

# Thai cops seize record three tonnes of pangolin scales

February 2 2017

## Endangered pangolins

The world's most heavily trafficked mammal

*No reliable global population estimates but drastic local declines documented*



### Behaviour

- Solitary, nocturnal
- Digs long burrows to hunt termites and for shelter
- Can climb trees
- Good swimmer

Diet: ants, termites

### Scales



- Made from keratin, the substance that also forms human hair and nails
- Sought on the black market for supposed medicinal benefits

### Defence



- Rolls into a ball
- Easy to catch for illegal meat and medicine market

### Trafficking

- Increasing **demand for their meat and body parts** is fuelling illegal hunting
- More than **1 million pangolins** believed to have been **poached** from the wild in the past decade

**CITES\* in September banned all international trade**

\*Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species



Young travel on mother's tail

Source: [CITES/savepangolins.org/IUCN](http://CITES/savepangolins.org/IUCN)

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## Endangered pangolins

Thai customs police on Thursday unveiled a massive three-tonne cache of seized pangolin scales intended for Asia's lucrative wildlife markets, where feverish demand for the 'scaly anteater' has turned it into the most trafficked mammal on earth.

The shy pangolin's brown scales are made of nothing more than

keratin—the same substance as fingernails—but are highly prized in Vietnam and China where they are misleadingly touted as bearing medicinal properties.

Soaring demand for the products has seen an estimated one million pangolins plucked from Asian and African forests over the past decade, shunting them onto the list of species at the highest risk of extinction.

On Thursday, Thai police revealed nearly three tonnes of pangolin scales, packed into white bags, that had been seized from two air cargo hauls at Bangkok's main airport.

The contraband was shipped from the Congo, smuggled through Turkey and eventually bound for Laos—a key transit hub for regional trafficking syndicates.

"This is the biggest lot (of pangolin scales) that we have seized," Police Major General Worapong Thongpaiboon, acting commander of the Natural Resources and Environment Crime Division, told AFP.

Thailand's CITES director said the final destination was almost certainly intended to be China or Vietnam, where the price of pangolin scales runs around \$1,700 per kilo.

"After (customers) clean and dry the scales they fry and mix them with traditional medicine that they believe cure cancer and enhance sexual performance," Somkiat Soontonpitakkool told AFP.

There is no peer-reviewed scientific evidence to support any medicinal properties for pangolin scales.

Steve Galster, executive director of the anti-trafficking group Freeland, applauded police's work but stressed that it fit a familiar pattern: the

products were confiscated but the criminals behind the trade remain at large.

"With [wildlife crime](#) they seize, check the box and move on," he said.

"Wildlife crime is still not high-level for most governments. They're not told from the top level to focus on this, so usually it's good enough just to do a seizure. That's the problem," he added.

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Citation: Thai cops seize record three tonnes of pangolin scales (2017, February 2) retrieved 7 August 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-02-thai-cops-seize-tonnes-pangolin.html>

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