

**Forum:** Environmental Commission

**Issue:** Combating poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna by organized criminal groups

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## Introduction

Urbanization and the increased stress on natural resources demand certain actions that, if not taken cautiously, can greatly diminish biodiversity. Recent increase in this demand has led to an innumerable amount of poaching and trafficking of wildlife. Scarcity of products led to a skyrocketing of prices, which in turn led to an even bigger increase in these abusive trades. This vicious cycle may seem never-ending and catastrophic, but we are still in time to fix this crossborder problem, so long as we introduce the appropriate measures at the right time and in the right place.

In today's political spectrum, environmental matters in general don't seem to demand the attention they actually require, especially in developing countries, where this problems are more abundant. In such places natural habitats of endangered species are fragmented due to the need to harvest vital natural resources, such as water or timber for fuel. The effect the exploitation of this resources has on they way these animals interact with the environment and the ecosystem in general is incredibly detrimental for all of us.

Ecologically unsustainable exploitation stands strong because of different reasons. Exacerbated population growth in the last century is a main contributor to this environmental problem. The rapid increase of population inescapably leads to a rapid increase in demand, that in turn leads to the increase of prices and the need to satisfy that demand. Some may resort to unlawful ways of doing so, seeing as some are not really aware of an appropriate alternative for personal economic stability. Light sentences allow criminals to have free reign when it comes to wildlife crimes, without fear of any kind of harsh retribution for their illicit actions.

That is one among many of the reasons why conservation interventions, comprised by stronger security measures in protected areas and stronger, more effective legal restrictions, are so vital for our well being in today's social and environmental setting.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Wildlife

Initially, the definitions of this term focused generally in “wild animals (undomesticated free-ranging animals)” (Yarrow, 2009), but lower animals and plants were later introduced into the definition. Some separate fish from wildlife, while others exclusively separate invertebrates, but as of late the term has come to encompass a wide variety of living beings: “...the Endangered Species Act of 1973 recognized fish and wildlife as any member of the animal kingdom, including without limitation any mammal, bird, fish, amphibian, reptile, mollusk, crustacean, arthropod, or other invertebrates.” (Yarrow, 2009). However, many argue that “...wildlife should include all animals and their associated habitats...” (Yarrow, 2009). This last definition is the most accepted by most ecologists and environmental scientists, but there is not currently a universal definition of ‘wildlife’.

### Transnational Organized Wildlife Crime

An “organized criminal group” is defined by The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime as: “...a structured group of three or more persons, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes or offenses established in accordance with this Convention, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit...”. There is no international agreement in the definition of international organized wildlife crime, seeing as each country protects its species however they deem it necessary. However, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) protects and regulates international trade on specific endangered species, and CITES affiliated parties have the obligation to punish illegal trade.

### Illegal Wildlife Trade

Wildlife trade is, first and foremost, the trading of plants or animal, or anything that constitutes as wildlife. Likewise, illegal wildlife trade is the unsanctioned trafficking of wildlife or wildlife parts.

## Poaching

Tracking, trapping and killing animals is the widely-known definition of hunting. When the hunting is allowed by the pertaining authorities of the region or the territory, it is known as “lawful hunting”. The opposite, unlawful hunting, also known as “poaching”, is the illegal killing or capture of animals (deemed illegal by whoever is in control of the land in which the poaching is being carried out).

## Background Information

Poaching and illegal wildlife trade have been ongoing global problems for a very long time now. These crimes, however, are known as predicate Offences (crimes underlying money laundering or terrorist finance activity), which means that usually, transnational trafficking and trading networks are heavily linked to weapons and drug illicit trade, as well as money laundering and human trafficking. Wildlife trade is the second-biggest threat to the animal's survival; and, lately, it has been decimating their populations enormously. “Populations of species on earth declined by an average 40% between 1970 and 2000” (WWF).

The true, accurate wildlife trade worth cannot be precisely calculated due to the fact that most transactions and operations happen covertly, but TRAFFIC (an non-governmental organization that works on wildlife trade) calculated that approximately 160 US billion dollar worth of wildlife products were imported each year globally in the begging of the 1990s. The record of the amount of wildlife products and animals being traded and trafficked is extraordinarily big; “there are records of over 100 million tonnes of fish, 1.5 million live birds and 440,000 tonnes of medicinal plants in trade in just one year” (WWF). The overall values can't be calculated either, but efforts have been made on that front: “...it is estimated at US\$7.8-10 billion per year.” (GFI, 2011).

Pachyderms, big cats and lions and other wild carnivores great apes and pangolins are among those animals that whose numbers are nowadays dying more so because of human intervention and poaching rather than biological natural causes. The effect these carnivores and herbivores have on their respective habitats is great, and the disappearance of any of them would cause incredible harm to already existing complex food chains. When it comes to farming, invasive plants that are generally consumed by these animals, as well as invasive, destructive pests generally staunched by smaller animals (such as apes), can

greatly hinder successful agriculture. Areas with a higher degree of diversity have been known to have achieved better carbon storage. Those that suffer from poverty heavily rely in healthy surrounding ecosystems to survive day to day, and it is vital for catering for the whole population of the world to have a healthy ecosystem that has sufficient resources to provide for every world citizen.

These are some among the many harming disadvantages of wildlife and biodiversity loss, that is being brought about nowadays mainly through organized crime, and need to be fixed as expeditiously as possible. While the direct approach of tackling the organized crime may seem as the most efficient way of thwarting criminal efforts, conservational intervention is even more relevant, seeing as actually creating new policies has proved to take a lot more time when it comes to efficiently solving problems.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### Kenya

Heavily involved in the elephant trade network, this african country is primarily an exporter of products from endangered species, which has led to the considerable decline in the elephant and rhino populations in this country. The Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) was established in 1989 to staunch the depletion of said populations and to try to increase security in national parks, and has the legal obligation to uphold kenyan wildlife laws and legislations on the matter. However, wildlife crime in this country was furthered by the proliferation of small arms and weapons that allowed for an easier means of obtaining illegal wildlife products.

### China

As the axis around which revolve the rhinoceros and tiger trade networks, this asian country is primarily an importer and intermediary of trafficking. The demand and price of illegal wildlife goods has greatly increased as of late. Importers of banned items (such as tiger bone) have found loopholes in the current legislation, and unchecked commercialization of tiger parts have led to the creation of “tiger farms” for the trade of their parts. The legality in China of the purchase of ivory from Africa in 2008 led to an increased demand that furthered the trade enormously.

### African Wildlife Foundation

The African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) is an organization dedicated to wildlife conservation, land and habitat protection, community empowerment and economic development in Africa. When it comes to fighting organized crime in the area to protect wildlife, the AWF provides trained scouts with state of the art equipment for the protection of the endangered species and wildlife in general.

### World Wildlife Fund for Nature

The World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) does a lot of work on its own, as well as in collaboration with [TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network](#), and other partners, such as local communities and governments and fellow organizations. It created a [Stop Wildlife Crime campaign](#) that intends to push governments to increase law enforcement, defend protectors of endangered species, and conscientize and persuade consumer to make informed choices about the purchase of dubious items.

### Fauna and Flora International

Fauna and Flora International is an NGO with the mission and objective of finding sustainable solutions for conservation, ecosystem and wildlife problems internationally. This organization's approach is primarily focused in conservation, rather than the combat of organized crime, but its role of safeguarding species is vital for putting a stopper in the killing and poaching of wildlife for its illegal trade.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1960s	Formation of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) as an international agreement to protect wildlife
October 17th, 1989	CITES creates a global ivory ban to staunch the decrease of elephant poaching
1973	The Endangered Species Act is created (to help endangered fauna and flora in their respective habitats)
November, 2010	Formation of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime
December 20th, 2013	March 3rd declared as World Wildlife Day by UN GA resolution <a href="#">68/205</a>

October 12th, 2018

Renewed global commitment to tackle wildlife crime agreed on the 2018 London Conference on Illegal Wildlife Trade

## Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife, 30 July 2015 (**A/RES/69/314**)
- Poaching and Illicit Wildlife Trafficking: Towards Joint Action by the International Community, 26 September 2014 (**A/RES/69/430**)
- Poaching and Illicit Wildlife Trafficking: A Multidimensional Crime and a Growing Challenge to the International Community, 26 September 2013 (**A/RES/68/553**)
- 13th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice: Wildlife and Forest Crime: A Serious Crime, 13 April 2015 (**A/CONF.222/17**)
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
- The International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC)

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

### UN Programmes

Multiple UN programmes have been established in order to tackle the problem: UN Development Programme (UNDP): Combating Poaching and Wildlife Trafficking, UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA): Illegal Trade in Wildlife, UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC): Wildlife and Forest Crime, among others. Moreover, all of CITES affiliated parties (that have all ratified the convention and are therefore legally bound to its conditions) are required to respect and uphold each party's respective wildlife-related legislations as well as CITES-determined provisions, that include anti-poaching measures to be taken in each territory prey to this problem.

### Conservation and security

When it comes to combating organized crime, some might have the impression that a head-on, direct approach is the only solution for successfully solving the problem. In spite of all of that, protected area management and expansion are vital steps to take in order to ensure the continuous safety of the multiple endangered species. Wildlife corridors have been established (large sections of land) in order to allow different animals to move from one protected area to another one. Anti-poaching units are already in play, along with other

anti-poaching efforts, as well as the increment of park rangers in protected areas (or any types of wildlife protectors).

## Possible Solutions

### Raising awareness

Raising awareness about the issue is key for reaching a solution. The benefits of a successful public awareness campaign include the donation of land to be used as protected areas, private protection of wildlife habitats, decrease in demand due to the realization of buyers of the actual source of the items purchased and/or the effect on the environment, motivation of public figures to sponsor efforts against poaching and wildlife trafficking, among other things.

### Supporting law enforcement

While raising awareness can definitely aid the decrement of unintentional, misinformed purchases of illegal wildlife goods, it fails to dissuade those that intentionally commit wildlife crimes. New and more effective law enforcement is of utmost importance, seeing as it is the most direct way to tackle the issue in an expeditious way. One of the ways this could be carried out is through the creation of new policies that reinforce the security on the areas, by appointing more officers in charge of safeguarding the different endangered species, or establishing more severe punishments for the perpetrators of wildlife crime (from additional fines to additional jail-time, depending on already existing laws regarding the matter). More rigorous and meaningful penalties for violators may discourage further criminal infringements, and the correction of laws to achieve an unambiguous legislation may lead to less availability of means of circumventing the law. Already existing transnational organized crimes fighting legal frameworks can be modified so as to include and address wildlife crimes as well.

### Support of communities and already existing efforts

Some countries and communities where trade is abundant already have groups and even regional organizations (such as the KWS in Kenya, or Defenders of Wildlife in North America) whose sole objective is to preserve at all costs biodiversity and endangered species, but, occasionally, these groups and organizations function on limited governmental budgets or rely exclusively on donations to create and carry out projects to protect wildlife. In such cases it is important to publicly advertise and create policies that support these already existing work towards a solution, as an alternative to creating new plans and programmes

that uselessly replace them, wasting time, money and overall resources. The training and equipping of an increased amount of park rangers, for example, is a possible measure to be taken to reinforce protected wildlife zones. Providing officers with the necessary equipment to be better organized and informed than poachers to prevent illegal bushmeat hunting can help current anti-poaching efforts. Supporting surrounding communities can deter nearby dwellers from delving into poaching and wildlife trafficking, by offering alternative economic activities.

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## Appendices

- For any more information on the recent work of the African Wildlife Foundation don't hesitate to check out their page for more recent updates on the matter: [https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories?threat\\_id=illegal-wildlife-trade](https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories?threat_id=illegal-wildlife-trade)
- For any recent information on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) visit their site at: <https://cites.org/eng>