

A satellite view of the Earth from space, showing the Americas (North and South America) in the center. The continents are green and brown, surrounded by blue oceans and white clouds. The title text is overlaid in the center.

WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING IN THE AMERICAS



Vulnerable Region

The Americas (North America, Central America, the Caribbean and South America) are home to the widest array of plants and animals in the world. These lands encompass the Amazon rainforest—the single most biologically diverse area on the planet—the Andes Mountains, the Mesoamerican reef and many more beautiful and unique habitats that support thousands of species not found anywhere else in the world.



AMAZON RAINFOREST © NEIL PALMER/CIAT

Valuable Wildlife

Unfortunately, the irreplaceable wildlife and habitats found in the Americas are disappearing. Since the 1970s, **biodiversity has declined by 83 percent** in some areas, largely due to overexploitation and unsustainable use. Legal and illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products is a large part of this exploitation, with the Americas serving as a source, transit and consumer region.

The Americas face the same perfect storm of factors that have led to rampant wildlife trafficking in other regions: They include developing countries that have thousands of imperiled and endemic species and struggle with corruption, governance and enforcement. Consequently, wildlife trafficking in the Americas is often not as high a priority as political, economic and even other environmental issues.



SEIZED AMERICAN ALLIGATOR © ROSA INDEBBAUM
SEIZED HAWKSBILL SEA TURTLE © ROSA INDEBBAUM



Endemic wildlife is part of the natural heritage of a country and region and should be protected as such. It can also generate significant revenue from people willing to spend thousands of dollars to see wild animals in their native habitat. This sustainable ecotourism is far more economically valuable than a one-time deal on the black market.

#WorthMoreAlive

TRAFFICKED IN THE AMERICAS

Countless species from the Americas are illegally traded to meet the global demand for wildlife and wildlife products. Here's a look at just a few of them.

Amphibians

FROGS

More than 1,500 different species of frog are native to the Americas.



Chondrichthyes

SHARKS

At least 88 species of sharks inhabit the waters of the Americas.

Depending on the species, sharks may be targeted for their fins and meat. Other shark products include oil, skins and teeth.



LAKE TITICACA FROG
© PETE OXFORD/MINDEN PICTURES/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CREATIVE

Rare and endemic frogs are frequently sought after for the international pet trade, particularly by collectors. Some of the larger species, such as the Titicaca water frog, are captured for human consumption.

At least 30 different species of iguana, terrestrial and marine, are native to the Americas.

Reptiles

IGUANAS

GREEN IGUANA © GERRY MILLER



Certain species, such as spiny-tailed iguanas, are favored for the live pet trade; others, such as the common green iguana, are targeted for the meat. Some species are even targeted for their skin, which is used to make leather products ranging from shoes to wallets.

International Support

International policy frameworks exist for combating the illegal trade in wildlife, but not all governments in the Americas have made the issue a high enough priority for effectively responding to it at either the regional or international level.

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution in 2015 urging member states to raise awareness about wildlife trafficking and to reduce demand for illegal wildlife and wildlife products.

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) adopted a resolution at its first-ever session in 2015 that strongly encouraged member states and regional economic integration organizations to implement their commitments

to fighting illegal trade in wildlife and urged all engaged in efforts to combat this trade to promote synergies, cooperate and coordinate.

The Convention on Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) adopted a resolution encouraging parties to increase awareness of wildlife crime and recommended reducing demand for illegal wildlife and wildlife products.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are set forth in *Transforming Our World: The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* specifically call for urgent action to end poaching and trafficking in protected species of flora and fauna and to address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products.



Recommended Actions

Any country in the Americas could be a source, transit or consumer country—or all three. Here are some actions any country can take to make progress in the fight against wildlife trafficking.

- **Solidify political will.** Raise the issue of wildlife trafficking at high-level fora and emphasize the urgency of addressing it at all levels of government.
- **Raise awareness.** Educate the general public and government officials about the prevalence of wildlife trafficking in the Americas.
- **Reduce demand.** Decrease demand for illegal wildlife and wildlife products by deterring potential consumers through education and increased penalties.
- **Strengthen law enforcement.** Increase capacity of wildlife enforcement officials and improve communication amongst law enforcement agencies in general.
- **Treat wildlife trafficking as a serious crime.** At all levels, address this illegal trade as a crime equivalent to trafficking in other goods.
- **Expand domestic regulations.** Make it unlawful to possess wildlife illegally harvested or traded in other countries.
- **Increase judicial capacity.** Train judges and prosecutors in the effective handling of wildlife cases, including comprehensive compilation of evidence.
- **Support cross-agency collaboration.** Promote synergies and coordination among government agencies that should be combating wildlife trafficking.
- **Increase regional cooperation.** Coordinate and communicate at a regional level to better identify trafficking.
- **Collect data.** Improve mechanisms and capacity for data collection on illegal wildlife trade routes, products and species.

“Human activities pose the
main threat to wildlife.
We must therefore be the
solution, by tackling greed,
ignorance and indifference.”

—United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon
New York, March 3, 2016

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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www.defenders.org/combating-wildlife-trafficking