

EEB 2208: LECTURE TOPIC 24

INTERNATIONAL LEGISLATION

Reading for this lecture

Primack: Chapters 21, 22

Discussion reading: [Call of the wild: Is the prohibition of trade saving wildlife, or endangering it? The Economist, 6th March 2008.](#) (see also this opinion piece in the same issue: [Use them or lose them.](#))

Supplemental reading:

For more information on CITES, [click here](#).

1. Introduction

International legislation and agreements cover many things related to biological conservation. Rather than give a superficial overview of lots of them, in this lecture I will talk primarily about one of the more important and influential ones – CITES. I'll also briefly mention a few international conventions that are important for habitat conservation. In the lecture, I'll only cover the first half of the chapter in the text book – you should make sure you read the rest, especially the information relating to the Earth Summit and the funding of international conservation.

2. Trade in endangered species

A) BACKGROUND

- i) As I have mentioned earlier in the course, illegal trade in rare species is very common and is worth billions of dollars every year.
- ii) Trade affects many kinds of species and occurs for numerous reasons. Mostly, it tends to affect large mammals and other species killed for their body parts (furs, skin, organs for medicinal use, etc.), and species that are sold as pets.
- iii) But, illegal trade in rare species is not restricted to large vertebrates. Various plants (especially orchids and cacti) are traded, as are some species of insects (especially flashy things like butterflies).

B) CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA (CITES)

- i) This convention is an international agreement between countries to limit trade on endangered species. CITES was agreed upon in 1973, and came into force in 1975.
- ii) The convention bans commercial international trade of species considered to be at-risk of extinction. In addition it regulates and monitors trade in other species thought to be vulnerable.
- iii) Among the goals of the convention are to (a) conserve biological diversity, (b) allow for sustainable use of species, and (c) enable fair and equitable sharing of the benefits that arise from the use of genetic resources.
- iv) Currently, the treaty has been ratified by 164 of the world's countries (out of a total of ~230 countries). Ratification is voluntary, but once countries join they have to adhere to the convention's rules – how they do this though is up to the individual countries, which each develop their own laws to ensure that the convention is followed. [Note that just because a country has ratified a treaty, it does not necessarily enforce it.]

C) EXAMPLES OF WILDLIFE TRADE

- i) **Parrots.** Over 40 species of parrots (out of a total of ~330) are endangered. Pretty much all species are traded internationally, but all (except budgerigars and cockatiels) are regulated by CITES. Millions of parrots are traded annually. In 1990, 150,000 were legally imported into the US alone (this legal trade has now stopped due to US legislation). In addition to taking these birds from the wild, many others simply die during the transport process. The US, Europe and Japan all remain major importers of illegal parrots.
- ii) **Elephants.** Species of elephants are mainly killed for their ivory. Before 1990, 700-800 tons of ivory (both legal and illegal) were traded annually, resulting in the deaths of about 75,000 elephants. Most of this ivory was exported to Hong Kong and Japan.
- iii) **Bears.** Most species are declining. Much of the trade in bears involves various body parts, including gall bladders (used as medicine), claws, teeth, and fur. As an example of the value of these parts, bear paw soup reportedly sells for up to \$1500 in some Taiwanese restaurants.

3. Habitat protection through international conventions

International agreements can also be used to protect habitats – here are three important examples (discussed in more detail in the textbook).

A) RAMSAR CONVENTION ON WETLANDS (1971)

This convention has now been ratified by over 130 countries and protects at least 1150 sites and more than 96 million ha of wetland habitat around the world.

B) WORLD HERITAGE CONVENTION (1972)

This convention focuses on sites that are important both because of their cultural and natural value. Currently there are at least 144 World Heritage Sites, covering 142 million hectares. The Great Smoky Mountains is an example.

C) BIOSPHERE RESERVES PROGRAM (1971)

This program was designed to create sites where nature conservation and sustainable development can go hand in hand. Consequently, biosphere reserves are inhabited by people, who continue to use the resources the reserves contain – ideally in a sustainable manner. To date, over 400 reserves have been designated, covering over 260 million ha in at least 94 countries.