e-ISSN: 2839-5786, p-ISSN: 3139-8464 | JATIR

Illegal Wildlife Trade and Organized Crime: Exploitation of Endangered Species for Luxury and Status Markets

Rahi Shinde, Urja Jain

Abstract—**Biodiversity sustains life on Earth, bringing together wildlife, plants, and ecosystems in ways that carry deep ecological, economic, ethical, and cultural value. For many indigenous and tribal communities, native flora and fauna are woven into daily traditions, moral beliefs, and religious practices, meaning the loss of these species also erodes cultural heritage. This study examines the exploitation of endangered species, the consequences of declining biodiversity, and the urgent need to prevent extinction. It explores how the illegal wildlife trade operates as a form of organized crime, violating constitutional protections alongside environmental and criminal laws. Specifically, the study traces domestic and international supply chains driven by human greed and status consumption, where trafficked animals and plants are sold for luxury fashion, accessories, décor, exotic pets, food, and traditional medicine. Finally, it reviews existing legal frameworks, points out enforcement gaps, compares wildlife protection laws across countries, and examines key judicial precedents (in pari materia) to offer practical legal and policy reforms.**

Index Terms—**biodiversity conservation, comparative environmental law, endangered species, illegal wildlife trade, indigenous rights, organized crime, wildlife trafficking**

I. INTRODUCTION

The world we live in, the environment we survive, the ecology we follow and the geology we adapt is nothing but the best example of biodiversity wherein the variety of species exist together to achieve equilibrium. The importance of the environment or wildlife cannot be defined in words as it is the basis of human existence and endurance. Every creature is so closely interwoven into the circle of mother nature that it is impossible to survive alone. All living creatures, be it living or non- living organisms, are so dependent on each other that on the extinction of one the survival of another will become difficult and highly imperative. Nature's most precious gift which we have is the environment we live in today, which should be maintained, balanced and be in equilibrium with the changing time this definition has been

e-ISSN: 2839-5786, p-ISSN: 3139-8464 | JATIR

shifted from creating a balanced ecosystem to a more commercialized and profit-making approach. With the advent of industrialization, globalization, privatization and technological advancements human beings started deteriorating the environment and biodiversity for their own private motives by creating an illusion of sustainability in the name of luxurious goods which in turn harming the endangered and protected species of the environment. The over exploitation of the resources including the forest and wildlife lead to the rise in criminal liability for which illegal trafficking, trading, poaching and hunting is responsible. Every living creature has an inherent right to exist in the environment even though it is beneficial to human beings or not. Illegal trade is a multi-dollar industry the roots of which can be traced through a network of organized crime, drug trafficking, human smuggling. India has time and again acknowledged the seriousness of this issue, with this Indian Government has started off programs post-independence India took some notable steps to protect the wild animals. The success stories were Project Tiger that was launched in April 1973 to conserve Bengal Tiger population in India in order to protect and preserve these species. In the case of Sansar Chand v. State of Rajasthan (2010)[1]: The Supreme Court while upholding the conviction and emphasized that wildlife crimes threaten ecological balance. The Court noted that crimes against wildlife are not merely economic offenses but affect the very survival of species. [2]

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The colonial history of India and Britishers had deeply rooted traces of hunting and poaching of wild animals, which served as a profound impact to show the ultimate authority, power and dominance. It was believed that the king's prestige and valour would be indicated by the number of wild animals he turned down. The dead remains or the carcass of these animals including the heads, skin, tucks are often used for decor pieces, jewellery and in order to symbolize and to commemorate the ruler's power and strength. In colonial India trophy hunting was a genuine "regal sport" in various princely kingdoms, many Maharajas and Nawabs had a full corps of shikaris who were local professional hunters. By the Mughal era, Hunting had become a prominent act demonstrating the warrior's bravery and masculinity. [3]

In India three types of hunting traditions prevail of the princes, of the commoners and of the tribal communities. The kingdoms of Rajasthan'sKota, Mewar and Kangra frequently depicts the history of these times through the paintings and other decorative items showcasing kings'

[1]*Sansar Chand v. State of Rajasthan (2010) 10 SCC 604.*

[2]*The colonial history of trophy hunting and the present legal regime prohibiting trophy hunting in India, RESEARCHGATE (may 31, 2026), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362057019_the_colonial_history_of_trophy_hunting_and_the_present_legal_regime_prohibiting_trophy_hunting_in_india.*

[3]*The colonial history of trophy hunting and the present legal regime prohibiting trophy hunting in India, RESEARCHGATE (may 31, 2026), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362057019_the_colonial_history_of_trophy_hunting_and_the_present_legal_regime_prohibiting_trophy_hunting_in_india.*

e-ISSN: 2839-5786, p-ISSN: 3139-8464 | JATIR

righteous rule which instill in the mind of the citizens that their king has an ability to protect the kingdom from any attack and public order[4]

The skin of these animals was often woven by the kings into royal thrones, banners and weapons to project fierce and unyielding power. Between 1875 and 1925 alone, an estimated 80,000 tigers, 150,000 leopards, and 200,000 wolves were slaughtered under the reward system and shikar expeditions, permanently altering India's wild ecosystem and driving species like the Asiatic cheetah to extinction. [5]

III. LUXURY AND STATUS MARKETING:

3.1. Fashion Industry

Animal-derived materials are widely used in the fashion industry to manufacture products such as fur coats, leather handbags, belts, and footwear. As a result, the fashion industry is among the major consumers of products associated with illegal wildlife trade (IWT), whether knowingly or unknowingly. Though fur accounts for approximately 90% of legally traded wildlife commodities used in fashion, the illegal trade is largely associated with reptile skins used in leather goods. The relatively low level of illegal fur trade may be attributed to the widespread establishment of fur farms, which has reduced the demand for fur obtained from wild animals.

Legal farming of reptiles also exists in several countries. For instance, Nile crocodiles are legally farmed in Kenya. However, concerns remain about the actual source of reptile skins entering international markets. In several countries, the annual export of python skins exceeds the production capacity of registered breeding facilities. The trade in large reticulated python skins raises particular concerns because these snakes take years to reach the size required for commercial use. The price to breed and feed them over such a long period may exceed the price they fetch in the market. This suggests that a considerable proportion of python skins, including those imported into the EU , may originate from animals captured in the forest rather than from legal breeding operations.

Research also indicates that a relatively small number of reptile genera account for a large share of wildlife trafficking linked to the fashion industry. Sosnowski and Petrossian, in their study of wildlife captures in the United States during 2003 and 2013, found that six genera Alligator, Crocodylus Python, Varanus, Homalopsis, and Caiman, accounted for more than 80% of fashion-related seizure incidents among the 49 genera examined. These reptiles are commonly used to produce leather goods. Python species were seized more than twice as frequently as any other genus, highlighting their prominence in the illegal trade. Inspite of these drawbacks, studies have reported a decline in wildlife-related imports and exports associated with the fashion

[4] *A Hunt for Meaning: Hunting Scenes in India, 1700–1900 | Cleveland Museum of Art, https://www.clevelandart.org/articles/hunt-meaning-hunting-scenes-india-1700-1900 (last visited Oct. 19, 2026).*

[5] *Ryan Biller, How the Tiger Became an Indian National Symbol, NEW LINES MAGAZINE (Jan. 16, 2026), https://newlinesmag.com/essays/how-the-tiger-became-an-indian-national-symbol/.*

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industry. In contrast, seizures of live animals intended for the exotic pet trade have increased, indicating that illegal wildlife trade continues to shift across different markets.[6]

3.2. Exotic Pets

Exotic pets are animals belonging to non-native or non-domesticated species that are kept or traded for companionship, entertainment, or personal interest. Their trade forms a significant part of illegal wildlife trade and creates a threat to several wild populations. Parrots provide a notable example. Research on parrots in the Neotropics found that 68% of the populations studied were affected by capture for the local pet trade, making this activity the greatest threat to those populations. International demand further increases the commercial value of these birds. Certain parrot species may sell for prices in European markets which is more than 1,500 times than those in Latin American markets.

The reasons for buying and keeping exotic pets vary. Some owners consider themselves animal lovers or collectors, while others are attracted by the financial value, rarity, or prestige associated with particular species. Certain animals are also traded for participation in competitions, such as birds kept for singing contests. The trade primarily involves birds and reptiles, although mammals and invertebrates are also involved.

Tarantulas and other invertebrates have become part of this market, particularly when newly discovered species attract the attention of collectors. In some documented cases, traffickers have used scientific descriptions and information shared publicly on social media to identify new species and locate opportunities for illegal collection and sale. This creates a serious challenge for researchers and conservationists. Scientific information about a species, including its physical characteristics and geographical distribution, is essential for research and conservation, but this information can help traffickers locate and exploit vulnerable populations.

The exotic pet trade therefore presents a significant conservation concern. Demand for rare and unusual animals can encourage the capture of wild populations, while high prices in international markets create further leverage for illegal trade. This problem needs not only stronger enforcement against trafficking but also greater scrutiny of the sources of animals sold in pet trade also the demand that sustains the market.[7]

3.3. Jewellery, Decorations and Accessories

The illegal wildlife trade (IWT) includes a wide range of plants and animal products required for decorative purposes, accessories, and jewellery. These products include hunting trophies such as antlers and animal skins, furniture made from elephant parts, jewellery crafted from turtle shells, and talismans or amulets containing animal remains. Other examples include preserved butterflies, coral ornaments, ivory carvings, and household items such as bowls, caskets, and pipes created from animal horns.

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[6]Annika Moz*er & Stefan Prost, An Introduction to Illegal Wildlife Trade and Its Effects on Biodiversity and Society, 3 FORENSIC SCIENCE INTERNATIONAL: ANIMALS AND ENVIRONMENTS 100064 (2023), https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666937423000021.*

[7]*Ibid.*

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Ivory remains amongst most prominent products in this trade and is used to create jewellery, accessories, and decorative objects. According to the UNODC World WISE Database, ivory and other elephant products accounted for nearly one-third of all recorded seizures between 2009 and 2018. Since the illegal ivory trade is widely discussed in existing research, it is not examined in detail here.

The illegal trade also extends to plants collected for ornamental purposes, particularly cacti, succulents, and orchids. More than 85% of traded ornamental plants belong to the Orchidaceae family, highlighting the demand for these species. Illegal logging and timber trafficking are also major environmental crimes, causing annual resource losses estimated at USD 30–100 billion. Illegally sourced timber is commonly used in furniture and musical instruments. Rosewood, valued for its reddish color and quality, attracts high prices in international markets. To conceal its illegal origin, rosewood and other timber species are sometimes laundered through false documentation or misleading supply chains.[8]

IV.FLOW OF FUNDS AND MONEY LAUNDERING METHODS IN ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING FOR LUXURY AND STATUS GOODS:

Illegal wildlife trafficking (IWT) relies on financial networks that hide where the money came from, who owns it and where it's going. The money generally follows the same path as the animals or products, starting with hunters and collectors and moving up through middlemen and distributors to the final buyers. As the trade spreads across regions and borders, offenders use different payment channels, business setups and asset transfers to cover up the illegal source of their income.

4.1. Layered networks and middlemen

Wildlife trafficking works through networks where each person has a set job: hunting, collecting, transporting, distributing or selling. The people running the trade usually stay away from the money itself. They use middlemen to negotiate prices, collect payments and organize shipments, which makes it hard to work out who is really in charge. The money often starts out as cash or informal transfers, then moves through shell companies or trade-based money laundering, and finally ends up in the legitimate economy through investments and asset purchases.

4.2. Shifting payment methods and third-party accounts

Cash is still the norm at the first stage, especially when paying hunters and local collectors. Once products reach bigger markets and cross-border networks, payments tend to move to bank transfers, online banking and virtual payment accounts. Traffickers may have relatives, associates or other third parties receive the money so the real beneficiaries stay hidden. Transaction records may also carry false names or vague descriptions of the goods, which makes it harder for authorities to link a payment to illegal wildlife products.

[8] *Ibid.*

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4.3. Hiding and integrating the proceeds

Once the money is in the financial system, traffickers may shift it quickly between several accounts to hide where it came from and who owns it. It may pass through associates' accounts before being withdrawn as cash, spent on running costs or put into assets. Even everyday payments, such as electricity bills and mobile services, can be part of the activity. These transactions help the dirty money blend into normal spending, so it becomes hard to tell illegal earnings from legitimate income.

4.4. Misusing legal trade and shipping channels

Traffickers can take advantage of ordinary transport and international trade systems to move wildlife products and hide the related payments. Shipments may go by courier, air cargo or sea freight, often with false declarations, inaccurate invoices or documents that misdescribe the goods. Shell companies can also be set up to make import-export activity look genuine. Investigators therefore need to go through financial records, trade documents, shipping manifests, customs declarations, company records and beneficial ownership information to connect shipments, payments and the people behind them.

4.5. Buying assets and hiding them further

High-value assets such as luxury vehicles, real estate and gold jewellery give criminals a place to store their wealth. When things get risky, offenders may pass assets or ownership papers to other people and use misleading sale agreements or receipts to hide the real transaction. Money from later sales may go into third-party accounts, which further blurs who the real owner is. All of this makes it harder to track assets and recover the proceeds of wildlife trafficking. [9]

V. LAWS RELATED TO ILLEGAL TRADE OF WILDLIFE AND TRAFFICKING OF ENDANGERED SPECIES FOR LUXURY AND STATUS MARKETS:

5.1. Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972:

Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 is the most important and principal legislation related to wildlife protection and to protect the plants, birds and animal species and ensuring their security. This legislation plays aefficacious role in indicating the and separating the species to the level of protection they require by distinguishing the areas as protected, reserved such as Sanctuaries, National Parks, Conservation Reserves, Community Reserves, Tiger Reserves the Act also provides for the Wildlife Protection Board, Chief Wildlife wardens, Central Zoo Authority, The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau and power, functions of these authorities. The Act has also helped India ratified to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The act restricts illegal hunting and poaching of animals and also

[9] *Egmont Group Information Exchange Working Group, Environmental Crimes Bulletin: Illegal Wildlife Trade 4 (June 2026), https://egmontgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/IEWG-Enviro-Crimes-Illegal-Wildlife-Trade-Bulletin-June-2026.pdf*

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makes it a punishable offence. The 2022 amendment significantly strengthened the penalty structure. The general fine for violations, previously capped at ₹25,000, was raised to ₹1,00,000.[10]

Following are the provisions which will provide a safeguard to the illegal trade taking place.

i. Section 9: Prohibition of hunting specified wild animals, subject to statutory exceptions.
ii. Sections 39 and 40: Government ownership and restrictions concerning possession and declarations, as applicable under the Act.
iii. Sections 49A & 49C: Restrictions on specified dealings in animal articles and related matters; the precise applicability depends on the provision and the item concerned.
iv. Sections 49E to 49M: Framework for international trade in scheduled specimens under CITES.
v. Sections 50 & 51: Powers of entry, search, seizure, arrest, and penalties for offences.
vi. Chapter VIA: Forfeiture of property derived from illegal hunting and trade.[11]

5.2. The Forest Rights Act, 2006:

This at plays a very important role in defining the individuals' rights as to hold and cultivate in the forest land to earn their livelihood and also mentions about the community rights as to the rights over forest produce, fisheries, water bodies, grazing land and right the protect and manage the community forest resources. This Act has a same standing with the Wildlife Protection Act has it completely prohibits the hunting and poaching of animals. This act goes beyond its scope to define the intellectual property right over the materials used for the purpose of traditional knowledge and why they are culturally important. It recognizes the access to biodiversity by the individuals, its extent and restrictions. [12]

5.3. Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act,1960:

The Ministry of Climate Change, Environment and Forest has released new guidelines wherein the pet owners have to register themselves with the state animal welfare boards. The notification specifically talks about the markets where animals are being used, about the fish owners and also talks about the breeding of dogs. The animals will be transferred to rehabilitation centers if the accused if found guilty and his license will be suspended. This Act also prescribes different forms of cruelty against the animals, and in case of violation of the laws the penalties will be provided. Under this act the training and exhibition of animals is also considered as punishable offence and it is not allowed. In the case of Ivory Traders and Manufacturers Association v. Union of India, (1997)[13]: The petitioners, in this case, challenged the ban for having the possession of mammoth and articles made out of it by the authorities and also questioned certain

[10]*Ivory Traders and Manufacturing Association v Union of India (1997).*
[11]*Ibid.*
[12]*Redirecting*, https://www.google.com/url?q=https://thelaw.institute/introduction-to-law/india-wildlife-forest-conservation-laws/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1792407160576183&usg=AOvVaw3ylDuXeePhwRL1CkH7y1lW (last visited Oct. 19, 2026).
[13]*Ivory Traders and Manufacturers Association v. Union of India, (1997),AIR1997DELHI267B, ILR1997DELHI22, AIR 1997 DELHI 267, 1997 A I H C 3988, (1997) 42 DRJ 131, (1997) 67 DLT 145.*

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amendments which were made in the Wildlife Protection Act, where the trading of these imported articles were not allowed with respect to article 19(1)(g) of the Constitution of India as it was considered as a violation of right to carry on any occupation, business, trade or to practice any profession . The court upheld the validity of the act and has said that ban does not violate article 19(1)(g).

5.4. CITES[14]:

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) hosts the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wildlife Fauna and Flora, known as CITES. It is an international accord made between the countries wherein the protection and preservation of plants and animals which are about to be extincted. Under this particular agreement animals are divided for the amount of protection they require from exploitation and trading of animals. The act basically protects whether any animal require immediate relief or they should be safeguarded from any future loss. It also talks about the management of licensing, its suspension. India has joined CITES and has become a member by ratifying on oct 18, 1976.

VI. CONSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Wildlife conservation in India is rooted in a constitutional commitment to environmental preservation, ecological balance, and the responsible use of natural resources. Wildlife conservation is not confined to preventing the hunting of animals or prohibiting the unlawful trade in their body parts. It also encompasses the preservation of natural habitats, the survival of threatened species, the maintenance of biodiversity, and the shielding of activities that disturb ecological systems. The Constitution of India is absent on any particular fundamental right in this respect but has time and again through the interpretation evolved the foundation of these articles related to protection of wildlife and the natural environment.

Article 48A: It was inserted into the Constitution by the Constitution[15] within Part IV as it was not included priorly, when it directs the State to take steps towards environmental improvement and the safeguarding of forests and wildlife. The significance of this provision lies in its recognition that the preservation of wildlife is a matter of public responsibility rather than merely an administrative preference. This article is a part of Directive Principles of State Policy which puts a restriction on executive and legislative authorities to protect the exploitation of wildlife and put restrictions on hunting and poaching and other illegal trade activities. Article 48A also provides an important interpretative principle when courts examine governmental decisions that may affect forests, wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, or the survival of endangered species.

Article 51A(g): establishes a fundamental duty requiring citizens to protect and improve the natural environment, including forests, lakes, wildlife rivers and to demonstrate compassion towards living creatures. This provision extends the constitutional significance of wildlife

[14] *The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wildlife Fauna and Flora.*
[15] *by the Constitution (Forty-second Amendment) Act, 1976*

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conservation beyond governmental institutions. It recognizes that the protection of natural resources rests responsible conduct by individuals and communities. It puts a duty on the citizens to protect the wildlife and natural resources from over exploitation, illegal trafficking and selling, transportation and buying and selling of materials made out of this. Public cooperation can contribute to conservation through lawful reporting of suspected wildlife offences, responsible consumption, community participation, and respect for protected habitats. In case of Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra v. the State of UP, (1985)[16]stated that it is not only States's duty but also of its citizens to protect the environment under Article 51A(g).

Article 21: protects life and personal liberty, subject to the procedure established by law. Through its environmental jurisprudence, we in the Indian Constitution is absent about any specific fundamental right in for the protection of environment, forest and wildlife. But the Supreme Court of India through various landmark judgments made it a fundamental right of citizens to live in a pollution free environment, to prevent deforestation and deterioration of ecosystems, as the environment and the ecosystem is the sole basis of human existence and protection of natural resources and life on earth. Law is not static in nature and keeps on changing and it is progressive in nature. With the changing time Sustainability has to become not a mandatory condition but a necessity. Use of the endangered species for luxury markets and as a status symbol is disrupting the biodiversity in a way which cannot get fixed if we are putting restrictions presently. In GR Simon v. Union of India[17], the petition who had a business of leather material made of snake skin challenged the constitutional validity of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and argued that it is a colorable legislation which is challenging the fundamental right 19 (1) (g) to carry out any trade and commerce freely. Stating this the Delhi High Court suggested that any kind of activity which is against public interest and is against public policy should be stopped, and also, they uphold the validity of this act by stating that animals are important to the environment and cannot be harmed. In the case of Animal Welfare Board of India v. A. Nagaraja & Ors. (2014)[18]The Supreme Court held that animals have a right to live with dignity and without unnecessary pain, expanding the scope of animal welfare to include wildlife under Article 21 of the Indian constitution. Provided a constitutional foundation for wildlife protection and strengthened criminal liability for acts endangering species or their habitats. Gauri Maulekhi v. Union of India, (2010)[19]: The main issue in this case is the illegal trading and export of buffaloes and cattles to Nepal from India. Nepal has a traditional festival which was followed by indigenous people of Bara district who sacrifices the animals such as rats, pigs, goats, buffaloes etc. The Supreme Court passed an order in connection with the Foreign Trade (Development and Regulation) Act,of 1992, and the Prevention of Cruelty to

[16]*Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra v. the State of UP, (1985), AIR 652, 1985 SCR (3) 169, AIR 1985 SUPREME COURT 652, 1985 UJ (SC) 594, (1985) 2 CURCC 70, 1985 (2) SCC 43.*

[17]*GR Simon v. Union of India,AIR1997DELHI301, 1997(41) DRJ604, (1997)117PLR6.*
[18] *Animal Welfare Board of India v. A. Nagaraja & Ors. (2014) 7 SCC 547*
[19]*Gauri Maulekhi v. Union of India, (2010)*

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Animals Act, 1960. The Court held in order to satisfy the individuals desires of human beings no unnecessary pain shall be inflicted on to animals.[20]

Articles 32 and 226: provide constitutional mechanisms through which appropriate judicial relief may be sought. Article 32 concerns the enforcement of fundamental rights before the Supreme Court, on the other hand Article 226 empowers High Courts to issue writs for the enforcement of fundamental rights and for other legally recognized purposes within their jurisdiction. These provisions play a very important role in providing remedies and to seek justice by reviewing government actions, any inadequacy of administration. The concept of Public Interest Litigation was not incorporated earlier; it is the creation of judicial interpretation. PIL plays a most important role in environment protection cases where a party can file a PIL even if he is not particularly affected by it, but in order to ensure a public duty of welfare to the nation. PILs have been filed to protect the illegal trade and trafficking of the animals, to protect the forest and biodiversity, illegal dumping of waste, to enforce more stricter laws in terms of wildlife protection cases. The smuggling of animal skin, heads, teeth, and tucks across national and international borders is also considered as a crime against the environment and public. The indiscriminate hunting of protected and endangered species is a punishable offence under the law. In the case of T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad, the petitioner Godavarman has filed a petition under the Constitution of India under article 32 before the Supreme Court to protect the Asiatic Wild Buffalo which was considered as an endangered species and also to prevent the interbreeding of the animals, asking the Supreme Court to order the state of Chattisgarh and UOI to take every possible steps to save the Asiatic wild Buffalo and also ensure that the interbreeding of wild and domestic buffaloes should not contaminate the genetic purity.

Article 253: This Article of the Indian Constitution is made to implement the conventions, treaties and international agreements which were discussed in international conferences, without affecting the delegation of legislative powers. It deals with how these internationals accords will resemble to the protection of wildlife and protected species. These International discussions paly an important role in regulating and balancing the trade in the national as well as international borders. And how India has a binding effect over these agreements and conventions if they are party of these.

VII. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

India plays three roles in the illegal wildlife trade: it's a source, a transit point, and a destination. Its wide range of wildlife, including tigers, leopards, pangolins, turtles, elephants, live birds and reptiles, makes it a target for traffickers. The chain usually starts with local poachers or hunters who sell animal parts or live animals to middlemen. Those middlemen then pass them on to smugglers, brokers and foreign buyers. India's long land borders, thick forests, busy ports and large domestic markets all make it easier to hide and move illegal goods. The country has the

[20] Animal Rights in India: Landmark Cases and Laws, https://finologylegal.in/blog/legal-news/animal-rights-india (last visited Oct. 19, 2026)

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Wildlife Crime Control Bureau to coordinate forest, police and customs officials, but gaps remain in border monitoring, wildlife forensics, online tracking and following the money. To make a real dent, enforcement has to go after the whole network: poachers, transporters, brokers, exporters, online sellers and anyone laundering the profits.

China is one of the biggest destinations and processing centres for illegal wildlife products. People buy them for traditional medicine, luxury carvings, ornaments, collectibles, investment and as a sign of status. Rhino horn, ivory, pangolin scales and tiger bone still make their way in despite legal bans and tougher enforcement. Organized groups often deal in several species at once, using hidden compartments, fake paperwork, layered supply chains and money-laundering schemes. China has stepped up prosecutions and agency cooperation, but demand has been stubborn, since these products are tied to prestige, wealth and perceived health benefits. The biggest challenge is bringing demand down, along with tighter control over online marketplaces, social media sales and hidden imports.

Vietnam is mainly a transit point and a market for luxury buyers. It takes in large shipments of African ivory, rhino horn and pangolin products, which are either sold to wealthy buyers at home or sent on to China and elsewhere. Rhino horn in particular is linked to high status, gift-giving, investment and supposed medical value, while pangolin meat and scales are tied to luxury consumption and traditional medicine. The criminal networks here usually include importers, brokers, transporters, corrupt officials and wealthy buyers. Since Vietnam sits between African supply and Asian demand, its main problem isn't local poaching. It's breaking up international brokerage networks, tightening port and border controls, and working more closely with China, African countries and international agencies.

The United States is mostly a destination and a financial hub, not a major source of illegal wildlife products. The trade covers exotic pets, ivory, coral, reptiles, traditional medicines, fashion items and collectibles. Typical offences include import fraud, false labelling, lying about which species is being shipped, online sales, and hiding illegal items inside legitimate shipments. The country has strong laws, notably the Lacey Act and the Endangered Species Act, which let authorities prosecute trafficking, forged paperwork and illegal commercial trade. Still, the sheer volume of e-commerce and international shipping, plus scattered online marketplaces, makes catching offenders hard. The US response leans heavily on customs inspections, financial tracing, online monitoring and cooperation with other countries.

African range states like South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and Namibia are the main source countries for elephants, rhinos, pangolins and other valuable species. The visible crime is poaching inside protected areas, but most of the profit goes to international brokers, exporters, shipping agents and buyers in Asia. Local poachers are often recruited or funded by organized syndicates, sometimes with weapons, logistical help and corrupt contacts. This puts enormous pressure on endangered species and damages tourism, local livelihoods and the health of ecosystems. These countries need stronger ranger teams, intelligence-led anti-poaching work, real action against corruption, and programs that share benefits with communities, so local people gain more from protecting wildlife than from joining traffickers.

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VIII. SUGGESTIONS

Followings are the suggestions for regulating the illegal trade of endangered species-

i. India has comprehensive laws for the protection of illegal trade of endangered species including hunting, poaching, transportation of these species for exotic food, clothes, materials. Stricter implementation of laws by increasing the punishments, suspending and restraining the license of the middle men and also by complying with the international conventions, agreements and treaties such as CITES for these purposes.
ii. Training should be given to the Forest and Wildlife experts as for trafficking and smuggling detection, to trace the network and also train them to manage these animals, manage their count, breeding and in which geographical conditions they will be able to survive.
iii. Advanced level of surveillance and monitoring devices should be used including the newer techniques of artificial intelligence and computer technology so that the people disrupting these codes will be easily detected. A stricter software system and better networking among the various departments of the government including the forest department, zoo, national park authorities and wildlife officers should be maintained.
iv. Awareness campaigns should be organized for the citizens, students and also for the influential people using such materials and goods to consume products which are sustainable means used in such a manner which should be harming the future generations by disrupting the ecosystem. People should be encouraged to use cruelty free products without harming the animals, should avoid the use of such materials for the decoration purposes in their houses or for any of their uses. Trafficking and smuggling the animals for exotic pets and food items is putting wildlife life on the verge of extinction such as elephant teeth's, tiger skin, crocodile skins, claws or canines used to make luxury handbags and shoes.
v. Being a vigilant citizen of this country, it is our duty to report the crime if there is suspicion of any person involved in certain illegal trade or trafficking of these animals nationally or internationally to the National Wildlife Crime Unit.[21]
vi. People vulnerable to recruitment as poachers, carriers, or local middlemen, such as eco-tourism, sustainable agriculture, handicrafts, and conservation.
vii. Countries should build common databases on seizures, trafficking routes, suspects, shipping records, and species identification, while applying DNA forensics, isotope analysis, and digital forensics to trace wildlife products back to their source and expose criminal networks. Enforcement performance should then be measured through indicators such as seizure rates, conviction rates, corruption cases, and reductions in poaching incidents, enabling agencies to identify gaps and improve coordinated action.
viii. Prevent poaching, intercept shipments, prosecute organizers, seize assets, reduce corruption, cut consumer demand, and give communities lawful alternatives. Enforcement alone may

[21] *7 Things You Can Do to Help Prevent the Illegal Wildlife Trade | ZSL*, https://www.zsl.org/what-we-do/conservation/protecting-species/7-things-you-can-do-help-prevent-illegal-wildlife-trade (last visited Oct. 19, 2026).

e-ISSN: 2839-5786, p-ISSN: 3139-8464 | JATIR

remove individual poachers, but only financial investigations and demand reduction can dismantle the organized networks that profit most from the trade.

IX. CONCLUSION

It is a saying by Mahatma Gandhi that "Earth provides enough to satisfy man's needs, not for man's greed." Human Beings are not the only living creatures living in this nature, we should be living in harmony with all the living organisms in order to have a balanced ecosystem without disturbing their peace for our individual desires of living a luxurious lifestyle for status and symbol by harming and deteriorating these endangered species. Illegal trade and smuggling of these animals are not a crime against any individual or state, rather it should be a crime against the society, environment and world at large that we live in, as it is not only affecting the lives of these creatures but also responsible for disrupting the ecosystem by making survival impossible. We have so many national and international treaties and agreements and legislations on this behalf but why is this issue still prevalent? The reason is because the stricter implementation of these laws should be enforced. Regular monitoring and maintaining of the statistical data of the animals needs to be maintained properly at a regional, state and national level. Proper licensing and stricter laws are the need of the hour in order to track this issue down. Citizens need to make a shift from high end luxurious goods made of animal parts to cruelty free sustainable goods that will last long and will not affect the ecosystem. The governments should be tracking the network behind this illegal trade, who are the intermediaries, the purpose of their trade and what possible penalties we can impose on them. The big fat fashion giants often sell and market their products and goods as luxurious creating a gap in the minds of individuals having these goods will give them a unique and antique identity amongst the rich and affluent class of the society.

The illegal wildlife trade isn't just an environmental offence. It's organized economic crime, run through long supply chains, middlemen, cross-border networks and financial transactions. Existing laws give us a base to protect endangered species, but enforcing them well takes a wider approach. It's not enough to go after the poachers and transporters. Investigators also need to target the financiers, brokers, businesses and end buyers who keep this market alive. That means tracing the money, finding out who really owns the companies involved, and getting wildlife authorities, customs, police and financial intelligence units to work together. Without that, these networks won't be dismantled.

Governments and enforcement agencies can't carry this burden alone either. Luxury brands, online marketplaces, traders and ordinary consumers all have a part to play in making sure what they sell or buy isn't fuelling the exploitation of endangered animals. More openness in supply chains, dependable checks on where animal-based materials come from, and better cruelty-free alternatives can all help cut the demand behind the trade. Local and tribal communities also need a real seat at the table. They should have access to sustainable ways of earning a living and a genuine say in protecting wildlife.

e-ISSN: 2839-5786, p-ISSN: 3139-8464 | JATIR

In the end, protecting endangered species means changing how we think about luxury, prestige and progress. A product shouldn't be seen as valuable just because the animal it comes from is rare, and owning an endangered animal or its body parts shouldn't signal wealth or status. A society that is truly sustainable is one where economic growth, legal accountability and care for nature go hand in hand. Wildlife laws will only work if penalties are enforced consistently, countries cooperate, money flows are tracked, and people collectively refuse to turn biodiversity into a commodity. Protecting wildlife is about more than conservation. It's a commitment to keeping the ecological balance and natural heritage that today's and future generations rely on.