

Forum: Environmental Commission

Issue: Combating poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna by organized criminal groups*

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Introduction

In recent years, the world has witnessed an unparalleled increase in the poaching and trade of extinct and protected species, threatening the efforts of millions of individuals as they aim to conserve the biodiversity that exists on the earth. With the ever-increasing threat of poaching, some of the world's most unique species are in danger, some being elephants, rhinoceroses, birds, monkey, tigers, reptiles and numerous indigenous plant species. The primary reason for this comes from criminal groups that are determined to extract specific items such as horns and herbs in order to profit economically. According to the United Nations Environment Program, the key force behind the black market trade is the increasing demand for products that can arise from endangered flora and fauna. This increase has resulted in the creation of a lucrative black market that distribute products such as religious remedies, medicines, clothing, sport and even personal collection. Therefore, due to this the international community has yet to see a clear solution to this issue.

When addressing this issue and the ways in which the conflict can be eradicated, two perspectives need to be taken into account. Firstly, criminal groups and illegal poaching that exists within them need to be stopped. Organized crime networks and groups have realized that there are massive profits to be made, and as a result they have chosen to control this domain. One example is Feisal Mohamed Ali and the criminal organizations that he facilitates. On June 6th, 2014, Kenyan police found over 200 elephant tusks that the organization had been collecting for over 6 years. Therefore, many officials and wildlife reserves experts argue that as a world we are failing because the international community has allowed these criminal groups to make a major profit in low risk environments. Therefore, National Geographic specialists say that the only way to stop these organized criminal groups is through law enforcement.

Another lens this issue must be looked at is from the eyes of a consumer. As consumers, our increasing demands for everyday items such as a variety of kinds of seafood, leather goods, timbers, medicinal ingredients, and textiles have come from the illegal practices of these criminal groups.

According to a study conducted by Isabella Vique, a member of Flora and Fauna International (FFI), “In Nicaragua, turtles are widely exploited for their meat, eggs, and shell. Their meat and eggs are traditionally consumed as food, with up to 100% of eggs poached from some nesting sites. Turtle shell is highly valued as material for making jewelry and ornaments, and Nicaragua is reported to be the supplier for most of the turtle shell products marketed throughout Central America.” This is one example of illegal poaching in our real world, however, what is even more astonishing is the increased consumer demands for these turtle necklaces. Therefore, if we are to stop individuals from illegally poaching, we need to eradicate the core problem which is consumer demands. According to the experts from the FFI, “to build effective strategies in order to influence the behaviour of a consumer, it is necessary to identify target groups and understand their motivations and values, and how those influence their decision making.” Only once we have targeted the necessary groups will consumer demands drop.

Definition of Key Terms

Poaching

The word poaching from an environmental perspective refers to the illegal trespassing or hunting of a particular species without the permission of landowners or authority from government-protected areas in order to gain from the animal or plant and benefit economically.

Trafficking

Trafficking in a general scale refers to the transportation or movement of individuals or objects from one area to another. In this issue trafficking refers to the movements of poached plants and animals (flora and fauna) in order to trade and exchange goods produced from those organisms.

Flora and Fauna

The terms flora and fauna refer to the indigenous plants and animals of a specific environment, respectively.

Criminal Groups

Criminal groups are groups of individuals that oppose the laws enforced within a region and take actions to undermine the central dogma and basis of the law. In our case, this refers to poaching animals and plants even when the law states otherwise.

Endangered Species

Endangered species are organisms that are at risk of becoming extinct due to natural reasons or other factors such as excessive poaching and environmental stressors.

Eco-tourism

Eco-tourism is a form of tourism involving visiting natural locations, such as a safari. These locations are regarded as exotic where an abundance of indigenous organisms and diverse wildlife can be found.

Biological Management

Biological Management is the ability for the government, NGOs and the general public to maintain and provide an environment where flora and fauna may flourish in their natural habitats.

Translocation

Translocation is referred to as the movement of a species of flora and fauna from one location to another in order to help the species survive, initiate new settlements, and to reintegrate species into their natural habitats.

Background Information

Legalities of Poaching

The definition of poaching has drastically changed over time and the laws for which poaching is regulated differs from one nation to another. In most countries, poaching is forbidden due to the united effort to conserve the species and organisms on Earth, however, as we have witnessed, criminal groups are still poaching animals and plants. In the past, specifically in the Medieval Times, poaching was deemed a serious crime punishable by imprisonment, but the enforcement was comparably weak until the 16th century. This was mainly due to the fact that only nobility was allowed to profit economically from poached animals and plants.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, restrictions on hunting and poaching rights became more specified in terms of private property ownership. Individuals known as foresters or gamekeepers, “a person in charge of a forest or skilled in planting, managing, or caring for trees and the animals within that area,” enforced private property rights where citizens would not be allowed to hunt within their land (PAMS Foundation). However, by the end of the 18th century, the industrialization and introduction of long-range rifles and specified hunting techniques allowed hunters to poach without directly needing to enter private property.

In terms of modern-day poaching laws, many researchers, scientists, and wildlife conservationist have deemed poaching and all other forms of its trafficking methods as an environmental crime. This is because it infringes on the regulations and laws that have been set to protect vulnerable species and to deter illegal poaching in all of its forms including its possession, transportation, consumption, purchasing, and selling. Poaching plants and animals is one of the most serious threats to the survival of these organisms and therefore, laws in the United States, United Kingdom, and most other MEDCs have strictly been enforced to regulate the poaching by criminal groups within their respective regions.

Motives

Although it is widely known that the primary reason for poaching is for economic benefit, there are many other proposed motives, some being for pleasure, sport, hunting, cultural purposes, or because they do not agree with certain hunting regulations. In some rare cases such as indigenous populations in the United States, hunting is not only used to preserve culture, heritage and traditions but also in order to relieve the suffering from poverty that these populations may experience. In an interview conducted “with 41 poachers in the Atchafalaya River basin in Louisiana revealed that 37 of them hunt to provide food for themselves and their families; 11 stated that poaching is part of their personal or cultural history; nine earn money from the sale of poached game to support their families; eight feel exhilarated and thrilled by outsmarting game wardens.” This portrays how most hunters use hunting as a method to provide for their families rather than economic gain, however, this survey only reached out to 41 poachers in a somewhat remote area, so the complete validity of the experiment must be taken into account as well.

In other areas around the world, the primary motive for poaching is the lack of employment opportunities found within the nation. This is mostly found within regions of Africa where citizens may not be completely educated about the laws in place or where the laws aren't strictly enforced. These are two core factors when looking to solve the issue.

In addition, indigenous populations in Africa are heavily reliant on natural resources in order to thrive economically. This is because most individuals make a profit by selling regionally-based products to foreign consumers, and since agricultural activity within these hunting hotspots is relatively low, people often rely on hunting as their best option. Due to the unprecedented increase of poaching in Africa, a wide-spread armed conflict has result in many nations internationally as task forces now seek to prosecute those who have committed illegal crimes.

Effects of Poaching

Due to the increasing threat of poaching, detrimental effects arise on both the organisms being poached and the individuals within the surrounding region. Firstly, the population of animals drastically declines to the point of near extinction for some organisms and for others, they have already surpassed that point. The decrease of one species not only affects that species' existence but also affects all other

species within that food chain, as it creates a domino effect. These are known as the bottom-up and top-down methods that detail how by incapacitating a plant, the organisms that consume the plant are also affected, possibly leading to their extinction. In addition, by affecting a consumer or animal in the secondary or tertiary level, lower consumers begin to increase substantially when food and resources are limited, resulting in the decrease of their population due to competition. The species that play a key role in developing community structure and play pivotal ecological roles are known as keystone species.

To add on, the size of protected areas continues to decrease as poachers are continuously using the edges of these areas and moving in so that they can hunt illegally. Not only does this endorse poaching, but it also harms the ecosystems for which these protected areas are located. In terms of their location, wildlife tourism destinations also face negative publicity as tourism and the income of such conservation organizations have begun to lose profit. Once again this is due to the poaching that is found within a region that can have negative benefits of tourism within that nation as well.

Products made from poaching

The parts and fragments of both animals and plants are used in multiple ways that vary depending on the country and traditions within it. Most commonly known, rhinos and tigers contain body parts that have been attributed and known to positively affecting human health and has lead to advances in the fight to cure cancer. In addition, the use of herbs and plants have also been connected to curing different types of diseases worldwide.

Culturally, many ethnic groups believe that the body parts of animals and the leaves of plants can be used in tribal rituals. In Chinese traditions, the incorporation of animal and plants parts in medicine is a common fact. Parts such as “the leaf, stem, flower, root, and also ingredients from animals and minerals.” This has created controversy and as a result has led to an increase in black market poachers. This black market of poachers also poses another threat to the political systems established as they provide an easily accessible network where consumers allow demand for products to rise. Evidence of this is shown where “recent prices for a kilo of crushed rhino horn have gone for as much as \$60,000, more expensive than a kilo of gold.”

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

World Wildlife Fund (WWF)

The World Wildlife Fund is one of the largest organizations aiming to ensure the sustainable development of the earth. To be more specific the WWF mission is to “stop the degradation of the planet’s natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by

conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption." In terms of combating poaching of Flora and Fauna, the WWF has developed numerous approaches to combating this issue. It calls upon governments to, in cooperation with one another, to reduce the consumption of endangered species to so that they can work towards reducing the illegal supply and demand worldwide. As for the organization itself, it has developed numerous branches worldwide that take a direct approach to tackling environmentally issued that vary greatly.

TRAFFIC

TRAFFIC is a leading organization worldwide that aims to conserve the extensive and diverse wildlife found on earth. The organization was established in 1976, and since then has developed expertise in areas such as analyzing and investigating trends in wildlife, apparent patterns, causes and impacts. In addition, TRAFFIC provides information in a form that private sectors then use to determine effective and sustainable wildlife practice. TRAFFIC's mission is "to ensure that trade in wild plants and animals is not a threat to the conservation of nature". By the end of 2020, TRAFFIC has the goal "to help reduce the pressure of illegal and unsustainable wildlife trade on biodiversity, and enhance the benefits to wildlife conservation and human well-being that derive from trade at sustainable levels".

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)

CITES, which is also commonly referred to as the Washington Convention, is an international organization that aims to "safeguard certain species from exploitation" which it achieves through regional and international cooperation with governments and non-governmental organizations. The headquarters are situated in Washington DC, however as mentioned, their work is also completed internationally and as a result, they have expanded their offices worldwide. Numerous nations are signatories to the CITES treaty with some exception being Haiti, South Sudan, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, East Timor, and DPR Korea. Although CITES isn't directly represented in the United Nations, it is widely regarded as having just as much importance in terms of addressing and finding solutions on this matter.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Beginning in the early 21st century, UNODC has been monitoring the rates at which poaching exists in major biodiversity hotspots such as South America, Africa, North America and Asia. It was shown that over the course of 15 years, poverty rates drastically increased as the increase in demand for such products also rose. According to the UNODC website, "Widespread poverty, coupled with a lucrative overseas market for exotic animal products, have resulted in massive poaching of African and South-East Asian wildlife." While economic profit plays as a prominent cause of widespread poaching, the UNODC also recognizes that poverty and unemployment are also two primary factors that lead individuals to such lucrative markets in the first place. In terms of their initiatives, the UNODC has

assisted governments in strengthening and addressing the weaknesses of the present criminal justice system in response to wildlife related and poaching crimes. At the regional and local levels, the UNODC has aimed to tackle various environmental crime-related issues such as improved research on illegal logging in order to increase efforts to protect wildlife and the natural resources found within their societies, and finally to prosecute those who have committed illegal crimes.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

One of the most extensive efforts to accurately document the poaching and illicit trafficking of flora and fauna regionally is that taken by the United Nations Development Programme. The UNDP-GEF Biodiversity and Ecosystems portfolio is “the largest in the UN system, covering over 130 countries and 500 projects with USD 1.5 billion in funding and USD 3.5 billion of co-financing.” It provides a detailed report of endangered species within each region of the world and the specific programs that have been designed to aid them and to ensure that poaching of those species is discontinued. In addition to this, the UNDP has worked directly with governmental and non-governmental organizations such as the World Bank, Wildlife Conservation Organizations, and civil society groups in order to formulate plans to protect endangered species and to punish those who are involved in poaching and trafficking. The UNDP’s main focuses center around developing networks to eradicate poverty (as it is a main contributor to poaching), empowering women, and building strong institutions to both educate the general public and to support the rule of law.

China

China is one of the most popular destinations for both animal and plant products. This is due to Chinese traditional methods of formulating medicinal products that rely heavily on natural based raw materials. China’s National Inter-Agency CITES Enforcement Coordination Group (NICE-CG) “has, in the past few years, been attempting to crack down on this smuggling, especially in the southern border of the Guangxi Province.” Additionally, in late 2012, “the agency performed a smuggling interception operation, which, in those two months alone, seized 17,300 live animals and 2,242 pieces of ivory and bone.”

The fishing of sharks to acquire their fins is also popular due to it being regarded as a Chinese delicacy. Although shark hunting in China is legal, there is international pressure to increase restrictions on its import, due to the methods used, such as finning, which is the practice of net fishing for sharks, removing the fins, and dumping the animal back into the ocean. This method and multiple others present serious problems that drastically impact the survival of many species.

United States of America

The United States is a strategic location for poaching due to its abundance of both plants and animals. Following China, the United States is the second largest importer of illegal wildlife organisms. A commonly poached organism in the United States is the black bear. Out of the 50 states, only 34 have banned the trade of these bear species, which contain substances that can help treat cancerous diseases. Nevertheless, there is still one state, Minnesota, where black bear poaching is still legal. In this state alone, over 52,000 bears die annually due to poaching. The United States' Environmental Program has continued to develop initiatives that tackle this issue. When addressing solutions, it is important to mention the impact of the Black Market both in the United States and all other nations since the market provides one of the largest platforms where the illegal purchasing of flora and fauna products takes place.

India

While being one of the most populous nations, India also boasts extremely diverse and varied wildlife organisms; however, the illegal poaching of animals and plants is still apparent in India. Since India's animal trafficking is mostly internal, the government and NGOs face more trouble with finding smugglers attempting to cross its borders. Nevertheless, India has strict laws concerning the protection of its native organisms, yet inefficient governance and a lack of political willpower have undermined enforcement of these regulations. In addition, "there is also a significant export of Indian goods, primarily through Southeast Asia to China. Due to the direct land border, these routes are relatively safer than importing illegal goods into Chinese ports." Similar to China, India also uses these animal and plant products to formulate traditional medicines and other substances.

Canada

In the past, Canada has imposed and implemented numerous laws regarding endangered species and wildlife that protected them from criminal groups, the issue is, as we find in many countries, is the lack of strict enforcement of these laws. This is due to the inefficient methods of locating criminal groups and the confiscation of their illegally obtained products (not just within Canada, but all around the world). As a result, illegally killed animals continue to surface the black market and other secretive trade networks. "As wildlife populations start to deplete in countries like South Africa, Tanzania and Kenya, more poachers move to Canada with its vast quantity of wild animals and protected natural parks, ideal for illegal hunters. Specifically, in Canada, wild animals are hunted for the purpose of the exotic pet trade, as well as medicines, souvenirs, fur, and food." Since the formation of the CITIES organization, Canada has moved towards implementing stricter poaching regulations, however, due to the lack of proper funding and resources, the accurate and proper monitoring methods are unattainable.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1900	The United States passes the Lacey Act that made it illegal to sell or purchase a poached animal in one state to someone in a different state to make a profit
1918	The Migratory Bird Treaty Act
1948	International Union for the Conservation of Nature founded and publishes the IUCN Species Survival Commission
1961	The World Wildlife Fund for Nature is founded
1973	The Endangered Species Act provides “conservation for threatened and endangered plants and animals in their respective habitats in an effort to keep populations stable and protected.”
1975	The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is initiated
1976	TRAFFIC, a wildlife trade monitoring network, is co-founded by the World Wildlife Fund and IUCN
1982	World Charter for Nature passed
1989	A global ivory ban is created by CITES in an effort to “reduce poaching and stop the decreasing number of elephant populations.”
2013	INTERPOL carries out its first operation targeting illegal logging, under the Project Leaf initiative. “Over \$8 million worth of illegal timber is seized in 12 Latin American countries.”
2014	“The first UN Environment Assembly, the highest-level UN body ever convened on the environment, discusses the illegal wildlife trade, among other issues.”

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- World Charter for Nature, 1982

- o Although this treaty is not directly affiliated with trafficking, it was the first UN agreement on the issue of environmental conservation.
- **ECOSOC Resolution, 2001, (A/RES/12)**
 - o This resolution was the first major UN resolution pertaining to this issue. It recognized the problem of trafficking of protected species and continues to encourage member states to adopt laws to control it within their own borders.
- **ECOSOC Resolution, 2001, (A/RES/18)**
 - o “Builds upon resolution 2001/12 and suggests that member states cooperate to control cross-border organizations.”
- **ECOSOC Resolution, 2002, (A/RES/27)**
 - o “Builds upon resolution 2002/18 and encourages member states to work with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in eradicating international trafficking.”
- **The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Resolution 2007, (A/RES/16/1)**
 - o Mainly encourages member states to increase cooperation with the each other in combating international trafficking.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

In an evaluation of the previous attempts to solve this issue, we find that numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations have made many attempts to end the illegal poaching of wildlife species. For example, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has worked directly with many governments to ensure an end to the problem. In a report of the WWF’s efforts to resolve this issue, it mentioned how “the representatives of all governments – with the exception of China, which does not see illicit wildlife trafficking as the most urgent issue – indicated that the best result would be achieved through demand reduction in consumer countries.” Therefore, the WWF took the necessary measures in aiding governments to pose stricter law on poaching flora and fauna and to formulate stricter laws for punishing criminal groups; however, as we’ve seen, this solution has yet to become accomplished worldwide.

In addition, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) is an organization that not only works to end illegal wildlife poaching but hopes to reintegrate organisms back into societies where they have vanished. Their work is divided into many sectors. In terms of protected area, the organization “assists governments and communities to protect the natural systems critical to saving wildlife and wild places, securing valuable flows of ecosystems services and local livelihoods based on principles of social and environmental sustainability.” In terms of illegal wildlife trafficking, they use their local presence and global influence to “stop wildlife poaching, block trafficking across transit routes, and reduce demand for wildlife and wildlife products,” then finally, in terms of wildlife management, they “take action to minimize

threats to wildlife so that species populations are stable or increasing, to ensure that hunting and fishing are sustainable, and to see that conflicts between people and wildlife are resolved.” However, because this problem is so widespread, they’ve only been tackling 50% of the biodiversity on the earth, which is an outstanding achievement, yet not enough to completely eradicate the problem.

Moreover, the WCS has “partnered with the United States military to develop, implement and maintain an outreach program that will discourage consumers from purchasing wildlife souvenirs by having personnel stationed at oversea borders.” As a result, the cooperation between them will result in a decrease in supply and demand and ultimately raise awareness about the issue at hand, thereby letting tourists know that these souvenirs that they are purchasing come from illegally obtained animals.

Since 2001 and the adoption of the ECOSOC resolutions, the international community has recognized this problem as a major issue. Since then most resolutions have mentioned the need for increased cooperation between member states and how in order to solve this issue each nation needs to have the similar laws that ban and punish the illegal poaching of wildlife. Although this increased urge to cooperate internationally is highly beneficial, specific action plans for each country is needed. “The government representatives of countries that are primarily associated with supply and international organizations commented that the current approach to fighting illicit wildlife trafficking is too uncoordinated and dispersed, limiting its impact. They called for a more systematic approach that surmounts national borders and at the same time addresses all steps in the trade chain through a coordinated effort of international organizations, governments, and civil society” (WWF).

Possible Solutions

The issue we are dealing with is most definitely far from being achieved, however, the first step to getting closer to solving it would be to not only strengthen international cooperation between countries but to call for all countries to adopt a similar legislation that would completely ban the illegal poaching of wildlife organisms. In addition to this, member nations must impose harsh consequences for criminal groups that are caught hunting illegally so that the fear of being caught may drive these groups away from such activities. In addition, consequences must be placed on countries such as China that fail to adopt the proper legislature that the house calls to agree upon. It is also recommended that MEDCs assist LEDCs in achieving such goals and provide the necessary equipment and funds in order to do so.

A prominent cause of the illegal poaching of wildlife is due to the increasingly high supply and demand. According to the United Nations Environment Program, the increase of demand is the main force driving the illegal wildlife trade of protected and endangered species. These products are used for a number of purposes including “food, clothing, religious items, medicine, sport, and even personal

collections.” Therefore, if we want the legal aspects to be resolved we also need to address the economic factors driving it. We as a community need to call attention to products that we are consuming so that we know of its origins and what we are truly purchasing.

Another prime cause that relates to the previously mentioned point is the lack of awareness of the general public. Most individuals aren’t aware of the issue of illegal poaching that occurs all around us, most just assume that their products were obtained legally. Therefore, they need to be addressed in a manner where not only those that are socially aware know of this topic but even those in highly remote areas that are isolated from civilization are also educated and knowledgeable.

Another possible solution is one that conservation biologists have already been working towards and that is the protection of endangered organisms and species against illegal poaching by creating wildlife reserves that allow species to live according to the natural laws of the environment, free from hunters. In some areas around the world, wildlife reserves exist, yet criminal groups continue to interfere due to the inability for reserves personnel to surround the entire premise of the reserve. Therefore, better enforcement and technology is needed to make these reserves more capable of sustaining the environment within it without the threat of illegal poaching.

The issue of illegal wildlife trade is directly correlated with the illegal poaching of organisms. Once the animals and plants have been killed, they are then sent in mass numbers to different locations around the world, the most common intermediate being the Black Market. Therefore, if we are to eradicate the problem, then we also need to be able to stop the illegal trade process. This can be done by government involvement in the Black Market. Although the complete monitorization of these networks is not ideal (since it would be an infringement on the right to free internet access), restricted surveillance may be an option that nations should consider. This will not only stop the trading process, but also locate these criminal groups so that they may be punished as necessary.

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Appendix or Appendices

- I. <https://www.wcs.org/our-work/solutions> (WCS-Wildlife Conservation Society)

This website and article provide different solutions not only pertaining to poaching but environmental issues in general, that may also be affiliated with the topic. Take a minute to look through them as they may help with providing you with ideas for resolution writing.

- II. <https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/7455/dalberg-report-dec-2012.pdf> (Fighting Illicit Wildlife Trafficking)

This report conducted by Dalberg on the WWF addresses the core issue of illegal poaching and draws upon the failures of the past and what needs to be done in order to solve the issue.

- III. https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/World_Wildlife_Crime_Report_2016_final.pdf (UNODC-World Wildlife Crime Report)

A statistical analysis of data pertaining to the illegal poaching of wildlife organisms, it also provides multiple case studies that support the arguments made.

IV. <https://www.interpol.int/News-and-media/News/2018/N2018-058> (INTERPOL)

An article that talks about an international operation against the illegal trade in wildlife, what is very helpful is it mentions previous attempts to solve the issue and lists specific countries involved.

V. https://www.cites.org/eng/news/pr/CITES_welcomes_new_powerful_UN_resolution_to_tackle_wildlife_trafficking_12092017 (CITIES)

Provides solutions from an organization that is highly reliable, it also talks about previous resolutions and what further action is needed.