

Newsletter

March 2020

Crocodile on the shore of Congo River, Credit: Matt Shirley

The UK government is committed to ending the illegal wildlife trade, and has committed £30m over three years to help eradicate illegal wildlife trade and better protect the world's most iconic species from the threat of extinction.

Find out more [here](#) or follow [#endwildlifecrime](#) on social media for the latest news and information.

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:

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


Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



#endwildlifecrime

**[gov.uk/government/collections/
illegal-wildlife-trade-iwt-challenge-fund](https://gov.uk/government/collections/illegal-wildlife-trade-iwt-challenge-fund)**



Lounging cheetah cubs, Credit: J Dougherty, Cheetah Conservation Fund

Contents

Publicity and information about the IWT Challenge Fund	3
Introduction	4
Project articles	5
Investigating the scale and economic importance of Congo's dwarf crocodile trade	5
The LICIT project: Engaging communities to stop trafficking of cheetahs for the illegal pet trade	7
Engaging local people against illegal wildlife trade in jaguar strongholds in Bolivia	8
Laotian enforcement efforts focus on combating illegal wildlife trade during the Lunar New Year of 2020	12
Surveying citizens and alerting law enforcement agencies	14
Newsletter contacts	16



Commitment signing by tour guides, Credit: WWF Laos

Publicity and information about the IWT Challenge Fund

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

If you would like any further information about the IWT Challenge Fund, please email the team at IWT-Fund@itsi.co.uk

If you would like to submit an article about your project for a future edition of the IWT Newsletter, please email an article of no more than one side of A4, alongside any pictures, to IWT-Newsletter@itsi.co.uk

Publicity and referencing 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.



Cheetah family, Credit: S. Durant

Introduction

All wildlife has a value - individual species and their habitats provide vital ecosystem goods and services, from food and fuel provision, pollination, and water and air purification to cultural and aesthetic values. However, many of these species also have an additional monetary value and are highly sought after on the illegal market. Despite the ecologically important role that these species play, they are targeted by the illegal wildlife trade and often end up as pets, used in medicines on the global market or consumed as delicacies by the elite.

This edition of the Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund Newsletter highlights the ecological value of these species and emphasises that they are worth much more alive. IWT endangers not only the animals that are being sold, but also the global population. The recent outbreak of COVID-19 is a sobering reminder that the trading and consumption of wildlife and bushmeat has the potential to lead to the emergence of zoonotic diseases.

The projects featured in this newsletter are tackling the trade head on, through shedding light on the extent and nature of the trade of endangered species.

Through awareness campaigns and local involvement, these projects are working to ensure that the value of these targeted species is recognised and is worth more than the price on their heads.

We hope that you enjoy this edition of the newsletter!

To read more about the links between the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the illegal wildlife trade, see the following suggested articles:

Mongabay – [**Conservationists set the record straight on COVID-19's wildlife links**](#)

Wildlife Conservation Society – [**Vietnam Prime Minister proposes a ban on trade and consumption of wildlife**](#)

Mongabay – [**China beefs up wildlife trade ban as COVID-19 outbreak intensifies**](#)

Environmental Investigation Agency – [**China and Laos wildlife traffickers exploiting coronavirus fears to peddle illegal wildlife**](#)

World Bank - [**Coronavirus and the 'Pangolin Effect': Increased exposure to wildlife poses health, biosafety and global security risks**](#)



Community surround crocodile in Lake Tele, Credit: Matt Shirley

Investigating the scale and economic importance of Congo's dwarf crocodile trade

The Congo dwarf crocodile (*Osteolaemus osborni*) is amongst the smallest crocodylians in the world. Despite their size, the work completed under our IWT Challenge Fund project shows that they may have a larger-than-life impact on Congo's forests and the wellbeing of the people whose lives are intricately linked to them.

These small reptiles live in the flooded forests, swamps, and wetlands across the Congo Basin, however much about their natural history is still unknown. In collaboration with the chair of the IUCN Crocodile Specialist Group West and Central Africa, Dr. Matthew Shirley, WCS have been investigating the importance of these keystone predators to communities in the Lac Tele Community Reserve, situated in northern Republic of Congo.

For six months in 2019, WCS teams worked with crocodile hunters, traders, and community members across thirteen villages in this remote area, investigating the size and dynamics of dwarf crocodile populations and how people use them. During this period our teams followed crocodile hunters and held discussions on the importance of this ecological and cultural icon and its role as an economic and nutritional resource.

To improve our understanding of the use and importance of these crocodiles at the national scale, we monitored their movements outside of the Lac Tele Community Reserve.

“

Over the course of four months we recorded over 3,600 individuals traded outside of the Lac Tele Community Reserve, some traveling as far as Brazzaville - over 500 km away!

”

Preliminary results show a surprisingly high density of dwarf crocodiles in this pristine habitat – the largest swath of tropical peat swamp forest in the world – and an extensive commerce in live animals. Over the course of four months we recorded over 3,600 individuals traded outside of the Lac Tele Community Reserve, some traveling as far as Brazzaville – over 500 km away!

Lac Tele's hunters and other community members recounted the important role played by these crocodiles for the local economy and their diet. Many people depend on predictable harvests of dwarf crocodiles to see their families through the year.

One village elder we encountered was embarking on a trip to Brazzaville to visit her family. She was carrying a dwarf crocodile with her and explained that her grandchildren, who grew up in Brazzaville, had never before experienced this species despite it playing such a crucial role in her own daily life.

“

The value of the species may be its downfall, as economic hardship bites across the country, and advances in transportation infrastructure increase, the levels of exploitation and demand are increasing

The value of the species may be its downfall, as economic hardship bites across the country, and advances in transportation infrastructure increase, the levels of exploitation and demand are increasing. In response to this, hunters are having to work harder for their catch year on year.

”

This study was the first of its kind, outlining the scale, extent, and nature of the illegal trade in dwarf crocodiles for meat across the Republic of Congo. Our early results support that this is the largest, unmanaged trade of any crocodylian species anywhere in the world! Through prioritising collaboration with local communities, we have been able to have open conversations about the future of these animals, which has been a starting point for the establishment of sustainable management.

This article features project IWT054 “Tackling Central Africa’s illegal urban wild meat demand”, led by WCS, working in the Republic of Congo.



Crocodiles in Lake Tele, Credit: Matt Shirley



Seized cubs in clinic,
Credit: Cheetah Conservation Fund

The LICIT project: Engaging communities to stop trafficking of cheetahs for the illegal pet trade

Despite being apex predators and playing a key role in maintaining healthy ecosystems, cheetahs are endangered, with less than 7,500 remaining in the wild. One of the most significant threats faced by cheetahs is trafficking for the illegal pet trade. It is estimated that around 300 are smuggled into the countries of the Arabian Peninsula each year to be sold as pets. Evidence shows that these animals mainly originate in the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia/Somaliland), where they are taken from the wild as young cubs.

Most of these cubs do not survive the journey due to neglect and abuse, but those that do can command up to USD 15,000 when illegally sold on the internet or in exotic animal markets. The main objective of the Legal Intelligence for Cheetah Illicit Trade (LICIT) project is to build capacity at the national and community levels in these countries to combat this illegal trade.

“ It has been found that farmers or herders who have lost livestock are more willing to take and sell cheetah cubs

”

The affected cheetah population in the Horn of Africa shares its habitat with human communities. Many of these communities are pastoralists and are significantly impacted by climate change, conflict, and poverty. These factors can be drivers of trafficking, as well as human-wildlife conflict. It has been found that farmers or herders who have lost livestock are more willing to take and sell cheetah cubs. Evidence indicates that traffickers are generally willing to pay about USD 200-300 per cub – which is a substantial amount for these communities given the per capita income is USD 790 in Ethiopia and USD 347 in Somaliland.

Involving the communities in countries where cheetah trafficking originates has been critical in our efforts to stop the illegal trade through improving the understanding that cheetahs belong in the wild. Wildlife is an important element of a community landscape, along with water, forests, pasture land, and other natural resources. Like other resources, when it is sustainably managed, wildlife contributes to ecosystem functioning and economic well-being. The challenge for the LICIT partners - the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF), International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), and Legal Atlas - is demonstrating that the long-term value of cheetahs in the wild is greater than any short-term benefits from selling cheetah cubs to traffickers.

One of the principles that guides the work of CCF and its partners is that the protection of cheetahs and other wildlife also benefits people. This is achieved not only through outreach and education, but also through actions that provide concrete benefits for wildlife conservation such as improved livelihoods that are not dependent on illegal activities. In Namibia, CCF has pioneered a number of such programmes within the context of its cheetah conservation efforts.

“
One of the principles that guides the work of CCF and its partners is that the protection of cheetahs and other wildlife also benefits people
”

One of the key outcomes of the LICIT project is building a network of contacts and stakeholders within target communities in Ethiopia and Somaliland, that will serve as a foundation for pursuing similar programmes which will encourage these communities to work with each other to address the common threat posed by cheetah trafficking.

The initial question faced by the project is how to build these networks in insular communities where physical and social access for outsiders can be difficult, as is the

case in much of the Ogaden region. To overcome this challenge, our project has partnered with government agencies, civil society organisations, and universities that have their own community connections and can help open doors for LICIT activities.

This strategy recently took a significant step forward when Dr. Laurie Marker, CCF Founder and Executive Director, and Dr. Shira Yashphe, CCF's Illegal Wildlife Trade Lead, travelled to Jijiga, the capital of the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia. There they met with members of the Somali Regional State Wildlife Trafficking Task Force, an entity created by the Ethiopian government to promote an integrated approach to combating wildlife trafficking.

Task Force members represent a number of regional government offices that are involved with local communities on economic, social, and environmental matters. The meeting was arranged with the assistance of the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Agency (EWCA), and was the first time the Task Force had ever convened. Drs. Marker and Yashphe, along with representatives from IFAW and EWCA, presented the LICIT project and its place in the larger context of anti-cheetah trafficking initiatives in the region, emphasising the importance of community involvement.



Neju and Helene look after cub at the clinic, Credit: Cheetah Conservation Fund

“

One of the key outcomes of the LICIT project is building a network of contacts and stakeholders within target communities in Ethiopia and Somaliland, that will serve as a foundation for pursuing similar programmes which will encourage these communities to work with each other to address the common threat posed by cheetah trafficking

”

At the end of the meeting, the Task Force issued a statement that “involvement and consideration of communities living in areas impacted by wildlife crime is key to any successful action against wildlife trafficking,” and that any actions related to community involvement should be pursued through cooperation with EWCA, Somali Regional State authorities in affected communities, the LICIT partners, and other partners and stakeholders. The importance of this statement is that it both endorses the LICIT approach and commits regional government support for our project. CCF and IFAW are already working on follow up strategies for taking the next steps in the network building process with the Task Force and its members.

This article features project IWT066 “Legal Intelligence for Cheetah Illicit Trade (LICIT)”, led by the Cheetah Conservation Fund, which works in Yemen, Ethiopia and Somalia.



Cub arrives at CCF Safehouse in Hargeisa, Credit: Cheetah Conservation Fund



A jaguar in the Hondo River within Madidi National Park, Credit: Guido Ayala & Maria Viscarra/WCS

Engaging local people against illegal wildlife trade in jaguar strongholds in Bolivia

Jaguar populations in Bolivia have been threatened by the wildlife skin trade until the mid-1970s, when international CITES legislation prohibited threatened wildlife trade. This was followed by the creation of national protected area networks across the region that led to the recovery of jaguar populations in several regional strongholds. Nevertheless, this positivity should be tempered by the fact that jaguars have disappeared from almost 50% of their original distribution.

After a long day in the field in July 2014, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) scientists who were camera trapping for jaguars (*Panthera onca*) in Madidi National Park heard an advert offering to buy jaguar teeth on a local radio station. In response, the scientists alerted the Bolivian Ministry of Environment who in collaboration with the Bolivian Post Office were able to intercept packages containing almost 400 jaguar teeth over a two year period – all addressed to Chinese addresses.

This was the first major evidence of illegal wildlife trade (IWT) as an emerging threat to jaguars, primarily linked to a demand of their teeth and other body parts as amulets or jewellery for Asian markets. These and other more recent cases led to indignation from Bolivian society, as

“

The jaguar along with the Andean bear and the Andean condor is a top wildlife symbol, and is culturally revered in both indigenous communities and in urban centres around the country

”

the jaguar along with the Andean bear and the Andean condor is a top wildlife symbol, and is culturally revered in both indigenous communities and in urban centres around the country.

WCS is working with the Bolivian government to address IWT for jaguars and other wildlife by developing communication and outreach initiatives to inform Bolivian urban and rural society about the illegal nature of wildlife trade. This is being achieved through the development of training curricula for a variety of professionals involved in combatting IWT, and through cataloguing IWT data across the country in a standardised database to identify priority target species, hotspots and provide a resource for intelligence agencies. One of the activities funded by the IWT Challenge Fund, is to facilitate a local

network to combat jaguar and other wildlife trafficking around the Bolivian portion of one of the most important jaguar strongholds in the Amazon - The Greater Madidi-Tambopata Landscape in north-western Bolivia and south-eastern Peru.

Towards the end of 2019, several local actors made public pledges to combat the illegal trade in wildlife and begin coordinating efforts. The T'simane Mositene Regional Council (CRTM) which represents 23 communities made the first indigenous peoples declaration to combat illegal wildlife trade. This was quickly followed by the neighbouring Tacana indigenous people and their community leaders through the Tacana Indigenous Peoples Council (CIPTA). Chalalan and Mashaquipe, two indigenous community-based ecotourism businesses that operate within Madidi National Park, also made declarations.

Finally, two neighbouring national protected areas, Madidi National Park and Pilón Lajas Biosphere Reserve and Indigenous Territory, along with five municipalities, Ixiamas, Reyes, Rurrenabaque, San Buenaventura and Santa Rosa del Yacuma, signed a joint declaration to combat illegal wildlife trade. These public efforts will be the basis of a local communication campaign in 2020, to clarify the illegality of wildlife trade; the authorities, park rangers and individuals involved are also forming a local network to report suspicious activities to the national authorities and the Forestry and Environmental Police (POFOMA).

The jaguar represents an indivisible part of the Amazonian indigenous worldview, and the cultural valuation of this species is reflected in the countless number of stories in which it features. These developments have demonstrated the necessity in involving local communities and informing them on the dangers of IWT.

“
The jaguar represents an indivisible part of the Amazonian indigenous worldview, and the cultural valuation of this species is reflected in the countless number of stories in which it features
”

The declarations made by these communities underline the interest from local people in implementing actions to avoid IWT, and stresses the urgent need to encourage coordination between local communities and authorities to strengthen mechanisms against trafficking. In an effort to continue to support indigenous communities and the management of their territories it is essential to ensure that the symbolic jaguar is a permanent feature in Bolivia.

This article features project IWT068 “A price on their heads: Addressing jaguar trafficking in Bolivia”, led by WCS, working in Bolivia.



The project team informing the community of Quiquibey on the threat of IWT to jaguars, Credit: Guido Ayala/WCS



Confiscation of wildlife sold on the roadside, Credit: WWF Laos

Laotian enforcement efforts focus on combating illegal wildlife trade during the Lunar New Year of 2020

During the Lunar New Year holiday, almost 90 kg of bushmeat was confiscated in Laos as part of a public awareness and law enforcement campaign supported by WWF, TRAFFIC and other conservation organisations.

The campaign, which took place in January, concentrated on the three Golden Triangle provinces within Laos – Bokeo, Luang Namtha, and Oudomxay – as well as the national capital of Vientiane. Led by the Department of Forest Inspection (DoFI) the campaign worked with 56 officials in seven agencies who are members of the Lao Provincial Wildlife Enforcement Network (P-WEN).

“ The Lunar New Year attracts large volumes of Chinese travellers to Laos, a key demographic who have been identified as significant consumers of illegal wildlife products and wild meat

”

The Lunar New Year attracts large volumes of Chinese travellers to Laos, a key demographic who have been identified as significant consumers of illegal wildlife products and wild meat. The volume of Chinese travellers entering Laos was unusually low due to the outbreak of COVID-19, outreach and law enforcement efforts still had some promising results in terms of improving public awareness of the need to fight IWT in Laos.

The project has issued 16,900 postcards and 4,050 stickers urging people to #TravellvoryFree and informing them of the implications of getting caught trafficking illegal wildlife products under the recently updated Lao Penal Code.



Distributing postcards to incoming Chinese visitors, Credit: WWF Laos

The postcards and stickers were distributed and displayed at international border crossings, airports, special economic zones, markets, and in locations that have a high volume of visitors or where there is high likelihood of wildlife crime.

In addition to these outreach efforts, patrols and inspections were carried out by P-WEN officers in areas that had been identified as IWT hotspots. The markets and roadside stalls in Luang Namtha and Oudomxay saw the confiscation of multiple bird species, muntjacs, leopards, civets, wild boar and flying squirrels. In Oudomxay, live bamboo rats were also confiscated and released back into the wild.

Although not all of these species are considered to be under significant threat, the majority of them are caught through the setting of indiscriminate and illegal snares in the forests of Laos, many of which are protected areas. These snares catch anything that walks into them, creating ecological problems in the forests. For example, losing large bird species reduces the rate and area of seed dispersal, impacting the very structure of the forest.

“

Although not all of these species are considered to be under significant threat, the majority of them are caught through the setting of indiscriminate and illegal snares in the forests of Laos, many of which are protected areas

”

Snares also often catch apex predators that travel large distances to hunt and breed, and the loss of these predators can lead to an unnaturally large number of mesocarnivores (animals whose diets consist of 50–70% meat) like civets - ultimately resulting in an unbalanced ecosystem.

The campaign works in conjunction with law enforcement actions to curb the demand for these types of poached animals, taking a holistic approach to fighting the illegal wildlife trade and conserving biodiversity in Laos.

This article features project IWT071 “Reducing demand for wildlife products among Chinese nationals in Laos”, led by TRAFFIC, working in Laos and China.



Distributing stickers on ivory products in shops, markets and hotels, Credit: WWF Laos



The first technical meeting held during the Covid-19 outbreak, Credit: VBCSD

Surveying citizens and alerting law enforcement agencies

This project, led by WCS Vietnam, is working to develop stronger international cooperation between Vietnam and Mozambique in an effort to disrupt trans-continental IWT networks and trade routes between the two countries.

In January 2020, as a member of the United for Wildlife - Transport Task Force (UfW-TT), WCS Vietnam provided 15 law enforcement agencies with alerts and bulletins on seizure, modus operandi and red flags of wildlife trafficking. These agencies work at central and provincial levels, and are stationed within provinces that have busy air and seaports that act as hotspots for wildlife trafficking activities. The project team has received positive feedback from the National Environmental Police Department, and the National General Department of Customs. Through collaboration with the relevant departments and the national law enforcement agencies, the translated version of these informative documents are distributed to other provinces throughout Vietnam.

In November, 78 out of approximately 100 Vietnamese citizens living in Maputo, Mozambique were surveyed using close-ended questions and specialised questioning techniques, such as False Consensus Bias and the Nominative Technique.

These surveys were carried out to provide prevalence estimates of the number of Vietnamese nationals participating in smuggling of rhino horn into Vietnam. Our preliminary results showed that in general, the Vietnamese immigrants and workers in Maputo understand that illegal trading and smuggling of wildlife products, such as rhino horn and elephant ivory are serious crimes. However, the results from the Nominative Technique are still awaiting analysis and might be able to give a greater insight into the percentage of the population that have smuggled rhino horn into Vietnam from Mozambique. We are in the process of confirming the severity of the illegal wildlife trafficking among the Vietnamese community and working to identify opportunities to mitigate these behaviours.

“ Our preliminary results showed that in general, the Vietnamese immigrants and workers in Maputo understand that illegal trading and smuggling of wildlife products, such as rhino horn and elephant ivory are serious crimes ”



Seized rhino horn found in luggage at Maputo Airport, Credit: ANAC

In light of the preliminary results and observed success of marrying behavioural science with conservation efforts, WCS Vietnam aims to ensure that behaviour change communications are considered in the design of the risk mitigation strategy for Vietnamese citizens and businesses operating and living in WCS's African targeted countries. Our strategy will focus on the impact of poaching and illegal wildlife trade on targeted species, human well-being and business operation - ultimately encouraging businesses to develop and/or improve their procedures and policy toward biodiversity protection and fighting the illegal wildlife trade.

Recently the project team has started to work with Vietnam Business Council for Sustainable Development (VBCSD) under the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry to improve their Corporate Sustainable Index which is one of the most recognised tools for corporate social responsibility in Vietnam. Enterprises announced as 'sustainable business' in the Corporate Sustainable Index are recognised by the Government, the business community, and society for their outstanding contributions to the sustainable development of Vietnam.

At the same time, this recognition also gives businesses the opportunity to improve their prestige and branding, attract human resources, create new business opportunities through increasing the trust of partners,

investors and shareholders, contributing to the business development towards sustainability.

While the Corporate Sustainable Index is strongly endorsed by Vietnam Government as a strategic tool to increase sustainable business capacity, there are currently a lack of sophisticated indicators aimed at raising awareness of businesses on biodiversity and wildlife protection, and pro-wildlife policies. Therefore, the partnership between WCS and VBCSD will provide an opportunity for wildlife-related issues to be included in the Vietnamese business governance agenda. As a result, Vietnam will benefit from a strong commitment to the conservation of biodiversity, and the protection of wildlife. The first technical meeting with VBCSD's and external experts on improving the Corporate Sustainable Index was held during the initial outbreak of COVID-19.

Unfortunately, Vietnam and its business sector has been seriously affected by the outbreak, however it is high time for Vietnam's business sector to carefully review their relationship between wildlife protection and business operation.

This article features project IWT040 "Strengthening trans-continental cooperation to combat IWT between Vietnam and Mozambique", led by WCS, working in Vietnam and Mozambique.



Crocodile captured in Lake Tele, Credit: Matt Shirley

Newsletter Contacts

If you have any general queries about how the IWT Challenge Fund operates please e-mail us at IllegalWildlifeTrade@defra.gov.uk

For any queries on project applications or existing projects please contact our IWT Administrators (LTS International) at IWT-Fund@ltsi.co.uk

This newsletter is produced quarterly. To include an article on your project in an upcoming edition, please contact us at IWT-Newsletter@ltsi.co.uk

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

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

To date through the Challenge Fund, over £20 million has been allocated to 75 projects.