

World Pangolin Day 2025: Illegal trade and poaching threaten Namibia's unique scaly mammals



By Wild Africa
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A new global report reveals that over half a million pangolins were seized between 2016 and 2024, highlighting urgent conservation needs despite intensified Namibian protection.

During this time, pangolin scales accounted for 99% of all confiscated parts.

This was reported on World Pangolin Day on Saturday.

The report, 'Conservation Status, Trade and Enforcement Efforts for Pangolins', released at the end of last year, provides the most up-to-date review of pangolin conservation status and legal and illegal trade.

It shows that demand for pangolin scales and meat continues to drive exploitation across Africa despite international trade bans, and highlights the need for stronger protection, improved population monitoring, and effective engagement with local communities.

There are eight pangolin species globally, four of which occur in Africa. All species are highly threatened, ranging from vulnerable to critically endangered.

Pangolins are over-exploited due to illegal international trade in their meat and scales, poaching for local use, and widespread habitat loss. In Southeast Asia, pangolin scales are used in so-called 'medical elixirs' to treat ailments such as asthma and arthritis.

Despite receiving the highest level of protection under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) through their inclusion in Appendix I, and being listed as endangered or critically endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's red list, pangolins continue to be trafficked at alarming levels.

According to the report, 49 countries were involved in pangolin seizures during this period, with just 10 countries accounting for 96% of all seized pangolins.

CHINA, VIETNAM MAIN DESTINATIONS

China and Vietnam were the main destinations for illegally traded pangolin parts, while Nigeria, Mozambique, Cameroon, and the Congo were identified as key countries of alleged origin. The most frequently detected illegal trade route was from Nigeria to

Vietnam, with an estimated 82 215 whole pangolin equivalents seized across nine incidents.

African pangolin species were identified in 1 080 seizure incidents, involving an estimated 87 906 whole pangolin equivalents. The report cautions that seizure data reflect only a fraction of the total trade, as many illicit shipments go undetected.

While the data provide insight into trafficking patterns, they also highlight significant gaps in knowledge, particularly regarding pangolin population size and distribution in the wild.

NO NEW POPULATION

Despite increased research in recent years, no new population estimates have been produced since the last comprehensive report submitted to Cites in 2021.

Pangolins are difficult to study due to their elusive and often nocturnal behaviour, which complicates monitoring. Many pangolin-range states face challenges in implementing effective conservation measures because of weak enforcement, failed monitoring systems, limited resources, and awareness campaigns with limited reach.

The Temminck's pangolin, one of Africa's four pangolin species, is found across southern and East Africa, including Namibia. They are the country's only indigenous pangolin species.

Although pangolins are fully protected under Namibia's national law, they remain among the most trafficked wildlife species in the country, second only to rhinos in recorded wildlife crime cases in recent years.

Since 2018, at least 570 pangolins have been poached from the wild, according to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

Wild Africa chief executive Peter Knights says: "With few natural predators and slow reproduction rates, pangolins cannot sustain human exploitation. Recent changes to reduce the use of scales in China should help, but we need more public awareness and better enforcement in Africa if they are to survive."

PROGRESS MADE

But there is hope — some progress in pangolin protection has been made across Africa.

In 2025, the government, in collaboration with the Namibian Pangolin Working Group, reaffirmed its commitment to protecting pangolins with the announcement of its National Species Management Plan to curb poaching and address habitat loss.

Since then, conservation efforts have been strengthened through improved legislation, increased enforcement of wildlife crime laws, and closer collaboration with local communities and non-governmental organisations.

Over the past four years, 35 pangolins have been rescued, rehabilitated, released, and monitored.

The government has also pledged to continue enforcing strict measures against wildlife crime to ensure that pangolins remain protected in their natural habitat.

Moving forward, the report suggests that pangolin-range states should implement population monitoring and management at site and national levels to support population assessments and guide their conservation action plans. More comprehensive and consistent data are needed to support evidence-based decision-making and long-term protection of all pangolin species.

The report also emphasises that effective pangolin conservation depends on the involvement of local communities and indigenous peoples.

Pangolins remain understudied and underprotected, and their time is running out.

World Pangolin Day highlights the urgent need for governments, conservation organisations, and communities to scale up efforts to protect pangolins and prevent the loss of one of the world's most extraordinary animals.