



THE SLOTH INSTITUTE

SAVE A SLOTH. SAVE A TREE. SAVE A FOREST.

PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NOVEMBER 22, 2025



ANALYSIS OF U.S. FEDERAL WILDLIFE DATA REVEALS SURGE IN IMPORTS OF WILD-CAUGHT SLOTHS INTO THE UNITED STATES

The Sloth Institute has analyzed a decade of federal LEMIS (Law Enforcement Management Information System) data on the importation of sloths from 2011–2021. Records show that more than one thousand wild-caught sloths entered the United States during this period. These findings—obtained through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)—highlight a rapidly expanding and poorly regulated wildlife trade that poses serious risks to animal welfare and conservation.

Concerns regarding the international sloth trade are intensified by the limited scientific understanding of wild sloth populations. Comprehensive population censuses and genetic analyses across range countries are largely lacking.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE LEMIS DATA (2011–2021)

- 97% of all live sloth imports originated from Guyana.
- 1,141 of the 1,146 live sloths imported were wild-caught; only five were recorded as captive-bred.
- Live sloth imports more than doubled over the decade, peaking in 2020.
- 417 shipments—over 98%—entered through a single port: Miami, Florida.
- The most commonly imported species was the Linnaeus' two-fingered sloth (*Choloepus didactylus*).

These data reveal a concentrated and rapidly expanding trade pipeline that overwhelmingly depends on the removal of sloths from the wild. Many Americans are unaware that sloths seen on social media, in roadside zoos, or in private collections often originate from live capture. This trade threatens fragile and understudied wild populations and imposes enormous stress on animals with specialized ecological needs. *New data obtained by Brazil show that this trade pace has continued into 2023.

The analysis further shows that nearly all live sloth imports are for commercial purposes. Meanwhile, inspection records from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) demonstrate no correlation between periods of high importation and population increases within regulated facilities. This discrepancy suggests low survival rates among imported sloths and rising demand in the unregulated private exotic-pet market, where documentation is minimal or nonexistent.

Additionally, The Sloth Institute warns that sloths are frequently misidentified in federal records. A comparison of USDA inspection reports with sloth photos on facility websites revealed widespread inaccuracies:

OUT OF 233 USDA-REPORTING FACILITIES REVIEWED BY TSI SLOTH EXPERTS IN 2022:

- 45 facilities displayed species that did not match USDA records.
- 138 facilities had photos consistent with the species identified by USDA inspectors.
- 50 facilities had no identifiable sloth photos on their websites.
- Overall, at least 19% of sloths were misidentified by USDA inspectors.

Routine species-level errors undermine proper welfare-standard enforcement and compromise conservation planning.

Currently, *Bradypus variegatus* and *Bradypus pygmaeus* are the only sloth species listed in the CITES Appendices. The Sloth Institute therefore urges that both species of two-fingered sloths (*Choloepus hoffmanni* and *Choloepus didactylus*), be added to CITES Appendix II to ensure proper documentation and monitoring of their international trade.



ABOUT THE SLOTH INSTITUTE

The Sloth Institute is a licensed non-profit organization based in Manuel Antonio, Costa Rica, dedicated to enhancing the welfare and conservation of sloths through rescue, rehabilitation, and release, as well as research, education, and reforestation initiatives.



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SUPPLEMENTARY INFO

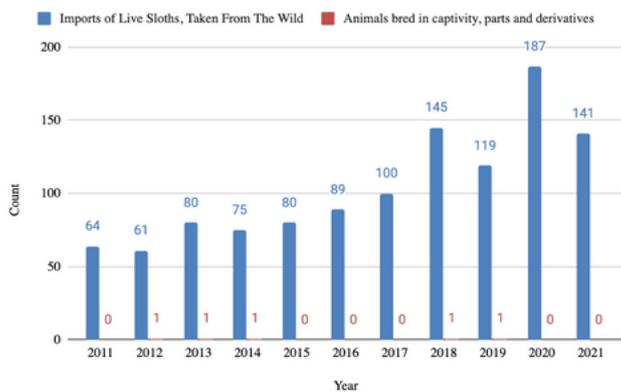


CHOLOEPUS DIDACTYLUS AND CHOLOEPUS HOFFMANNI HAVE A VERY SIMILAR APPEARANCE TO THE UNTRAINED EYE:

Their body shape, size, hair color, and general morphology are either the same or highly identical (didactylus on the left; hoffmanni on the right)



Imports of Live Sloths, Taken From The Wild



Sloth count per year by type

