

# The illegal animal trade online and across Europe as an organised crime

A collage of various animals including a dog, a parrot, a cat, a ferret, a rabbit, a turtle, and a snail.

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# Scale and Nature of the Illegal Trades

## 3 types of trade

Legal regulated

Legal unregulated

Illegal

## Puppy Trade

1. Large-scale rural breeding establishments & international commercial breeders
2. Increased consumer demand and desire for young fashionable dogs
3. Growth in sales from online, largely unregulated, advertisements
4. High profits and low risks for illegal breeders/suppliers

(Wyatt et al 2017)

- 68 million dogs in the EU (Fediaf 2020)
- 8 million puppies required annually in the EU trade, worth €1 billion (Diamantopoulou 2019)
- 46,000 dogs traded monthly, 20,779 TRACES registered dogs (IBF Inter. Cons et al. 2015)
- 87% puppies purchased via online advertisements (RSPCA 2019)
- £130 million annual UK online trade (Maher and Wyatt 2019)



# Scale and Nature of the Illegal Trades

## 3 conditions for the illegal trade to occur

Vulnerable Victim

Motivated Offender

Absence of a Capable Guardian

## Wildlife Trade

1. Increased consumer demand for wildlife products and keeping exotic animals as pets
  2. Internet has replaced traditional markets in the EU for purchasing wildlife (Sollund 2019)
  3. IWT attracts highly specialised organised crime groups (Europol 2013)
  4. High profits and low risks (Maher and Sollund 2016)
- EU major point of transit and demand (Maher and Sollund 2016)
  - 12,486 seizures recorded 2007-2011 (Traffic 2013)
  - Multibillion-dollar illegal trade valued between \$73 and \$216 billion (World Bank 2019)
  - Estimated to be 25% of legal trade:  
“if there is an assumed legal wildlife trade of €86 billion, the illegal trade would be roughly estimated to be €21.5 billion worldwide from which €9.5 billion relates to the EU (van Uhm 2016:91)

# Online and Organised Crime

- Recognised links between organised crime and the pet trades since 2015.
- Organised crime dimensions: transnational trade, overlapping legitimate and illegitimate trade, diverse and multiple players, flexible and complex modus operandi, fraud and tax evasion.
- Internet marketplace:
  - is 'accessible', 'convenient', and 'trusted'
  - scale and variety confuses consumers
  - links global markets to rural suppliers
  - distances consumer from origin, providing opportunities for criminality



(Maher and Wyatt (2021))

# Direct, indirect and wide- reaching impact

- Animal welfare
- Serious & organised crime
- Tax evasion & fraud
- National instability
- Destabilised trade (unfair competition)
- Public health
- Biodiversity loss
- Invasive species
- Economic loss
- Consumer rights

## Top 10 breeds for rising prices

A - Cocker Spaniel

B - Jack Russell

C - Cockapoo

D - Border Collie

E - Cavalier King Charles Spaniel

F - Cavapoo

G - Labrador Retriever

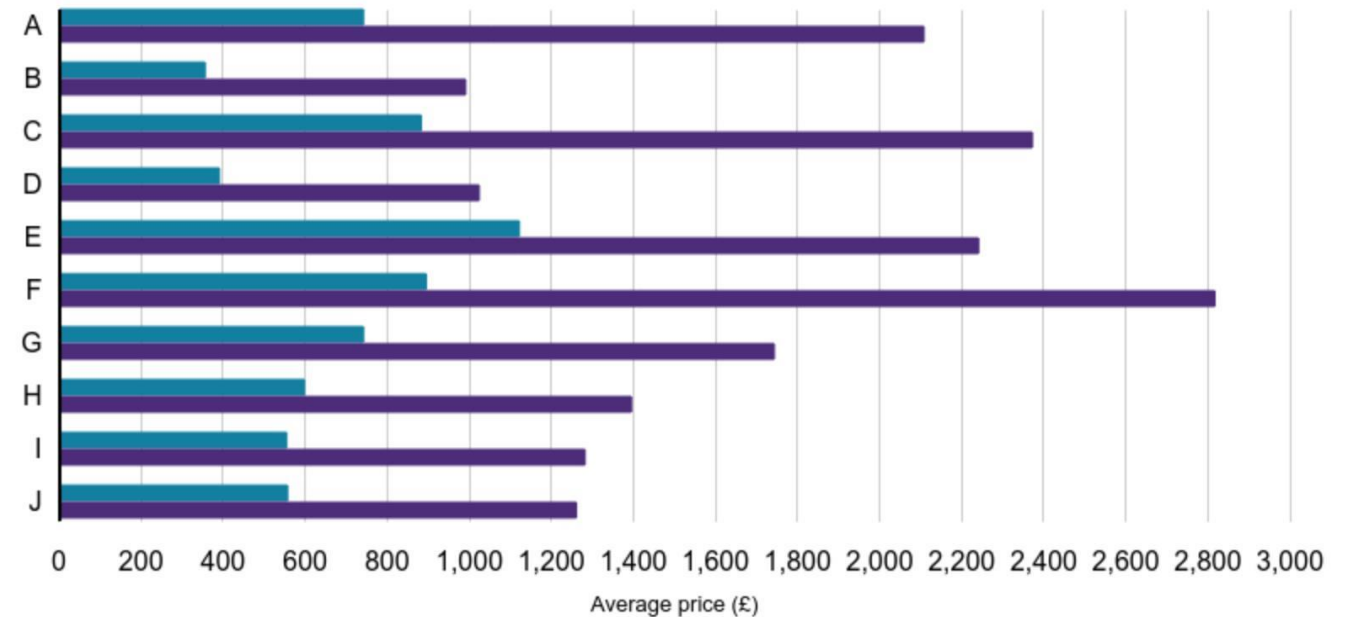
H - English Springer Spaniel

I - Yorkshire Terrier

J - Shih Tzu

■ 2019 average price

■ 2020 average price



Source: Pets4Homes Cited in BBC (2020)



# Conclusion

- The EU trade in animals is a *buoyant, lucrative, but harmful* market.
- The Internet enables the *rural to urban* flow of animals, facilitating *transnational crime* from *remote and economically poor* spaces to *populated* cities and *lucrative markets*.
- Consumers believe there is a level of *protection* and *regulation* of online trade, that *does not currently exist*.
- Failure to *regulate* and *enforce* Internet advertising has permitted traders to *act without restraint*, exposing consumers to *illegal breeders* and *organised crime* and encouraging them to *engage irresponsibly* with the trade.
- Crime Prevention 101 – establish a *capable guardian* & reduce victim *vulnerability* via the *Digital Services Act*.



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