

Case study

Keeping animals wild: animal welfare for biodiversity and environmental sustainability

Problem:

The diversity and welfare of wildlife are threatened by illegal trafficking

Illegal wildlife trafficking has a devastating impact on animal welfare, species conservation, ecosystems and the communities that could develop through eco-tourism. Second to ecosystem loss, it is the biggest cause of species extinction. Those buying trafficked animals may have little understanding of the damage they are doing to the environment, animals and sustainable development.

Central America's diverse ecosystem attracts wildlife traffickers. In efforts to stem this trade, the governments of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua carry out border inspections where wildlife traffickers are stopped and animals are confiscated.

However, the need for a place to take the animals is often overlooked in confiscation plans. As a result, Central America lacks the infrastructure necessary to accommodate and ensure the welfare of wildlife confiscated under the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Currently, only two countries in the region host adequate facilities for wildlife reception and rehabilitation. This means that many of Central America's confiscated but potentially releasable animals are sent to private collections and zoos and spend their lives in captivity.

The illegal wildlife trade

This worldwide business is estimated to be worth \$20 billion annually.

Horrorific conditions cause the majority of animals to die in transit – trafficked parrots have a 90 per cent mortality rate.



Here today, gone tomorrow? Trafficking wildlife threatens animal welfare and biodiversity.

Solution:

Public education initiatives and high welfare wildlife rescue centres

Education is a preventative element: greater public awareness of the cruelty and environmental damage caused by trafficking is a way to reduce demand, which can in turn reduce poaching.

As long as trafficking continues, specialist wildlife rescue centres – housing, treating and rehabilitating confiscated

animals in high welfare conditions – will help ensure the survival of species targeted by traffickers. Successful rehabilitation can lead to reintroduction, helping to reinforce wild populations.

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HUMANE SOCIETY
INTERNATIONAL

WSPA

❖ To protect the diversity and welfare of wildlife in Central America, the Humane Society International (HSI) has worked closely with:

Local NGO partners

- developing educational campaigns and extensive outreach, including print and radio adverts, to halt the demand for illegal wildlife products. These highlight penalties, the environmental and public health dangers posed by purchasing wildlife as pets, and the long-term destruction of natural resources
- building the capacity of eco-tourism enterprises by training employees and owners on best practice management of service industries.

Wildlife rescue centres (since 2003)

- training staff on CITES and national wildlife laws, enabling them to better respond to illegal trafficking
- providing small grants for technical assistance, public outreach, education and improvements to infrastructure (including veterinary, holding and transport equipment to improve animal safety and increase capacity to receive wildlife)
- developing fundraising and management plans for long-term financial sustainability
- building local capacity through technical training in areas such as animal nutrition, rehabilitation and release.

Governments

- developing strategies for rescue centre sustainability; national governments, responsible for confiscating trafficked wildlife and deciding the fate of the animals, must be engaged.

US State Department

- who provide a trade capacity building programme focused on improving CITES implementation in the Central American countries, under the Central America-Dominican Republic-US Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR).



Investing in the future. Animal welfare training is vital to help prepare confiscated animals for a return to the wild.

Impact: Reduced market for traffickers and increased capacity to care for confiscated wildlife

Public awareness and education programmes on the trade in illegal wildlife products and exotic pets reached an estimated 800,000 residents and tourists in 2008 alone.

Together, rescue centres that have partnered with HSI are able to offer high welfare care for 1,000 animals annually. Improvements to infrastructure across all four centres are ongoing, however many of the confiscated animals are already being transported safely, fed a balanced diet and rehabilitated, enabling some to be released back into the wild. Wild releases boost the animal populations that encourage eco-tourism.

Conclusion:

Education and dedicated facilities protect the diversity and welfare of wildlife

The United Nations¹ recognises the vital role that education plays in preserving wildlife and the environment by reducing demand for illegal animal products and encouraging local people to protect their natural resources – in this case, the unique wildlife of Central America that attracts so many visitors.

Until this education work has the desired effect, wildlife rescue centres can be supported to provide high welfare care and rehabilitation for confiscated animals. High animal welfare during this period improves the animals' chances of survival and even release, playing a role in maintaining biodiversity through wild populations.

¹ Principle 19, *Declaration of the United Nations Conference on Human Environment* (UNCHE), Stockholm, 1972

