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Nigeria greenlights a new law to tackle wildlife trafficking and protect endangered species

New legislation to combat wildlife trafficking and protect highly endangered species has passed its first reading at the Nigeria House of Representatives.

The Endangered Species Conservation and Protection Bill – prepared by the Nigerian Ministry of Environment and jointly sponsored by Johnson Oghuma, Chair of the House Environment Committee, and Sam Onuigbo – would make Nigeria compliant with international conventions on endangered species, organised crime and corruption while increasing investigative powers to include financial enquiries and intelligence-led operations.

In addition to creating offences for damaging critical habitats, permit violations, the introduction of invasive species, obstruction and preparing to commit an illegal act, the Bill passing its first reading on Wednesday would increase penalties to reflect the seriousness of the crimes and their impact on endangered species; expands courts' ability to expedite wildlife cases and recover assets, create corporate liability and support international cooperation.



The National Assembly building, Nigeria (c) Ovinuchi Prince Ejiohuo

EIA and its regional partners Africa Nature Investors Foundation (ANI) and Wild Africa Fund have been actively supporting the Nigerian Government's efforts to fight illegal wildlife trafficking, with support from the UK Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund and the US Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs.

Mary Rice, EIA Executive Director, stated: "This comprehensive legislation is cutting-edge and a potential game-changer. Working alongside our partners, EIA sees this as a key step in tackling trafficking and protecting critically endangered wildlife in Nigeria and across Africa. We hope it can be rapidly adopted to address the current crisis."

After the Bill passed its first reading, co-sponsor Oghuma said: "The rate at which some species of fauna and flora are being extinguished is assuming a frightening dimension. Every day, more and more species are becoming endangered and pushed to the brink of extinction. It is worthy of note that any action that is against biodiversity sustainability comes with a great cost. Just as humans have the right to life, so do the plants and animals.



The seizure of 8,492kg pangolin scales in Nigeria (c) Nigeria Customs Service

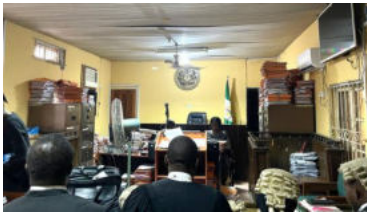
“We [Nigeria] must therefore do everything within our strength to ensure their sustainability. It is time to act to stop environmental degradation and protect our wildlife and plants globally and Nigeria cannot afford to be the last.”

Tunde Morakinyo, ANI Executive Director, said: “This is a momentous thing for Nigeria. The whole world is watching us. Let’s get it right and show the world how we can be the leaders in Africa on fighting the illegal trade in wildlife.

“We salute the politicians for giving this their attention so close to the elections. They know how important this is for Nigeria.”

Wild Africa Fund CEO Peter Knights added: “Nigeria has become the epicentre of the illegal trade in ivory and pangolin scales. If passed, this Bill would give authorities the legal tools to close down trafficking – border agencies have made huge seizures but have struggled to prosecute and pursue criminals internationally due to weak laws previously.”

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