EDITORIAL: WILDLIFE CRIME POSES UNIQUE CHALLENGES TO PROTECTED AREAS

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ABSTRACT
Wildlife crime is the fifth largest international criminal activity worldwide. Wildlife and timber poaching is becoming increasingly organised, increasingly global and more ruthless. Protected areas are suffering most acutely from this crime wave. They frequently contain the richest biodiversity and many species valued by poachers are now virtually or completely confined to protected areas. Managers, rangers and their families are intimidated, attacked and killed. Local communities suffer threats, disturbance and loss of natural resources from community reserves. Protected areas are further exposed in many countries by weak judicial processes that fail to prosecute wildlife traders even if they are caught. These developments signal the need for long-term changes in management in protected areas containing species sought by wildlife traders; more emphasis on patrolling and enforcement along with efforts to address corruption, strengthen the judiciary and improve enforcement along the rest of the trade chain. Many of these changes are unwelcome in institutions that have spent decades developing softer approaches to management. Addressing wildlife crime without losing the benefits of more transparent, consultative and participatory approaches is a challenge that requires concerted efforts by all those affected.

Much of the world’s protected areas network is being deliberately targeted by increasingly violent and ruthless criminal syndicates, who move their operations around the world stripping out the most valuable species for sale on the international market. Unless governments, protected area managers, law enforcement agencies, the judicial sector and communities can improve their success at addressing these problems, protected areas will fail to deliver effective conservation for a proportion of the world’s most iconic species. As protected areas are in many cases the most significant remaining habitat for these species, failure means consigning them to extinction in the wild. Addressing wildlife crime at the intensity it currently exists will require a fundamental realignment in the way in which protected areas do business, as well as a significant increase in law enforcement effort to tackle the rest of the trade chain and strategically designed efforts to reduce demand.

Crucially, the pervasive corruption which currently permeates nearly every stage of the law enforcement process in many regions must be combated for the system to function with effectiveness and political credibility (Huijbregts et. al. 2013).

Over the last two decades, wildlife crime has developed into a multi-billion dollar industry; by some estimates now the fifth largest international criminal activity after narcotics, counterfeiting, and illicit trafficking of humans and oil. (Haken, 2011). As with narcotics, wildlife crime has become increasingly well organised and violent, posing a new level of threat to those responsible for managing and protecting wildlife. Problems are escalating fast, in terms of both the scale of poaching and the audacity with which poachers take high value, heavily protected species. Mass killings of hundreds of elephants in individual protected areas have now occurred in several African countries (Haken, 2011). A sudden surge in poaching effort in some areas in the last few years has caught authorities off guard. It is estimated that up to 30,000 elephants are killed in Africa each year and rhino poaching in South Africa has increased from 13 in 2007 to 668 in 2012, rolling back years of conservation effort. In many parts of the world poachers have extirpated...
species from large parts of their former range. The loss of
the last population of a unique sub-species of Javan
rhinoceros from Cat Tien National Park in Vietnam, was
due to poaching (Brook et al., 2012). For several species
whose body parts are particularly valuable to the wildlife
trade, criminal activity is now a greater threat than
habitat loss.

Analysts still only have an approximate idea of the scale
of the problem. The legal trade in wildlife was estimated
to be US$21 billion a year in 2005 (Rosen and Smith,
2010). Estimates of the parallel illegal trade vary from
US$5-20 billion (Wyler and Sheikh, 2008), with the high
value products including tiger parts, caviar, elephant
ivory, rhinoceros horn and some exotic birds and
reptiles.

Poaching has been a controversial issue ever since people
started claiming natural resources as personal property.
The poacher has often been a romantic figure in popular
culture and folklore: someone relieving the rich and
powerful of resources they had expropriated by force,
often in turn suppressed by ruthless force of law
(Thompson, 1976). There is an extent to which this
attitude remains today; local communities taking game
from protected areas set up on their traditional lands
meet with considerable sympathy (Lewis, 1996).

Similarly, both inside and outside protected areas local
bushmeat hunting has been closely correlated with
shortages of other foods or of money (e.g., Brashares et
al; 2004, Nasi et al, 2008). Addressing these problems is
challenging but is ultimately as much about negotiation
and overall levels of development and wellbeing than it is
to do with heavy-handed enforcement.

THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF WILDLIFE CRIME

What is happening now is both of a different type and a
different order of magnitude. Subsistence poaching is
being overtaken by commercial theft of valuable wildlife
products: resources for the exotic pet trade; freshwater
and marine fish; and ivory and rhino horn to supply the
huge markets in Asia, particularly China, Thailand and
Vietnam.

Criminal syndicates involved in wildlife trafficking are
increasingly well organised, with significant networks of
international connections that enable them to gather and
transport large quantities of illegal wildlife products
across continents. Poaching gangs are better equipped,
heavily armed, technologically savvy and prepared to
move quickly between countries to exploit legal
loopholes, areas of weak enforcement or changing
demand. The amount of money involved has made the
trade increasingly sophisticated, more violent and more
susceptible to corruption, including of professionals
within the system (such as veterinarian involvement in
illegal rhino horn trade in South Africa). Illegal wildlife
products are also used by rebel movements, such as the
Sudan People’s Liberation Army and the Janjaweed
militia (WWF/Dalberg, 2012), and the Maoists in Nepal
(Baral & Heinen, 2006), to fund their activities.

Governments are often either complicit (Smith &
Walpole, 2005) or unable to control the trade, which is
seen as less serious than other criminal activities (e.g.,
Shepherd and Nijman, 2008): Corruption and abuse of
power can be apparent throughout the system, for
example even if poachers are apprehended they often
never reach court. A recent survey of governments found
mounting concern about the implications for security,
sustainable development, natural resources and, due to
the unregulated movement of animal parts, global health
(WWF/Dalberg, 2012).
Protected areas are, in many countries, the major, and sometimes the only, remaining habitat for species of conservation concern that are targeted for the illegal trade. They are therefore the focus of a large proportion of the illegal wildlife trade (e.g., Yi Ming et al., 2000); and in many countries protected areas are subject to highly criminalised poaching. Protected area agencies, primarily established and run by wildlife experts and insufficiently equipped or completely unarmed government park rangers, are now expected to respond to heavily armed criminal gangs; something akin to expecting social workers to deal with cross border drug smuggling cartels. Protected area rangers are killed every year in attempts to control poaching and there are increasing reports of intimidation against family members. Managers and rangers frequently feel unsupported by police and judiciary, and even their own hierarchies who may be complicit in the trade, and have little incentive to undertake dangerous patrolling missions.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR PROTECTED AREA MANAGEMENT**

For the last few decades or more, the emphasis of protected area management has increasingly been focused on softer approaches, building on negotiation, participation and consensus and consciously moving away from the rather militarised and top-down management approach of the past. Many donors have been reluctant to support law enforcement activities, which were seen as symptomatic of an old-fashioned, colonial attitude to wildlife conservation. But management by consensus only works where there is a broad agreement on values and aims, and where they system is closed to outsiders and free of violations to the agreements. The rising criminality associated with wildlife trading, mainly driven by wealthy individuals, jeopardises a consensus approach to management. It also threatens indigenous and community conserved areas as much as it does state-run reserves; many coastal communities are finding their traditional fishing reserves under threat from mobile, offshore fleets and fishing collectives are mounting armed patrols to protect their resources.

Uncomfortable though it may be, many protected area agencies responsible for species valued by the wildlife trade need to elevate enforcement much higher up their list of management priorities. There is good evidence that poaching levels are closely correlated with enforcement (e.g., Hilborne et al, 2006 reporting on Serengeti in Tanzania) and that effective enforcement can indeed help stem the tide of poaching.

For enforcement to match the current level of threat, there is a need to shift protected area management further towards performance based accountability. It is critical that all protected areas implement Adaptive Tactical Patrolling techniques, including strong Law Enforcement Monitoring systems. The creation of
protected area agencies that have legal and financial independence from central government can also help drive effectiveness. Enforcement strategies need to be location-specific, such as recognising the need for heavier patrolling activities in densely forested areas than in open plains (Jachmann, 2008). Bi- or multi-lateral government agreements can provide critical frameworks for transboundary law enforcement where protected areas cross one or more national boundaries.

Informant networks around protected area territories are also an essential tool for effective law enforcement, ensuring patrolling effort is well targeted and that poachers can be apprehended before animals are lost. All intelligence gathered from informant networks or arrested suspects should feed into national and regional intelligence systems to help articulate links to trafficking syndicates.

Agencies addressing wildlife crime also need to match the criminals in terms of technological sophistication and new tools are becoming available all the time, such as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles to facilitate patrolling, DNA profiling to track origin of traded animals (Baker et al., 2007; Wasser et al., 2007); use of satellite imagery to track ships involved in illegal fishing; and electronic coding of logs to track legal shipments. On a more fundamental level, efforts to target the criminal syndicates at the heart of the trade would be greatly facilitated by methodologies used to combat other serious crimes such as drug and arms trafficking. These include controlled deliveries, covert investigation techniques, intelligence gathering, forensics and crime scene investigation, confiscation of assets, appropriate sentencing and extradition (ICCWC, 2012).

**INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES**

There are signs that the global community is waking up to the scale of the threat facing wildlife and to the wider implications for human society. Formation of the International Consortium for Combating Wildlife Trade, between CITES, the Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna, INTERPOL, The World Bank, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the World Customs Organisation, marks a new determination to bring the full array of enforcement measures against wildlife crime (UNODC, 2012), and there is increasing engagement of non-environmental fora such as the UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime and the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. After decades of inaction, governments are starting to be held accountable for wildlife crime - the last CITES Conference of the
Parties put several countries ‘on notice’ due to illegal ivory or rhino horn trade problems, with specific action required to avoid CITES compliance measures, which include sanctions. Most critically, high level politicians are increasingly acknowledging that wildlife crime is a serious crime, as outlined by the statements and commitments made by heads of state in international fora such as the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, the Rio+20 Outcome Document, and the UN General Assembly, although this political commitment still needs to be comprehensively translated into action.

On a more practical level, penalties for criminals convicted of wildlife trafficking are beginning to improve: in April 2013 Japan increased the maximum penalty for wildlife trafficking from one to five years and there is a growing (yet still small) number of highly significant prosecutions, such as the 40 year jail sentence given in South Africa late last year to a convicted Thai national kingpin in a rhino horn poaching racket. On-ground responses to these crimes have increased significantly in some areas – several African countries have launched elite military responses to large scale poaching threats, the latest in Cameroon involving 600 elite troops.

So far the unique role of protected areas has received less attention. We need urgent steps to bring protected area agencies more centrally into strategic discussions about controlling trade; without their support – and without greater support for them in turn – these efforts are likely to be wasted.

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Los delitos contra la vida silvestre son la quinta actividad delictiva internacional más grande del mundo. La caza furtiva y la explotación maderera ilegal son actividades cada vez más organizadas, más globales y más despiadadas. Las áreas protegidas están sufriendo de forma más aguda los embates de esta ola delictiva. Con frecuencia contienen la biodiversidad más rica y muchas especies apreciadas por los cazadores furtivos están ahora prácticamente –voire complètement– confinadas a las áreas protegidas. Los administradores y los guarda parques y sus familias son intimidados, atacados y asesinados. Las comunidades locales sufren amenazas y alteraciones y la pérdida de los recursos naturales de las reservas comunitarias. Las áreas protegidas se ven más expuestas en muchos países por la debilidad de los procesos judiciales que no logran enjuiciar a los comerciantes de vida silvestre, incluso si son atrapados. Estos hechos señalan la necesidad de cambios a largo plazo en la gestión de las áreas protegidas que contienen especies buscadas por los comerciantes de vida silvestre, incluyendo más énfasis en el patrullaje y la aplicación de la ley; y de crear capacidades para asegurar el apoyo efectivo de la comunidad judicial en general. Muchos de estos cambios no son bienvenidos en las instituciones que han pasado décadas desarrollando enfoques de gestión más blandos. El abordaje de los delitos contra la vida silvestre sin perder los beneficios de enfoques más transparentes, consultivos y participativos es un reto que precisa de los esfuerzos concertados de todos los afectados.

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