



**Beastly
Business**

Green-Collar Crime and the illegal wildlife trade



Using a **Green-Collar Crime** approach will produce more effective policies to tackle illegal wildlife trade (IWT).

Green-collar crimes are those that are committed knowingly or unknowingly by legal entities.

Tackling these crimes should include:

1. Addressing the role of legal entities in IWT including private businesses and governments
2. Highlighting the harms to wildlife in IWT
3. Focusing on meeting high welfare standards in legal wildlife trade, including during capture, transportation and housing.

Value of the wildlife trade

The wildlife trade, globally, has an estimated worth of US\$220 billion per year ([CITES, 2022](#)), while the value of the illegal wildlife trade is harder to establish: it is estimated to be worth US\$ 7-23 billion per year.

Wildlife crime is commonly called a form of serious, organised crime. The lucrative illegal trade in wildlife is attractive to criminal networks – it offers potentially high profits with lower penalties and risks of being caught.

However, in tackling the illegal wildlife trade, the focus on those easily identified as operating outside the law (poachers, traffickers, organised crime networks) misses the important role of legal businesses that are involved (intentionally or not). It also means current policy responses rely too heavily on law enforcement as a solution, including increased penalties, fines and imprisonment.

As a result, current policies to tackle wildlife crime often fail to address the role of legal entities involved in the illegal wildlife trade.

This is a key policy gap which can be filled by designing policies that explicitly address Green-Collar Crime.

What is Green-Collar Crime?

Green criminologists use the idea of Green-Collar Crime to highlight the ways that legal businesses engage in harmful and/or illegal practices that facilitate illegal wildlife trade ([Wolf, 2011](#); [van Uhm 2016](#)). This is important because it resists clear cut and simple definitions of criminal, organised crime, poacher, and trafficker. Instead, the Green-Collar Crime approach highlights the complexity of the players and processes involved in producing harms towards wildlife ([Iordăchescu et al, 2022](#)).

By using the framework of Green-Collar Crime, we can draw attention to the environmental harms produced by both legal and illegal activities ([van Uhm, 2016](#)) by, for example, transport and shipping companies, restaurants or government failure to manage/control fishing and hunting.

It also opens an opportunity to address animal welfare in the legal and illegal wildlife trades. There is ignorance and denial of the routine and serious harms experienced by animals in the wildlife trade ([Wyatt et al 2022](#)). Harm is brought about by companies and practices that abide by the law, by actors and practices that violate the law, and those that straddle the line between legality and illegality.

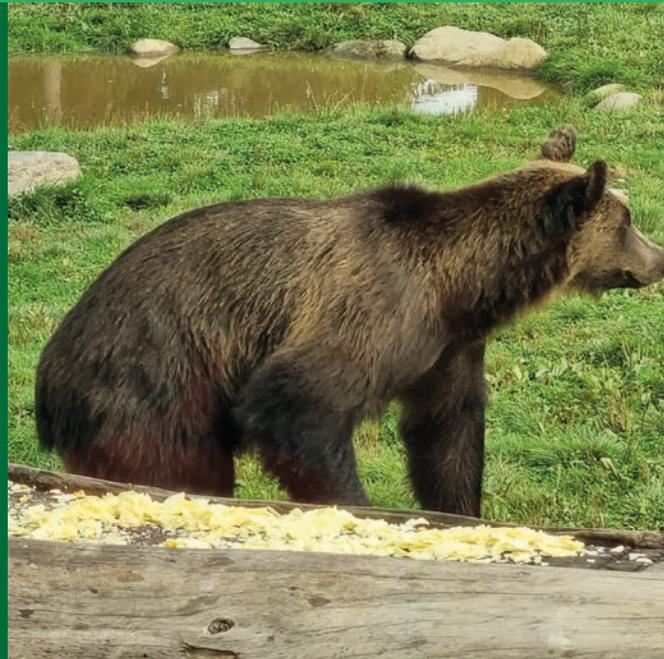
Trapping, hunting, shipping, storage and the sale of wildlife (legal or illegal) can all entail significant harms to the animals themselves. There is a need to develop and enforce high welfare standards for traded wildlife.



Concrete examples

Green-Collar Crime and Bears:

Address the role of private zoos, hunting companies, taxidermists, bear observatories and restaurants in bear trafficking. The harms experienced by 'habituated' bears include becoming conditioned to associate humans with food sources- either because people feed them or leave trash that attracts bears. As a result they can become labelled as a 'problem bear' to be managed through culling, and this opens grey markets for trophies, or can lead to illegal killing as a form of retaliation.



Green-Collar Crime and Eels:

Green-Collar Crime is made possible through fishing activities and restocking operators who may fish beyond the allowable quota. Additional harms also arise during the packing and transport of live glass eels for restocking or aquaculture, and poor welfare conditions at aquaculture facilities. Beyond fishing activities, harms from water abstraction and the lack of eel passes at hydropower plants should also be viewed as a form of wildlife crime.

Green-Collar Crime and Songbirds:

Green-Collar Crime offenders can include hunting companies, restaurants, food transporters, or taxidermists. For example, hunting tourism companies can be involved in using illegal methods, such as calling devices, hunting operators may shoot more than they are officially permitted or shoot birds that are not on the approved list, and restaurants may sell illegally killed birds as delicacies to their customers.





Further reading:

CITES (2022) [World Wildlife Trade Report](#) (CITES/ UNEP-WCMC; Geneva/Cambridge).

lordăchescu, G., Lappe-Osthege, T., Dickinson, H., Duffy, R. and Burns, C. (2022). [Political Ecologies of Green Collar Crime: Understanding Illegal Trades in European Wildlife](#). *Environmental Politics*

Van Uhm, D.P. (2016) [The Illegal Wildlife Trade: Inside the World of Poachers, Smugglers and Traders](#). Springer.

Wolf, B. (2011). [Green-collar crime: Environmental crime and justice in the sociological perspective](#). *Sociology Compass*, 5(7): 499-511.

Wyatt, T. et al (2022) [The welfare of wildlife: an interdisciplinary analysis of harm in the legal and illegal wildlife trades and possible ways forward](#). *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 77: 69–89.

About the Author

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About the Beastly Business Project

The Project is funded by the UKRI Economic and Social Research Council, grant number ES/V00929X/1, and focuses on the political ecologies of green collar crime. Our research examines the trade in European species, especially brown bear, European eel and songbirds.

For more information on our outputs, team and research:

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