# Illegal Trafficking of Succulent Plants Disguised as Toys and Mushrooms Uncovered in South Africa



In April 2022, South African officials at Cape Town International Airport discovered 23,000 endangered succulent plants labeled as "toys" bound for China during a spot check. These plants, primarily the conophytum species, were carefully wrapped in toilet paper. About a year later, authorities intercepted another shipment labeled as mushrooms, revealing 12,000 succulents concealed in onion bags.

This trend follows a larger pattern of wildlife trafficking via postal and courier services, fueled by rising demand for ornamental plants in East Asia. Since 2019, over one million illegally harvested succulents have been seized in southern Africa. This illicit trade threatens the biodiversity of regions like the Succulent Karoo, home to over 6,000 unique succulent species.

Customs agents have also encountered other innovative smuggling methods, such as painting ivory tusks black to resemble horns. These detection efforts are bolstered by international cooperation and advanced technologies, but the evolving techniques of traffickers pose ongoing challenges.