

LEGAL, HEALTH AND CONSERVATION ISSUES OF THE WILDLIFE TRADE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Objectives

The purpose of this presentation is to review legal, health and conservation issues associated with the legal and illegal movement of wildlife in the Middle East (ME) and to propose recommendations to improve the accountability and sustainability of the trade.

Background

In 1994 the global wildlife trade was estimated to be more than \$10 billion, with at least \$2-3 billion of that illegal (Hemly, 1994). In the ME there is a large trade in domestic and wildlife species imported from Africa, Asia and Europe for agriculture, sport, pets, private zoological collections and for traditional pastimes such as falconry. Some movements are legal and are regulated by animal health legislation, international treaties and conservation bodies. However, many wildlife movements in the region are illegal and non-regulated. Unfortunately, no firm estimates can be given for the size of the illegal trade either in the ME, but it is undoubtedly a profitable business and smuggled wildlife are known to follow the same routes as illegal drugs (Beissenger, 2001). This movement of animals across frontiers is associated with the global spread of infectious diseases, as well as having conservation implications.

Conservation implications - The unsustainable nature of the trade concerns conservationists and the over-exploitation of wildlife through trade is playing an important part in driving the extinction crisis (Traffic, 2002). The world annual trade in captive birds is estimated at 2-5 million and almost half of the 358 species of parrots are threatened by trade (Hemly, 1994). Recent reports have shown that Egypt is facing wildlife trade challenges such as a trade in ivory, tortoises, Uromastix lizards, snakes and raptors (Traffic, 2001). Examples of free-living wildlife populations threatened by illegal trade conducted in the ME include the Arabian oryx (*Oryx leucoryx*) and saker falcons (*Falco cherrug*) (Spalton et al., 1999; Anon, 2000).

Disease implications - A well-known example is the risk posed by outbreaks of infectious disease in domestic poultry spread from imported wild birds. Outbreaks of highly virulent Newcastle disease (ND) and avipox frequently occur in illegally imported wild birds in the ME (Wernery, 1999). While figures for the economic impact of disease outbreaks in the ME are not available, such data is documented elsewhere. For example, in 1971 one ND epizootic in poultry in the USA, linked to the importation of parrots from S. America resulted in the destruction of 11 million chickens and the total control programme cost \$56 million (Ashton, 1984). Outbreaks of foot and mouth disease and peste des petits ruminants are not uncommon in domestic and wild ungulates in the ME because of unregulated movement of animals from Asia and N. Africa into the region. In other parts of the world efforts to discourage the illegal wildlife trade and to promote the legal movement of wildlife have tended to be driven by economic threats to national agriculture. In response to ND epidemics in the 1970's government regulations were introduced to control the import of captive birds in the UK (Ashton, 1984).

Relevant legislation, treaties and codes

CITES, 1973. CITES regulates the trade and international movement of species that are, or may soon become endangered by listing them in one of the treaty's appendices (Table 1) and monitoring their legal trade through a licensing system. CITES is a 'soft' law in that it is not legally binding upon individual countries, although having been adopted by the United Nations General Assembly there is a moral obligation for signatories to comply with it (Cooper, 1973). CITES provides a framework to be respected by each Party, which has to adopt its own domestic legislation to implement the Treaty at the domestic level. In support of the implementation of CITES, IUCN founded TRAFFIC and WCMC to monitor the international trade. When a state joins CITES it must appoint management and scientific authorities to advise and issue permits, to keep import and export record, to compile statistical reports and report on the legislative and regulatory measures taken to enforce the convention. One hundred and fifty five countries are party to CITES (CITES, 2002), but one third have totally inadequate legislation to implement the convention and only 20% of parties have adequate legislation (Heijnbergen, 1997). If the Standing Committee of CITES becomes concerned by the implementation of the Convention by a country it may be suspended from CITES. In November 2001, CITES suspended trade with the UAE because the UAE is regarded as a destination for an illicit trade in falcons, cheetah cubs, Appendix 1 derivatives and caviar (www.CITES.org/news).

Convention for the Protection of Animals during International Transport, 1968. IATA produces regulations to ensure high standards of welfare for live animals that are transported by air (IATA, 1998). IATA produces a handbook providing non-statutory guidelines for the transportation of animals and these regulations have been adopted as part of legislation by some countries (e.g. UK). These are strictly enforced by reputable airline companies and should be referred to whenever animals are transported by international airlines.

Animal Health Laws. A major factor in the control and prevention of animal diseases is the regulation of the movement of animals, which may carry infection from one country to another. The OIE produces an International Animal Health Code (Anon, 1999) and generally as domestic animal health issues are important to national economies import and export regulations exist in the Middle East. When wildlife are moved to or from the Middle East there is a requirement for a veterinary health certificate from the country of departure.

Local laws and customs protecting wildlife in Middle East. Local customs protecting wildlife from persecution and illegal trade (Table 2) are less well developed compared to the situation in Europe and N. America. Those that exist vary according to the preferences of the rulers of the countries, so that a country with a tradition for falconry and where the ruling family are keen hunters such as the UAE has laws restricting the import of falcons, while a country such as Oman, where the ruler does not hunt has laws preventing hunting.

What it all means – procedures to legally move wildlife. Table 3 summarises the necessary legal procedures that are required to import or export animals into or out of the ME following existing legislation and codes of conduct. Note the examples given are for the import/export of live animals, but permits are also required for biological material derived from animals. This would include samples for diagnostic investigation (formalin tissues) or genetic material for breeding (semen). These require CITES permits for CITES listed species and non-fixed, potentially infectious samples will require Health Certification from the importing country (e.g. a UK Importation of Pathogens Permit).

Case Studies and Problems on the Ground

Case Studies Case studies providing examples of the illegal movement of wildlife in the ME are presented in Table 4. These examples show how the illegal trade is threatening free-living populations of oryx and bustards in the region.

Problems associated with animal movements in the region Success of conservation efforts are as dependent on favourable biopolitical conditions as they are on biological factors. Factors of importance in perpetuating the illegal trade in the region include;

- Poor enforcement of conservation legislation.
- Large economic differences between supplying and consuming countries.
- Lack of conservation awareness in supplying and consuming countries.
- Selective and inconsistent enforcement of local and international conservation legislation in consuming countries.
- Inconsistent enforcement of animal health laws. The OIE states that health certificates must relate to animals that have been inspected. Health certificates are issued, but animals are rarely inspected by official veterinarians. Similarly, quarantine is the exception rather than the rule for wildlife legally imported into the Middle East.

Food for Thought

Principles to guide the international trade in live animals Issues relating to the governance of the international trade in wildlife are complex and transcend biology. If there is to be a trade in live animals for commercial purposes it is important to state what conditions should be fulfilled and the American Ornithologists Union has developed the following principles to provide the basis for guiding an international trade in live birds (Beissinger, 2001). These principles state that importation of wildlife:

- should be sustainable and pose no risks for wild populations.
- should pose no significant risks of disease transmission.
- should not result in the establishment of feral populations.
- should be governed by regulations that are economically feasible, practically enforceable, simple and effective.

Furthermore when wildlife are traded for captive breeding programmes these programmes should 5) be self-sustaining and 6) should be pursued only as a last resort, and only as part of internationally recognised programmes.

Wildlife Trade in Practice in the Middle East

Two factors work at different spatial scales to affect how the trade in wildlife is actually practised (Beissinger, 2001). Firstly market forces far from the source of the wildlife are so strong that it is attractive for local people to poach animals for the trade. The data in Table 4 demonstrate the large profits to be made from the illegal trade in wildlife in the ME along with the discrepancies in GDP between source and consuming countries (UN, 2002). There is a great incentive for poachers, because for many species of wildlife demand far exceeds the capacity of breeders to produce sufficient surplus. Secondly, the practice of sustainable harvesting would require a degree of local control over harvests that is difficult and expensive to achieve. Reliably distinguishing between legally and illegally harvested animals requires a well-documented pedigree, DNA analysis and identification system. Without strong controls, attempts at sustainable harvesting can create conservation problems, not solve them.

In the Middle East large number of private collections fuel the large trade in wildlife, because they are not self-sustaining and require continual top-ups of stock. Similarly, the sport of falconry provides a large market for falcons and prey species.

Generally efforts to set sustainable harvest rates for wildlife are handicapped by lack of good biological data. Indeed, Beissinger (2001) considers it is not possible to set scientifically determined harvest quotas for any species of bird currently traded. If implemented properly and conservatively, sustainable harvesting and legal trade in wildlife has potential benefits for conservationists, aviculturalists, zoological collections, pet industry and local people.

Conclusions

The international trade in wildlife is a multimillion dollar industry that consumes rather than conserves wildlife (Beissinger, 2001). The current unregulated trade in wildlife in the Middle East represents an issue that is relevant to both veterinarians concerned with the health of populations of captive domestic and wildlife species, and to biologists concerned with managing self-sustaining free-living populations of these species. Long-term conservation solutions for wildlife species in trade must be based on a balanced approach of effective regulation when necessary, development of positive economic incentives and motivation of well-informed consumer choice (TRAFFIC, 2000). Legislation is of little value unless it is observed.

In the context of the Middle East this means that attempts to enforce international treaties, such as CITES, by governments should go hand in hand with efforts to increase conservation awareness to the main consumers. The social position of the consumers (often VIPs) and their political influence means that without their support, efforts to regulate the wildlife trade will fail. However, if conservationists and veterinarians demonstrate that the benefits of regulation will include reduced risk of infectious disease outbreaks amongst domestic agricultural species, improved health of highly prized species such as falcons, more prey species such as houbara to hunt in the hunting grounds and an enhanced reputation of their countries, support may be forthcoming. Only if sustainable harvesting can lead to robust wildlife populations and habitat preservation will giving a market value to wildlife by trading them achieve a conservation goal (Beissinger, 2001).

Recommendations

Two interconnected themes are explored in this presentation. Firstly, the mechanisms in place for the legal movement of wildlife within the ME are reviewed. Secondly the biological and political issues around the illegal trade and movement of wildlife into the region are discussed.

It is generally accepted that rigid control policies, e.g. banning trade, rarely deals with a problem because it causes the price of wildlife to increase and with it the likelihood of unsupervised illegal importation (Ashton and Cooper, 1984). What is needed is to use measures that have been successfully implemented in other countries and adapt them to the situation in the Middle East. Measures that should be considered by regional animal health and environmental agencies include:

- Preimportation standards in wildlife exporting countries
- Enforcing international treaties
- Improving of transportation methods
- Introducing import regulations
- Establishing national quarantine centers

- Increasing conservation awareness in suppliers and consumers
- Encouraging co-operation between enforcement agencies in regional countries

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Glossary

CITES – The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

IATA - International Air Transport Association

IUCN – International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources

OIE - World Organisation for Animal Health (Office International des Epizooties)

TRAFFIC - Trade Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce

WCMC – World Conservation Monitoring Center

Table 1. Criteria for placing species in the CITES Appendices

Appendix I	Species threatened with extinction. Trade permitted in special circumstances	e.g. Arabian Oryx <i>Oryx leucoryx</i>
Appendix II	Trade controlled to avoid utilisation incompatible with survival	e.g. Arabian bustard <i>Ardeotis arabs</i>
Appendix III	Species protected by at least one country that has asked CITES for assistance to control trade.	e.g. Sand gazelle <i>Gazella leptoceros</i>

Table 2. Examples of Local Customs/Laws protecting wildlife in some Middle East countries.

Law	Country	Description
'Wayesh' Royal decree by President Law 93/2001	UAE	Import of wild-caught falcons allowed between 2nd ^o October and 1 st April
	UAE	Prohibition of importation of live animals without import permit from MAW
Hunting Laws	Saudi Arabia	Hunting of all wildlife allowed except oryx, gazelle and ibex from 14 th November to 1 st March. Forbids night shooting and machine guns!
Royal Decree by Sultan Qaboos	Oman	Bans all hunting in Oman (theoretically protecting oryx from poaching).

Table 3. Wildlife import and export procedures from the Middle East. Import procedures (into Middle East)

Obtain CITES export and import certificate from CITES offices in importing and exporting countries.
 Obtain Veterinary Health Certificate from appropriate authority in exporting country.
 Obtain Import Licence from the Ministry of Animal Wealth, UAE.

Export procedures (from Middle East)

Obtain CITES export and import certificate from Regional CITES office^{1,2}.

Obtain UAE Veterinary Health Certificate from the Ministry of Animal Wealth

Obtain Import Licence from appropriate authority in importing country.

¹note CITES permits must be obtained for veterinary diagnostic samples that are shipped between countries for analysis for CITES listed species.

²note certificates of origin (zoo records, customs confiscation reports) may be required to be submitted with applications for CITES permits to demonstrate origin of the animals.

Transportation procedures (import or export)

Obtain approval from transporting airline for transport crates (IATA standards)

Provide proforma-invoices of value of animals for customs clearance.

Table 4. Case Studies - Examples where the illegal trade in Middle East is impacting on free-living wildlife populations.

Species	Price Source \$US	Price Consumer \$US	Source Country (GDP \$US)	Effect
Houbara bustard	50	500	Pakistan (\$487)*	There is an illegal trade in free-living houbara bustards, trapped in Pakistan which are exported to the ME where they are used by falconers to train their falcons (Bailey <i>et al.</i> , 1999). Between 4,000-7,000 houbaras are traded in this way from Pakistan each year (Goriup, 1997). The mortality of the birds is high and this trade impacts on houbara bustard populations and there are important veterinary health problems associated with this trade.
Arabian oryx	Not known but very high	Not known but very high	Oman (\$6,386)*	Important milestones in the successes and set-backs to Operation Oryx caused by poaching and the illegal trade (Spalton <i>et al.</i> , 1999) include: 1963 – World Oryx Herd established in USA (9 founders). 1972 – Last wild oryx killed by poachers in wild in Oman. 1982 – Captive bred oryx re-introduced into Oman. 1996 – Over 400 oryx known to be living in reserve in Oman. 1996 – Oryx poaching resumes. 1999 – Collapse of free-living oryx population, 28 female oryx left. The original feasibility study of the release programme concluded that the hunting threat that caused the original extinction had been eliminated (Stanley-Price, 1989). However, in retrospect biologists involved with the project consider that the threat lay dormant and once large numbers of oryx were available poaching resumed (Spalton <i>et al.</i> , 1999). Oryx were taken for illegal trade with live animals gifted and sold to private zoos and animal collectors in the ME.

*Note: GDP of United Arab Emirates is \$19,700. GDP data source: United Nations, 1999