

CRIMINAL NATURE

The Global Security Implications of the Illegal Wildlife Trade



INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

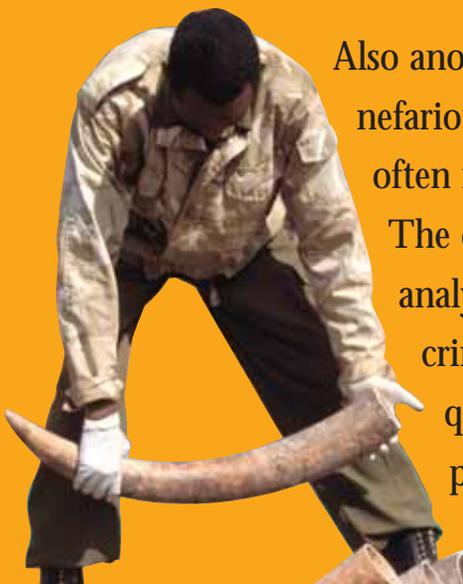


The illicit trade in wildlife is not only a serious global environmental crime with profoundly negative impacts for endangered species protection, ecosystem stability, and biodiversity conservation, but it is also a real and increasing threat to national and global security.

An alarming proliferation in recent years of wild animals and animal parts taken illegally and exchanged through the black market across international borders has left law enforcement officials in the United States and worldwide searching for ways to both stem an increasingly prolific area of international crime and stop the trade before it is too late for many endangered animals.

No longer a problem localized to parts of the world where many lack access to basic resources, the illegal trade in wildlife has grown to become a massive global industry. It is believed to be on par with drug trafficking and the arms trade, if not in terms of total revenue produced for criminal enterprises, then in gravity. In fact, various governmental and non-governmental agencies have estimated that it may be worth in excess of 20 billion USD, or more¹. Much of this is in clandestine undertakings interwoven into a criminal industry that generates enormous levels of undocumented, untraceable revenue, the full scale of which may never really be known.

Also anonymous are the perpetrators, as they conduct their nefarious activities in the shadows, behind locked doors, and often in conjunction with other dangerous criminal elements. The obvious question for those involved in tracking and analyzing the illegal wildlife trade and other international crimes is “Where does the money go?” The answer to that question may be more serious, and more insidious, than people think.

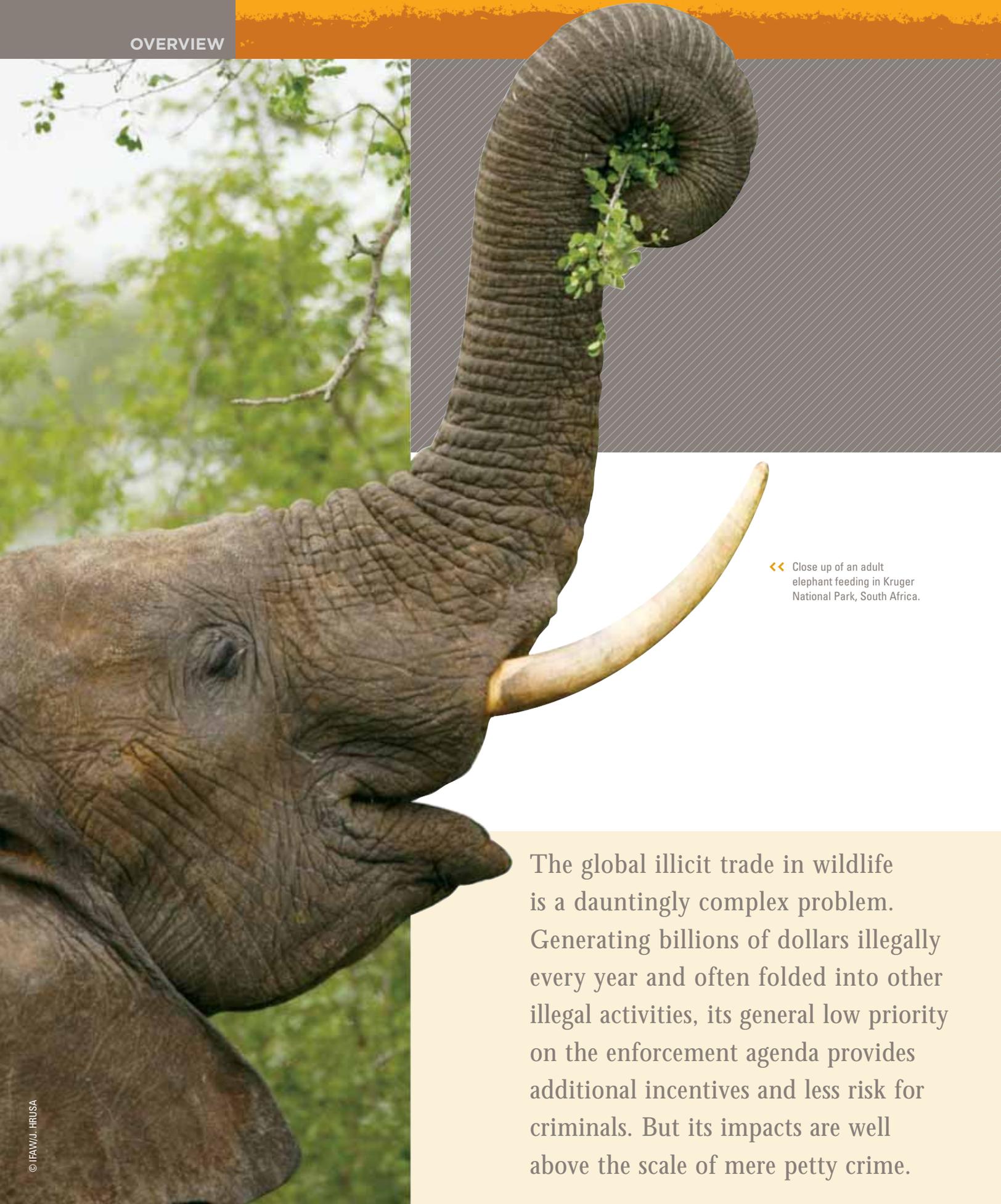


◀◀ A KWS staffer lays out pieces of ivory for inspection. The ivory was confiscated in Singapore and returned to Kenya.

1. Wildlife Crime, August 23, 2007. The International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL). (<http://www.interpol.int/Public/EnvironmentalCrime/Wildlife/Default.asp>)



<< Containers of ivory confiscated in Singapore and returned to Kenya.



<< Close up of an adult elephant feeding in Kruger National Park, South Africa.

The global illicit trade in wildlife is a dauntingly complex problem. Generating billions of dollars illegally every year and often folded into other illegal activities, its general low priority on the enforcement agenda provides additional incentives and less risk for criminals. But its impacts are well above the scale of mere petty crime.



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One trafficking ring in pangolins was valued at

\$3.2 million dollars.

◀◀ Tiger and leopard skin for sale on the main street of Litang, Sichuan Province, China, Aug 2005.

The trade feeds the black-market by taking advantage of the earth's rich biodiversity, pillaging wildlife resources beyond their sustainable capacity and turning them into commercial products. Big cat pelts, rhinoceros horns, elephant tusks, meat from primates and other bush species, pangolin scales, tortoise shells, bear gall bladders, shark fins—traffickers have a large variety of commodities to exploit depending on their resources, motives, and location in the world.

The supply chain from animal source population to consumer is complex, feeding a market in wildlife product that covers a broad range of uses, including food (often expensive delicacies), traditional medicines, pets, decorations (including trophies), clothing, and fashion items. Species from across the animal kingdom are victims in this trade: fish, reptiles, birds, mammals, and amphibians. At times concealed under the rubric of legal trade or sheltered by

intricate wildlife trade laws that may vary from country to country and differ according to national environmental policies, the illicit wildlife trade provides unique opportunities for criminals and imposes extra challenges for law enforcement. The global reach, the multitude of species and products involved and the expansion of the global marketplaces as a result of the proliferation of the Internet make these criminal activities difficult to understand, trace or enforce.

In recent years, a steady stream of worldwide media and governmental reports have begun to relay disquieting new details of the illegal trade in wildlife—its ties to violent crime, large trade rings all over the world, and brazen attempts at smuggling animals and their parts over large distances. Wildlife traffickers have at their disposal an incredibly efficient and adaptable pipeline through which they can move wildlife and their derivatives from poacher to consumer.

Pangolins, medium-sized, scaly mammals resembling armadillos, live in Africa and Southeast Asia. They are widely traded for use in traditional medicines.



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- In the summer of 2006, customs officials stopped a container of 2,849 pangolins (a medium-sized, scaly mammal that resembles an armadillo) and 2,600 large geckos, originating in Malaysia, from illegally entering China.²
- For the seven month period from October 2005 to April 2006, the illegal trade in pangolins from one trafficking ring was valued at 3.2 million USD.³
- Early in 2008, two shipments with over 1,200 African grey parrots were seized from traffickers leaving Cameroon on their way to Bahrain and Mexico.⁴

There are numerous other incidents on record of massive shipments of illegal wildlife transported internationally, and in some regions, daily.

Beyond the individual crimes being reported randomly in the news, often of small-scale collectors or drugs and arms smugglers trading in wildlife on the side, large-scale illicit trade in wildlife is where the big profits are being made. This high-value, high-volume illegal trade is occurring globally and requires the networks and skills of major organized crime to succeed. Some high-value illegal wildlife commodities are no longer available in massive quantities, and their value has increased with their scarcity. The illegal trade in ivory, rhino horn, and tiger parts, for example, continues to be highly profitable – perhaps more so because of the increasing rarity of the species that are poached for their parts.

In spite of the proven links with criminal syndicates, the enormity of scale and the potential for harm to both global biodiversity and public health, national and international legal frameworks and penalties are often woefully inadequate compared to those that address the illegal trade in drugs and weapons. In reality, the illicit trade in wildlife is not only a serious global environmental crime

Elephants, rhinos and tigers are more challenging to capture and transport and their protected status is generally known, making every stage of this trade relatively more dangerous. For instance, any international trade in tigers or tiger parts is illegal. The trade is exclusively black-market – from killing the tiger, to production and sale of its parts and derivatives, to the sale of tiger bone wine in a shop in China or San Francisco.⁵

with profoundly negative impacts for endangered species protection, ecosystem stability, and biodiversity conservation, but a real and increasing threat to national and global security. The skills and networks required to illegally trade in wildlife, coupled with the lucrative profits, makes this type of trafficking highly attractive to serious criminals as a relatively easy method for generating funds, whether they be in parallel to or in support of other illicit trade dealings.

The global scale of this trade in terms of profits, volume and an extensive network is drawing in criminal syndicates of all kinds. Claudia McMurray of the U.S. Department of State explains, “Wildlife trafficking is often closely linked to international organized crime and increasingly involves many of the same offenders and smuggling routes as trafficking in arms, drugs and people.”⁶ And, in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001, concerns have been raised that a new profiteer from the illegal wildlife trade could be emerging, according to the worldwide news media, international intelligence agencies, and global police forces: local, regional, and global terrorist organizations.

These reports, though at times vague or anecdotal, indicate that an increasing number of poaching incidents could be tied to organized crime, militias, or terrorist groups. Examples include elephant poaching in Chad tied to Sudan’s Janjaweed militias, poaching of rhino and other wildlife in Kenya tied to Somali warlords, illegal shark finning operations off the coast of Costa Rica and worldwide bear poaching connected to multinational organized crime syndicates, and tiger and other big game poaching in South and Southeast Asia linked to local and regional militant groups.

Many wildlife trade policy and enforcement experts from around the world agree on two things: 1) More resources are desperately needed to fully understand and ultimately combat the illegal trade in wildlife, and 2) If criminal elements, including terrorist groups, are not already using the wildlife trade as a source for revenue, they likely will be soon.

2. “China comes down hard on pangolin smugglers.” Reuters, January 9, 2008. (<http://www.reuters.com/article/environmentNews/idUSPEK19856420080110>)

3. Ibid.

4. IFAW report: Made in China, Farming Tigers to Extinction

5. Media Note, U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, Washington, DC, June 5, 2007 Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans, Environment, and Science Hosts Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking Side Event at 14th CITES Conference of the Parties (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2007/jun/86017.htm>)

6. Office of the Spokesman, Washington, DC, U.S. Department of State, June 5, 2007. Claudia McMurray is the Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans, Environment, and Science at the United States Department of State. (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2007/jun/86017.htm>)





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<< Illegally poached rhino horns, Meru National Park, Nairobi, Kenya.

An orphan rhino stands in a field of dry grass at the Daphne Sheldrick Orphanage in Nairobi, Kenya.



Wildlife trafficking is often closely linked to international organized crime and increasingly involves many of the same offenders and smuggling routes as trafficking in arms, drugs and people.

Six brown bear cubs being rehabilitated at the IFAW Orphan Bear Cubs Project, Tver Region, Russia. Brown and other bear species are targeted by poachers for their gallbladders.



ORGANIZED CRIME

Compared to other criminal activities and penalties, the low risk of detection and minimal consequences for perpetrating wildlife crime are attractive incentives to professional criminals. The degree of organized criminal involvement and methodology varies widely, depending on the species, its population size, market demand and geography. The legal trade in wildlife is itself used as a vehicle for the illicit trade—transporting illegal species instead of the legal ones or together within the shipments, using falsified documents, bogus species identification permits or false numbers.⁷ An Indonesian wildlife smuggler explained in a 2006 interview that they routinely pack a layer of legal turtles on top [of the shipping crates] and put thousands of illegal turtles underneath.⁸ Conversely, shipments of cocaine have been found concealed beneath legal shipments of live lizards into the Caribbean.⁹

In addition to incidents of drugs being smuggled within wildlife shipments, sometimes even sewn into animals' bodies, there are rising reports of illegal wildlife products being traded directly for other illegal commodities – namely drugs or weapons. A 2007 Wall Street Journal article reported mass quantities of illegally harvested abalone from South Africa being exchanged directly for methamphetamine from buyers in Hong Kong where abalone sells for over \$200US a pound.¹⁰

Even when organized crime, as such, is not fully involved, much of the trafficking is highly organized.

As outlined by experts, there are clear factors connecting groups and individuals in organized crime to operations in the illicit wildlife trade.¹¹ These include:

- Detailed planning,
- Significant financial support,
- Use or threat of violence,
- International management of shipments,
- Sophisticated forgery and alteration of permits and certifications,
- Well-armed participants with the latest weapons,
- Opportunity for massive profits, and
- Capacity to launder enormous amounts of cash.

A United Nations report from 2003 on trafficking in protected species of wild flora and fauna explains, “Even when organized crime, as such, is not fully involved, much of the trafficking is highly organized.”

The trade in sturgeon caviar for instance has become so entrenched in illegal harvesting and trade that in 2007, officials representing The Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) World Conservation and Monitoring Centre decided that a database designed just to monitor the permits and certifications of caviar was needed. The UNEP report noted, “Perhaps no sector of the illegal fauna and flora trade has been criminalized to the extent of that of sturgeon and caviar.”¹²

The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines organized crime as:

“Any group having some manner of a formalized structure and whose primary objective is to obtain money through illegal activities. Such groups maintain their position through the use of actual or threatened violence, corrupt public officials, graft, or extortion, and generally have a significant impact on the people in their locales, region, or country as a whole.”¹³

By all accounts much of the global illegal trade in wildlife *is* organized crime. The stage this global black-market has reached in terms of networks, profits and operators, as well as its links to other trafficking syndicates, poses a substantial threat to international law and stability.

7. “Illicit trafficking in protected species of wild flora and fauna and illicit access to genetic resources.” *United Nations Economic and Social Council Report of the Secretary-General, Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice*, United Nations Report, Twelfth session, Vienna, 13-22, May 2003.

8. Simon Elegant, “Eating Disorder: China’s appetite for exotic wildlife has spawned a thriving black market in Asia’s endangered species. Will pangolin be eaten into extinction?” *TIME.com+*, September 26, 2005. (<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,501051003-1109398,00.html>)

9. Interview with a Caribbean customs official, 2007.

10. Mark Schoofs, “As Meth Trade Goes Global, South Africa Becomes a Hub.” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 21, 2007.

11. John M. Sellar, “Organized Illicit Trafficking in Wildlife, John M. Sellar.” *The Police Chief*. Vol. 74, No. 6, June 2007. (http://policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display_arch&article_id=1203&issue_id=62007)

12. United Nations Report, United Nations, May 2003.

13. “Organized Crime.” Federal Bureau of Investigation. (<http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/orgcrime/glossary.htm>)

SHARKS

An example of an entire industry utilizing a chain of corruption wherein loopholes and differences in laws are knowingly exploited by criminals is shark finning. With China's expanding middle class, demand for shark fin soup as a delicacy and status symbol has been rising for years. Dried shark fins sell for hundreds of dollars per pound. The Taiwanese mafia has set up large finning operations in Ecuador and Costa Rica.¹⁴ Although the meat could be consumed by source countries, only the fins are worth enough in Asia to warrant investment in processing and shipping them back. Fishermen, who are paid to obtain as many fins as possible, use the practice of quickly cutting off a shark's fins on the boat and throwing the carcass back in the water, resulting in massive numbers of sharks being killed in a short amount of time and considerable waste of the animal. Figures on the number of sharks being finned annually are staggering.¹⁵

Almost difficult to imagine, the World Conservation Union's (IUCN) Shark Specialist Group estimates tens of millions of sharks are killed globally every year for this trade.¹⁶

There has been some recognition of the brutality and unsustainable nature of this practice. After reviewing the implications for the fishing industry and conservation, the United States National Marine Fisheries Association officially banned this practice, making shark finning illegal in U.S. waters. Fifteen additional countries have also banned shark finning.¹⁷ But, with profits continuing and disjointed enforcement, the bans alone have proven inadequate to compete with the demand in China and Southeast Asia and with the established system of organized crime groups facilitating the shark finning trade.

14. Rob Stewart, writer and director. *Sharkwater*, Sharkwater Productions, 2006. (www.sharkwater.com)

15. "The End of the Line? Global threats to sharks." Oceana and WildAid Report, Oceana, 2007. (http://www.oceana.org/fileadmin/oceana/uploads/Sharks/EndoftheLine_Spread_sm.pdf)

16. IUCN Shark Specialist Group Finning Statement Website, IUCN Shark Specialist Group, 2003.

17. Oceana and WildAid Report, 2007.



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In China, one bowl of shark fin soup can fetch as much as

\$100 US

Snap shot of shark fins on display in a restaurant in Beijing, China.



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A young Asiatic moon bear at a bear farm in Chengdu, central China.

Bear bile wine for sale in Heilongjiang, China.

BEARS

Criminals looking to profit off of the trade in bear gallbladders and bear bile often exploit the complex system of national and international laws governing hunting and trade in a range of bear species. Bear bile (stored in the gallbladder) is used in traditional medicines in Asia, where demand for gallbladders and bile is high. Bear farming in China, Korea and Vietnam was permitted by the governments of these countries intending that this would supply the black market demand and spare wild bears. In fact, it has served to stimulate the market and put wild bears everywhere at risk. Cases of bear poaching to supply the trade going to Asia are occurring in Russia, Canada and the United States. In Canada, the trade in bear gallbladders is reportedly run by a small cartel of just five individuals, and bear smuggling rings are being identified in other parts of North America.¹⁸ One report from Canada highlighted the tenacity of the criminals involved:

“Bear gall traffickers appear to stop at nothing. One wildlife supplier, believed to be selling fake galls, was found murdered in his New York apartment. In Russia, the family of an officer was murdered when he came too close to uncovering the mafia’s role in the wildlife trade.”¹⁹

Allen Hundley of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been involved in addressing this trade, noting that “any time an unregulated market puts a price on the head of wildlife, as it has on bears for their gallbladders, the future of that wildlife is in serious jeopardy.”²⁰ So far in the United States, 34 states have passed laws to ban the trade in bear organs in response to this crisis.

18. “Bear Alliance Project, From Forest to Pharmacy.” Animal Alliance of Canada Report, Animal Alliance of Canada, January 29, 2008. (<http://www.animalalliance.ca/projects/index.html>)

19. Ibid.

20. Jane Raloff, “A Galling Business: The inhumane exploitation of bears for traditional Asian medicine.” *Science New*, Vol.168, No. 16, October 15, 2005. (<http://www.sciencenews.org/articles/20051015/bob10.asp>)

MILITANCY AND DESTABILIZING GOVERNMENTS

Able to reach remote areas and wildlife habitats difficult to access, militias and military personnel have discovered that trading in valuable wildlife parts and derivatives generates extra income to fund military endeavors, including rebel militias. Leading up to the international ban on trade in ivory in 1989, when global attention focused on plummeting elephant populations, some African governments were known to have funded invasions and military quests using revenue generated from culling mass numbers of elephants and selling the ivory.²¹ Although international treaties such as CITES and domestic laws in elephant range-states make elephant poaching and dealing in ivory illegal, the model of using this trade to fund militias persists. In some cases, elephants are even being poached by rebels and militias using sophisticated weapons manufactured for human wars. In 2005, an African tour guide told the British Broadcasting Company that he had witnessed elephants being slaughtered with anti-tank weapons.²²

Militias and military figures are able to illegally harvest and profit from wildlife with ease because governments and enforcement officials cannot contain them, or turn a blind eye to the problem, thereby empowering corruption in general. Dr. John Hart, scientific director for the Tshuapa-Lomami-Lualaba landscape project based in Kinshasa, with over thirty years experience working in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), says that the illicit wildlife trade is oriented to high-take and high-end profit. "It undermines our investment in community-based conservation," he says. "It corrupts communities and poisons officials from the bottom on up." In 2006, Dr. Hart reported that a recent cycle of elephant killings in DRC was different from previous poaching incidents in the way ivory has figured in as a resource to finance war. He wrote,

"Both elephant ivory and meat were actively acquired as a source of revenue by military and militias and even the national police. Military police bosses based in elephant landscapes hired professional hunters who recruited local guides and porters to find and kill elephants, and transport their meat and ivory. Congolese businessmen and women, including those in the transport sector, collaborated in a massive illegal trade in elephant meat and ivory. The "ivory chain" spanned Congo's borders and implicated neighboring countries, in particular Uganda."²³

Global trade, technology and transportation are constantly evolving and becoming more sophisticated, providing and even facilitating the formation of the networks required to move the ivory from forest or savannah to international markets. With the ever-increasing purchasing power of the Chinese middle class and the seemingly insatiable appetite in Japan for ivory products, the burgeoning

demand for elephant ivory shows no sign of abating. Studies of ivory seizures reveal that since the ivory ban was instated in 1989, large seizures of a ton or more have increased in frequency and size, with more than 40 tons seized in 2005 and 2006 alone.²⁴ And, this may just be the tip of the iceberg.

East, Central, West and even Southern African countries are heavily implicated as the source of most of this illicit market, with environments that are hospitable to well-established supply chains and routes particularly to China and Japan among other Asian markets. *Feature. In 2007, National Geographic reported that recent heavily-organized elephant poaching in Chad's renowned Zakouma National Park was reminiscent of the situation in the Central African Republic during the 1980's, when hundreds of armed men from Sudan, now associated with Janjaweed militias, went on a killing rampage of elephants and rhinos for the profit they would earn from the ivory and rhino horn.²⁵

According to a January 2008 report out of Assam, India, devastating increases in rhino poaching in Kaziranga National Park over the past year have offered every indication that militants are involved.²⁶ Rhino horn is believed to be bartered for arms by militant groups in northeastern India working with poaching syndicates.²⁷ The black market value for rhino horn is staggering, worth tens of thousands of dollars per kilogram. Prohibited in international trade,²⁸ rhino horn has been highly prized in Asia, for its purported medicinal qualities, and in the Middle East, where it is used to make ornamental and ceremonial daggers. A former rhino poacher now working with the Forest Service identified the Karbi tribal militant groups and the NSCN-IM (Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland), entities identified with radicalism, violence and terrorism, as key perpetrators of rhino poaching in Kaziranga.²⁹ The Assam Forest Minister is pushing to adopt new measures to combat the rhino killings.³⁰

21. Christopher S. Wren, "Angola Rebels Accused of Elephant Kills." *The New York Times*. November 21, 1989. (<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=950DE3DE143CF932A15752C1A96F948260>)

22. John Nielsen, "Confronting Africa's Poaching Crisis International Efforts Target Abuses of Bushmeat Trade." *National Public Radio, Weekend Edition*. January 12, 2003.

23. John Hart, *Wildlife Direct Blog*. (<http://www.wildlifedirect.org/blogAdmin/lomami/>)

24. Samuel K. Wasser, "Using DNA to track the origin of the largest ivory seizure since the 1989 trade ban." *PNAS*, February 26, 2007. The Wasser study cites a total of 23,461kg plus 91 unweighed tusks. This number does not include the 3,000kg seizure in Osaka, Japan, in August of 2006.

25. Michael Fay and Michael J. Nichols, "Ivory Wars: Last Stand in Zakouma." *National Geographic*, March 2007. (<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0703/feature1/index.html>)

26. "Naga, Karbi Militants Involved in Kaziranga Poaching." *Wildlifewatch*, January 27, 2008.

27. *Ibid*.

28. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. See generally www.cites.org.

29. *Wildlifewatch*, January 27, 2008.

30. *Ibid*.



A young mountain gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla beringei*) living in the rain forest of Virunga National Park, Congo.



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Ivory laid out for inspection. The ivory was confiscated in Singapore and returned to Kenya.

“Less than a year ago, rebels killed several rare mountain gorillas, which was widely reported in the global press. The gorilla killings illustrate just how difficult and complex the problem really is – the gorillas were executed not for bushmeat, but as a dire warning to rangers and international conservationists to stay away.”³³

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BUSHMEAT

The commercial bushmeat trade targets monkeys, apes, hoofed mammals and rodents, among others. These species are being taken out of the forests in unprecedented volumes, often facilitated by roads created by the logging industry. While bushmeat is defined simply as the meat derived from wildlife, characterizing the bushmeat trade is more difficult.³¹ It can include several components, among them:

- Illegal hunting methods,
- Protected species,
- Hunting from restricted areas,
- Unsustainable harvest, and
- Commercial exploitation by professional hunters for distant urban markets.³²

“Historically, local communities have consumed modest amounts of bushmeat,” says Dr. Heather Eves, Director of the Bushmeat Crisis Task Force. “The growing commercial trade in bushmeat, however, is fed by demand from markets in big cities in Africa and around the globe and Africans living abroad.” No longer simply a means of subsistence, bushmeat as a commodity, fueled by urban demand, brings with it the opportunity for large-scale illegal profit-making.

In some parts of the world, including Central Africa, this commodity is being exploited not just for profit, but for the profit necessary to support sometimes violent upheaval and warfare:

“The [Democratic Republic of Congo] saw an explosion of poaching in the early part of this decade, much of it due to the rising demand for bushmeat in urban areas. Rebel militias and other militant groups saw an opportunity and took control of large parts of the country’s parks, using bushmeat, ivory and other wildlife resources for both sustenance and to pay for weapons and other supplies. It’s still going on. In the past few years, hundreds of hippos in Eastern DRC were slaughtered for their meat near the headquarters of the Mai Mai rebels. The hippo population has declined from more than 20,000 in the late 1980s to less than a few hundred today. Less than a year ago, rebels killed several rare mountain gorillas, which was widely reported in the global press. The gorilla killings illustrate just how difficult and complex the problem really is – the gorillas were executed not for bushmeat, but as a dire warning to rangers and international conservationists to stay away.”³³

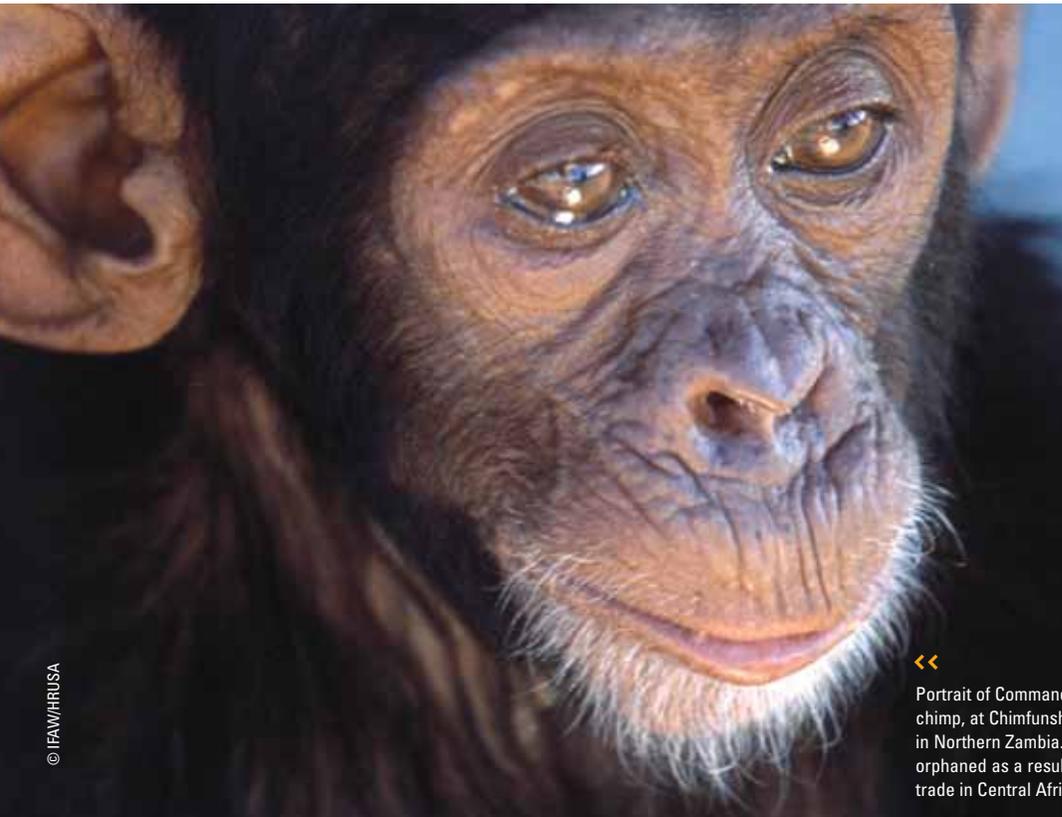
31. Dr. Heather E. Eves, “The Bushmeat Trade in Africa: Conflict, Consensus, and Collaboration.” *Gaining Ground: In pursuit of ecological sustainability*, 2006.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Personal interview with Dr. Heather E. Eves, Director, Bushmeat Crisis Task Force, February 6, 2008. See generally www.bushmeat.org.



▶▶
Monkey bushmeat for sale at a market in Kisangani, Congo (DRC).



Portrait of Commando, a rescued baby chimp, at Chimfunshi Wildlife Orphanage in Northern Zambia. Commando was orphaned as a result of illegal bushmeat trade in Central African Republic.

In the past few years, hundreds of hippos in Eastern DRC were slaughtered for their meat near the headquarters of the Mai Mai rebels. The hippo population has declined from more than 20,000 in the late 1980s to less than a few hundred today.

A mother hippo stands beside its baby while staring cautiously into the camera. The hippos reside in the Queen Elizabeth National Park in Uganda.

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Confiscated Tibetan antelope pelts and horns and bear and fox pelts as well as weapons and ammunition.

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THE WILDLIFE TRADE AND TERROR

The most foreboding criminal element playing a role in the global wildlife trade may be the most important to U.S. and international policymakers, as well as the most threatening. Over the past several years, the global news media and police agency reports have mentioned—initially almost in passing but recently with increasing regularity—that poachers have been connected to localized militant and terrorist groups responsible for attacks on cities and towns. **More recently, well-funded and well-armed poachers have taken an almost guerilla warfare-style approach to their activities in places like East, Central and North Africa—an approach reminiscent of the recent human conflicts between governments and rebel groups, warlords, and regional militias, some of which have been linked to terrorist attacks in the region.** In some cases, according to news reports, those same rebel groups, warlords, and militias have entered protected areas and engaged in large scale poaching – areas like the famed wildlife parks of Kenya and the Zakouma National Park in Chad. Somalia-based warlords and Sudan’s Janjaweed militias are two groups thought to engage in poaching in these areas. Though much remains unknown about this new twist to the ongoing assault on wildlife in Africa and other places around the world, experts are beginning to question whether the illegal wildlife trade will (or has already) become a source of revenue for terrorist groups.

There are known cases, for example, where poachers have direct links to military weapons and markets also accessible to terrorist

groups. Whether the poachers are connected directly to terrorist groups or their activities is not known. Warlords or militant groups that have been connected to specific instances of terrorist activity have also, separately, been connected to instances of poaching. “Elephant poachers in many parts of Africa use weapons that can be acquired only from military sources, and African wildlife agencies are starting to recover western military weapons as well – including American-made M-16s and German-made G3s,” says Michael Wamithi, Elephant Program Director at IFAW. “Whatever the source of these weapons is, the fact that poachers, whoever they are, can obtain these weapons is cause for concern.”

“The appearance of these weapons is very alarming because it means an improvement in the range, accuracy and firepower available to the poaching gangs, and this has a direct impact both on the animals and the rangers that are targeted by such weapons. Kenya Wildlife Service has recovered RPGs (Rocket Propelled Grenades), which Somali poachers sometimes carry to use against the rangers or to discourage KWS patrols from pursuit in the first place,” Wamithi says.

And, although tenuous, a geographic nexus exists between the illegal wildlife trade and terrorism activity as well. United States and United Nations officials are concerned that Central and West Africa, a well-known problem area for poaching and large-scale illegal wildlife trafficking, is also fast becoming a “hotbed” of crime and potential

34. Pascal Fletcher, “Interview - West Africa is crime, terrorism, ‘black hole’ – UN Expert.” *Reuters*, January 13, 2008. (<http://www.reuters.com/article/africaCrisis/idUSL13455450>)

35. “Qaeda’s Zawahri urges attacks on Darfur peacekeepers.” *Reuters*, September 20, 2007. (http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKL20798291_CH_242020070920)

36. *Ibid.*

37. “Poaching for Bin Laden.” *The Guardian Unlimited*, May 5, 2007. (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/alqaida/story/0,,2073168,00.html>)

38. *Ibid.*

terrorism.³⁴ Janjaweed militants and Somali warlords in East Africa are thought to receive support from al-Qaeda.³⁵ In September, 2007, al-Qaeda's second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri urged Sudanese militants to rise up against the African Union and U.N. peacekeepers in Sudan's region of Darfur. "The free *mujahideen* sons of Sudan must organize jihad against the forces invading Darfur as their brothers organized the *jihadi* resistance in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia," Zawahiri said in a video posted on the Internet on Sept. 20, 2007.³⁶

During the past year, there have also been reports of militants affiliated to al-Qaeda tapping into the illegal wildlife trade in India, Nepal, Burma and Thailand.³⁷ Individuals based in Bangladesh, who are believed to have ties to local terrorist groups, are hiring local trappers and infiltrating organized crime syndicates around India's Kaziranga National Park to poach in the park and nearby protected areas.³⁸ Kaziranga and other wildlife preserves in the area are vulnerable and therefore attractive to criminals. Kaziranga park wardens admit that sophisticated weapons and tranquilizer guns are being used to poach within the Park.³⁹ Indian officials and local traders and poachers say that Bangladeshi militants have turned to the wildlife trade for financial support because the profits from poaching and wildlife trafficking are untraceable, undetectable and readily exchanged – characteristics that are necessary in a post-9/11 world where the money laundering and banking schemes previously used by terrorist groups have been disrupted.⁴⁰ Illegal wildlife commodities like rhino horn, ivory, and tiger pelts and parts are the most coveted, with assured high-value on the black-market. And, rare wildlife commodities with established high black-market values can be used as collateral, just like gold, by those seeking fast cash resources.⁴¹

In piecing together what little information exists about the suspected poacher-terrorist nexus, worrisome questions arise about what little we know, as do even more disturbing questions about what we do not know. The U.S. and other governments and international bodies, though publicly acknowledging the possibility of a connection between the global illegal wildlife trade and terrorism, have yet to allocate the resources necessary to understand how strong the links are, to determine what threats those links may pose, or to develop strategies for confronting these threats.



CAVIAR

The market for caviar has always supported high-prices, but with decreasing availability after decades of over-harvesting and unregulated fishing, caviar prices have skyrocketed. Criminal syndicates, including the "caviar mafia," are lording over the caviar trade. The groups involved are known to use violence to protect their practices. Recently, one of the more extreme acts of terrorism served as a shocking example of the danger involved. As reported in The London Observer Service:

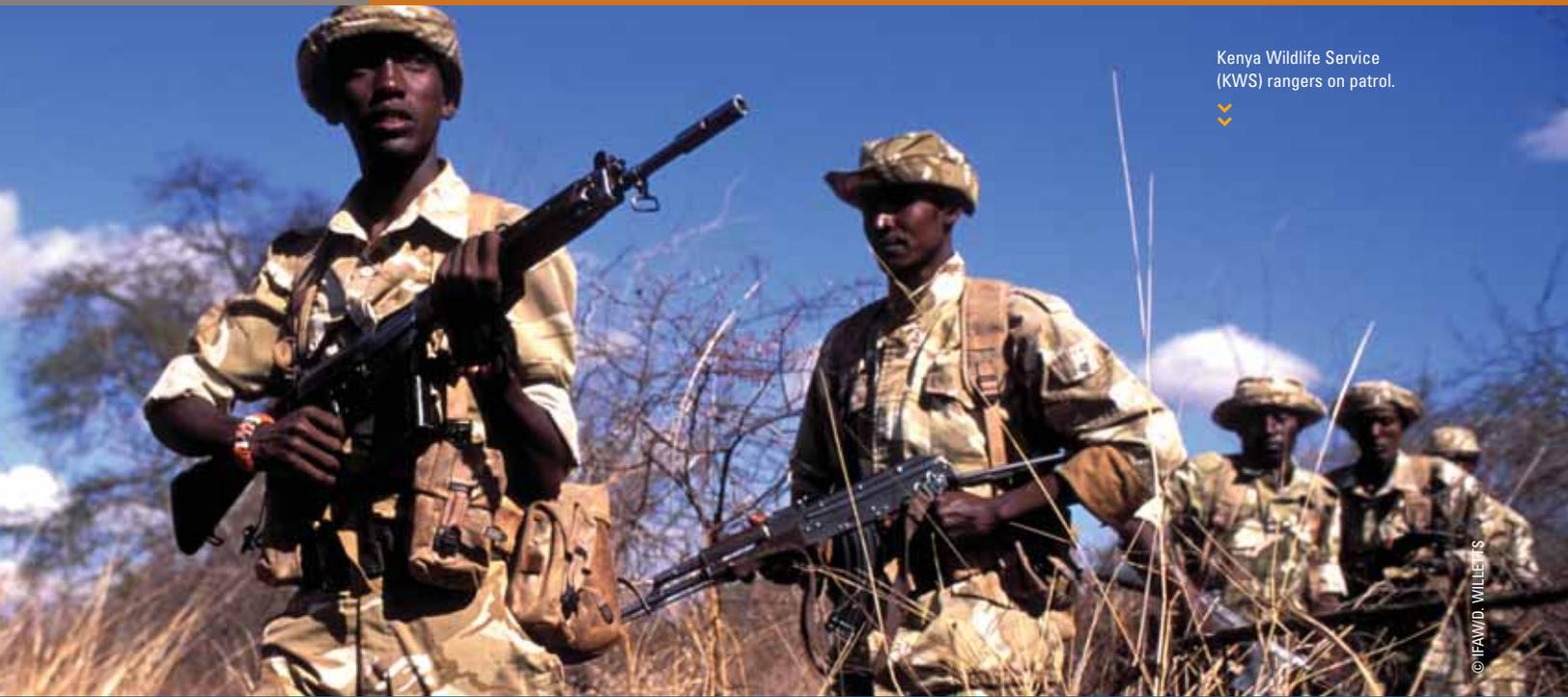
"The caviar mafia is thought to have been behind a terrorist bomb attack in the town of Kaspiysk that killed 67 people, including 21 children, and destroyed a nine-story apartment building. Most of the victims were Russian border guards and their families. The guards, who patrol Russia's new boundaries, had begun to produce results in regulating illegal traffic and, in doing so, made dangerous enemies. More than 100 people lived in the bombed building, including the commander of the locally based border guards unit, Lt. Col. Valery Morozov. Morozov reportedly had told a Russian newspaper, *Rossiysky Vesti*, that he had been threatened by the "sturgeon pirates."⁴²

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Simon Cooper, "The Caviar Kings: Inside the cartels that built empires and destroyed species." *Seed Magazine*, November 2003. (http://seedmagazine.com/news/2006/01/the_caviar_kings.php)



CONCLUSION

The resources dedicated by the U.S. and other nations to understanding and disrupting the global illegal wildlife trade are insufficient in comparison to those allocated for combating the two other large illegal industries, arms and drugs, both of which are also known to provide support for organized crime, militancy and regional instability, and globalized terror. Until recently, the major arguments for working to combat the wildlife trade have focused on the resource itself – protecting against extinction, preventing the spread of animal borne diseases, stopping animal cruelty, supporting local wildlife tourism, protecting biodiversity, and sustaining rural economies and livelihoods. In the post 9/11 world, however, the illegal wildlife trade is no longer only a conservation or animal welfare issue. It is a national and global security issue, as well.

The impacts of the illegal wildlife trade are perhaps most apparent on the ground in places where highly imperiled – and highly valued – wildlife species cling to life, guarded by a brave and dedicated few. In recent years, hundreds of park rangers in Africa and around the world charged with protecting wildlife from poachers have lost their lives. In 2004, over 100 rangers were killed in the line of duty in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) alone. India lost five rangers in 2006, and seven Chadian rangers were killed in 2007 protecting elephants in Zakouma National Park. The Kenya Wildlife Service has erected a permanent monument to the 19 rangers killed in the line of duty in recent years.⁴³ These tragic deaths serve as a stark

reminder that the illegal wildlife trade does not just affect the security of animals.

A report from the World Bank issued in 2005 on the illegal wildlife trade in South and East Asia summarizes a key theme in this global crime, stating, “Wildlife is not traded in isolation. It is part of a larger network of organized crime that involves drugs, guns, and people-smuggling.”⁴⁴ Significant attention and greatly increased resources are needed to fully understand the pathways of the illegal wildlife trade and connections to other illicit activities – drug running, military weapons, human smuggling, illegal logging, militancy, and terrorism – all of which profoundly affect both the communities where wildlife resources are depleted and the communities where wildlife resources are ultimately consumed. All of the links in the supply chain, from local source villages in wildlife-rich places to large cities where consumers purchase wildlife products, legally and illegally, are impacted by these crimes and the violence and upheaval that can often come with them. “There is a relationship between exploiting natural resources, including the illicit wildlife trade, and exploiting people, whether it’s based on religious or political ideology or just simple greed,” says Peter Pueschel, Illegal Wildlife Trade Program Director at IFAW. “Removing an opportunity for criminal profiteering by addressing this illegal wildlife trade crisis will result in a safer world for animals and for people.”

43. *On Track* Newsletter, IFAW, Spring 2007.

44. “Going, Going, Gone: The illegal Trade in Wildlife in East and Southeast Asia, Environment and Social Development, East Asia and Pacific Region.” World Bank Report, The World Bank, July 2005. (<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTEAPREGTOPENVIRONMENT/Resources/going-going-gone.pdf>)

A LEADER IN FIGHTING ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE

With offices in 16 countries, IFAW is a world leader in developing practical solutions to fighting the illegal wildlife trade, while building a better world for animals and people.

IFAW works to create a world in which cruel and ecologically unsustainable trade in wild animals is eradicated. In the context of the Protection of Wildlife from Commercial Trade program, IFAW works to reduce the levels of trade and to improve animal welfare standards by focusing on three core activities:

- 1. Increased application of the precautionary principal by wildlife trade relevant international conventions, treaties and national legislation.** This requires IFAW to have a strong political presence and influence, nationally and in international conventions such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES), the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the International Whaling Commission.
- 2. Enhanced compliance and enforcement regimes to eliminate illegal wildlife trade.** IFAW works to improve enforcement collaboration between domestic wildlife authorities and agencies and among countries that are involved in wildlife trade. IFAW also supports, through training programs and technical assistance, the building of appropriate enforcement capacity in "wildlife rich" – as well as in "consuming" countries.
- 3. Increased consumer awareness of the impacts that trade in wildlife has on conservation and animal welfare.** IFAW believes that once educated, consumers will reject wildlife products, resulting in a decrease in wildlife consumption as a whole. IFAW also believes that public awareness will increase the number of voices advocating for protection.



One of the elephant orphans from the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (DSWT) playfully bonds with James Isiche of IFAW at Tsavo East N.P.

Areas where IFAW engages include:

- Fighting the rapidly expanding global marketplace for selling and purchasing illegal wildlife on the Internet.
- Educating governments and decision-makers about the need for legislation and corresponding penalties focused on combating the global illegal wildlife trade.
- Launching campaigns in tourist hot-spots around the world to redirect tourist dollars from illegal wildlife products to locally produced sustainable souvenirs or handicrafts and to tourist activities such as whale watching that value living animals.
- Participating in international fora that regulate and monitor both illegal and legal wildlife trade, and advocating for the elimination of trade in vulnerable or endangered species.
- Providing on-the-ground training to local enforcement officials across the globe so that they can better enforce wildlife trade laws.

Please visit IFAW at www.ifaw.org to learn how you can help protect species from the illegal wildlife trade.





Cover photo © IFAW/ D. WILLETTS

Ashok Kumar of the Wildlife Trust of India examines a tiger skin just before burning. Indian wildlife authorities torched a huge pile of banned wildlife furs and skins in Kashmir as part of the government's effort to stop an illegal trade that threatens to wipe out many of India's most endangered species.

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