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AFRICA

Wildlife crimes in Cameroon: Prosecution needs to be bolstered as poaching remains a menace despite measures

A staggering 24% of cases bear signs of corruption somewhere along the legal chain _

[Susan Chacko](#)

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Cameroon ranked seventh out of 29 African nations in terms of being a source or transit point for illegal wildlife trafficking (IWT) during the decade spanning from 2009 to 2019, according to a new report.

This is despite the measures taken by the law enforcement to curb the menace as increased involvement from the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF), CITES authorities and various other stakeholders, according to the report titled [Analysis of Wildlife Court Cases in Cameroon: Jan 2010-Dec 2022](#).

The most frequently seized items included unprocessed elephant tusks, crafted ivory articles, pangolin scales, African Grey Parrots, and a variety of primate species that were traded for purposes other than bushmeat, an analysis of confiscations through TRAFFIC's Wildlife Trade Information System (WiTIS) during this timeframe uncovered.

Elephant-related products made up a significant 40 per cent of seized commodities, ranging from raw tusks to crafted ivory, meat, tails and bones. These elephant products were frequently bundled with other illicitly traded items. Some wildlife criminals even engaged in cyber-enabled IWT.

The researchers scrutinised 675 wildlife crime cases that had been brought before Cameroon's courts between January 2010 and December 2022. They found several glaring loopholes that must be addressed to ensure the effective prosecution and identification of culprits and broader criminal networks.

Issues such as insufficient cooperation, inadequate record-keeping, and misinterpretations of the 1994 Wildlife Law that have collectively created legal vulnerabilities, TRAFFIC underscored.

Wildlife offences primarily involved illegal possession, trafficking or trading, with an additional six per cent being linked to arms-related offences, according to the report.

Out of the 675 cases reviewed, 518 (77 per cent) led to prosecutions with varying degrees of penalties imposed. Some suspects were meted out prison terms, while others received suspended sentences.

Some were found guilty and were ordered to pay compensation to MINFOF for damages, while others received prison sentences accompanied by damage payments or suspended sentences alongside compensation. The duration of prison sentences ranged from 20 days to three years for cases involving wildlife.

The report also brought to light that a significant 24 per cent of cases displayed substantial indications of influence peddling and corruption within the legal process, encompassing issues such as non-arrests of suspects, undisclosed cases, unnecessary delays, deliberate missteps, and lenient court penalties.

Wildlife crimes in Cameroon have been perpetrated by individuals from diverse backgrounds, social statuses, genders and nationalities. While over 90 per cent of the offenders are Cameroonian and predominantly male, others have origins in Nigeria, China, Ghana, Mali, Egypt and Benin, as per the report's findings.

The court cases were from eight of Cameroon's 10 regions, with exceptions being the northern and extreme northern regions; however, this doesn't imply an absence of seizures in those areas.

The eastern and southern regions emerged as the primary hotspots for wildlife crime, with Douala, Cameroon's largest city, being singled out as a major hub and departure point for trafficking wildlife specimens.

Nestled on the northwestern fringes of the Congo Basin, Cameroon boasts a rich tapestry of wild species. Regrettably, the nation is grappling with a distressing decline in its wildlife due to habitat destruction, poaching and the illicit wildlife trade, exemplified by the plight of rhinoceroses in Cameroon.

The consequences of this wildlife decline extend far beyond ecological concerns, adversely affecting the nation's economy, social fabric and broader conservation endeavours.

In July 2023, TRAFFIC's Central Africa Office and MINFOF took a [united stance](#) against the illicit trade in wildlife species in Cameroon by officially signing a Memorandum of Understanding.