**Second-biggest direct threat to species after habitat destruction**

**What is wildlife trade?**

Whenever people sell or exchange wild animal and plant resources, this is wildlife trade. It can involve live animals and plants or all kinds of wild animal and plant products. Wildlife trade is easiest to track when it is from one country to another because it must be checked, and often recorded, at Customs checkpoints.

**Why do people trade wildlife?**

People trade wildlife for cash or exchange it for other useful objects - for example, utensils in exchange for wild animal skins. Driving the trade is the end-consumer who has a need or desire for wildlife products, whether for food, construction or clothing.

**What is wildlife trade worth financially?**

This is a difficult estimate to make. As a guideline, TRAFFIC has calculated that wildlife products worth about 160 US billion dollars were imported around the globe each year. In addition to this, there is a large and profitable illegal wildlife trade, but because it is conducted covertly no-one can judge with any accuracy what this may be worth.

**What is the scale of wildlife trade?**

The trade involves hundreds of millions of wild plants and animals from tens of thousands of species. To provide a glimpse of the scale of wildlife trafficking, there are records of over 100 million tonnes of fish, 1.5 million live birds and 440,000 tonnes of medicinal plants in trade in just one year.

**Why is wildlife trade a problem?**

Wildlife trade is by no means always a problem and most wildlife trade is legal. However, it has the potential to be very damaging. Populations of species on earth declined by an average 40% between 1970 and 2000 - and the second-biggest direct threat to species survival, after habitat destruction, is wildlife trade.

Perhaps the most obvious problem associated with wildlife trade is that **it can cause overexploitation** to the point where the survival of a species hangs in the balance. Historically, such overexploitation has caused extinctions or severely threatened species and, as human populations have expanded, demand for wildlife has only increased.

Recent overexploitation of wildlife for trade has affected countless species. This has been well-publicized in the cases of tigers, rhinoceroses, elephants and others, but many other species are affected.

**This overexploitation should concern us all...**

* **...because it harms human livelihoods.**  
  Wildlife is vital to the lives of a high proportion of the world's population, often the poorest. Some rural households depend on local wild animals for their meat protein and on local trees for fuel, and both wild animals and plants provide components of traditional medicines used by the majority of people in the world. While many people in developed countries are cushioned from any effects caused by a reduced supply of a particular household item, many people in the developing world depend entirely on the continued availability of local wildlife resources.
* **...because it harms the balance of nature.**  
  In addition to the impact on human livelihoods caused by the over-harvesting of animals and plants is the harm caused by overexploitation of species to the living planet in a wider way. For example, overfishing does not only affect individual fishing communities and threaten certain fish species, but causes imbalances in the whole marine system. As human life depends on the existence of a functioning planet Earth, careful and thoughtful use of wildlife species and their habitats is required to avoid not only extinctions, but serious disturbances to the complex web of life.

**Particular problems are associated with illegal wildlife trade**, which is usually driven by a demand for rare, protected species which need to be smuggled and/or by a desire to avoid paying duties. In illegal wildlife trade, some species involved are highly endangered, conditions of transport for live animals are likely to be worse and wildlife is more likely to have been obtained in an environmentally damaging way. The existence of illegal trade is also worrying because it undermines countries' efforts to protect their natural resources.

**Wildlife trade can also cause indirect harm through:**

* ***Introducing invasive species*** which then prey on, or compete with, native species. Invasive species are as big a threat to the balance of nature as the direct overexploitation by humans of some species. Many invasive species have been purposely introduced by wildlife traders; examples include the American Mink, the Red-eared Terrapin and countless plant species.  
    
  ***Incidental killing of non-target species***, such as dolphins and seabirds, when they are caught in fishing gear. It is estimated that over a quarter of the global marine fisheries catch is incidental, unwanted, and discarded. Incidental killing of animals also happens on land when crude traps are set (for example, for musk deer or duikers). These cause damage and death to a variety of animals besides the intended ones.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfIFVuv4bcw>

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