



**TRAFFIC**  
the wildlife trade monitoring network

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## WWF POLICY BRIEFING

### Wildlife Crime Policing

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WWF has been working for the protection of endangered species for 50 years, and now operates in over 100 countries. TRAFFIC was founded by WWF and IUCN in 1976 as the independent advisory body on the international wildlife trade.

#### Summary

- Wildlife crime and the illegal trade in wildlife are serious threats to nature and the protection of biodiversity.
- Wildlife crime undermines the rule of law, corrupts governance, destabilises society, and has a devastating impact on species populations.
- The illegal wildlife trade is estimated to be the fifth most lucrative illicit transnational activity worldwide, worth \$7.8 - \$10 billion per year. It often involves international criminal networks with links to other organised crimes and terrorism.
- Poaching has escalated dramatically in recent years and is at crisis levels.
  - Rhino poaching in South Africa increased 3,000% between 2007 and 2011 (13 in 2007 to 448 in 2011).
  - Tens of thousands of elephants are killed each year for their ivory.
- The UK is a transit and destination country for the illegal trade in endangered species. The world's largest seizure of rhino horn, involving 128 horns, was in London in 1996.
- In the UK, the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) provides expert support for prevention, detection and enforcement of wildlife crime across borders, customs and local policing. It is a valuable and cost-effective unit.
- Funding for the NWCU is currently insecure. The budget was cut by 10% last year, and funding is only confirmed until March 2013.
- **WWF-UK and TRAFFIC call on the respective Ministers at DEFRA and the Home Office to recognise publicly the importance of the NWCU and commit to sustained funding beyond March 2013, and to commit to long-term funding beyond 2014.**

## Importance of the NWCU

The NWCU assists in the prevention and detection of wildlife crime by obtaining and disseminating intelligence from a wide range of organisations, undertaking analysis which highlights local or national threats, and directly assisting law enforcement agencies in wildlife crime investigations. <sup>1</sup>It works with UK Border Force, Revenue & Customs, Animal Health and police. Internationally it carries out joint operations with EUROPOL and INTERPOL.

## Recent NWCU successes

Rhino horn is a highly valued commodity on the black market as a medicine. Recently an international organised criminal group has stolen rhino horn from antique dealers, auction houses, art galleries, museums, private collectors and zoos. They have committed offences in 15 countries, including five thefts in the UK. The NWCU and Europol gathered and analysed intelligence to track down the gang, leading to several arrests and convictions. In July a man was jailed for two-and-a-half years for his part in a gang's attempt to steal a rhino horn from Norwich Castle. The NWCU provided invaluable expertise to help lead to this successful prosecution.

## Value for money

NWCU is funded by several departments, led by Defra. The current breakdown is:

Defra	£136,000
Home Office	£136,000
ACPO	£75,000
Scottish Executive	£45,000
Scottish Natural Heritage	£15,000
Northern Ireland Government	£5,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£397,000</b>

Its budget was cut by 10% from £440,000 in 2011/12 to £397,000 in the current year. NWCU investigations resulted in the seizure or forfeit of more than £400,000 worth of criminal gains in 2009-10, and gathered intelligence on a number of serious and organised crime groups.<sup>1</sup>

Funding for the NWCU is only confirmed until the end of March 2013.

## Wildlife crime priorities

The NWCU's strategic assessment identifies six UK wildlife crime priorities for 2011-2013: badger persecution; bat persecution; illegal trade in CITES species (with 3 sub-priorities of ivory, tortoises and traditional medicines including rhino horn); freshwater pearl mussels; poaching; and raptor persecution.

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1961-2011: 50 years of conservation. WWF works in over a hundred countries to protect the natural world, tackle climate change and promote sustainable consumption.

Download Briefings at [www.wwf.org.uk/parliamentary](http://www.wwf.org.uk/parliamentary)

<sup>1</sup> NWCU Annual Report 2010 <http://www.defra.gov.uk/paw/files/nwcu-annualreport2010.pdf>