



WILDLIFE CRIME

Thousands of dolphins are killed illegally every year © WDC

KEY MESSAGE

Wildlife crime ranks alongside drug smuggling, human trafficking and illegal arms trade as one of the most lucrative activities funding organized crime and terrorism. It undermines legitimate activities such as eco-tourism or sustainable hunting, which provide long-term livelihoods and generate foreign exchange income.

What is Wildlife Crime?

Migratory species constitute an important component of wildlife. Wildlife crime refers to acts committed contrary to national and international laws and regulations intended to protect natural resources and to manage their sustainable use. It poses a serious threat to the survival of migratory animals such as birds, elephants, big cats, antelopes, cetaceans, fish and marine turtles.

At the international level, wildlife crime involves violations of intergovernmental treaties such as the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) as well as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which regulates exports and imports of wildlife.

Some facts and figures on illegal killing of species of relevance to CMS

- Tens of millions of individual **birds** are possibly killed or trapped illegally across Mediterranean countries every year.
- **Tibetan antelope or chiru (*Pantholops hodgsonii*)** Numbers of this species dropped from an estimated 1 million in the 1990s to less than 75,000 animals due to poaching for their highly valuable shahtoosh wool.
- **Snow leopard (*Uncia uncia*)** More than 40 per cent of these Central Asian cats may have been poached for their valuable pelts in the past two decades.
- **African elephant (*Loxodonta spp.*)** In 2012, over 300 elephants were killed by poachers in a single incident for the illegal ivory trade. Overall, populations more than halved from 1980 to 1990, from 1.3 million to around 600,000.
- **Wild Bactrian camel (*Camelus bactrianus*)** Wild Bactrian camels have been illegally hunted for subsistence, sports and to minimize competition for food with domestic camels and livestock. With an estimated population of 650 to 1,000, it is threatened with extinction.
- **Saiga antelope (*Saiga spp.*)** The population plummeted by more than 95 per cent from 1 million to 50,000 animals in the decade after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Poaching for meat and horns has brought the Saiga closer to extinction.
- In at least six of the 11 South American coastal countries, numerous communities regularly consume **cetacean** and **sea turtle** products, which is illegal in many of them.
- Six species of **sea turtle**, numerous **small cetacean** species, dugongs and manatees are used illegally as ‘marine bushmeat’, threatening their long-term survival.

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CMS actions

- > COP Resolution on minimizing the risk of poisoning to migratory birds (Res.10.26) which established a Working Group to assess the extent of the problem and recommend actions to address it,
- > COP Resolution on the illegal killing, taking and trade of migratory birds (Res.11.16) which established an intergovernmental task force to review existing guidelines and propose new ones if necessary,
- > COP Resolution adopting the Central Asian Mammal Initiative and its associated programme of work covering the 15 species (Res.11.24),
- > COP Resolution fighting wildlife crime and offences within and beyond borders (Res.11.31) calling for greater cooperation among countries and agencies,
- > CMS-CITES Joint Work Programme 2015-2020.

CMS objectives

- > CMS provides a global platform for the conservation of migratory species of wild animals and their habitats. It brings together countries through which migratory animals pass and lays the legal foundation for conservation measures.

EXAMPLES OF WILDLIFE CRIME

- > Poaching, such as illegal hunting of a fully protected species.
- > Unauthorized netting or trapping of protected bird species for consumption or for illegal trade.
- > Trade in fully protected species.
- > Poisoning, illegal trade and hunting either outside the legal season or within protected areas.
- > Illegal shooting, poisoning, netting, liming and snaring of bird species.
- > Killing protected dolphins to use as bait for fishing, or increasingly, consuming dolphins as a response to falling fish catches.
- > Killing of marine turtles and collection of their eggs for consumption and use of their shells for ornamental products.



Bird trapped in a net found along the Egyptian coast © Holger Schulz

About CMS/CMS at a glance

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), also known as the Bonn Convention, works for the conservation of a wide array of endangered migratory animals worldwide through negotiation and implementation of agreements and species action plans. It has 120 Member States.

CMS engages all relevant stakeholders in addressing wildlife crime in concert with all other aspects of wildlife conservation and management.

CMS instruments

Animals receive protection under CMS through listing on its two Appendices, through global or regional agreements and through action plans.

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