



Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme



PRESS RELEASE

Animals on the Move Hit Hard by Wildlife Crime

Bonn, 3 March 2015 - Migratory species of wild animals on land, in our skies and across the world's oceans are increasingly being threatened by wildlife crime. Fully protected species are being illegally killed, hunted and traded by organized criminals, fuelling conflicts and destroying conservation efforts put in place to save species in many parts of the world.

They are falling victim to criminal acts which are posing a serious threat to the survival of many migratory animals such as birds, elephants, big cats, antelopes, cetaceans, fish and marine turtles.

Wildlife crime ranks alongside drug smuggling, human trafficking and the illegal arms trade as one of the largest international criminal activities, and is also one of the main causes driving species to the brink of extinction and is increasingly jeopardizing trans-boundary conservation efforts.

On World Wildlife Day being observed around the world today, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) is calling for urgent action to tackle this global problem. "Migratory animals in all corners of the world are being hit hard by wildlife crime. They are being targeted by criminals illegally killing them for their tusks, horns, meat, pelts and fur. It is time to step up action to put an end to these acts committed contrary to both national and international laws," said Bradnee Chambers, Executive Secretary of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).

Today about 100 elephants are killed every day for their ivory and meat, while the number of elephants killed in Africa annually lies between 20,000 – 25,000 elephants per year out of an estimated population of 600,000. The hunting of elephants, rhinos and tigers is mainly driven by wealthy consumers all over the world.

More than 40 per cent of Snow leopards in Central Asia are likely to have been lost due to trophy hunting for their pelts since 1990, while following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, poaching of Saiga antelopes skyrocketed. Numbers of Saiga antelopes fell to only 50,000 from previous levels of around 1 million animals.

Wildlife crime does not only target iconic animals in Africa and Asia, but also migratory birds in the heart of Europe. Migratory birds are exposed to enhanced risks because they gather in large numbers, at specific locations, at predictable times, making them easy targets for human exploitation.

Jacques Trouvilliez, Executive Secretary of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA), an international treaty concluded under CMS, said: "The ivory trade is unfortunately just the tip of the iceberg. The unsustainable use of wildlife such as the overharvesting of birds by some hunters is just as detrimental to the survival of species."

According to unpublished data by Birdlife International, tens of millions of individual birds might be killed or trapped illegally across Mediterranean countries every year.

For hundreds of years, migrating birds have been trapped in artisanal nets along the coast of North Africa and the magnitude of the take had little or no impact on the species. But now there are hundreds of miles of indestructible plastic nets forming a continuous and indiscriminating barrier, putting further pressures on populations already in decline as a result of habitat loss.

In the marine environment, marine turtles, which have roamed the oceans for more than 100 million years, are being illegally killed for meat and their shells used for ornamental products. Their eggs are collected for consumption. The direct exploitation of turtles – for their meat, eggs or shells – is largely concentrated in the Coral Triangle region and rapidly increasing.

Numerous small cetacean species as well as dugongs and manatees as well as six out of seven species of sea turtles, are used as ‘marine bushmeat’, threatening their long-term survival.

Thousands of Amazon river dolphins are estimated to be killed every year, mainly as bait for illegal fisheries. Accumulating threats arising from fishermen killing dolphins that compete for their fish, incidental mortality in fishing gear, river dams and pollution from organochlorines and heavy metals increase the pressure.

Using dynamite for fishing is illegal in many countries but continues to be practiced nonetheless not only seriously affecting marine mammals, but also destroying large amounts of the marine ecosystem.

The multitude of threats caused by wildlife crime are disastrous to endangered migratory animals already trying to cope with massive habitat loss and climate change. Unless urgent action is taken, the long-term survival of many species that depend on various habitats during their seasonal migrations is at stake.

Solutions

CMS works closely with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) on a number of species listed on the appendices of both conventions, which are actually or potentially the subject of wildlife crime, including the gorilla, the snow leopard, the argali sheep, the Saiga antelope, marine turtles and the Saker falcon.

In addition, the Convention works with governments to ensure the animals’ safe passage across international borders. At the 11th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CMS in November 2014, a resolution on the prevention of illegal killing, taking and trade of migratory birds was adopted.

An international task force will be established to work with governments to focus attention on illegal activities. It will advise countries on how to ensure that adequate national legislation is in place and enforced in compliance with existing international commitments on bird protection.

At the conference, countries also agreed on another resolution to fight wildlife crime and offences within and beyond borders calling for greater cooperation among countries and agencies.

“We must use the occasion of World Wildlife Day to continue to increase global awareness about the need to conserve and protect our planet’s wildlife, including the great phenomenon of animal migration, for generations to come” said Chambers.

In addition to raising awareness, the solutions need to involve all interested parties to preserve migratory wildlife as a unique part of biodiversity. Introducing sustainable catch quotas and

enforcing wildlife law across the species' range could bring about a much needed change that would be in the interest of conservationists and consumers alike.

Notes to Editors:

The **Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)** aims to conserve terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory species throughout their range. It is an intergovernmental treaty, concluded under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Programme, concerned with the conservation of wildlife and habitats on a global scale. To date 120 State Parties have ratified the Convention.

www.cms.int

The **Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA)** is an intergovernmental treaty developed under the auspices of CMS dedicated to the conservation of migratory waterbirds that migrate along the African-Eurasian Flyway. The Agreement covers 255 species of birds ecologically dependent on wetlands for at least part of their annual cycle. The treaty covers 119 Range States from Europe, parts of Asia and Canada, the Middle East and Africa. Currently, 71 countries and the European Union are Contracting Parties to AEWA.

www.unep-aewa.org

Related links:

http://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/fact_sheet_wildlife_crime.pdf

Contacts

Florian Keil, Coordinator of the Common Information Management, Communication and Outreach Team of the UNEP/CMS and UNEP/AEWA Secretariats, tel: +49 (0)228 815 2451), e-mail: florian.keil@unep.org

Veronika Lenarz, Public Information, UNEP/CMS Secretariat, tel: +49 (0)228 815 2409 ; e-mail: vlenarz@cms.int