

THE INTERNATIONAL CACTI TRADE: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE WORLDWIDE WEB

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The CITES convention aims to regulate the international trade in endangered fauna and flora species to ensure their sustainable use. CITES addresses this issue by monitoring international trade by a systems of import and export permits (Smith *et al.* 2011; Sajeve e Carimi, 2007).

The system of permits works for most international transactions but in recent times trade on the Web brought up a considerable increment and many commercial transactions regarding CITES specimens are not included in the monitoring.

This research aimed to investigate the Web trade of CITES Appendix I species. The Web survey was conducted between July and December 2010. As a case study www.ebay.com was used as the main source of data. From the eBay Website it was possible to obtain data on offers, prices, sales, and market flows. The total number of sales for each genus of Appendix I Cacti was recorded and the percentage of plants sold for each genus over the total sales was calculated. Both buyers' and sellers' countries of origin were recorded.

During the survey, a total of 668 plants and 699 packages of seeds were sold. Among the 17 genera included in Appendix I, three genera predominated the market: *Ariocarpus* (333 plants and 275 packages of seeds); *Astrophytum* (123 plants and 245 packages of seeds), *Turbinicarpus* (95 plants and 38 packages of seeds). All plants were artificially propagated except two pre-convention specimens of *Ariocarpus*, while no indication of the origin of seeds was reported. The highest number of exports was recorded among the European Union, Thailand and United States.

Not all the transactions were complying with CITES regulations. In fact, many sellers did not supply CITES permits and refused responsibility if the plants were confiscated at custom because of lack of CITES documents.

The present survey clearly indicates that the current trade on the Web plays a relevant role in CITES listed species, and it confirms the necessity to regulate the Web transactions to further implement the CITES Convention.

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