



African countries, and the United States (UNODC, 2020). The amount and type of trafficked wildlife varies across countries. For reptiles, Asia and the United States are the top destinations, while South America and Africa are the top sources for illegal animals (UNODC, 2020). Figure 1 displays a world map with the top import and export countries of reptiles.

Figure 1. Top Import and Export Countries of Reptiles

Source: UNODC

The largest exporters of big cats (e.g., tigers, lions) are Thailand, India, and South Africa. The largest importers of these animals are China, Thailand, and the United States (UNODC, 2020). For Pangolin scales, the largest exporters are African countries, and the largest importers are Asian countries (UNODC, 2020). Although this data shows that different countries vary widely in their prevalence of trafficking illegal exotic animals, Asia, Africa, and the United States are identified as the largest importers and exporters.

### Reptiles

Reptiles are commonly traded as exotic pets. Some trading of reptiles is legal, but many reptiles are trafficked. Trafficked reptiles include reptiles that are wild-caught and then sold and reptiles that are sold in areas where they are banned. Some of the most trafficked reptiles are turtles and tortoises, snakes, lizards, and crocodylians (UNODC, 2020). As

shown in Table 1, turtles and tortoises represent the largest proportion of the 10 most trafficked reptiles. However, these 10 most commonly trafficked reptiles account for only about 33% of all reptiles seized and known to authorities (UNODC, 2020).

Table 1: Top Ten Reptiles Seized

Animal	Percent Among Top 10 Trafficked Reptiles
Yellow -spotted river turtle	29.1%
Indian star tortoise	21.3%
Asian box turtle	11.2%
Russian tortoise	8.9%
Radiated tortoise	8.2%
Black spotted turtle	7.0%
Greek tortoise	6.1%
Pig-nosed turtle	3.0%
False map turtle	2.9%
Mali uromastyx	2.3%





(UNODC, 2019). Wildlife traffickers can also make a large amount of money which can affect the local economy by taking resources away from local communities (ICE, 2023).

### Data Sources and Limitations

Data for this Research in Brief were taken from a variety of sources, but the major sources used were United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), National Humane Education Society (NHES), Big Cat Rescue, and the Department of Justice (DOJ). All these data sources have several limitations. First, wildlife trafficking is only tracked by animals that are seized, seriously undercounting the number of animals trafficked that are known to these authorities. Second, there is no comprehensive data on the true fiscal aspects of the industry and the number of animals seized for each year. Without this data, it is difficult to make statements about the growth or decline of wildlife trafficking over time. Third, since the exotic animal trade is international, not all countries report their data for illegal animal trafficking. As a consequence, it is difficult to get accurate data from many countries and compare it to data from other countries.

### References

Big Cat Rescue. (2023). State Laws: Keeping Exotic Cats and Cubs as Pets. State Laws Exotic Cats. <https://bigcatrescue.org/state-laws-exotic-cats/>

Department of Justice (DOJ). (2022). Prosecution of federal wildlife crimes. Environment and Natural Resources Division. <https://www.justice.gov/enrd/prosecution-federal-wildlife-crimes>

FindLaw. (2023). Exotic animal laws by State. Findlaw. <https://www.findlaw.com/injury/torts-and-personal-injuries/exotic-animal-laws-by-state.html>

National Humane Education Society (NHES). (2016). Exotic pet trade - National Humane Education Society. National Humane Education Society. <https://www.nhes.org/exotic-pet-trade/>

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2019). Wildlife, Forest & Fisheries Crime Module 1 key issues: I (i)-0.(s)(at)3.5 (0 Td [(pe)-5.97 Td [0