

International Police Organization (INTERPOL)

MetMUNC XLVIII

Topic: Exploitation of Endangered Species

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The Earth is full of fascinating and beautiful species, with new ones being discovered every day. However, this dazzling world faces many struggles and dangers, as many animal and plant populations are faced with threats. The International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) Red List keeps track of all threatened species and classifies them into three escalating levels: vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species. The list states that “more than 28,000 species are currently threatened with extinction, which is 27% of all assessed species”¹(shown in Figure 1). Any species on the list is considered at risk of dying out. When members of these species are subjected to crimes such as poaching (illegal hunting) or smuggling (illegal trading), the species’ chance of survival decreases dramatically.

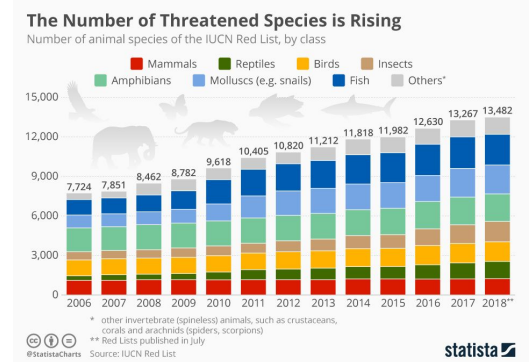


Figure 1: The number of threatened species by year.

The National Geographic is one of the many non-profit organizations whose mission is to explore solutions to help strive for environmental balance.² They state that for a species to be considered endangered on the IUCN Red List, they must meet the following three criteria: (1) all of the members of the species live within 5,000 square kilometers or less, (2) only 2,500

¹ <https://www.iucnredlist.org>

² <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/endangered-species/>

members of the species are mature, and (3) the probability of extinction exceeds 20 percent in 20 years or five generations.

An example of a critically endangered species is the South China Tiger (Figure 2).³ The Chinese government made hunting them illegal in 1979; however, the population went from



4,000 to between 30 and 80 individuals in just under 50 years. All types of tigers have been disappearing from our planet for many years, and a combination of over-hunting and habitat loss are to blame. Although the Chinese government tried to avert the crisis of the South China Tiger becoming extinct, one has not been spotted in the wild for 25 years; therefore, they are believed to be functionally extinct (extinct in the wild). This species demonstrates how the

Figure 2: A picture of a South China Tiger.

intervention of a single government is often insufficient when it comes to the conservation of species.

In recent years, smuggling and poaching of animals has increased at an alarming rate.⁴ When an animal is killed because its body parts can be sold (whether as clothing, for their purported medicinal uses, or for other reasons) the negative effects extend beyond just the loss of that animal's life. Significant damage to single populations disrupts ecosystems, illegal animal trade leads to invasive species arriving in new areas, and tourism can even be impacted in communities that rely on animals as an attraction.⁵

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), established in the 1960s, has been a standard for protecting species from becoming

³ <https://www.worldwildlife.org/species/south-china-tiger>

⁴ <https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/illegal-wildlife-trade>

⁵ <https://www.onegreenplanet.org/animalsandnature/the-devastating-effects-of-wildlife-poaching/>

endangered through trade.⁶ Today, 182 countries are “parties” to CITES. Under CITES, countries are, in theory, prohibited from commercially trading endangered species, and are responsible for appointing a “Scientific Authority” to ensure that trade involving any other animals is not detrimental to that species’ ability to survive. CITES has increased monitoring of wildlife trade, but many signatories to the treaty lack the resources to enforce it; in 2014, roughly half of the parties were found to meet all of CITES’s guidelines.⁷ Some of these countries had given conservation almost no priority on their political agendas, and some governments were even accused of colluding with poachers.

As species become endangered, their assets become even more valuable to humans. Elephant and rhino ivory are considered rare commodities, yet trading them is illegal. Although numerous efforts have been undertaken by INTERPOL to end this illegal trade, it only seems to increase. Consequently, elephant (Figure 3) and rhino populations are diminishing so much so that almost every rhino and elephant species are located somewhere on the spectrum



Figure 3: An elephant poached for tusks.

of the threatened species. INTERPOL has previously taken action to fight against the exploitation of rhinos and elephants. For instance, “Project Wisdom” was intended to ban the trade of ivory internationally because of the endangered status of elephants; however, the trade of elephant ivory continues and there has also been an increase in rhino hunting for their horns.⁸

⁶ <https://www.fws.gov/international/cites/what-is-cites.html>

⁷ <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL32751.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.interpol.int/en/Crimes/Environmental-crime/Wildlife-crime>

In addition, “Operation Thunderstorm” helped seize 1.3 tonnes of illegal ivory as well as

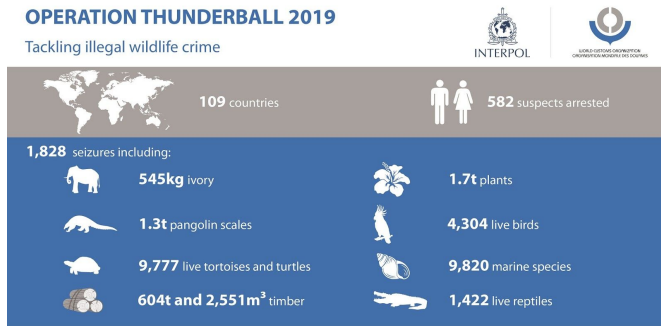


Figure 4: Seizures in Operation Thunderball

thousands of other illegally traded wildlife in 93 countries, including Vietnam and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 2019, Interpol partook in “Operation Thunderball”, a fight against wildlife trafficking in conjunction with the World Customs

Organization. It was a success with an extensive

number of seizures of illegally obtained products of exploited species.

There are several other programs INTERPOL is involved in to help fight against against the exploitation of endangered species. “Project Predator” was created to save tigers from exploitation such as tiger farms, which are designed to breed tigers to provide for merchandising of their parts.⁹ It advocated for country’s governments and law enforcement to help end the exploitation of tigers in the 13 countries that still have tigers. Law enforcement in each country was to be trained to find individuals who were involved in or controlled the illegal trade of tigers and their parts. While all of these programs have made progress in stopping monetary gain off of the exploitation of endangered species, they have not prevented the initial exploitation from occurring.

In committee, delegates will interpret prevalent cases of the exploitation of endangered species and design solutions to stymie their illegal trade, and devise a plan to prevent new crimes from occurring. Delegates must also keep in mind the current and former programs organized by

⁹ <http://actionguide.info/m/icits/138/>

INTERPOL in response to crimes against wildlife, and their limited success. Is the best way to help endangered species to strengthen laws protecting them? Is it to raise awareness so that such laws are no longer necessary? Or is it to make stronger attempts to stop these species from becoming endangered in the first place?

Questions to Consider

1. Is there a high rate of wildlife crime in your country?
2. Is your country known for having any specific endangered species?
3. Has your country taken any action to prevent the exploitation of endangered species?
4. Is your country known for being involved in the trade of endangered species?
5. How would your country be affected if an endangered species went extinct?
6. Does your country have the resources to make serious efforts to stop illegal trade within its own borders?

Helpful Links

- <https://www.iucnredlist.org>
- <https://www.interpol.int/en/Crimes/Environmental-crime/Wildlife-crime>
- <https://www.worldwildlife.org>
- <https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/illegal-wildlife-trade>
- http://wwf.panda.org/our_work/wildlife/problems/illegal_trade/wildlife_trade_campaign/scorecard/