

Forum: Environmental Committee
Issue: Combating illegal wildlife trade
Student Officer: Danae- Maria Karantanou
Position: Co-chair

Personal Introduction

My name is Danae- Maria Karantanou, I'm 16 years old and I attend the German School of Athens. Primarily, concerning my MUN experience, I have attended six (6) MUN Conferences in the course of the last two years. The 6th Session of the PSMUN is going to be my 7th conference and my first one as a Student Officer. I hope that the Study Guide will help you during your research on the issue and clarify your questions concerning this topic. Moreover, I wish you all three days of interesting and fruitful debate and as a little piece of advice do your best and try to make this conference an unforgettable and remarkable experience. Lastly, if you have any questions regarding the topic you can contact me any time at my e-mail address: danaekarant@gmail.com.

Introducing topic

The international illegal wildlife trade is a multi-billion dollar industry which is threatening biodiversity and a significant number of vulnerable and endangered species. Around the globe, wildlife is being bought, sold and/or exchanged on an increasingly huge level and hundreds of millions of animals and plants are sold as pets, food, medicine, furs, feathers, leather and trophies.

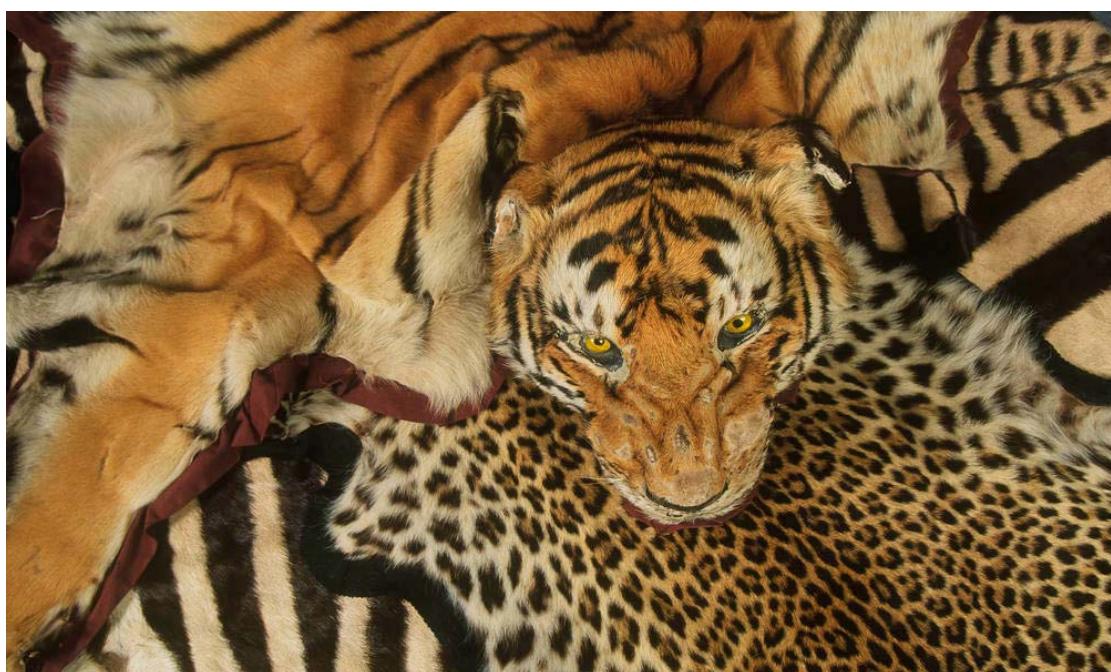
A large proportion of this trade is legal, done in a sustainable manner and it does not cause any negative environmental impact, while a dangerously great part is illegal and unsustainable and it engenders imbalances on the ecosystem. Illicit wildlife trade is putting all species under additional pressure, keeping in mind that in the 21st century they are facing many other serious threats, such as over-fishing, deforestation, pollution and other forms of habitat destruction.

The main motivating cause for illegal wildlife traders is economic and people trade wildlife for cash or they exchange it for other useful objects. Extreme poverty is one of the primary reasons why people choose to meet their short-term needs by trading wildlife for whatever they can get. It is said that illicit wildlife trade is one of the most valuable illegal “industries” behind drugs and weapons.

Between collectors of wildlife and eventual users, a great number of middlemen might be involved, including many specialists who participate in the transportation,

handling, storing, manufacturing, industrial production exportation and trade businesses. In fact most of us are involved in illicit wildlife trade in some way, even as end consumers of wildlife products.

As our survival depends on the existence of a functioning planet Earth, we need to use wildlife species and their habitats carefully and thoughtfully in order to avoid environmental harms and disturbances in the complex web of life.



Key-Terms

Wildlife

Wildlife refers to non- domesticated or tamed animal species, plants, and other organisms that grow or live wild in natural conditions, independently of people.

Wildlife trade

Wildlife trade is an economic activity carried out at local, national and international levels. More specifically, any sale or exchange of wild animal and plant resources by people is considered as wildlife trade. This can involve live animals and plants or a diverse range of products needed or prized by humans. Most wildlife trade is probably within national borders, but there is a large volume of wildlife in trade internationally.

Legal/ Illegal wildlife trade

International wildlife trade can be classified in 2 forms: legal and illegal. On the one hand, legal wildlife trade is a sustainable and controllable form of this trade and is

not harming wild populations. On the other hand, illegal wildlife trade is forbidden by the law and it is one of the most immediate threats to vulnerable species in many parts of the world.

Biodiversity

"Biodiversity" is a contracted version of "biological diversity". The Convention on Biological Diversity defines biodiversity as the variability among living organisms from all sources including, *inter alia*, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are a part; this includes diversity within species, between species, and of ecosystems." (<https://www.cbd.int/convention/articles/default.shtml?a=cbd-02>)

Vulnerable/ endangered species

These are animals, plants and other organisms which have been categorized by the International Union for Conversation of Nature as likely to become extinct unless the circumstances that are threatening their survival and reproduction improve.

Overexploitation

Overexploitation (overharvesting) means harvesting a renewable resource to the point of decreasing returns and it can lead to the destruction of the resource.

Historical Information

The wildlife trade is not a new phenomenon. For hundreds of years, illegal wildlife trade in tiger bones, leopard skins, rhino horns, elephant ivory has flourished between Japan, China, Europe and the United States of America.

In 1663, a shipment of elephant ivory between Siam and Japan totaled 3,000kg. Later shipments were even larger. For example, in 1821 18,000kg of elephant ivory was transported from Siam to China, carried together with unknown quantities of other wildlife products.



Cultural and social factors have contributed in the illegal wildlife trade. According to myths, the tiger is believed to acquire supernatural powers and it is widely accepted amongst the old generation, in countries just like India or China, that anyone who eats the flesh of the animal will obtain part of the tiger's superpowers. It is also said that some other parts of the animal contain medicinal properties that can help in the treatment of chronic ailments, such as muscle cramps, typhoid fever, rheumatism and boils.

Such beliefs are not limited only to tiger parts. Many Chinese believe that shark fins, bears' paws and rhino horns enhance muscularity and longevity. This is also the reason why some animal parts can sell more than 10 times the price of gold.

Of course, there are also other historical reasons behind wildlife trafficking. Leopard skin jackets and fur coats were considered to be the height of taste amongst the fashionable and rich people all around the globe. It was only in 1976 when an organization called the Dangerous Wild Animals Act appeared in Britain. Until then, the United Kingdom was one of the biggest traders of exotic animal products.

In Asia, around 50 years ago, wild cats, elephants, snakes, bears and monkeys were hunted for food, or simply because they were threatening the crops or even the people living near the forests.

In the 21st century, in spite of the clear deterioration in the number of wild animals, such ways of thinking and living continue to prevail. Apart from massive education, it will take many decades to change this point of view. Since 1960, demand for wildlife products has risen significantly as a result of the vivid increase in the global trade and the absence of effective trafficking laws. What was once carried out by individuals and small- scale companies is now a multi- dollar business linked to criminal syndicates in many countries all around the globe.

As illicit wildlife trafficking has reached crisis levels, governments and NGO's finally realized the need to act. In 1973, the United Nations created the UN Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), whose aim is to prevent wildlife trade from threatening the survival of 5,000 animal and 28,000 plant species. But despite this, there have been many difficulties, such as lack of funding, difficulties with law enforcement and the economic situation of many countries which are some of the reasons why this culture of killing is threatening the balance of the ecosystem and our survival.

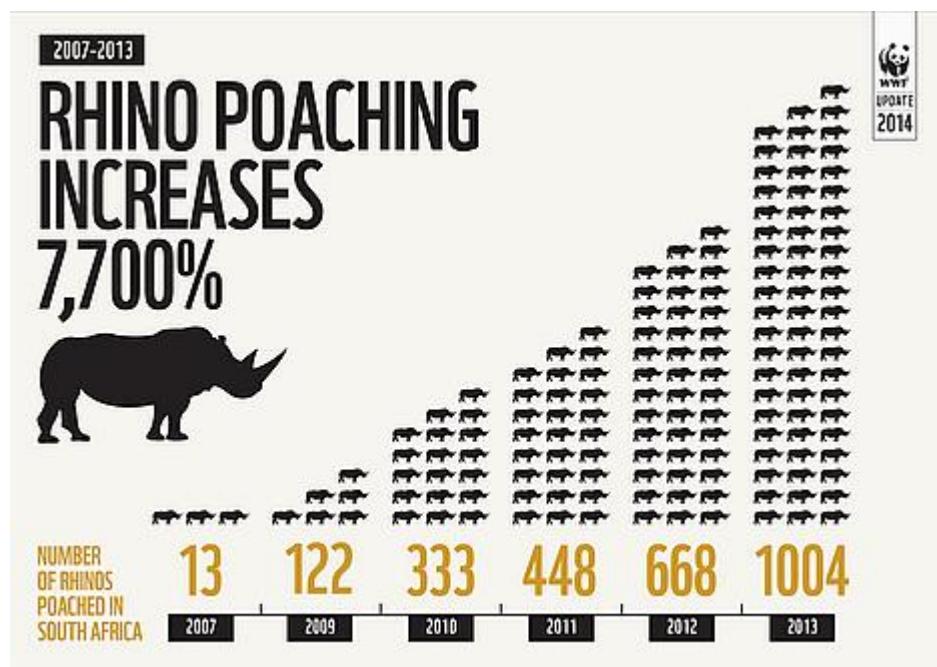
The scale of wildlife trade

Illegal wildlife trade affects millions of different wild animals and plants. To provide a glimpse of the scale of wildlife trafficking:

- a) Each year, almost 21.000 African grey parrots, originating from Cameroon, are exported and it is estimated that a percentage of 14-50% of birds that have been captured die before the process of exportation begins.
- b) Between 1970 and 1993, East Asian consuming countries imported more than ten tons of tiger bones from other parts of Asia, representing 500 to 1000 tigers.
- c) In Sumatra, about 51 tigers were killed every year between 1998 and 2002, in order to be traded in Asian countries.¹

¹ <http://programs.wcs.org/wildlifetrade/About-Wildlife-Trade/The-Scale-of-Wildlife-Trade.aspx>

- d) According to the FAO, more than \$100 billion of fish were traded and nearly \$200 billion timber in 2009.²
- e) It is estimated that 70,000 plant species are being used for healthcare reasons. Around 25% of new pharmacy medicines have are based on the medicinal properties of wild species.
- f) From 2005 to 2009, 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 tones of caviar, 1.1 million coral pieces and nearly 20,000 hunting trophies have been collected by wildlife traders in order to be sold, according to a CITES study.²
- g) In 2012 some 15,000 elephants were illegally killed at 42 sites across 27 African countries. According to Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) analysis, 22,000 elephants were illegally killed in the African continent in 2012.³
- h) The number of rhinos poached in South Africa has increased by 9,000% since 2007 - from 13 to a record 1,215 in 2014, according to a recent WWF study on African rhinos wildlife trade.



² <http://www.traffic.org/trade/>

³ https://www.cites.org/eng/news/pr/2013/20131202_elephant-figures.php

Countries and organizations involved in the issue

There are certain places where wildlife trade is particularly threatening called "wildlife trade hotspots". They include:

South American countries

In open air Amazon markets in Iquitos and Manaus, various rainforest animals are sold as meat, such as agoutis, peccaries, turtles, turtle eggs, walking catfish, etc. Many villagers along the Amazon are keeping parrots and monkeys as pets and they are allowed to sell these so called, "companion" animals in open markets. As a result of overpopulation and continuing human population increase, actions like these have seriously impacted the future of many threatened species. Wildlife species are smuggled across borders like illegal drugs are - in vehicles, luggage, and in crates camouflaged as something else.

China

In previous years, illegal tiger bone, rhino horn, musk and saiga horn trade was very common in Asia and especially in China for many decades. However, in May 1993, the State Council of the People's Republic of China banned the trade in rhinoceros horn and tiger bone in order support international conservation efforts to combat wildlife trade. The ban included the ejection of these products from the official pharmacopeia of China, and the cessation of all formal manufacture and commercial trade within the country. According to China's Criminal Law, people who are involved in the purchasing and transporting of such wildlife products shall be brought to justice and sentenced to 5 years or more in jail.

African countries

A very large black market for elephant ivory and rhino horn has been created over the past period and has led to a poaching crisis on the African continent. Africa's elephants and rhinos are fighting for their survival. Only 450,000 elephants and 25,000 rhinoceroses remain on the continent. Building on its decades of experience combating rhino and elephant poaching in Africa, an organization called AWF has shown leadership and foresight in this new war against illegal wildlife trafficking.

South-eastern Asian countries

South-east Asia, possibly more than any other area, encompasses the full variety of challenges dealing with the management of wildlife trade. Cultural, political, linguistic and religious variety in combination with flora and fauna diversity, are one reason why the region has enclosed ways of lifestyle that all rely upon wildlife resources for food, healthcare, clothing and other products. Suvarnabhumi International Airport, located in Bangkok, gives smugglers the opportunity to travel to several places all around the globe via direct jet service. In Bangkok, the

Chatuchak weekend market is a very famous center of illegal wildlife trade and the sale of many endangered species has been widely documented.

European Union Member States

The third largest wildlife market of the world is in the European Union, (including the USA and Japan). Hundreds of thousands of animals and plants are imported and exported every year, including parrots from South America, caviar from the Caspian Sea, reptiles from the African continent and orchids from Southeast Asia. Several wildlife products, such as shoes and bags made of reptile skin, furniture made of timber products and wildlife plants used in medicines are in high demand in the European Union. CITES, aided by the European Community (EC) Wildlife Trade Regulations and many national laws, supervises this trade internationally.

Mexico

In Mexico the animal-trafficking problem is out of control. “It is estimated that between 65,000 to 78,500 parrots are caught illegally every year.”⁴ Illicit wildlife trade in Mexico is carried out by organized international crime networks. Mexico is a, so called “hotspot” for the global trade in wildlife, both due to its rich biodiversity, and of course due to its proximity to the USA, one of the globe’s largest black markets for endangered plants and animals.

India

India has a strict legal and policy framework to manage and restrict wildlife trade. Trade in over 1800 species of wild animals, plants and their derivative has been prevented by the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. India is also a member of the CITES since 1976. Like in many other countries, the problem in India is that the laws might not be efficiently implemented and enforced. Often, positive attempts to address wildlife trafficking concerns are threatened by lack of political will and governmental failures. With no political support, penalties for legal infractions, have all often failed.

WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature)

WWF provides technical and scientific advice to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.⁵ The issue and the impacts of illegal wildlife trade concern WWF and TRAFFIC, and thus, research is carried out by them. WWF is working on creating new plans and finding new measures for dealing with illicit wildlife trade and it helps raising awareness through commercials, campaigns and web- advertising.

⁴ <http://geo-mexico.com/?p=4193>

⁵ <http://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/illegal-wildlife-trade>

TRAFFIC

TRAFFIC is an organization activating solutions in order to eliminate illegal wildlife trafficking. The purpose of the organization is to ensure sustainability and provide traders -and generally people involved in such illicit actions- with reliable information about the negative effects on the environment irresponsible trade can cause. TRAFFIC is also cooperating with law enforces and the judiciary, to renew law concerning wildlife trade and to assure that transgressors receive appropriate penalties.

WCS (Wildlife Conservation Society)

WCS is a non-governmental organization aiming to save wildlife species and wild places worldwide through science, education, and inspiring people to value nature. WCS is becoming more influential on wildlife trafficking in the global policy area. It has also implemented programs in nearly 60 nations, which are working in order to limit poaching. WCS is trying to deal with poaching by creating intelligence networks in many regions all around the globe.

Timeline of Events

Date	Event
1976	TRAFFIC is founded, working in co-operation with the Secretariat of the CITES.
1961	AWF (African Wildlife Foundation) founded and it works in cooperation with African people to ensure the wildlife and wild lands of Africa will endure forever.
1895	WCS (Wildlife Conservation Society) founded in as the New York Zoological Society (NYZS), it works to conserve more than two million square miles of wild places all around the globe.

29 April 1961	Foundation of World Wide Fund (WWF) and NGO founded on, specialized in the field of biodiversity preservation, and the elimination of humanity's footprint on the environment.
3 March 1973	CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, also known as the Washington Convention) was opened for signature.
1 July 1975	CITES entered into force and its aim is to protect endangered plants and animals.
30 July 2015	Resolution A/RES/69/314 on Tackling the Illicit Trafficking in Wildlife, co-sponsored by more than 80 other nations and is the culmination of three years of diplomatic efforts, in New York, USA.

Possible solutions

The issue of illegal wildlife trade is high on the agenda of several non-governmental organizations and governments. Most people think that there is an abundance of wildlife species on Earth, but the truth is, their numbers are decreasing and if we do not take action, these species might become extinct. Animals become endangered all the time and people are not aware about it. First of all in order to solve this issue, more and more preservation programs have to be established to ensure that these animals are protected and well-taken care of. These preservation programs should be created to motivate and raise the awareness of the public concerning the proper management of natural resources.

Furthermore, governments should increase law enforcements, set strict deterrents and reduce demand for endangered species by organizing several campaigns and other events to inform the relevant consumers and persuade them to make informed choices when buying wildlife-based products. It is also important to recognize that teamwork and cooperation are needed. More specifically, the partnering and cooperation between governments, UN agencies and NGO's should

be encouraged and promoted for programs to guarantee the protection of wildlife species to be established.

Moreover, practical help has to be provided to overcome poverty in the LEDC's and help the citizens in those countries use their local wildlife in a more sustainable and safe way.

Lastly, all the Member States should implement resolutions such as Resolution A/RES/69/314 on tackling the Illicit trafficking in wildlife and collaborate with each other to create new ones that will help ensuring that animals, wild populations and their habitats are protected and will finally give an end to illegal wildlife trafficking.



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