



# WILDLIFE CRIME TECH CHALLENGE

ISSUE 3: CONSUMER DEMAND

## Reduce Consumer Demand

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Over the last decade demand for illegal wildlife and wildlife parts has boomed, evidenced by rising prices for these products even as poaching reaches unprecedented levels. This trend is most widely apparent among iconic species such as elephants, rhinos, and tigers, but is clear across a range of avian, terrestrial, and marine species. As recent growth in wildlife trafficking is primarily driven by increased demand, solutions that seek to reduce demand will be critical to solving the problem.

Although speculation in certain types of illegal wildlife and wildlife parts is a growing concern, they are more frequently purchased as status symbols, consumer goods, or as pets. Status symbols include fine art work and decorations. Consumer goods include trinkets and curios, alternative medicines or drugs, food, and clothing. Pets include a wide swath of fauna such as tropical fish, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and large mammals.

As such, demand for wildlife and wildlife parts is largely driven by consumer tastes rather than economic need. This means that perhaps the most significant barriers standing in the way of lower consumption are preferences, which can be socially constructed, and the information available to consumers. Technology is clearly a good distributor of information, but it has also shown to be an effective medium through which to influence social behavior across a variety of public policy arenas.<sup>1</sup> This suggests that technology may have an important role to play in reducing demand for illegally traded wildlife and wildlife parts.

## We are seeking innovative solutions to two problem areas

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The Challenge is looking for technology or technology-enabled approaches, methods, or processes that can:

- Address harmful societal norms that make it acceptable to consume illegal wildlife or wildlife parts
- Raise consumer awareness about the illegality and negative impact of buying illegal wildlife parts

Possible solutions include, but are not limited to, social media campaigns, mobile technology applications, and social video games with anti-trafficking messages.

## Current state of the issue: drivers of demand

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The demand for illegal wildlife and wildlife parts and products is driven by a diverse set of social and cultural forces. Some are historical. Shark fin soup, turtle meat, and tiger bone have been consumed for centuries as food or medicine. The practice of keeping exotic birds as pets is just as old. Yet contemporary demand also reflects modern consumption trends. Illegal wildlife parts are used today as party drugs, to signal social status, or as gifts that show respect to authority figures. Examples include rhino horn, elephant ivory, and trinkets made from the casque of the helmeted hornbill.

Further, patterns of demand for illegally traded wildlife and wildlife parts and products differ across the world. In East Asia, both elephant ivory and culinary delicacies, such as bear paw soup, are aspirational goods for a population that is growing richer. China is now the world's largest market for elephant ivory, having overtaken Japan and the United States in the last several years. Most of the recent growth in demand for rhino horn can be traced to Vietnam, where it is sold as a hangover remedy, cancer cure, or party drug. Studies of demand have found that in general, consumers of threatened wildlife products in Asia are educated and affluent men aged 30 and over who are in positions of influence and power, including businessmen and senior government and military officials.<sup>2</sup>

In the United States, illegal wildlife and wildlife parts are primarily sought as exotic pets, hunting trophies, souvenirs, and luxury fashion items. An important component of this demand is related to tourism, more specifically cruise ship tourism. For example, in 2006, a TRAFFIC investigation found 50,000 hawksbill turtle products for sale in just over a week throughout markets in a single port in the Dominican Republic

that caters to cruise ship passengers.<sup>3</sup> The pet trade is also represents an important driver of wildlife trafficking, and it goes beyond birds and reptiles. For example, there are more tigers held captive on private American property than are left in the wild. Some 5,000 tigers are held privately by US individuals, of which only 6% are in the care of accredited zoos.<sup>4</sup>

## Current efforts to reduce demand

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Governments and organizations acknowledge that demand reduction is a critical component of halting wildlife trafficking. In February 2014, roughly 40 countries, among them the U.S., China, and Vietnam, signed the London Declaration on wildlife trafficking, which incorporated a pledge to address both supply and demand side issues related to the trade. At a follow-up conference in Kasane, Botswana in March 2015, governments committed to strengthen private sector partnerships for demand reduction and to improve their understanding of effective demand reduction strategies. This speaks to the high level commitment of governments around the world to this issue, and the ready availability of public sector partners.

A number of organizations have rolled out demand reduction initiatives in major consumer countries around the world, some of which have been quite successful.

### *Examples of efforts to address harmful social norms*

- Advocacy organizations use public service announcements with celebrities and social icons to relay the message that consuming threatened wildlife is 'not cool.' This has included web and social media outreach.
- In 2012, consumption of shark fin in Hong Kong fell by 50%, an improvement which the chairman of the Shark Fin Trade Merchants Association credited to the work of international advocacy organizations.<sup>5</sup>
- TRAFFIC has held workshops and meetings that have encouraged leading practitioners of traditional medicine in China and Vietnam to make important statements against using threatened species in traditional medicines.<sup>6</sup>
- The international Slow Food movement, originally focused on promoting traditional and local cuisine, has developed an advocacy campaign on sustainable fisheries called Slow Fish that is affecting how western consumers make decisions on buying fish.<sup>7</sup>

### *Examples of public education/consumer awareness initiatives*

- Advocacy organizations partner with technology companies to leverage social media platforms with the goal of reducing consumer demand. One organization's efforts in China have raised awareness among consumers of the fact that ivory comes from killing elephants. Campaigns like *Give Peace to Elephants*, *Say No to Ivory Gifts* rely on clever Chinese-language word play to deliver messages that resonate with local audiences.
- In Vietnam, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) launched a rhino horn campaign that has reached 65 million people via mobile phone text messaging.<sup>8</sup>
- In late 2014, Rovio Entertainment, a video game maker held a gaming tournament to raise awareness about the surging illegal trade in pangolins. In the game, players free illegally captured pangolins and, in the process, learn about the poaching and trafficking of these animals. The company also created a video series in which a prominent conservation spokesman discusses tackling the illegal demand for pangolins.<sup>9</sup>
- Seafood Watch, a program of the Monterey Bay Aquarium, provides US consumers with convenient tools to determine if a seafood product was sustainably harvested, or whether its consumption is likely to be the result of illegal fishing or harmful practices.<sup>10</sup>

## The way forward

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It is widely acknowledged that much more needs to be done to reduce demand for illegal wildlife and wildlife parts. Based on a review of existing initiatives, some general principles to consider when designing new solutions include:

- Consumer profiles must be better understood. TRAFFIC has critiqued past campaigns as being too general and lacking a real understanding of how to influence specific groups of consumers.
- Projects should prioritize outreach to the private sector. In particular, there should be more advocacy with companies and high profile CEOs to adopt zero-tolerance policies toward trade and consumption of threatened wildlife – especially those companies working in tourism, transportation, infrastructure development, and extractive industries.
- Anti-wildlife trafficking messages must be linked with trusted spokespeople. Awareness campaigns have employed influential role models and social icons, such as actors and sports stars, but this needs to be broadened to non-traditional actors and targeted to each consumer group to make consumption socially unacceptable.
- Campaigns must utilize new media and emphasize public engagement and participation. With increasingly young and savvy consumers, new innovations in social media should be tracked and more widely and creatively used. A particularly relevant approach here may be gaming.
- Conservationists have generally lacked the resources to conduct adequate evaluation of their efforts at demand reduction or to fully capture lessons learned, and the ability to adapt a message or its delivery mechanism as its effects become clear will be important.

The suggestions presented in this document are simply intended to spur ideas. USAID encourages applicants with innovative solutions other than those explicitly mentioned.

## Useful links

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- TRAFFIC: Understanding Chinese consumer motivation accessible at <http://www.traffic.org/home/2010/1/28/understanding-chinese-consumer-motivation-the-key-to-control.html>
- TRAFFIC: Pioneering research reveals new insights into the consumers behind rhino poaching accessible at <http://www.traffic.org/home/2013/9/17/pioneering-research-reveals-new-insights-into-the-consumers.html>
- TRAFFIC: Creative experts devise multi-layered strategies to curtail demand for tigers and other endangered species accessible at <http://www.traffic.org/home/2011/11/25/creative-experts-devise-multi-layered-strategies-to-curtail.html>

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Cohn et al. "Promoting behavior change from alcohol use through mobile technology," 2011, or Centola, Damon, "The Spread of Behavior in an Online Social Network Experiment." *Science* (2010)

<sup>2</sup> UNODC, 2010

<sup>3</sup> Reuter and Allan, 2006, *Tourists, Turtles, and Trinkets: A look at the trade in marine turtle products in the Dominican Republic and Colombia*. TRAFFIC North America

<sup>4</sup> World Wildlife Fund, 2014, [online] <http://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/more-tigers-in-american-backyards-than-in-the-wild>

<sup>5</sup> WILDAID, 2013, [online] <http://www.wildaid.org/news/wildaids-campaign-helps-reduce-shark-fin-demand>

<sup>6</sup> TRAFFIC, 2015, [online] <http://www.traffic.org/home/2015/1/30/traditional-medicine-practitioners-in-viet-nam-pledge-to-pro.html>

<sup>7</sup> Slow Food, 2015, [online] <http://www.slowfood.com/slowfish/>

<sup>8</sup> World Wildlife Fund, 2015, [online]

[http://wwf.panda.org/about\\_our\\_earth/species/problems/illegal\\_trade/wildlife\\_trade\\_campaign/](http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/species/problems/illegal_trade/wildlife_trade_campaign/)

<sup>9</sup> Rovio, 2014, [online] <http://www.rovio.com/en/news/blog/581/roll-with-the-pangolins-in-angry-birds-friends-and-help-save-these-unique-animals>

<sup>10</sup> Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch, 2015, [online] <http://www.seafoodwatch.org/>