



The Journal of  
**AFRICAN ELEPHANTS**



# Conservationists applaud Nigeria's action to confront illegal wildlife trade

Nov 9, 2023 | News



By Etta Michael Bisong, EnviroNews Nigeria

Nigerian environmental activists have hailed the federal government's decision to publicly destroy a sizable amount of wildlife products that were seized, such as crocodile skins, pangolin scales, leopard skins, and python skins, as a clear indication of the end of an era marked by various forms of impunity against the safekeeping of wildlife.

Their happiness stems from the knowledge that this action will prevent more illegal trafficking and the extinction of some of these species, especially pangolin, of which 55% of its seizures globally between 2016 and 2019 are linked to Nigeria.

A recent investigation into pangolin product seizures connected to Nigeria led by a group of conservationists from the University of Cambridge found that between 2010 and September 2021, law enforcement officials seized and reported 190,407 kg of pangolin products, which originated from at least 800,000 to as many as a million dead pangolins.

These creatures are the most trafficked in the world, in part due to the high demand for their scales in Asian traditional medicine and the fact that their meat is likewise prized as a delicacy.

Therefore, Dr. Iziaq Salako, Nigeria's State Minister for the Environment, described the seized items as the past "we leave behind."

Speaking on Monday, October 16, 2023, at a historic incineration exercise in Abuja, the minister added that their destruction, however, represents the future: "We are determined to build for our planet."

The event, organised by the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) in collaboration with the Wild African Fund (WAF) and the Elephant Protection Initiative (EPI) Foundation and supported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), saw the burning of 3914.08 kilogrammes (nearly 4 tonnes) of seized pangolin scales and 110 kilogrammes of skins from protected species such as pangolins, leopards, and pythons.

Dr. Salako warned that Nigeria's wildlife is not for sale and that the government will go to any length to protect it from anyone involved in unlawful activities because it is a stronghold for the nation's fauna and flora.

He went on to declare that the ugly trade has no place in the country since the government will not let its natural treasure be auctioned off to the highest bidder.

The country's second-in-command of the environment pledged government support to help bolster enforcement operations by carrying out conservation projects to increase public understanding of the ecological consequences of wildlife trafficking.

"By destroying these pangolin scales and skins, we're not just eradicating contraband; we're crushing the illegal trade that preys on our wildlife," he said.

Professor Aliyu Jauro, the director general and chief executive officer of NESREA, laments the perils of this illicit enterprise, characterising it as a grave danger to both Nigeria's natural heritage and global biodiversity.

He said that Nigeria is determined to do its share in resolving this issue and that the destruction of the seized products sends a strong message that the illegal trafficking of wildlife will not be allowed anywhere in the nation.

"We will take every measure necessary to protect our unique ecosystems and endangered species," NESREA's CEO promised.

Ruth Musgrave, director of stockpile management at the EPI Foundation, regards Nigeria's move to incinerate the apprehended items as a step in the right direction for increasing wildlife security.

"It is a shining example," she said, "of a nation taking proactive measures to protect its natural heritage and contribute to the global fight against wildlife crime."

Undoubtedly, the Nigerian government acknowledges the critical need to safeguard this species, as seen by the noteworthy actions it has taken to prevent pangolin trafficking across its borders. One such action is the adoption of the country's first national policy to combat wildlife and forest crime. The government has also established the Wildlife Law Enforcement Task Force (WLETF), of which NESREA is the operational lead, working closely with the Federal Ministry of Environment to address wildlife crime in the country.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of seizures of pangolin scales and the prosecution of offenders. The Nigeria Customs Service said that it seized 1,613 metric tonnes of pangolin scales in 2022 alone and detained 14 people.

In May 2023, two individuals were given a four-year prison sentence for conspiring to possess 839.4 kg of pangolin scales and 145 kg of elephant

tusks illegally, and a clearing agent was sentenced to a six-month prison term in June for illegally possessing a container full of pangolin scales, elephant ivory, tusks, and bones.

Furthermore, in July, a Federal High Court in Lagos sentenced four foreigners to six years in prison for wildlife trafficking.

The government, also through NESREA, uses the Endangered Species (Control of International Trade and Traffic) Act 2016 and the National Environmental Protection of Endangered Species in International Trade Regulations 2011 to tackle wildlife crime.

What Nigeria needs now, in the view of Peter Knights OBE, founder and CEO of Wild Africa Fund, is an urgent need to update its outdated wildlife laws by introducing and passing new legislation.

“This would be the next step in a comprehensive response to reduce wildlife crime,” he said, urging for continued cooperation between government agencies, civil society, and international partners to help achieve this noble objective.

<http://www.environewsnigeria.com/conservationists-applaud-nigerias-action-to-confront-illegal-wildlife-trade/>

Please follow and like us:



© 2023 Journal of African Elephants. All Rights Reserved.