

CRIMINAL NATURE

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**THE GLOBAL
SECURITY
IMPLICATIONS OF
THE ILLEGAL
WILDLIFE TRADE**



IFAW

INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | | | |
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| AMCEN | African Ministerial Conference on the Environment | KWS | Kenya Wildlife Service |
| CAR | Central African Republic | LRA | Lord's Resistance Army |
| CNDP | National Congress for the Defense of the People, Democratic Republic of the Congo | NGO | Nongovernmental Organization |
| CITES | Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora | NSCN-IM | Isak-Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, India |
| CRS | U.S. Congressional Research Service | OCTA | Organized Crime Threat Assessment (Europol) |
| ECCAS | Economic Community of Central African States | PBS | Public Broadcasting Service |
| ETIS | Elephant Trade Information System (of CITES) | RENAMO | Mozambican National Resistance |
| EU | European Union | TRAFFIC | global wildlife trade monitoring network |
| FWS | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service | UN | United Nations |
| GRASP | Great Apes Survival Partnership | UNEP | United Nations Environment Program |
| HUJI-B | Harakat ul-Jihad-Islami-Bangladesh | UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| ICCF | International Conservation Caucus Foundation | UNITA | National Union for the Total Independence of Angola |
| ICCWC | International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime | UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |
| IFAW | International Fund for Animal Welfare | UNTOC | United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime |
| IGO | Intergovernmental Organization | WCO | World Customs Organization |
| IUCN | International Union for Conservation of Nature | WWF | World Wildlife Fund |
| JMB | Jamaat-ul Mujahedin Bangladesh | | |

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IFAW

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“Certainly, even if we aren’t today thinking much about the global implications of poaching in Africa, I can guarantee that we will be if it goes unabated. How shockingly destructive and historically shameful it would be if we did nothing while a great species was criminally slaughtered into extinction. And yet, here we are in the midst of one of the most tragic and outrageous assaults on our shared inheritance that I’ve seen in my lifetime—where an elephant’s dead ivory is prized over its living condition, where corruption feeds on its body and soul, and where money only makes matters worse.”

— SENATOR JOHN KERRY, STATEMENT AT THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE HEARING ON
IVORY AND INSECURITY: THE GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS OF POACHING IN AFRICA, MAY 24, 2012.*

“Wildlife crime is leading to the proliferation of guns in exactly those areas that need less conflict, not more; it is providing money for corruption in exactly those countries in which corruption has already stalled all pro-poor decision making and doing business legitimately is already hard enough; and it is oiling the engine of crime and polluting efforts at good governance, democracy and transparency in exactly those communities that need more voice, not more silence The fight to end wildlife crime is a fight for humanity.”

— VALERIE HICKEY, WORLD BANK ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTIST **

* U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. 2012. Ivory and Insecurity: The Global Implications of Poaching in Africa. 112th Cong., 2nd sess., 2 April 2013. Statement by Senator John F. Kerry. Accessed April 2, 2013. www.foreign.senate.gov/press/chair/release/kerry-statement_senate-foreign-relations-committee-hearing-on-ivory-and-insecurity-the-global-implications-of-poaching-in-africa

** Hickey, Valerie. 2013. The fight to end wildlife crime is a fight for humanity. Voices, Perspectives on Development Weblog, March 11. <http://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/Fight-to-End-Wildlife-Crime-Is-Fight-for-Humanity>

Introduction

IN 2008, THE INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR ANIMAL WELFARE (IFAW) EMBARKED ON AN EFFORT TO FULLY UNDERSTAND THE TRUE NATURE OF WILDLIFE CRIME AROUND THE WORLD. What we found was shocking, and we chronicled our findings in a report becoming one of the first organizations to assert that the illicit trade in wildlife could be a genuine and increasing threat to national and global security.

Since that time, the international trade in endangered species has only grown, making the threat all the more real and menacing. Elephants were killed for their ivory in record numbers in 2011 and 2012, and some rhinoceros subspecies have become extinct or are on the verge of extinction. Rangers are regularly killed by poachers, and some of the world's poorest countries continue to see their wildlife decimated for the black market in wild animals and parts. Meanwhile, the profits realized from the illegal trade in wildlife have surged to levels once reserved for legally traded precious metals. Criminal and violent groups around the world have become the main actors exploiting this global industry.

The world community is taking notice. In November 2012, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that illegal wildlife trade must be addressed at every level of the international community and declared illegal wildlife trade a national security issue. In May 2013, the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice agreed to a resolution calling on the nations of the world to consider wildlife and forest crime a serious form of organized crime. Also in a May 2013 report to the United Nations Security Council, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon highlighted the potential link between poaching and other transnational organized criminal activities, including terrorism.

IFAW has updated *Criminal Nature* in response to the increasingly urgent need to elevate responses to wildlife crime; to enhance our understanding of the global security implications of the illegal wildlife trade; and to highlight the known and potential links among poaching, illegal wildlife trade, and transnational organized criminal activities.

This updated report contains new evidence about the gravity of the threat that illegal wildlife trade and the poaching crisis represent to security, to wildlife, and to people. It also examines illegal wildlife trade links to violence, radicalism, organized crime, corruption, fraud, and terror—highlighting signs that

income from poaching helps fund violent activities by state and nonstate actors.

IFAW has a long history of working to stamp out the illegal wildlife trade in source, transit, and end-user nations. We provide training and equipment to anti-poaching ranger units; train customs officials to detect, identify, and seize wildlife contraband; advocate for stronger protective measures for elephants and rhinos at both the domestic and international level; collaborate with law enforcement authorities to arrest and prosecute black-market sellers; and campaign to reduce consumer demand throughout the world.

Since 2005, IFAW has partnered with INTERPOL because we share a profound commitment to battling the illegal wildlife trade through building enforcement capacity and improving information sharing among wildlife enforcement agencies. We are proud to be the first NGO to forge a formal partnership with INTERPOL's Environmental Crime Programme as of May 2013.

IFAW strongly believes that, by tackling all of the links on the illegal wildlife supply chain and working to remove the opportunity for criminal profiteering, the global community can move toward a safer world for animals and people.

—Azzedine Downes

PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Summary

IFAW'S 2008 REPORT, was one of the first publications of its kind to assert that 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. Since 2008, the problem has only worsened, and the world community has taken notice. On May 1, 2013, the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice agreed to a resolution calling on the nations of the world to “recognize wildlife and forest crimes as a serious form of organized crime and strengthen penalties against criminal syndicates and networks profiting from such illegal trade.”¹

This updated report seeks to further enhance our understanding of the global security implications of illegal wildlife trade and highlight the known and potential connections between poaching and illegal wildlife trade and organized criminal actors and organizations operating at a local, national, and global scale. The report makes the case for greatly increased attention and resources needed to fully understand the pathways of the illegal wildlife trade and connections to other illicit activities—drugs and arms trafficking, corruption and fraud, and, ominously, militancy and terrorism—all of which severely affect not only the security and development of the local communi-

ties where wildlife resources are depleted, but also the security of the nations and regions in which those communities are located and of the world community as a whole.

No longer a problem that is localized to parts of the world where many lack access to basic resources, illegal trade in wildlife has grown to become a massive global industry. Various organizations and reports estimate that the trade is worth at least US\$19 billion per year and rank illegal wildlife trade, including timber and fisheries, as the fourth largest global illegal activity after narcotics, counterfeiting, and human trafficking and ahead of oil, art, gold, human organs, small arms, and diamonds.^{2,3,4,5} Traffickers have a large variety of commodities to exploit depending on their resources, motives, and location in the world, including big cat pelts, rhinoceros horns, elephant ivory, bushmeat, pangolin scales, shahtoosh shawls, tortoise shells, bear gall bladders, shark fins, and caviar. The supply chain from animal source population to consumer is complex, feeding a demand that covers a broad range of uses, such as culinary delicacies, traditional Asian medicines, pets, decorations and trinkets, hunting trophies, clothing, leather products, jewelry, and traditional crafts.

The trade proliferates easily, thanks to a parallel legal trade in wildlife (estimated at over US\$300 billion per year), the expansion of the Internet as a global marketplace, confusing wildlife trade laws, lack of enforcement and basic governance structures, and fast-developing economic markets. Wildlife crime also does not receive the attention it merits from local, national, and international law enforcement and security agencies or political bodies.

There are numerous incidents on record of massive shipments of illegal wildlife transported across international borders, and most experts agree that this high-value, high-volume illegal trade requires the networks and skills of major organized crime to succeed. Illegal ivory trade activity worldwide has more than doubled since 2007 and is now over three times larger than it was in 1998, its highest level in two decades, with ivory fetching up to US\$1,000 a pound (US\$2,205 a kilogram) in the streets of Beijing.⁶ Poaching is also bringing rhinoceros to the edge of extinction, with the price of rhino horn in the black market currently at around US\$30,000 per pound (US\$66,139 per kilogram)^{7,8}—more than the value of gold and platinum.⁹

Illegal trade in wildlife also poses an immediate risk to people and communities in the places where wildlife is found. At





least 1,000 rangers were killed in 35 different countries over the last decade.¹⁰ At the global level, illegal wildlife trade undermines sustainable development through its effects on security and the rule of law.

Warlords or militant groups that exist to achieve ideological or political goals, often through violence, and that have been connected to specific instances of violent criminal activity have also been connected to instances of large-scale poaching. Somalia- and Sudan-based warlords and militias are reportedly hunting down elephants in Central Africa and, experts believe, using the tusks to buy weapons and sustain their activities.¹¹ There have also been reports of militants affiliated with al-Qaeda tapping into the illegal trade in ivory, tiger pelts, and rhino horns in India, Nepal, Burma, and Thailand.¹²

Experts believe that illegal wildlife trade has become a source of revenue for identified extremist and even terrorist groups. Ivory, like the blood diamonds of other African con-

flicts, is thought to be funding many rebel groups and militias in Africa, including the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), Somalia's al-Shabaab, and Darfur's Janjaweed.

Government forces from Congo, Uganda, and newly independent South Sudan have also been implicated in poaching and illegal wildlife trade. Elephant poachers in many parts of Africa use weapons that can be acquired only from military sources; these military-style weapons mark an improvement in the range, accuracy, and firepower available to the poaching gangs and their capacity to kill a large number of animals and the rangers tasked with protecting them.¹³

Much of the global illegal trade in wildlife is run by organized crime syndicates that carry out detailed planning, have significant financial support, understand and use new information technology, and are often well armed.¹⁴ Organized crime groups, especially those with smuggling capabilities, find wildlife trafficking attractive because of its low risks, high profits, and weak penalties. Wildlife traffickers use smuggling routes similar to those of drug traffickers, and the crimes often become entangled, with smugglers branching out into animal trafficking in order to mask their drug trafficking, making enforcement even more complicated.¹⁵ As organized crime, militias, and terrorist entities have become more involved in the illegal trade of wildlife, the use of sophisticated money laundering schemes to move their profits and protect their organizations from detection and prosecution has increased as well.

Wildlife crime syndicates constantly adapt their tactics to avoid detection and prosecution, making national borders increasingly irrelevant. The legal trade in wildlife is itself also used as a vehicle for the illicit trade—transporting illegal species instead of legal ones or mixed in with legal shipments and using falsified documents, fake species identification permits, or false numbers.¹⁶

Compared to other transnational criminal activities, the low risk of detection, relatively small penalties, and minimal consequences for perpetrating wildlife crime are attractive incentives to participate in illegal trade in wildlife. In the case of ivory, very few large-scale seizures actually result in successful follow-up law enforcement actions, including investigations, arrests, convictions, and the imposition of penalties that serve as deterrents.¹⁷ Wildlife trade is considered a low-risk enterprise for the criminals involved, in large part because wildlife trafficking is treated as a low priority by many law enforcement agencies.



The worst year on record for elephant ivory seizures was 2011, when almost 40 tons of smuggled ivory were seized.¹⁸ Law enforcement officials say organized crime has an increasingly active grip on the ivory underworld because only a well-oiled criminal machine could move hundreds of pounds of tusks around the globe with relative impunity. In the last decade, 11,000 forest elephants have been killed in one park alone (Gabon's Minkebe National Park),¹⁹ with the total population of forest elephants down 62 percent in the past 10 years.²⁰ This kill rate exceeds the birth rate—a trend that, if not reversed, could lead to extinction of the African elephant from some areas in the next few years.²¹ Elephant massacres in Chad, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic are the latest gruesome incidents of elephant poaching to have taken place in 2013.

In 2012, a record 668 rhinos were poached in South Africa, up by almost 50 percent from 2011 figures.²² In 2013, the toll continued to rise, with 201 rhinos killed in Kruger National Park alone.²³ A subspecies of the black rhino was declared extinct in the wild in West Africa in 2011, and that year Vietnam lost its last Javan rhino, which was killed by poachers.²⁴ In April 2013, wildlife authorities in Mozambique's Limpopo National Park reported that the country's last 15 rhinos had been wiped out by poachers working with the game rangers responsible for protecting them.²⁵ In India, rhino horn is believed to be bartered for arms by militant groups working with poaching syndicates.²⁶

In conclusion, illegal wildlife trade must be a priority issue for governments and their agencies. Organized criminal syndicates, insurgency groups, brutal militias, and corrupt military units are among the primary actors involved in large-scale, commercial-sized wildlife trafficking. Many wildlife trade policy and enforcement experts from around the world agree that more resources are desperately needed to fully understand and ultimately combat the illegal trade in wildlife, including the activities undertaken by transnational organized crime.

To counter the criminal syndicates running the global illegal wildlife trade, it is critical for the enforcement community to have access to intelligence that will enable them to identify emerging trends in a timely manner, to address current trends, to plan for future activities, and to deploy the best available techniques and technologies. At the same time, an integrated enforcement strategy that includes the police, military, judges, and customs officials is needed. There are clear examples of how the support of transboundary information sharing can achieve great success in targeting wildlife crime. Resources are needed to support these efforts.

Until recently, the major arguments for working to combat

the illegal 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, illegal wildlife trade is no longer only a conservation or animal welfare issue. It is a national and global security issue and must be addressed accordingly.

IFAW makes the following recommendations to governments, multilateral institutions, intergovernmental organizations, and nongovernmental organizations:

- 1** Elevate wildlife crime to the level of other serious international organized crimes, such as human trafficking and the drug trade, that pose significant threats to global security and development;
- 2** Strengthen policies and legal frameworks, increase law enforcement capacity, and develop effective judicial systems in order to better combat wildlife crime at the local, national, and international levels;
- 3** Develop and implement regional wildlife enforcement strategies and networks that are interconnected through a global coordinating mechanism; and
- 4** Address the growing demand for and availability of wildlife products through targeted consumer awareness and demand-reduction initiatives in key consumer states.

Gravity of the Problem

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 worldwide searching for ways both to stem an increasingly prolific area of international crime and to stop the trade before it is too late for many endangered animals.

No longer a problem that is localized to parts of the world where many lack access to basic resources, illegal trade in wildlife has grown to become a massive global industry. Various organizations and reports estimate that the trade is worth at least US\$19 billion per year. A 2011 report from Global Financial Integrity, a program of the Center for International Policy, analyzed the scale, flow, profit distribution, and impact of the main types of illicit trade. According to that report, illegal wildlife trade, including timber and fisheries, is the fourth largest global illegal activity after narcotics, counterfeiting, and human trafficking and ahead of oil, art, gold, human organs, small arms, and diamonds.^{2,3,4,5} Illegal wildlife trade is believed to be on par with drug trafficking and the arms trade, both in terms of revenue produced for criminal enterprises and in the threat to global security. 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 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. Only recently have law enforcement officials and security analysts begun to understand the linkages among criminals involved in global illegal wildlife trade and identified threats to global stability and security.

The number of wild animals taken illegally and exchanged through the worldwide black market in wild animals and their parts is incredibly difficult to assess. TRAFFIC analysis reports that from 2005 to 2009, CITES recorded an annual average legal trade in species of international concern of more than 317,000 live birds, just over 2 million live reptiles, 2.5 million crocodilian skins, 1.5 million lizard skins, 2.1 million snake skins, 73 tons of caviar, 1.1 million coral pieces, and nearly 20,000 hunting trophies.⁶ Illegal trade is estimated to be around one-third of the legal trade,⁷ although for certain species and products, such as caviar, the value of the illegal trade can be many times that of legal commerce.⁸ Traffickers have a large variety of com-

modities to exploit depending on their resources, motives, and location in the world, including big cat pelts, rhinoceros horns, elephant ivory, bushmeat, pangolin scales, shahtoosh shawls, tortoise shells, bear gall bladders, shark fins, and caviar. The supply chain from animal source population to consumer is complex, feeding a demand that covers a broad range of uses, such as culinary delicacies, traditional Asian medicines, pets, decorations and trinkets, hunting trophies, clothing, leather products, jewelry, and traditional crafts such as hankos (signature seals used mainly in Japan).

The trade proliferates easily, thanks to a parallel legal trade in wildlife (TRAFFIC estimated the value of legal wildlife products imported globally in 2009 was over US\$323 billion), the expansion of the Internet as a global marketplace, confusing wildlife trade laws, lack of enforcement and basic governance structures, and fast-developing economic markets. Moreover, legal frameworks and penalties are often woefully inadequate compared to those that address the illegal trade in drugs and weapons in most countries. For example, in March 2013 a Chinese smuggler was caught in Kenya with 439 pieces of worked ivory, hidden in a suitcase among tree bark to disguise it as traditional medicine. The man was fined less than US\$1 per piece and has since been set free, according to the Kenya Wildlife Service.¹⁹

Wildlife crime also does not receive the attention it merits from local, national, and international law enforcement and security agencies or political bodies. According to CITES, “assessing the scale of wildlife crime is very difficult . . . partly because wildlife crime remains outside ‘mainstream’ crime and, so, it is not recorded in the way that drug trafficking, murder, rape, or burglaries are.”²⁰ Thus, criminal syndicates are attracted to wildlife trafficking for its high profitability, small risk of detection or prosecution, and light fines and jail sentences.

Poachers have direct access to military weapons and arms markets linked to organized criminal and terrorist groups.²¹ In Africa, news, NGO, and governmental reports regularly note that the illegal wildlife trade involves militia groups and warlords, some of which have been linked to terrorist attacks in the region and have alleged ties to al-Qaeda. In some cases, those same rebel groups, warlords, and militias that have terrorized communities in multiple African countries traverse the continent and engage in large-scale poaching. The fact that heavily armed gangs of poachers can enter national parks, reserves, and other protected areas and kill large numbers of animals and then move those products across multiple jurisdictions and ship their contraband out to destinations throughout the world through major airports and seaports is a cause for alarm for

many working in global security, defense, and law enforcement.

There are numerous incidents on record of massive shipments of illegal wildlife transported across international borders. Most experts agree that this high-value, high-volume illegal trade requires the networks and skills of major organized crime to succeed. According to INTERPOL, the U.S. Department of State, the UNODC, and others, the same routes used to smuggle wildlife across countries and continents are often used to smuggle weapons, drugs, and people, with the same culprits frequently involved as well. Indeed, wildlife crime often occurs hand in hand with other offenses like fraud, corruption, money laundering, theft, and murder.^{22,23,24} The UNODC's Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice agrees that the involvement of well-organized criminal groups has turned environmental exploitation into a professional business with high revenues encouraging the poaching of endangered and protected species.^{25,26}

The current value of elephant ivory and rhino horn has reached such staggering levels that professional poachers are elbowing more localized and traditional hunters out of the poaching business. These days, the illicit ivory and horn mar-

kets are fed by some of the world's most vicious and heavily armed militant and criminal groups.²⁷ Illegal ivory trade activity worldwide has more than doubled since 2007 and is now over three times larger than it was in 1998, its highest level in two decades. Fetching up to US\$1,000 a pound (US\$2,205 a kilogram) in the streets of Beijing,²⁸ the vast majority of illegal ivory—experts say as much as 70 percent²⁹—is flowing to China where a booming middle class and a seemingly insatiable appetite for ivory products result in a demand for elephant ivory with no sign of abating.

Asian demand is also bringing rhinoceros to the edge of extinction, driving up the price of rhino horn in the black market, currently at around US\$30,000 per pound (US\$66,139 per kilogram)^{30,31}—more than the value of gold and platinum.³² Across Africa, barely 26,000 rhinos remain: 21,150 of the white rhino species, mostly in South Africa, and 740 of the critically endangered eastern black rhino species, mostly in Kenya. The IUCN declared the western black rhino extinct in 2011 and recorded the northern white rhino, a subspecies in central Africa, as being on the brink of extinction, with only seven individuals surviving.^{33,34} The number of rhinos poached in

Prime destinations for illegal wildlife trade

By most accounts, **CHINA** is the world's largest consumer of illegal wildlife products.⁹ From ivory to rhino horn, pangolin scales to bear bile, tiger bone to shark fin soup, demand for wildlife and wildlife products in China is massive and growing.¹⁰ This includes many wildlife products most directly tied to violent extremist or militant groups and their organized poaching activities in Africa and other places. For example, more than half of all large shipments of illegal ivory seized by authorities worldwide are destined for China, and China has been identified as a key endpoint in the wildlife trafficking chain by countless enforcement agencies and experts around the world for many other species.¹¹ In response, the Chinese government has significantly enhanced enforcement activities, working with local and international NGOs and IGOs and other

stakeholders, including Chinese Web sites involved in wildlife trade.¹²

The **UNITED STATES** is a major consumer nation in the wildlife trade black market and is considered by many to be the second-largest destination market for illegally trafficked wildlife in the world.¹³ FWS typically seizes about US\$10 million worth of illegal wildlife per year, an amount that probably only scratches the surface of the wildlife contraband coming into the country.¹⁴ The United States is a key end market for rare reptiles, such as crocodiles, pythons, caimans, and sea turtles, as well as mammals such as elephants and bears. The United States is also a prime market for ivory and ivory carvings, as well as other art or handicraft items made from the parts and derivatives of protected species. Sea turtle eggs and meat are frequently intercepted at some ports of entry as are Asian medicinals made from various endangered wildlife, including tigers and pangolins.¹⁵

The **EUROPEAN UNION** is widely considered to be the third largest destination for illegal wildlife.¹⁶ In one year alone, EU enforcement authorities seized more than 7,000 shipments including over 3.5 million CITES-protected wildlife specimens.¹⁷ The EU is used as both a market and a transit route for the illegal wildlife trade. For example, according to ETIS, Europe accounts for around a third of all ivory seizures worldwide, with Belgium, France, Portugal, and the United Kingdom acting as key transit routes. These countries, along with Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain, are noted for their frequent, small-scale seizures of ivory. Caviar, vicuña wool, and reptiles are also among the commonly traded items, which could be having a dramatic impact on wild populations of those species. From 2000 to 2005, almost 13.22 tons of illegal caviar were seized in the EU.¹⁸

South Africa has soared in the past five years, from 13 killed in 2007 to more than 630 in 2012. As reported in the *New York Times*, the country is using an increased number of rangers, the national army, even drones to stop the slaughter—and it is still losing. “The prehistoric, battleship-gray animals are often found on their knees, bleeding to death from a gaping stump on their face.”³⁵

The human toll

Illegal trade in wildlife poses an immediate risk to people and communities in the places where wildlife is found. Criminals and criminal syndicates terrorize and exploit people in rural communities in some of the poorest countries of the world, take advantage of corrupt local officials charged with wildlife protection, and kill and injure rangers and law enforcers, thereby posing a serious threat to the stability, livelihoods, and natural resources of these communities.³⁶ Local impacts scale up to national challenges, and national challenges conglomerate to create international threats.

The impacts of the illegal wildlife trade are perhaps most acutely felt on the ground in places where highly imperiled wildlife species cling to life and are guarded by a handful of under-resourced park rangers charged with their protection. According to the International Ranger Federation, at least 1,000 rangers were killed in 35 different countries over the last decade, and the real global figure may be between 3,000 and 5,000.³⁷ The following specific cases were reported by The Thin Green Line, a foundation that supports park rangers in the field:

- In the Democratic Republic of Congo over the last 10 years, 183 park rangers were killed in one national park.³⁸
- In Colombia, park rangers are killed when dealing with drug cartels, land mines, and militias.³⁹
- In India, illegal poachers have buried park rangers alive in sawing pits.⁴⁰

These tragic deaths serve as a stark reminder that with illegal wildlife trade, it is not only animals whose lives are at stake. In 2012, then Senator and current U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry chaired a congressional hearing that underscored the impact of wildlife crime on local populations in developing countries, global security, and terrorism.⁴¹ He said, “[Poaching is] a menace to developing economies, and it thrives where governance is weakest. Poachers with heavy weapons are a danger to lightly armed rangers and civilians as well as to the animals they target. They . . . [wreak] havoc on villages and families. Increasingly, criminal gangs and militias are wiping out entire herds and killing anyone who gets in their way.”⁴²

Impacts on global sustainable development

At the global level, illegal wildlife trade undermines sustainable development through its effects on security and the rule of law. Many of the pathways of wildlife trafficking are similar to those of drug, arms, or human trafficking, which allows illegal wildlife trade to further exacerbate the deteriorating security situation along those routes. Areas without security are often hindered in their social and economic development with di-

Addressing illegal wildlife trade also helps address threats to economic security and public health

In addition to its impact on national and global security, wildlife trafficking also threatens economic security. Many of the regions where poaching is prevalent rely heavily on environmental tourism. Fewer animals to view and increased violence detract from a region’s viability as a tourist destination. Illegal trade also diverts money away from legitimate businesses and instead puts cash in the hands of crim-

inals, preventing economic growth.

The One Health Initiative recognizes that some 70 percent of emerging or reemerging diseases are zoonotic—i.e., they can be transmitted from animals to humans.^{46,47} An increasing number of human disease pandemics—SARS, avian influenza, and the ebola virus, among others—are caused by infectious agents that, having been transmitted from animals (particularly wildlife) to humans, can then spread rapidly within the human population. Wildlife trafficking poses a grave threat to public health as close contact between humans and animals and lack of even

basic hygiene are common in illegal trade and provide a perfect environment for the spread of zoonotic disease to humans.⁴⁸ By circumventing public health controls, the illegal trade of live animals or their body parts, including the growing demand for bushmeat, not only puts the health of individuals at risk but could result in a serious global pandemic.⁴⁹

rect consequences for national and international security and human development.^{43,44}

Wildlife crime goes far beyond decimating the wildlife and wild places that could otherwise serve as a vehicle for positive economic development. As Valerie Hickey, a World Bank environmental scientist, explains: “Wildlife crime is leading to the proliferation of guns in exactly those areas that need less conflict, not more; it is providing money for corruption in exactly those countries in which corruption has already stalled all pro-poor decision making and doing business legitimately is already hard enough; and it is oiling the engine of crime and polluting efforts at good governance, democracy and transparency in exactly those communities that need more voice, not more silence The fight to end wildlife crime is a fight for humanity.”⁴⁵

Illegal Wildlife Trade Links to Violence, Radicalism, and Terror

WARLORDS OR MILITANT GROUPS that exist to achieve ideological or political goals, often through violence, and that have been connected to specific instances of violent criminal activity have also been connected to instances of large-scale poaching. Trafficking in contraband of all kinds is “increasingly converging with ideologically motivated networks, fostering a new generation of hybrid threats,” according to information from the Transnational Threats Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.⁵⁰ Illegal wildlife trade is no exception.

A geographic nexus exists between the illegal wildlife trade and violent criminal and militant activities. For example, Central and East Africa, a well-known problem area for poaching and large-scale wildlife trafficking, has also become a hotbed of crime and potential terrorism.⁵¹ This is especially true in the illegal trade in ivory, where well-funded and well-armed poachers are taking a guerilla warfare-style approach to their activities. Somalia- and Sudan-based warlords and militias are reportedly hunting down elephants in Central Africa and, experts believe, using the tusks to buy weapons and sustain their activities.⁵²

There have also been reports in the last few years of militants affiliated with al-Qaeda tapping into the illegal trade in ivory, tiger pelts, and rhino horns, among other things, in India,

Nepal, Burma, and Thailand.⁵³ Individuals based in Bangladesh, who are believed to have ties to local terrorist groups, are reportedly hiring local trappers and infiltrating organized crime syndicates around India’s Kaziranga National Park to poach in the park and nearby protected areas, to name another example.⁵⁴

In each case, it is important to note that poaching by itself does not occur in isolation. It is of no value unless the animal can be moved to market, wherever that market exists. Thus, poachers, whether as individuals or as part of large-scale operations, must hook up with global trafficking syndicates and illegal financial networks to move the ivory and other products around the world to where the demand and markets are strongest, exploiting turbulent states, fluid borders, weak enforcement, and corrupt officials from Africa to Asia and beyond along the way.⁵⁵

Income from poaching helps fund violent activities

Though much remains unknown about the link between poaching and violent conflict, including terrorism, experts believe that illegal wildlife trade has become a source of revenue for identified extremist and even terrorist groups. Able to reach remote areas and wildlife habitats that are otherwise difficult to access, violent nonstate actors operating outside the jurisdiction and reach of any one country are well aware that trading in wildlife parts and derivatives can generate significant income to fund their endeavors. Rare wildlife commodities with established high black-market values can be used as collateral, just like gold, by those seeking fast-cash resources.⁵⁶

The involvement of militias and insurgent groups in poaching and smuggling, particularly related to ivory, is nothing new. During the late 1970s and 1980s both UNITA and RENAMO were heavily involved in the killing of elephants and the export of illegal ivory via routes facilitated by South African Military Intelligence.⁵⁷ Many of those involved in South Africa’s Special Forces had been professional hunters or game park wardens or had been involved in the wildlife business in other ways before being trained for bush warfare. They helped UNITA and RENAMO establish efficient ivory harvesting operations.⁵⁸ In addition to ivory, RENAMO reportedly ran rackets in rhino horn, rare hardwoods, stolen gemstones, and counterfeit currency.^{59,60}

In 2012, Ian James Saunders, cofounder of the Tsavo Trust and also a former British Army and intelligence officer and a veteran of counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afgha-

nistan, told members of the U.S. House and Senate, “There is a credible threat whereby the ‘extremist franchise’ is following a repeated pattern, both operationally and economically: An illegal commodity is sought that is in high demand and exploited to fund terrorism—ivory fits the bill all too well. The demand and the market for illegal ivory have the potential to generate funding to carry out increasing numbers of attacks, both within Africa and globally.”⁶¹

The growing commercial trade in bushmeat is another example of how illegal wildlife trade has transformed a means of subsistence into a commodity. Dr. Heather E. Eves, who has worked and conducted research in Africa since 1985 and is currently chief technical adviser of the Bushmeat-free Eastern Africa Network, notes how in Central Africa this commodity is being exploited not just for profit, but for the profit necessary to support violent upheaval and warfare: “Much of Central Africa has seen an explosion of poaching, due to the continued rise in demand for bushmeat in urban areas. Rebel militias and other militant groups have seized an opportunity and continue to take control of large parts of the region’s parks, using bushmeat, ivory, and other wildlife resources for both sustenance and to pay for weapons and other supplies. We also now know there are multiple syndicates operating in other parts of Africa with ties to Asia. The sophisticated nature of the poaching, in terms of organization and power, now exceeds everything we have witnessed for decades.”⁶²

Islamic militants affiliated with al-Qaeda and based in Bangladesh are suspected of sponsoring the poaching of tigers, rhinos, elephants, and other vanishing species at India’s Kaziranga National Park to support terrorist activities, as reported by police sources in India. The groups include the Harakat ul-Jihad-Islami-Bangladesh (HUJI-B) and Jamaat-ul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB), two entities designated as foreign terrorist organizations by the U.S. Department of State and European governments.⁶³ Indian officials and local traders and poachers say these militants have turned to the wildlife trade for financial support because the profits from poaching and wildlife traf-

ficking are untraceable.^{64,65} Domestic separatist groups may also be involved. 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.⁶⁶

Violent nonstate actors involved in killing elephants and rhinos

Ivory, like the blood diamonds of other African conflicts, is thought to be funding many rebel groups and militias in Africa. In some cases, elephants are poached by rebels and militias using sophisticated weapons manufactured for human wars. Armed groups, including the LRA, Somalia’s al-Shabaab, and Darfur’s Janjaweed have been implicated in poaching elephants and dealing in ivory.

The LRA is a rebel outfit that circulates in central Africa, infamous for its mass executions; rape, abduction, and mutilation of victims; and use of child soldiers.⁶⁹ The group’s leader, Joseph Kony, has been indicted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity⁷⁰ and labeled a “global terrorist” by the United States.⁷¹ One hundred American Special Operations troops are helping several thousand African soldiers hunt down Kony deep in the jungles of central Africa, as part of broader effort to counter the emerging threat from the growth of terrorist networks across Africa.⁷² According to the LRA Crisis Tracker 2012 Annual Security Brief, recent LRA escapees have reported witnessing rebels shoot elephants and remove their tusks at Kony’s demand. Those escapees said that Kony had ordered his fighters to kill as many elephants as possible.⁷³ Escapee reports also describe unknown persons arriving by helicopter to remote locations and providing rations in exchange for ivory.⁷⁴ Other escapees have reportedly said that their group had killed elephants and had bought guns and ammunition with the proceeds. The *New York Times* reported that

Income from poaching can help fund terrorism activities

The illegal trafficking of wildlife appears to be one of the ways a number of al-Qaeda affiliates and other militants have chosen to raise money to fund their operations.⁶⁷ Poaching and wildlife trafficking offer militants profits that are untraceable 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.⁶⁸

The UN links elephant poaching to crime and terrorism

In May 2013, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon highlighted the grave security threat posed by large-scale, organized wildlife crime, particularly in Africa. “Poaching and its potential linkages to other criminal, even terrorist, activities constitute a grave menace to sustainable peace and security in central Africa,” he said in a report to the UN Security Council.⁸⁹ Ban said the illegal trade in ivory may be an important

source of funding for armed groups, including warlord fugitive Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). “The situation has become so serious that national authorities in some countries, such as Cameroon, have decided to use the national army, in addition to law and order enforcement agencies, to hunt down poachers,” Ban said.⁹⁰

Kony is likely selling his poached ivory to Sudanese retailers in Sudan.⁷⁵ In January 2013, the UN Security Council requested an investigation into LRA’s sources of funding, including elephant poaching and ivory smuggling.⁷⁶

Somalia has languished under insecurity and lawlessness for more than 20 years, becoming a breeding ground for Islamist militants, gunrunners, human traffickers, and modern-day pirates.⁷⁷ Al-Shabaab, a militant Islamist group that pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2012⁷⁸ and controls most of Somalia, is thought to be training fighters to infiltrate neighboring Kenya and kill elephants for ivory to raise money.⁷⁹ Former al-Shabaab associates have reported that the group has encouraged villagers along the Kenya-Somalia border to bring them tusks, which are then shipped out through the port of Kismayo, a notorious smuggling hub under al-Shabaab’s control.⁸⁰ A 2011 Vanity Fair article featuring this crisis warned that “nothing less than a full-scale military operation is going to stop the poaching in the north [of Kenya].”⁸¹ As stated in U.S. Africom’s Mission statement, “[Al-Shabaab’s] alliance provides al-Qaida a safe haven to plan global terror operations, train foreign fighters, and conduct global terror operations.... This situation poses a direct threat to the security of the United States.”⁸²

Sudanese ivory traders and Western officials have said that the Janjaweed (horseback raiders) militias, operating in Darfur and more recently Western Chad,⁸³ are also major poachers. The Janjaweed were blamed for the genocide of thousands of civilians in the early 2000s, when Darfur erupted in ethnic conflict. International law enforcement officials suspect that hundreds of Janjaweed militiamen were tied to the slaughter of at least 300 elephants in Bouba Ndjida National Park in Cameroon in January 2012.⁸⁴ Armed horsemen believed to belong to the same band of Sudanese Janjaweed made similar poaching attempts targeting elephants in Central African Republic’s Dzanga-Sangha Reserve in 2011.⁸⁵ The Janjaweed are

also the prime suspects of the elephant massacres in Chad and Cameroon that took place in March 2013 (see below). After butchering the elephants, the Janjaweed carry the tusks back to Sudan where they are stashed on ships bound mostly for Asia—or traded for weapons.⁸⁶

Janjaweed militias armed with AK-47s were also responsible for the slaughter of the highly endangered northern white rhino, which was making a comeback in Garamba National Park, on the border of Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo until 2003, when Janjaweed raids began, according to a 2008 *Newsweek* article. Conservation biologist Emmanuel de Merode described how some 20 horse-mounted militiamen typically do the killing, while scores of others camp on the edge of the park with large caravans of donkeys providing supplies for the days-long journey from Sudan and back. As of 2012, there were two rhinos left in Garamba, a death sentence for that population.⁸⁷ “There may have been some local poaching, too,” said de Merode, “but it was the Janjaweed that killed them off.”⁸⁸

State actors

There is no doubt that militias are involved in elephant poaching; however, they are not solely responsible. Government forces from Congo, Uganda, and newly independent South Sudan have also been implicated in poaching and illegal wildlife trade. The UN and INTERPOL have accused both the Congolese Army and Laurent Nkunda’s CNDP of participating in poaching.⁹¹ There have also been claims of military involvement and the use of helicopters in poaching.⁹²

Garamba officials, scientists, and Congolese authorities believe that the Ugandan military killed 22 elephants from a helicopter in March 2012, taking more than a million dollars’ worth of ivory.⁹³ The park’s 140 armed rangers were outgunned and in no position to cope with incursions by the Ugandan

army, who were ostensibly looking for Kony but taking ivory on the side.⁹⁴

Elephant poachers in many parts of Africa use weapons that can be acquired only from military sources, including American-made M-16s and German-made G3s, which fire bullets 500–600m, twice the distance of AK-47s. The KWS has recovered rocket propelled grenades, which Somali poachers sometimes carry to use against the rangers or to discourage KWS patrols from pursuit in the first place.⁹⁵ These military style weapons mean an improvement in the range, accuracy, and firepower available to the poaching gangs and their capacity to kill the animals and the rangers tasked with protecting them.⁹⁶ A newly approved UN Global Arms Trade Treaty seeks to serve as a framework to regulate the international trade in conventional arms and contribute to efforts to prevent conflicts, regional instabilities, terrorism, and transnational organized crime, possibly including wildlife trafficking.⁹⁷

Illegal Wildlife Trade Links to Organized Crime, Corruption, and Fraud

IN MAY 2013, THE UN OFFICIALLY CHARACTERIZED INTERNATIONAL WILDLIFE AND TIMBER TRAFFICKING AS A “SERIOUS ORGANIZED CRIME,” which can require stiff sentences of four or more years in prison and which will also allow the UNODC to broaden its role in combating the trade.⁹⁸

In the United States, the 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.”⁹⁹

By all accounts, much of the global illegal trade in wildlife is run by organized crime syndicates that carry out detailed planning, have significant financial support, understand and use new information technology, and are often well armed.¹⁰⁰

Trafficking relies on porous borders, corrupt officials, and strong networks of organized criminal trade. The skills and net-

works required to illegally trade in wildlife, coupled with the lucrative profits, make 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 stage that 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.

As outlined by experts, there are clear factors connecting groups and individuals in organized crime to operations in the illicit wildlife trade:¹⁰¹

- 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
- capacity to launder enormous amounts of cash

Organized crime groups, especially those with smuggling capabilities, find wildlife trafficking attractive because of its low risks, high profits, and weak penalties. Products like rhino horn, deer musk, and bear bile can be worth more than gold or cocaine; and the earnings from wildlife trafficking can amount to well over a 1,000 percent return on investment.¹⁰²

The trade in wildlife sometimes provides cover for other forms of violent crime. IFAW monitoring of illegal wildlife trade in China identified a Web site that trades in wildlife products and hunting equipment. Upon further investigation, Chinese law enforcement agencies uncovered a widespread illegal weapons manufacture and trade ring implicating 540 suspects in 30 provinces. In total, the authorities confiscated 590 weapons, 150,000 bullets, 640,000 weapon-making parts, and 2,072 pounds (940 kg) of ammunition.¹⁰³

Links to drug trafficking

Wildlife traffickers use similar smuggling routes as drug traffickers, and the crimes often become entangled, with smugglers branching out into animal trafficking in order to mask their drug trafficking, making enforcement even more complicated.¹⁰⁴ 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 such as drugs or weapons. The exchange of drugs for wildlife is part of the laundering of drug trafficking revenue.¹⁰⁵

A 2010 CRS report listed several examples of wildlife and drug trafficking linkages:

- Members of the former Cali drug cartel in Colombia and Mexican drug dealers have allegedly smuggled mixed shipments of drugs and wildlife products into the United States (as reported by the UN).¹⁰⁶
- The former Medellin drug cartel was allegedly involved in the illegal trade of rare birds.¹⁰⁷
- Forty percent of an estimated 400 criminal rings smuggling animals were also involved in other criminal activities, espe-

cially drug trafficking (according to the Brazilian National Network Against the Trafficking of Wild Animals-RENTAS).¹⁰⁸

- Combinations of parrots and drugs have been smuggled together from Cote d'Ivoire to Israel (as reported by the CITES Secretariat).¹⁰⁹

In addition, the Europol OCTA for 2011 highlighted that those involved in high-level drug trafficking in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico have established a notable role in the illegal supply of endangered species to the EU and U.S. markets.¹¹⁰ As a result, some of the concealment methods developed for drug trafficking are now used to traffic endangered species.¹¹¹

According to a 2011 investigation by *The Independent*, there have been reports in South Africa of Chinese triads exchanging the raw ingredients for methamphetamine ("crystal meth,"



Criminals use legal wildlife trade to facilitate wildlife trafficking

The legal trade in wildlife is itself also used as a vehicle for the illicit trade—transporting illegal species instead of the legal ones or mixed in with the legal shipments and using falsified documents, fake species identification permits, or false numbers. Former wildlife smugglers have admitted to routinely packing a layer of legal species on top [of the shipping crates] and

putting thousands of illegal ones underneath or otherwise mixing illegal animals with similar-looking legal imports, hoping that the authorities will not notice.¹¹⁵

There is no real disincentive for illegal wildlife importers

In the United States, although a fine and prison sentence is possible in large smuggling cases, in the vast majority of cases, importers of illegal ivory at most lose possession of the illegal item by signing an abandonment form agreeing to its forfeiture to the United States.¹²⁶

In Europe, Europol has been investigating links between an Irish gang and rhino horn smuggling for at least two years after a

spate of robberies around Europe where rhino horns were taken from museums and antique dealers.¹²⁷ Despite this, in March 2013 in Ireland, two rhino horn dealers were fined just 500 euros (US\$650) each for illegally smuggling eight rhino horns, valued at an estimated 500,000 euros (US\$650,000) on the black market.¹²⁸

known locally as “tik”) for abalone, an endangered shellfish served as a delicacy in Asia. Because drugs are the currency of payment, the exchange is virtually untraceable.¹¹²

Links to money laundering

As organized crime, militias, and terrorist entities have become more involved in the illegal trade of wildlife, the use of sophisticated money-laundering schemes to move their profits and protect their organizations from detection and prosecution has increased as well. CITES has highlighted “the establishment and use of fake or ‘front’ companies to distribute and market wildlife products” and has noted that “various forms of wildlife crime lend themselves to money-laundering activities, attracting the involvement of organized criminal groups.”¹¹³

Tom Cardamone, of Global Financial Integrity, explains: “The use of anonymous shell companies, often layered via multiple jurisdictions, is one of the most effective tools available to money launderers and organized criminals, obscuring the money trail and impeding law enforcement investigations. They [shell companies] are frequently used not just by wildlife traffickers, but also by American and foreign terrorists, narco-traffickers, arms dealers, corrupt foreign officials, tax evaders and rogue states, and other criminals to easily launder their money.”¹¹⁴

Links in the supply chain

The black-market profits of the illegal wildlife trade are enormous with a long and complex smuggling chain that involves numerous intermediaries. It starts with poachers, frequently hired by syndicates to capture or kill the targeted species. Poachers can typically spend extended periods in the wild and are equipped with vehicles, weapons, and training.¹¹⁶ Once caught,

animals or their parts are transferred to “mules”—humans paid to carry the wildlife either in a suitcase or on their person.¹¹⁷

However, poaching is only the start of a long chain of criminality that may stretch from forests, through villages, to large cities, across borders, and via land, air, and sea ports until the poached wildlife is finally delivered to clandestine markets, dealers, and consumers.¹¹⁸ Traffickers are connected globally to suppliers of exotic animals in developing countries; consumers at upscale art galleries; safari operators guiding hunters to illegal animal trophies; and international and interstate networks of wildlife exporters, taxidermists, and wildlife retailers.¹¹⁹

All of the links in the supply chain, from local villages in wildlife-rich places to large cities where consumers purchase wildlife products, legally and illegally, are affected by these crimes and the violence and unrest that can often come with them.

Illegal Wildlife Trade Is a Low-Risk Enterprise for Criminals

COMPARED TO OTHER TRANSNATIONAL CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES, the low risk of detection, relatively small penalties, and minimal consequences for perpetrating wildlife crime are attractive incentives to participate in the illegal trade in wildlife. In most countries, poachers and traffickers face little more than a small fine and a couple of months in prison if caught,¹²⁰ while punishment for drug trafficking can result in the death penalty.¹²¹

In the case of ivory, very few large-scale seizures actually result in successful follow-up law enforcement actions, includ-

ing investigations, arrests, convictions, and the imposition of penalties that serve as deterrents.¹²² In January 2013, two ivory traffickers were arrested in the port of Libreville with 18 ivory tusks weighing a total of 392 pounds (178 kg) as they boarded a ship bound for Nigeria/Benin. This represented Gabon's largest ivory seizure. The ship that was involved is thought to have been supporting ivory smuggling in this way for a decade. The two arrested traffickers were senior staff on the ship, including a Gabonese head of the local branch of the shipping company. A quantity of shark fins was also found on board. For this crime, the law in Gabon provides for only two to six months' imprisonment and fines of between US\$200 and US\$20,000.¹²³

Wildlife trade is considered a low-risk enterprise for the criminals involved, in large part because wildlife trafficking is treated as a low priority by many law enforcement agencies. A report by WWF and TRAFFIC illustrates this situation using the case of rhino horn. Although rhino horn is now more valuable on the black market than diamonds and cocaine, poachers convicted under the North West Province law in South Africa may get away with a US\$14,000 fine,¹²⁴ while trafficking up to five grams of cocaine is sentenced with at least five years in jail.¹²⁵

Technology and globalization

Technology and globalization are constantly evolving and becoming more sophisticated, providing and even facilitating the networks required to move wildlife products from their source to international markets.

Conservationists are warning that the Internet is facilitating unprecedented levels of illegal wildlife trade and that, for many species, this is now a principal element in the threat to their survival. In 2008, IFAW identified more than 7,000 wildlife products from threatened species being offered for sale in online auctions, forums, and classified ads.¹²⁹ The Environmental Investigation Agency published a statement on its Web site in March 2013 saying it found 10,000 ads for ivory products and another 1,400 for whale products on Google Shopping in Japan.¹³⁰ The Associated Press reports that the ivory products are often sold under code words such as “unburnable bone,” “ox-bone,” and “white gold,” among others.¹³¹

Much of the wildlife trade is currently handled online by middlemen using varying degrees of secrecy.¹³² Organized wildlife criminals are using “deep Web” online tools more commonly associated with serious financial crime, drug trafficking, and child pornography.¹³³ Increasingly, sites that are not accessible via search engines and that require software to access them are used, with communications bounced through large numbers of computers to maintain anonymity.¹³⁴

Globalization is also facilitating linkages between illegal wildlife trade and other illicit activities. For example, there is growing evidence that poaching increases in elephant-rich areas where Chinese workers are building roads. In 2011, more than 150 Chinese citizens were arrested across Africa for smuggling ivory.¹³⁵ Hundreds of thousands of Chinese workers are employed on road, logging, mining, and oil-drilling crews in all of the elephants' range states. A *Vanity Fair* article reported that 90 percent of the passengers who were arrested for possession of ivory at Kenyatta International Airport, in Kenya,





were Chinese nationals and that half the poaching in that country was happening within 20 miles of one of the five massive Chinese road-building projects. Some workers may make it home with a few pounds of ivory hidden in their suitcases, or they are recruited as carriers for others higher up on the criminal chain.¹³⁶

Species Focus: Elephant Ivory

ELEPHANTS ARE ONE OF THE EARTH'S MOST CHARISMATIC AND MAJESTIC LAND ANIMALS. They are also threatened by organized crime, which feeds the illegal market for ivory and other elephant parts and products.¹³⁷ Every 15 minutes, on average, an elephant is killed illegally in Africa to feed an insatiable demand for ivory, principally from Asia.^{138,139,140,141} In the last decade, 11,000 forest elephants were killed in one park alone, Gabon's Minkebe National Park,¹⁴² with the total population of forest elephants down 62 percent in the past 10 years.¹⁴³ This kill rate exceeds the birth rate—a trend that, if not reversed, could lead to extinction of the African elephant from some areas in the next few years.¹⁴⁴

According to a report released by CITES and presented at the 16th Conference of the Parties in March 2013, the period 2009–2011 included three of the top four years in which the largest quantities of ivory were seized worldwide. Successive years of peak seizure volumes is not a pattern previously observed by CITES, and it stands as a very worrying indication that illegal trade in elephant ivory continues to surge in an unabated manner.¹⁴⁵ The worst year on record for ivory seizures was 2011, when almost 40 tons of smuggled ivory were seized, including a record 17 large-scale seizures, each of 1,764 pounds (800 kg) or more (equaling the tusks from more than 4,000 dead elephants).¹⁴⁶ A massive six-ton seizure, made by the Royal Malaysian Customs in Port Klang, Malaysia, in December 2012 was the largest seizure anywhere in a decade and the third largest ever.¹⁴⁷ With demand for ivory on the rise, hordes of heavily armed gangs are killing entire herds at a time, as well as any people who get in their way.¹⁴⁸

The most recent analysis from CITES' ETIS also notes that the frequency of large-scale ivory seizures has increased as well, indicating a highly organized illegal ivory supply chain.¹⁴⁹ Law enforcement officials say organized crime has an increasingly active grip on the ivory underworld because only a well-oiled criminal machine—with the help of corrupt officials—could

move hundreds of pounds of tusks around the globe with relative impunity. According to the director of ETIS, the smugglers are “Africa-based, Asian-run crime syndicates, highly adaptive to law enforcement interventions, constantly changing trade routes and modus operandi.”¹⁵⁰

Law enforcement officials in Africa have stated that, once ivory arrives to the city from the field, little boats come from big ships offshore to local “tycoons” with heroin and guns and return with ivory. The drug, arms, money laundering, and ivory trades are intertwined. Where you have one, you have the others.¹⁵¹

Elephant massacres in Chad, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic

In March 2013, poachers in Chad slaughtered 89 elephants, including 35 pregnant females.¹⁵² The elephants were killed near the Chad border with Cameroon, and their ivory tusks hacked out. It was the worst killing spree of elephants since early 2012 when poachers from Chad and Sudan killed 300–450 elephants in a matter of weeks in Cameroon's Bouba Ndjida National Park.^{84,153} In the Chad massacre, poachers were on horseback and spoke Arabic.¹⁵⁴ As of this writing, more information about the incident was being collected, and international organizations were working together with INTERPOL to bring the world's attention and action to this slaughter.^{155,156}

In late March 2013, Ministers of ECCAS, representing ministries of foreign affairs, defense and security issues, regional integration, and wildlife protection, convened an emergency meeting in Cameroon and adopted an emergency anti-poaching plan called PEXULAB to protect elephants in ECCAS countries.¹⁵⁷ Implementation remains a challenge without significant technical and financial support from donor states and other actors.¹⁵⁸

Weeks before the Chad massacre, 28 elephant carcasses, including some newborn, all stripped of their ivory tusks, were discovered in Cameroon's Nki and Lobeke National Parks,¹⁵⁹ as well as 15 carcasses across four separate locations in the Central African Republic.¹⁶⁰ All these incidents followed numerous reports of a horseback-riding band of hundreds of poachers from Sudan crossing the CAR and heading toward Cameroon and Chad. Although both the Chad and Cameroon governments had responded to this advance notice by sending soldiers and military aircraft to patrol the region, neither was able to find the poaching gangs and stop them. Based on sightings, it appeared that the poachers had broken into small bands and were widely dispersed, still hunting and poised for more attacks.¹⁶¹

Even remote and (until recently) relatively well-protected World Heritage Sites are targets for mass elephant killings. In

May 2013, CITES and UNESCO expressed concern over reports of the deteriorating security situation, increased poaching, and killing of elephants in Dzanga-Sanga National Park, part of Sangha Trinational, a World Heritage Site located at the meeting point between Cameroon, Congo, and the CAR.^{162,163} A day after reports that heavily armed groups had entered the park heading for a large clearing where elephants gather, 26 carcasses were found with all of their tusks hacked off.¹⁶⁴ Conservation organizations had warned for weeks that elephant meat was being openly sold in local markets and available in nearby villages.¹⁶⁵ The Okapi Wildlife Reserve in the Democratic Republic of Congo is another World Heritage Site that was targeted by elephant poachers in the last year. In June 2012, mai mai rebels, a local gang made up of elephant poachers and illegal miners, attacked the reserve's headquarters and neighboring village, leaving 19 dead, including six local people, as well as 14 rare okapis (the only living relative of the giraffe). The attack on the reserve was in retaliation for recent engagements by rangers that disrupted poaching and mining activities in the southern part of the reserve.^{166,167}

Species Focus: Rhino Horn

THE BLACK-MARKET VALUE FOR RHINO HORN IS STAGGERING, currently fetching more than gold. Prohibited in international trade, rhino horn has been highly prized in Asia, where it is believed to be a cure for cancer and other ills. In Vietnam, the horn is increasingly used in a manner akin to a recreational drug, such as “rhino wine,” to improve male sexual performance.¹⁶⁸ Also, rhino horn is used in the Middle East to make ornamental and ceremonial daggers.

In 2012, a record 668 rhinos were poached in South Africa, up by almost 50 percent on 2011's figures.¹⁶⁹ In 2013, the toll continued to rise, with 201 rhinos killed in Kruger National Park alone.¹⁷⁰ With an estimated 25,000 rhinos left in the wild (80 percent of them located in South Africa), “these current rates of illegal killing could drive the species to extinction during the lifetime of our children,” said the secretary-general of CITES in 2012. In 2011, a subspecies of the black rhino was declared extinct in the wild in West Africa, and Vietnam lost its last Javan rhino, which was killed by poachers.¹⁷¹ Northern white rhinos in Congo's Garamba National Park were among the last ones in the wild anywhere, but rangers have not seen



any for the past five years, as the country has descended into chaos and rhino poachers have moved into the park.¹⁷² In April 2013, wildlife authorities in Mozambique's Limpopo National Park reported that the country's last 15 rhinos had been wiped out by poachers working with the game rangers responsible for protecting them.¹⁷³ Tom Milliken, a rhino expert from TRAFFIC, has said, “Today, rhino poaching and illegal horn trade are at their highest levels in 20 years, threatening to reverse years of conservation effort, particularly in Africa. There is no doubt that rhino species are facing a serious crisis.”¹⁷⁴

Rhino horn is believed to be bartered for arms by militant groups in northeastern India working with poaching syndicates.¹⁷⁵ In India's Kaziranga National Park there have been devastating increases in rhino poaching, and the use of automatic guns provides evidence of the involvement of militants.¹⁷⁶

The rhino horn rush has exploded into a worldwide criminal enterprise, drawing characters such as Thai prostitutes, Irish gangsters, Vietnamese diplomats, Chinese scientists, veterinarians, helicopter pilots, antiques dealers, and even an American rodeo star who used Facebook to find some horns.¹⁷⁷ In South Africa, it is legal to hunt rhinos for trophy purposes, creating a loophole that has been exploited by some of these criminals. Hunters must agree to keep the horn set as a trophy and not sell it, and hunters are allowed to kill only one white rhino every 12 months. According to South African law en-

forcement officials, gang leaders in Thailand and Laos decided to maximize the number of rhinos they could kill and enlisted Thai prostitutes, who were already in South Africa with valid passports, to obtain additional hunting permits. The women then tagged along on the hunts, but somebody else—usually a professional hunter—pulled the trigger.¹⁷⁸ That fake permit scenario has played out numerous times, thus making legal hunting a conduit for illegal horn laundering.¹⁷⁹

Organized crime is also involved in the theft and illegal trade of stolen rhino horn. Europol has identified an Irish organized criminal group, known for the use of intimidation and violence in a variety of other crimes across the European Union such as drug trafficking, robbery, distribution of counterfeit products, and money laundering.¹⁸⁰ The group has targeted antique dealers, auction houses, art galleries, museums, private collections, and zoos, resorting to theft and aggravated burglary. To sell specimens, this group has exploited international auction houses in the United Kingdom, France, the United States, and China. Outside the EU, the group has been active in North and South America, South Africa, China, and Australia.¹⁸¹

Other species targeted for poaching by criminal syndicates

TIGERS: Wild tigers, the biggest of all cats, once numbered 100,000 across Asia. Today, there are as few as 3,200 tigers in the wild.¹⁸² In addition to threats from habitat loss and human-wildlife conflict, the tiger is primarily killed to supply underground black markets with its organs, pelts, and bones. These items are highly regarded in Eastern medicine where they are believed to possess capabilities to heal all sorts of human illnesses and dysfunctions.¹⁸³ In addition, the tiger is hunted recreationally for sport and trophies. According to a TRAFFIC report, from 2000 to 2012, 1,425 tiger parts were seized across 13 tiger range countries. During this period, a total of 654 seizures of body parts ranging from skin and bones to teeth, claws, and skulls took place. About 110 tigers—or just over two per week per year, on average—were killed for trade.^{184 185}

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 skyrock-

eted.¹⁸⁶ Criminal syndicates—including the “caviar mafia,” which is known to use violence to protect its practices—are lording over the caviar trade.¹⁸⁷ Organized groups in and around the Caspian Sea control the caviar harvest, trade, and international distribution by whatever means is required.¹⁸⁸ According to FWS, investigations into the U.S. caviar trade revealed that seven of the ten major importers on the East Coast had been illegally importing millions of dollars worth of caviar annually.¹⁸⁹

PANGOLINS: The pangolin is a nocturnal, scaled anteater. Sought after for its meat, as well as its skin (for fashionable leather) and scales (an ingredient in traditional Eastern medicine), pangolins are now one of the most endangered mammal groups in the world.¹⁹⁰ Pangolins are being sold on the black market in Asia at prices as high as US\$1,000 for the entire pangolin.¹⁹¹ In 2010, intelligence reports claimed that a criminal trafficking organization in Malaysia captured 22,000 pangolins to sell on the black market.¹⁹² In Vietnam, 40,000 to 60,000 pangolins were believed to have been caught by traffickers in 2011.¹⁹³ In May 2013, French Customs seized a shipment en route to Vietnam containing 110 pounds (50 kg) of pangolin scales, representing the deaths of up to 400 pangolins.¹⁹⁴ The pangolin trade is so profitable that organized traffickers have set up processing plants to butcher and package the meat, which is shipped out via airplane and is very difficult to identify.¹⁹⁵

SHAHTOOSH: A shawl created from the wool of the endangered Tibetan antelope or chiru, shahtoosh has become a common currency among crime gangs and terrorist groups, such as the Kashmiri separatists.¹⁹⁶ It is also a key part of a complicated transaction involving tiger bones being smuggled into China, where the smugglers are paid in shahtoosh. Reputedly, as a result of this two-way trade, a tiger is killed in India every day.¹⁹⁷

GREAT APES: The illicit trade in great apes is increasingly linked to organized crime, with sophisticated networks moving their contraband along with drugs, arms, laundered money, and other illegal wildlife, according to a 2013 report by UNEP-GRASP. For example, a smuggler apprehended in Cameroon in early 2013 was transporting a live chimpanzee wedged between sacks of marijuana.¹⁹⁸

EXOTIC BIRDS: The global black market for exotic birds is a multi-billion-dollar business that has had a big impact on bird populations in Central and South America.¹⁹⁹ According to IUCN, roughly 100 of the world's 350 parrot species are now

threatened with extinction by illegal seizure for trade and habitat loss.²⁰⁰ In 2012, INTERPOL conducted Operation Cage in response to the growing illegal transborder trade of captive-bred and wild birds and eggs and the increasing involvement of organized crime networks in their transit from Latin America to Europe. The operation resulted in the seizure of more than 8,700 birds and animals, including reptiles, mammals, and insects, and the arrest of nearly 4,000 people.²⁰¹

REPTILES: There are 71 reptile species on the verge of extinction.²⁰² Illegal international trade in reptiles is a serious threat to species such as tortoises, which are highly prized as pets.²⁰³ There have been a number of high-profile cases involving illicit trade in reptiles, including two seizures, a month apart, of hundreds of Malagasy tortoises found in luggage by customs officers in Malaysia and the arrest and subsequent conviction of notorious wildlife

trader Anson Wong, also in Malaysia.^{204,205} Python skins and live reptiles traded as pets are also areas of concern and have been the focus of large INTERPOL and FWS operations.^{206,207}

A Path Forward

Worldwide Media Attention

In recent years, a steady stream of worldwide media and governmental reports have relayed disquieting new details of the illegal trade in wildlife. The violence associated with the poaching and the actors involved, which include various militia and brutal rebel groups and even military units, is garnering a more serious examination of the issue.

The New York Times has dedicated a series of reports on the epic elephant slaughter that is taking place in Africa. The reports focus on how poachers are wiping out tens of thousands of elephants a year, more than at any time in the previous two decades, and how the underground ivory trade is becoming increasingly militarized. Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo is described as a “battlefield, with an arms race playing out across the savanna.” *The New York Times* series has included a slideshow of photographs that showcased the horrifying deaths of these elephants, including some poached elephants that had been sexually mutilated, with their genitals or nipples cut off, possibly for sale—a phenomenon researchers say they had not encountered before.

National Geographic’s “Battle for the Elephants” TV special first aired in the United States in February 2013 by PBS. It takes viewers undercover as reporters investigate the criminal network behind ivory’s supply and demand. The film is based on an article in the October 2012 issue of *National Geographic* magazine, titled “Blood Ivory,” which was the result of a three-year investigation.²⁰⁸ The National Geographic’s “A Voice for Elephants” (<http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/blog/a-voice-for-elephants/>) is an online resource for information,



Gabon torches illegal ivory in fight against poachers

In 2012, Gabonese President Ali Bongo set on fire over five tons of illegal ivory worth US\$9.3 million as part of attempts to deter poaching. Mr. Bongo said, “Gabon has a policy of zero tolerance for wildlife crime, and we are putting in place the institutions and

laws to ensure this policy is enforced We don’t want our children to inherit an empty forest. For that reason, we cannot allow this trafficking to continue.”²¹⁶

The ICCWC Wildlife and Forest Crime Analytic Toolkit

The ICCWC comprises the CITES Secretariat, INTERPOL, the UNODC, the World Bank, and the WCO. The toolkit is primarily designed to help government officials working in wildlife and forestry administration, customs and other relevant enforcement agencies, and the judiciary to

conduct a comprehensive analysis of their existing measures to protect and monitor wildlife and forest products and their capacity to respond to unlawful exploitation of those resources and to identify areas for improvement.²¹⁹

forum for discussion, and rallying point for those who want to get involved. The underworld of illegal ivory trafficking was also explored in 2012 in Panorama's "Ivory Wars," which aired on the Discovery Channel.

The Independent conducted a month-long investigation about the growing scale and impact of wildlife trafficking, reporting that this illicit business, with huge profits and the violence to which it so readily resorts, is overwhelming the law enforcement resources ranged against it. Further, the investigation reported that such illicit profits are a major source of funding for terrorist and militia groups, including some thought to receive support from al-Qaeda.²⁰⁹ The 2012 series "The Sixth Extinction" by the *Guardian* online aggregates current news articles and links on the impact of illegal wildlife trade, among other biodiversity and conservation topics.²¹⁰

Governments around the world have also called for increased action to combat illegal wildlife trade based on its impact on global security. In September 2012 at the UN General Assembly, in a written statement the United States highlighted "the harm caused by wildlife poaching and trafficking to conservation efforts, rule of law, governance, and economic development."²¹¹ At the same time, France also emphasized the severity and negative impacts of wildlife crime. "International law is lacking when it comes to the plundering of natural resources, for example, or the trafficking of fauna."²¹²

Government Calls for Action

Governments in Africa have raised their concerns over wildlife crime at the most senior levels. At the September 2012 AMCEN meeting, the official decision from the meeting stated these governments' concerns over the "alarming prevalence of transboundary illegal trade in wild fauna and flora, which is contributing to the destruction and extinction of species, in particular the African elephant, rhinoceros, and the African great apes." The decision went on to ask the African Union Commission, in collaboration with the other international partners, to

convene an international conference on the fight against wildlife crime with a view to enhancing cooperative enforcement operations directed at transboundary wildlife crime.²¹³

At a hearing before the U.S. Senate in May 2012, then Kenya Wildlife Service director Julius Kipng'etich revealed the link between the surging illegal trade in high-value wildlife products and transnational criminal networks that are creating instability and funding militant insurgencies. He told the hearing, "Poached ivory travels through the same channels as drugs and people who are being trafficked. Terrorist organisations like al-Shabaab have been linked to poaching in Kenya."²¹⁴

In late 2012, Kenya's ambassador to the United States urged then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to send U.S. Marines to help counteract the increasingly "vicious boldness of the poaching gangs" that are decimating Kenya's wildlife. "KWS wants Marine-style training, which helps to build initiative, team spirit and cohesiveness, confidence and determination."²¹⁵

New tools to combat wildlife traffickers

As illegal wildlife trade has become more entangled with other criminal activities and militant networks, various new tools are now being employed in the war against poaching. At the 2013 CITES Conference of the Parties, nations agreed to make DNA testing mandatory for large-scale ivory seizures. Before the conference, researchers throughout the world had urged CITES to mandate forensic examination of tusks' DNA, which can be used to trace their origins, so that law enforcement can be directed to poaching hot spots.^{217,218}

As one of the countries most affected by wildlife trafficking, Kenya is also trying several new technologies to capture and prosecute poachers. The KWS is installing an alarm system that alerts rangers of poaching by text message. KWS officials hope that the system, connected to fences around parks and wildlife sanctuaries, will reduce poaching by up to 90 percent.²²⁰ Kenya and South Africa have also adopted DNA-profiling technology called the rhinoceros DNA index so that, if a

Operation Worthy

Operation Worthy, a joint effort of INTERPOL and IFAW, resulted in more than 200 arrests and the seizure of nearly two tons of contraband elephant ivory as well as more than 44 pounds (20 kg) of rhino horn, in addition to lion, leopard, and cheetah pelts, crocodile and python skins, live tropical birds, turtles, and other protected species. The three-month-

long operation involved 14 countries across Eastern, Southern, and Western Africa and also resulted in the recovery of firearms including AK-47s, G3s, and M16s. More than 320 officers from agencies including police, customs, environmental protection, veterinary services, airport security, ministries of tourism, and national prosecuting authorities took part in Operation Worthy. “This has been to date the most wide-ranging operation coordinated by INTERPOL against

the illegal ivory trade..., targeting the criminal organizations making millions of dollars through the killing and destruction of wildlife..., and associated crimes such as murder, corruption, and money laundering,” said David Higgins, manager of INTERPOL’s Environmental Crime Programme. “The intelligence gathered... will enable us to identify the links between the poachers and the global networks driving and facilitating the crime.”²²⁸

rhino horn is intercepted in any part of the world, enforcement agencies can profile the origin of the horn.²²¹

A new wildlife forensic and genetics laboratory for East and Central Africa, operated by KWS and partly financed by the U.S. government, will help to identify suspected bushmeat to a species level and gather evidence for submission to the courts of law for prosecutorial purposes. The laboratory will also be able to provide traceability of wildlife trophies, especially for rhino horn and elephant ivory.^{222,223}

Rhinos at Kenya’s Lewa Conservancy are protected using a military approach that includes an electric fence surrounding the 62,000 acres of savannah and a US\$1 million-a-year security force of armed rangers, night trackers, dog handlers, and a helicopter.²²⁴ Kenya is also set to get its first drone for use in preventing poachers from killing the last seven northern white rhinos and other endangered species at Ol Pejeta, a 90,000-acre privately owned conservancy. The plane, bought from a U.S. company, is fitted with surveillance cameras linked to a command center via satellite to monitor unwanted movement in the ranch. Another U.S. firm will launch the drone, dubbed the aerial ranger, and provide equipment for the ground-based control room.²²⁵ Tanzania is also taking steps to combat the rise in elephant and rhinoceros poaching by deploying army personnel and camera-equipped drones to engage in anti-poaching operations.²²⁶ International NGOs are also providing assistance for developing countries to adopt new technologies in the war against poaching, including the use of drones.^{227,228}

However, as stated by Garry Reid, U.S. principal deputy assistant secretary of defense for special operations, there are “issues of partner-nation absorption,” i.e., what portion of the enforcement burden local societies and militaries can take on. In fighting illegal wildlife trade, as in the case of the fight against transnational crime and terror, simply handing over or

lending complicated unmanned aerial vehicles surveillance systems or other high-tech tools to developing nations will not suffice. These technologies can be effective, but, Reid warns, it is “not as simple as providing a piece of kit [equipment] and waving goodbye.” Once criminal activity is detected, the host nation must have the will and training to curtail it, with experts even arguing for “a steady presence of Special Operations Forces personnel in remote parts of the world.”²²⁹ Some conservationists have also called for increased involvement by the U.S. military. In 2012, explorer Michael Fay spoke on the magnitude of poaching’s impact on fragile economic and security environments in developing regions: “With elephant poaching comes . . . corruption, intimidation . . . gun trafficking, criminality of all types.” He noted that, without the aid of military and intelligence services, governance will likely not return to regions destabilized by poachers.^{230,231} Developed countries providing military hardware for use in the fight against poaching must also provide ongoing technical and financial support to partner countries in order for them to develop their own capacity to tackle the problem effectively in the long term.

A Coordinated International Enforcement Approach among Wildlife, Customs, and Police Agencies

Given the complex chain links in the supply of wildlife trafficking, anti-poaching personnel acting alone can do little to break these links. A coordinated approach among wildlife agencies, customs, and police is critical, as well as coordination at the local, national, and international levels.

There are clear examples of how the support of transboundary information sharing can achieve great success in tar-

getting wildlife crime. INTERPOL coordinated two international operations in 2010. Operation Tram targeted the illegal trade in traditional medicines containing protected wildlife products. It resulted in a series of arrests worldwide and the seizure of thousands of illegal medicines containing or marketing the use of ingredients such as tiger, bear, and rhinoceros, with a value of more than €10 million. National wildlife law enforcement authorities, police, customs, and specialized units from 18 countries across all five continents worked together during the month-long operation.²³²

OPERATION RAMP took place later that year, this time involving 51 countries and with a focus on the illegal trade in reptiles and amphibians. The two-month investigation resulted in arrests worldwide and the seizure of thousands of animals as well as products worth more than €25 million. Again, national wildlife enforcement authorities, police, customs, and specialized units from participating countries conducted thousands of searches and inspections and seized goods that included leather products, illicit firearms, and drugs. “While investigations will continue well beyond the conclusion of Operation RAMP, this operation has shown what the international law enforcement community can collaboratively achieve against suspected environmental criminals and their networks,” said Bernd Rossbach, the director of INTERPOL’s Specialized Crime Unit.²³³

The WCO’s **OPERATION GAPIN** (Great Apes and Integrity) took place during two weeks in 2011 with the aim of raising awareness and building the enforcement and integrity capacity of customs administrations in 14 African countries for combating the illicit trafficking in great apes and other protected species.

Belgium, China, and Thailand actively contributed to the operation through significant seizures. The operation resulted in over 100 seizures covering more than 31 species of protected wildlife.²³⁴

OPERATION CRASH is a continuing investigation focused on rhino trafficking led by the Special Investigations Unit of the FWS Office of Law Enforcement. The operation has received assistance from other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies including the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s Homeland Security Investigations and the Internal Revenue Service.²³⁵ The probe has led to the seizure of 37 horns and products made from them over the one and a half years since its launch, according to FWS. The operation has also confiscated US\$1 million in cash from criminal organizations, along with gold ingots worth the same amount. In the past year, seven people have been arrested.²³⁶ “Rhinos are a part of our planet’s conservation heritage, and everyone has a stake in ensuring that they thrive in the wild,” said FWS Director Dan Ashe. “The fact that our nation is being used as a base and a transshipment point by criminals seeking to profit on the deaths of hundreds of rhinos makes it imperative that we act here and now to shut them down.”²³⁷

These cases show that, while environmental criminals may cross borders and display high levels of organization, so too can the international law enforcement community in its efforts to apprehend those criminals.

The U.S. Department of State called illegal wildlife trade a major national security issue

In 2012, Hillary Clinton (U.S. Secretary of State at the time) publicly called an unprecedented attention to the illegal wildlife trade, which she said must be addressed at every level of the international community. She noted how poachers now have helicopters, technology, and automatic weapons, which pose a threat to human life as well as

wildlife. Clinton called the illegal wildlife trade a national security issue, a public health issue, and an economic security issue. Further, she called on the intelligence community to assess the impact of large-scale wildlife trafficking on U.S. security interests. “Over the past few years wildlife trafficking has become more organized, more lucrative, more widespread, and more dangerous than ever before Local communities are becoming terrified. Local leaders are telling their national leaders that they can lose control of large swaths of

territory to these criminal gangs. Where criminal gangs can come and go at their total discretion, we know that begins to provide safe havens for other sorts of threats to people and governments.”²³⁹

Conclusion

Illegal Wildlife Trade Must Be a Priority for Governments

ORGANIZED CRIMINAL SYNDICATES, INSURGENCY GROUPS, BRUTAL MILITIAS, AND CORRUPT MILITARY UNITS ARE AMONG THE PRIMARY ACTORS INVOLVED IN LARGE-SCALE, COMMERCIAL-SIZED WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING. No longer a problem localized to parts of the world where many lack access to basic resources, the illegal trade in wildlife is now a massive global industry. This is in part because, for governments, the trade is often seen only as an environmental issue and not a security issue; so it is not given a high priority.

Many wildlife trade policy and enforcement experts from around the world agree that more resources are desperately needed to fully understand and ultimately combat the illegal trade in wildlife, including the activities undertaken by transnational organized crime. Governments and international bodies—although publicly acknowledging the possibility of a connection between the global illegal wildlife trade and security threats, including 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. The UN reclassification of timber and animal trafficking as a serious organized crime is a step forward that may strengthen the political will to counter spiking rates of poaching.

In order to face the criminal syndicates running the global illegal wildlife trade, it is critical for the enforcement community to have access to intelligence that will enable it to identify emerging trends in a timely manner, to address current trends, to plan for future activities, and to deploy the best available techniques and technologies. At the same time, an integrated enforcement strategy that includes the police, military, judges, and customs is needed. However, the resources dedicated by the world community to support this are insufficient in comparison to those allocated for combating other large illegal industries like arms and drugs at the international level.

In spite of the links with criminal syndicates, the huge scale and the potential for harm to both global biodiversity and public

health and safety, national and international legal frameworks and penalties are often woefully inadequate compared to those that address the illegal trade in drugs and weapons. The effectiveness of measures to curb illegal wildlife trade should be judged not only by seizures and arrests recorded but also by convictions with proportionate penalties and the disruption of the implicated trade networks. Tougher penalties with larger fines and longer prison sentences for the top-level criminals masterminding the trafficking chains and incentives for whistle-blowing would also help. Countries must follow the money and deploy anti-money-laundering tools and training to make the risks of wildlife crime greater than the rewards by increasing the cost of doing business. Politicians, judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement agencies must build political will, organize departmental support, and improve professional services to address wildlife crime so that the punishment and penalties are commensurate with the toll this illicit business is taking on communities.

Until recently, the major arguments for working to combat the illegal 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, illegal wildlife trade is no longer only a conservation or animal welfare issue. It is a national and global security issue and must be addressed accordingly.

IFAW Recommendations

Governments, multilateral institutions, IGOs, and NGOs should:

- 1. Elevate wildlife crime to the level of other serious international organized crimes that pose significant threats to global security and development, such as human trafficking and the drug trade;**
- 2. Strengthen policies and legal frameworks, increase law enforcement capacity, and develop effective judicial systems in order to better combat wildlife crime at the local, national, and international levels;**
- 3. Develop and implement regional wildlife enforcement strategies and networks that are interconnected through a global coordinating mechanism; and**
- 4. Address the growing demand for and availability of wildlife products through targeted consumer awareness and demand-reduction initiatives in key consumer states.**



Notes

SUMMARY NOTES

- 1 Biron, Carey. 2013. UN recognises wildlife trafficking as “serious crime.” *IPS News*, April 29. Accessed May 14. www.ipsnews.net/2013/04/u-n-recognises-wildlife-trafficking-as-serious-crime/
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Unreported and unregulated fisheries trade: estimated at between us\$4.2 billion and us\$9.5 billion per year; Illegal timber trade: as much as us\$7 billion per year;

Illicit wildlife trafficking (excluding fisheries and timber): between us\$7.8 billion and us\$10 billion per year.
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NOTES TO THE REPORT

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INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

290 Summer Street
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Call toll-free: 800.932.4329

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US OFFICE

1350 Connecticut Avenue NW
Suite 1220
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Fax: 202.296.3802

Email: info@ifaw.org

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