

Forum: GA2

Issue: Combating illegal wildlife trade

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Introduction

Illegal wildlife trade has become a global issue threatening wildlife in numerous countries across the world. The market built around illegal wildlife trade has grown to be one of the largest illegal markets in the world. The market has grown to such an extent that wildlife trade products are trafficked in the same way as illegal drugs and arms. The illegal wildlife trade has grown so much due to the high demand for products such as elephant ivory, rhino horn, tiger skin and bones, timber, and armadillos. The high demand is caused by the world's increasing population which increases the demand as even more people are born to cultures where outlawed wildlife products are used. As the global demand for illegal wildlife trade products has increased, the poor and desperate populations in regions where such goods are found have viewed it as a way to make more money, increasing poaching and the number of illegal products on the market.

Illegal wildlife trade has been recognized by multiple countries and organizations as a highly relevant issue. However, many countries do not view it as such. This is due to illegal wildlife trade not affecting these countries to the same extent. Countries like China, India, South Africa, and Viet Nam where illegal wildlife trade is a major issue.

Illegal wildlife trade is not only an issue for countries. Poaching and illegal wildlife trade cause a vital threat to any species of animals and plants that are already endangered. If nothing is done about illegal wildlife trade it could cause many other species to become endangered or extinct. It could also cause animals to flee their natural habitats in fear of poachers to areas that are not suitable for their living conditions and disrupt the ecosystems of the areas they move to. Animals fleeing their natural habitats and highly desired plant life such as timber being eradicated from suitable areas would be extremely harmful to entire ecosystems and the balance of nature.

Definition of Key Terms

Poaching

The Cambridge Dictionary defines poaching as the catching and killing of animals without permission on someone else's land. Poaching also includes the catching and killing of endangered species and other animals which hunting is outlawed by a government or an international organization. An example of poaching is hunting elephants for ivory which is one of the most desired wildlife trade

products.

Illegal wildlife trade

Illegal wildlife trade is an illegal global business operated by dangerous criminal organizations such as cartels. For example, illegal wildlife trade would be hunting down a rhino and selling it to a buyer in a country such as Viet Nam, where a popular belief is that rhino horns can cure cancer. Illegal wildlife trade should not be confused with the legal side of the industry.

Endangered species

An endangered species is any species that is at risk of extinction due to a rapid loss of population or the loss of the species natural habitat. For example, the African Black Rhino is a critically endangered species due to its population being only 6000 members of the race and it being spread thin across Coastal East Africa and southern Sahara.

Wildlife trade products

A wildlife trade product is any wild animal or plant resource traded by people. It is critical to notice that there are legal wildlife trade products as well as illegal wildlife ones. For example, a legal wildlife trade product would be sustainably grown timber which is by volume and value the biggest legal wildlife trade product. On the other hand, timber as an illegal wildlife trade product would for example be illegally logged timber.

Safe haven

A safe haven is an officially protected place which purpose is to protect living beings from harm. For endangered species safe havens would be places such as animal sanctuaries that protect endangered species. For example, marine sanctuaries in the United States of America are built to provide safety to endangered marine species such as orcas and Hawaiian monk seals.

Key hotspots

Key hotspots for illegal wildlife trade are areas across the world where the presence of illegal wildlife trade is particularly threatening. These areas include for example China's international borders, trade hubs in East and Southern Africa, Southeast Asia, the borders of Europe, areas in Mexico, parts of the Caribbean islands, and many others.

Ecosystem

An ecosystem is a geographic area where animals, plants, and other organisms form a balance of life to their area where more life can grow. Ecosystems contain living parts such as animals and plants and also nonliving parts such as temperature and climate. Ecosystems are dependent on all parts working as they should and ecosystems could weaken if the conditions of the ecosystem change or a new animal enters the ecosystem that disrupts the food chain.

Background Information

The first time illegal wildlife trade was internationally recognized as a threat was in the year 1900 when countries started to focus on poached species in Africa. In the same year the Convention Designed to Ensure the Conservation of various species of wild animals in Africa, which are useful to Man or inoffensive, was signed to protect wildlife species, however, it was never enforced. Later in 1936 the Convention Relative to the Preservation of Fauna and Flora in their Natural State, also known as the London Convention, was adopted in the former's place. The London Convention aimed at protecting wildlife in Africa from being captured and killed. The Convention also regulated regional and international trade. The London Convention later made possible that in 1948 the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) was formed to preserve nature as an organ of the United Nations (UN).

In 1960 delegates of the IUCN expressed concern for many threatened species and urged the members of the UN to restrict imported wildlife products according to regulations set by the exporting countries. Because of the IUCN, many countries came to the realization that they weren't aware of the regulations set by the exporting countries. Later in 1963, the delegates of the IUCN brought this issue up in the General Assembly urging the creation of a new treaty to regulate the international trade of wildlife. However, it took until 1972 when in the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment it was recommended that 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." Later in 1973, a final draft presented by the United States became the basis for the negotiations that resulted in the birth of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

As CITES came to effect it started regulating both legal and illegal trade of wildlife species. However, CITES was not intended to be a criminal convention and as such it cannot oblige countries to make illegal wildlife trade a criminal offense. Later in the 2010s John Scanlon, the Secretary General of CITES worked with international organizations such as the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), and the World Customs Organization (WCO) to overcome the limitations of CITES in countering illegal wildlife trade by embedding CITES' goals to these organizations' work programs. CITES' goals were further enhanced in 2010 with the creation of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC).

In 2013 in the CITES Convention held in Bangkok, Thailand the threat of illegal wildlife trade was highlighted. It was brought to the attention of the attending parties that findings showed illegal wildlife trade being the fourth largest domestic trade on the global illegal markets being behind only narcotics, counterfeiting, and human trafficking. Delegates of the Convention debated the impacts of legal domestic trade on illegal markets due to the fact that many national ivory markets were still open at the time. The Ministerial Roundtable on Combating Transnational Organized Wildlife and Forest Crime came to the conclusion that transnational organized wildlife and forest crime had major and far-reaching impacts on "species, livelihoods, economies, regional security, and in some instances human lives"

During the same year, the United Nations Group of Friends on Poaching and Illicit Wildlife

Trafficking promoted the first UN General Assembly resolution on tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife. This resolution was later adopted in 2015 with three follow-up resolutions that recognized CITES as “the primary legal framework for regulating international trade in species of wild animals and plants and combating illicit trafficking in wildlife.”

In 2014 the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) dedicated most of the first United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) to addressing the threat of illegal wildlife trade. In the outcome document, the delegates taking part in UNEA urged countries to prevent, combat, and eradicate illegal wildlife trade. In 2020 UNEP launched the Wild for Life campaign with CITES and the United Nations Development Program (UNODC). In 2015 it was found that illegal wildlife trade had spread to social media and was often conducted through it, the campaign aimed to stop it by enlisting high-profile social media influencers to support and promote the urgency and importance of combating illegal wildlife trade.

In 2020 CITES faced a whole new kind of challenge, the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic started as an animal virus SARS-CoV-2 and possibly spread to humans from a wet market in China where many legal and illegal wildlife products were traded. Many have called CITES to address the impact of COVID-19. Still, CITES’ response has been that “Matters regarding zoonotic diseases are outside of CITES’s mandate, and therefore the CITES Secretariat does not have the competence to make comments regarding the recent news on the possible links between human consumption of wild animals and COVID-19”

Sub-topic 1 : Reducing demand for illegal wildlife products

Illegal wildlife trade has grown to be one of the largest illegal markets in the world due to the increasingly high demand for illegal wildlife products. The high demand for illegal wildlife products is very diverse, consisting of over 6000 species of fauna and flora from all across the world. This demand is met by supply from areas where highly desired and usually very endangered species are found.



A map of trade routes in Africa and Asia for ivory harvested from African elephants.

These primary points of access also include the trade routes where illegal wildlife products are being transported. These trade routes contain a large number of airports, maritime routes as well as more lightly guarded borders which criminal organizations use to smuggle illegal wildlife products into countries with demand for such products. Oftentimes smugglers will use companies operating on international maritime and air routes to smuggle wildlife products. These companies usually have no knowledge when they are being used for transporting these products because smugglers have created multiple different methods to hide wildlife products inside other products so that they can smuggle them undetected. Products such as pangolin scales have been found inside cashew nuts.

Customs across the world have put a lot of effort in stopping smugglers from smuggling wildlife products. The customs of multiple countries work together with organizations that protect wildlife and try to stop illegal wildlife trade, to stop these smugglers by sharing information of methods that have been used to smuggle wildlife products. On the other hand local police forces in areas where illegal trade hubs exist are trying to shut them down as well as trying to shut down and/or locate smugglers selling wildlife products through the internet.

Sub-topic 3 : Providing safe havens for endangered species in their natural habitat

For species such as rhinos, elephants, tigers and pangolins which are highly endangered and targeted by poachers, providing them with protection is crucial. Many countries that have populations of poached animals have moved large amounts of those populations into protected national parks or other forms of sanctuaries. However, for example in South Africa, South Africa's largest national park, Kruger National Park has dealt with poachers for a long time due to the park's size and the guards' inability to guard the park all at once. In parks such as this, the rangers have in many cases, for example, cut off rhinos' horns to protect them from poachers.



A four-man antipoaching team permanently guards the last remaining male northern white rhino on Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya.

When creating safe-havens and sanctuaries for wildlife it is crucial to take into note that the species are kept in their natural habitat. Removing species from their natural habitat could cause species to be restricted from expressing their normal behavior and could introduce them to new kinds of plague and psychological distress from their new environment that they are not used to. Removing animals from their natural habitat could also cause ecosystems to be damaged from removing key species from them resulting in many species dying.

In protected national parks, safe havens, and sanctuaries the guards have to be armed and ready to protect the animals from armed poachers. African countries have worked together and formed the African Parks (AP) to protect national parks from poachers all across the African continent having under their protection over 20 million hectares of land. AP has also studied the methods of poachers and have strengthened their protection based directly on combating the poachers methods.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

China

In the past years, China has grown to be one of the countries with the highest demand for illegal wildlife products. China's high demand for illegal wildlife products comes from multiple factors. Among the largest factors are the use of wildlife products in traditional Chinese medicine, illegal wildlife products being used as status symbols and investments in addition high probabilities and low risks in wildlife crime have raised the supply of illegal wildlife products on the Chinese illegal market. The State Council of China banned the trade and use of tiger and rhino bone in 1993. However many illegal tiger farms still

operate in China due to some Chinese authorities having granted licenses as wineries or taxidermists because of the commercial interest in tiger bone. Although much of the global illegal wildlife trade is linked to China, the Chinese government does not support illegal wildlife trade and has issued bans and laws on wildlife trade and conducted multiple operations to tackle networks conducting illegal wildlife trade.

India

India is a country where illegal wildlife trade exists in all forms. India is home to many highly poached species such as tigers, snow leopards, pangolins, and Indian rhinos and elephants. India also has a significant amount of wildlife trade hubs and organizations operating the illegal wildlife trade. Due to India's high supply and functioning trade networks, India's demand for illegal wildlife products has risen to one of the highest in the world. India is also the home to a large amount of the world's decreasing pangolin population. Pangolins have been deemed the most poached and trafficked animal in the world and a lot of this poaching and trade is conducted in India. Although illegal wildlife trade is a major issue in India, the Indian government recognizes the issue and has implemented a strong framework of laws and policies to combat illegal wildlife trade and has been a member of CITES since 1976.

Vietnam

Vietnam is a country where illegal wildlife products are gathered and traded as well as a major destination for illegal wildlife products gathered outside of Vietnam. Due to Vietnam's rich fauna and flora, Vietnam has become one of the largest countries exporting wildlife goods. Vietnamese international illegal trade networks have been found to be responsible for poaching thousands of rhinos, pangolins and elephants since 2010. Even in light of these findings very few have been prosecuted. The Vietnamese government is against illegal wildlife trade and has worked to eradicate it from Vietnam with methods such as raising the punishments for wildlife criminals.

Kenya

Kenya is related to illegal wildlife trade due to its large populations of rhinos and elephants. Before the establishment of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) in 1989, Kenya had a massive problem with poaching and protecting wildlife. During the same year Kenya raised awareness of the dangers of poaching by burning a large stockpile of ivory confiscated from poachers. Although the creation of the KWS changed the situation in Kenya, today Kenya still has a large problem with poaching. Kenya's rhino and elephant populations have attracted poachers from countries like Somalia into Kenya. Kenya's government has worked to eliminate poaching from Kenya and neighboring regions by legally mandating KWS to enforce Kenya's wildlife laws and regulations. The outcome of Kenya's government's actions has been that poaching in Kenya has dropped by 90% in the six years between 2012 and 2018.

South Africa

South Africa has been able to decrease poaching inside their country during the 2010's, however

in recent years the number of poached rhinos has started to increase. South Africa has had a poaching crisis since 2008 targeting especially South Africa's largest national park, Kruger National Park. Kruger National Park has become the target of poachers because of its size and the guards' inability to keep watch on the entire park at all times. Also the parks' close location to the border of Mozambique has caused poachers from Mozambique to cross the border for wildlife products such as rhino horn.

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

WWF is one of the most internationally known and well-funded non-profit organizations in the movement to preserve nature. Stopping the illegal wildlife trade is one of WWF's most important missions in order to protect threatened wildlife across the globe. WWF also does significant and effective work spreading information and raising awareness about issues such as wildlife conservation and illegal wildlife trade. WWF has also introduced its plan to eradicate illegal wildlife trade. The plan includes supporting rangers and local communities in protecting poached animals in order to ensure security for the animals, closing down key hot-spots, trade routes, and large trade hubs in order to make dealing with illegal wildlife trade products more difficult, pressuring governments to improve and enforce their regulations on illegal wildlife trade and promoting initiatives that would lower demand for wildlife products.

International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)

IFAW is another international non-profit organization which goal is to protect wildlife across the globe. IFAW has made its mission to protect animals worldwide and protect and restore their natural habitats. IFAW has partnered with multiple governments and organizations as well as local communities to create a strong network of people fighting against the network that is organized wildlife crime. IFAW has also introduced multiple campaigns to spread awareness of the issue. One of the largest campaigns was the campaign to spread awareness of ivory and where it comes from. The campaign was apparent in countries like China where ivory is a desired product but where most of the people did not know where ivory comes from.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

CITES is a convention and an international agreement between governments working to ensure safety of wildlife and making sure international trade does not hurt wildlife species. CITES protects over 40,000 endangered species of plants and animals across the globe. When CITES was formed in 1973 it regulated much of the international trade of wildlife to ensure safety for wildlife. CITES' goals to ensure the safety of wildlife have not changed from the ones it set in 1973. CITES has also stressed that all species should be protected even if they are not endangered, as it is the best way to make sure that more species don't become endangered.

International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)

INTERPOL is an inter-governmental police organization that assists governments with fighting crime across the globe to make the world a more peaceful place. INTERPOL's focused mostly on

organized and international crime such as wildlife crime. INTERPOL is one of the most important organizations combating wildlife crime due to their global networks and cooperation with local police in areas where wildlife crime is a larger issue. When combating wildlife crime INTERPOL focuses on disrupting and dismantling the international crime organizations in charge of global wildlife trade. INTERPOL's wildlife crime fighting branch, the INTERPOL Wildlife Enforcement team, has conducted multiple successful operations that have brought multiple wildlife criminals to justice and dismantled networks conducting illegal wildlife trade.

Timeline of Events

January, 14th, 1936 The London Convention

The London Convention was a convention that replaced the Convention Designed to Ensure the Conservation of various species of wild animals in Africa, which are useful to Man or inoffensive, as the primary guideline on nature's preservation and made way for the forming of the IUCN

October, 5th, 1948 The founding of IUCN

The founding of IUCN made protecting wildlife and nature all across the globe easier as IUCN was made an organ of the UN.

March, 3rd, 1973 The founding of CITES

The founding of CITES allowed another international organization, that was much more focused on wildlife trade to regulate the trade and start fighting the illegal side of it.

January, 1st, 1981 CITES' global ban on ivory

CITES' global ban on ivory was made in effort to reduce the poaching of elephants and allow the decreased elephant populations to grow

November, 23rd, 2010 The founding of ICCWC

Due to CITES' limitations of combating illegal wildlife trade, ICCWC was formed so that it could target criminals dealing with illegal wildlife products, better than before.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- [Poaching and Illicit Wildlife Trafficking: A Multidimensional Crime and a Growing Challenge to the International Community](#), 26 September 2013
- [Adoption of Resolution on Illicit Trafficking in Wildlife](#), 15 July 2015
- [Tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife](#), 10 September 2019

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Solving the issue of illegal wildlife trade has proven to be extremely difficult for governments and international organizations. Although organizations such as the ICCWC, CITES,

IUCN and WWF have been founded and are working towards solving the issue in many ways, no solution has been made that would eradicate the entire illegal wildlife market.

Possible Solutions

Sub-topic 1:

This sub-topic is incredibly hard to solve but possible solutions for the first sub-topic could be introducing international and governmental programs in countries where illegal wildlife trade products are bought, that would spread information about the effects of illegal wildlife trade on animal and plant populations in hopes that it could make more people realize what the trade does to these populations.

Sub-topic 2:

In effort to shut down the primary points of access for illegal wildlife trade, a global task force could be made to find smugglers' routes and markets for illegal wildlife trade. After finding these trade access points local police forces could work with this task force to shut down the markets and closing the trade routes for wildlife products.

Sub-topic 3:

As this sub-topic is very specific, solving it to the fullest extent is a difficult task. Animal safe havens could be built in many suitable conditions across the globe, but them being in the natural habitat of specific species could prove to be difficult. Although, the sanctuaries could be made into a larger scale so that more species living in similar conditions could be brought in the same sanctuaries. Then again this could introduce a similar problem to the Kruger National Park's where the area is too large to protect all at once.

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