

*Lakhtsutko P. A., Myadelets A. V. Illicit Trafficking of Endangered Species of Fauna*

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At the current stage of the international trade, customs officers all over the world happen to be in grave charge of dealing with an enormous number of issues in variable spheres of vital activity. A professional customs officer is a multi-skilled versatile person whose position requires providing legislative security of the country and protecting the environment of the entire world simultaneously.

The nature-enforcement aspect to date is more significant than at any time. According to a recent study by the World Animal Protection and WildCRU, Oxford University's wildlife conservation research team, officials seized more than 60,000 wild creatures between 2010 and 2014. About a fifth of those were threatened species. And these statistics represent just the "tip of a far greater iceberg". Over the past 400 years 50 bird and mammal species were driven to extinction. Meanwhile the illegal trade of the endangered animals annually reaches 200 million dollars USA. At the same time the black market for wildlife is currently estimated to be worth more than 20 billion dollars USA. It is also proved that it will take at least 5 million years for speciation to rebuild the biodiversity we are likely to destroy during only this century. All mentioned appalled us and ensured in the importance of our future profession to be aware of ways to identify rare endangered species of fauna.

So the objectives of our work are to comprehend the reasons why such a cruel type of crime is so enormously expanded, perceive the leading aims of smugglers, draw attention to the global problem of animals' extinction and promote the enhancing of customs officers' awareness in the scope of protecting rare kinds of fauna.

Wildlife smuggling or trafficking involves the illegal gathering, transportation, and distribution of animals and their derivatives. One should note here that the main regions/countries of the illegal export are Africa, South America, South-East Asia, and Russia. And those of the illegal import are China, South-east Asia, Middle East, Europe, North America, and Russia.

Smugglers move live wild animals to other nations, where they are sold as exotic pets. It often leads to pain and death of these animals, who can easily suffer from malnutrition, loneliness, and stress of confinement to an unnatural and uncomfortable environment. Some are killed to supply the demand for their body parts. What is more, many animals die along the way.

When trappers take animals away from their natural habitats, the animals often change hands several times through intermediaries and exporters, and they endure grueling transport conditions. For instance, parrots might have their beaks and feet taped and might be stuffed into plastic tubes that can easily be hidden in luggage. Stolen bird and reptile eggs are concealed in special vests so that couriers can bypass X-ray machines at airports. Baby turtles have been taped so that they are trapped inside their shells and shoved by the dozen into tube socks. Infant pythons have been shipped in CD cases. Isn't it cruel?

Animals which do survive often become a subject of an inadequate care. Caretakers are often unprepared or unable to provide exotic animals with proper environment, and many of them will die or be abandoned. According to the statistics, 90 percent of exported reptiles die within a year.

But what goods do traffickers make money from? The objects of export-import are animals and their derivatives – skin, antlers, skulls, claws, feathers, tusks, stuffers, internal organs, caviar and so on. First of all, let us say how they get such derivatives: poachers slice the face off living rhinos to steal their horns; militia groups use helicopters to shoot down elephants for their tusks; factory farmers breed captive tigers to marinate their bones for medicinal wine and to sautee their flesh for the dinner plate; bears are cramped for a lifetime in tiny cages to have their gall bladders drained regularly for liver tonic.

Let us consider another essential disadvantage of this phenomenon. We live in the world, - where everything has its consequences. First of all, let's talk about ecology.

The main problem is that traffickers are interested in seeking out truly rare animals, the cost of which is extremely high on the black market. But because of their high habitat specificity and low population densities, rare species are dramatically prone to extinction, which leads to devastating ecological consequences:

- The loss of pollinators or disruption of pollination systems may cause reduced seed and fruit production and ultimately, plant extinction;
- Lack of animals eating certain species of plants definitely results in the excessive spread of the latter-mentioned ones;
- Since animals influence greatly one another, local food chain disruption or another reason for imbalance may end with co-extinctions (the loss of a species upon the loss of another) or, vice versa, lead to extra population of certain species.

The Consequences for the health of people must also be taken into consideration:

- Many species have unique bodily processes that may hold the key to any number of medical breakthroughs, but reduced biodiversity will rob humans of valuable medical advancements;

- The transmission of numerous diseases from animals to people, which may lead to infection of countries and continents. For instance, some monkeys are capable of carrying HIV, smallpox, flu and others, while snails are hosts for many stomach parasites. Parrots and other exotic birds can transfer potentially deadly pathogens such as psittacosis, salmonella, and even avian tuberculosis to humans.

Moreover, wildlife smuggling terribly influences the economy of any country:

- Smuggling creates a black economy and national budgets of many countries fail to receive considerable amount of revenues in the form of taxes and customs duties;

- Certain countries are becoming less appealing for tourists hence their income is descending;

- Some indigenous people who are closely linked to the environment lose their sources of livelihood;

- Degradation of ecosystems caused by illegal trades of fauna demands extra financial means, - and investments. Thus potential economic resources of our future generations are being wasted away.

You would probably think now, whether the juice is worth the squeeze? Any criminal who wants to make money with minimal risk would answer 'yes' without hesitation. The existing laws and penalties facilitate such attractive business with high returns.

Let us start by considering the facts. Smuggling in Belarus is considered as a criminal offence only in case the cost of the goods is 2000 times bigger than 1 base rate. Therefore criminals try to take out goods in small quantities in order to avoid responsibility. Come to think of it, the cost of CITES-protected objects does not exceed this amount of money.

Traffickers are brought only to administrative responsibility in the form of fines, the amount of which is insignificant in comparison with the profit they would have got in case of realization of their goods.

We have not mentioned the term CITES, have we? It would be reckless not to explain what it means. As the trade in wild animals crosses borders between countries it become obvious that the safeguarding of certain species from over-exploitation requires international cooperation. Consequently in the 1960s CITES (the Convention on International Trade in

Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) was formed. The CITES is an international agreement between governments whose aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.

The species covered by the CITES are listed in three Appendices, according to the degree of protection they need. Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction. The trade in specimens of these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances. Appendix II includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled in order to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival. This Appendix contains species that are protected in at least one country, which has asked other CITES Parties for assistance in controlling the trade. International trade in specimens of species listed in Appendix III is allowed only on presentation of the appropriate permits or certificates.

For many years CITES has been among the conservation agreements with the largest membership, with now 183 Parties. The Republic of Belarus acceded to the Convention in 1994.

The CITES protects an immense number of species and obviously that causes difficulties keeping in mind all of them. And here we face the lack of precise knowledge Belarusian customs officers need to identify CITES's species. Performing expert analysis is not always sensible as involvement of zoologists leads to time delays and additional expenditures. In some cases authorities simply decide not to confiscate the animals because they have no idea what to do with them. In that regard we suggest solutions to the problem: holding the training seminars, including the involvement of the Secretariat of the Convention CITES's representatives; publication of manuals which would contain the description of the main ways to cross illegally the customs border with the objects of the CITES; broader application of canine services.

Besides that, in our opinion the best option for further training is to create a special electronic information base for customs officers. It would contain all necessary data in reference to species fell within the scope of the CITES, namely, detailed description of a specimen and its derivatives with photos, examples of the most widespread ways to smuggle it and methods to fight it. The base should be prepared taking into account particularities of Belarusian fauna and the experience of leading European countries. Also penalties for illegal trafficking of endangered species of wild fauna must be strengthened to prevent criminals from their destructive business.

In conclusion, we can say that the relevant problem of the illegal trade of exotic animals has been considered from every angle in our work. From these arguments you could agree that this kind of crime is undoubtedly destructive for national economics, nature and human beings. Here we tried to take up the vital question of inhuman treatment of animals, lack of professional preparedness of the government for this kind of relationship, the irreversible results of the trade and the actual situation of smuggling. An important point is that we suggest how to settle the matter. So it is up to everybody to decide whether this subject is worth attention or not. But you should keep in mind: for Mother Nature an animal is as important as you are.

*Лахуцко П.А., Мяделец А. В. Незаконный оборот видов дикой фауны, находящихся под угрозой исчезновения*

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На современном этапе развития международной торговли представителям таможенной службы приходится решать задачи в самых разных областях человеческой жизнедеятельности. В профессиональные задачи таможенника входит как задача обеспечения правовой защиты государства, так и обязанность сохранности окружающей среды всего мира.

На настоящий момент природоохранный аспект занимает более важную позицию, чем когда-либо. Согласно проведенным исследованиям Всемирного общества защиты животных и WildCRU, сотрудники таможенной службы конфисковали более 60 000 диких животных в период с 2010 по 2014 г., пятая часть которых были вымирающими видами. И данная статистика – это лишь «вершина айсберга». За последние 400 лет 50 видов птиц и млекопитающих были «стерты с лица земли». При этом незаконная трансграничная торговля животными, находящимися под угрозой исчезновения, ежегодно достигает 200 миллионов долларов США. В то же время прибыль черного рынка, специализирующегося на редких животных, на данный момент оценивается в 20 миллиардов долларов США. Доказано, что как минимум 5 миллионов лет потребуется природе, чтобы восстановить то биоразнообразие видов, которое человечество, вероятно, уничтожит на протяжении одного века.