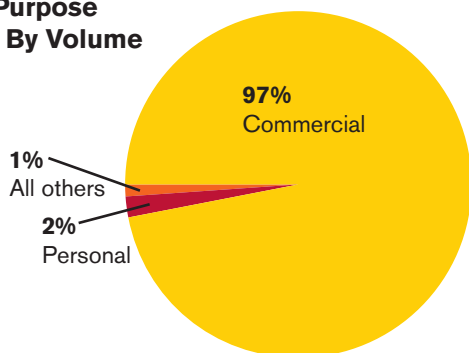
Figure 2. Volume of Live Animals Denied Entry Annually 2005–2014



Purpose of Import

The vast majority of the live animals were imported for commercial purposes (97 percent), although a small percentage (2 percent) were imported for personal purposes (Figure 3). A small number of animals were brought in for educational or scientific purposes. Even fewer animals brought in were destined for zoos and a single animal was intended for the circus.

Figure 3. Purpose of Import: By Volume



Top 5 Animals Exported

One hundred sixty nine different generic name categories (categories describing common groups of animals) were present in the data. Together, the top five generic name categories contained 26,869 individual animals, 48.9 percent of all individual animals exported from Latin America.

Table 3. Top 5 Generic Name Categories by Volume

Rank	Generic Name	Number of Individuals	Percentage of Live Animals
1	Slider turtles	15,238	27.7%
2	Butterflies	4,516	8.2%
3	Other turtles	3,153	5.7%
4	Iguanas	2,125	3.8%
5	Corals	1,837	3.3%

Sliders

The majority of shipments containing sliders, a group of turtles especially popular in the pet trade, were exported from Mexico (91.4 percent) and denied entry at the port of Nogales, Arizona (64.5 percent). Mexico to Nogales was also the most common trade route (64.5 percent). Almost all the sliders were imported for commercial purposes (98.6 percent). All but one of the individuals were identified as pond sliders (*Trachemys scripta*). No sliders died during transit. The majority of the sliders were sourced from captivity (98.8 percent). The number of sliders denied import annually fluctuated greatly from as low as two in 2012 to as many as 15,046 in 2005.

Butterflies

Shipments containing butterflies were most commonly exported from Costa Rica (30 percent) and El Salvador (20 percent) and denied entry at the port of Miami, Florida (80 percent). The most common trade routes were

from Costa Rica to Miami (20 percent) and El Salvador to Miami (20 percent). Almost all of the butterflies were imported for commercial purposes (90.9 percent). Of the 4,516 butterflies in the shipments, 71 died during transit (one in 63). The majority of the butterflies were sourced from captivity (98.4 percent). The number of butterflies denied import annually was extremely low or even non-existent in every year except 2012 during which 3,130 butterflies were denied import.

Other Turtles

The majority of shipments containing turtles other than sliders were exported from Mexico (72.8 percent) and denied entry at the port of El Paso, Texas (28.8 percent), which was also the most common trade route (28.8 percent). Almost one third of the turtles (32.2 percent) were mud turtles from the genus *Kinosternon*. No turtles died during transit. Almost all of the turtles were imported for commercial purposes (98.3 percent) and almost all were sourced from captivity (91.1 percent). The number of turtles denied import annually fluctuated from three individuals in 2006 to 1,014 in 2014.

Iguanas

Shipments containing iguanas were most commonly exported from Mexico (76.2 percent) and denied at the port of Nogales (38.9 percent), which was also the most common trade route (38.9 percent). Effectively all of the iguanas (99.1 percent) were identified as common iguanas (*Iguana iguana*). No iguanas died during shipment. Almost all of the iguanas (97.5 percent) were imported for commercial purposes and almost all (94.4 percent) were sourced from captivity. The number of iguanas denied import annually ranged from zero in 2013 to 2,073 in 2008.

Corals

Shipments containing coral were most commonly exported from Mexico (25 percent) and denied entry at the port of Los Angeles, California (33.3 percent), which was also the most common trade route (16.6 percent). Of the 1,837 corals in the shipments, 25 died during transit (one in 73). The majority of corals were imported for commercial purposes (96.6 percent) and the majority of corals were sourced from the wild (95.8 percent). The number of corals denied entry annually ranged between zero in 2006 and 2008 and 735 in 2011.

For more information please contact: Alejandra Goyenechea, agoyenechea@defenders.org

For a full report on combating wildlife trafficking from Latin America to the United States, more fact sheets and updates on the illegal wildlife trade, visit www.defenders.org/combating-wildlife-trafficking