

Why illegal wildlife trade flourishes in India

[India's forests and wildlife have been under threat](#) for a while not just from mindless development but also the illegal trade in flora and fauna. [Last week, a notorious wildlife trafficker with international links](#), who was involved in smuggling the body parts of 125 tigers and 1,200 leopards, was convicted by a Madhya Pradesh court along with four other traffickers and awarded four years rigorous imprisonment. For the crime he has committed, four years in jail is disproportionately small.

HOW STRONG IS INDIA'S LEGAL FRAMEWORK

This is not to say that India doesn't have a strong legal and policy framework to regulate and restrict the wildlife trade. Trade in over 1,800 species of wild animals, plants and their derivatives, is prohibited under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Yet illegal wild animal trade takes place all over the country.

Porous international land borders and a constrained enforcement exacerbate the situation. Native and non-native species are being brought into illegal trafficking and this threatens biodiversity and conservation in the wild.

A WWF-India document lists all that is illegally traded: From bird eggs to marmosets, and a moth to tiger, a large number of wildlife species bear price tags put on them by poachers and illegal traffickers.

India is also a member of the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora) since 1976. CITES is an international agreement between governments that aims to ensure that the international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. CITES works by subjecting international trade in specimens of selected species listed on Appendices to certain controls.

WHAT INDIA NEEDS TO DO TO CURB WILDLIFE TRADE

But arrests such as the one made in [Madhya Pradesh shows India has a long way to go if it has to curb such illegal trade](#).

In India like many other countries, the problem is not of the laws but that these may be poorly communicated and poorly implemented and enforced.

Often, positive efforts to address wildlife trade concerns are undermined by lack of political will and governance failures.

Without political backing, disincentives for over-exploitation and illegal trade, such as penalties for legal infringements, are all too often weak.

According to WWF-India, there is an urgent need for knowledge and action to bring the legal wildlife trade within sustainable levels and stop all illegal trade that has threatened and even pushed many species towards extinction.

END