



**WORLD  
ENVIRONMENT  
DAY**



## Illegal Trade in Wildlife Fact Sheet

May 2016

### Why illegal trade in wildlife matters

Driven by growing demand for wildlife and forest products, the illegal trade in wildlife has in recent years escalated into a global crisis, pushing several iconic species to the brink of extinction. Much more than a conservation issue, wildlife crime is disrupting development by depriving countries of billions of dollars-worth of resources, cashed in by organized international cartels. It is increasing the risk of diseases, such as the Ebola Virus. Decisive action against illegal trade in wildlife will benefit every aspect of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### The state of play<sup>i</sup>

- **100,000** African elephants were killed in 2010-2012, out of a population estimated at less than 500,000.
- African Savannah Elephants have declined by 60% in Tanzania and by 50% in Mozambique since 2009.
- Poaching has caused the forest elephants population to **plummet by 2/3** during 2002-2011.
- An estimated **170 tonnes of ivory** was illegally exported out of Africa between 2009 and 2014.
- Poachers in Africa killed at least **1,338 rhinos** in 2015.
- Rhino Poaching in South Africa increased almost **90-fold** between 2007 and 2015 – from 13 rhinos killed in 2007 to 1,175 rhinos killed in 2015.
- Chimpanzees are now **extinct** in Gambia, Burkina Faso, Benin and Togo.
- **3,000** great apes are lost from the wild every year; over **70% of all great ape seizures** are orangutans.
- During 2013-2015, approximately **2 apes** were reported **seized each week**.
- With over **one million animals** taken from the wild in the past decade, pangolins are the **most illegally trafficked** mammal in the world.
- Environmental crime is estimated at up to **\$213 billion annually**, compared to \$120 billion of official development assistance.
- Illegal trade in wildlife alone is worth **\$15-20 billion annually**, and is one of the largest illegal trades in the world, along with trafficking of drugs, arms and humans.
- Africa loses **twice as much** in illicit financial flows as it receives in international aid.
- Illegal timber trade is responsible for up to **90% of deforestation** in major tropical countries and threatens the livelihoods of around one billion people dependent on forests.
- Illegal trade in wildlife abuses the poorest populations and weakens government authority by **compromising the rule of law**.
- According to the Thing Green Line, over the last decade, **over 1,000 park rangers have been killed in the line of duty**.
- Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is estimated at **11-26 million tonnes of fish** each year, worth between **\$10 and \$23 billion**, causing depletion of fish stocks, price increase and loss of livelihoods for fishermen.

- **40%** of all intrastate conflicts in the last 60 years were linked to natural resources and over **80%** of major armed conflicts in the last 50 years occurred in biodiversity hotspots.

### The benefits of action

- Protecting wild animals and ecosystems would benefit tourism, which brought sub-Saharan Africa over **\$36 billion** and contributed over **7% of its GDP** in 2012.
- Each live gorilla is bringing Uganda about **\$1 million** per year in tourism revenues, while Rwanda, famous for its mountain gorillas made **\$304 million** in eco-tourism in 2014, a \$10 million increase over 2013.
- **Fully implementing existing international laws and commitments** (Sustainable Development Goals, UN Environment Assembly and UN General Assembly resolutions, CITES, including CITES National Ivory Action Plans, London and Kasane Declarations, among others) would trigger a concerted global effort to fight environmental crime as decisively as drugs or arms trafficking.
- **Zero tolerance approach** to wildlife crime and related illicit activities, including corruption, money laundering, organized crime, illicit firearms, drugs and terrorism would create a powerful deterrent.
- Preventing trafficking by **strengthening cooperation** between source, destination and transit countries will disrupt the illegal trade and raise the costs of illicit activities.
- **Mitigating human-wildlife conflict and engaging communities** in conservation would increase the social support for wildlife protection and reduce incentives for poaching.

### Change across the globe

- In November 2010, the International Consortium on Combatting Wildlife Crime (ICWC) – CITES, INTERPOL; UNODC, the World Bank and WCO – was created to offer countries coordinated enforcement support.
- In September 2015, two of the largest ivory markets in the world, **US and China**, announced they would be **closing their international and domestic trade in elephant ivory**.
- UN Environment award-winning British biologist, Dr. Lucy E. King, found an innovative way of reducing human-elephant conflict by **protecting crops with beehive fences**, based on the fact that elephants fear the stings of bees.
- UN Environment's Champions of the Earth, the mostly female South African Black Mamba Anti-Poaching Unit has **reduced snaring by 76%**, removed **over 1,000 snares** and put 5 poachers' camps and 2 bush meat kitchens out of action in the Balule Reserve, which they protect.
- Tougher penalties for poaching and a streamlined judicial system have helped Nepal to achieve **zero rhino poaching** in 3 out of the last 5 years, allowing the rhino population to **grow by 21%**. There are now **645 rhinos** as compared to 534 in 2011.
- The 19 countries of most concern in the illegal trade in ivory have prepared time-bound action plans to stop the poaching of elephants and illegal trade in ivory, known as CITES National Ivory Action Plans.
- In May 2015, the cross-continent Operation Cobra III brought together enforcement agencies from range, transit and destination countries, resulting in **139 arrests** and more than **247 seizures**, which included elephant ivory, medicinal plants, rhino horns, pangolins and many more.
- CITES regulates international trade in over 35,000 species of animals and plants, including elephants, great apes, rhinos, pangolins and rosewood. In September 2016, South Africa will host the seventeenth Conference of the Parties to CITE, at which many additional species will be considered for CITES listing.

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<sup>i</sup> Sources: CITES, IUCN, ICWC, UNEP, Traffic. Some figures quoted are estimates.