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# Environmental Commission (EC)

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**COMBATING ILLEGAL TRADE IN  
WILDLIFE**

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**International  
Community**

**Memorable  
Experience**

**Challenges  
Skills**



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# INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of humanity, mistreatment of natural goods has been commonly seen. Our environment has been overexploited numerous times, with no concern for the consequences affecting both wildlife and humans.

Wildlife trade refers to “the commerce of products that are derived from non-domesticated animals or plants.” Usually, such individuals are taken from their natural environment and raised under controlled conditions. This way wildlife develops characteristics beneficial to trade, increasing their worth. Wildlife trade is regulated by the United Nations' Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

This market can offer significant benefits to poor communities, when well-regulated. Sustainable income from the trade of medicine, food, clothing, pets and many other can be invested to the livelihood of people and families in LEDCs. Additionally, wildlife can be protected through legal trade. For example, eggs can be collected, regulating and increasing breeding to avoiding extinction. Though, with such economic benefits, it is inevitable for this market to be exploited.

Illegal wildlife trade has been ranked as the fourth largest transnational crime. A worrying percentage of wildlife trade is illegal making it the second-largest direct threat to many species, after habitat loss. TRAFFIC estimated that wildlife products worth about 160 US billion dollars were imported, legally, around the globe each year and roughly 19 US billion dollars of illegal trade. Shockingly, over 100 million tons of fish, 1.5 million live birds and 440,000 tonnes of medicinal plants in trade in just one year. This has been made possible by taking advantage of modern air travel system.

Illegal wildlife trade shows some major disadvantages. Firstly, the immorality of the issue must be discussed. The use of living creatures for economic benefit or the creation of luxury goods such as designer clothing and decorative pieces has been vastly criticized. Infants are being killed, left orphaned and deprived of their mother's protection. Additionally, such trade has significant effects on biodiversity by limiting wildlife variety and threatening local ecosystems and decreases animal population.

In order to tackle this issue, it is first important to understand its size and consequences. Subsequently, how traders manage to illegally exchange wildlife and what are their motives.



## DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

- **Flora**

“The plants of a particular region, habitat, or geological period”

- **Fauna**

The animals of a particular region, habitat, or geological period”

- **Wildlife Trade**

“Refers to the commerce of products that are derived from non-domesticated animals or plants usually extracted from their natural environment or raised under controlled conditions” It may involve live or dead animals, their skins, bones or meat.

- **Poaching**

“The illegal practice of trespassing on another's property to hunt or steal game without the landowner's permission”

- **Sustainability**

“The ability to be sustained, supported, upheld, or confirmed.” In environmental sciences, specifically, it is considered the “quality of not being harmful to the environment or depleting natural resources, and thereby supporting long-term ecological balance”

- **Biodiversity**

“The variety of plant and animal life in the world or in a particular habitat, a high level of which is usually considered to be important and desirable.”



- **Wildlife trade hotspots**

Certain places where wildlife trade is particularly threatening

- **Corruption**

“Dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typically involving bribery”



## TIMELINE

Date	Description of Event
1600-1900	75 known mammals go extinct
1903	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establishment of the Society for the Preservation of Wild Fauna and Flora of the Empire</li><li>• Now Fauna and Flora International</li></ul>
1972	UN Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment
1973	Establishment of CITES
2006	Spike of Elephant Poaching
20 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2013	3 March proclaimed World Wildlife Day
2016	EU Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking
April 2016	Ivory tusk burn in protest of poaching by Kenya and Cameroon
2 <sup>nd</sup> Dec 2016	Launch of Oxford Martin Program to tackle illegal wildlife trade

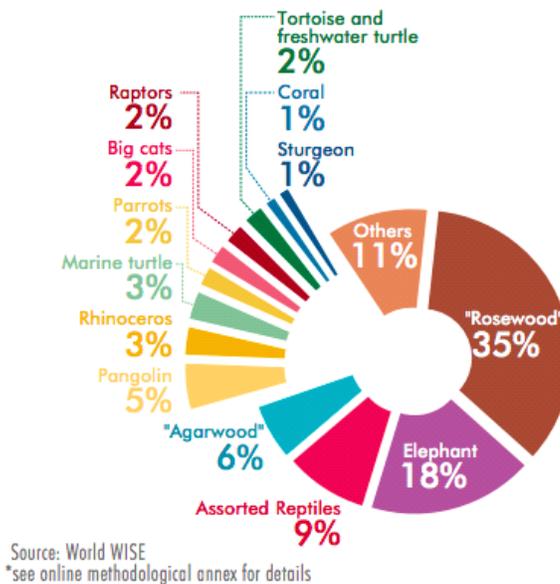
# TOPIC DISCUSSION

## ✚ Size and Guidelines of Legal Trade

Wildlife trade, as aforementioned, is an exchange of animals or plants by humans. It ranges from medicine to clothing, ornaments, food, and pets. It can be seen in a national as well as an international level and involves hundreds of thousands of different species.

The main motive of the trade is economic, ranging from local income to major businesses. Additionally, it helps to provide food, such as nuts, fruits, and leaves, which make up significant resources for sustainable livelihood in rural areas. It is estimated that over 60 countries depend on wildlife to obtain animal protein. Subsequently, trees and plants are used for fuel and medicine ingredients, especially herbal remedies and traditional medicine, is acquired from wildlife. It is estimated the 70,000 plants species are used for medicine and 25% of “modern” medicine has developed based on wildlife medicinal properties.

**Fig. 3** : Share of type of wildlife among total seizures (aggregated on the basis of standard value\*) 2005-2014



Strict and specific guidelines have been set for the regulation of trade. After the 15th Conference of the Parties of CITES, held in Doha, Qatar in March 2010, trade of the majority of endangered species was prohibited (Appendix I), except for rare circumstances. A list of animals and plant, whose commercial trade wasn't fully prohibited was finalized in the conference (Appendix II and III).

LEDCs are greatly depending on wildlife trade, mostly to increase tourism. For example, shark diving brings an income of \$49.9 billion to Fiji, alone.

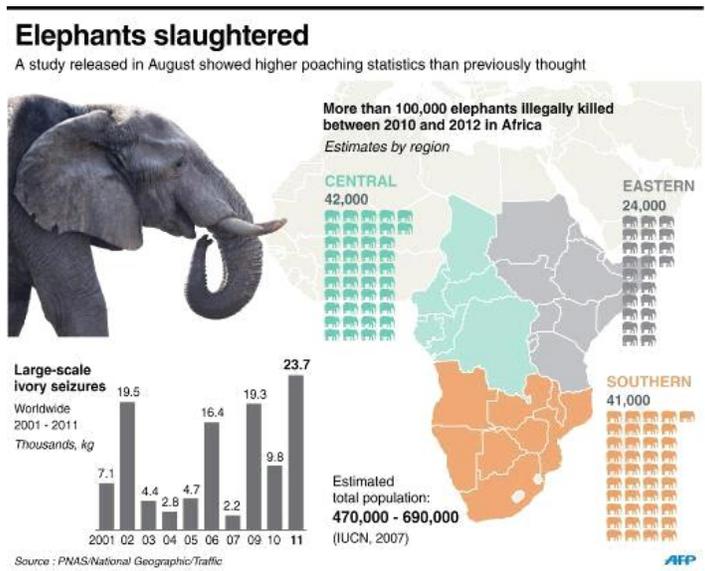
**✚ Size of illegal trade**

Wildlife trafficking appears at a large scale. Specifically, it is the fourth biggest transnational crime valued at roughly 19-20 US billion dollars a year. It could best be described as unsustainable overexploitation of wildlife for economic benefit due to increasingly high demand by dangerous dangerous international networks. It constitutes one of the biggest threats to biodiversity and endangered species such as elephants, rhinos, and orchids.

Many variables are responsible for its dramatic increase in size over the past decade. Firstly, the human population growth and increase in wealth have raised demand. Also, the improvement of international transport has allowed for easier trade. For example, it is estimated that 20-35 elephants are taken out Assam each year and are being sold at a price of \$22,572 to \$33,841. In addition, an estimated 1,069 to 1,220 tiger killings for tiger parts trafficking has taken place between 2000 and 2010.

**✚ How the trade happens**

Wildlife trafficking trade has routes extending to every continent and key linkages in major markets such as China and the United States. Such trade happens in a similar way to illegal drug and arms trafficking. A major source is the internet’s deep web and dark web (part of the deep web) which refers to “encrypted online content that is not indexed on conventional search engines” containing “a wider collection of content that doesn't appear through regular internet browsing”. A lot of trade has been seen taking place on auction sites, via classified ads, and in enthusiast chat rooms. Products are even often available on eBay. For example, the International Fund for Animal Welfare found that 12,000 items worth \$4m, including ivory, live orangutans and a huge number of reptiles and birds were included in pet trade of online markets. Lastly, the air travel system, alongside land and sea carriers, also enable wildlife trafficking when products are hidden in luggage and carry-ons.





### **Evolution of Trade**

When it comes to legal wildlife trade, throughout the years many changes have been made in laws and regulations towards the wellbeing of animals. Such laws mostly consists of banning the trade of specific species by nations. For example, Kenya and Cameroon banned ivory trade and the EU, in 2010, banned the import of seals due to the inhumane way by which they are killed. Furthermore, illegal trade has become a bigger concern in the 21st century. Governments and NGOs are more active on the matter than ever. For example, the EU launched an action plan against wildlife trade in 2016. Correspondingly, the methods of poaching have advanced. Trade used to be done between locals in wildlife areas. Now, airlines have enabled international trade and the internet, trade through the dark web. Additionally, poachers are using technology to their advantage. They have utilized helicopters, GPS systems and tranquilizers. Lastly, research has increased significantly compared to the previous century and it has been discovered that there is a big number of undocumented trade from the past.

### **Elephant and Ivory Trade**

Ivory is the white, hard material from tusks of animals, such as and most commonly Asian and African elephants. It is the wildlife product with the highest demand, for hundreds of years, leading to the endangerment of the species.

Starting in Africa, for a pound of Ivory, middlemen can pay from \$66 up to \$397 and tusks values range from \$220 to \$496. When reaching an export center their value rises to \$606-\$882 and at Asian markets, it peaks to \$946-\$4,360.

Ivory trade has become a topic of great controversy due to the incline it has cause to elephant population. It has led to the placement of the Asian elephant to CITES' Appendix I and the African elephant in Appendix II.

### **Sustainable Development Goals**

The UN Sustainable Development Goals, or 2030 Agenda, is a set of 17 goals set by the General Assembly, to be met until the year 2030. They were assembled in order to tackle issues such as poverty, gender inequality, climate change and hunger. These also include life on land and below water. Both are essential for a livable planet and to preserve biodiversity. Such targets are essential and need to be stressed when tackling an issue such as wildlife trafficking.



**✚ Major disadvantages and effect**

In the last 40 years, more than half of our planet's wildlife has been lost. Illegal trade is the second biggest threat to endangered species, after habitat loss, and its effects have become evident.

Poaching constitutes a major threat to the environment. Biodiversity wears away as habitats are destroyed and large numbers of animals are killed. Furthermore, invasive species are spread into habitats they do not belong in. For example, the IUCN declared the western black rhinoceros extinct in 2011 as the species was a victim of trafficking. Animal and plant populations have been decreasing drastically, stripping countries from their natural assets ruining habitats. Subsequently, a wide range of pathogens are carried by wildlife causing diseases to spread. Additionally, most of the species traded are often already in danger of extinction, making their worth and demand higher.

Next, economy and safety are also greatly affected by wildlife trafficking. Illicit wildlife trade has been linked to corruption. The 2017 UN anti-corruption conference highlighted how exploitation of power fuels and facilitates high-value wildlife trafficking. Additionally, LEDCs lose unique tourist attractions on which the majority of their income is based on. Growing economic growth in Asia has increased demand for Africa's wildlife and natural resources. Lastly, the security of rangers is at stake from criminal wildlife gangs. it is estimated that over 1,000 rangers have been killed in anti-poaching operations.



## CAUSES

Illicit wildlife trade has reached its current size for multiple reason. It has attractive many criminals through its high demand and profit and because it is the type of trafficking governments seem to take less action against. This makes penalties limited and the possibility of being caught small.

### ➤ **Medicine and Superstitions**

The major reason wildlife trafficking persists is the high and increasing demand for such products. This can be seen particularly in Asia, where is it believed then some wildlife items can cure diseases such as cancer and diabetes as you may acquire the animal's abilities. Such superstitions have seriously affected populations of rhinoceros, who are hunted for their horns. These superstitions are the result of lack of education in areas with high poverty rates.

### ➤ **Economic and Social Status**

The ownership of ivory and rhino horns is considered to enhance social status as they are considered luxury goods. For this reason, various online auctions have been held, where offering bids for such items reached millions. Police in Bangkok airport recently confiscated ivory worth over \$450,000.

### ➤ **Economic Issues**

In countries greatly affected by poverty, such as Africa, wildlife is a great asset of economic growth. Wild species can be used for tourist attraction and trade. Poachers gain large amounts of money from trade. For example, ivory can be sold for over \$4,000. This has motivated the involvement of transnationally organized syndicates, as it is an opportunity to gain large profit with little danger of detection.



## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

Illicit wildlife trade is an international matter and requires international cooperation to be tackled. UN member states and NGOs must work together for this common purpose, especially transit and major consumer countries. Numerous material and human resources, such as rangers and researchers, are needed for the most effective action. Additionally, it is important to address the root causes of the issue and base action on these.

Raising awareness is an important aspect when tackling most issues. Take for example the US, where 80% of Americans are not aware that poaching is an issue in their country. This could be done in numerous ways, like campaigns and school programs. Moreover, it is a way to eliminate medical superstitions. Except for informing people of the overall situation, it would be effective to teach sustainable and informed consumer choices and to discourage the purchase of illicit wildlife.

In reality, there are existing laws against poaching. It is essential to strengthen existing regulations as some have been difficult to implement and enforce. For example border-control in the EU requires special attention before any further laws are applied. Additionally, seeing as trade mostly happens through airways, security could be increased. Customs officials, scanners, baggage handlers, and dogs are all tools that could be used and increased to detect wildlife items. Especially Dogs are increasingly being used at airports.

Throughout the past few years, new technology has been developed which has helped combat wildlife crime. For example, TRAFFIC launched the Wildlife Crime Tech Challenge Offering, where participants competed with innovative ideas using science and technology to combat trafficking. Amongst the 16 winning ideas was an electronic nose that detects wildlife products and fake sea turtle eggs embedded with GPS trackers. So, funds could be offered for further research and development of new technology.



# MAJOR COUNTRIES & ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

## Organizations

### TRAFFIC

The research-driven and action-oriented, wildlife trade monitoring network, is a global non-governmental organization working towards the trade on wildlife through ensuring sustainable development and biodiversity conservation. Its actions include studying and analysis trafficking and trading patterns, informing certain places where wildlife trade is particularly threatening and supporting governments and working on environmentally beneficial laws for the environment. Additionally, it specializes in advising and regulating the private sector, in an effective way of sustainable trade and collecting insight into consumer patterns.

### **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**

IUCN allows the cooperation of governmental and civil society organizations to promote human progress, economic development and nature conservation, simultaneously. Being the biggest environmental network, its main goals is to inform and empowering conservation efforts worldwide. It focuses on topics such as biodiversity, climate change, and sustainable development. Member organizations of IUCN complete and vote on resolutions aiming to drive the global conservation agenda.

### **ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN)**

Established in 2005, ASEAN-WEN works towards the establishments of the multinational treaty, CITES. This organization aims to raise awareness in ways such as producing publications or any other way of. Also, it produces training material and establishes training activities for combating wildlife trafficking. It has agreed to collect financial and human resources and to collaborate in cross-border cooperation for effective enforcement of legislation governing conservation, trade and sustainable use of wild fauna and flora.

### **Wildlife Alliance**

Wildlife Alliance is an international non-governmental, wildlife and forest preservation, organization. It focuses a lot of its actions on Cambodia after 2001 when it partnered with the Cambodian government to implement an urban law enforcement team, known as the Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team (WRRRT). Through

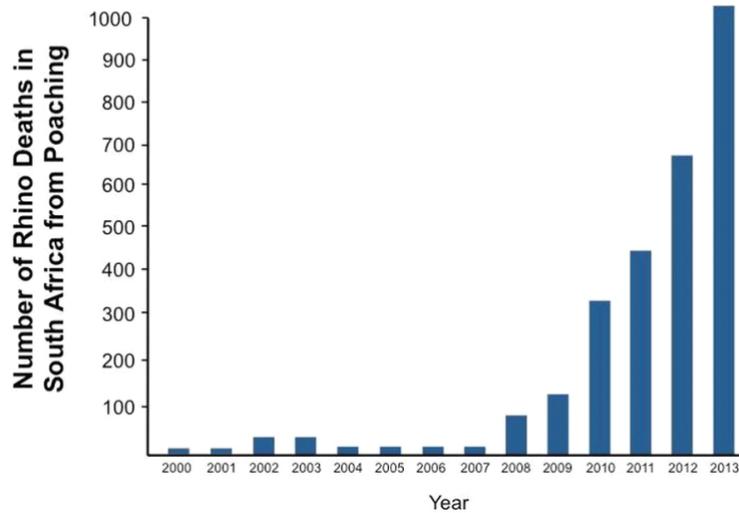


the WRRT the organization has been tackling poaching. One of its most recent actions was the Wildlife Anti-Trafficking Campaign in Cambodian Airports which started in 2013.

### WWF

The World Wildlife Fund is the leading organization in wildlife preservation and has been working 50 years for nature protections in 100 countries. In collaboration with TRAFFIC, WWF aims to combat wildlife trafficking in three ways. Firstly, it supports CITES by offering it scientific and technical advice. Additionally, it limits or bans trade in a particular species and, lastly, it educates the public.

**Recent Dramatic Increase in Rhino Deaths From Poaching**  
(Save The Rhino; South African Dept. of Env. Affairs)





## **Countries**

### **China**

China constitutes the largest markets of wildlife. The demand for wildlife for medicine production is very high due to numerous beliefs and superstitions of species' medicinal capacity. As a result, endangered species are being killed at an alarming rate for use in rituals and therapies such as crushed rhinoceros horns prescribed for headaches, hallucination, and food poisoning. Additionally, due to rhino horns been in high demand for those who practice traditional Chinese medicine, some are willing to pay poachers to obtain it.

Alongside Thailand, China has the biggest demand for Ivory but the recent ban in legal ivory trade seems to be affecting it. In 2011 the IFAW, after the investigation of 158 Chinese ivory retail shops and carving factories, found that only 58 of them had the appropriated license. Out of these licensed facilities, 59.6% were laundering illegal ivory. Subsequently in 2017, TRAFFIC and WWF, carried out an investigation of 110 Ivory shops in 23 different cities, 88 of which were closed down for the same reason.

### **Kenya**

Wildlife is a significant part of Kenya's economy, especially as a tourist attraction. Inevitably, wildlife trafficking is of a very high degree and increasing. Especially, ivory and rhino horn trade have had major effects on rhino and elephant population. It is estimated that 33,000 elephants and 1,010 rhinos are under protection in the nation, but poachers persist to their actions.

The Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) was legally established to combat trafficking. It attempts to eliminate trade through law enforcement and specific security strategies. Additionally, the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), supports and cooperates with KWS in order to fight wildlife crime. For example, AWF has enhanced the Canine Detection Unit with dogs and support for training, which is responsible for detecting contraband rhino horns at airports and seaports

### **European Union**

The European Union constitutes a transit point for a large amount of trafficking between African and Asia, but wildlife is also trafficked from Europe. An estimated 2500 significant confiscation of illicit wildlife products happens every year.

The EU has set the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations as part of the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law. These ensure that wildlife trafficking is a criminal offense in all member states and the cooperation of national authorities against the issue.



## **Spain**

The Iberian Peninsula represents 50% of species present in the European Union and probably the richest biodiversity in Western Europe but such wildlife is in danger from wildlife crime like illegal poisoning, private hunting estates, and poaching. It was estimated that between 2013 and 2014 9,500 cases of animal trafficking and 10,000 of illegal plant shipping were opened. Most commonly, reptiles and exotic birds from South Africa and product from large mammals are poached into the state.

Spain will be acting through a 16-part action plan to prevent trafficking. This will constitute of measures such as funding of awareness campaigns and support of the development of alternative livelihoods.

## **United States of America**

The United States plays an important role in wildlife trafficking as a consumer and transit state and one of the largest markets following China. There were 49,334 illegal wildlife shipments detected between 2005 and 2014, more than a quarter of which originated from Latin American poachers. Such products are smuggled through southern borders which constitute a wildlife trade hotspot and only a few officers are monitoring them. Additionally, Trump administration's role is unclear. The issue has been discussed in President Trump's executive order on transnational organized crime, but budget cuts have been proposed which will make fighting trafficking much harder.



# UN INVOLVEMENT: Relevant Resolutions & Treaties

## ✚ CITES

The multilateral treaty “Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora” or “Washington Convention” is the main regulator of wildlife trade, responsible for the protection of endangered plants and animals. It was initially drafted as a result of a 1963 resolution of IUCN members. The text was finalized by a representative of 80 countries, in 1973, allowing the cooperation of governments, in order to control international borders. Today, CITES offers various degrees of protection of over 35,000 species of plants and animals.

## ✚ United Nations of Drugs and Crime

In combating wildlife crime, the UNODC focuses on Global Programme for Combating Wildlife and Forest Crime/Sustainable Livelihoods Unit (GP/SLU). The programme provides support and to countries affected by trafficking, training to those working to tackle the issue such as rangers, prosecutors, and investigators and collects data and information.

## ✚ United Nations Environment Programme & United Nations Development Program (UNDP)

The UNEP, CITES, UNODC and UNDP cooperate to fight illegal trade. UNEP provides the Secretariat for many global and regional Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), one of which was CITES. Additionally, the UNDP-Global Environmental Finance Unit (UNDP – GEF Unit) created the “Biodiversity (EBD) Portfolio Management Support Consultant” In order to help countries eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities and exclusion through access to environmental finance for sustainable development.

## ✚ UN Biodiversity Conference General Assembly resolution 68/205.

Adopted 20 December 2013, the resolution proclaimed 3 March as World Wildlife Day.

## ✚ General Assembly resolution 69/314,

Adopted 30 July 2015, this resolution discusses tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife and corruption.



## Research Questions

Check data on the decrease in species' population and additional threats of illicit trade on the environment.

Question to look into: To what extent does illegal wildlife trade affect biodiversity?

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