

of wild species. As a result of national and international efforts, however, cases of illegal ivory trafficking in China decreased by about one-third during 2014. On 25 February 2015 the State Forestry Administration announced a ban on importation of ivory carvings for a period of 1 year. In addition, following the destruction of 6.1 t of illegal ivory and ivory products by the State Forestry Administration and the General Administration of Customs in Dongguan, Guangdong, in January 2014, the same bodies destroyed a further 662 kg of ivory products, confiscated during 2014, in Beijing on 29 May 2015.

To help combat the illegal trade in ivory trafficking, a Workshop on Demand-side Strategies for Curbing Illegal Ivory Trade, jointly sponsored by the EU and the China CITES Management Authority, was held in Hangzhou, China on 28–29 January 2015. The State Forestry Administration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture, and General Administration of Customs, as well as representatives from the UK, USA and the European Commission, and representatives of the UN Development and Environment Programmes, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the World Bank, the private sector, NGOs, experts and specialists from many disciplines, including from the ivory carving, collection and art investment circles, joined the meeting. Delegates sought to understand better the markets, motivations and economics of the demand for illegal ivory, identifying key stakeholders and investors. The delegates also discussed what has been done, what should be done, and what will be done to curb the illegal ivory trade, and agreed that a better understanding of the black market drivers of the illegal trade is required.

In May 2015 customs officers and wildlife law enforcement staff took part in Operation Cobra III, an international law enforcement operation to combat wildlife crime. The operation resulted in 139 arrests and many seizures, including elephant ivory and rhinoceros horns. Arrests included a Chinese national believed to have been coordinating rhinoceros horn smuggling from Namibia, an elephant poacher in India, and the seizure of 340 elephant tusks and 65 rhinoceros horns in Mozambique. In total, 37 countries reported seizures and/or arrests during the operation.

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The addax approaches extinction

Following decades of overhunting, two new threats could finally seal the fate of one of Africa's most enigmatic species, the addax. Already Critically Endangered, with at best some 100 individuals left in the wild, the quest for oil coupled with the impacts of chronic insecurity are conspiring to do the rest.

Massive disturbance by oil companies working in the addax's last major stronghold in the deserts of eastern Niger are rapidly negating the progress made by the government and its conservation partners to halt the addax's decline while creating conditions for its recovery. These include the establishment of a vast desert reserve for the addax and other threatened species such as the dama gazelle, cheetah and Barbary sheep, in 2012, and the recruitment and equipping of dozens of new rangers. Efforts to engage the oil companies involved in discussions on how to reduce the impact of their operations on critical addax habitat have so far fallen on deaf ears. Related to this but with even greater direct impact has been the illegal hunting carried out by the military detachments seconded to the petroleum camps to ensure their protection. Ongoing wildlife monitoring is reporting vastly reduced addax sightings and a virtual absence of the antelopes from their previous haunts.

In addition to oil, the fall of the Qaddafi regime in 2011 continues to have consequences for the entire Sahelo-Saharan region of Africa and beyond. Following Libya's meltdown the number of guns and all-terrain vehicles has increased dramatically in neighbouring countries. The once tranquil and rarely visited deserts are now criss-crossed by traffickers of all sorts, and whether by design or by default their impact on wildlife has been significant, with signs of hunting and the trophies of dead animals grim witness to their passage. As crippling are the restrictions put on conservationists from working in areas deemed to be unsafe, currently the majority of the entire Sahara and Sahel!

In response to all this, an alliance spearheaded by the Sahara Conservation Fund and the IUCN Antelope Specialist Group is calling for the support of the leaders of both Niger and Chad to increase the presence of wildlife rangers in key areas and to use their convening power to bring all stakeholders together to adopt meaningful action plans to halt the decline of the addax and associated species before it is too late.

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