

Free essay on poaching and sustainable tourism

[Environment](#), [Animals](#)



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Poaching, or the illegal removal of animals or plants, is a prevalent problem world-wide motivated mostly by economic gain (“ Poaching,” n. d.).

Endangered species are at particular risk for extinction from poaching (“ Tiger Poaching,” 2006). For example, rhinoceros, tiger, and elephant body parts are in such high demand, their population levels are being decimated. So why is there such a high demand for these animals? Their horns, organs, or body parts are highly valued in traditional medicine in Asian countries. It is believed these items can treat a wide range of illnesses including curing cancer and restoring virility. In addition, these items are used for ornamental and cultural reasons (“ Poaching,” n. d.). This paper will focus on the incidence and causes of poaching of tigers, rhinoceros, and elephants and examine the efficacy of developing sustainable tourism in lieu of poaching.

Background

Tigers, rhinoceros, and elephants are in high demand due to the high market price for their skins, organs, and other body parts. Powdered humerus bone from tigers can bring a price exceeding \$1700 per pound (“ Tiger Poaching,” 2006). Because of the potential economic gains, poaching is seen particularly in struggling economies where the enforcement is not economically feasible or dangerous (Weidlich, 2013). Also, the lack of benefit to local people to care about the wildlife while needing to allow them access to their land does not support them protecting these endangered animals (“ Black Rhino,” n. d.).

Tigers

Tigers are regal, powerful animals. Tiger body parts are valued not only for their ornamental or trophy value, but also for the supposed benefits their organs can promote in traditional medicine. For example, thousands of pounds of tiger bones are transported between Asian countries every year. In addition, the eyes, internal organs, hair, and even the penises are all traded in the black market for use in traditional medicine. Although the use of these body parts is common in Asia, there is no medical proof that they have any medicinal value (“ Tiger Poaching,” 2006). Population numbers of tigers have decreased world-wide over 97% in the last century due to poaching and habitat loss (“ Tiger,” n. d.).

Rhinoceros

Rhinoceros horns are in high demand for both their use in traditional medicine in Asia as well as for their use in the Middle East in handles of

ceremonial daggers. In addition, many ornamental items made from rhinoceros horns, such as buttons, hair pins, and belt buckles, are highly coveted. Rhinoceros horns are actually not comprised of compressed hair. They do not have a bony core, like most animals. Rhinoceros horns are actually made up primarily of a protein called keratin, the protein that makes up fingernails, hair, and animal hooves (“ Rhinoceros,” 2013).

The proposed benefits of using powdered rhinoceros horn in traditional medicine include treating fever, gout, snakebites, headaches, vomiting, demonic possession, typhoid, etc. It is even believed by some to be an aphrodisiac. There is very little evidence any of these claims are true. One study in Hong Kong did see a slight reduction in fever in rats using the rhinoceros horn, but the levels used were far higher than any used in traditional medicine (“ Rhinoceros,” 2013). It is the belief, however in these medicinal uses, that are the primary cause for the 95% reduction in African rhinoceros between 1970 and 1992 (“ Black Rhino Conservation,” n. d.)

Elephants

Elephants are at risk for poaching because of the high black market price for the ivory in their tusks. Ivory is made up of dentine, the same chemical that makes up teeth. It is very hard and lends itself to many practical and ornamental uses. It was historically used for buttons, piano keys, buttons, etc. It is still desired today for making such items, although it cannot be traded outside the black market. Nowadays, the usage of ivory has gone primarily into the manufacturing of jewelry and souvenirs (“ Ivory,” 2013).

Trade of ivory has been restricted by the Conservation on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). The Asian elephant was first recognized as

endangered (Appendix One) in 1975. The African elephant was added to Appendix One in 1990. Between 1979 and 1989, the population numbers of the African elephant declined from 1.3 million to about 600,000. Since being added as an Appendix One species by CITES, the population levels of some countries in Africa have rebounded and their status has been downgraded to Appendix Two, which allows the sale of ivory stockpiles (“Ivory,” 2013).

Discussion

In efforts to protect these endangered animals from poaching, it has been suggested that tourism to view these animals be promoted. This would be a sustainable income for the local people and protect these animals from extinction. While eco-tourism would provide economic gains in numerous ways, there is also the risk that if tourism fails or is reduced because of economic fluctuations, the local people would simply return to poaching (Hanisdah Saikim et al., 2011).

An example where tourism and local government involvement have affected a change is in Namibia. The black rhinoceros was on the brink of extinction and with some ground-breaking education, government policy, and tourism; the rates of poaching have diminished dramatically (“Black Rhino Conservation, n. d.). The population has increased from 300 to 1700 since 1980 (Weidlich, 2013). The idea was to convince the local people that the black rhinoceros was more valuable to them alive than dead. This was the pioneering work of Garth Owen-Smith, head of a community-based conservation group who encouraged local people to value wildlife (Weidlich, 2013). It also included the use of governmental legislation whereas local

participants who agreed to be part of the conservancy would benefit economically. This approach has been very successful there, but poaching still occurs in neighboring countries. Tourism also is involved. Because eco-tourism has increased dramatically there, the black rhinoceros has moved into adjacent lands, ones that still have high rates of poaching. So even though this plan has effected a change at a local level, tourism still is not the cure for protecting the black rhinoceros from extinction. These efforts by the Save the Rhino Trust need to continue into the neighboring countries within the black rhinoceros home range to have a long-term benefit to the overall population (“ Black Rhino Conservation,” n. d.).

One of Africa’s leading conservationists, Ian Craig, follows this ideology. Changing people’s views about conservation of wildlife is very important. He also believes tourism plays an integral role in reducing poaching. Convincing communities that these animals are more of an asset alive by illustrating how they can capitalize on their existence through sustainable tourism is paramount. Lodges, tours, restaurants, etc. can provide economic revenue and still conserve the elephant in Kenya. But, unfortunately, because of growing demand in Asia for ivory, this approach has only had marginal success and in fact, in 2011, poaching levels are now higher than in 2006 (Craig, 2012).

Conclusion

So what is the consensus on whether sustainable tourism can successfully curb poaching rates and protect these endangered species? It is going to take a lot of mutual cooperation in promoting sustainable tourism throughout the world. Local governments cannot usually afford such dramatic efforts to

put these practices into place or enforce current legislation more rigorously. Perhaps with increased education by conservation organizations, local communities will realize what an asset they have in protecting their endangered species.

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