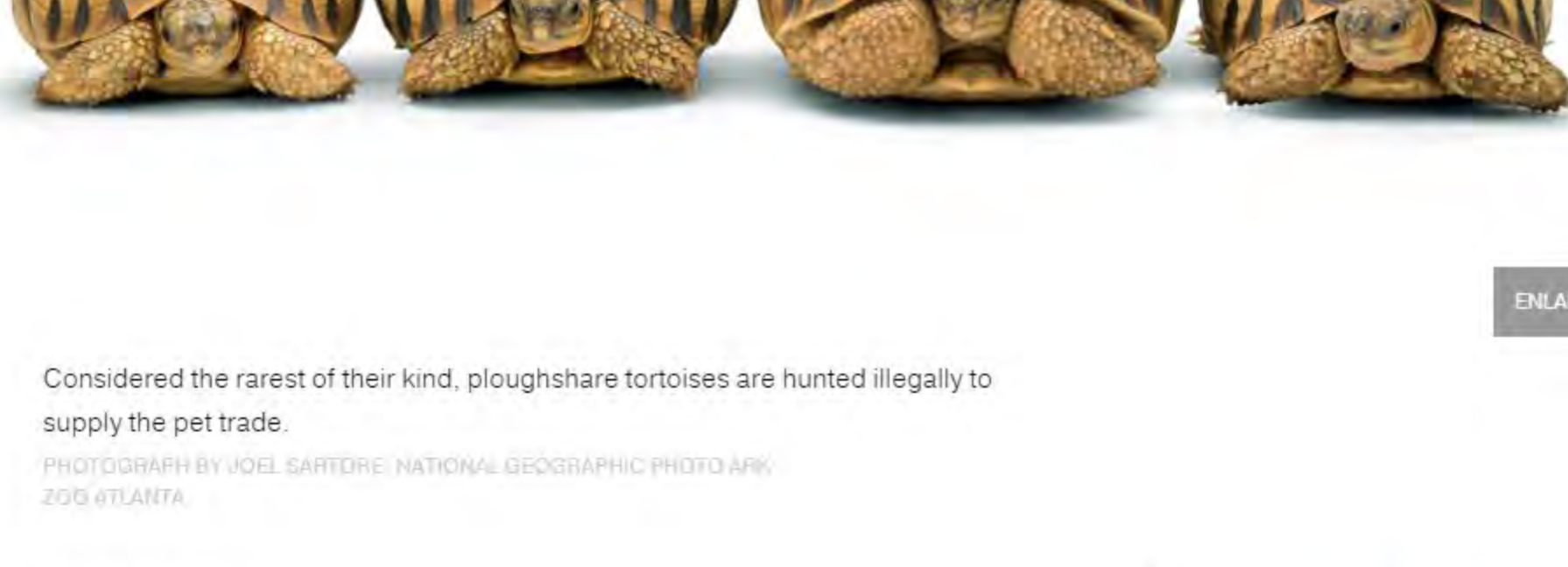


WILDLIFE WATCH

Poaching May Drive These 7 Species to Extinction

On Endangered Species Day, a look at animals threatened by illicit hunting and commercial trade.



ENLARGE

Considered the rarest of their kind, ploughshare tortoises are hunted illegally to supply the pet trade.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOEL SARTORE, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PHOTO ARCHIVE, 2009 ATLANTA



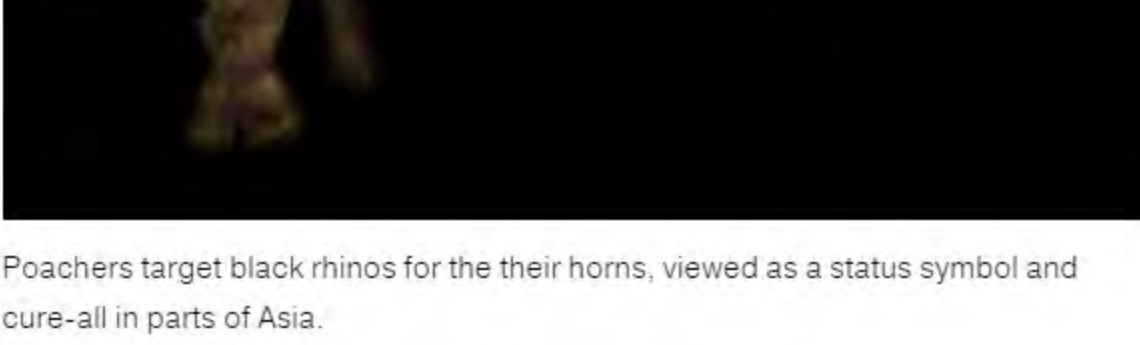
By Jani Actman

PUBLISHED MAY 20, 2016



From illegal hunting for the exotic pet trade to illegal hunting for fun, criminal acts have a devastating impact on some of the world's most loved species, as well as some of the more obscure. To mark Endangered Species Day, Wildlife Watch looks at how crime jeopardizes seven animals facing extinction.

Ploughshare Tortoise: With its distinctive gold and black shells, this tortoise is vividly appealing—and now the rarest of its kind on Earth. Only about 500 ploughshares hold on in the forests of northwestern Madagascar. Hunted to supply the international pet trade, the creatures can fetch thousands of dollars on the international black market. Things are so bad that last year conservationists engraved some of the tortoises' shells with a serial number and the initials "MG" (for Madagascar) to ward off poachers.



Poachers target black rhinos for their horns, viewed as a status symbol and cure-all in parts of Asia.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOEL SARTORE, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PHOTO ARCHIVE

Black Rhino: The smaller of the two African rhino species, the black rhino is in trouble in its East and Southern African range. That's because poachers have killed so many, hacking off their horns to supply the illicit trade. Only about 5,000 black rhinos are left in the wild. Buyers in Vietnam and China—the main markets—view rhino horn as a status symbol and think it can cure everything from cancer to hangovers. It can't: The horn consists of keratin, the same stuff in our nails and hair.



The world's smallest porpoise, the near-extinct vaquita, dies in gill nets intended for the endangered totoaba.

PHOTOGRAPH BY FLUPICKLURI, MINDEN PICTURES

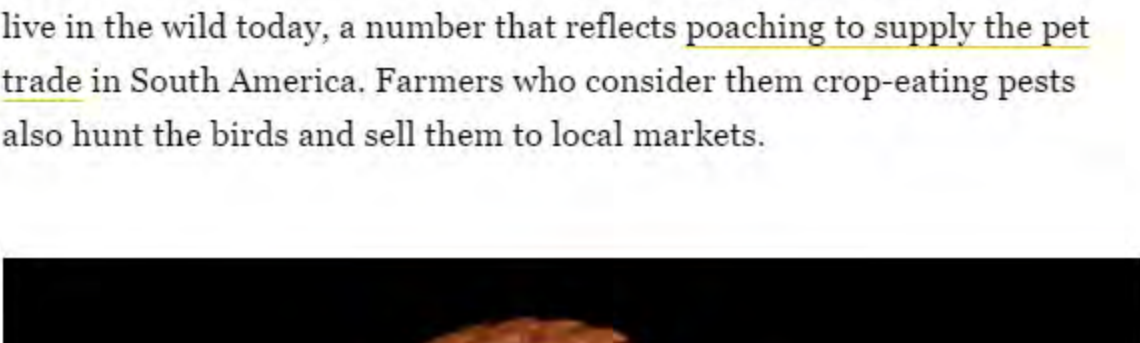
Vaquita: Criminals don't target this little porpoise, but they die at the hands of poachers anyway. They become entangled in gill nets used to illegally catch totoaba, an endangered fish found in the Gulf of California whose swim bladder—the organ that helps it float—is coveted in China for soups and medicines. The vaquita is dangerously close to extinction—only 60 remain, the Mexican government announced last Friday.



Red-fronted macaws, found in Bolivia, are plucked from the wild and sold as pets.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOEL SARTORE, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PHOTO ARCHIVE, MILLER PARK ZOO

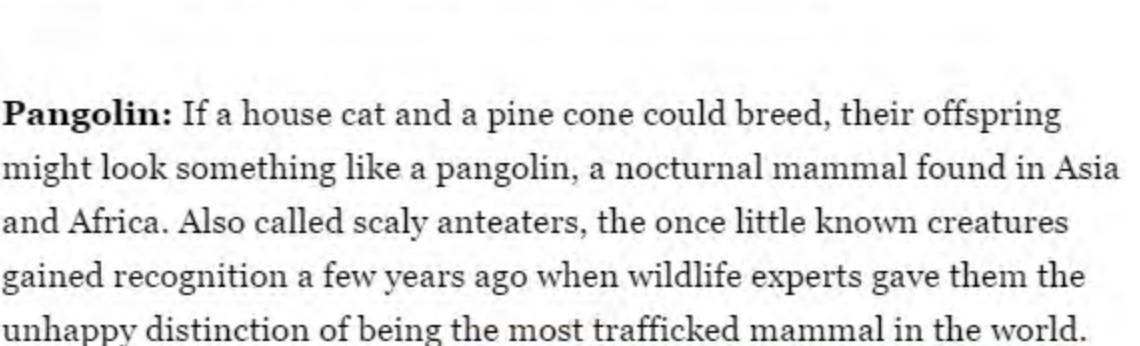
Red-Fronted Macaw: Found in the dry valleys of central Bolivia, these vocal beauties are in a dire state. Fewer than 4,000 red-fronted macaws live in the wild today, a number that reflects poaching to supply the pet trade in South America. Farmers who consider them crop-eating pests also hunt the birds and sell them to local markets.



Pangolins are considered the most trafficked mammals in the world.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOEL SARTORE, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PHOTO ARCHIVE

Pangolin: If a house cat and a pine cone could breed, their offspring might look something like a pangolin, a nocturnal mammal found in Asia and Africa. Also called scaly anteaters, the once little-known creatures gained recognition a few years ago when wildlife experts gave them the unhappy distinction of being the most trafficked mammal in the world. More than a million pangolins have been illegally plucked from the wild during the past decade to satisfy demand—mainly in China and Vietnam—for their meat and scales, used in traditional medicine.



Only three addaxes are known to remain in the wild. Hunters have targeted the antelope for fun.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOEL SARTORE, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PHOTO ARCHIVE

Addax: Poachers don't always kill endangered animals to make money. Sometimes, they're hunted for fun—like addaxes, an ethereal-looking Saharan antelope facing imminent extinction. Niger's own military, assigned to protect oil workers in the heart of addax territory, have hunted the animals for sport in violation of the law, as did migrants fleeing Libya after the collapse of the Qaddafi regime in 2011. Researchers spotted a mere three addaxes during a survey of their habitat in March.



The population of Asian elephants, poached for their ivory, dropped by 50 percent during the past century.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOEL SARTORE, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PHOTO ARCHIVE

Asian Elephant: Although most illicit ivory comes from African elephants, the illegal trade has also taken a toll on those in Asia, whose numbers have plummeted by 50 percent during the past century. Asian elephants, which are smaller than their African counterparts, with rounder ears, are targeted for their tusks (which only males possess) but also their meat and skin. They're also heavily threatened by habitat loss and capture from the wild to stock tourist attractions.

This story was produced by National Geographic's Special Investigations Unit, which focuses on wildlife crime and is made possible by grants from the BAND Foundation, and the Woodtiger Fund. Read more stories from the SIU on Wildlife Watch. Send tips, feedback, and story ideas to ngwildlife@ngs.org.

Follow Jani Actman on Twitter.

Comment on This Story

You Might Also Like



WILDLIFE WATCH

TripAdvisor Accused of Promoting Cruel Animal...

The travel website has come under fire from animal welfare advocates for promoting and profiting from inhumane wildlife attractions.



WILDLIFE WATCH

World's Smallest Porpoise Is on the Verge of Extinction

Vaquitas' numbers have dropped precipitously because of illegal gillnet fishing.



WILDLIFE WATCH

Death of One of World's Biggest Sharks Causes Outcry

In this week's crime blotter: shark meat sales, tiger claw jewelry, and imprisonment for a turtle egg smuggling scheme.

Comment on This Story

6 comments

Sign in

18 people listening



Comment box with share button and post comment button

Newest | Oldest | Top Comments

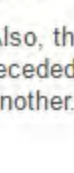


Dee Timm

7 months ago

It's really simple -too many people chasing too few goods -or resources-and than the waste =so zero population growth a real goal-too many wars displacing people and too many coming into us and disregarding our protective species laws

Like Reply



Ken Hill

2 days ago

Well, Mr. Holder, that's a bold statement for our young ones, who by the way can speak intelligently about conservation, environment, and endangered species. Try going over to Ted Talks and watching/listening to our youth speak on projects they are currently working on; don't ever cut a group out if you don't know anything about them. Some of these "kids" have plans about helping other parts of the world with their problems, and they are savvy about endangered species. And they "speak" it out because CO2 waste from, ex., a coal or natural gas fired plant IS a potent greenhouse gas.

Don't put the blame on Nat Geo for what you call "alarmism" over our CO2 emissions. Do you follow the carbon conferences worldwide? This pollution subject is argued about and discussed all over the world.

Thrown around like a steelie in a pinball machine. Have you ever looked at Madagascar? It is burning 24 x 7.

Also, the polar bear is not safe right now and is in trouble, the ice shelf that was frozen farther north has receded, the bear is unable to walk across straight land and must now jump in and swim from one block to another. I did see a polar bear exhausted from swimming and looking for food on a small block of ice.

Ken Hill, Seattle, WA

1 Like Reply



Guy Holder

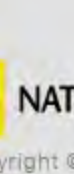
2 days ago

Conservation was once the primary goal of environmentalists. Unfortunately alarmism over our CO2 emissions has created the impression this is the bigger threat. We can thank the media and National Geographic for this shift. We are now spend a small fortune and conduct international conferences to combat a problem that can only be clearly identified in models - models that to date have been less than accurate.

The polar bear was the symbol for this movement, an animal whose numbers are stable and some multiple of what they were at the middle of the last century. The polar bear is safe because we don't want to live where they do and because we outlawed the hunting of this animal and rigorously enforced the law. Habitat destruction / encroachment and hunting / poaching have always been and remain the only threat to our environment.

It's a shame we have raised an entire generation that are clueless about conservation and our environment and believe CO2 is a poison. These kids can't speak intelligently about endangered species, population growth, access to clean water / climate plumping or a myriad of very real and verifiable problems but they can spew some misinformation about climate change or nonsense about micro-aggressions.

1 Like Reply

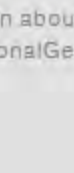


Lila Afifi

3 days ago

Absolutely awful that Endangered Species Day has to exist but I am so glad it does, awareness of how badly humans are affecting wild animals needs to be spread to all parts of the world and I'm glad Endangered Species Day exist :)

Like Reply



Elissa Tide

3 days ago

So sad... I am a graphic designer and I do a lot of animal conservation awareness posters... Check out my anti-poaching elephant piece! <https://www.instagram.com/p/BESAE4ZvoTn/>

1 Like Reply

John Hughes

3 days ago

Since these people now they are poaching endangered species for profit, maybe we need to put poachers on an endangered species list so they can be eliminated

Like Reply