

Pangolin trade study highlights the need for urgent reforms to CITES

May 28 2015

New research by conservationists at the University of Kent suggests that in order to manage trade-threatened species more effectively the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) needs to act more upon the economic reality of wildlife trade.

In a paper published in *Biological Conservation* Dan Challender and colleagues, Professor Douglas MacMillan from Kent and Professor Stuart Harrop from the University of Sussex, critically and constructively evaluated the CITES approach to controlling trade through means of a case study on the trade in pangolins in Asia.

They discovered that pangolins continue to be in demand today for their meat and scales, and that relying on trade controls will likely prove inadequate to control trade and additional interventions will be needed. Rarity, the fact that pangolin meat is wild, illegality, high price, and the significance of conspicuous consumption in East and Southeast Asian consumer markets - where most demand exists - also suggest that trade controls may even act to stimulate demand, for example, by leading to higher prices.

Formed in 1975, CITES is the primary mechanism for controlling international wildlife trade, which is a major threat to [biodiversity conservation](#). However, that the Convention doesn't adequately contend with the complex reality of wildlife trade today is worrying for biodiversity conservation, especially in a world of rapid economic and

social change, where changing dynamic markets can lead to greater pressure on wildlife populations. For example, the seemingly increasing demand for pangolin products and other species of wildlife used in traditional medicines and as luxury foods and curios in parts of Asia

As part of its remit, CITES seeks to ensure that [international trade](#) does not threaten the survival in the wild of circa 35,000 species. It relies on precise and specific regulatory measures including trade bans and controls, which are established following an assessment of species' extinction risk, and the subsequent monitoring of trade levels. It is implemented by member states (currently numbering 181) through a system of permits, national legislation and enforcement mechanisms, and nominated national agencies.

In order to improve the management of trade-threatened species such as pangolins, Challender and colleagues recommend that CITES needs to accept and act upon the economic reality of wildlife trade and its broader socio-economic and cultural drivers.

They specifically highlight the need for improved monitoring of supply in CITES by accounting for illegal and legal trade, and of demand and prices for wildlife through national wildlife consumption surveys. They argue that this information would generate a more holistic understanding of [wildlife trade](#) and, if integrated with existing data collected within CITES, would allow for a more realistic evaluation of the performance of trade controls, and could inform interventions which go beyond regulation and address demand directly. Such interventions could include informed and targeted social marketing programmes to dissuade consumers from buying certain illegal wildlife products or business-to-business led social responsibility initiatives.

The team emphasises that without a new mechanism to record illegal trade, to understand markets and address demand, and evaluate the

impact of trade controls, as their pangolin [case study](#) demonstrates, species listed in CITES will continue to be subject to illicit and potentially detrimental trade, despite receiving protection in the Convention .

Provided by University of Kent

Citation: Pangolin trade study highlights the need for urgent reforms to CITES (2015, May 28)
retrieved 24 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2015-05-pangolin-highlights-urgent-reforms-cites.html>

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