



THE ISSUE

Pangolin are unusual insectivorous mammals that have keratinous scales covering their body. They are distantly related to dogs and cats. They feed on ants and termites, using their sticky tongues to scoop them up. They are solitary and largely nocturnal. They are the only truly scaly mammals in the world. Startled pangolins will roll up into a ball and expose their scales to potential predators. The word pangolin is derived from the Malay word 'penggulung' which means roller.

There are eight species of pangolin in the world and all are threatened with extinction. The four African species are listed as Vulnerable by IUCN, whereas the four Asian species are listed as Critically Endangered and Endangered by IUCN. As of 2018, all pangolin are listed on Appendix I of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), meaning commercial trade is prohibited. Pangolins continue to be the most heavily trafficked wild mammals worldwide, even though the trade is illegal.

The primary threat to pangolins is poaching for the illegal trade in meat and scales. Pangolin meat is considered a delicacy in China and Vietnam and is believed to be good for kidneys, whereas pangolin scales are regarded as traditional medicine to help breast feeding women lactate, to cure ailments ranging from asthma and psoriasis to cancer, and to improve blood circulation. Pangolin are also a favoured bushmeat in much of Africa. Pangolin scale is the same material as human fingernails, keratin.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Globally, WWF, together with TRAFFIC, is working in Asia and Africa to protect pangolins and other species from wildlife crime. We are actively trying to reduce demand for illegal wildlife products in countries like China and Vietnam. We are also helping governments mount a strong defence against the poaching crisis. And WWF is lobbying for strong national laws and stronger enforcement to ensure that wildlife crime does not pay.

In 2016, an international agreement was announced that would end all legal trade of pangolins and further protect the species from extinction. Countries decided to strengthen existing protections under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) – a global agreement between governments to follow rules to monitor, regulate, or ban international trade in species under threat. Pangolins are considered one of the 'Big Five at CITES', together with elephants, rhinos, sharks and tigers.

A study released in 2017 stated that most international trafficking of pangolins (largely sourced from Africa these days as Asian populations have been wiped out) and their products occurred within Asia (in terms of number of incidents and quantity). Hong Kong is listed as one of the top 10 countries and territories involved.

Hong Kong may not be the primary end-user of pangolin products, but Hong Kong is doubtless a trafficking hotspot for pangolin. In January 2019, the Hong Kong customs seized about 8,300 kilograms of pangolin scales (value HK\$42 million) and 2,100 kilograms of ivory tusks (value HK\$20 million) at the Kwai Chung cargo port. The smuggled products were sent from Nigeria. It was the largest single seizure of pangolin parts in Hong Kong. A news report stated that Hong Kong confiscated more than 17 tonnes of the scales in 2018, which is double the amount seized in 2017.

OUR ASK

WWF-Hong Kong is urging 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.

WWF-Hong Kong will continue to work with business and government, and launch public awareness campaigns, to combat wildlife crime.