

Nepal torches valuable wildlife parts

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A Nepali park worker burns wildlife parts seized from poachers at Chitwan National Park on May 22, 2017

Nepal destroyed thousands of valuable animal skins and other parts seized from poachers on a giant bonfire Monday in a symbolic gesture against the illegal wildlife trade.

More than 4,000 animal parts, including endangered tiger skins and rhino hides, were burned in a large pyre at Chitwan National Park, the nation's most important [conservation area](#).

"As a country committed to conservation of [wildlife](#) and biodiversity, Nepal has destroyed animal parts stored over 20 years," Maheswor Dhakal from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation told AFP.

"With this we want to send a message that these body parts of endangered [animals](#) are not meant for trade."

The stockpile included 67 tiger skins, more than 350 rhino hides, hair from elephant tails and other items.

The bonfire was timed to coincide with International Day for Biological Diversity on Monday.

Another 1,100 kilograms of ivory is still in storage since it requires a higher temperature to incinerate.

Dhakal said the storage and security of the animal specimens was also a financial burden for the small and impoverished country.

George Phocas, the regional attaché for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, said the torching of the specimens was "very significant".

"It is both a way to prevent them from going to market... and it is also a statement that the government of Nepal and the people believe that it (the animal) should be in the wild," Phocas said.

"These are priceless but they don't have a value if they are dead and in the closet."

Nepal suffered rampant poaching during a decade-long civil war that ended in 2006. The government ordered officials guarding wildlife sanctuaries to abandon their posts to fight Maoist rebels.

But conservation groups have praised the Himalayan nation for its progress since then in combating poachers, who mainly hunt tigers and rhinos in its [national parks](#).

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