

## PANGOLIN TRAFFICKING IN NIGERIA IN THE FACE OF WILDLIFE LAWS\*

### Abstract

Pangolins are the most trafficked mammal in the world with records of seizures of illegal cargo originating in Africa and intended for Asian markets. This has increased sporadically over the years since 2014. Pangolins are trafficked for their scales and eaten as luxury dishes by the wealthy with utmost disregard to their ecological role as natural ant and termite controllers. Over the years regulatory bodies have enacted laws protecting some animals from human activities. The paper through desk-based research sourced data from records of pangolin seizures linked to Nigeria and found that despite the existence of these laws prohibiting illegal trade in pangolins, the practice persists and is increasing drastically over the years. Several attempts have been put in place by concerned countries to checkmate these practices, but these efforts have remained futile. Findings also reveal that out of the 27 countries determined to be involved in the practice, 94 percent of the trafficked scales were linked to six countries having Nigeria, Uganda, Cameroon and the Republic of Congo at the apex. It is recommended that there should be more enlightenment on the danger and effect of pangolins going into extinction. It concludes by emphasizing the importance of pangolins to the society particularly farmers which saves millions of naira by destroying pests. If pangolins become extinct the consequences could be disastrous for our economy.

**Keywords:** Pangolin, Wildlife, trafficking, Endangered animals, Nigeria

### 1. Introduction

The importance of animals to man cannot be over-emphasized because of the significant role they play in the life of man. Animals have been used for recreational activities, security, clothing materials, hunting, fertilizer and food supplies, religious practices, research, and medicine. History reveals that man's interaction with animals was the major means of sustenance for man.<sup>1</sup> Animals have been used as food, clothing items, farming, recreation etc. Despite the beneficial purposes and loyalty of animals to man, animal rights/welfare activists believe that man has not reciprocated this gesture equally to animals. Some of the ways by which man has been unfair to animals are: illegal trades in animal parts, indiscriminate hunting of animals for meat, indiscriminate logging, deliberate wildlife captivity and the destruction of natural forest and its resources. The pangolin is an example of animal species that has enormous benefit to man, however man has not reciprocated the benefits of this mammal to the environment.

One of the recent reports on the illegal trafficking and poaching of pangolins reveals that between August 2000 and July 2019 about 895,000 pangolins were trafficked from Africa to Asia.<sup>2</sup> Though wildlife trade where permitted is legal and regulated, the demands for certain species is posing a global conservation threat as average of 100 million organisms are seized annually.<sup>3</sup> The pangolin has been labeled the most trafficked mammal on earth and has been listed under the Conservation on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora<sup>4</sup> as vulnerable in various degrees. The reason for this sporadic increase in the demand of this mammal by countries in Asia has China and Vietnam as the major culprit countries, is the medicinal value they believe it possesses.<sup>5</sup> This article examines the status of pangolins in Nigeria through the lenses of the law to determine the efficacy of the wildlife laws. Effort has been made to present the current trafficking rate of these mammals as reported by global and reputable organisations through graphical representations. The aim of which is to draw the attention of policy makers, law enforcement agencies and other relevant stake holders to this menace and the consequences if pangolin trafficking remain unchecked. Factors that appear to serve as clogs in the wheel of justice were examined and recommendations proffered that could possibly reduce the illegal trafficking of pangolins.

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<sup>1</sup>Teletchea, F. 2019, *Animal Domestication: A Brief Overview*. Retrieved 2 November 2021 from <<https://www.inychopen.com/books>>.

<sup>2</sup>Challender, D.W *et al.*, 2020. *International Trade and Trafficking in Pangolins, 1900-2019*. In Challader, D. *et al.*, 2020. *Pangolins: Science, Society and Conservation*. Academic Press, London, UK, pp. 259-276.

<sup>3</sup>Harfoot, M; Glaser, S.A, *et al*, 2018. 'Unveiling the Patterns and Trends in 40 years of Global Trade in CITES-listed Wildlife'. *Biol. Conser* 223, pp.47-57. See also UNODC, 2016 Report. World Wildlife Crime Report: Trafficking in Protected Species Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Vienna, Austria, United Nations Office. p.101.

<sup>4</sup>CITES 2017.

<sup>5</sup>Baiyewu, M.K; Boakye, A *et al.*, 2018. Ethnozoological Survey of Traditional uses of Ground pangolin (*Smutsia Temminckii*) in South Africa'. *Soc. Anim.*, 26 pp. 306-325. Heinrich, S; Wittman, T, *et al*, 2017. 'The Global Trafficking of Pangolins: A Comprehensive Summary of Seizures and Trafficking Routes from 2010-2015'. *Malaysia, Southeast Asia, Selangor*, p.50. Ingram, D.J; Coad, L., 2018. 'Assessing African-wide Pangolin Exploitation by scaling local data'. *Conser. Lett.*, 11, Article e12389. Shairp, R; Verissimo, D., 2016. 'Understanding Urban Demand for Wild Meat in Vietnam: Implications for Conservation Actions'. *PLoS One*, 11 Article e0134787.

## 2. Pangolins as Endangered Species

Endangered species are animals or plants that are more likely to go extinct in the near future if their population continues to decline owing to a variety of threats, regardless of their geographic location; worldwide or in a specific region, such as Africa, Asia, or Europe. There are around 38, 646 species categorized as endangered in the world.<sup>6</sup> The globe came together to establish a treaty, an international agreement called The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 1975. This was in response to the decrease of several animal and plant species. This is a pact aimed at preventing the extinction of plant and animal species as a result of international trade.<sup>7</sup> The response to indiscriminate and illegal trade in wildlife yielded a positive result and the urgent need to protect was implemented. The member countries reached a unanimous decision to up list all eight species in Appendix 1 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), pangolins gained the highest levels of protection under the Convention. International commerce of pangolins for commercial purposes is prohibited under this regulation.<sup>8</sup> The pangolin is a solitary, nocturnal animal that protect itself from attack by covering its head with its front legs, thereby exposing its scales to any predator.<sup>9</sup> The sharp scales are used by the pangolin to protect itself from any form of attack. The benefits of pangolins to man are enormous, for example, a single pangolin can consume up to 20,000 ants a day, that's about 73 million ants a year.<sup>10</sup> There are eight species of pangolins found in two continents and their degree of extinction range from vulnerable to critically endangered. Four species of pangolins are found in Africa which are the black-bellied (phataginus tetradactyla), white-bellied pangolin (*Phataginus tricuspis*, Giant Ground Pangolin (*Smutsia gigantea*) and Temminck's Ground Pangolin (*Smutsia temminckii*). The other four categories of pangolins found in Asia are the: Indian pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*), Philippine pangolin (*Manis culionensis*), Sunda pangoin (*manis javanica*) and the Chinese pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*).<sup>11</sup>

The high demand for pangolin scales due to their commercial value was seen as a serious issue in the year 2000 in Asia that needed to be addressed urgently. Due to the skyrocketing demands in pangolin parts despite its regulation in Asia, in 2017 there was a total ban on its commercial sale, however the illegal trade persisted. A decline in the numbers of pangolins led to traders invading Africa in search of pangolins to satisfy the East and Southeast Asia.

The eight kinds of pangolins listed above are protected under National and international laws, while two kinds have been listed as Critically Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Natures (IUCN) Red list of threatened species.<sup>12</sup> These are the Chinese pangolin and the Philippine pangolin. In Cameroon for example, the government burnt down eight tonnes of confiscated pangolin scale in 2017 which were seized from poachers and traffickers. The scales retrieved were estimated to be about 15000 animals.<sup>13</sup> Despite the protection given to pangolins at the national and international levels, there is an increase in the illegal international trade and what has motivated this is the growing demand for their scales in China and Vietnam. The trafficking of pangolins has been exacerbated by the internet, as traffickers now have access to the world's biggest market place through e-commerce, social media or other search platforms which aids ease of advertisement and payment for this illegal transaction with the risk of arrest at its barest minimum.<sup>14</sup> Illegal wild life trade is not properly managed nor regulated mainly because of its surreptitious, dynamic, multifarious nature of execution despite the huge monetary investments expended on it.,<sup>15</sup> There is a high demand on Nigerian wildlife this involves endangered species been traded within and outside Nigeria.<sup>16</sup> Some of these practices are illegal trade in animal parts such as elephant

<sup>6</sup> Heighton, S.P; Gaubert, P., 2021. 'A Timely Systematic Review on Pangolin Research, commercialization, and Popularization to identify knowledge gaps and Produce Conservation Guidelines'. *Biological Conservation* Volume 256. 109042.

<sup>7</sup> Anadu, P.A., 1987. 'Progress in the Conservation of Nigeria's Wildlife', *Biological Conservation*. 41(4) 237-51.

<sup>8</sup> Retrieved 27 November, 2002 from <https://www.savepangolins.org>co..>

<sup>9</sup> Pangolin Species WWF-World Wildlife Fund. Retrieved 24 November 2021 from <https://www.worldwildlife.org>pan..>

<sup>10</sup> Dallas, T., Pangolin Guide, where they are found and why they are the most trafficked animal in the world. Retrieved from: <https://www.discoverwildlife.com/animal-facts/mammals/facts-about-pangolins>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Dallas, T., (nd) Pangolin Guide: Including why they are the most Trafficked animal in the World. Retrieved 23 November 2021 from <https://www.discoverwildlife.com>..>

<sup>13</sup> McDonough, R., 2017, Africa's First-ever public burn of seized pangolin scales. Retrieved 23 November from <https://discoverwildlife.com>..>

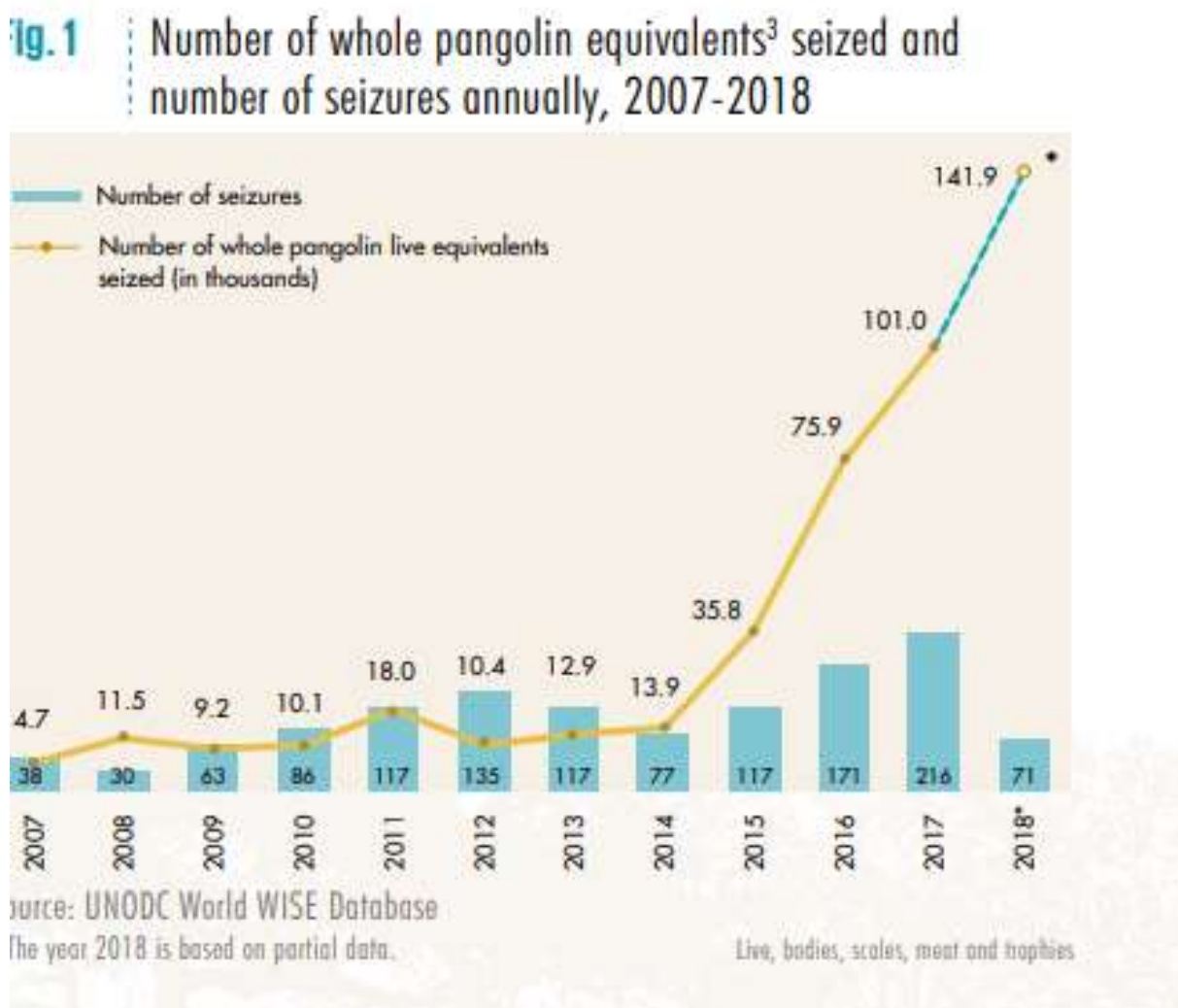
<sup>14</sup> The Fight to stop Pangolin Extinction. The Coalition to end Wildlife Trafficking Online is Looking out for this Elusive Animal. Retrieved 23 November from <https://www.nationalgeographic.com>..>

<sup>15</sup> Phelps, E.I; Webb, 2015. 'Invisible wildlife Trades: Southeast Asia's undocumented illegal trade in wild ornamented plants'. *Biol.Conserv.* 186 pp.296-305.

<sup>16</sup> Ajayi, M.O., 2021. Pangolin Trafficking in the Face of Wild Life Laws, Paper delivered at a Public Lecture Wildlife Trafficking in Nigeria, Wildlife Park, Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library, 10 December, 2021.

ivory and pangolin scales, inordinate deforestation of the countries game reserves through logging. These activities have also contributed to the decrease in endangered species. This notorious practice has been legislated against by several national and international laws, but the practice persists. In 2020, a report by UNOD's World Wildlife Crime Report (WWCR) revealed that in 2019 alone, pangolin scales worth about 51 tons were seized globally and findings revealed that the scales originated from Nigeria.

Figure 1 Pangolin seizures between 2007 and 2018.<sup>17</sup>



There is a belief that all African Pangolins, the ground, giant, white bellied and black bellied are found in Nigeria.<sup>18</sup> Over the years, the usual practice was for local hunters to hunt pangolins for food, however the awareness of the high commercial value the scales of pangolins attracts brought about a shift in the practice of selling the pangolins as bush meat to poaching them for trafficking outside the shores of Nigeria. This practice exacerbated by the high demand of pangolin parts for traditional medicine in Asia and Vietnam.<sup>19</sup>

In July 2021, the Nigeria customs at Apapa Ports seized a 20 feet container which contained 7.1 metric tons of various remains of animal body parts of endangered species. The container had 162 sacks of pangolin scales which weighed 5,329kg in addition to large quantities of other endangered species. This container was bound for

<sup>17</sup>Retrieved 9 November 2021 from [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/WWLC20\\_Chapter\\_4\\_Pangolin.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/WWLC20_Chapter_4_Pangolin.pdf)

<sup>18</sup>Ogundipe, S., 2019. The Pangolin Trade Explained: Situation in Nigeria. Premium Times. Retrieved 23 November, 2021 from [www.premiumtimesng.com](http://www.premiumtimesng.com)

<sup>19</sup>Pangolin Species WWF-World Wildlife Fund. Retrieved 24 November 2021 from <https://www.worldwildlife.org/pan..>

international medicine markets.<sup>20</sup> This is a drastic increase from the quantity of scales seized over the years. There is an estimated seizures of more than 190,000 kilograms harvested from between 625,944 and 996,353 butchered pangolins which have been linked to Nigeria over the last ten years. This makes Nigeria the major trafficking center of this animal species.<sup>21</sup>

### **3. An Examination of Wildlife Laws in Nigeria**

The core of this article examines the illegal trafficking of pangolins in Nigeria and the Laws protecting endangered and critically endangered species. The hallmark is to examine why these illegal trafficking of pangolins persist despite several laws criminalizing this practice. The issue of illegal trafficking and hunting of wildlife has been given the necessary attention it demands under the Nigerian wildlife laws through the provision of requisite laws. Over the years there have been improvements on the law particularly with respect to enforcement and punishment sections. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) describes Nigeria to be very rich in wild life and also a transit country for illegal exportation of pangolins. “There appears to be geographic consolidation of trafficking routes across several markets, with Nigeria emerging as the key source/transit country for many shipments of protected species and products”.<sup>22</sup> This section examines the laws on wildlife in Nigeria from independence to post-independence to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the law and provide possible improvements to the law if the crime of illegal trafficking of wildlife is to be eradicated or brought to its barest minimum.

#### **Wild Animals Preservation Ordinance 1958**

This is the first indigenous law on game management in Nigeria in 1958, known as the Wild Animals Preservation Ordinance of 1958. It was enacted after a series of deliberations. It is the first indigenous law on game management in Nigeria in 1958, known as the Wild Animals Preservation ordinance of 1958. This Ordinance gave protection in various degrees to certain species. The Preamble to this Ordinance, clearly and unequivocally listed the animals which were protected from hunting, killing and capturing except with the special permission from the administrative officer of magistrate. The reason for the protection of these animals is to ensure the growth of their population and their increase in number. The categories of the animals protected were expressly mentioned in the Ordinance. The violation of this section of the Ordinance attracted a fine of fifty Pounds. The global outcry for the need to protect some near species that were near extinction facilitated the birth of Endangered Species (control of International Trade and Traffic) Act, Cap 108 Laws of Federation of Nigeria, 2004. Some of the challenges with the 1958 Ordinance are that the general public did not also see the need to support the law to ensure that the law was not violated.

#### **Wild Animal Law 1963**

This is the first indigenous legislation on wildlife in Nigeria, but was subsequently reviewed after the recommendation of the National Wildlife Conservation Committee established in 1970. The animals mentioned in the second Schedule, were the specifically protected animals while those mentioned in the third schedule were protected animals.<sup>23</sup> Some of the specifically protected animals were primates such as: Hippopotamus; Buffalo; Western Hartebeest; Topi; Kob; Reedbuck; Roan; waterbuck; Bushbuck, reptiles such as all pythons and all monitor lizards. The next categories were Aves which included all parrots. Any person who contravenes any of the provisions of section 7, 9, 25, 27, 30, 32, 33 or 36 (where the offence shall involve a specially protected animal) shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding two hundred naira or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months or to both such fine and imprisonment.<sup>24</sup> The provisions of the Wild Animals Law appear to have taken into cognizance the challenges observed in the Wild Animals Preservation Law, 1958) by making provisions for officers to assist with the enforcement of the law. However, the fee prescribed as penalty for the various offenders would have to be reviewed to align with economic situation as it obtains today. Penalties are meant to serve as deterrent and not punishment; these fees may not curb potential offenders from committing offences against the law. The law also made no provision criminalizing the trade of skins and other parts of animals besides criminalizing the illegal possession of elephant tusks. This was probably because the transportation of skins and other animal parts such as the pangolin was not prominent at the time the law was made. The shortcomings of this law led to the establishment of the National Wildlife Conservation

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<sup>20</sup> Cerullo, G., 2021. Tracking White-bellied Pangolins in Nigeria, the New Global Trafficking hub. *Conservations News*. Retrieved 26 November from <https://news.mongabay.com/tracki..>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Tackling Corruption In Illegal Wildlife Trade in Nigeria. Retrieved, 23 November 2021 from <https://www.unodc.org/Nigeria/en/pr>.

<sup>23</sup> Section 6 The Wild Animals Law, 1963.

<sup>24</sup> Section 53 (2) The Wild Animals Law, 1963.

Committee in the 1970s this made a drastic review of the law thereby bringing it in consonance with modern wildlife conservation requirements.<sup>25</sup>

### **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) 1975**

Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten the survival of the species. This Convention is not a self-executing treaty and the obligations require that policy, powers, rights, duties and procedures be specified in a country's national Legislation. There must be a legal basis for the implementation of the treaty at national levels.

### **Endangered Species (Control of International Trade and Traffic) Act<sup>26</sup>**

The most comprehensive laws among the Post-independence animal welfare laws in Nigeria is the Endangered Species (Control of International Trade and Traffic) Act<sup>27</sup> This is an Act enacted to provide for the conservation and management of Nigeria's wildlife and the protection of some of her endangered species in danger and extinction as a result of over-exploitation, as required under certain international treaties to which Nigeria is a signatory. The commencement date of the Act is 20<sup>th</sup> April, 1985. This Act is arranged into nine sections and two schedules. The first schedule provides for the category of animals protected by the Act, are animal species that are threatened with extinction. These categories of animals are absolutely prohibited from hunting, capture or trade and the Pangolin fortunately is being captured under this Schedule. The Commencement Clause of this Act prohibits the hunting of or trading in wild animals. It specifically provides thus; "(1) As from the commencement of this Act, the hunting or capture of or trade in, the animal species specified in the First Schedule to this Act (being animal species threatened with extinction) is absolutely prohibited".<sup>28</sup> The second schedule provides for animals in relation to which international trade may only be conducted with an approval (license). Section one of the Act expressly prohibits the hunting of or trading of wild animals. The specific wordings of the Act provide thus:

1. As from the commencement of this Act, the hunting or capture of or trade in, the animal species specified in the First Schedule to this Act (being animal species threatened with extinction) is absolutely prohibited.
2. As from the commencement of this Act, no person shall hunt, capture, trade in or otherwise deal with an animal species specified in the Second Schedule to this Act (being animals which, though not necessary now threatened with extinction, may become so threatened unless trade in respect of such species is controlled) except where he is in possession of a license issued under this Act.<sup>29</sup>

A thorough examination of animals protected under the First schedule of the Act, reveals that Giant pangolin *Manis gigantea* Tree pangolin *Manis tricuspis* Long-tailed pangolin are among the first animals listed as protected animals. This no doubt portrays the risk of the various species of pangolins. Section 2(1) of CITES provides that no person shall trade in any animal species in the second schedule to this Act except he complies with a list of requirements provide in section 2(2) (a-d). The hall mark of these requirements is that an export permit must be obtained from the Minister before a person can indulge in any trade in animals listed in Section 2(1). From the wordings of Act it is obvious that trading, hunting or capture of animals listed in the first schedule is absolutely prohibited so the possibility of obtaining a permit from the Minister is impossible. The worry at this point is that the practice of exporting pangolin scales is on the increase despite our national laws and Nigeria being a signatory to CITES. The reality of time is that some animals listed as threatened with extinction in the first schedule of CITES are now listed as "critically endangered species in the Endangered Species (Control of International Trade and Traffic) Act<sup>30</sup> while animals whose trade are regulated due to the possibility of becoming extinct are now listed as endangered species in other climes. For example, in June 2020, the protection of the native Chinese pangolin was increased by the Chinese government to give it the highest level of protection. In addition to this the government prohibited the use of pangolin scales for the indigenous traditional medicine. This drastic step towards protecting these animals was triggered by the realization that an estimated 195,000 pangolins were trafficked in 2019 just for the use of their body scales. In November, 2010, the zoological Society of London added pangolins to the list of evolutionary distinct and endangered mammals.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Wildlife Bulletin of Nigeria*, No.1 Vol. 1 1973.

<sup>26</sup> 1985.

<sup>27</sup> 1985.

<sup>28</sup> Commencement Clause Endangered Species (Control of International Trade and Traffic) Act 1985

<sup>29</sup> Section 1(2) Endangered Species (Control of International Trade and Traffic) Act, 1985.

<sup>30</sup> 1985.

<sup>31</sup> *Illegal Wildlife Trade Crises, pangolin Conservation*. Pangolin Conservation Zoological society of London (ZSL) retrieved 23 November 2021 from <https://www.zsl.org>.

Penalties, forfeitures, and other provisions are set forth in Section 5 of the statute, which reads as follows: Penalties, forfeitures, and other provisions. (1) Any person who trades in, is in possession of, or otherwise deals with a specimen mentioned in the First and Second Schedules to this Act in violation of the provisions of this Act is guilty of an offence and liable on conviction. (a) in the case of any specimen under the First Schedule to this Act, a fine of N1,000 for a first offence, and imprisonment for one year without the option of a fine for a second and subsequent offence. The provisions of Section 1(1) of the Endangered Species (Control of International Trade and Traffic Act appear to put a stop to illegal trafficking of protected animals, but the growing trend of harvesting pangolin as a delicacy and for therapeutic reasons bears a sad testimony to the laws' ineffectiveness. Evidence abounds with regards to this assertion on the various seizures that are been made from time to time from illegal traffickers.

**4. How effective are the Wildlife Protection Laws?**

A brief examination of the aforementioned laws reveals that the apparatus for enforcing the law's requirements is lacking. Worse yet, the Nigerian government has done nothing to correct the wrongs caused by the aforementioned events. The amendment of the law in 2016 to review the fines payable upon been found liable has not served as deterrence for potential offenders. However, forfeiture as a punishment is a good notion and an improvement over the old regulations. However, forfeiting unlawfully traded scales will not bring a dead pangolin back to life. Another problem with the law is not only that law enforcement officers are unaware that they have a duty to arrest under the Act, but that the act itself is either not appreciated by the police or that the police are unaware that the law exists, leading them to believe that there is nothing they can do about it. As a result, large-scale violations of the law will persist. Regardless, the Wildlife Justice Commission should be commended for their efforts to combat wildlife crime and other criminal networks that indulge in wildlife crime. Nigeria, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo serve as pangolin and wildlife trafficking transit countries and logistics hubs.<sup>32</sup> The illegal pangolin trade in Nigeria appears to have exploded in recent years, with at least 51 tons of pangolin scales captured in 2019. Authorities in the Netherlands, for example, have captured similar packaged consignments of roughly 20 kg of scales from Nigeria through parcel post on several occasions.<sup>33</sup> Individual seizures of pangolin shipments in 2019 demonstrate that Nigeria is the leading point of export, with Viet Nam emerging as the primary destination

**Pangolin Scale Shipments involving Nigeria as a Source of Destination between 2015 and 2019.<sup>34</sup>**

**Fig. 5** Pangolin scale shipments involving Nigeria as a source or destination, 2015-2019 (tons)



Source: UNODC World WISE Database and CITES

In October of 2021, the Chinese authorities stated that it had captured 23 tons of pangolin scales in a series of raids around the country. These cargoes were routed through the Republic of Korea from Nigeria.<sup>35</sup> Sea, air, and

<sup>32</sup> Emogor, C. A et al., 2021. The scale of Nigeria’s Involvement in the trans-national illegal pangolin trade: Temporal and Spatial Patters and the Effectiveness of Wildlife Trade Regulations. *Biological Conservation* p.264: 109365. Retrieved 17 December, 2021 from [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/11/211104081451.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/11/211104081451.htm).

<sup>33</sup> [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/WWLC20\\_Chapter\\_4\\_Pangolin.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/WWLC20_Chapter_4_Pangolin.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/WWLC20\\_Chapter\\_4\\_Pangolin.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/WWLC20_Chapter_4_Pangolin.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Osborne, S., ‘Record haul of pangolin scales seized along with hundreds of ivory tusks in Hong Kong’, *The Independent*, 2 February 2019.

land trafficking are all employed, with parcel post being used occasionally. Shipments have been discovered under frozen meat and ice,<sup>36</sup> buried in logs using candle wax,<sup>37</sup> and put within steel barrels containing other items.<sup>38</sup> Large illicit consignments of pangolin scales are either mis-declared or hidden beneath 'cover loads' like plastic garbage in shipping containers. International seizures have revealed that traffickers employ the same tactics again and over again, such as regular plane shipments of very tiny quantities of scales. Authorities in the Netherlands, for example, have captured similar packaged consignments of roughly 20 kg of scales from Nigeria via parcel post on several occasions. In 2017, Malaysia seized a number of similarly packed air freight shipments from Ghana.<sup>39</sup> Some are even concealed inside luggage's and shipped as wood chips or other commodities via parcel post.<sup>40</sup> Three of the world's eight pangolin species; the white-bellied pangolin, black-bellied pangolin (*phataginus tetradactyla*), and giant pangolins (*smutsia gigantea*), maintained stable populations in Nigeria, but the giant pangolin has now become extinct in large parts of the country. Between 2016 and 2019, 52 seizures generated an estimated 206.4 tonnes of pangolin scales. The Wildlife Justice Commission estimates that this is only a fraction of the total numbers of pangolins trafficked, as a considerable number of pangolins are likely to go undetected.<sup>41</sup> Out of the 27 countries determined to be involved in the practice, 94 percent of the trafficked scales were linked to six countries. Around 193.2 tonnes of pangolin scales have been captured in these six nations, with Nigeria and Vietnam playing a key role.<sup>42</sup>

**Table 3: Showing Notable Pangolin Seizures in 2019.**

Notable Pangolin Seizures in 2019<sup>43</sup>

**Table 2** : Notable pangolin seizures in 2019

DATE	VOLUME OF PANGOLIN SCALES SEIZED (TONS)	REPORTED ORIGIN	SEIZING COUNTRY	REPORTED DESTINATION
January	1.4 (with 100 kg ivory)	Nigeria	Viet Nam	–
January	8.3 (with 2.1 tons ivory)	Nigeria	China (Hong Kong SAR)	Viet Nam
March	8.3	Nigeria	Viet Nam	–
April	12.9 (with 175 kg ivory)	Nigeria	Singapore	Viet Nam
April	12.8	Nigeria	Singapore	Viet Nam
April	4 (with 3.4 tons ivory)	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Viet Nam	–
May	5.3	Nigeria	Viet Nam	–
July	11.9 (with 8.8 tons ivory)	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Singapore	Viet Nam
July	1.2	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Turkey	–
October	1.5	–	Nigeria	Malaysia
December	1.7 (with 330 kg ivory)	Nigeria	Viet Nam	–

Source: CITES

<sup>37</sup> Delegation of the European Union to the African Union, '3.2 tons of ivory and 423 Kg of pangolin scales seized thanks to support of EU Wildlife Conservation Program, 2 April 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Doom, J., '7.5 tons of ivory, pangolin scales seized in Viet Nam', ABC News, 14 June 2019

<sup>39</sup>CITES, Wildlife crime enforcement support in West and Central Africa, CoP18, Doc34 (available at: <https://cites.org/sites/default/>).

<sup>40</sup>Pangolin document report [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/WWLC20\\_Chapter\\_4\\_Pangolin.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/WWLC20_Chapter_4_Pangolin.pdf),

<sup>41</sup> Analysis: Current Data shows significant changes in dynamics of ivory trafficking. 2019. Retrieved 26 November, from <https://wildlifejustice.org/significant-changes-in-dynamics-ivory-trafficking>.

<sup>42</sup> World Wildlife Crime Report Trafficking in Protected, Species, May, 2020. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Vienna.

<sup>43</sup>Retrieved 9 November 2021 from [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/WWLC20\\_Chapter\\_4\\_Pangolin.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/wildlife/2020/WWLC20_Chapter_4_Pangolin.pdf)

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

Over the years Nigeria has played a major transit role for the illegal trafficking of pangolin body parts with its first recorded case in 2012. The increasing demand for pangolin body parts for traditional Chinese medicine by Asian countries has increased their exploitation over the years. This has been exacerbated by the ban on the commercial sale of pangolins in China. Nigeria is armed with the requisite laws protecting specially protected animals from all forms of hunting; however there appears to be a lax in the prosecution of offenders. There have been reported seizures of pangolin scales and other body parts such as claws having Nigeria as their country of origin to Asian countries; however these offenders are rarely prosecuted. This has contributed to trafficking of these mammals which has increased sporadically over the years despite the laws in place. This paper concludes by strongly advocating for a more radical approach to combat wildlife crime and greater emphasis on prosecution to serve as deterrence to others. The extinction of pangolins from the soil will no doubt have a cascading effect on food security.

The importance of Pangolins has brought to bear in the paragraphs above and there is an urgent call for a change of attitude to avoid a possible unpleasant situation where ants and termites eat up plants in the nearest future. The presence of pangolins as natural pests and ant controllers has enormous effect in guaranteeing food security for the country. The following recommendations are made to ensure a drastic reduction in the illegal trade of these animals and ensure that the various provisions of the law are complied with. The various wildlife laws protection pangolins from illegal hunting and trafficking should be enforced. There should be a deliberate attempt to create awareness among the law enforcement officials to know how to make arrests and how to go about prosecution. Where the willpower to make arrests and presents culprits for prosecution makes the law inoperative and the practice persists. Judicial officers should also be encouraged to prosecute violations of wildlife crimes presented before their courts. They should also be encouraged to understand the importance of wildlife and the need to protect them from extinction. The constant disregard for wildlife laws and the increase in poaching and trafficking of pangolins despite laws protecting these mammals calls for an urgent action.

There is a need to change the approach of combating this crime from addressing it as a wildlife crime to a trans-national crime. This is suggested considering the fact that illegal poaching of pangolins is a high profile crime practiced through syndicates within countries having Nigeria as a major transit route. To achieve this suggestion it is imperative that Nigerian officials be specifically trained to combat this crime and be able to identify wildlife body parts. There should be exchange of information from countries that have been identified as destination countries, which are China and Vietnam. The urge to combat this crime of illegal trafficking should be re-invigorated and officials assigned with this responsibility should view this crime as high profile. There should be the zeal to dismantle this criminal network and culprits should be brought to justice. It is expected that serious matters be dedicated requisite attention. There should be in place facilities to monitor e-commerce since the internet makes the practice of the easier. To achieve pangolin scale trafficking requires a really intelligence-led approach that involves identifying chronic crime enablers with advanced investigative tools utilized in other organized crime.

There should be a synergy of efforts between private persons, local hunters and government officials. The need to stop or bring illegal trafficking of pangolins to its barest minimum should not be seen as the responsibility of government officials alone. There is a need for private persons and groups such as non-governmental organizations to create awareness about the need to protect these mammals and the consequences on our environment if they get depleted. It is further suggested that there be a gradual re-orientation of the people in the local communities who hunt down these animals for food. This category of persons should be made aware of the consequences of the removal of pangolins. The provisions of the law alone will not suffice in reducing or curbing this practice, since the reckless killing of wildlife irrespective of the protection by the law has been perpetrated over the years. The current economic situation in the country may pose a threat to this, considering the fact that poverty is yet to be eradicated and sporadically on the increase. If the people in the rural communities are hungry, this increases the chances of reckless killing of animal's particular small mammals such as pangolins for food and other sources of income. At this point what is suggested is a gradual education of people in rural communities and the local hunters through their various community heads to stop this illegal practice.

The lackadaisical attitude and lack of interest of persons in Nigeria towards protecting the wildlife and other serious issues concerning wildlife should be given a serious consideration in tackling this menace. Pangolin meat is eaten as delicacy by many persons in Nigeria and issues of conservation would naturally not be of interest to concerned persons. It is suggested that there be a change of creating awareness about the benefits of these animals to man. The use of documentaries, large broadcasting platforms and other visual forms of gaining attention should be employed for this purpose.



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