

In 1976, TRAFFIC was established to monitor trade in flora and fauna and to make recommendations for conservation action. This specialist role forms the nucleus of our work. Monitoring—of markets, both physical and online—as well as of trade statistics and seizure data, for example, is essential to identifying trends at varying levels and emerging issues, and provides an early warning function. Monitoring also allows us to measure the impact of our work, as well as that of other internal or external interventions. As the number of species threatened by illegal and unsustainable trade grows, this role becomes increasingly essential. Recent examples described here illustrate the importance of monitoring the global wildlife trade.

EDITORIAL

As is the case with many other types of crime, illicit wildlife traders are many steps ahead of those of us monitoring and researching the trade. Populations of many species of animals have been greatly diminished or extirpated by trade before conservationists are even aware of the extent or impact of the overexploitation, or before steps to provide legal protection or other conservation interventions are made. It is key that negative trends detected through trade monitoring are made available to the broader conservation community, enforcement agencies, decision-makers and the public so that actions can be taken to slow, stop and reverse the trend.

Some claim that publishing such information may increase demand for the species in question. This notion is in most cases misguided although there are a few examples where publicity of the rarity of a species has actually increased the value and demand for it. However, this needs to be balanced with the benefits to be gained from drawing attention to the threats and conservation needs of a species so that the obstacles to tackling the trade can be identified and solutions found.

Take the Earless Monitor Lizard *Lanthanotus borneensis*, for example, a little-known reptile endemic to the island of Borneo. In 2014, through monitoring actions, TRAFFIC became aware of increased demand and availability of this species in the black market pet trade. It published a report on this emerging trade, highlighting the fact that unscrupulous traders were illegally collecting the species and smuggling it to Japan and the EU, and called for action to be taken. Despite the species being totally protected in all three countries that share the island of Borneo (Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia), it is not listed in CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) and importing countries are therefore not obliged to take action against the trade. As a direct result of the report's findings, steps are now being taken to list the species in the CITES Appendices and it is hoped that effective international co-operation to regulate this trade can soon be achieved.

While CITES plays an important role in encouraging and facilitating co-operation in international efforts to regulate illegal wildlife trade, a CITES listing cannot always ensure that trade is sustainable, particularly where enforcement is lacking. It is therefore vital that both

importing and exporting countries are kept abreast of areas of conservation concern so as to aid source countries in their efforts to protect their wildlife, regardless of whether the species is listed in CITES.

Continual monitoring and highlighting of important and emerging issues is paramount not only to identifying and prioritizing matters of concern, but also essential to track and monitor progress, successes and failures. Monitoring the trade in the wildlife market of Mong La, Myanmar, on the border with China, for example, has yielded alarming findings—a market that once typically only carried regional species has now become a hub for trade in illicit African wildlife products, such as ivory, rhinoceros horn and hippopotamus teeth. Reports by TRAFFIC and others on the findings and trends observed in this market over time have been covered extensively in the media, and as a result, Mong La market has become a priority for conservation action.

Regular monitoring of “legal” trade and trade records and volumes has led to the detection of one of the most frequent, high-volume and problematic forms of wildlife trafficking methods used—the trade in wild-caught species falsely declared as captive-bred. Literally millions of animals are currently traded around the world, declared as captive-bred, with little or no requirements to prove these claims. Laundering of wild-caught animals in this manner is not only a threat to the conservation of a multitude of species, but it is also undermining the efforts and credibility of businesses that truly are engaged in legal commercial breeding.

A number of case studies highlighting the large-scale laundering of wild-caught animals into the global market have been published, raising the issue as a major concern, and priority for action. A report by TRAFFIC arising from the monitoring of trade in wildlife declared as captive-bred focused on the previously unknown Short-beaked Echidna *Tachyglossus aculeatus*. This species is difficult to breed in captivity, and the trade in supposedly captive-bred individuals sparked concern amongst zoo communities around the world, who subsequently began reviewing their policies regarding the acquisition of specimens declared as captive-bred, taking major steps to eliminate this form of fraud, including through the development of forensic tools and methodologies.

The issue continues to be addressed and championed by prominent organizations, such as the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA), which recently released a statement calling for due diligence among their members globally when obtaining wildlife declared as being captive-bred. Efforts are also under way to add restrictions and policies to regulations that allow for the trade in captive-bred wildlife, calling for proof of parentage to be provided to the importing countries.

The drive to combat unsustainable and sometimes illegal wildlife trade is far from complete, and it is essential that evidence-based findings continue to be disseminated widely and used as a basis for shaping conservation action. Basic monitoring, be it of wildlife markets, online, or of trade statistics, is integral to the global effort to ensure that wildlife trade is not a threat to the conservation of nature.

Chris R. Shepherd, Regional Director—Southeast Asia, TRAFFIC. E-mail: chris.shepherd@traffic.org