

Wildlife trafficking and law enforcement in Norway

Ragnhild Sollund

Criminal justice, wildlife conservation and animal rights in the Anthropocene (CRIMEANTHROP) is funded by the Research Council of Norway's Independent projects (FRIPRO) programme.

Summary of the research

Norway is a country highly engaged in the wildlife trade. Ragnhild Sollund's case study in the CRIMEANTHROP project has focused on the illegal wildlife trade in Norway and law enforcement of the trade. This CRIMEANTHROP case study is a follow up of research that started in 2010, thus providing a longitudinal approach to wildlife trafficking and its law enforcement in Norway with data covering more than a decade.

Data collection in the project has been in form of a thorough analysis of several hundred penal case files accumulated from all police districts in Norway, including verdicts and investigation reports, in addition to seizure reports from customs collected between 2010-2020. Qualitative interviews with the police, customs, Food Safety Authority border veterinarians and advisors working in the Norwegian environment agency were conducted first in 2010-2013, and then followed up with new interviews in 2019.

Wildlife trade is regulated through CITES (Convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora). Norway became a party to the convention in 1976. The CITES regulation has been transposed to Norwegian law through a variety of laws, but is currently implemented through the Nature Diversity Act (Naturmangfoldloven), like the Bern

convention. The variety of legislation that has been employed in the enforcement of the convention over the years has entailed that many cases have been dismissed (Sollund 2019), and if CITES has been enforced, punishment has been extremely lenient in form of insignificant fines and confiscation of goods, including live animals. Most offenses are concluded with an administrative sanction in form of a fine.

A general and consistent finding is that the animals who have been victims of trafficking to Norway have been killed by the authorities as an enforcement measure. The Food Safety Authority which is responsible for the welfare of animals who arrive illegally to Norway are not sufficiently resourced to house them. Animals may be offered to zoos, but these reach a saturation point and for complications concerning quarantine and housing, therefore most offers are rejected and the animals are killed, even when they are listed on Appendix I of CITES as endangered.

In 2010 it was impossible to get an overview of CITES offenses in Norway, since the police lacked a code for CITES cases in their penal case file system, STRASAK. This is still the case.

In 2017 a ban that existed that generally forbade exotic reptiles in Norway was partially lifted, introducing a positive list of 19 species, 15 of

which are either listed on appendix II of CITES or at the IUCN (International Union of the Conservation of Nature) list as vulnerable. This has entailed that reptiles that are wild caught, and hence illegal in Norway, may easily be laundered into Norway as legal, provided they are the right species, through the production of erroneous information on documents that serve to legitimate the animal(s) in question.

Law enforcement of the reptile trade generally and CITES specifically has become more random, since with a positive list it has become far more complicated. This demands certain skills in recognizing CITES animals and documents. Hence police may more often make discretionary decisions not to check for an animal's legality and CITES becomes under enforced.

Law enforcement agents involved in CITES often lack fundamental knowledge about CITES, simply because they seldom have such cases on their desk.

Policy implications and recommendations

All police officers, border veterinarians, customs inspectors and judges should receive regular, general training relating to CITES together. This would facilitate cooperation when cases occur and also improve the competence enforcement agents possess concerning CITES.

Manuals about how to address these cases could be produced.

CITES offenses should be prioritized by enforcement agencies as a crime threatening biodiversity and wildlife's integrity and survival.

Education about CITES and the Bern convention should be provided for police officers and customs inspectors as part of the regular training program in the corresponding educational institutions.

Specific codes should be established in the police and customs systems that could facilitate the production of statistics and general overviews of CITES offenses and the ways in which these are punished, whether in products or live animals, or plants.

More effort should be made to make people aware of CITES and the illegality of trading in endangered wildlife. This could for example be done through information at airport and through press releases concerning wildlife seizures and convictions. Children should receive information about the protection of wildlife from an early age, through incorporating this in their study plans at school.

Rescue and rehabilitation centres for wildlife should be established to avoid the easy "quick fix killing solution" now in practice.

Relevant publications:

Sollund, R. (2017). Legal and illegal theriocide of trafficked animals. The Palgrave international handbook of animal abuse studies, 453-474.

Sollund, R. A. (2019). The crimes of wildlife trafficking: Issues of justice, legality and morality. Routledge.

Sollund, R. (2021). Introduction to Special Issue of CRIMEANTHROP: Criminal Justice, Wildlife Conservation and Animal Rights in the Anthropocene. *Revista Catalana de Dret Ambiental*, 12(1).

Sollund, R. (2021). The development of the enforcement of Cites in Norway: Discretionary omissions and theriocides. *Revista Catalana de Dret Ambiental*, 12(1).

Sollund, R. (2020). Wildlife crime: A crime of hegemonic masculinity?. *Social Sciences*, 9(6), 93.

Sollund, R. (2022). Wildlife Trade and Law Enforcement: A Proposal for a Remodeling of CITES Incorporating Species Justice, Ecojustice, and Environmental Justice. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 66(9), 1017-1035.

Sollund, R. (2023). The dark side of nature conventions: A call to end anthropogenic wildlife destruction. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 17488958231181309.



The opinions expressed in this policy brief are the author's own and do not reflect the view of the University of Oslo, Department of Criminology and Sociology of Law.

Scan the QR-code to visit the project website:



The author

Dr. Ragnhild Sollund is professor of criminology at the University of Oslo, dept. of criminology and sociology of law. She has published widely within migration studies, police racial profiling and violence. During the last 15 years she has contributed to the development of green criminology, particularly wildlife trafficking and wildlife harms more generally. She is the author/ editor of 15 books, including *The crimes of wildlife trafficking. Issues of Justice, legality and morality* (Routledge 2019). Between 2019-2024 she led the research project; *Criminal Justice, wildlife conservation and animal rights in the Anthropocene*, funded by the Research Council Norway.

E-mail: ragnhild.sollund@jus.uio.no