

# Drivers of illegal wildlife trade

The problem of illegal wildlife trade is one of wealth, not poverty. Poor people do not buy wildlife, rich people do. As can be seen from the table below, only rich people can afford to pay such high prices for illegal wildlife products. There are several main drivers of illegal wildlife trade: medicinal, ornamental, spiritual, food, and status.

- Many wildlife products are believed to be medicinal but this is mostly a mythical belief. For example, pangolin scale or rhino horn are made of keratin - just as fingernails they lack medicinal value.
- Other products such as elephant ivory serve as a show of status and wealth.
- Most urban Lao consider wild meat a healthy delicacy.

**But most of all, illegal wildlife trade is driven by prices paid for wildlife products traded internationally**



Prices of illegal wildlife products in Laos 2016-2020	
pair of polished elephant tusks	US\$ 25,000
1 kg of Rhino horn	US\$ 16,000
helmeted hornbill casque	US\$ 3,700
pair of tiger fangs	US\$ 1,340
100 g of elephant skin powder	US\$ 153
100 g of pangolin scales	US\$ 43
100 g of bear bile powder	US\$ 29

# How the Lao government is fighting illegal wildlife trade in Laos

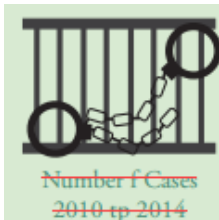
Lao legislation allows villagers controlled hunting of specific wildlife at certain times, but only for home consumption. But selling wildlife in exchange for income is prohibited. This is to protect the livelihood of poor rural people.

- More specifically, Lao Aquatic and Wildlife Law (2007) and Forestry Law (2019) state that all trade in any wildlife species is illegal.

Hunting protected species, hunting during restricted seasons or in prohibited places, and using prohibited hunting tools are considered breaching the law.

- Since 2004, Laos is a signatory of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) to prohibit the trade of highly endangered wildlife between countries.
- PM Order No. 05/2018 was issued to increase forest cover and wildlife populations for the benefit of Lao citizens.
- In recent years, many known locations selling ivory and other wildlife products in Laos have been shut down.

- Penal Code No. 13/2017, Chapter 9, Article 337 states “Anyone hunts, catches, trades, and transits live, carcasses, parts and organs of prohibited wild animals under law shall be punished by six months to three years of imprisonment and fined from 10,000,000 – 50,000,000 Kip”.
- Laos is cooperating with Vietnam, China, South Africa and Thailand, among other countries, to combat illegal wildlife trade across its borders.



- There were about 266 cases of wildlife and aquatic trafficking seizures.
- More than 200 kg of ivory were seized.
- In 2019 alone, 3,400 pieces of ivory products with a total weight of 73.8 kg were seized in Luang Prabang

# What Lao citizens should do to stop illegal wildlife trade

- Educating the next generation on illegal wildlife trade is crucial in changing people’s attitudes and behavior.
- Lao youth who regard protecting wildlife more prestigious than eating it should promote this trend throughout Lao society.
- Urban Lao should stop buying illegal wildlife products.
- Rural residents should protect their wildlife resources by stopping to sell bushmeat or rare animals to urban or foreign people.
- Patriotic Lao citizens should protect their country’s cultural heritage rooted in rich and healthy biodiversity and ecosystems.



# What is illegal wildlife trade all about?

- Illegal wildlife trade is the 4th largest illegal trade worldwide,
- Southeast Asia is a major hub for IWT
- Illegal wildlife trade and over-hunting are responsible for wildlife decline, biodiversity losses and threatened valuable ecosystems such as forests, watersheds or wetlands in Laos and neighboring countries.
- When an ecosystem becomes unbalanced, its functions will begin to decline.
- Human life is beginning to become unhealthy due to IWT



# What is the situation of illegal wildlife trade in Laos

In Laos, illegal wildlife trade means domestic consumption, export of Lao wildlife abroad, and transit wildlife trade through Laos from one country to another.

- **Domestic** wildlife trade occurs in wet markets across the country. Lao legislation allows for controlled hunting by villagers. to hunt unsustainably in exchange for income by selling wildlife.
- **Transit** of very large quantities of wildlife parts such as elephant ivory, rhino horns or pangolin scales are trafficked through Laos to consumers in China and Vietnam.
- **International** wildlife trade by illegal networks imports highvalued wildlife to be resold in Laos or other countries. Wildlife farms in Laos breed and market monkeys, tigers and bears to meet the soaring illegal demand of neighboring countries.

# Why does illegal wildlife trade matter in Laos?

**Food security** - Around 80% of the Lao population live in rural areas and depend on wild animals as staple food. If wildlife is overhunted, the food security of this population will be negatively affected. The Department of Forest Inspection reported that almost 19 tons of wildlife parts of 46 species were seized in Laos in 2014-2019 alone. These volumes of overhunting in fact contribute to the reduction of rural people’s food security.

**Ecosystems and biodiversity at risk** - By 2050, more than 80% of today’s bird and mammal population will have vanished if current practices continue. This also applies to Laos. If species are depleted, ecosystems will become imbalanced, leading to the extinction of other species and impacts on people’s livelihood. For example, when birds are overhunted the population of grasshoppers will increase and crop yields will decrease. In 2019, 5,000 ha of crops in five provinces of Northern Laos were lost to crop pests due to unbalanced ecosystems.

Humans > hunt many birds > bird reduced > grasshoppers increase > crops is destroyed > humans’ livelihood affected

**Economic, social and cultural losses** - Laos is known for its variety and uniqueness of wildlife. The lack of wildlife management and overhunting could lead to the loss of natural and cultural heritage, iconic wildlife species, and economic opportunities such as Lao ecotourism.

- Laos, once called The Land of a Million Elephants, witnesses these iconic animals declining rapidly. Elephants are hunted for ivory and skin as a show of status and wealth.
- Since 1988, approximately 90% of the elephant population in Laos has declined.

**Health risks** - More than 60% of all human diseases originate from wildlife, causing millions of cases of human illness and death worldwide every year.

period Lan Xang late 1980s 2009

number of 1,000,000 2,000 3,000 600-800 wild elephants

- The 2020 Corona virus may have originated from wildlife markets in China. Societies and economies worldwide have lost thousands of lives and billions of dollars.
- If wildlife markets and consumption are not stopped, viruses such as SARS, Ebola, Bird Flu, MERS or Covid-19 will negatively affect human health and the economy in Laos.



## ProFEB

Protection and sustainable use of forest ecosystems and biodiversity

The Protection and Substitutable Use of Forest Ecosystems and Biodiversity (ProFEB) program promotes innovative solutions for good forest governance to the sustainable valuation of forest resources and biodiversity. In addition, the program strengthens the existing environmental education and awareness raising network in Laos that works together in promoting environmental literacy among urban and rural citizens in the country. Environmental Education and Awareness in Laos - EEAL, established in 2019, is a partnership of governments and civil society organizations dedicated to substance development and environmental protection principles. To this end, EEAL used a wide range of interactive and participatory environmental education, communications and awareness raising methods and tools.

## CONTACT

Environmental Education and Awareness in Laos - EEAL  
Department of Environmental Quality Promotion  
Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment  
Nahaidiau Rd, Ban Nahaidiau, Chanthabouly District  
Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR

T +856 21 254 011  
E inf@eea-laos.org  
I www.eea-laos.org

