

Forum: United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP)

Issue: Measures to address the ongoing conflict of unsustainable wildlife trafficking and its effects on the environment.

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Introduction

The sale of goods made from non-domesticated animals or plants—usually taken from their natural habitats or environments—is known as wildlife trafficking. When such animals are released back into the wild after being confined and relocated from their natural habitat, the ecology is harmed. Invasive species affect the environment by vying with native species for resources, preying on them, and/or spreading diseases that were not previously present. It is imperative that the UNEP unite to resolve this problem because it is evident that the ecosystem is being damaged. This issue has an influence on a number of nations, particularly those with large regions of animal habitat and those that trade in wildlife/ make money off of animals legitimately and illegally. The lawful international commerce in wildlife was valued at approximately \$300 billion in 2020, making it evident that there was a significant market for each animal. Uncontrolled wildlife trading can seriously harm the environment and must be prevented, to keep the environment healthy and safe. In terms of size and scope, the illegal wildlife trade is a significant transnational and organized crime that brings in between US \$7 billion and US \$23 billion annually. It is similar to the illegal trade in drugs, weapons, and people. Unfortunately, illegal and unsustainable wildlife trafficking has grown over the years, and with it its damage to the environment. A crucial reason why the UNEP has decided to

come together and try to tackle/ minimize the crime and harm to the environment.

Definition of Key Terms

Wildlife trafficking

The sale of goods made from non-domesticated animals or plants—usually taken from their natural habitats or environments.

Poaching

Illegally hunt or catch on land that is not one's own or in contravention of official protection.

Pangolin

African and Asian mammal that has a body covered with horny overlapping scales, a small head with elongated snout, a long sticky tongue for catching ants and termites, and a thick, tapering tail.

Non-domesticated animals

Any animal, reptile, or mammal that is naturally tamed or gentle.

Biodiversity

The variety of life in a particular ecosystem or habitat.

Extinction

A group of animals, plants, or species that have no living members or no longer exist.

CITES

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

Keystone Species

An organism that helps define an entire ecosystem. Without them the entire ecosystem would cease to exist all together.

General Overview

Wildlife trafficking is both categorized as a crime and as a great threat for several plants and species worldwide. The pangolin as an example is the most trafficked mammal in the world where over one million pangolins have been poached in the last decade. However not all wildlife trade is illegal and there are numerous plants, animals, leathers, etc. That is sold in the market legitimately. The problem occurs when the trade escalates to a massive scale becoming illegal, unsustainable and dangerous for the species survival.

Poaching

Poaching refers to the illegally hunt or catch on land that is not one's own or in contravention of official protection. Just like drugs and arms, animal parts are trafficked worldwide as well. Examples include, but are not limited to poaching elephants for their ivory tusks and tigers for their skin and bones. Putting at risk the survival of various wildlife species with the extinction of the Mozambique rhino. However, laws that prohibit poaching have been implied in several countries around the world. This has decreased the poaching percentages significantly as it can be observed in diagram 1.

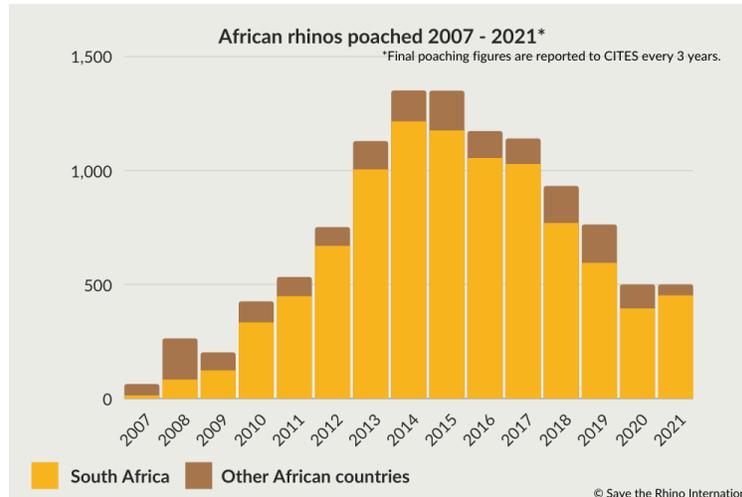


Diagram 1 (<https://www.savetherhino.org/rhino-info/poaching-stats/>)

Human Effect

The effects that wildlife trafficking has on humans is not highly known and discussed however its importance is crucial. Wildlife trafficking has been directly linked to the spread and emergence of diseases. An example would be the SARS outbreak in Hong Kong which occurred to do with the consumption of meat which was offered in the black wildlife market. Ebola has had an outbreak in Africa linked to the poaching and consumption of monkeys. Furthermore, diseases like bird flu, monkeypox, and heart water disease have all had outbreaks due to the consequences of wildlife trafficking. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), 75% of the diseases in the world that reach humans occur due to animals. This fact is highly worrying to humans because due to animals smuggling through borders, disease spread is faster and more dangerous.

Economic Effect

Poaching and the extinction of animals have negative effects economically for several reasons. To begin with, local tourism is highly affected by the extinction of animals. These countries become less attractive to potential tourists when

their key species become extinct. This creates a huge financial burden because several countries depend on tourism economically. For example; the current African problem due to elephant poaching is costing 25 million dollars annually because of the loss in tourism.

Environmental Effect

The environmental impacts of poaching and trafficking are not necessarily observable in the short term, that is why they are classified in three sections which are immediate impact, medium term effect and long term effect. The most obvious short term observable change is the decrease of species in the area. However, the medium term effect is the amount of wildlife offspring which directly correlates to the rate of reproduction which will eventually lead to the long term impact of thinning the gene pool which causes complete extinction of races. This issue is not something that will occur in the future, it is occurring in the current ages. Due to human actions rhinoceros have decreased 97% in Africa as well as tigers that have decreased 93%.

The population decrease of the animals is not only sad but also fundamentally tragic for the entire food chain. Without the predators there would be excess prey and without the prey the predators will die due to starvation. This destabilization in the food supply and demand will cause severe and irreversible changes in our environment.

Lastly, several local species in countries are known and considered as keystone species. This means that they help maintain the ecosystem, doing things such as spreading and carrying plant seeds. In the African ecosystem plant seeds stick to the feet of the elephant which helps them distribute them throughout the land. With the large decrease of elephants in the wildlife there has also been a large impact in the local vegetation of Africa.

Biodiversity Effect

As mentioned before, human actions have serious long term effects referring to the thinning of the gene pool of several species. With the extinction of one single species, most specially the key stone species, can cause a chain reaction which can vary from losing plants, other species or the entire collapse of an ecosystem.

Evolution due to poaching and wildlife trafficking

Through the past decades due to the large animal trafficking and poaching of countless species' evolutionary adaptations have taken place in many species. An evolutionary adaptation can be described as how a species changes its physical feature to be more suitable for survival. For example: as mentioned previously, elephants are poached to remove their ivory tusks and trafficked illegally. Therefore, the only elephants which are able to reproduce are the ones with short tusks. This caused most offspring to have little to no tusks and be less prone to being targeted by poachers.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Brazil

With over 13% of the world's animal and plant species, Brazil is the country with the greatest biodiversity treasure trove around the globe. Brazilian wildlife and the discovery of new animal species have been increasing for many years. However, 1,173 wild species were categorized as extinct or threatened with extinction in Brazil's Red Book of Threatened Species in 2018. One of the biggest threats is the unsustainable illegal trade in wildlife, which has a direct harmful correlation to Brazil's economy and its population.

China

China is known to be one of the largest consumer markets in the international wildlife trade. Banks in China are known to have a major role in curtailing these crimes, but the Chinese government alongside international authorities is strengthening their efforts to halt this. Research shows that significant amounts of wildlife have been taken from around the world for the Chinese market. During the time period of 1997 to 2016, more than 11-5 million whole-organism equivalents and 5 million kg of derivatives of legally traded wildlife; as well as more than 130,000 live and dead illegally traded animals, were imported into China, causing very harmful effects to the environment around the globe.

The United States of America

The United States is the largest consumer of legally and internationally traded wildlife. The United States compared to many Asian and African countries, has a cleaner record on unsustainable animal trafficking, yet that does not mean it does not exist. The wildlife trade has a big effect on the economy and the environment, and therefore it is important for the Government to monitor the wildlife sector carefully.

Laos

Laos is one of the three countries in the so-called "Golden Triangle", and is known to be a global hub of wildlife trade. On a WWF scoreboard, the Asian country scored the lowest possible scores for its efforts to safeguard elephants and tigers. Among many other animals, tigers are one of the most trafficked animals. It is common to come across zoos that are actually breeding facilities for tigers and other cats. Many of these tigers are raised primarily for slaughter. Tigers are killed and sold all over the world for their skins, tails, bones, and other components. Enforcement agencies are attempting to put a stop to this illicit

farming and selling, but Laos has a significant impact on the fact that there are still many more tigers in captivity than in the wild, harming the environment.

South Africa

The destruction and loss of human, natural, and social capital stocks caused by the IWT (Illegal wildlife trade) have a significant negative influence on African economies, such as South Africa. This hinders the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and has an effect on national budgets. South Africa is known to be the third most biodiverse country worldwide. The country has established 20 National parks, with Kruger National Park being the most famous. However, most of their ecosystems, which include wild species, are threatened, leading to a harmful impact on the nation's biodiversity as well as on its people. This is due to the vast amount of people that depend on natural resources either indirectly, through tourism, or through the use of traditional medicinal plants as a source of healthcare.

Timeline of Events

| Date | Description of event |
|------|--|
| 1900 | The signing of "Convention Designed to Ensure the Conservation of various species of wild animals in Africa, which are useful to Man or inoffensive". The first international treaty on nature conservation. |
| 1936 | Adopted and put into effect was the "Convention Relative to the Preservation of Fauna and Flora in their Natural State." Its aim was to protect African species by prohibiting hunting, killing, and capture of animals. |

- 1948 The creation of the IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature.
- 1960 IUCN delegates urged governments to restrict imports of animals, due to the concern over the threatened status of many species.
- 1972-1973, After eight years the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment recommended a “conference be convened as soon as possible... to prepare and adopt a convention on export, import and transit of certain species of wild animals and plants”. A year later the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was born.
- 2014 In June 2014, the UNEP devoted most of its first UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) to combating illegal wildlife trafficking. Delegations urged nations to prevent and end the illegal trade in wildlife in the ministerial outcome document.
- 2020 The UNEP Launched the Wild for life Campaign, in partnership with United Nations Development Programme, UNODC, and CITES.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Through the years the United Nations have taken several action plans to prevent the extinction of wildlife species, their traffic, and the destruction of the flora and fauna of the world. One of the most important is the international agreement between governments of CITES. CITES is the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora and aims to ensure that the life of wildlife and plants won't be treated. Ensuring the sustainability of the fauna in

several countries for threats such as tourists, habitat loss. Poachers, etc... There are over 184 parties that form part and contribute to CITES. In CITIES there is a special convention called The international consortium on combating wildlife crime (ICCWC) that establishes and reassures laws for wildlife.

Furthermore every country has their set of laws and regimens that prohibit wildlife traffic. For example, in the United States of America, the Lacey Act of 1900 prohibits trade in wilfide, fish and plants.

Past Action

The United Nations founded The United Nations Environment Programme in 1972 as a result of its concern over the rise in wildlife trafficking over the past 50 years (UNEP). Since then, the UNEP has organized numerous conferences across the globe to increase public awareness of this and numerous other environmental challenges. In addition to holding conferences, the UNEP has also used publicity to draft international legislation, sign treaties, and disseminate awareness. For instance, exporting or importing protected animals is prohibited by Article 41 of the decree from March 29, 2000, which governs international trade in species of flora and fauna that are at risk of extinction. Violators of this article will be subject to a fine. Have all these efforts had an impact on wildlife trafficking? Yes, it has, but of course, the job of the UNEP is to tackle these issues until solved. As well as that the issue of wildlife trafficking continues to grow so more immediate action needs to be taken and continue to be taken. That is why the UNEP is currently still addressing this issue in these three ways:

- **UNEP supports the legal and sustainable management and trade of wildlife, in compliance with national and international law.**
 - In a joint effort, UNEP and the CITES Secretariat help nations and territories in strengthening their environmental governance in order to comply with CITES regulations intended to stop the illegal trade in

wildlife.

- **UNEP advocates for an end to illegal wildlife trade globally.**
 - Alongside other United Nations secretariats and agencies like CITES to stamp out the illegal sale and trafficking of wildlife internationally and domestically.
- **UNEP supports the conservation of the world's biodiverse habitats.**
 - Two-thirds of the oceans and land around the globe have undergone a human-caused change. The extinction of species that we are currently experiencing (by some estimates) is up to 1,000 times higher than any other time in recorded history. This is caused by the result of habitat degradation and destruction.

Possible Solutions

Due to the high consequences of wildlife trafficking and poaching, several laws and regulations have been implemented in affected countries. However, there are still countless action plans that people can take to prevent further issues. This includes but is not limited to;

- Trackers and sensors in the wild: these are harmless and undetectable which help have accurate data on animal numbers, their locations and if any threats might be upon them
- Outlaw the purchase and sale of animal parts: by outlawing the market of animal pieces this can significantly reduce the chances of poaching. This is because people will reduce their buying which will eventually make sellers go out of business.
- Reporting all poachers
- Giving animals sanctuaries: by doing this and helping animals with a designated safe area, endangered species will be able to grow and increase their population

- Stick to certified products:

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

Responsible Consumption and Production, a Sustainable Development Goal, which is tightly correlated with the global issue of illegal wildlife trafficking and its effects on the ecosystem. This is because human beings engage in very unsustainable commerce and trafficking that is neither secure, safe, nor sustainable. The SDG goals 12.2, 12.6, and 12.7 are related and are being challenged to this problem. Due to the practice of unsustainable wildlife trafficking being illegal and in violation of numerous national policies and priorities, Target 12.7 of "Promoting public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities" is currently being challenged. To reach this goal this trafficking must stop. Goal 12.6 of "Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle" is being challenged by unsustainable wildlife trafficking due to the Banks that manage the money of the illegal unsustainable trades by not reporting nor investigating this crime and transactions. Lastly, the goal that is being challenged the most by this issue is 12.2, which is that "By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources". This is because animals/ wildlife are considered to be natural resources and the unsustainable trafficking of them is very poor management and inefficient use of natural resources. If SDG number 12, wants to reach unsustainable wildlife trafficking and its effect on the environment must be tackled by the Globe's Nations, effective immediately.

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Appendix

Useful links

- A. <https://www.traffic.org/publications/reports/taking-off/>
 - Article that describes the wildlife traffick tenders in the sky of Latin America and the Caribbean
- B. https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/13031/brazil_wildlife_trafficking_assessment.pdf
 - Detailed PDF about Brazil and the surrounding ideas, laws, wildlife, graphs, dates, ect...
- C. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/10/211013104605.htm>
 - Article written by Science daily on the negative effects on illegal and unsustainable wildlife trade in the united states of america
- D. <https://www.iisd.org/articles/evolving-war-illegal-wildlife-trade>
 - Website filled with articles, publications, and events revolving the general idea of the evolving war on illegal wildlife trade

E. <https://www.intlwdf.org/impact-of-poaching>

- Impacts on worldwide poaching and its environmental, economic, human and biodiversity effects due to human actions.