



**Wildlife
Conservation
Society**



Wildlife Crime in Belize

A snapshot

September 2018

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Belizeans use wildlife in many different ways

- Direct consumption - subsistence, tradition, luxury
- Local or national retail sale
- International sale/export
- Construction
- Medicine
- Artisan





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Photo: Wildtracks

Wildlife trade - legal

- Defined: *“the commerce of products that are derived from non-domesticated animals or plants usually extracted from their natural environment or raised under controlled conditions”*
- International legal trade in wildlife is of great economic and cultural value to Belize
 - Timber export industry - US\$10m
 - Capture fisheries - US\$10m
- Tens of thousands of Belizeans depend on the health and sustainability of these industries



International Wildlife Trade

- Globally, trafficking is worth US\$23bn (4th most profitable)
- Why? – Weak penalties and poor legal enforcement unable to deal with highly lucrative trade
- Relatively, Latin America has escaped the worst but there are worrying signs of intensification
- There is **major** global attention (and \$\$) focused upon international trade currently, **but we must be cautious**





**Is the bulk of illegal wildlife trade in BELIZE
national, or international?**

**Where should we allocate our limited
resources?**



Threat Assessment (WCS, 2016) of Belize IWT using intelligence approach (HUMINT, OSINT), found;

- The largest driver of IWT in Belize and Petén comes from local populations
- IWT activity in the region remains unorganized and opportunistic in nature
- Illegal fishing practices (out of season, undersized, moratorium) for local demand/additional income
- Extraction of mahogany, cedar, and other types of hardwood to meet local construction and furniture demands
- Collection of Psittacines, parrots, primates, and other animals to satisfy (geographically) local demand for exotic pets
- High margin products (sea cucumber, rosewood, jaguar parts) have in some cases been linked to diaspora as either consumer or intermediary





In 2017 WCS commissioned a study to determine how Belizeans use wildlife, the study was conducted by Yahaira Urbina and Bart Harmsen (Panthera/ERI), they found;

- Game meat consumption is very high (69% of **1525 interviewees** – mostly paca, deer, armadillo)
- For most Belizeans game meat is a luxury but is much more important for a (less wealthy) minority (also Foster et al, 2014)
- 80% of all game meat portions was consumed in households with lower income (\$150-\$750/month)
- Two main types of hunter – ‘dependent’ and ‘hobby’
- One hundred and four people reported owning a wild animal as a pet of which 70% were parrots
- Eighty of the 104 animals were taken out of the wild by a person of the household, with only 21 people buying the wild animal, which were mainly parrots (3 YHPs)
- 0.5% of the total sample population owned a parrot (this would extrapolate to 3800 nationally with 900 YHPs)





Jaguar trade

- 54 persons owned a jaguar tooth (4% total sample)
- 75% of those who knew someone that used jaguar products indicated use for teeth, necklaces or other ornamental use
- Jaguar trade appears to have an established market, link to conflict?

Crocodile trade

- Sixty six people (4%) reported that they knew people who used crocodile products, while 11 people (0.7%) indicated that they used the products themselves.
- Food is principal use with ornamental a secondary use

Hicatee trade

- Seventy six people (5%) reported that they knew people who used hicatee, while a relatively large number of 32 (2%) indicated that they did this themselves.

Traditional hunting vs. illegal trade?



Compliance management strategies developed for the Southern Maya Mountains and nationally for the Forest Department found that the majority of those hunting did not obtain hunting permits;

- Does this mean that most bushmeat available in restaurants is illegally sourced?
- Is the majority of wild meat consumption technically illegal?
- Are we illegitimising people using wildlife for subsistence or local sale/trade? In effect creating an 'illegal wildlife trade' where it should not necessarily be illegal
- How can we separate commercial hunting from subsistence?
- How can we define sustainable levels of hunting for the main target species?



- It is important to be critical when dealing with wildlife trade, we need to know the what, how, where, why and the extent if we are to allocate limited resources effectively
- We must examine the motivations of those involved in the different levels of the trade
- Currently, limited studies suggest that resources are best directed at local and national demand
- Effective national and local awareness, enforcement and partnerships stand as Belize's best defence
- Trafficking has decimated species across Africa and Asia, so far Latin America has escaped the worst. This is no reason for complacency, we must remain vigilant

We Stand for Wildlife™

