
Understanding motivations as the key to addressing the illegal international trade in wildlife

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Abstract

The illegal international trade in wildlife is now of major concern to governments as well as conservationists, with 46 governments signing up to the 2014 London Declaration committing to tackle the issue at the highest level. Disrupting the criminal trade networks through which wildlife flows is critical to reducing the flow of illegal wildlife, and is the province of law enforcement agencies. However, at each end of the chain are individuals whose actions may be influenceable by conservationists, whose motivations for hunting or consuming wildlife products need to be understood in order for interventions to be successful. In this talk I highlight new research, using methods from behavioural economics and marketing, which aims to tease apart the factors driving behaviour, and explore ways to change it. My first case study comes from Uganda, where we use indirect questioning methods, choice experiments and scenario analyses to explore the reasons behind decisions to hunt in protected areas. Here, bushmeat for local sale is the primary commodity, and products destined for international markets (like ivory) are generally opportunistic byproducts. Promising interventions to change behaviour include diverting existing benefit-sharing funding towards human wildlife conflict mitigation. At the other end of the chain, consumers in south-east Asia have diverse relationships with wildlife products, including as medicine and status symbols. Using a case study of ivory and rhino horn in Viet Nam, we explore how people relate to wildlife products as luxury goods, their emotional attachment to horn and ivory compared to other luxury products. In our sample, horn and ivory are viewed mostly with indifference and associated with wealth and men. I suggest how these approaches to exploring motivations can support the development of effective, well-targeted conservation interventions.

Keywords: international trade, wildlife

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