

Wildlife

ISSUE Wildlife populations are in widespread decline globally. Habitat destruction and poaching to supply the international illegal wildlife trade are two key drivers of this grave problem. As a consequence, it is estimated that the biomass of humans is now an order of magnitude higher than that of all wild mammals combined. The value of illegal trade has been estimated at between USD 5 and USD 20 billion per year, making wildlife crime one of the most lucrative illegal business, following only narcotics, human trafficking, and weapons.

The conservation of elephants and rhinos has received considerable global attention from the donor community, including GEF investments through the Global Wildlife Program (GWP). Nevertheless, other mammals are under severe pressure, including cats (e.g. lions, tigers, and snow leopards), non-human primates (e.g. great apes, monkeys), and pangolins.

In Asia, illicit trade in skins, bones, and body parts is the largest current threat for the survival of wild tiger, snow leopard, and other Asian big cat species. The population of tigers has declined from an estimated 100,000 in 1900 to less than 4,000 in 2016. Since 2007, all breeding tiger populations have disappeared from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Current information shows that approximately 60% of primate species are now threatened with extinction and more are declining due to poaching for bushmeat and illegal trade. Pangolins, an endangered, scaly-skinned mammal highly sought after for meat and scales, are thought to be the world's most heavily trafficked mammal: nearly 20 tons of pangolin scales were seized from illegal shipments originating from Africa between

2013 and 2016. These scales represent the lives of as many as 39,000 pangolins.

Other taxonomic groups that are equally or more significantly impacted by poaching and illegal trade and require urgent attention include reptiles (e.g. freshwater turtles and tortoises), birds (e.g. parrots, toucans, owls, hornbills, and birds of paradise), amphibians (e.g. frogs), and invertebrates (e.g. butterflies, corals). Marine species are also being severely poached: all seven species of marine turtles are endangered, three—leatherbacks, hawksbill, and Kemp's Ridley—critically so; fish (e.g. Totoaba fish); rays; and a quarter of the world's shark species. Turtles are slaughtered for their eggs, meat, skin, and shells; rays for their gills; sharks for their fins; and Totoaba for their swim bladders.

The demand for wildlife products comes from a number of different consumer groups and is, in some cases, heavily influenced by culture. There is demand that is fueled by the perceived medicinal value of some products or the social status that is associated with them. For instance, the upsurge in

rhino horn trading in the markets of south-east Asia, is underpinned by persistent myths and hype about the dubious miraculous “hangover cure” and cancer remission following treatments using rhinoceros horn. Nevertheless, the majority opinion is that the primary driver of demand is the social status associated with the products being trafficked. This applies not only to rhino horns but to the collection of arts and crafts, jewelry and antiques. Other drivers of demand include opportunistic buying driven by the desire to possess exotic pets and rare plants and animals

SOLUTION

The challenge is significant, and a two-pronged approach is needed.

The first prong is to address the global threat of poaching and illegal wildlife trade that is affecting not only the charismatic species in Africa (i.e. elephants and rhinos), but other large species as well, including cats in Asia and Latin America, and numerous smaller species around the globe. This approach requires the reinforcement of the rule of law along the value chain by apprehending, prosecuting, and convicting those engaged in poaching and trafficking. Logistics companies (shipping, airline, and land-based transport) which facilitate the import, transit, and export of goods, must take measures to prevent and penalize the abuse of their services for illicit wildlife trafficking. On the demand side, Governments and the private sector can help create awareness, reject the corporate “gifting” of illegal wildlife products, improve understanding of what drives consumer behaviour, and support campaigns to change that behaviour. Some progress is being made in reducing poaching, trafficking, and demand for wildlife and wildlife products. One of the most important achievements in the fight against illegal wildlife trade was China’s decision to ban the domestic ivory trade and processing by the end of 2017. While this is encouraging, demand is still widespread because the cultures in many countries rely in some way upon wildlife resources for traditional medicines, clothing, food, and more recently, as a sign of prestige.

The second prong is deriving economic growth from the sustainable use of wildlife. Wildlife tourism is one way to enhance the conservation of species

and provide a revenue stream for conservation and management areas, the local communities living in and around protected areas, and the tourism industry and associated NGOs and CSOs. As the illegal killing of wildlife is leveling off and showing signs of a slight decrease in some regions, the global community should turn the current and future increases in wildlife numbers into an opportunity. Sustainable, wildlife-based sources of income have the potential to be an engine for sustainable development. Indeed, a growing body of evidence shows that wildlife-based land uses (including eco-tourism), confer several ecological and socio-economic benefits (e.g. income generation by means of direct employment in nature-based operations or through community lead enterprises), compared to more traditional land uses like livestock farming in semi-arid environments. This includes the potential for improved representation of women and other marginalized groups in the decision-making and management systems of the community. In many of these areas, wildlife is now generating four times as much income as livestock, and sixteen times the wages.

LOOKING AHEAD

The GEF has funded the GWP to address the wildlife crisis across 19 countries in Africa and Asia. Launched in 2015, the GWP is a USD 131 million GEF grant program aimed at reducing the threats to wildlife by tackling the problems along the supply chain of illegally traded wildlife and wildlife products. The GWP is investing in the reduction of poaching at the site level through engagement with local communities and by conserving and protecting wildlife natural habitats; controlling wildlife crime and reducing trafficking through effective law enforcement; and reducing demand for illegal wildlife by raising awareness. In GEF-7, the investments in the 19 participating countries in Africa and Asia will be complemented by expanding the geographic and species-scope of the GWP, and by promoting long-term sustainability by means of wildlife-based tourism.

In countries where there is significant pressure on threatened wildlife species, GEF plans to build the capacity to reduce poaching inside and outside of protected areas. Support could include the development of strategic plans to combat illegal trade



when governments commit to an adequate budget for implementation to help ensure the sustainability of these investments. The GEF may invest in a suite of activities in support of law enforcement and the judiciary to tackle the “chain of custody” of the illegally traded wildlife. Investments in these areas are crucial, as the poaching and trafficking of wildlife goes hand-in-hand with other illegal trafficking of other threatened species. The GEF will be particularly sensitive to the needs of local communities as their livelihoods will be affected severely by the depletion of wildlife as a source of protein and cash when sold in the local markets.

The GEF can support more effective awareness-raising campaigns to communicate the destabilizing effects of illicit wildlife trafficking on society beyond its direct environmental consequences. These include threats to national and international security through its links with organized crime, money laundering, and drug trafficking, and global health through transmission of disease through illegal bush meat trade. On the demand side, the GEF can support not only public awareness campaigns but the gathering of information for the design and implementation of actions to change consumer behaviour. Measures could include imposing social controls by means of effective law enforcement, restricting consumer choice, and issuing messages to change individual motivation for the use and consumption of wildlife and wildlife products.

In countries where enabling conditions are in place to make use of wildlife as the engine for economic growth, the GEF can support the development or improvement of a wildlife based-economy by means of wildlife-based tourism. Enabling conditions include: political will to introduce the policy and institutional changes necessary to build an economy on the suitable use of wildlife by unlocking the potential for self-financing conservation areas and viable wildlife-based Community Based Natural Resources Management; wildlife populations that are growing, stable, or showing signs of recovery; conservation areas large enough to secure the viability of threaten species in perpetuity; a tourism industry with the will to support sustainable wildlife tourism; and local communities building enterprises and investing and deriving financial benefits from conservation and wildlife tourism.

Looking ahead, there are additional crucial issues to address in illegal wildlife trade. For instance, the closing of additional ivory markets (especially those in the region around the now- closed Chinese market); developing a better understanding of what drives consumer demand and how to change behavior; enhancing private sector engagement with governments: in particular, more product development from the technology sector and additional engagement from the financial sector in “following the money” to prosecute money laundering and corruption; increasing training of judicial and prosecutorial personnel; and adoption of legislation to stiffen penalties in a broader range of countries.

Moreover, investing in public awareness—and behavioral change—campaigns is still a key necessity, and in the enforcement of the law including the arrest, prosecution, and conviction for the kingpins of the wildlife smuggling syndicate. At a global level, the harmonization of the laws would greatly facilitate this task including elevating wildlife offenses as a “serious crime.” Governments involved in combating on illegal wildlife trade need greater cooperation on law enforcement combatting money laundering and intelligence sharing.

Wildlife tourism is a business opportunity for developing countries. But wildlife tourism without the community is not sustainable. Challenges occur when communities are denied their economic rights, and hence the need for equitable sharing of the gains of tourism. Local communities, the private sector and governments need to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and avoid at all cost the temptation to try to do it all. Professional operators need to be brought in if tourism is going to realize its potential. Too often NGOs or governments forget that they are not a business and try to do things they are not good at. Community engagement takes place through local employment, procurement, equity, and corporate and social responsibility provision which needs to be perceived as greater than the costs of living with wildlife.

There are useful models for enhancing community engagement in wildlife tourism. For example, Great Plains Conservation leases land from communities to conserve wildlife as well as to enhance the livelihoods of the communities. A USD 120 million equity fund



to train communities to run their own conservation lodges will help the communities to look “beyond the ticket sales” in tourism and analyze the intrinsic value of the wildlife.

Also, domestic tourism needs to be promoted as much as international tourism, not only because of the financial resources that this type of tourism brings, but because it allows for nationals to buy into

the conservation of wildlife and the natural spaces that support the populations of these wild animals. The domestic wildlife tourism market needs to have more family development and tailor-made marketing strategies. Through planning and policy decisions, wealth generated through high-net-worth wildlife tourism can be redistributed to areas outside of national parks and protected areas.

