



Position Statement on Illegal Wildlife Trade

July 2020

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) supports legal, sustainable, ethical wildlife trade that does not pose a threat to the conservation of species or human or animal health. AZA recognizes that illegal wildlife trade is a multi-faceted, international crisis that has devastating impacts to both animals and humans. Illegal wildlife trade:

- Is fueled by global demand for illegal wildlife and wildlife products.
- Is a significant threat to wildlife, driving many endangered and threatened species to the brink of extinction, and negatively impacting the earth's biodiversity.
- Poses risks to human health and welfare, damages the global economy, and fuels transnational criminal networks, government instability and corruption.

AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums, with approximately 200 million annual visitors, tens of millions of people reached through social media, and through their extensive conservation work, are well-positioned to play a critical role to reduce—and eventually end—illegal wildlife trade. Therefore, AZA supports the following strategies and actions to help stop illegal wildlife trade:

- Raise awareness with consumers and the general public about the illegal wildlife trade through targeted messaging and campaigns to effect behavior change and reduce consumer demand for illegal wildlife products.
- Support – both directly and through audience engagement – legislation at the local, national, and international levels to strengthen anti-poaching and anti-trafficking regulations and reduce demand for illegal wildlife.

- Advocate for the closure of live animal markets that contribute to illegal and unsustainable trade, threaten human health, or jeopardize animal welfare.
- Support anti-poaching initiatives such as training, patrolling, provision of equipment, and application of innovative anti-poaching tools such as poacher cams and SMART¹.
- Support projects aimed at providing local communities living among threatened wildlife with alternative, sustainable livelihoods that encourage coexistence and discourage poaching.
- Support law enforcement in efforts to develop information networks, detect and confiscate illegal shipments, and train prosecutors and judiciary in the application of anti-wildlife trafficking laws.
- Assist wildlife law enforcement with live animal confiscations, including care and placement in appropriate facilities, or reintroduction into the wild.
- Work through international initiatives and agreements, especially the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), to end illegal wildlife trade.
- Mobilize responsible corporations in key industries to help cut off traffickers' access to consumer markets and use corporate communication channels to assist in raising public awareness, changing consumer behavior, and reducing demand for illegal wildlife products.

AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums are also encouraged to include these and other strategies and actions to combat illegal wildlife trade in their strategic and operational planning efforts, so that we can harness the collective power of the community to reduce, and eventually eliminate, illegal wildlife trade.

Rationale

The Role of Zoos and Aquariums: AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums already play a critical role in efforts to combat illegal wildlife trade, including supporting field conservation efforts where wild populations are at risk. AZA's Wildlife Trafficking Alliance (WTA), which includes a coalition of more than 80 leading companies, non-profit organizations, and AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums, also plays an important role in combating illegal wildlife trade, including by raising public awareness, changing consumer behavior, and influencing corporate practices. The AZA community collectively supports wildlife conservation programs, including efforts to combat illegal wildlife

¹ www.smartconservationtools.org

trade, through AZA SAFE: Saving Animals From Extinction®, a framework for collaborative, strategic, and impact-oriented conservation.

AZA's collective and individual zoo and aquarium initiatives include supporting anti-poaching and enforcement training and patrolling in the field; working with national organizations, governments, and multi-national initiatives to break the trafficking chain and help confiscate illegal shipments; educating the public about the dangers to wildlife and humans that stem from these illegal practices; and providing actions the public can take to help stem the threat. AZA institutions also help to change policies and laws, such as through the 96 Elephants campaign, which helped close loopholes in ivory trade laws. AZA organizations continue to identify gaps in policies and regulations and urge legislative and regulatory action to increase efforts to combat illegal wildlife trade in the U.S. and around the world.

AZA-accredited aquariums and zoos also play a critical role in the care and placement of confiscated live wildlife. Fulfilling this role is challenging on multiple levels, because confiscated animals are often in compromised health, are frequently seized in large volumes, and require substantial investment to provide care, welfare, and long-term placement.

Impact on Wildlife and Biodiversity: Unprecedented global demand for illegal wildlife and wildlife products has triggered an industrial-scale killing spree of countless species, many of which are endangered, both on land and at sea. Although the loss of African wildlife garners the most public attention, wildlife traffickers are decimating wildlife populations across the globe. The demand for illegally traded wildlife is vast and varied, including for food, medicine, pets, home décor, tourist trinkets, jewelry, as photo props, and numerous other uses. The demand for illegal wildlife has caused dramatic declines not only to iconic wildlife such as African elephants and rhinos but also a wide range of lesser-known species such as pangolins, box turtles, and seahorses.

The United Nations confirms that illegal wildlife trade is a global issue and that most countries – including the United States – play a role as a source, transit hub, and/or destination for illegal wildlife and wildlife products.² Wildlife experts have confirmed that if we do not act quickly, trafficking will wipe out many endangered species in our lifetime. A recent United Nations report warns that as many as one million plant and animal species are now at

² UNODC, World Wildlife Crime Report (2016)

risk of extinction due to human activities, including poaching, and that we are altering the natural world at a rate unmatched in human history.³

Impact on Society and Human Health: Illegal wildlife trade is a highly profitable criminal industry, estimated to generate between \$7 billion and \$23 billion annually,⁴ and is now estimated to be the fourth largest transnational crime after narcotics, counterfeiting of products and currency, and human trafficking.⁵ Illegal wildlife trade is exacerbated and bolstered by government corruption,⁶ and it is facilitated in large part by transnational criminal networks with links to other forms of organized crime.⁷

Illegal wildlife trade negatively affects the livelihoods of communities that depend upon ecotourism revenue for survival. According to a recent report, elephant poaching alone is costing African economies \$25 million in lost tourism revenue per year.⁸

Illegal wildlife trade also poses a significant risk to human health. The illegal trade of wildlife allows for a variety of transmission points of zoonotic diseases, including the capture and killing of animals in the wild, transit and import of animals for consumption, and the live pet trade. Illegal, unregulated, and under-regulated trade can all contribute to the spread of contagious diseases and threaten human and animal health globally.

While the exact origins are still unconfirmed, the recent outbreak of COVID-19 is believed to have originated in Wuhan, China, in a market known as a “wet market,” where wild animals—alive and dead—are sold in public. Such markets exist throughout the world and are important to local economies and livelihoods. However, some sell a wide array of wild species, including birds, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals, and include animals that are from both

³ IPBES (2019): Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. S. Díaz, J. Settele, E. S. Brondízio E.S., et al. IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany.

⁴ Nellemann, C., Henriksen, R., Raxter, P., Ash, N., Mrema, E. (Eds). 2014. *The Environmental Crime Crisis – Threats to Sustainable Development from Illegal Exploitation and Trade in Wildlife and Forest Resources*. A UNEP Rapid Response Assessment. United Nations Environment Programme and GRID-Arendal, Nairobi and Arendal

⁵ WWF / Dalberg. 2012. *Fighting illicit wildlife trafficking: A consultation with governments*. WWF International, Gland, Switzerland.

⁶ UNODC: *Scaling Back Corruption—A Guide on Addressing Corruption for Wildlife Management Authorities*. Vienna. 2020.

⁷ INTERPOL-UNEP Strategic Report: *Environment, Peace and Security—A Convergence of Threats*. 2016.

⁸ Naidoo, R. et al. Estimating economic losses to tourism in Africa from the illegal killing of elephants. *Nat. Commun.* 7, 13379 doi: 10.1038/ncomms13379 (2016).

the legal and illegal trade. Wild and domestic animals and animal products are often near one another—and to people—in a constant state of handling, rotation, and often in unsanitary conditions, creating a recipe for contagion. The 2002-03 SARS pandemic, which infected more than 8,000 people globally, also originated in a live animal market in China.

Zoonotic disease is not exclusive to any one country; it is a global problem. The HIV/AIDS pandemic, H1N1 “Swine Flu” pandemic (2009-2010), West African Ebola epidemic (2014-2016), and Zika epidemic (2015-2016), were also the result of diseases that crossed over from animals to humans.

The economic impact of global pandemics can be widespread and catastrophic. COVID-19 has cost the global economy trillions of dollars. The 2002-2003 SARS pandemic cost global economies \$33 billion, including \$7 billion in lost travel revenue for the airline industry.⁹

Public opinion: The US public overwhelmingly supports wildlife conservation. Almost 90% of the US population has some degree of concern about the extinction of animals and plants¹⁰. Similarly, a significant majority of people surveyed agree that illegal wildlife trade is a “serious problem” (90%)¹¹. Additionally, the survey data supports the public’s increased desire to take action to combat wildlife trafficking when provided with strong messaging.

⁹ International Air Transport Association. Avian Flu Economic Briefing. <https://www.iata.org/en/iata-repository/publications/economic-reports/impact-of-avian-flu/> (2006).

¹⁰ Gallup Environment poll 2019. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1615/environment.aspx>

¹¹ AZA Public Opinion Poll; Conducted March 27-April 2, 2020; U.S. census-representative sample; n=1,306.