



THE ISSUE

All international trade in vulnerable and threatened wildlife – large and small, terrestrial and aquatic, plant or animal, edible or inedible – must be immediately decreased and in many cases halted, to stem the global hemorrhaging of wildlife populations and biodiversity that is leaving us a very lonely and dysfunctional planet. Vulnerable species require strict protection everywhere, whether they are traded or not.

Globally, the loss of wildlife populations in terrestrial habitats, particularly in the tropics, is catastrophic. Southeast Asian forests are described as 'empty', being exhaustively hunted out, driven by bushmeat and animal parts markets in China and other Asian countries. Bushmeat hunters operate hundreds of kilometers deep into the remaining Congolese and Amazonian forest wilderness. Literally thousands of species – from parrots to turtles and cacti to land snails – are suffering devastating population declines due to the international wildlife trade funneling vast numbers of animals and rare plants to major markets in Asia, the United States, and Europe. Nearly every land and landfall in the world is being vacuumed of its wildlife for local and international markets. The global consequences of this insatiable trade are staggering. The latest *Living Planet* Report reveals that global populations of vertebrate species have declined by an average of 60% in less than 50 years, a sobering picture of the impact of human consumption on the health of wildlife, forests, oceans, rivers and climate.

Illegal poaching and sourcing are serious and causing threats to national security and stability. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the trafficking of wildlife is increasingly recognized as a specialized area of organized crime. It is estimated that the illegal trade in fauna and flora to be worth US\$7-23 billion dollars annually. Wildlife crime is the fourth most profitable illegal trade in the world.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

The Wildlife Crime Initiative (WCI), a long-term, global initiative launched by WWF and TRAFFIC in 2014 has four core pillars, focusing on poaching, trafficking, buying, and international policy. WWF-Hong Kong focuses its work on stopping buying and trafficking, so as to stop poaching.

Hong Kong has the largest air cargo airport, and top 10 busiest passenger airports and container ports in the world. Hong Kong is also a key gateway to China's mainland. It is doubtless that the city is a busy trading hub for wildlife products. According to the Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department, there were 2,011 wildlife seizures between 2013-2017, including 1,456 tonnes of wildlife products seized with 20 tonnes of Ivory, 43 tonnes of pangolin and 1,366 tonnes of wood logs.

In May 2018, the Hong Kong government increased the maximum penalties for the smuggling of endangered species to a fine of HK\$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years. The prosecutions in Hong Kong, however, were unable to disrupt the international gangs involved. The cost to wildlife, the rangers who protect it, and the wider society is unacceptable, and the reputation of Hong Kong as Asia's World City is undermined.

OUR ASK

The recent 2019 seizure of over 1,000 elephant tusks and tons of pangolin scale from one container provides ample evidence that the illegal wildlife trade is supported by well-organized,

locally-affiliated (the container was being picked up in Hong Kong) crime syndicates with an international reach. Similar shipments with the same transport profile were recently seized in Singapore, as well, highlighting the organization and reach of the crime syndicates.

WWF-Hong Kong urges the Hong Kong government to take wildlife crime as a serious crime. Wildlife smuggling should be included under Schedule 1 of the Organized and Serious Crimes Ordinance (OSCO) to further deter transnational criminal enterprises that use Hong Kong as a major port and transportation hub for illegal wildlife trade. The government must strictly implement CITES, ensuring that the relevant regulations are effectively and comprehensively enforced in ports and in businesses. We must do more by treating wildlife crime as a predicate offence for money laundering and use Anti-Money Laundering (AML) tools in the prosecution of wildlife crime offences, in compliance with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Recommendation 30.