

The scale of exotic (wild) meat import into Belgium: Findings from the INTERCEPT project

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Workshop on the illegal importation of wild meat

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INTERCEPT

Monitoring the trade in exotic animals, wild meat and the pathogens they carry



Belgian Science Policy Office co-funded project



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With the help of many others!

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Be Federal Agency for the Safety of the Food Chain

Project Aim

Monitor the import of exotic animals and wild meat into Belgium and the associated pathogens.

Why?

Conservation

Hunting for wild meat and trade in exotic animals poses grave threat to endangered species, especially in tropics

Public Health

Risk of importation of pathogens hosted by animals and animal products

Focus of project

Belgium and entry point Brussels Airport

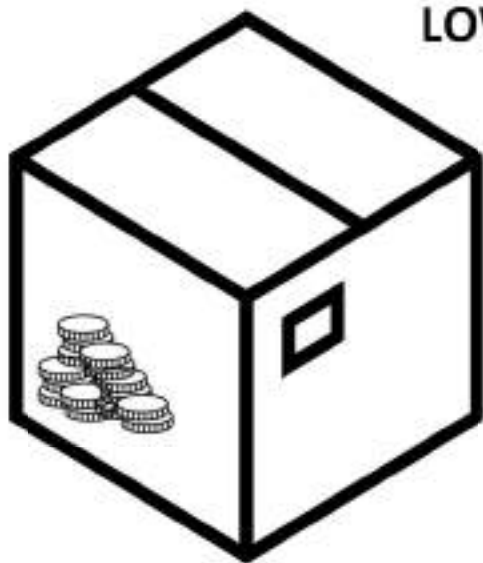
Objectives

- Chart current situation in Belgium:
 - Mapping legal and illegal import pathways into Belgium
 - Frequency and modus operandi of controls
 - Identify which data is stored where
- Compile dataset
 - Prototype centralised database
 - Sampling confiscated meat
 - DNA-based animal species identification
 - Sampling and species ID pipelines
 - Microbial diversity

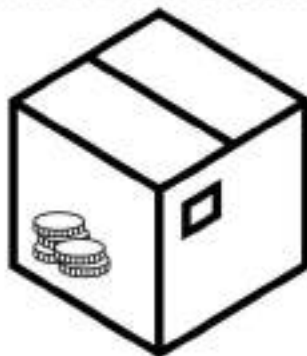
Import pathways

How are meat, animal products, live animals,... coming into Belgium from third countries?

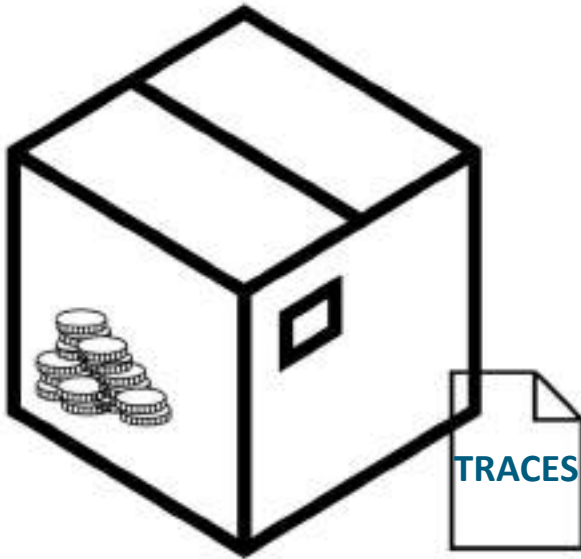
**COMMERCIAL
SHIPMENTS**



**LOW VALUE CONSIGNMENTS
(E-COMMERCE,
PRIVATE PACKAGES)**



Commercial shipments of live animals and animal products



- Legal (unless fraud)
- EU regulated
 - documentary checks
 - physical checks
 - laboratory pathogen tests
 - ~ product type

- TRACES
 - EC online platform for sanitary certification
 - CHED (Common Health Entry Document)

taxon information not always very detailed...

difficult to assess smuggling of wild meat with current checks





Commercial shipments of meat 01/2020-21/11/2024

Imported into Belgium

Product types:

‘Domestic’

‘Meat products’

(excl. Extracts and juices of meat ‘160300’)

(excl. Sauces and mixed condiments only ‘21039090’)

‘Meat preparations’

‘Fresh meat (not Meat minced, not Meat preparations)’

‘Wild game’

‘Small wild game birds’

‘Farmed game’

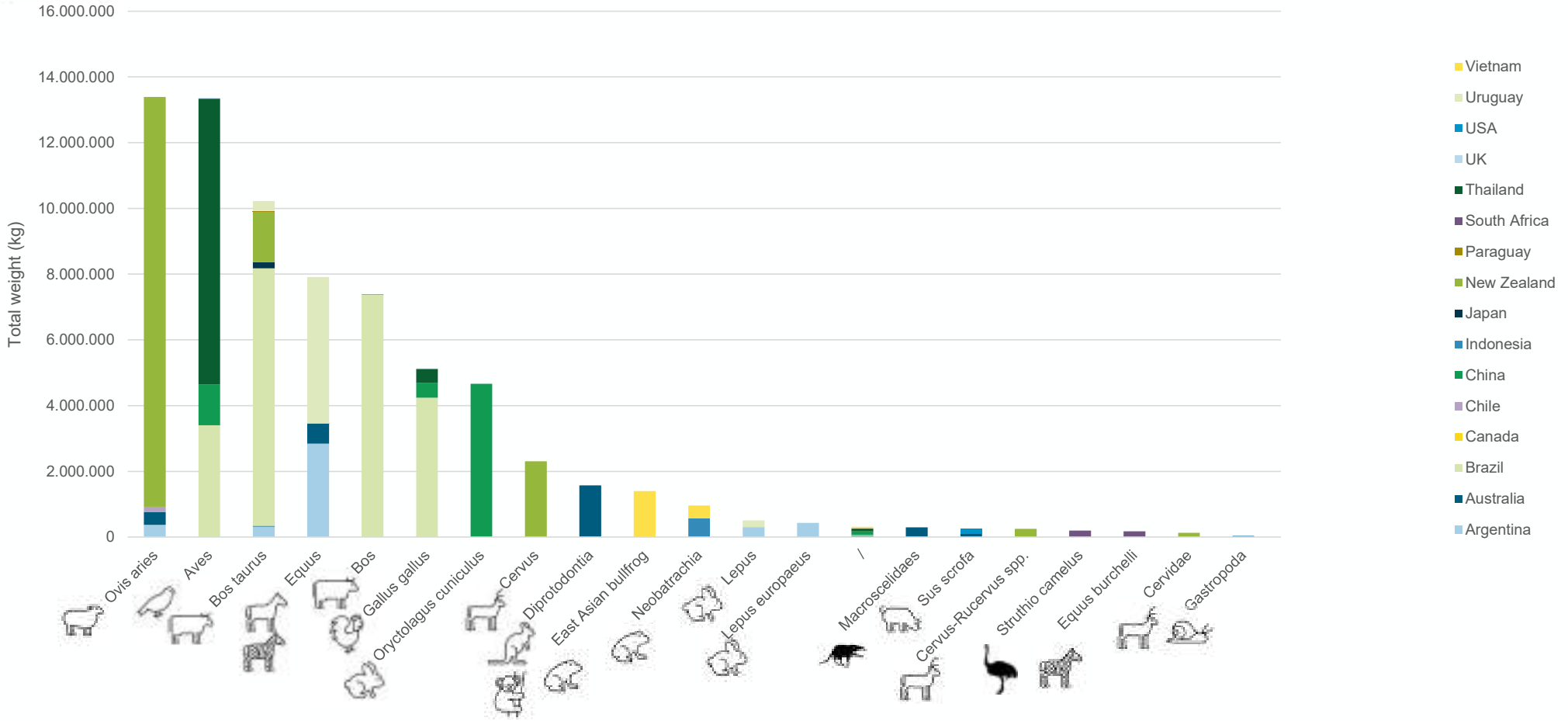
‘/’

For human consumption

	2020 (kg)	2021 (kg)	2022 (kg)	2023 (kg)	2024 (kg)	Total weight (kg)
Brazil	3,347,602	3,240,848	6,527,438	6,343,698	3,417,956	22,877,542
New Zealand	820,286	2,807,910	3,660,392	4,982,998	4,434,612	16,706,198
Thailand	1,296,170	1,313,618	1,988,976	2,896,513	1,696,105	9,191,381
China	1,346,749	1,129,511	1,275,694	1,487,345	1,246,092	6,485,392
Uruguay	867,864	738,676	1,445,980	1,347,564	551,733	4,951,817
Argentina	690,112	720,472	1,020,157	740,271	1,097,755	4,268,767
Australia	674,438	499,654	651,078	529,737	677,605	3,032,511
Vietnam	227,495	198,765	438,879	435,528	523,806	1,824,473
Indonesia	123,297	27,763	159,326	136,981	162,717	610,085
South Africa	63,041	52,407	82,913	68,984	105,605	372,950
Japan	28,495	81,640	7,205	689	73,314	191,344
Chile	98,188	12,513	59,513			170,214
USA	36,666	18,308			104,182	159,155
UK		44,667	5,810	5,215		55,692
Paraguay	11,329					11,329
Canada	11,083					11,083
	9,642,816	10,886,752	17,323,362	18,975,523	14,091,481	70,919,934

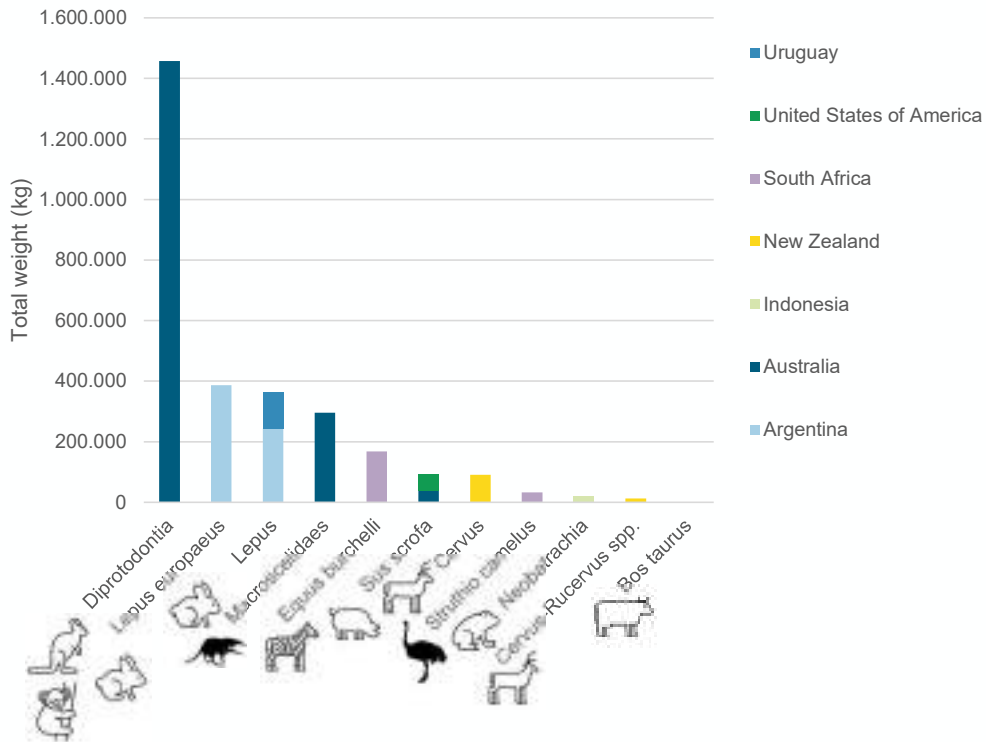


Commercial shipments of meat 01/2020-21/11/2024



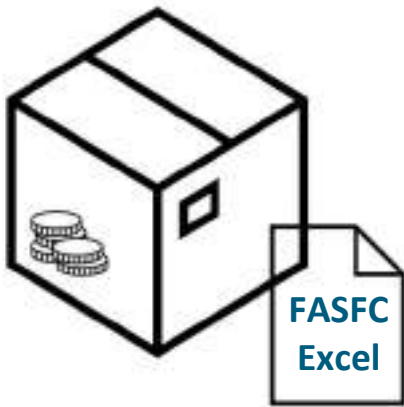


Commercial shipments of wild game meat 01/2020-21/11/2024



	2020 (kg)	2021 (kg)	2022 (kg)	2023 (kg)	2024 (kg)	Total weight (kg)
Australia	333,350	264,168	423,028	332,524	437,712	1,790,783
Argentina	23,628	170,661	176,961	155,366	104,230	630,845
South Africa	15,066	15,983	44,345	68,984	55,954	200,331
Uruguay	75,066	19,468	24,794			119,328
New Zealand	9,126	9,790	67,516	12,088	4,050	102,570
United States of America	36,666	18,308				54,973
Indonesia	18,575					18,575
	511,475	498,378	736,644	568,963	601,946	2,917,406

Low value consignments



- Legal (unless fraud)
- Less regulated
- Difficult to assess what proportion of consignments is checked
- Difficult to assess how much wild meat is smuggled

Personal luggage



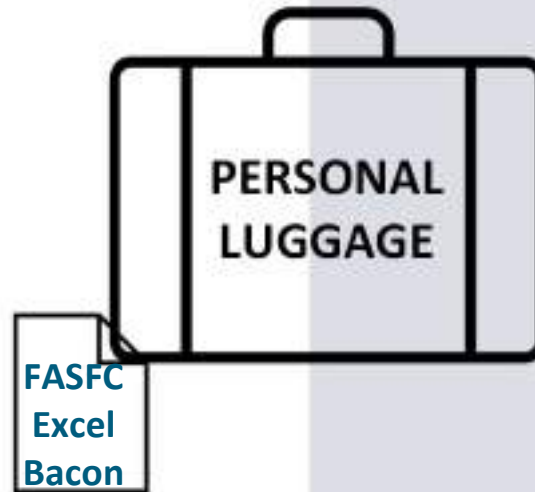
- Pets legal to import, provided veterinary and ID documentation
- Limited amounts of some animal products (e.g. fish, honey, snails, insects,...) legal to import without documentation
- Most animal products incl. meat illegal to import
- Clear that meat incl. wild meat is smuggled into Belgium
- Brussels airport
 - routine controls
 - BaCon actions
 - luggage destruction actions



Personal luggage

BaCon actions

by Customs and FAFSC
(but also FAMHP, FPS Health
CITES and Cosmetics)





Personal luggage BaCon actions

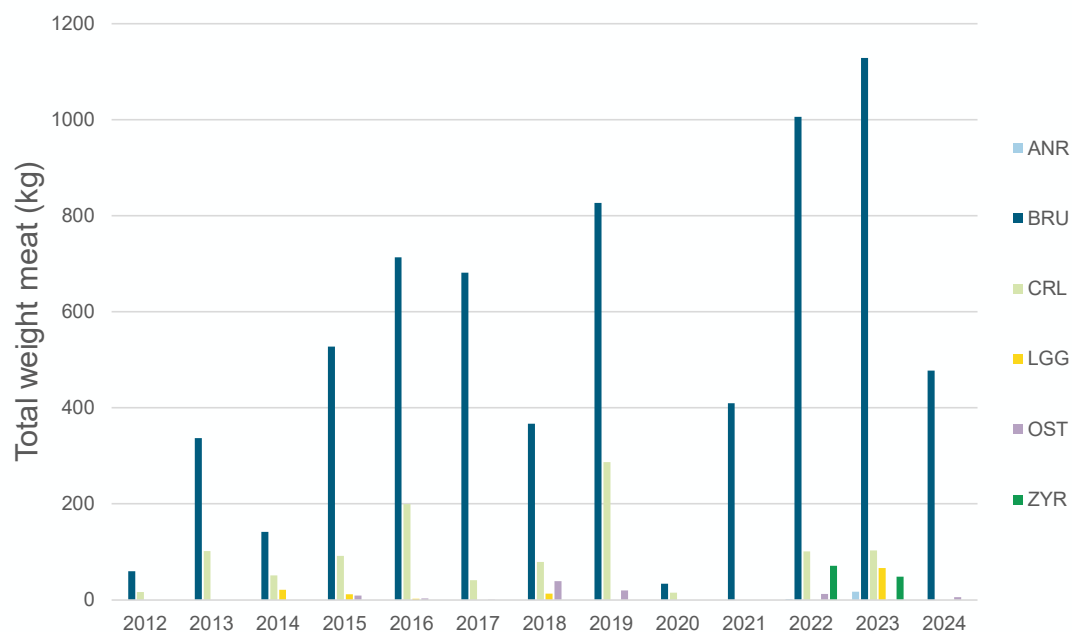
Contrôles des voyageurs :

Nombre d'actions BaCon	56
Nombre de passagers en infraction	942
Quantité de produits d'origine animale et non animale saisis (viande, produits laitiers, légumes, fruits...)	7.564 kg, 7,5 l et 124 pièces
Produits cosmétiques saisis	2,2 kg et 543 pièces
Médicaments saisis	0,4 kg et 440 pièces
Nombre d'animaux contrôlés	54
Suspensions CITES	chez 9 passagers

(FASFC year report 2023)

Controles bij reizigers:

Aantal BaCon-acties	56
Aantal passagiers met inbreuk	942
In beslag genomen hoeveelheid producten van dierlijke en niet dierlijke oorsprong (vlees, zuivel, groenten, fruit...)	7.564 kg, 7,5 l en 124 stuks
In beslag genomen cosmetica	2,2 kg en 543 stuks
In beslag genomen geneesmiddelen	0,4 kg en 440 stuks
Aantal gecontroleerde dieren	54
Vermoeden CITES	bij 9 passagiers



Personal luggage

BaCon actions

by Customs and FAFSC
(but also FAMHP, FPS Health
CITES and Cosmetics)



Luggage destruction actions

by Saniport and BAC Waste
Management



Personal luggage

BaCon actions



Luggage destruction actions



Sampling of confiscated meat
to get a better overview



Sampling of confiscated meat in personal luggage

All terrestrial vertebrate meat targeted

- no fish
- ~ 1 specimen per package
- no discrimination of suspected domestic vs wild meat

26 BaCon actions

7 Luggage destruction actions

625 specimens sampled

long-term storage in RBINS and RMCA biobanks

Sampling protocol for non-researchers



Adding species identifications

625 specimens sampled

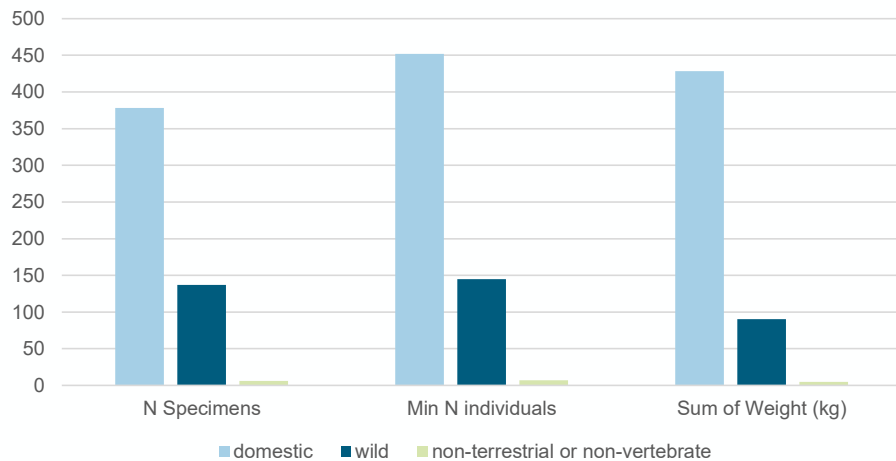
Ongoing DNA-based identifications

514 specimens identified at least up to genus level

6 non terrestrial/non-vertebrate (non-target)

about 17-26% wild meat

Domestic vs wild meat



Adding species identifications

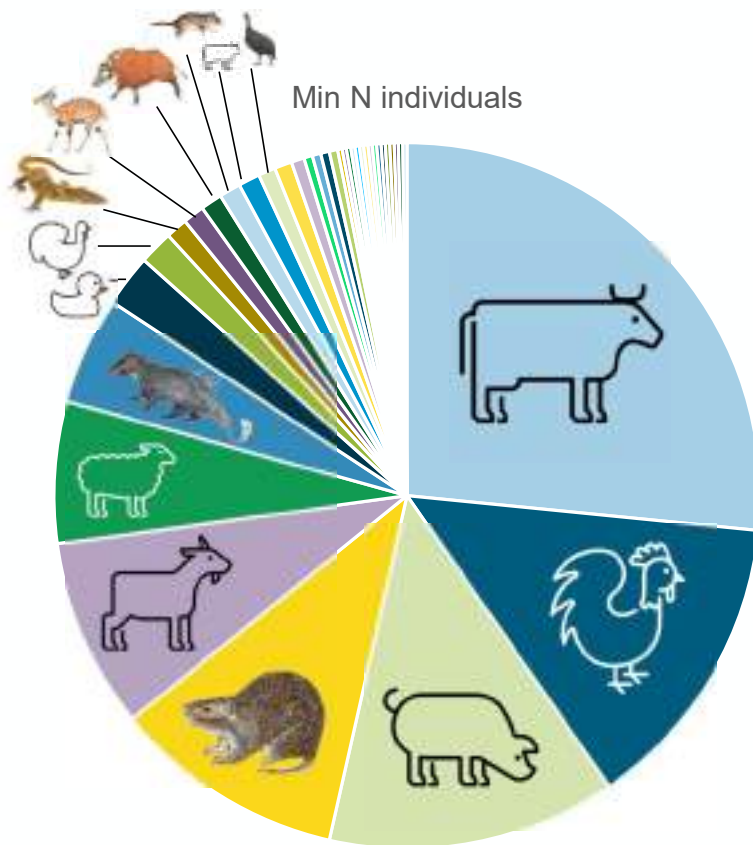
The screenshot shows a web application interface for 'Specimen and shipment view'. The left sidebar contains a navigation menu with items: Home, Specimen and shipment view (selected), Control Action, Planned Flights to check, Passenger, Passenger records, Flights, Specimen View and Edit, Cities Airports, Country, Sample, Biomolecule, PCR, PCR Purified Sample, and Lab Species Confirmation. The main content area has a search bar with the text 'Only BaCon and LLD' and a dropdown menu. Below the search bar are three filter cards: 'Saved Report = "Only BaCon and LLD"', 'Reporting Agency like "RBNS"', and 'Species is not null'. The main area displays a table with the following columns: Passenger Quantity (Officials), Action, Flight of Export, Country of Export, City of Export, Alternative Passenger Code, Profile/ Specifications, Post Description, Compliance/ Not Compliant, Non Compliance Reason, Suspected Terminals (Officals), IWB Domestic (Officals), Suspected City (Officals), and Reporting Agency. The table contains two rows of data:

Passenger Quantity (Official)	Action	Flight of Export	Country of Export	City of Export	Alternative Passenger Code	Profile/ Specifications	Post Description	Compliance/ Not Compliant	Non Compliance Reason	Suspected Terminals (Officals)	IWB Domestic (Officals)	Suspected City (Officals)	Reporting Agency
	202307ESRLLD	54569	Cameroun			root		not compliant	not allowed				RBNS/RMCA/
	202307ESRLLD					root		not compliant	not allowed				RBNS/RMCA/

At the bottom of the screen, there is a footer bar with icons for Home, App ID, Page ID, Screen ID, Debug, Quick Edit, Connection, and a refresh icon.

Adding species identifications

508 terrestrial vertebrate specimens identified
36 distinct animal species



11 CITES-protected species



The scale of exotic (wild) meat import into Belgium

Difficult to assess, especially of illegal imports

- Data is scattered across agencies, not always well-curated and not always digitised
- Species identification
 - regular checks missing for legal imports
 - not recorded (or even wild vs. domestic) for illegal imports (unless CITES suspicion)
 - with training 2 most common wild species in passenger luggage are identifiable based on skin morphology
- Sampling effort during controls on illegal imports not recorded/known (e.g. proportion/number of consignments/luggages checked)

Thank you!