



WCS & the Illegal Wildlife Trade

Our approach to combatting wildlife trafficking, from source to market



Wildlife trafficking poses threats to wildlife and people.

The illegal wildlife trade, also known as wildlife trafficking, is devastating for wildlife and human communities around the world. This illegal trade in wild animals and their parts threatens hundreds of species, such as elephants, tigers, pangolins, and macaws. Wildlife trafficking benefits from corruption and weak governance along the trade chain, and it further weakens rule of law and security for communities living alongside wildlife and wild places.

WCS is working to counter wildlife trafficking around the globe.

The [Wildlife Conservation Society \(WCS\)](https://www.wcs.org) is a non-profit, international non-governmental organization (NGO) that has been working for more than 120 years to save wildlife and wild places. Our goal is to dismantle wildlife trafficking networks that drive the illegal hunting and illegal trade of endangered, threatened, or otherwise protected species.

We seek to do this by a) **increasing the risk of wildlife trafficking** as a criminal, commercial enterprise by identifying, targeting and removing—through established judicial systems—the most important criminals in trafficking networks, and b) **decreasing the potential reward** for trafficking through legal reform in markets that criminals use to launder illegal wildlife.

Our approach is proactive—our conservation work in the field helps us to evaluate potential and emerging threats to wildlife, and to refine our strategy accordingly.

- We work closely with government partners to combat wildlife trafficking in **more than half of the 60+ countries** where we have programs, including major source, transit and consumer countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America
- We are developing **sophisticated intelligence gathering and analysis capabilities** in multiple regions to ensure that our interventions are successful and cost-effective.
- We have **over 100 years of translating field conservation work into policy change** at the national and international levels.

To learn more, visit www.wcs.org/our-work/solutions/combating-wildlife-trafficking and www.wcs.org/cites



WCS uses a strategic approach to approach a complex threat.

INTELLIGENCE-LED ENFORCEMENT: WCS goes beyond disrupting wildlife trafficking at established choke points, which can change rapidly along with trade routes. We focus on gathering and managing information on the activities of wildlife trafficking networks and the criminals that run them. We help our government partners convert actionable intelligence into real action through long-term support and mentoring, building on short-term capacity building or training workshops. This approach has enhanced enforcement operations and resulted in the successful arrest, prosecution, and conviction of targeted wildlife criminals in multiple countries.

IMPROVING LEGAL FRAMEWORKS: WCS works at the national and international levels to ensure that governments strengthen wildlife crime laws and improve their enforcement, as well as to make it more difficult for consumers to purchase illegally or unsustainably sourced wildlife products. We are working to ensure that criminal justice systems and relevant government agencies have robust laws and penalties for combatting wildlife crime, and that they follow through on prosecution, conviction and sentencing of criminals who are convicted. At the international level, we work through intergovernmental treaties such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and other fora (e.g. United Nations General Assembly) on collaborative approaches.

SPECIES AND GEOGRAPHIES: WCS focuses on a suite of species that are of high commercial value, protected under national law or international treaties, and where we bring specific expertise and add value to ongoing efforts. Our efforts include a focus on African and Asian elephants; rhinoceroses; pangolins; big cats including tigers, lions, snow leopards, jaguars, pumas, and cheetahs; tortoises and freshwater turtles; helmeted hornbills; cage birds such as parrots and macaws; and sharks and rays. WCS works to combat wildlife trafficking of these species in about 30 countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America and Europe—about half of the 60+ countries where we are engaging in field conservation action (see below for an indicative map).

MEASURING OUR SUCCESS: WCS measures the impact of counter trafficking work through science-based monitoring efforts for many populations of key species (such as elephants and tigers), as well as ongoing efforts to track illegal killing and conduct market surveys of species in trade. These monitoring efforts for wildlife have also been critical in policy advocacy around illegal wildlife trade.

