An_Hand_Ep 366261027

The Trafficked Wild and Exotic Animal Trade

Our topics for this week are

- **Wildlife Trafficking and its Impacts**
- **Trafficked Species and Estimated Losses**
- **Laws and Enforcement Against Illegal Trafficking of Animals**

Size of Wildlife Trafficking and its Impacts

Wildlife trade is whenever people sell or exchange wild animal resources, live animals or wild animal products. Wildlife trade is easiest to track when it is international because of it being required checkpoints. Wildlife trade is the second-biggest direct threat to species after habitat destruction.

Wildlife trafficking is a multi-billion-dollar global criminal industry in illegal trading of wild animals. It is valued at up to $20 billion annually, ranking among the largest illicit trades in the world alongside drugs, weapons, and human trafficking. The global illegal pet trade is valued at $10 billion annually, with 70% of profits going to transnational criminal organizations.

Animal trafficking poses significant threats to biodiversity and ecosystems. The illegal trade of wild and exotic animal species accelerates the extinction of endangered species, destabilizing ecosystems and reducing biodiversity. Approximately 60% of all known threatened species face extinction due in part to illegal wildlife trade. Natural habitats become imbalanced, affecting food chains and habitat health. The risk of zoonotic diseases is increased. Illegal trafficking of animals is often linked to international corruption and organized crime.

Some Trafficked Animals and Estimated Losses

The most trafficked animals are:

- Pangolins, considered the most trafficked mammals in the world, poached in Africa and Asia for their keratin scales that are used in traditional medicine and for their bushmeat. They may have contributed to the mutation of COVID-19 resulting in its ability to affect humans.

- Black and White Rhinos are hunted and mutilated by organized criminal syndicates for their keratin horns, for sale in Asian markets.
- African Elephants are killed for ivory tusks which has led to a loss of 90% of their populations in the wild over the last century. In the last 10 years alone, there has been a 30% decline in African elephant populations. Over 30,000 African elephants are poached each year, with 90% of ivory smuggled to Asia.
- Orangutans and other primates from Borneo and Sumatra are captured and have been reduced to endangered populations for the exotic pet trade or as status symbols.
- Tigers and other big cats are poached for skins, bones, and body parts used in traditional medicine or sold by illegal private breeding facilities for body parts or canned hunts.
- Reptiles and tropical birds are captured in massive numbers to be sold globally as exotic pets. The illegal pet trade has caused local extinctions of 12 bird species in Southeast Asia since 2000. Both birds and reptiles are easily smuggled due to their size inside clothing, baggage, hidden compartments in vehicles, among other options. Reptiles are generally silent and may require little water and infrequent feeding. Trade in reptiles and birds can also lead to escape and biopollution leading to depletion or elimination of native species.

If purchasing reptiles or birds as pets, buyers should insist on evidence the animals were captive-bred and legally traded. Otherwise, there can be legal consequences.

Laws and Enforcements Against Illegal Trafficking of Wildlife

There are national laws and enforcement, plus global efforts, intended to control the illegal trafficking of wildlife. In the United States there is the Lacey Act of 1900, which bans the illegal trade of fish, wildlife, and plants. It also includes provisions for regulating the importation of species deemed injurious to humans or the environment, requiring permits for their entry into the U.S. In addition, there is the Big Cat Public Safety Act of 2022 regulating captive big cats. The law imposes new restrictions on the breeding, possession, and sale of certain big cat species, enhancing conservation efforts.

Global organizations like TRAFFIC (Trade Record Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) use AI-assisted X-ray scanners, DNA forensics, and online monitoring to intercept shipments and curb black-market demand.

In 2022, over 15,000 individuals were convicted of wildlife crimes globally, with 3,000 receiving prison sentences exceeding 10 years. The enforcement of wildlife protection laws has increased by 40% since 2018, with 80% of enhanced efforts focusing on transnational networks.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

1. **Approximately 60% of all endangered animal species are due to illegal trafficking of the animals or their parts.**
2. **Nearly 70% of the profits from illegal pet trade goes to transnational criminal organizations.**
3. **Buyers of non-indiginous reptiles and birds should insist on proof of captive breeding and being legally traded.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, ***Animal Handling and Physical Restraint***, ***Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling, and Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling*** all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 350 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.

She said he was a real stand-up chameleon