The world’s most endangered species are under threat from an unexpected source: the internet.

The scale and anonymous nature of online trafficking, which includes ever-changing usernames, the security of direct messaging apps and cloaked VPNs, means it is essential that online technology companies take charge in detecting and disrupting online wildlife criminals.

E-commerce, social media and technology companies can operate at an unprecedented scale, preventing or removing millions of listings of protected wildlife in collaboration with wildlife experts.

All sectors must unite to fight this global threat
IFAW experts work closely with governments, law enforcement agencies, online marketplaces, and social media platforms to provide them with data, information and training to identify and combat wildlife cybercrime.

sold online
Ivory, rhino horn, big cats, primates such as orangutans and gorillas, a significant trade in protected live parrots and birds of prey, and numerous reptiles such as crocodiles, alligators, snakes, tortoises and turtles as well as amphibians

4+ million
listings to date removed or blocked by the Coalition. Find out more here

12,000
protected wildlife specimens discovered in an IFAW investigation. They were offered for sale in over 5,000 advertisements and posts on 106 online marketplaces (as well as four social media platforms) over a period of six weeks, across four countries. See our 2018 report ‘Disrupt: Cybercrime’

An elephant is photographed in Tsavo National Park in Kenya. African elephants are threatened by wildlife trade - online and offline.

ifaw’s pioneering efforts to stop the deadly trade

Partnering with online tech companies
Since 2008, IFAW has been at the forefront of working with the world’s leading online technology companies to crack down on wildlife cybercrime.

In March 2018, we launched the Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online, together with WWF, TRAFFIC and 21 of the world’s leading tech companies. In the first three years more than four million listings of endangered or threatened species and associated products were removed or blocked from their platforms. There are now over 35 tech companies involved and the number is growing.

One of the first large multi-national companies to join the Coalition was eBay. Through close collaboration with IFAW, eBay decided to completely ban ivory products from all of its platforms in 2009. This has led to well over 100,000 prohibited wildlife listings blocked or removed in 2017 and 2018 alone. Read more about IFAW’s work with the Coalition.
Stop wildlife cybercrime

33,000 endangered wildlife and wildlife products available for sale in almost 9,500 advertisements on 280 online marketplaces in 16 countries during a six-week period. See our 2014, ‘Wanted – Dead or Alive’ research

5,900 prohibited listings for sale online that were flagged so far by Cyber Spotters in the US, Germany, France and Singapore. This is a joint effort with our partners WWF and TRAFFIC

Making progress in public policy
IFAW shines a spotlight on wildlife cybercrime at high profile international forums to build awareness of the problem and empower governments and other partners to solve it. These include INTERPOL, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the United Nations World Crime Congress, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the G7.

Highlights include:
In 2007, 172 government member states to CITES agreed for the first time to a series of practical steps to address wildlife cybercrime. These recommendations were strengthened in 2019.

In 2020, the IUCN adopted a resolution on ‘Implementing international efforts to combat the sale of illegal wildlife products online’.

Supporting law enforcement
IFAW supports law enforcement efforts by actively conducting enforcement trainings as well as calling on governments to ensure their enforcers have the resources they need to detect and disrupt wildlife cybercriminals. This also includes having access to cybercrime experts.

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IFAW empowers enforcers to detect online wildlife criminals by providing information on the methods used to buy and sell illegal wildlife online; on trends regarding which animals are traded and on what platforms; sharing data on suspicious posts where possible and supporting training of enforcers.

Consumer awareness
We’re helping educate and mobilize the public to do their part to stop wildlife trafficking online. We promote being a conscious consumer by not buying wildlife or wildlife products.

As part of our work with the Coalition, we are working with our partners WWF and TRAFFIC and companies to roll out the Wildlife Cyber Spotter Program, a critical force of trained volunteers and ambassadors. We train Cyber Spotters on how to identify endangered species and derived products in listings on various e-commerce and social media platforms. As our eyes across the web, they report any suspicious content they find online directly to Coalition experts for review. The Coalition partners then share that information with the companies, whose enforcement teams will remove the listings in real time.

see how at ifaw.org

#KeepItWild