

illegal animal trade



drink beer. Later, a pig was disembowelled in the bath, and its head stuck on a mirror.

chimpanzee, banned from international sale and worth several thousand pounds, to a prospective Polish buyer.

There is no concrete evidence that illegal shipments of animals from the former Soviet Union

are reaching Britain. But Dr Alexander Sorokin, chief ornithologist at Moscow's All-Russian Research Institute of Nature Conservation and Reserves, has warned that several dealers claim they are

smuggling rare falcons from St Petersburg via Heathrow to the United Arab Emirates.

Trade in falcons is strictly limited by the UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites).

Within the EC, only captive-bred birds with permits for non-commercial use may be sold.

Traffic International, a Cambridge-based wildlife investigation agency, is to help the Russian authorities infiltrate and monitor the illegal wildlife trade. Its assistant director, Steven Broad, said: 'We've no idea of the total scale of the trade, but Russian wildlife is certainly suffering dramatically. There is a free-for-all on exports at the moment as Russians start up opportunistic wildlife smuggling to bring in hard currency, while any vestiges of trade management that there were before have disappeared.'

The RSPCA is also launching a campaign to highlight the cruel treatment of animals by the major dealers, around 20 of whom operate from Moscow. Apart from the high death rates in transit, many dealers also treat individual animals with appalling cruelty.

Alec Pavlov, one of Moscow's leading animal traders, and his henchmen were filmed by the Polish investigators forcing monkeys to drink beer in Pavlov's flat, while a pig was disembowelled in a bath and its head stuck on top of a mirror. He also keeps a three-month leopard in cage 18in high. He plans to sell the cub for £1,300.

Donations can be made to the campaign by sending cheques, payable to the RSPCA, to Department 93N3, Freepost, Bristol BS3 3YY.