

Chapter 11

Outside and Out of Mind: Organized Criminal Enterprises and the Fleecing of Flora and Fauna

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ABSTRACT

Organized crime is a noted facilitator of drugs, weapons, and human trafficking. Overlooked, however, is the involvement of these criminal enterprises regarding flora (i.e., plants) and fauna (i.e., animals) crimes. For example, the trafficking of wildlife and wildlife parts globally. The need to better understand the impact these criminal units is espoused by multiple stakeholders. Subsequently, this chapter will discuss the impact organized crime has on wildlife and the environment through an international lens.

INTRODUCTION

Organized crime has received a great deal of attention regarding drug and human trafficking (Jones et al., 2022). These offenses can, at times, obscure the fact that these criminal enterprises also traffic in flora (i.e., plants) and fauna (i.e., animals) (Felbab-Brown, 2017). Subsequently, crimes against wildlife and the environment go largely underenforced and underexplored (Felbab-Brown, 2017; Wolf, 2011). The obscurity of these offenses further incentivizes the draw to these criminal acts, given the lucrative ability to turn a profit with little oversight. For example, scholars have noted the value associated with the trafficking of wildlife across different species (Moreto & Pires, 2018; Nurse, 2015; Pires et al., 2023). Thus, non-profits,

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practitioners, and academics espouse the impact organized criminal units have on wildlife and the environment (Corwin, 2009; Crow e et al., 2013; Gore et al., 2023; Jacobs et al., 2014; Keskin et al., 2022; Stadler et al., 2023).

In short, institutions and individuals charged with protecting wildlife and the environment have taken notice of crimes against wildlife and the environment. The ability to inform and educate interested parties is crucial to addressing offenses against animals and the environment (Kahler et al., 2023; Moreto & Pires, 2018; Nurse, 2015). For this chapter, wildlife crime will encapsulate a multitude of different offenses ranging from poaching to the trafficking of wildlife and their parts. Moreover, environmental harm will capture actions ranging from illegal dumping toxic materials into the environment to clandestine logging operations (Burns & Lynch, 2004; Nores, 2010, 2019; Wolf, 2011). These flora- and fauna-related harms involve actions that occur on the outskirts of legal and ethical standards and outside common-place policing strategies (Felbab-Brown, 2017). Subsequently, organized crime leverages these events' obscurity and maximizes potential gains while negatively impacting the environment and wildlife.

Understanding the criminal networks and wildlife crime nexus is established through multiple information sources beyond typical academic outlets (Felbab-Brown, 2017; Moreto & Pires, 2018; Nuwer, 2018). For example, investigative journalists such as Nuwer (2018) highlight the complex structures of these enterprises, from the individuals securing wildlife or wildlife parts for transport to the individuals orchestrating the transfer of these animals or items to other parts of the world. An element consistent within the literature is that organized traffickers move prominent species (i.e., rhinos) along with lesser-known species (i.e., pangolin). Therefore, individuals and institutions interested in dismantling these networks must be cognizant of all animals.

Other outlets, such as work by wildlife enforcement practitioners, provide unique insight into wildlife and environmental crimes. Work by Nores (2010, 2019) underlines the complex issues these organized groups present to the environment and public safety. More specifically, the impact clandestine grow operations present regarding violence used by criminal groups and the environmental impact associated with illegal dumping. The latter point is magnified when the chemicals used in the illegal grow operations saturate the topsoil and radiate into water sources (Burns & Lynch, 2004; Nores, 2010, 2019). The underlying supposition to these cases is that multiple areas can be impacted initially and in the long term. Moreover, these events occur within urban centers and rural communities (Nores, 2010, 2019).

Therefore, this chapter aims to unpack what is known about the impact these groups have both domestically and internationally regarding wildlife and environmental crime. Moreover, contextual backcloths such as urban and rural landscapes will be included so motivated parties understand that the issue is not limited to a particular

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