

Iconic African game to be focus at world wildlife conference

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Nicci Wright, a wildlife rehabilitation expert and executive director of the African Pangolin Working Group in South Africa, holds a pangolin at a Wildlife Veterinary Hospital in Johannesburg, South Africa on Oct. 18, 2020. Iconic African wildlife such as elephants, big cats, rosewood trees, pangolins and marine turtles will be central to discussions of the World Wildlife Conference slated for Panama later in 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Themba Hadebe, File

Iconic African wildlife such as elephants, big cats and rosewood trees will be central to discussions of the World Wildlife Conference slated for Panama later this year.

The standing committee meeting of the UN wildlife [trade](#) body, called the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, which met all of last week in Lyon, France, slated these animals and trees for the main agenda of discussion during the Panama wildlife conference, scheduled for November.

The wildlife body is the highest decision-making organ on global wildlife trade. It is expected to make decisions on the resolutions set in Lyon on flagship wildlife including pangolins, West African vultures, parrots orchids, seahorses, marine turtles, Malagasy ebonies, sharks and rays.

"African nations are providing a strong example to the world of how states can collaboratively take action against illegal international trade in wildlife," said Ivonne Higuero, the secretary general of the UN wildlife agency. "In Central and West Africa, there is a new political commitment and engagement to combat the [illegal trade endangered species](#) of wild animals and plants."

Higuero added that African countries had led by example in instituting the African Carnivore Initiative, which aims to conserve lions, leopards, cheetahs and the African wild dog [species](#).



Delivery men load Chinese-style furniture made from African rosewood outside a furniture shop in Beijing, China on Oct. 23, 2012. Iconic African wildlife such as elephants, big cats, rosewood trees, pangolins and marine turtles will be central to discussions of the World Wildlife Conference slated for Panama later in 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Ng Han Guan, File

The powerful UN wildlife agency makes three distinctions for listing of wildlife according to the degree of protection needed. It also spells out commercial rules covering over 38,000 species of plants and animals, requiring member states to penalize any violation of the procedures that it sets. Each October since 2017, member states have been required to submit data on all seizures of wildlife made in the previous year. Nearly 6,000 species have been seized between 1999-2018, ranging from mammals, reptiles, corals, birds, and fish according to the UN crime

office records.

The World Wildlife Seizures Database, which is a global repository of reported wildlife confiscations compiled by the UN office on drugs and crime, is the main tool used to review worldwide illegal commercial trends. Between 1999 and 2018, there were over 180,000 seizures, covering 6,000 species spread across 149 countries represents the network of illegal wildlife trade, according to the database.

Poaching and trafficking records indicate that ivory trade saw a resurgence around 2007 and grew steadily until around 2011, before declining in 2016. The estimated number of elephants in African countries in 2006 was 556,973. This number has since decreased to the current 413,242.



An ivory statue, right, lies on top of pyres of ivory as they are set on fire in a dramatic statement against the trade in ivory and products from endangered species, in Nairobi National Park, Kenya on April 30, 2016. Iconic African wildlife such as elephants, big cats, rosewood trees, pangolins and marine turtles will be central to discussions of the World Wildlife Conference slated for Panama later in 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Ben Curtis, File

Trends of wildlife trophy seizures accumulated in the last four years reveal that there has been a shift in ivory shipments, with Lagos Port in Nigeria dominating exports and Vietnam leading as main elephant tusks importer. Previously, the Mombasa Port in Kenya held the primacy of illicit ivory shipments and China took the lead as the main importer.

UN records also indicate that the "largest flow of illicitly harvested rosewood in the past four years is coming out of Africa." Global imports of tropical hardwood logs totaled 18 million cubic meters in 2018, valued at over US\$ 3 billion. Some 82 % of the value of this import demand came from industries based in China, which currently leads the world in furniture manufacturing.

Up until 2013, one of the more prominent non-Asian sources for rosewood was Madagascar, where at least 48 species are known to occur with 47 of them being widespread on the Indian Ocean island nation. A recommendation to suspend trade in species of rosewood from Madagascar was made in 2016 and remains in place to this day.



Two-month-old orphaned baby elephant Ajabu is given a dust-bath in the red earth after being fed milk from a bottle by a keeper, as she is too young to do it herself, at an event to commemorate World Environment Day at the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust Elephant Orphanage in Nairobi, Kenya on June 5, 2013. Iconic African wildlife such as elephants, big cats, rosewood trees, pangolins and marine turtles will be central to discussions of the World Wildlife Conference slated for Panama later in 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Ben Curtis, File



Fikiri Kiponda, left, and others from the Local Ocean Conservation group carry a green turtle that was unintentionally caught in a fisherman's net, before releasing it back into the Watamu National Marine Park on the Indian Ocean coast of Kenya on Sept. 22, 2021. Iconic African wildlife such as elephants, big cats, rosewood trees, pangolins and marine turtles will be central to discussions of the World Wildlife Conference slated for Panama later in 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Brian Inganga, File



An old male lion raises his head above the long grass in the early morning, in the savannah of the Maasai Mara, south-western Kenya on July 7, 2015. Iconic African wildlife such as elephants, big cats, rosewood trees, pangolins and marine turtles will be central to discussions of the World Wildlife Conference slated for Panama later in 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Ben Curtis, File

"The rosewood crisis has been devastating West African forests and the livelihoods of its people for almost a decade," said Raphael Edou, the Africa program manager of the environmental group.

In 2018, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature classified redwood as "endangered." China, Vietnam, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, the European Union, Japan and Malaysia remain the main destinations of trafficked rosewood, accounting for three-quarters of all logs seized globally.

Pangolins in Africa are increasingly being hunted for their meat and their scales. The bulk of pangolin exports come from Nigeria, Guinea, Liberia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo and Gabon. According to the wildlife database, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Congo-Brazzaville are hubs and logistics nodes of pangolins' transshipment in Africa, with China as the largest importer. In 2016 due to overexploitation of pangolins, the wildlife body placed a global trade ban.

While the Lyon standing committee this last week highlighted the plight of Africa's [wildlife](#), decisions aimed at curbing illegal trade and the future of the continent's iconic species will be decided by officials at the Panama conference.

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