



THE LOADSTAR

LongRead

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Chasing animals

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Carriers and airports are ramping up their game to draw in lucrative animal traffic

Airlines have animals in their sights. Even carriers that hitherto eschewed living cargo on their aircraft are now rolling out the welcome mat.

“Some airlines that in the past took none, have begun to accept animals. Two of them have recently done some charters with us,” reports Charlie McMullen, global sales & development manager at animal transportation specialist firm Intradco, a subsidiary of global charter broker Chapman Freeborn.

One of them, a global B747 operator, agreed in January to work with Intradco. By mid-February the animal specialist had booked four charters with the carrier.

Meanwhile airlines that have been in the game longer are burnishing their credentials. Cargolux is planning a significant investment at its Luxembourg hub in response to strong growth in animal traffic.

“The new facility will be quite unique. It will open up a lot of opportunities through Luxembourg,” says Christian Theis, global product manager for the airline’s CV alive service.

Cargolux last boosted its animal handling capabilities in the summer of 2015 with the addition of both fixed and collapsible stalls to its animal station at its home base, increasing the total number of available stalls to 50.



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you name it, we fly it!

In Frankfurt, Lufthansa is looking to expand its animal lounge, which is getting crowded, according to a spokesman.

Last year AirBridgeCargo raised its game with the creation of a dedicated department staffed with specialists.

Notwithstanding the overall surge in cargo over the past two years, airlines have been eager to perform charters or divert scheduled all-cargo flights to pick up animals.

"We increased our scheduled moves in recent years," McMullen says.

The higher yield that comes with animal movements is one powerful magnet for airlines.

"We pay a premium for our space," McMullen adds. He notes that some airlines are pushing the envelope by asking for IATA rates – US\$20 a kg. For a shipment of cattle, that would make a huge difference, he points out.

Set for growth

In addition to juicy rates, this segment offers growing volumes, albeit at a flatter trajectory than ecommerce or pharmaceuticals. According to the Animal Transportation Market Report 2018, this sector is projected to show a compound annual growth rate of 3.4% in the 2018-2022 period.

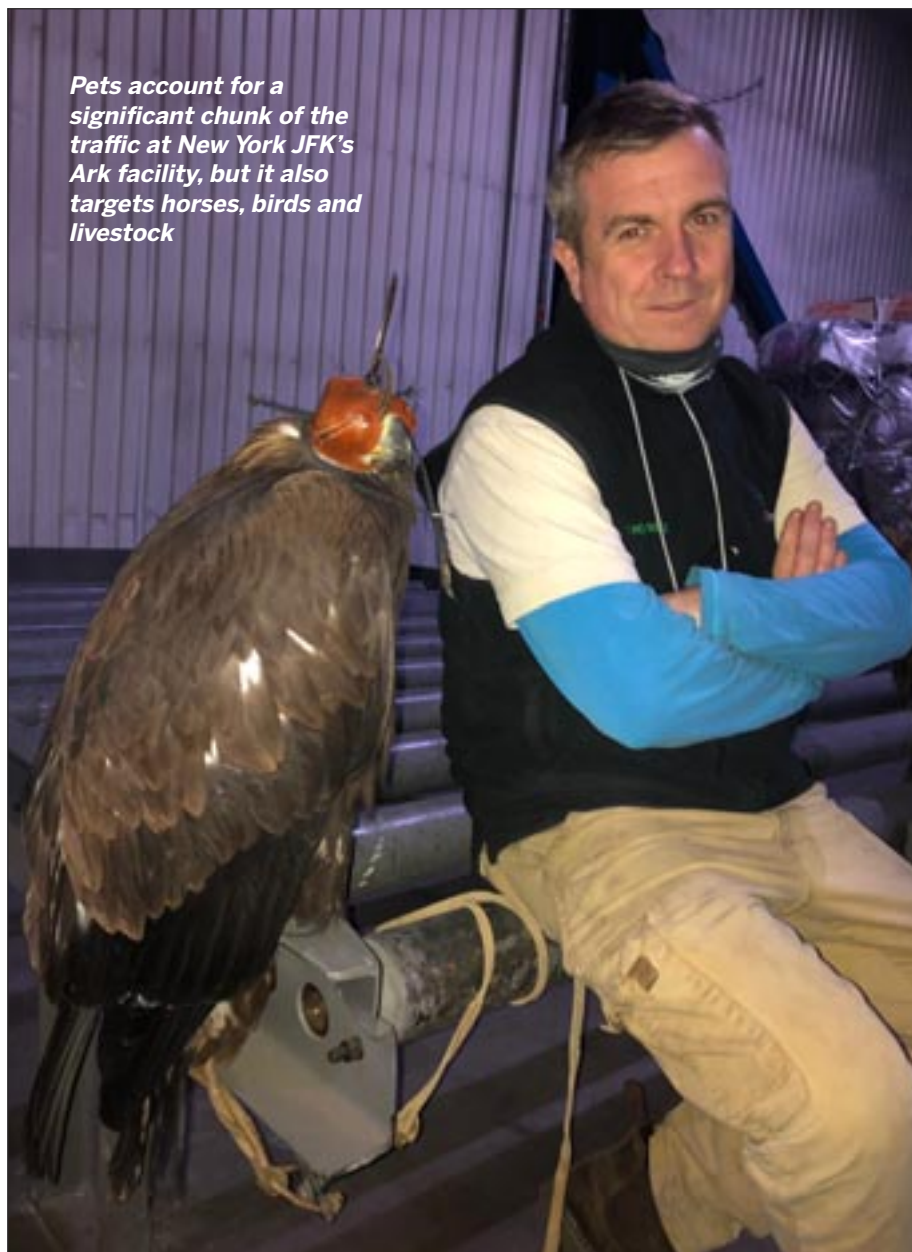
Airlines report that their animal traffic has increased in recent years.

"Over the last 18 months our live animal business has been very good," confirms Daniel Johnson, global products manager at IAG Cargo. Cargolux enjoyed 15.7% growth in this segment last year, Theis reports.

The freighter airline registered its biggest increase in horse traffic, which accounts for about half of its live animal numbers. This sector climbed from some 2,000 horses in 2017 to 2,600 last year. There were no significant changes in routes and destinations, just incremental growth in every lane, Theis says.

The livestock segment also showed double-digit growth in 2018. Cargolux has seen a steep increase in pigs flown from Canada to Europe, and shipments of sheep have become more regular.

According to McMullen, the rise of livestock is largely driven by the establishment of new farms in emerging markets, catering to the palates of consumers with rising income who clamour for meat. Moving larger numbers of animals is a faster way of populating these farms than



Pets account for a significant chunk of the traffic at New York JFK's Ark facility, but it also targets horses, birds and livestock

shipping sperm to impregnate female animals in these locations.

Contrary to popular belief, cattle and pigs readily and routinely move in bellyholds of passenger planes, although a lot of carriers decline livestock shipments. There are limitations on how many animals can be loaded. The heat generated by pigs is one factor. This limits the loading density of the animals on a freighter to 60 tons, whereas cattle offers a loading density of 90 tons, McMullen explains.

At an average weight of 30kg, as many as 2,300 young sheep can go on a single 747 freighter, he says.

Baby chicks also continue to be flown in large numbers, volumes also with an upward trajectory. IAG recorded strong growth of day-old chicks out of the UK last year, Johnson reports.

The traffic of exotic animals has shown less robust growth rates.

Overall, it has been relatively stable, except for some pockets of growth. IAG enjoyed an increase of about 20% year-on-year in the tropical fish segment. But when it comes to the transportation of exotics outside the commercial arena, chiefly for zoos or conservation purposes, there has been no dramatic change.

Whale of a journey

Still, the sheer magnitude of many of these undertakings turns heads, be it the movement of a rhino or a comodo dragon. They also take a lot of preparation.

Owing to the associated requirements – from vaccinations and medical checks to quarantines and certification issue – animal movements are rarely organised at the last moment, but some projects need extra time. Cargolux spent a long time preparing for the transport of two

beluga whales from China to Iceland this spring. The 6,000-mile journey from Changfeng Ocean World in Shanghai to the world's first open water sanctuary, off the Icelandic coast, itself took 24 hours, but the move was complex and required a lot of planning.

"One big issue was the amount of water inside the tank," explains Marc Roveri, the airline's expert in animal transportation solutions. To avoid excessive water movement and spillage during take-off and landing, it was decided to top up the water levels once the plane reached cruising mode and reduce them again before landing.

The whales themselves had to be trained over months for the move that involved special equipment and bespoke stretchers. For the transport they had to be placed in tanks that were six metres long and two metres wide. They were accompanied on their journey by two veterinarians and two trainers. Cargolux, which sponsored the flight of the whales to their new habitat, had to liaise with the organisers as well as animal welfare organisations to plan the project.

Pampering pets

Not surprisingly, for most passenger carriers pets have been the primary, in some cases the only, target of their endeavours to get animals into their bellyholds. It is a growing business, airlines confirm.

There is a good reason beyond the business itself for passenger carriers to draw pet traffic into their cargo holds. The people who readily spend money to have their pets with them on their travels are precisely the kind of passenger that airlines want to welcome on board, one carrier executive points out.

So airlines are lavishing attention on humans' mostly four-legged family members. Cats and dogs dominate, and are, in some cases, the only pets accepted for carriage.

Lufthansa upped its pet service last year with an offering that includes special food and enlarged space for the animals. If an animal on this package transits its Frankfurt hub, an employee snaps a photo of it inside the Animal Lounge to send to the owner. Staff of the carrier liken this to a business class upgrade.

IAG opened a new customer service contact centre with specially trained



Horse traffic accounts for about half of Cargolux's live animal numbers

staff to handle enquiries and bookings, while at its Heathrow hub it opened a 'meet-and-greet' facility. According to Johnson, this has more of a consumer feel to it than cargo generally does, as the product is B2C rather than B2B.

Last summer, Emirates launched a dedicated service with 24/7 veterinary care included. Reaching out beyond the airport-to-airport leg, the Middle Eastern carrier teamed up with a pet relocation service for a premium door-to-door offering.

Pet technology partner

Increasingly carriers are turning to firms that specialise in animal travel to hone their services and pamper pets better. In October, Delta Cargo announced an exclusive partnership with CarePod, a pet technology start-up, to develop a new pet transportation strategy. This aims to find better ways to carry pets and monitor their journey, with real-time updates to their owners in the cabin above.

"We had a discussion: do we go on with pets?"

**Jan Krems,
president, United Cargo**

"Demand for pet shipments is strong and we are always looking for ways to create a best-in-class travel experience for pets and their owners," says Shawn Cole, vice-president of Delta Cargo.

"Working with a start-up like CarePod allows Delta the flexibility to enhance our service in new and innovative ways."

IAG joined hands with PetAir UK for a new service for flights out of the UK to offer a simpler booking experience and assistance with travel preparations. The airline's partner offers a home collection service across the UK and it can manage all import permits, export documents and the veterinary requirements.

In the air the pets travel in a temperature-controlled environment in customised crates that are lined with bedding that absorbs moisture to keep the animals warm and dry.

The risks

Between 2015 and the end of 2017, 85 pets died while in the care of US airlines – and 41 of those occurred on United flights, according to media reports. However, to put those figures into context, nearly half were breeds that had been identified as higher risk – and as such, not flown by American or Delta.

United Cargo turned to an outside party to overhaul its pet service, after a couple of mishaps that sent dogs to airports far from their intended destinations.

The consequent reputational damage forced the airline to suspend its animal transport service for one-and-a-half months to conduct a fundamental review of its set-up.

"We had a discussion: do we go on with pets?" says Jan Krems, president of United Cargo.

The airline is far and away the largest US carrier of animals. In 2017 it moved more than 109,000, over one-fifth of the total number of animals flown in the US that year. Its incident rate was, therefore, small, and predominantly due to causes beyond the airline's control (privately, some airline executives lament the poor preparation of animals by their owners for the experience). However, the publicity from any incident has powerful repercussions, he notes.

Having decided to continue, United called in animal welfare group American Humane to scrutinise its process in order to make the trip as safe and stress-free for the animals as possible. They also discussed which animals were more prone to complications resulting from high stress levels, such as breathing problems and potential asphyxiation, and decided to whittle down the list of pets accepted for carriage.

This led to the narrowing down of the programme to just cats and dogs, and some embargoes within those groups. United no longer accepts more than 20 dog breeds and four breeds of cat, including pit bulls, boxers, pugs and Persian cats.



Jan Krems, president of United Cargo

The review also included a scrutiny of different containers and crates, types and levels of lighting and the use of technology like RFID, Krems says.

The list of animals excluded from aircraft has been growing. Many airlines now embargo endangered species, primates and animals headed for research facilities (see box).

Users attest to the airlines that their level of professionalism has gone up in recent years. Adam Parascandola, senior director, animal protection & crisis response at the Humane Society International, said their service levels and attention to animals had improved considerably.

However, communication between them and their handling contractors could do with improvement, he notes. In his experience, poor communication between carriers and their handling partners is one of the biggest challenges.

Certification

Some operators are now trying to reflect their elevated service levels in a formal way through certification of their processes. Air Canada Cargo has been the pioneer for the development of IATA's Animal CEIV programme and was duly certified as the first carrier to meet the criteria of independent external auditors under the scheme. According to the airline, the exercise did not require any significant changes to its processes.

This finds that the CEIV programme has brought the industry forward in the pharmaceuticals sector, where it was first developed. He thinks the concept can be a good step forward in the animal transport field as well, but so far the new certificate has not garnered much publicity.

"I haven't seen the requirements for airlines," he says.

"Industry standards are always a positive," comments Krems. He adds that United is creating its own

Contrary to popular belief, cattle and pigs readily and routinely move in bellyholds of passenger planes. Intradco has special pens for cattle



HSI to the rescue



In February Adam Parascandola, senior director, animal protection & crisis response at the Humane Society International (HSI), had a large job on his hands. He was in Korea to organise the movement of 200 dogs following the shut-down of a dog meat farm.

Koreans are losing their taste for canine meat, so more and more of these facilities are closing down. With few animal shelters available in Korea, the HSI has been busy moving the dogs from these farms out of the country.

Out of the 200 animals headed for foreign futures, 160 were flown to Canada.

"We've done some moves to the UK and to the Netherlands, but most dogs go to the US or Canada," says Parascandola. The main reason is the large number of animal shelters available in these countries, he adds.

The first shipment of dogs left Seoul on February 16, the last one travelled nine days later.

"Air Canada has been most agreeable. They give us two pallets a day," Parascandola says.

To date the HSI has moved more than 1,500 dogs and puppies from South Korean dog meat farms.

"This is our fourteenth project. It's been a learning curve for us and the airlines," he remarks.

The biggest lesson was in picking airlines and routings, notably to avoid getting the animals stuck at a gateway a long way from their destination, without suitable connecting flights. Widebody service and connectivity are key criteria.

For their part, the airlines have come a long way to treating animals not just like another piece of cargo, Parascandola says.

"They have service when an animal arrives in transit. Some have agreements with kennels where the animals can be fed and checked, instead of sitting at an airport and waiting for another flight."

A number of airlines have gone to set up lavish facilities for animals, but these tend to be prohibitively expensive when it comes to shipping large numbers of dogs, Parascandola comments. The size of the plane and the destination are more pertinent criteria for airline selection, he adds.

Ideally he would keep dogs on the ground. "We're not huge advocates of transporting animals internationally. We prefer local adoption if possible," he said.

Flying is stressful for dogs, and his charges are not very socialised. They often shut down when put into crates. Arguably the best part of the journey is the flight itself.

"Waiting is the hardest part. Inside a plane or a truck the motion calms them down," Parascandola notes.

standards on the basis of what it has been developing together with American Humane.

Likewise, Johnson says he continues to observe the new CEIV scheme. IAG develops its processes on the basis of a continuous review of the IATA guidelines as well as work with the Animal Transport Association and other industry bodies, and on internal decisions, he notes.

Airports take a bite

Airlines are not the only party in the air cargo community that look to build up animal traffic. Several airport authorities have invested in dedicated infrastructure or supported its development in order to attract animal moves.

Arguably, the most prominent move in this arena over the past couple of years has come in New York, where the Ark, a \$65m animal facility with 178,000sq ft of warehouse space, came on stream in 2017 at JFK Airport.

Pets account for a significant chunk of the facility's traffic, but it also targets horses, birds and livestock.

At Rickenbacker Airport, which hosts the freighter traffic serving Columbus, the port authority modernised and expanded its animal facility, adding 12 new animal stalls. It subsequently obtained US Department of Agriculture status for the building as a certified export inspection facility and a permanent port of embarkation for livestock.

David Whitaker, chief commercial officer of Columbus Regional Airport Authority, reports that the move has extended the airport's appeal further out, attracting hog shipments from the Dakotas.

He acknowledges, though, that a lot hinges on the requirements at the other end of the route, pointing to different health and safety regulations.

"We had a shipment of horses to Australia. Vets came over here and the horses were put in quarantine," he recalls.

McMullen applauds the efforts of airports to provide better facilities and make the journey easier for the animals, but he points out that this is not a significant factor when it comes to determining a route for an animal shipment. For a recent project that involved three animal charters out of Bishkek, Intradco brought in collapsible stalls, as the airport of the



Kyrgyz capital was not equipped for such a move.

"Things like equipment, space, security, or giving grooms better access airside, are good but not essential. What matters most is capacity, network and price. We can make an airport suitable by bringing in equipment," he says.

The Ark at JFK was not a case of "build it and they will come" he says. "It was not built to create demand, but as a result of the network of airlines at JFK that are suitable to carry animals."

The receiving end

One element that he finds important is the receiving end of the journey.

"If you're importing from an international location you need a border inspection post for clearance. That's a limiting factor," McMullen says.

Over the past few year Intradco has spent some effort on designing, manufacturing and testing its own collapsible animal stalls, which started coming into service last year. These are

based on the company's own research that identified some ergonomic improvements to collapsible ULDs.

According to McMullen, the experience with the collapsible horse stalls suitable for B747 and 777 freighters has been good.

"We just ordered 28 triple-deck stalls for livestock," he adds.

As IAG's improvements of the booking process indicate, electronic processes are also on the advance in animal transport, but there is still a lot of paper involved, McMullen says.

"We look to use data to assist with the sales process, to find rates to pass on to our clients."

He is following trials by some airlines using Bluetooth technology for in-flight access to shipment data.

"One thing we want to do with Bluetooth temperature readers is get in-flight temperature readings of different animal shipments – cattle, pigs, horses.... We know from the grooms, but we never got that digitised," he says.

Health versus wealth

Not all animals are created equally, in the eyes of the airlines.

Far less frequently reported than the normal pets and horse stories is last year's battle between carriers and the US National Association for Biomedical Research (NABR).

Over the past five years or so, airlines have come under immense pressure from organisations such as PETA to stop flying animals to medical research centres. The vast majority of major airlines will not carry animals for medical research – despite vying to carry the pharmaceuticals that are developed on the back of that research.

But last year the medical research industry fought back – putting airlines in the unenviable position of 'damned if they do, damned if they don't'.

Discriminating

According to documents filed with the US Department of Transportation, the NABR, on behalf of its members, claimed that four airlines were illegally discriminating against shippers that "seek to transport animals for purposes of live animal research undertaken at medical and other research facilities".

It argued that the airlines would happily carry the same animals, when destined for a zoo or as pets, proving there were no transport or safety factors in their decisions-making. Instead, airlines were trying to avoid "political criticism, regardless of legitimate customer needs", it claimed.

NABR sought "appropriate remedies", including cease and desist orders, civil penalties and "to end and correct this continued illegal refusal to transport animals that are destined for research facilities".

The case appeared to have caught the eye of many interested parties. NABR was backed up by numerous universities, schools and medical research organisations.

On the other side were more than 9,000 comments from individuals – not necessarily backing the airlines' right to choose, but many criticising animal research itself.

A week in the life of Zac Carroll, head groom, Intradco

Monday, Feb 18, Bucharest:
Setting up special Intradco livestock stalls and helping load a consignment of 1,200 sheep on a charter to the Middle East.

Tuesday, Feb 19, Luxembourg:
Flew over from Bucharest to load three horses on a direct flight to Singapore and fly out with them.

Wednesday, Feb 20, Singapore
Unloaded the three mares after a smooth journey. With a small movement like this I was the only groom on board. Then travelled back to UK on a passenger flight.

Friday, Feb 22, Bishkek
Flew in with four other Intradco grooms for a big job moving animals to Saudi Arabia for the World Nomad Games. We have 108 horses plus falcons, eagles, hunting dogs and yaks traveling on three chartered planes. We brought all the stalls from our Belgium warehouse, which was not without some customs difficulties. After their arrival, we have a few days to build them up ready for the project. Facilities are not excellent at Bishkek airport, but we were given a good space. This is a real specialist job - the kind we all love to do.



And the airlines – British Airways (BA), Qatar Airways, China Southern and United Airlines – fought back, claiming that none of the four complaints had a legal basis, and suggesting that 27 other airlines which ban the practice were also named.

BA's filing concluded: "Accordingly, there is no basis for any further action ... and the department should close this investigation immediately... Alternatively ... it should direct NABR to serve the complaint on all the other named carriers and provide an opportunity for those carriers to respond".

It is, as Qatar Airways pointed out, unclear as to why these four carriers were singled out.

Qatar's response, similar to China Southern's, also pointed out that it is "neither a pharmaceutical nor a medical research company" and therefore could not respond to the NABR's six pages of arguments about the benefits of animal testing. The case was rejected by the Department of Transportation at the end of last year.

Airlines have not – publicly anyway – changed their stance. But given their desire to carry animals in other situations, the biggest argument for banning the transport of live animals for research seems to be bad publicity.

But the medical research centres still need animals, which must then be trucked, or shipped, at far greater risk to the animals' welfare.