

Highlights from the Working Group on Wildlife in 2016

The OIE's Working Group on Wildlife (WGW) helps the OIE to fulfill its mandates where wild animals are concerned. This short paper presents some highlights from the work of the WGW in 2016. The aim is to strengthen the link between OIE activities on wildlife and the OIE National Focal Points on Wildlife.

The full meeting report will be available on the OIE website by March 2017.

Continued Importance of Wildlife and a Broad Scope of Environmental Concerns

At a recent meeting of the WGW, Dr Monique Eloit, Director General of the OIE, emphasized to WGW members the continued importance of wild animals in global policies, management and standards for animal health. Rapid environmental changes are major factors influencing animal health issues around the world, and nowhere more so than at the interface among wildlife, human and domestic animal health. She asked the WGW to include the full range of disease, environment and epidemiological risks at this interface in its work, to assist all of the OIE Commissions, and to **report directly to the World Assembly of Delegates at each annual meeting in May.**

Wildlife Diseases around the World

With the help of the OIE Information and Analysis Department and the on-line reporting tool *WAHIS-Wild*, the WGW monitors wild animal health and disease around the world. A small sample of the note-worthy disease occurrences brought to the attention of the WGW in 2016 is presented below:

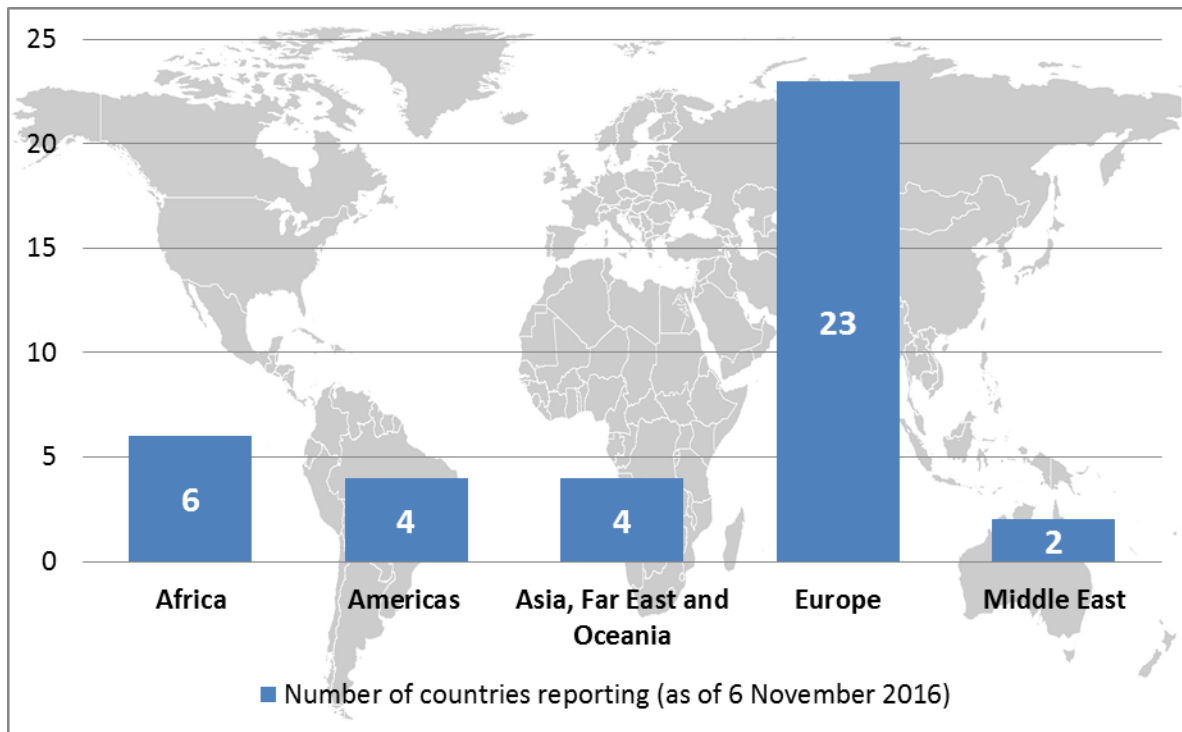
- *Chronic Wasting Disease in Norway*: Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a prion disease affecting members of the deer family (Cervidae) which was first identified in North America in the 1970s. It has spread slowly but relentlessly since then, and is beginning to have negative impacts on wild deer populations. In 2016, CWD was found unexpectedly in reindeer and in moose in Norway, 6500 km east of the nearest previously-known location. It is not known how CWD has occurred in Norway, but the disease now has been detected there in two species that are present from Norway all the way to far eastern Russia, placing all members of the deer family in Europe and Asia at risk.

- **Devastating Fungal Diseases:** Pathogenic fungi present a grave concern for wild animal health and biodiversity. A new Chytrid fungus (*Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans*), native to Asia, has produced very high mortality in wild salamanders in Western Europe and has been found in salamanders in international commerce.
- **Snake Fungal Disease:** it is a lethal skin infection of snakes of many species caused by the fungus *Ophidiomyces ophiodiicola*. It was discovered in North America in wild snakes and has been expanding its geographic range over the past decade. In 2016, diseased wild snakes were found in the United Kingdom, the first known occurrence of the disease outside of North America and 5,200 km east of the nearest previously-known location. White Nose Syndrome of insectivorous bats, caused by the fungus *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* and which has killed millions of bats and threatens several species with extinction in North America, was detected for the first time in 2016 on the west coast of North America, over 2000 km from the nearest previously-known location.
- **Rabies:** While dog rabies is the greatest rabies threat to human and domestic animal health, rabies viruses and other closely-related Lyssaviruses occur and persist in populations of many different wild animal species. For the current effort toward global eradication of dog rabies to be successful, it is essential that all occurrences of rabies or rabies-like viruses in wild animals everywhere in the world be documented and reported. The WGW learned that, in 2016, a single rabid jackal (*Canis aureus*) in Asia had bitten and potentially infected 36 people. Dog rabies occurs in many populations of wild members of the dog family (Canidae), but also in many other species, such as insectivorous bats and ferret badgers (Mustelidae – the weasel family) and civets (Viverridae – family of civets and genets).

Reporting of Diseases in Wild Animals by OIE Member Country Delegates

The voluntary reporting by Delegates to the OIE of diseases in wild animals is extremely important to the worldwide management of animal health. As of 2016, OIE-Listed diseases that occur in wild animals are reported through the regular mandatory reporting carried out through the WAHIS on-line reporting system by the Delegate, assisted by the national Focal Point for Animal Disease Notification. However, many diseases occur in wild animals that are important to biodiversity conservation, human health and domestic animal health but do not meet the criteria for inclusion on the OIE List. Delegates are asked by the OIE voluntarily to report at the

end of each year on the occurrence of some of these diseases, using the special on-line reporting tool *WAHIS-Wild*. The Focal Points for Wildlife assemble the information needed for the Delegates to make these annual voluntary reports. The graph below shows the reporting of non-listed diseases in wildlife through *WAHIS-Wild* by the 180 Permanent OIE Delegates for the year 2015.



As the graph shows, only 39 Delegates (22%) submitted reports on non-Listed wildlife diseases through *WAHIS-Wild* for 2015. If OIE Member Countries are to be adequately informed about pathogens and diseases of importance in wild animals, some of which may one day meet the criteria for Listing by the OIE, a much larger proportion of Delegates and their Focal Points for Wildlife will have to gather together information about wild animal diseases in their countries and report to the OIE annually through *WAHIS-Wild*.

CITES and the Nagoya Protocol: challenges for disease diagnosis

The WGW gathered information and discussed at length the problems for timely disease diagnosis posed by regulations on the international shipment of specimens from wild animals associated with CITES¹ regulations, aimed at conservation of endangered species, and with the Nagoya Protocol, which aims to safeguard the economic interests of a country when life-forms from that country are exploited commercially elsewhere. Both sets of regulations can impose delays in the timely shipment of diagnostic specimens from wild animals to laboratories outside the country of origin. The WGW noted positive efforts by the OIE to find workable solutions with CITES and the Nagoya Protocol to facilitate timely disease diagnosis while maintaining the global benefits of these regulations.

¹ Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora