



The EU as a major destination and transit point in global wildlife trade: facts and figures

The EU is both a major destination and a transit point in the global wildlife trade. All EU Member States are Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora (CITES), the international treaty which regulates global wildlife trade. CITES is implemented in the EU via a set of EU Wildlife Trade Regulations which go further than the requirements of the Convention. For example, the Regulations have stricter requirements for imports of CITES-listed species, and trade in the most endangered species within the EU is strictly regulated.

Wildlife trade in figures:

The EU and legal wildlife trade:

The legal trade in wildlife goods is a vital part of the global economy. In 2009 the global trade in live reptiles (including turtles and snakes but excluding skins) was estimated to be worth EUR 25.5 million, of which the EU's share was EUR 7.5 million (about 30% in terms of value), while the global trade in live ornamental fish was worth EUR 267.5 million, of which the EU's share was EUR 87.1 million[1]. In 2008, the global trade in fisheries products was worth EUR 64.2 billion, of which the EU's share was more than 50%, at EUR 34.6 billion.[2] (Sources: 1. TRAFFIC data analysis of UN Comtrade data. Value data based on declared import value, for EU27 only. 2. 2008 figures from FAO.)

The EU and illegal wildlife trade:

CITES regulations within the EU are implemented through the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations. However, poor implementation of the existing EU regulations on wildlife trade in some Member States leave EU borders porous to illegal trade activities. In 2011, a total of at least 486 seizures of wildlife goods took place at the EU's external borders (reported by 20 Member States), including ivory (354 worked specimens plus approximately 100 kg). The corresponding figures for "international" EU ivory seizures in 2012 were 1523 worked specimens plus approximately 70 kg (reported by 23 Member States). Major product groups over the two years included more than 5 million medicinal items claiming to contain wildlife parts and derivatives (in the form of pills, packets etc. and including some rhino horn) as well as items that together weighed more than 3.5 tonnes; 1273 live reptiles; 2616 reptile skins and other body parts; 508 mammal skins and other body parts; 51 kg sturgeon caviar and 1734 specimens and close to a combined 4.5 tonnes of corals.¹ EU nationals have been directly involved in some of these crimes, for example, the Czech Republic recently arrested a rhino horn trafficking syndicate, while EU citizens travelling outside the region may be unwitting contributors, such as the many tourists who visit Thailand and purchase ivory souvenirs.

¹ Overview of important international seizures of CITES-listed specimens in the European Union, January to December 2012. Compiled by TRAFFIC (<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/cites/pdf/Overview%20significant%20seizures.pdf>) and Overview of important international seizures in the European Union, January to December 2011. Compiled by TRAFFIC (<http://www.cites.org/eng/com/sc/62/inf/E62i-03.pdf>).

Wildlife crime is serious:

High threat to global and national security—Much of the trade in illegal wildlife products, including fish and timber, is run by sophisticated criminal networks with broad international reach. The profits from wildlife trafficking are used to purchase weapons, finance civil conflicts and there is some evidence they may underwrite terrorist-related activities. The involvement of organized crime syndicates and rebel groups in wildlife crimes appears to be increasing according to research carried out on behalf of WWF². The United Nations has drawn attention to the link between elephant poaching and the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army, a militant group active in various African countries and accused of widespread human rights violations³. The former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and others have spoken of the link between Al-Shabaab and such activities, while there are indications of the involvement of the Janjaweed in the poaching of hundreds of elephants in northern Cameroon in 2012⁴.

High threat to wildlife—In 2012, around 15 000 elephants were illegally killed at 42 sites across 27 African countries participating in the CITES-managed Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) Programme⁵. According to MIKE analysis, this equals about 22 000 elephants illegally killed throughout the African continent in 2012. Provisional figures for 2013 indicate some respite, although elephant poaching remains at unacceptable high levels and if it continues at the current rate, around 20% of Africa's elephants will be lost in the next decade. The elephants are targeted for their ivory, which is smuggled to Asia, mainly China and Thailand, to meet the soaring demand for ivory as decorative objects. In 2011 the illicit trade in ivory rose to its highest levels in the last 16 years and persisted at extremely high and unacceptable levels through 2012 and into 2013.

In addition to elephants, at least 946 rhinoceroses were illegally killed in 2013 in South Africa, home to more than 70% of the world's rhino population. In 2007, the nation recorded just 13 rhino poaching incidents. The animals are targeted for their horns, which are smuggled to Asia, principally Viet Nam, where they are mainly consumed as a "health tonic" by newly affluent middle aged men attempting to enhance their social standing through displaying their wealth.

In Asia, research by TRAFFIC revealed that parts of at least 1425 tigers had been seized across all but one of the 13 Tiger range countries between 2000 and 2012. Tiger numbers in the wild have fallen from around 30 000 animals in the 1970s to around 3200 today. They are mainly targeted for their bones, used in traditional medicine and in "health tonics".

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² WWF Report: Fighting illicit wildlife trafficking:

http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/species/problems/illegal_trade/wildlife_trade_campaign/wildlife_trafficking_report/

³ <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2013/sc11018.doc.htm>

⁴ <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2013/09/26/hillary-clinton-on-link-between-elephants-terrorism/>

⁵ See "Status of African elephant populations and levels of illegal killing and the illegal trade in ivory: A report to the African Elephant Summit, Dec 2013, available at: https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/african_elephant_summit_background_document_2013_en.pdf