

## Stolen Apes Counts Illegal Trade Toll

The illegal trade that sees almost 3,000 live great apes lost from the forests of Africa and Southeast Asia each year is increasingly impacting wild populations as links to organized crime grow stronger.

<u>Stolen Apes: The Illicit Trade in Chimpanzees, Gorillas, Bonobos and Orangutans</u> [PDF] is the first report to analyze the scale and scope of the illegal trade and highlights the growing links to sophisticated trans-boundary crime networks, which law enforcement networks are struggling to contain.

## Stolen Apes

, which was produced by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) through GRASP, estimates that a minimum of 22,218 great apes have been lost from the wild since 2005 – either sold, killed during the hunt, or dying in captivity – with chimpanzees comprising 64 per cent of that number.

The report examines confiscation records, international trade databases, law enforcement reports, and arrival rates from sanctuaries and rehabilitation centers between 2005 and 2011.

Stolen Apes says that each great ape confiscated or confirmed in the illegal trade represents many more that died either during the capture or the trafficking process.

Over the past seven years, a minimum of 643 chimpanzees, 48 bonobos, 98 gorillas and 1,019 orangutans are documented to have been captured from the wild for illegal trade. These figures are just the tip of the iceberg, and extrapolating from this research the report estimates that at least 2,972 great apes are lost from the wild each year. "The taking of great apes from the wild is not new – it has gone on for well over a century," said Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director. "But the current scale outlined in this report underlines how important it is that the international community and the organizations responsible for conserving endangered species remain vigilant, keeping a step ahead of those seeking to profit from such illegal activities."

All great apes are endangered and protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) as Appendix I animals.

## Yet

## Stolen Apes

reveals that the illegal trade has shifted from being a by-product of traditional conservation threats such as deforestation, mining and bushmeat hunting to a more sophisticated business driven by demand from international markets.

These markets include the tourist entertainment industry, disreputable zoos, and wealthy individuals who want exotic pets as status symbols. Great apes are used to attract tourists to entertainment facilities such as amusement parks and circuses. They are even used in tourist photo sessions on Mediterranean beaches and boxing matches in Asian safari parks.

Since 2007, standing orders from zoos and private owners in Asia have spurred the export of over 130 chimpanzees and 10 gorillas under falsified permits from Guinea alone, an enterprise that requires a coordinated trading network through Central and West Africa. A safari park in Thailand admitted in 2006 that it acquired at least 54 orangutans from the forests of Borneo and Sumatra.

"It is important to establish baseline figures for the illegal trade in great apes, even if these

numbers only hint at the devastation," said Doug Cress, coordinator of GRASP. "Great apes are extremely important for the health of forests in Africa and Asia, and even the loss of 10 or 20 at a time can have a deep impact on biodiversity."

The illicit trade is increasingly linked to organized crime, and sophisticated trans-boundary networks now move great apes along with other contraband such as ivory, arms, drugs, rhino horn and laundered money. A smuggler recently apprehended in Cameroon was transporting a live chimpanzee wedged between sacks of marijuana.

Profit margins are high for the criminal networks. The report found that a poacher may sell a live chimpanzee for US\$50, whereas the middleman will resell that same chimpanzee at a mark-up of as much as 400 per cent.

Orangutans can fetch US\$1,000 at re-sale, and gorillas illegally sold to a zoo in Malaysia in 2002 reportedly went for US\$400,000 each.

"The illegal trade in apes has little to do with poverty," said Ofir Drori, founder of the Last Great Ape Organization in Cameroon. "It is instead generated by the rich and powerful."

Law enforcement efforts lag far behind the rates of illegal trade. Only 27 arrests were made in Africa and Asia in connection with great ape trade between 2005 and 2011, and one-fourth of the arrests were never prosecuted.

The report also found that the loss of natural great ape ranges in Africa and Asia helps drive the illegal trade, as it promotes contact and conflict between apes and humans. Great ape habitat is being lost at the rate of 2-5 per cent annually. By 2030 less than 10 per cent of the current range will remain on current trends.

In Southeast Asia, the conversion of rainforest for agro-industry is directly linked to the illegal trade, as orangutans are flushed from the forest and end up being captured, killed, or trafficked. Extractive industries such as logging, mining, and petroleum exploration create transportation and trade routes that facilitate the illicit traffic of great apes.

GRASP is a unique alliance of nations, research institutions, U.N. agencies, conservation organizations and private supporters committed to the protection of great apes and their habitat in Africa and Asia.

For more information, please visit contact grasp@unep.org

March 2013

Watch Stolen Apes the short film on Vimeo.