The risks of using security approaches in tackling illegal wildlife trade
Navigating the risks of using security approaches in tackling IWT

The illegal wildlife trade (IWT), worth between US$7-23 billion a year, has gained international prominence since poaching of elephants and rhinos started to rise in 2008. For example, the illegal killing of elephants across Africa rose from 0.6% to 2.1% of the total population in 2005, to 3.5 - 11.7% in 2011 (source: CITES MIKE database).

Although the rates of both elephant and rhino poaching have fallen somewhat since their peak in 2011, they still remain high, and have forged a renewed sense of urgency in conservation: a call to do something before the IWT leads to extinctions.
**IWT as a Security Threat**

Conservation NGOs, donors, governments, international organisations and private companies began viewing the IWT as a wildlife crime, serious organised crime and a global security threat. This reflected concern that the revenues from IWT are a form of ‘threat finance’ which funds and sustains criminals, armed groups and even terrorist networks. This framing prompts and facilitates responses that are security-oriented, and while these can seem the only option in an urgent crisis, we need to be aware of the problems they can produce.

**Shaping Funding, Driving Priorities**

The security focus means other approaches like demand reduction or sustainable livelihoods can struggle for attention and financial support. One of the world’s most significant funders in this area, The Global Environment Facility (GEF) estimates that between 2010 and June 2016, a total of 24 international donors contributed US$1.3billion to the GEF to tackle the IWT. The top five were the Global Environment Facility (GEF), Germany, the United States, the European Commission, and the World Bank Group. Collectively, they contributed 86% of the total (US$1.1billion). A total of 46% of the funding supported protected area management, while 19% went to law enforcement, 15% for sustainable use and alternative livelihoods, 8% for policy and legislation, 6% for research and assessment, and 6% for communication and awareness raising.

**Partnering with the Security Sector**

The sense of an emergency produced a series of important shifts in conservation. It opened an important space for security thinking, practices, and practitioners to move into conservation. There are growing partnerships between conservation agencies, conservation NGOs and militaries, private sector security companies as well as intelligence gathering and risk companies.

These partnerships vary and can include advisory roles of intelligence specialists, working with mobile phone companies to track suspicious activity, contracting war veterans to advise on or carry out anti poaching campaigns or working with national armies.

Conservationists on the ground tackling poaching face intense pressures, and these new partnerships often seem to offer a solution. But they also carry risks and have in some places led to the militarisation of conservation.

**The Risks**

If you or your organisation provide funds for or run a conservation initiative which partners with security actors, there are risks:

**Human rights abuses:** The militarisation of conservation has produced human rights abuses perpetrated against some of the world's most vulnerable and marginalised people – including instances of torture, rape, beatings and extrajudicial killings.

**Alienating communities:** if the experience of communities is of militarisation or enhanced law enforcement this could alienate the very people that conservation will rely on in the longer term.

**Conservation workplace stress:** the shift towards use of new surveillance technologies, more aggressive anti poaching and law enforcement roles for rangers can contribute to pressures on rangers; surveys reveal workplace stress including PTSD, feelings of anxiety and burn out.

**Wrong targets, wrong solutions:** The focus on wildlife crime and security threats focuses solutions on particular targets; if IWT is driven by other factors such as poverty, lack of alternatives, demand from wealthy communities, then the solutions that tackle these can be overlooked.
About the Author

Professor Rosaleen Duffy is Professor of International Politics at the University of Sheffield, UK. She leads the BIOSEC Project, that investigates the implications of how conservation and security are becoming integrated. More broadly her previous work examined the politics of international conservation, including neoliberalisation of nature, global environmental governance, transfrontier conservation, community based natural resource management, human-wildlife conflict and ecotourism.

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Conservation & Crime
The paradoxical faces of caviar production in the EU
The conservation benefit of farmed caviar production is ambiguous

The policy shift towards farmed production of caviar has resulted in the emergence of a caviar ‘grey market’ in the EU, which raises questions over the purported conservation benefits of captive-bred caviar production.

The global caviar industry has transformed over the past two decades, moving from wild-caught to captive-bred caviar. Brought about by a number of regulatory changes, key actors including policymakers, industry leaders and conservationsists, have heralded this shift as a positive development for sturgeon conservation in the European Union and beyond. But my research found that the conservation benefit of farmed caviar production is ambiguous. What is clear however, is that sturgeon aquaculture and the systems of captive-bred caviar production have been exploited for illicit caviar trade. This has resulted in a caviar ‘grey market’ in the EU, with the potential to undermine any sturgeon conservation initiatives.

How did we get here?

Global demand for caviar - popularly referred to as ‘black gold’ - drove historically unsustainable sturgeon fishing practices in Europe most notably in the Caspian Sea, but also in the Black Sea and Danube River Basin. This unsustainable harvest is the primary reason behind the endangered status of sturgeon, and is further compounded by habitat destruction, blocked sturgeon migration routes and ongoing poaching. A recent journalistic investigation suggested sturgeon populations in the Danube River Basin are just 1% of the historical population size, although scientific studies do not exist to confirm this. A number of regulatory measures including export quotas have been implemented to prevent further unsustainable exploitation of sturgeon for caviar. These are set out in CITES Resolution Conf 127 and implemented in the EU via the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations. EU Member States Romania and Bulgaria have prohibited wild sturgeon fishing until at least 2021. These regulatory changes have rapidly transformed the global caviar industry and prompted the growth of sturgeon farming for captive bred caviar. Between 1998 and 2006, 97% of EU caviar imports were from wild-caught sturgeon. By 2015, 90% of all global exports of caviar were produced by aquaculture methods. This wholesale shift to caviar aquaculture has coincided with a dramatic decrease in seizures of contraband caviar in the EU. EU authorities seized 4.5kg of caviar in 1995 compared to just 6kg by 2016. This stark decline in seizures of illegal caviar is viewed by many in policy and enforcement circles, as proof that the growth of sturgeon farming can reduce demand for illegally sourced caviar in international markets. The regulatory shift to farmed caviar production is widely viewed as having brought illegal caviar trade under control in the EU, and there is a growing sense that aquaculture is the best hope for sturgones’ survival.

While the move towards farmed caviar production has transformed the caviar industry, it has also created a number of issues which can undermine the conservation potential of caviar aquaculture. As such, the current system of caviar production has limitations in how it can protect the future of the species.

Problems with the policy move towards farmed caviar production:

There are a number of practical issues which complicate and potentially undermine the conservation potential of farmed caviar production. These are caused by gaps and grey areas in the regulatory frameworks, as well as inconsistent enforcement of the regulations. The main issues are:

- **Unclear conservation benefits**: Farmed caviar production is widely presented as a sturgeon conservation tool, particularly by caviar industry representatives. However, my findings problematize this perception. Academic studies have identified a number of factors that any conservation farming initiative must meet in order to have a positive conservation impact. These include farmed products displacing demand for wild product; farming being more cost-efficient; no restocking from the wild; and an absence of laundering of wild specimens into farming enterprises. But my findings show that farmed caviar production in the EU does not appear to meet any of these factors. Whilst this does not mean that captive-bred caviar production cannot support sturgeon conservation, it should not be uncritically promoted by policymakers and industry representatives as the silver bullet for the species; particularly at the expense of pursuing or supporting other sturgeon conservation measures.

- **Illicit caviar trade**: The conservation potential of farmed caviar production is undermined by ongoing illicit caviar trade in the EU, which takes a number of forms. First, a preference amongst wealthy consumers for wild caviar drives a domestic black market for illegal caviar in EU Member States. The second form of illicit caviar trade is enabled by regulatory loopholes and grey areas in the caviar labelling and repackaging system, as well as gaps in enforcement and limited oversight of both aquaculture and repackaging facilities. Specifically, illegally harvested sturgeon and wild caviar are laundered into legal enterprises and fraudulently labelled as farmed products and then sold on legal markets. The true extent of this whitewashing is not known. Finally, this whitewashing process is mirrored by a blackwashing process, whereby farmed caviar is sold unlabeled on the black market as wild product, to meet consumer demand for ‘wild’ caviar.

- **Lost livelihoods**: The impact of caviar export quotas, sturgeon fishing bans, and the subsequent wholesale shift to farmed caviar production has been felt most acutely by sturgeon fishing communities in the EU. The criminalization of the livelihoods of these communities has been compounded by the absence of compensation for the socio-economic impacts of the regulatory changes. Moreover, these communities have reaped little to no economic benefit from the expansion of caviar aquaculture in the EU, as the enterprises have typically proliferated in non sturgeon range states. As a result of economic insecurity and a lack of alternative employment opportunities, some sturgeon fishermen have continued to illegally catch sturgeon and sometimes engage in corruption with enforcement officials and organised crime groups. Some reports suggest that poaching in sturgeon range states has reached ‘alarming proportions’. The ‘delocalization’ of caviar aquaculture in the EU has therefore ironically resulted in poaching activities which limit the conservation impact of farmed caviar production.

Recommendations:

The caviar industry, policymakers, enforcement agencies and NGOs must work together in a holistic manner to address the limitations of farmed caviar production in the EU. This will ensure that caviar production effectively contributes to, rather than undermines, sturgeon conservation efforts. This can be achieved by:

- **Integrating the caviar industry into sturgeon conservation in the EU**: by creating legislation that mandates businesses producing sturgeon and caviar to engage in specific sturgeon conservation actions, of which their compliance would be monitored.

- **Targeting enforcement operations at sturgeon farms and caviar repackaging facilities**: to ensure that wild caviar is not being laundered and subsequently entering legal EU markets.

- **Investing resources and establishing initiatives in EU sturgeon fishing communities** that are designed to counter the negative socio-economic impacts of zero export quotas, sturgeon fishing bans, and the shift to farmed caviar production.
About the Author
Hannah Dickinson is a Research Associate on the BIOSEC project. Hannah joined the project in 2016 and her doctoral research examines the impact of caviar trade regulations upon dynamics of illegal caviar trade and geopolitics in the European Union. More generally Hannah is interested in investigating illegal wildlife trade issues in Europe, and theorising how wildlife crimes in Europe intersect with issues of organised crime, geopolitics and political ecology.

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Eyes on Earth
Ensuring law enforcement technologies contribute to sustainable and just conservation
Updated equipment, unprecedented amounts of data and enhanced analysis capabilities have undeniable value to wildlife conservation practitioners. But these also bring new challenges.

The landscape of technology for conservation law enforcement

Since early experimentation with radio telemetry trackers in the 1950s, there has been a keen interest in how cutting edge technologies could support wildlife conservation work. The last five years have seen an unprecedented wave of innovation and interest in tools such as drones, ranger-based data collection and visualisation systems, satellite imagery and the latest generation of camera traps. Increasingly, these systems are paired with image and pattern recognition algorithms which enable the identification of potential offenders hunting, logging or fishing illegally or the determination of strategic patrol routes through protected areas.

While updated equipment and unprecedented amounts of data are valuable to conservation work, too many technology deployments struggle to take off or encounter resistance by intended users ie local conservation staff. This can be addressed by reviewing the design and implementation process for conservation projects resting on digital technology.

Protected area law enforcement design technologies - risks and challenges

1) Project Design and Adoption of Technologies

Field conservation agents often do not use new technologies to tackle wildlife crime as much as they might. This is because end users needs and working conditions are sometimes poorly assessed and procurement rules of government agencies are not well evaluated. Personnel turnover, lack of human resources available to keep the technology running and limited technological capabilities at ground level lead, in some cases, to a limited uptake of technologies. This has notably been the case for protected data management and visualisation systems as well as sensor networks that provide real-time alerts of intrusions in protected areas.

2) Ethics of Human Monitoring

Protected areas managers do not only use data collection and geolocation systems to collect information about wildlife and potential illegal activities but also as tools to surveil and evaluate on-the-ground staff. In some protected areas, patrol itineraries are recorded by GPS devices and inspected by supervisors, along with metrics such as number of kilometers covered or ratios of distance to amount of illegal activities detected. Ranger performance monitoring is often justified by decentralized working patterns and proven instances of corruption in some locations. However increased monitoring can also increase mistrust between NGO partners, wildlife authority managers and field staff as well as lead to resistance and technology avoidance by on-the-ground conservation staff. This is counterproductive as it alienates the very people who are best placed to look after wildlife and ecosystems.

“In terms of the target, if the national park is just carrying out the patrol task, there is no clear target, if the partner NGO is in charge, in a day we must do so many kilometers. [...] There is a truck, there is a grid.”
- Indonesia National Park Ranger

3) The Environmental (Un)sustainability of Technologies

A large proportion of monitoring devices are susceptible to damage in harsh outdoor conditions and run on lithium batteries. These products contain plastic, hazardous chemicals and heavy metals. Given that only 67 countries have adopted legislation on collecting and processing discarded electronic devices, there is a risk that defective tools end up as poorly managed e-waste.

Proposed Solutions

Biodiversity conservation is gaining increasing traction in global policy circles, and is expected to take centre stage at the 2021 Convention on Biological Diversity. Funders and project managers should consider the following recommendations on technology as part of this increasing global focus on biodiversity:

1. Directly engage end users and key stakeholders working on protected areas management - such as rangers and government agencies - in technology design from an early stage to ensure it is fit for purpose.
2. Invest in training and capacity building for technology use but also in improving basic equipment and working conditions for on-the-ground conservation staff.
3. Adopt ethics review boards and accountability mechanisms for projects which rely on technologies that capture personal information.
4. Encourage the development of technologies that can be repaired by users, with parts that can be easily replaced and recycled.

“If your basics are not right, then it’s not going to work and that’s where we need to focus. You need to get everything else under track then you start testing technology.”
- International Non-Governmental Organisation Employee

5. Conclusions

In the words of research participants, technologies for conservation law enforcement are simply tools - a means to an end - and will not in and of themselves address the illegal exploitation of natural resources. The relevance of these tools to just and sustainable conservation interventions therefore lies first and foremost in increased attention to and investment in human resources and local participation of protected areas and wildlife authorities stakeholders. Technology developers should work with conservation agencies from the design stage and international funders should stipulate the need to commit to better human resource investment to successfully secure funding.

1) These concerns add to the ethical warnings issued by others such as Sandbrook, (2015) and Sandbrook, Luque-Lora and Adams (2018), who demonstrate the negative outcomes personal data capture by drones and camera traps have in communities local to conservation projects.


About the Author
Laure Joanny is a doctoral researcher at the University of Sheffield and a member of the Biodiversity and Security project funded by the European Research Council. She has been researching and writing on the use of digital technology for conservation since 2016. Her research considers the advantages and challenges posed by monitoring technologies in the day to day work of conservation actors. Joanny designed a case study looking at Indonesian forest and wildlife conservation. She carried out in-depth interviews with representatives of over 70 local and international NGOs, funding bodies, government agencies, tech developers and the business community.

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Supporting community based approaches to reduce poaching
Local communities need to see real benefits from engaging in conservation, for example increased employment opportunities and income from the wildlife economy.
Community-based approaches to reducing poaching

Anti-poaching practice and policy can draw learning from community conservation and community crime prevention programmes on how best to engage local communities to secure their support in tackling poaching. Local communities need to see real benefits from engaging in conservation, for example increased employment opportunities and income from the wildlife economy. These benefits need to outweigh the negative costs of conservation and provide alternatives to working in the poaching economy.

Community-oriented approaches can take the following measures to reduce poaching, which deliver local benefits and reduce costs of living within and near conservation areas:

1. **Direct community-involvement in anti-poaching:** People from communities in and around protected areas are directly involved in anti-poaching. This includes being hired as rangers or through incentives to provide information on poaching. Namibia’s community conservancies are an example of this model, where community-run conservancies hire community members as anti-poaching guards.

   **Benefits:** Communities have a direct incentive to reduce poaching as they have jobs that are part of anti-poaching strategies

   **Challenges:** Potential for corruption and the creation of tensions and divisions within communities between those who are involved in poaching and those in anti-poaching

Conservationists need to ensure local communities lead anti-poaching strategies in any joint programmes. They should avoid top-down, or externally imposed approaches. This is clear from lessons learned in tackling rhino poaching in Mozambique, where community-led approaches delivered mixed, although insightful results. Finally, involving communities in anti-poaching still follows an enforcement-first approach to poaching that does not necessarily address the underlying structural causes

2. **Community-Based Conservation:** Initiatives built on increasing community support for conservation and anti-poaching, in turn weakening local poaching economies. Interventions often support alternative or existing livelihoods, and develop new conservation/biodiversity-based livelihoods through sustainable natural resource use and community management and/or ownership of wildlife and conservation.

   **Benefits:** Helps create incentives for people to protect biodiversity, support conservation and tackle poaching where they live.

   **Challenges:** A long-term process that may not align with immediate and urgent anti-poaching needs

Conserving Wildlife

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About the Author

Dr. Francis Massé is a Lecturer in the Department of Geography and Environmental Sciences, Northumbria University, UK and a fellow of the BIOSEC Project. His work focuses on commercial poaching economies and anti-poaching/conservation law enforcement in protected areas and across the enforcement and supply chain. He has a regional focus in Southern Africa where he has spent extensive time with rangers, communities, and conservation personnel in protected areas and poaching hotspots of Mozambique and South Africa.

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Understanding the motivations of actors engaged in illicit succulent plant trade
Key Issue
Illegal trade in plants receives scant attention compared to illegal trade in animals, yet it is a persistent form of illegal wildlife trade significantly affecting a variety of plant families. A number of recent succulent thefts drew widespread media attention and brought greater awareness to the existence of an illegal trade in succulent plant species, though it is by no means new; international theft of rare plant species dates back centuries. The cactus family of plants are perhaps the most well-known succulents, and they represent one the five most endangered taxonomic families of either animals or plants on the planet, in part due to illegal trade. Despite this very real risk of extinction, very little is known about how the illegal succulent trade operates or what motivates the people involved.

Why is there an illegal succulent trade?
The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) regulates the international legal trade in endangered species, including plants. When CITES lists specific plant families as at risk of extinction, international trade may be banned (Appendix I). Buyers and sellers might require a trade certificate if CITES is concerned the species may become endangered if trade is not controlled (Appendix II). If a person or business attempts to sell a succulent (or any other species) listed on either Appendix I or II without the appropriate certificate on the international market, the sale is illegal.

Where species are not regulated by CITES, additional government-mandated phytosanitary or import/export permits may add layers of additional cost and bureaucratic process and delay for plant buyers and sellers. This may disincentivize the purchasing and sale of plants through legally-regulated mechanisms. These regulations help to ensure that problematic plant diseases, pathogens, or pests do not enter countries from abroad. While larger-scale commercial operations often have more capacity for navigating such regulations, many individual sellers or buyers may not, making compliance with trade regulations cost prohibitive when selling small numbers of plants to specific buyers. With the emergence and proliferation of online buying markets such as eBay, Etsy, as well as a growing online market via social media sites, it is harder for authorities to regulate these venues for illegal succulent trade by smaller dealers, where sellers often openly flaunt trade regulations.

How does the illegal succulent trade function and who is involved?
The global illicit trade in cacti and succulent plants involves diverse types of actors operating for different purposes. It is therefore important to understand that there are likely few ‘one-size-fits all’ approaches to curtail this illegal trade, and it may be better to say there are many forms of illegal trades occurring involving different types of actors and networks. Where larger-scale commercial operations may engage in illicit activity through forging false documents, intentionally mislabeling species shipments, or ‘hiding’ regulated species within larger shipments, much of the

Mexico in Focus
The entire cactus (Cactaceae) family is listed as Appendix II on CITES, with 33 species and six genera currently listed as Appendix I. While normally plant seeds are exempted from CITES Appendix II provisions, any cactus seed exported from Mexico is also regulated under Appendix II and requires a certificate. Mexico is home to more species of cacti than anywhere else in the world. Therefore, with few exceptions foreign persons visiting Mexico would require a CITES export certificate to legally import a cactus or its seeds to another country. The fact that a variety of recently described Mexican cactus species are easily found for sale in international markets indicates, however, that such bans have not deterred a variety of actors from obtaining Mexican cacti illegally. Many of these species are sold over the internet by private dealers or at in-person plant sales.
illegal succulent trade is managed and operated by small groups of individuals—or even solitary actors—who may simultaneously engage in the legal commercial sale of plants, or only pursue collection of regulated species as a hobby. Thus, it is important to note that compared to many illicit economies where actors are primarily incentivized by potentially lucrative financial gains, many actors in the illegal succulent trade are motivated by personal passion and desire; they may also disagree on ethical or legal grounds with contemporary trade regulations and rationalize their behavior as illegal but ethically justified.

Is the illegal trade in succulent plants a form of serious organized crime?
The past decade saw illegal wildlife trade reframed as a form of serious organized crime and national security threat. However, many of the claims about the convergence of IWT with organized criminal syndicates and threat finance remain unsubstantiated or circumspect. Similar dynamics are beginning to shape discussions about illegal trade in succulent species, without strong evidence of the presence of criminal syndicates, cartels, or other forms of organized criminal groups involved in such trades. Much more likely is that a limited number of individual actors or small groups are engaged in the illicit succulent trade, a form of disorganized crime. Given the very limited habitat range and/or population size of many succulent species, however, these few people may have a disproportionate ability to drive particular species towards endangerment or extinction.

Where does illicit succulent trade occur?
There is evidence that practically all world regions with native succulent populations experience forms of illicit trade. Notable hotspots include Mexico, South Africa, Peru, and Brazil—all countries with exceptional succulent biodiversity. With the rise of online trading, the illicit cactus and succulent trade truly is global in its scope, connecting buyers and sellers around the world. Unlike many narratives about the primary routes of illegal wildlife via the Africa-to-Asia nexus, however, some of the greatest evidence of illegal succulent demand stems from Europe and North America. These two world regions feature robust communities of passionate cactus and succulent collectors, inclusive of actors who are willing to overlook the legality of obtaining a particularly coveted species for their collections.

Key Findings:
• Illicit succulent trade is not ‘one size fits all’: there are many forms of illegal trades occurring, even in the same species, involving different types of actors and networks.
• Some buyers and sellers of succulent plants might be driven towards illegal trading because it is easier and cheaper than complying with rules regulating the legal trade in succulents.
• Online auction markets and social media platforms greatly facilitate illicit succulent trade.
• Many actors in the illegal succulent trade disagree with contemporary trade regulations and therefore rationalize illicit behavior as ethically acceptable, compared to many illicit trades that are pursued simply for financial gain.
• Some of the greatest evidence of illegal succulent trade stems from Europe and North America, which are overlooked hubs of illegal wildlife trade.
• The small number of people involved in the illicit trade are nevertheless able to cause significant damage, endangering succulents and putting them at risk of extinction. This is because there is a limited succulent habitat range and small population sizes that this small group of illegal traders can exploit.
About the Author

Jared Margulies is an assistant professor of political ecology in the Department of Geography at the University of Alabama. Previously, he was a postdoctoral research fellow with the BIOSEC project in the Department of Politics at the University of Sheffield. His current research project focuses on the international illegal trade in succulent plants, with particular attention to understanding the motivations and desires of those engaged in illicit plant trade. His other primary area of research interest explores the politics of human-wildlife relations, conservation, and conflicts, particularly in South India.

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The illegal bird trade from the Western Balkans into the European Union: Drivers and responses
Executive Summary

Current EU policy regulating the trade in birds does not sufficiently recognise the European dimension of the illegal bird trade. While the EU Birds Directive prohibits the sale of wild birds within the European Union, it permits the introduction of national and regional derogations (Article 9). This creates a highly complex legal context, which hampers the coordinated implementation and enforcement of existing regulations, particularly at Customs. In addition, action taken to tackle the illegal bird trade disregards the role of the European consumer market in driving illegal trapping, killing and trade of birds. Even where European regulations are tightened to curb the trade (e.g. with amendments to the Annexes of the EU Birds Directive or the classification of illegal bird trade as environmental crime), there is evidence to suggest that existing legal grey areas externalise illegal activity to the EU’s immediate neighbourhood in the Western Balkans. EU policy should shift its focus from predominantly tackling the illegal bird trade in source countries and instead increase coordinated efforts to target consumer demand in EU Member States where demand for illegal bird products is particularly high.
Extent of the problem

Data on the illegal bird trade in Europe is largely based on estimates as reliable Customs seizure data are unavailable and other data are not centrally collected. However, reports by the EU Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law (IMPEL) network give a useful insight into the extent of the issue. Recent studies estimate that between 11 – 36 million birds are illegally trapped and/or killed in the Mediterranean alone. This is a grave concern for conservation policy given that many of the affected bird species are migratory and may be protected in certain geographic locations. However, although broad data on the illegal trapping and killing in Europe exist, the commercial dimensions surrounding it are largely unknown. Some studies estimate the profits from the illegal bird trade in Europe at around €10 million.

Underlying drivers

Contrary to the widespread perception that poverty sustains the illegal bird trade, evidence suggests that it is in fact wealth that drives it. Birds, particularly songbirds, such as skylarks (Alauda arvensis), goldfinches (Carduelis carduelis) and blackbirds (Turdus merula), are illegally trapped and killed for human consumption, pleasure or sport. In countries such as France, Italy and Cyprus, bird dishes are often framed as integral parts of the traditional regional cuisine and marketed as a cultural experience of consuming ‘forbidden delicacies’, conveying a sense of luxury. In addition, the tightening of European regulations has contributed to a shift of illegal activity towards the European neighbourhood. For instance, EU citizens are the primary driver of illegal activity associated with hunting tourism in Serbia. Here, legal and illegal activities are thought to be closely intertwined: while a hunting trip per se is legal, hunting quotas are often ignored, or prohibited hunting equipment is used to attract and kill birds in greater numbers. Evidence suggests that birds which are hunted by EU citizens during hunting trips in the Western Balkans are then illegally trafficked into the EU for consumption. Corruption plays a crucial role in this regard. Although the motivation to increase individual profits in source countries does matter, consumer demand appears to be the key driving force behind the European illegal bird trade, which is yet to be more prominently addressed in EU policy.

Recommendations

EU policy needs to recognise that EU citizens play a key role in driving the illegal bird trade in Europe. Rather than focusing on increased conservation efforts or the development of alternative livelihoods in source countries, consumer demand needs to be curbed. This can be achieved by

- recognising that the consumption of illegal bird products plays a crucial role in regional cultures and working with local communities to change public narratives surrounding these traditions;
- increasing transparency of regional derogations with a view towards harmonising legislation across the EU and facilitating implementation of existing legislation;
- increasing capacity-building and transnational cooperation of customs officials to support enforcement of legislation.

Crucially, these processes require a coordinated approach by a variety of stakeholders, such as EU institutions, national authorities and civil society. For instance, tackling illegal activities associated with hunting tourism cannot only rely on increased law enforcement in consumer and source countries. In fact, addressing the illegal dimensions of hunting tourism and its role in the illegal bird trade can only be achieved by devising a coordinated approach of national hunting and tourism associations, conservationists and national and regional authorities.
About the Author

Dr Teresa Lappe-Osthege works as Research Associate on the BIOSEC project. She researches the illegal bird trade in the Western Balkans, exploring the socio-economic interests that sustain the trade and how certain stakeholders, such as national governments or non-governmental organisations, respond to it. Her expertise lies more broadly in issues related to green political economy, political ecology and environmental governance in contexts of peace and conflict, with a regional focus on the Western Balkans and the EU.

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The Illegal Logging and Timber Trade
Between public security threat and organised crime
The Illegal logging and timber trade (ILTT) is a global problem with substantial negative economic, environmental and social impacts. As Europe’s forests have become essential elements of green growth, biodiversity and climate change mitigation strategies, the issue of illegal logging emerged as a point of contention between EU institutions and various member states (Poland, Slovakia, Romania).

Romania stands out as a country where illegal logging seems out of control. Despite attracting unprecedented international political attention, official reports show that timber is being illegally cut and introduced to the EU internal market, threatening valuable old-growth forests and other unique biodiversity hotspots. Journalists, NGOs, politicians and elected representatives started to call ILTT a serious organised crime (2017) and it is a public security threat under Romanian law (2016). These new realities have dramatically affected the forestry sector, created numerous timber shortages and led to an increase in violence and anti-European discourses.

What is ILTT and how does it function?

The illegal logging and timber trade is the harvesting, transporting and selling of timber in contravention to the laws of the country of harvest or the regulations governing the functioning of the common market. The phenomenon of illegal logging appeared in Romania during the post-socialist land reforms, and it was marked by the development of patron-client relations, corruption and various forms of violence.

The state currently owns 48.6% of Romanian forests; local communities own 17.3%; private owners 20.2% and other non-state institutions such as historical associations of forest owners (commons) 13.9%. The state’s forests are administered by the National Forestry Agency (ROMSILVA), an institution that finances all its operations from timber harvesting revenues. Private forest owners in Romania face significant restrictions to access and harvesting rights compared to their counterparts in most other EU Member States. A large part of the Romanian population is dependent on forests for subsistence and firewood, but do not have ownership or access rights.

A report of the Court of Accounts from 2013 uncovered that Romania lost 280 000 hectares to illegal logging between 2002-2011, valued at 5 billion euro. Nevertheless, national inventories show a constant increase in the forest cover since 1990. The Romanian state does not have official figures about the spread and dimensions of illegal logging and timber trade, so the social, environmental and economic impacts of this phenomenon are unclear.
Forest management in Romania is based on a scientific forestry tradition that promotes long harvesting cycles (>100 years), low annual allowable cuts and natural regeneration. Significantly different from the legislation of other EU Member States, Romanian forestry law is an instrument that actively promotes the conservation of biodiversity and resilient natural forests. Illegal logging and mismanagement of the country’s forest fund are considered a threat to national security as of 2016. The government developed wood tracking technologies to comply with the due diligence requirements of the European Union Timber Regulation and involved the public in the monitoring and reporting of potential cases of illegal logging and timber trade. Illegal logging still occurs in different ways which results in fast-paced and sometimes confusing changes in the legislation.

The over-regulation of forest governance, management and timber harvesting creates an unstable business environment while the lack of local capital and investment forces various actors in the forestry sector to operate at the border between licit and illicit activities.

Is ILTT a form of organised crime?

Local and regional NGOs and journalists have discussed the Romanian ILTT as a serious organised crime for many years, demanding stricter legislation and enforcement. Despite these calls for change, the state authorities started to refer to mafia-like operations only recently (November 2019).

Although an Environmental Investigation Agency document from 2015 exposed the organised and corrupt supply chain of a large timber processing company, few cases of forest crime have been prosecuted as serious crimes. Research shows that illegal logging involves a variety of actors, sometimes operating independently, opportunistic and most probably at the local level. This grey market survives as both the household and industry’s demand for timber outstrip supply.

Risks

Collapsing industry: as the ILTT started to be considered a serious organised crime, consumers’ trust in the forestry sector decreased both at the national level and internationally. This framing forced small or local processing firms to run out of business and allowed big international players to dominate the market.

Firewood shortage: in Romania, 3.5 million households use timber for heating and cooking, predominantly in rural areas. Official data shows that this need is higher than the allowable yearly timber harvesting quota, thus forcing rural dwellers to procure firewood through informal arrangements. Timber shortages have grown in intensity, putting a vulnerable rural population at risk.

Devaluing of Rangers work: the shifts towards serious crime narratives has led to a portrayal of forest rangers as corrupt public enemies, making them the target of various forms of violence including murder.

Fake news and populism: political discussions about ILTT are overwhelmed by fake-news and opportunistic populist proposals such as support for blanket bans, criminalisation of forest wrongdoers and militarised enforcement. ILTT as a serious crime is often framed in racist, xenophobic and anti-European discourses.

Recommendations

1. While it is essential to encourage the participation of civil society, environmental NGOs and other stakeholders in policy-making, forest-related regulations and strategies should be informed by sound science and democratic decision making.

2. Strict protection and limitation of access rights should be accompanied by adequate and fair compensation mechanisms targeting not only direct owners but also local communities and consumer communities.

3. As high conservation value forests become critical for the EU’s green growth and biodiversity strategies, it is crucial to take into consideration the variety of ownership and access rights, forest governance traditions and the varying degrees of forest-dependency across class, ethnicity and rural-urban divides.

4. It is vital to make sure that policy development does not perpetuate environmental injustice or deepen local inequalities and precarious livelihoods.
About the Author

George Iordăchescu is a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow of the BIOSEC Project at the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Sheffield. His work examines illegal logging and timber trade as a security threat. The research that informs this policy brief was conducted between 2019 and 2020 and involved 20 interviews with national authorities, MEPs and various EU institutions, representatives of environmental NGOs, stakeholders from the Romanian forestry sector and the timber industry, rangers and conservation practitioners as well as participation in national and international meetings related to illegal logging and timber trade. His work has a regional focus on Eastern Europe where he has researched forest governance, the role of the state in biodiversity conservation policy-making, rewilding and the emergence of private protected areas since 2014.

About the BIOSEC Project

The BIOSEC Project is funded by the European Research Council (ERC) 2016-2020. More information on our outputs, our team and our research is on our website.

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Reducing demand for illegal wildlife products – is there any way forward?
The drivers of poaching are too complex to be addressed by anti-poaching measures alone. One key driver has been heightened demand for wildlife products in emerging and increasingly affluent economies such as Vietnam. In recent years, international funding has been poured into a range of consumer-targeted interventions in Vietnam in order to alter behaviour and reduce demand for IWT products. However, these campaigns are ill-suited to the Vietnamese context. In order to be impactful at local levels, these campaigns need to address a number of key issues.
Key issues associated with IWT Demand Reduction Campaigns

- While the campaigns are deemed successful in producing and achieving communication outputs (e.g. media coverage, outreach level, number of shares, likes, comments, pledges, etc.), evidence shows that such outputs do not automatically lead to reduced levels of poaching and killing of target species in source countries.

- Campaigns are often grounded in Western models and ideas. As such they fail to engage socio-cultural specificities into their campaigning processes. They overlook the positive cultural attributes constructed and embedded within Vietnamese ideas and consciousness of nature.

- Campaigns challenge long-standing beliefs in the efficacy of traditional medicines, which has been steeped in an Eastern society like Vietnam for thousands of years.

- Campaigns fail to connect with locally-grounded grassroots environmental movements. There is a misalignment between IWT demand reduction campaigns led by conservation NGOs and grassroots environmental movements in Vietnam.

- Campaigns lack robust research and are largely dependent on campaigners' personal intuitions and understandings of local consumers.

- Campaigns are too focused on globalised charismatic species, which raises concerns about the impact of these campaigns on the conservation of native species to Vietnam.

Recommendations

- Campaigns need to go beyond an animal species focus, mainstream demand reduction action into wider issues, and engage local civil society groups who are organising themselves to save local habitats and endangered species;

- Campaigns should consider political and socio-cultural factors at the design stage to avoid deepening historical racist stereotypes and cultural misrepresentations;

- Campaigns need to be supported by rigorous interdisciplinary research. There is a particular need for social sciences' expertise in campaign processes so that campaigns can be better culturally-informed and locally-accepted.
About the Author

Dr Anh Vu is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow of the BIOSEC Project at the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Sheffield. She is an interdisciplinary researcher bringing expertise in development studies, politics, anthropology and geography. She also has over ten-year experience of working with international organisations (World Bank, UN), INGOs and civil society organisations. Prior to her post-doctoral research, she researched and published on environmentalism and authoritarianism in Southeast Asia. Her current research examines local environmentalism and the politics of Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) demand reduction campaigns in authoritarian Vietnam. This forms part of BIOSEC Project.

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