Breadcrumb

1. Home
2. Print
3. Pdf
4. Node
5. Entity Print

APHIS in Action—Two Owls. Thousands of Miles. One Incredible Team Effort: APHIS Ensures Safe Return for Burrowing Owls



What happens when two tiny travelers accidentally cross an ocean? Thanks to the dedication of APHIS employees and international partners, this story has a happy ending.

Last summer, Spanish authorities made an unusual discovery: two burrowing owls tucked inside a cargo container that had sailed from the Port of Miami, Florida to Cartagena, Spain. These small but mighty birds—protected under the U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species—had likely slipped into the container while it was open in Florida.

From that moment, the race was on to bring them home.

APHIS employees sprang into action, working hand-in-hand with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Spanish officials, and other partners to navigate complex international regulations and plan a safe return. But first, the owls needed care. Initial veterinary checks showed they weren't fit for travel, so they spent months recovering at a wildlife center in Murcia, Spain, receiving specialized treatment to restore their health.

Now, after months of planning and collaboration, these resilient birds are finally home. In February, they arrived back in Miami, where they'll complete a 30-day Federal quarantine to ensure they're healthy before returning to their natural habitat.

This successful repatriation is more than a feel-good story—it's a testament to what teamwork can achieve. APHIS employees played a critical role every step of the way: ensuring compliance with international laws, coordinating logistics, safeguarding animal health, and providing care during quarantine. Their work underscores APHIS' unwavering commitment to protecting wildlife and preserving biodiversity, no matter how far the challenge takes us.

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