

Research Report

Committee: Ecology and Environment

Topic: The question of preventing wildlife smuggling

Introduction:

The issue of wildlife smuggling is estimated to be worth up to \$10 billion a year and has devastating impacts on ecosystems and their biodiversity. This form of illegal smuggling is hard to control and is used for people wanting exotic pets, medicines and clothing. After the initial moral concern of wildlife smuggling there are further issues including danger to native species who may be harmed due to the uncontrolled introduction to a new species, the increased spread of disease between countries and many people who engage in this illegal activity then use their profits for further criminal activity such as terrorism and the purchase of firearms. It is therefore an extremely concerning issue which needs to be addressed on a global scale.

Definition of Key Terms:

Wildlife smuggling (trafficking)- This involves the illegal gathering, transportation, and distribution of animals and their derivatives, either internationally or nationally.

Wildlife trade- The commerce of products that are derived from non-domesticated animals or plants usually extracted from their natural environment or raised under controlled conditions.

Endangered- A species seriously at risk from extinction.

Habitat- The natural home or environment for an animal, plant or other organism.

Native- A species of indigenous origin or growth.

Contextual Information:

With the largest demand for wildlife occurring from China, the US and the EU there is growing concern as the demand continues to increase globally. With many countries continuing their traditional practices despite the new legislation, such as countries in Africa who prefer the consumption of wild animals, Chinese medicines use tiger bones and rhino horns to treat fevers and gout, there is a constant demand for this wildlife. It is estimated that there are 7000 tigers kept in the US as pets, with only 3,200 of some big cats left in the wild. This conveys how the lack of reporting needed in some areas could arguably be to blame for the severity of wildlife smuggling. With many animals popular for smuggling being listed as endangered and therefore extremely rare, it is crucial that smugglers are prevented from continuing their harmful acts. For instance, the elephant is endangered and yet it is poached for its tusks which contain ivory. With only 40,000 Asian elephants left, despite there being 10 million in 1930, ivory is now the hardest thing to smuggle into the US due to the huge impact that killing an elephant has on the ecosystem. Therefore, wildlife smuggling is devastating to the environment due to the removal of some key species in ecosystems such as elephants and tigers, which are required for the rest of the ecosystem to function properly. With many already endangered there is a likelihood of some

species disappearing completely from their native habitat, highlighting how some intervention is needed from the complete extinction of animals. In addition, many animals which are smuggled into new countries then directly compete with native species such as the American Mink and the Red-eared Terrapin. With so many negative implications from wildlife smuggling it is concerning to know that smugglers still continue to trade wildlife due to the incredibly high profit margins. It is also common to find that many species are killed accidentally especially dolphins and seabirds in fishing netting, showing how it is more species which are at danger from the initial \$10 billion worth which are actually traded. Not only are there concerning environmental impacts but there are also further negative implications including the aiding of terrorist and criminal organisations by the financial profits made from wildlife smuggling. With smaller punishments than drug trafficking, wildlife smuggling has enabled terrible actions to be financed such as the 2012 attacks in Chad and the Republic of Congo. Some animals such as the Ploughshare tortoise from Madagascar holds a price of \$24,000 showing how easily large criminal organisations gain funds to continue in illegal activity. Furthermore, the spread of animal-borne diseases rapidly increases due to wildlife smuggling as many of the wild animals transported are not checked for disease and may therefore spread deadly diseases to countries, with some diseases such as Monkeypox and Avian Flu infecting more species including humans. This conveys the severity and dangers which wildlife smuggling has globally to all species and there must therefore be action taken to ensure the safety of the world's population. With species such as pangolins, African rhinos, African elephants and tropical timber all facing threats due to illegal trade, there is huge concern for these species. Overall, with so many negative implications, can the world afford not to act?

Major Countries and Organizations Involved:

Coalition against Wildlife Trafficking (CAWT)- This organisation was established in 2005 by the US and it aims to end illegal trade of wildlife and its products. It includes 6 governments and 13 NGOs which all work together to raise awareness, strengthening border enforcement and raising political support.

World Wide Fund (WWF)- An NGO founded in 1961, which works in wildlife preservation and the reduction of human impact on the environment.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations Wild Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN)- This organisation oversees the cross border cooperation and the collective law enforcement capacity of 10 ASEAN member countries, it also receives support from US.

South Asian Enforcement Network (SAWEN)- Countries include Afghanistan, Bhutan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and are supported to prevent trafficking.

Wildlife Alliance- This is an international NGO which focuses on wildlife and forest conservation which is headquartered in New York.

International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)- This is one of the largest animal welfare and conservation charities which aims to safeguard populations and preserve habitat.

TRAFFIC- As a leading NGO they work globally on trade in wild animals and plants in both biodiversity conservation and sustainability development.

CITES- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species is an international agreement between governments which aims to ensure that international trade of wild animals and

plants doesn't threaten their survival, it continues to enforce new legislation to ensure the protection of wildlife. The UN recognises CITES as the primary framework which regulates wildlife transportation.

UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)- The lead department looking into wildlife and forest crime

Timeline of Events:

Date: **Event:**

1900- The Lacey Act was passed in the US which protected any wildlife, and that it was illegal to import and export any taken wildlife.

1st July 1975- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) came into force which protected 5,000 species of animals and 29,000 species of plants, it is still implemented globally today. It regulates the buying and selling of wildlife across borders.

1990- A global ban on international ivory trade was introduced by CITES.

1992- The US through the Wild Bird Conservation Act, outlawed the importation of most wild-caught birds.

1993- China outlawed the sale of bones, along with the trade of endangered species.

2008- A one-off auction of \$15.5 million of raw ivory occurred which skyrocketed the amount of poaching and smuggling that occurred.

2007- EU banned the importation of all wild birds.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events:

20th December 2013- World Wildlife Day was created to increase public awareness.

26th December 2014- Joint action by the international community towards poaching and illicit wildlife trafficking was agreed upon.

30th July 2015- A General Assembly resolution was created to tackle illicit trafficking in wildlife.

12th September 2017- A resolution on tackling illicit wildlife trafficking was adopted, which reinforced ideas about tougher legislation inside countries.

Possible Solutions:

With such severe amounts of wildlife smuggling occurring there is a desperate need for action to be taken. Perhaps the only solution is for individual governments to tighten border checks for imports and make it as hard as possible for smugglers to reach the buyers, thereby decreasing the amount of smugglers. Moreover, should there be tougher penalties for those found to be involved with wildlife smuggling and the buying thereafter which is currently much less harsh than drug trafficking penalties. Although CITES are regulating international exportation and importation of wildlife, should more legislation be put into place, restricting countries in Africa and China from continuing to poach endangered species. With the UN recently acknowledging the severity of wildlife smuggling, can species be saved in time and will the smugglers finally be stopped?

Bibliography:

CAWT website- <http://cawt-global.squarespace.com/>

WWF page- <https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/illegal-wildlife-trade>

TRAFFIC website- <https://www.traffic.org/about-us/illegal-wildlife-trade/>

Wikipedia wildlife smuggling page- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wildlife_smuggling