

Anti-poaching experts will gather amid upswing in illegal trade

July 4 2014, by Nina Larson



Kenyan police officers look on June 5, 2014 at 302 pieces of ivory, including 228 elephant tusks, found and seized the day before in a warehouse during a raid in the port city of Mombosa

Hundreds of experts will gather in Geneva next week to discuss a "disturbing upswing" in the illegal wildlife trade, driven increasingly by ostentatious displays of wealth by the super-rich.

"We're seeing a shift from health to wealth... a significant shift away

from (demand for) traditional uses associated with health to uses associated with wealth," said John Scanlon, head of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The rich increasingly like to show off, he said, by buying things like tiger wine—made by dumping tiger carcasses into vats of rice wine—while [elephant ivory](#) is increasingly seen as an investment by speculators.

CITES is gathering some 400 experts and country representatives for a July 7-11 meeting.

"Among the high priority issues for discussion are the large scale killings of elephants for their ivory and rhinos for their horns, as well as a concerning increase in the [illegal trade](#) in Asian big cats," said the wildlife regulator.

CITES, which regulates the trade of some 35,000 animal and [plant species](#), will discuss what actions its 180 member states are taking to fight the problem. It has the power to suspend a country's trade in one or more species if they breach treaty rules.

At a meeting of all CITES members in Bangkok in March last year, several shark species and the manta ray for instance won international protection.



Palestinian fishermen collect several Manta Ray fish that were washed up on the beach in Gaza City on February 27, 2013

"This is where the rubber hits the road," Scanlon told reporters on Friday.

'Industrial-scale poaching'

Next week's gathering of CITES 19-member standing committee will be "the most significant meeting in addressing the illegal killing of the African elephant, and illicit trade in its ivory," Scanlon said.

More than 20,000 African elephants were poached last year alone for their tusks, which rake in thousands of dollars a kilo in Asia, particularly from China, according to CITES.

That number is down slightly from a peak of some 25,000 in 2011, but still exceeds the natural birthrate of the world's largest land mammal.

Today there are only about 500,000 elephants remaining in Africa, down from some 10 million at the beginning of the 20th century.

Next week's meeting will evaluate the progress made by eight African and Asian countries identified last year as the leading sources and destinations of ivory and ordered to draw up action plans.



African Parks staff prepare a sedated elephant, darted at the Zakouma National Park on February 23, 2014 during a collaring operation aimed at preserving elephants in the park

Scanlon said the "industrial-scale poaching" carried out by transnational organised criminal gangs needed to be "hit with the full force of the

law."

Rhinos are also being killed in huge numbers for the horns, prized for their supposed medicinal qualities in Asia and especially Vietnam, which will need to report next week on its efforts to fight the illegal trade.

CITES will also discuss measure to halt illegal [trade](#) in threatened plant species, with rosewood from Madagascar of particular concern.

More than 4,000 tonnes of rosewood suspected to have been illegally exported from the country has been seized in various countries since last November.

"Rosewood is being wiped out," Scanlon said, adding that Madagascar's environment minister would likely attend the Geneva meeting to explain what steps were being taken to halt the "outrageous plundering."

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