



IWT Challenge Fund Newsletter

Racing Against Extinction

A pangolin being rehabilitated at Lilongwe Wildlife Centre in Malawi, Credit: Araluen Schunmann



iwt.challengefund.org.uk

gov.uk/guidance/illegal-wildlife-trade-challenge-fund-iwtcf

 @iwtcf

The Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) is a serious criminal industry worth up to £17 billion each year, threatening both wildlife and people. Funded by the UK Government, the IWT Challenge Fund tackles the illegal wildlife trade and, in doing so, contributes to sustainable development in developing countries. It funds projects which address one or more of the following themes:

- reducing demand for IWT products
- ensuring effective legal frameworks and deterrents
- strengthening law enforcement
- developing sustainable livelihoods to benefit people directly affected by IWT


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Chief District Officer of Gorkha District at an August 2022 discussion on orchid conservation and enforcement, Credit: K. Shrestha / Greenhood Nepal

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Orchid traders displaying the freshly-harvested tubers of the highly protected Dactylorhiza hatagirea (star-shaped) and Satyrium nepalense (round), Credit: R. Bashyal / Greenhood Nepal

Publicity and information about the IWT Challenge Fund

For more information about the IWT Challenge fund, please visit iwt.challengefund.org.uk or gov.uk/government/collections/illegal-wildlife-trade-iwt-challenge-fund

If you would like any further information about the IWT Challenge Fund, please email BCF-IWTCF@niras.com

If you would like to submit an article about your project for a future edition of the IWT Challenge Fund Newsletter, please email an article of no more than one side of A4, alongside any pictures, to BCF-Comms@niras.com

Publicity and referencing the IWT Challenge Fund

We kindly remind project leaders that if they are publicising their work then it is important that they make every effort to recognise UK Government support through the IWT Challenge Fund. This is important as it helps us to ensure the IWT Challenge Fund retains a high profile and to secure continued Government funding. Projects can access logos via the **IWTCF website**.



*Jaguar body parts sold in Belén Market (Peru),
Credit: Fernando Carniel Machado / World Animal
Protection, March 2017*

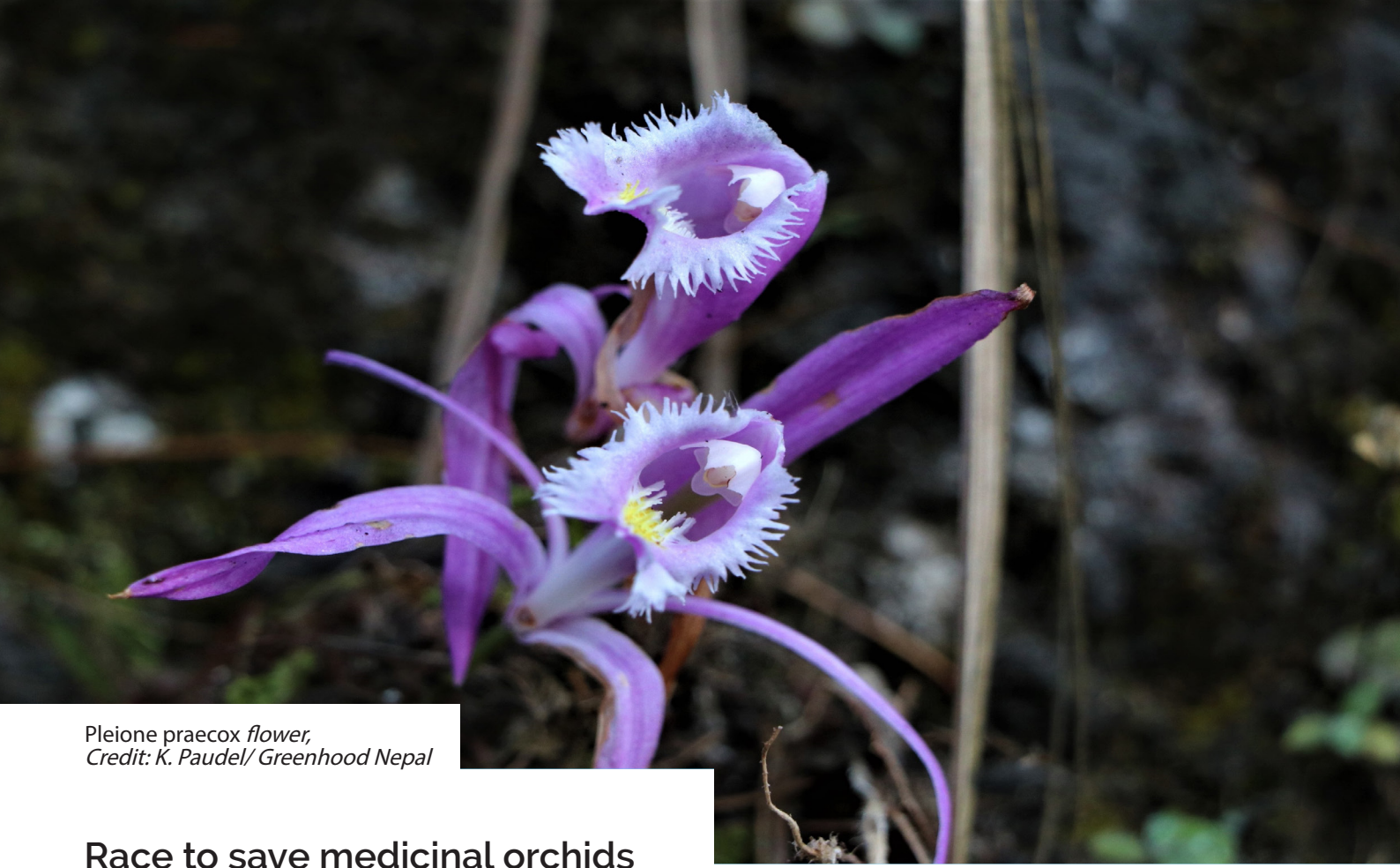
Introduction

Many species that are already buckling under the pressure of habitat loss and a rapidly changing climate find themselves as prime targets for the illegal wildlife trade (IWT). The threat of IWT has been significant on many wild populations, pushing them towards the brink of extinction.

In this edition of the newsletter we celebrate the efforts of our projects to prevent future extinctions. Our projects protect threatened species through influencing stricter laws and regulations against IWT, changing behaviours to reduce

demand for IWT products, and empowering individuals to make a difference. In the race against extinction, people, wildlife, and ecosystems are gaining ground against IWT threats. From Nepalese orchids to Malawian pangolins, join us in celebrating successes towards safeguarding our wildlife's future.

We hope that you enjoy this edition of the *IWT Challenge Fund Newsletter!*



Pleione praecox flower,
Credit: K. Paudel/ Greenhood Nepal

Race to save medicinal orchids from commercial trade

Nepal is well recognised for its concerted efforts to protect some of the world’s most charismatic animals - notably tigers and one-horned rhinos. Despite these achievements, they have not extended these efforts towards many of the country’s other highly-threatened, but “neglected,” species.

As across much of the world, conservation efforts in Nepal have largely overlooked plants. However, given the scale of commercial trade that many of these species are facing, the race to bring conservation and enforcement attention is mounting. This includes many orchid species, the largest family of flowering plants and, on paper, one of the most protected taxonomic groups in the world. All species are listed on the CITES Convention, and are often protected under national legislation, but this has failed to stop the large-scale collection of wild orchids in many countries which continues largely unaltered from previous levels.

“ Although primarily thought of as ornamental plants due to their beautiful appearance, many orchid species are also collected for use in traditional medicines

Although primarily thought of as ornamental plants due to their beautiful appearance, many orchid species are also collected for use in traditional Ayurvedic, Chinese and Unani medicines. Our work started with anecdotes of this large-scale harvest in mind. Over the past year, we have started to uncover a massive, regional, commercial-scale trade in Nepal’s medicinal orchids that is raising urgent concerns.

Notably, we have found that Nepal’s most protected species, the terrestrial *Dactylorhiza hatagirea*, whose harvest and trade has been banned since 1995, is currently under active commercial trade. Working with the government to review their data, we have identified 36 orchid seizures (2010-2020), involving more than 28,000kg of orchids. This includes a seizure of 75kg of *D. hatagirea* in 2017, representing nearly 20,000 individuals and with an estimated market value of US \$166,280. Our harvest monitoring in one community is documenting the large-scale, systematic harvest of multiple medicinal orchid species. This includes the commercial harvest of *Pleione praecox*, a species whose commercial trade has not been previously documented.

It is unsurprising that government and conservation organisations have yet to meaningfully respond. We are working to ensure Nepal’s conservation enforcement and management bodies begin to recognise the scale of this threat. We have been both surprised and encouraged by officials’ interest to learn more, many of whom say that they have never even heard that orchids are commercially traded, or a conservation priority.

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P. praecox pseudobulbs drying before being trade, Credit: K. Paudel/ Greenhood Nepal

Working with District Forest Offices and Community Forest User Groups in four regions, we are helping them to recognise the species most targeted by trade, explaining that their mandates include protecting not only charismatic animals but also “neglected” species such as orchids.

“ We are exploring opportunities for a more regulated, legal trade to begin replacing the country’s current, unregulated illegal market. A balance of improved enforcement and science-based harvest management may be the only realistic and ethical way to meaningfully address the threats to medicinal orchids

Yet, pressed with heavy harvest pressures, we are also discussing the social implications of increased enforcement attention. While some wild plant harvesters are opportunistic and do this for supplementary income, others are reliant on plant harvests, and orchids like *Dactylorhiza* are among the highest-value plant products. We have heard that, even when orchid harvesters are caught, sometimes enforcement officials

are reluctant to charge them because offenders are often poor. This is especially true because, under the country’s new CITES Law, sanctions for illegal orchid harvest include not only high fines but also possible imprisonment. Although Nepal has actively used these laws to target a range of people involved in the illegal harvest of species like tigers and rhinos, it is reluctant to do so for plant species. Indeed, although protected by law, strong enforcement of plant conservation laws is unlikely.

We are pressed therefore between addressing the real, if only recently documented, threats facing orchids, and the realities of livelihoods. This is why we are also beginning to undertake baseline studies to understand whether, and how, harvest of some orchids could be made more sustainable. Current techniques and volumes are unlikely to be sustainable, but improved protocols and regulation could make this more viable for some species. Working with orchidologists around the world, we are exploring opportunities for a more regulated legal trade to begin replacing the country’s current unregulated illegal market. A balance of improved enforcement and science-based harvest management may be the only realistic and ethical way to meaningfully address the threats to medicinal orchids.

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Written by Jacob Phelps and Reshu Bashyal. This article features project IWT083 “Illegal trade & sustainable use of medicinal orchids in Nepal”, led by the University of Lancaster.



Lilongwe Wildlife Trust Veterinary Nurse Auze Polela with a young pangolin at Lilongwe Wildlife Centre, Credit: Amanda Harwood

Protecting pangolins in Malawi: Saving the world's most trafficked mammal

Pangolin trafficking is on the rise in Malawi. In fact, 2021 saw the number of court cases involving the trade in pangolins exceed those for ivory for the first time ever. Pangolin intakes to the country's only wildlife sanctuary, Lilongwe Wildlife Centre, have risen exponentially in recent years and now make up around 20% of all its rescued animals.

Thanks to generous support from the IWT Challenge Fund, Lilongwe Wildlife Trust is supporting the Government of Malawi to improve criminal justice outcomes for wildlife crime, in part through the monitoring of all courtroom cases including those involving pangolins. However, our work on pangolin protection goes beyond the courtroom. We have developed a holistic programme that combines the efforts of our wildlife rescue, research, and justice teams. In addition to supporting law enforcement agencies to bring wildlife traffickers to justice through arrest, prosecution, and conviction, we also aim to save as many confiscated pangolins as possible. We do this through expert veterinary care and rehabilitation, releasing and monitoring pangolins strong and healthy enough to have a second chance at life back into the wild, and filling critical knowledge gaps on pangolin ecology.

May was one of the pangolins supported by our programme. She came into our care in early 2022 after the authorities seized her from traffickers. They found her tied up in a house with a tight rope around her tail. On initial assessment, our veterinary team discovered that, in addition to showing signs of exhaustion and malnutrition, she was suffering with a severe respiratory infection. Sadly, this is not uncommon; pangolins often endure significant trauma during their time

in the illegal wildlife trade, with typical issues including dehydration, malnutrition, pneumonia, infected wounds, gastrointestinal parasites, and ulcers. Our team provided veterinary care to stabilise May and treat her infection, and then delivered ongoing rehabilitation until she was strong enough to be released back into the wild. Prior to her release into a protected area, we fitted May with a satellite tracking device, which enabled our research team to track her movements for three months. The data shows that she has settled well into her new environment, developed a territory of her own and gained 3.1kg: a positive indication that she is foraging successfully. May's two traffickers were successfully convicted, each receiving a custodial sentence of four years.

Together with our partners, we are achieving positive impacts. Our pangolin survival rates are around 75% (amongst the highest in Africa) and conviction rates for pangolin-related offences are reaching 78%. Meanwhile, the data gathered through our post-release monitoring is helping to identify optimal release sites and inform future conservation efforts. We're grateful to the many partners and donors who are supporting our programme and, in doing so, contributing to a wider global effort to save this threatened species from extinction.

Lilongwe Wildlife Trust is Malawi's leading conservation organisation. It works to save wildlife, promote conservation justice and inspire people to value and protect nature in Malawi. Find out more at www.lilongwewildlife.org.

Written by Hannah Supply and Arthur Nyirenda at Conservation Justice Programme. This article features project IWT094 "Ensuring the deterrent enforcement of counter IWT legislation in Malawi" led by Lilongwe Wildlife Trust.



Caiman head intended for commercial sale. Caiman are sold as wild meat, and for decorative and medicinal use, Credit: Fernando Carniel Machado / World Animal Protection

Trading Places: Exploring consumer demand and livelihood opportunities to protect wildlife in Peru

A large jaguar skin is displayed front and centre in one of the stalls at the Belén Market in Iquitos, the most significant open market selling wildlife in the Peruvian Amazon. Once part of a wild animal that roamed free, this skin will now be sold illegally to produce luxury products, and other body parts will be used in traditional spiritual and medicinal remedies. Jaguars, the largest cats in the Americas, are highly threatened due to growing domestic and international demand for their body parts, which is driving increases in targeted poaching and illegal trafficking throughout Latin America. Research shows that multiple gun shots are typically used to kill jaguars for the trade, often causing extreme suffering to the animal.

Although worshiped by ancient South American cultures, jaguars are widely threatened and now only inhabit around 51% of their historic geographic range. While their trade is prohibited in Peru (Forest and Wildlife Law No.29763 and listed under CITES Appendix I since 1975), research by World Animal Protection in 2021 showed that jaguar derivatives were reportedly the most expensive items sold by market vendors at Belén.

This is neither an isolated case nor species. Iquitos is the main axis-point for illegal wildlife trade (IWT) in the north-eastern part of Peru. Poached wildlife is brought together in the region's capital, Iquitos, for sale locally at markets like Belén which serves a population of 400,000 people. Here, hundreds of Amazon species are illegally traded, including primates, jaguars, ocelots, sloths, boas, paca, caiman, and parrots. Around 9% of species sold are threatened with extinction. IWT is largely driven by domestic urban consumer demand at Belén. However, the region is also influenced by international wildlife traders and species are sought by consumers from around the world. IWT takes place with little or no appropriate health, safety, or sanitation measures, posing risk of zoonotic disease transmission (i.e. diseases passing from animals to humans).

“ Once part of a wild animal that roamed free, this skin will now be sold illegally to produce luxury products, and other body parts will be used in traditional spiritual and medicinal remedies

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A sloth claw and Common boa heads on sale for spiritual, medicinal and decorative use, Credit: Fernando Carniel Machado / World Animal Protection

Based on findings from previous research at Belén Market, and in collaboration with local partners, World Animal Protection designed a project to help understand and tackle this illegal trade. Using an innovative approach, this project will build the evidence needed to design, encourage, and support behaviour changes to reduce IWT in Belén and beyond and promote methods to support the transition to sustainable and legal livelihoods for communities dependent on this type of

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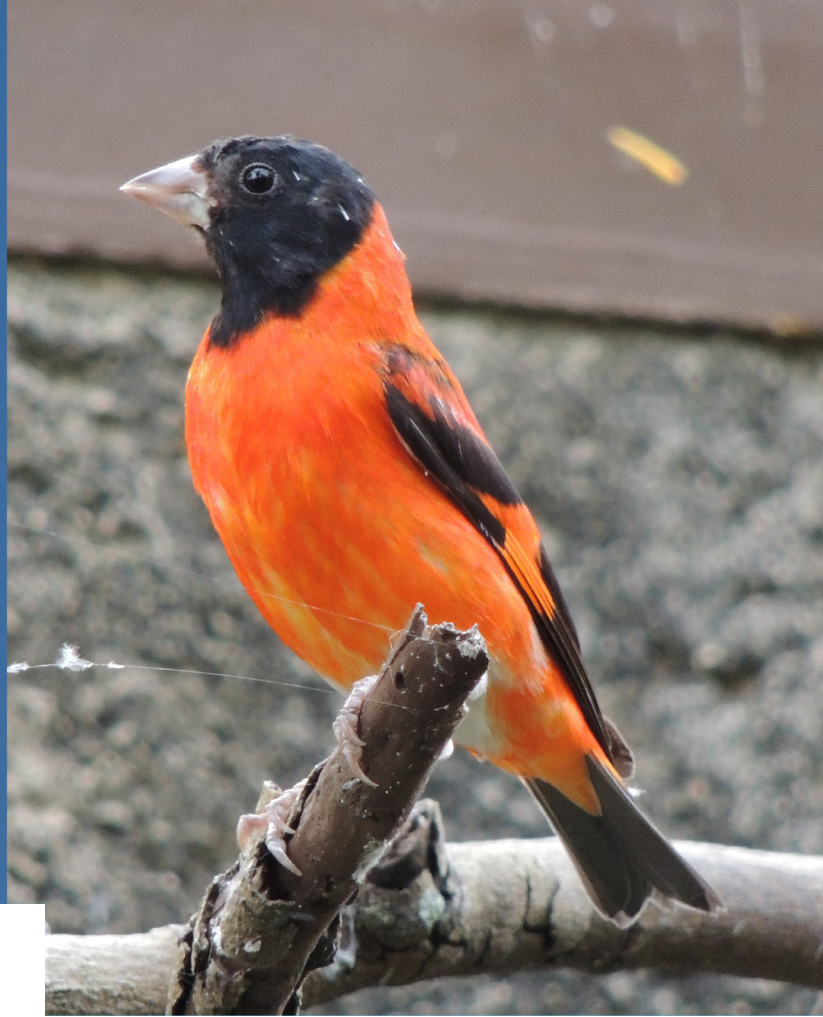
trade. The project will work directly with local communities in the Belén district to understand the challenges associated with ending IWT dependence for wildlife market vendors, and it will request support from other businesses in the area for a “zero tolerance” approach to IWT.

The evidence and knowledge gathered from this project will be incorporated into a National Action Plan used to reduce IWT in Peru. Our vision is for this project to be scaled and replicated so that threatened iconic Amazon species like the jaguar are no longer killed and sold in urban markets across Peru.

Written by Eugenia Morales, Angie Elwin, Debbie Curtis and Neil D’Cruze. This article features project IWTEV007 “Building evidence to reduce demand for wildlife products in Peru,” led by World Animal Protection.



A wild Yellow-shouldered Amazon in the Macanao's dry forest and a captive-bred Red Siskin from the Red Siskin Conservation Centre in Venezuela, Credit: Provita



The Flying Together Initiative: Changing behaviour to reduce trade in Venezuelan birds

Behaviour Change Campaigns (BCCs) have been increasingly used in the last decade to reduce demand for wildlife, with interesting examples in African and Asian mammals. However, implementation of effective BCCs in South American countries are limited by the diverse quality in design schemes and language barriers that impede the adoption of existing best practices.

Along with the Flying Together Initiative, Provita (www.volandojuntos.org) wants to increase the adoption of best practices for such campaigns in South America: firstly, by implementing theory and evidence-based campaigns for two Venezuelan threatened bird species, and secondly, by generating tools and guides to design, implement, and

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monitor campaigns adapted to regional conditions and language. Our case studies include two threatened Venezuelan birds: a finch, the Red Siskin (*Spinus cucullatus*); and a parrot, the Yellow-shouldered Amazon (*Amazona barbadensis*), each with contrasting illegal trade dynamics.

Most Yellow-shouldered Amazons are found on Macanao, Margarita Island, where three of every ten people keep the parrots as pets. The primary motivations behind demand are companionship needs. The absence of fathers, sons, and husbands while on long fishing trips creates strong emotions of loneliness in women left behind. Parrots are a frequently used tool for managing these emotions, with adult and senior women creating the largest demand.

In June 2022, we launched the Green Sky campaign, focused on guiding Macanao women to seek alternative sources of companionship and entertainment. The campaign encouraged participation in outdoor activities by creating positive attitudes towards outdoor involvement, thereby shaping social norms and changing behaviour. Through both communication campaigns and in-person initiatives, Green Sky aims to create both the space and opportunity for women to enjoy their favourite birds without keeping them captive, generating a reduction in demand in the medium term, and a reduction in IWT in the long run.



Participants in the Green Sky's bird watching activity, Credit: María Daniela Pineda

The illegal trade of the Red Siskin, on the other hand, presented very different motivations and social contexts to those observed in the Yellow-shouldered Amazon trade. At least 368 wild-caught Red Siskins are traded per year, with the rate expected to have a high negative impact on the remaining small populations present in Venezuela (<6,000 individuals). This bird's main consumers are breeders; mostly middle-class professional males between 30 and 60 years old, who profess a deep interest in improving their breeding skills and who strive for recognition amongst their peers. Demand for wild-caught Red Siskins is driven by perceptions which are found to be inaccurate, regarding the anticipated benefits of using wild-caught individuals to improve genetic variability in the captive flock. The close community of expert breeders lack tools and channels to share expertise with the less experienced breeders, perpetuating misguided and unsustainable Red Siskins captive-breeding practices among Venezuelan and international breeders.

“ By creating spaces where breeders can acquire, discuss and disseminate these practices among their peers, an increasing number of breeders are able to enjoy their favourite bird whilst applying effective and efficient breeding practices

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In June 2022, we launched the Nesting Future campaign, comprising a social media campaign, online forums and webinars. The Nesting Future campaign promotes positive attitudes towards the adoption of sustainable breeding practices that exclude wild-caught birds.

Focusing on Red Siskin breeders from Venezuela, Brazil, Spain and Portugal, the campaign shapes social norms and changes behaviour. By creating spaces - webinars, forums, and meetings - where breeders can acquire, discuss, and disseminate these practices among their peers, an increasing number of breeders are able to enjoy their favourite bird whilst applying effective and efficient breeding practices.

Beyond BCCs and sharing the technical knowledge and experience gained, Provita centres its approach within the social and economic context of Latin America, with interventions and campaigns implemented by local NGOs. Both Yellow-shouldered Amazons and Red Siskins have, for differing reasons, been subject to and threatened by IWT. However, through these campaigns to change behaviour and reduce demand, we hope to show that we can ward off the threat to species extinction.

Written by Ada Sánchez-Mercado, María Daniela Pineda, Lisandro Moran, Arlene Cardozo-Urdaneta, Alejandro Díaz-Petit, Félix Moya, Génesis Ramírez and Karilexis Ramírez. This article features project IWT102 "Demand reduction behaviour change in illegal Venezuelan threatened bird markets," led by Provita.



Camera trap photo of Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzees, the most endangered of four sub-species of chimpanzee currently known, Credit: WCS Nigeria

Tackling illegal wildlife trade in the Nigeria-Cameroon green corridor

Many species of wildlife in West Africa are on the verge of extinction, but a new project on the Nigeria-Cameroon border offers hope for critically endangered elephants, northern lions, Nigeria-Cameroon chimpanzees, and three species of pangolins.

Managed by a partnership between the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and Africa Nature Investors Foundation (ANI), together with local communities and government agencies, the project “*Tackling Illegal Wildlife Trade in the Nigeria-Cameroon Green Corridor*” is focused on strengthening law enforcement in and around two key protected areas in Nigeria. The project aims to disrupt criminal networks trading wildlife across the international border with Cameroon and provides improved security for wildlife and local communities.

The border between Nigeria and Cameroon is a hotspot for illegal wildlife trade (IWT) and a well-established transboundary smuggling route for ivory from central Africa into Nigeria, where it is then exported to Asia. Nigeria has also become Africa’s centre for the illegal pangolin trade, much of which originates from neighbouring Cameroon, with as many as one million pangolins killed each year to supply the trade. Regional insecurity and weak inter-agency cooperation allows the illegal wildlife trade to flourish in Nigeria, and lack of intelligence prevents development of strategies to tackle the problem. The project is helping to address regional insecurity in and around Yankari Game Reserve and Gashaka Gumti National Park (GGNP). Despite the impact of Covid-19 the project has made good progress to date. Community-based surveys and social needs assessments have been completed at both sites and are being used to guide the design of a

livelihoods support programme for surrounding communities. In GGNP, ANI are working with eight women’s groups to support the harvest and trade in shea butter.

We have produced a counter trafficking intelligence report that has helped improve our understanding of IWT in the region and to plan a long-term strategy to combat the issue. Training for staff of the Nigeria Customs Service in the transboundary area is helping raise awareness about the illegal wildlife trade as a security issue. In addition, the project has helped train and equip rangers at both sites so that there is an effective and well-disciplined wildlife law enforcement presence to help reduce levels of IWT in the region.

Coordinated by the Local Government Authority, the project is supporting inter-agency cooperation through support for security partnerships at both sites. The collaboration includes the Nigeria National Park Service, the police, army, Nigeria Customs Service, and the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) to share information and allow for a rapid response to wildlife crimes and insecurity incidents. High profile patrols between rangers and the army have helped to improve levels of security for surrounding communities.

Although much work remains to be done there is growing international interest in the issue of IWT in Nigeria as well as increasing political will to tackle IWT in the country, and, with enhanced capacity of government agencies we are confident that elephants, lions, chimpanzees, and pangolins can be protected from extinction in Nigeria.

Written by Andrew Dunn. This article features project IWT084 “Tackling Illegal Wildlife Trade in the Nigeria-Cameroon Green Corridor,” led by the Wildlife Conservation Society.



Camera trap photo of savanna elephants in Yankari Game Reserve, Credit: WCS Nigeria

Newsletter contacts

For any queries on project applications or existing projects please contact our IWT Challenge Fund Administrators (NIRAS) at BCF-IWTCF@niras.com

This newsletter is produced on a biannual basis. To include an article on your project in an upcoming edition, please contact us at BCF-Comms@niras.com

The UK Government's Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund provides financial support to practical projects around the world which are:

- reducing demand for IWT products
- ensuring effective legal frameworks
- strengthening law enforcement
- developing sustainable livelihoods to benefit people directly affected by IWT

The IWT Challenge Fund has committed over £43m to 136 projects around the world since it was launched at the London IWT Conference in 2014.