

Production timings could stem illegal wildlife laundering

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The legal trade in captive bred animals and artificially propagated plants is often used by criminals to launder illegally collected wildlife. In many cases this is an easy way to bypass wildlife trade regulations as it can be very difficult for both buyers and customs officers to tell whether an item is of wild-origin.

However, new research by Dr Dave Roberts in the School of Anthropology and Conservation at the University of Kent has shown that understanding the growth rates of species could help flag up when an item being sold could only have come from the wild, thus identifying it as illegal.

Using information from those involved in the cultivation of orchids, Dr Roberts, working alongside Dr Amy Hinsley, a former PhD student now at the Department of Zoology at the University of Oxford, calculated the minimum likely times for different slipper orchids to be artificially grown.

Using this data, they note that it should be possible for those monitoring [illegal wildlife trade](#) to spot when items are being offered for sale before they are likely to be legally available.

By way of example, the research cites a new slipper orchid, *Paphiopedilum nataschae*, which was first discovered in May 2015. Under regulations from the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) the first

artificially propagated plants should not have been available until July 2017. However, a flowering plant was found for sale on eBay in November 2016, almost nine months earlier than should be possible.

The researchers note that similar production time frames could also help flag up animals being traded earlier than should be possible, such as newly discovered poison arrow frogs and chameleons.

The hope is that the findings can be used to create a 'species watch list' so that [law enforcement agencies](#) and websites can spot when items are put up for sale.

The findings have been published in the journal *Biological Conservation*, entitled 'The Wild Origin Dilemma'.

More information: Amy Hinsley et al, The wild origin dilemma, *Biological Conservation* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.biocon.2017.11.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2017.11.011)

Provided by University of Kent

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