



**Forum:** General Assembly

**Issue:** Measures in combating the illegal trade in wildlife

**Student officer:** Garikai Sibanda

**Position:** Expert chair

## Introduction

Illegal wildlife trade is trading/selling of animal and plant resources often leading to harming large populations of the species. In illegal wildlife trade, rare animals and plants are more economically beneficial than more easily obtained wildlife. This creates a large risk of animal extinction for the rare and already endangered animals. Rhino poaching increased by 7,700% between 2007 and 2013, meaning that the practice is increasing at a completely unsustainable rate. This is due to the rhino's richness in ivory and strong skin. One of the leading causes for illegal wildlife trade is industrial and economic demand for goods brought by certain animals. Poverty also leads people to use animals as a means of income by bartering with the people desiring the animal's products. The protection of animals in certain wildlife game reserves and sanctuaries is at times not sufficient. With corruption and laws of no real substance it creates a dangerous environment for these animal and plant species to reside in. These loose judiciary systems make poaching a low risk business with immense amounts of profit. The profit of these people however, comes at the cost of the animals as over 100,000 African elephants were killed in the last three years and in South Africa an average of three rhinos were killed everyday in 2013

(100-250 words)

## Key Terms

**Poaching:** illegally hunt or catch (game or fish) on land that is not one's own or in contravention of official protection.

**Extinction:** In biology and ecology, extinction is the end of an organism or of a group of organisms, normally a species.

**Holocene Extinction:** The Holocene extinction, otherwise referred to as the Sixth extinction or Anthropocene extinction, is the ongoing extinction event of species during the present Holocene epoch mainly due to human activity.

**Illegal wildlife trade:** the often unsustainable, harming wild populations of animals and plants and pushing endangered species toward extinction.

## General Overview

### Why

There are many reasons why wildlife is traded, including:

- *Food*—fruits, mushrooms, nuts, leaves and tubers, are particular important resources in sustaining livelihoods in many rural areas. Wild animals (including fish) contribute at least a fifth of the animal protein in rural diets in more than 60 countries. A TRAFFIC study demonstrated reliance on wild meat is growing in Eastern and Southern Africa in response to increased human populations and poverty.
- *Fuel*—trees and plants are an important source of fuel for cooking and heating, especially in rural areas
- *Fodder*—considered very important non-wood forest products in arid regions of Asia and Africa
- *Building materials*—for example, timber for furniture and housing to ingredients in manufacturing processes, such as gums and resins
- *Clothing and ornaments*—leather, furs, feathers etc.
- *Sport*—from falconry to trophy hunting
- *Healthcare*—everything from herbal remedies, traditional medicines to ingredients for industrial pharmaceuticals. An estimated 80 % of the world's population are said to rely for primary health care on traditional medicines
- *Religion*—many animals and plants or derivatives are used for religious purposes);
- *Collections*—many wildlife specimens and curios are collected by museums and private individuals

The primary motivating factor for wildlife traders is economic, ranging from small-scale local income generation to major profit-oriented business, such as marine fisheries and logging companies.

Between collectors of wildlife and the ultimate users, any number of middlemen may be involved in the wildlife trade, including specialists involved in storage, handling, transport, manufacturing, industrial production, marketing, and the export and retail businesses.

In fact most of us are involved in wildlife trade in some way, even if it just as end consumers of wildlife products.

### What is wildlife trade?

Whenever people sell or exchange wild animal and plant resources, this is wildlife trade. It can involve live animals and plants or all kinds of wild animal and plant products. Wildlife trade is easiest to track when it is from one country to another because it must be checked, and often recorded, at Customs checkpoints. People

trade wildlife for cash or exchange it for other useful objects - for example, utensils in exchange for wild animal skins. Driving the trade is the end-consumer who has a need or desire for wildlife products, whether for food, construction or clothing.

### **What is wildlife trade worth financially?**

This is a difficult estimate to make. As a guideline, TRAFFIC has calculated that wildlife products worth about 160 US billion dollars were imported around the globe each year in the early 1990s. In addition to this, there is a large and profitable illegal wildlife trade, but because it is conducted covertly no-one can judge with any accuracy what this may be worth.

### **What is the scale of wildlife trade?**

The trade involves hundreds of millions of wild plants and animals from tens of thousands of species. To provide a glimpse of the scale of wildlife trafficking, there are records of over 100 million tones of fish, 1.5 million live birds and 440,000 tones of medicinal plants in trade in just one year.

### **Why is wildlife trade a problem?**

Wildlife trade is by no means always a problem and most wildlife trade is legal. However, it has the potential to be very damaging. Populations of species on earth declined by an average 40% between 1970 and 2000 - and the second-biggest direct threat to species survival, after habitat destruction, is wildlife trade.

Perhaps the most obvious problem associated with wildlife trade is that **it can** cause overexploitation to the point where the survival of a species hangs in the balance. Historically, such overexploitation has caused extinctions or severely threatened species and, as human populations have expanded, demand for wildlife has only increased.

Recent overexploitation of wildlife for trade has affected countless species. This has been well publicized in the cases of tigers, rhinoceroses, elephants and others, but many other species are affected. This overexploitation should concern us all...

- **...because it harms human livelihoods.**

Wildlife is vital to the lives of a high proportion of the world's population, often the poorest. Some rural households depend on local wild animals for their meat protein and on local trees for fuel, and both wild animals and plants provide components of traditional medicines used by the majority of people in the world. While many people in developed countries are cushioned from any effects caused by a reduced supply of a particular household item, many people in the developing world depend entirely on the continued availability of local wildlife resources.

- **...because it harms the balance of nature.**

In addition to the impact on human livelihoods caused by the over-harvesting of animals and plants is the harm caused by overexploitation of species to the living planet in a wider way. For example, overfishing does not only affect individual fishing communities and threaten certain fish species, but causes imbalances in the whole marine system. As human life depends on the existence of a functioning planet Earth, careful and thoughtful use of wildlife species and their habitats is required to avoid not only extinctions, but serious disturbances to the complex web of life.

**Particular problems are associated with illegal wildlife trade**, which is usually driven by a demand for rare, protected species which need to be smuggled and/or by a desire to avoid paying duties. In illegal wildlife trade, some species involved are highly endangered, conditions of transport for live animals are likely to be worse and wildlife is more likely to have been obtained in an environmentally damaging way. The existence of illegal trade is also worrying because it undermines countries' efforts to protect their natural resources.

#### **Related UN resolutions and Previous Approaches to Solving the Issue**

The United Nations has made the 2030 agenda for development and this outlines a series of goals that have been made for the coming years and up to 2030. Illegal wildlife trade would be something in need of being stopped for the goals to be reached.

#### **Also refer to,**

- General Assembly resolution [69/314](#), **Tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife**, adopted 30 July 2015
- General Assembly resolution [68/205](#), proclaiming 3 March as **World Wildlife Day**, adopted 20 December 2013

Organization such as the WWF also play a large role in keeping these animals safe.

#### **Works Cited**

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