

CONTROL OF POACHING AND THE MARKET FOR PRODUCTS SUCH AS IVORY, RHINO HORN, TIGER AND BEAR BODY PRODUCTS

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Summary

Poaching is a complex phenomenon whose motivation and impact on wildlife is diversified among countries. Objects of this article are to describe some of its common features and to outline some ways to deal with it. Trade of wildlife products is also a complex matter. When it encourages poaching or helps in disposing of trophies and animals, it becomes a serious threat to the implementation of any management plan and eventually to the species survival.

1. Introduction

Before discussing problems related to the control of poaching and the market of wildlife products, it seems necessary to understand the reasons that prompt poaching. If these reasons are not removed, poachers will be protected by the local public opinion and control will be either extremely costly or practically impossible.

Poaching, here defined as all illegal taking of wildlife species, species being either terrestrial or aquatic, and both vertebrates and invertebrates, is prompted by reasons that differ across localities, social and political conditions, traditions, and animals that are the object of poaching. On the other hand, the motive for trade is mainly profit (though

other motives may be indirectly related to the same reasons that prompt poaching). However, trade may deal with a variety of products and its control depends on its organisations at national and international levels, but also on the structure, motivation, and general efficiency of the control agencies. It is hard to devise a satisfactory classification of trade; we can however distinguish between the market of trophies (here defined as any part of an animal, whether worked into an object or portion of it, or just as a more or less complete part of an animal) and the trade of live wild animals.

That poachers try to dispose of the killed or captured animal for some sort of profit is usual, but often, at least in the case of terrestrial animals, the sale of trophies is a sort of by-product and not the prime mover of their activity. Vice versa, the capture of live animals, which often implies the killing of one or more adults, is practically always done to supply traders.

With the proviso that the situation differs among countries both as far as the impact on the single species and the general significance of poaching are concerned, some general considerations are however possible.

2. General considerations

A common cause for poaching in a number of countries is simply that people are not aware that their activities are illegal: even in Europe, North America and other so-called "developed countries", the majority of people do not know which restrictions are applied to the taking from the wild of a number of animals, especially when such restrictions are applied only to given areas or times. Apart from the obvious case of the different status of animals within protected areas, private estates, etc., we have, for instance, countries where hunting is generally forbidden when the land is "largely covered by snow", but there are no specifications of what the meaning "largely" is.

If we define "poaching" as above (and this definition is undoubtedly correct from the legal standpoint), few people are aware of most legislation protecting small animals (and especially invertebrates). Even if these are approximately known, the majority of people, including the officers in charge of the enforcement of regulations, are unable to identify the protected species.

When we consider the scientific or moral aspects of the issue, there is no difference between the killing of a rare insect and the killing of a rare mammal; indeed, the possibly unplanned, massive killing of a very rare and local protected insect, for instance by using pesticides, may have greater consequence to biodiversity and habitats than the occasional killing of a few mammals or birds beyond the limits legally stipulated.

3. Killing of wild animals to remove obstacles for possible alternative land developments

One of the main causes prompting conscious poaching in protected areas is when particular species are regarded as factors that restrict the possibility of some exploitation of the inhabited area, or are considered as otherwise harmful.

This is the "rationale" behind not only poaching, but burning, polluting or otherwise damaging protected areas and species. It seems common that local (and non local) people may think that one or more species of wildlife inhabiting a protected area, are the prime reason for the restrictions enforced. Their reasoning may be that, after having removed animals or, sometimes, the vegetation, the area should be declassified and they could develop there activities deemed as useful for themselves.

A possible resentment for being barred from some, possibly traditional, activities, and not necessarily hunting, is often an additional motive for poaching and often adds fuel to the previous one.

The implementation of conservation efforts and of management regulations, unavoidably impinges on traditional activities. It is often resented not only by farmers and pastoralists, who may be directly affected by it, but also, at least in the developed countries, by townspeople, who may complain of access restrictions or of the loss of opportunities such as the acquisition of a resort or the development of sporting facilities. Not rarely, nature conservation and management are accompanied with the ban or the restriction in the possibility of development or profit by either individuals or companies.

4. The illegal taking or destroying of marine animals

Three points are to be stressed when analysing the illegal exploitation of marine fauna. The fishing of protected species or of fry may be prompted by some local alimentary tradition. For instance, in certain areas of the Mediterranean there is an ancient tradition to prepare special dishes using small fishes; there is thus a ready market for them and this is obviously a strong motive to disregard regulations that forbid the use of fine-mesh nets. A second reason is that certain fishing techniques make it impossible to avoid the accidental (and possibly quite common) taking of otherwise protected species, such is the utilisation of floating nets and other non selective methods. Finally, as the unwanted netting of certain animals may induce costly damages to fishing gear, certain species, even when fishermen are aware that they are legally protected, are wilfully destroyed. This is what has happened to the Monk-seal (*Monachus monachus*) in the Mediterranean. Once imprisoned in the nets, seals efforts to free themselves seriously damage costly fishing gear; therefore, they have been hunted for centuries, until the verge of extinction.

5. Poaching animals for food

Poaching animals for food is common in certain areas, such as African forests, where endemic diseases such as Nagana, severely limit the production of meat by stock raising (wherever in tropical and subtropical areas there is a possibility of raising stock, overgrazing will follow almost immediately). This motive for poaching is usually irrelevant in more developed countries, although poachers can consume their quarries not for real alimentary needs, but rather for the sake of some special dish.

Obviously, poaching for food may be locally a major problem and difficult to control, since an effective control would curtail an essential alimentary supply for the population. The theory that we should enforce a policy of sustained yield is quite often

impossible to implement for the simple reason that population increase has outstripped the potential productivity of local wildlife, even under the best management policies. Theoretically an adequate supply of meat from other areas might solve the problem, but this requires a sufficient local income for affording it, a condition that is seldom attainable.

In such circumstances, any effort to implement a policy of control on poaching, even if concentrated only on some species, is due at most for temporary success, since once the other sources of meat will be exhausted the poachers will turn on protected species. In a number of instances, again theoretically, alternative sources of income could originate from the wildlife itself, for instance from tourism. However, to attract tourists, be they the ones with a camera or the ones with guns, there must be a high density of wildlife.

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Bibliography

The reader should be warned that bibliography on poaching, poaching control, trade in trophies, etc. is lacking. No publication has ever attempted to provide a general contribution on most aspects of poaching in the diverse countries.

Books that provide some hints at the poaching problem are as follows:

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Biographical Sketch

Alberto Mario Simonetta was born in Pisa on March 26, 1930. Matriculated in faculty of Medicine of the University of Modena at 16, thence moved to Florence, where he graduated in Medicine in 1952 and in Natural Sciences in 1956.

Has served for many years in the committee for nature conservation of the Italian National Research council and as trustee in the Abruzzi National Park, Calabria National Park, Stelvio National Park. Has directed a series of field missions in Somalia for the Department of Zoology University of Florence between 1959 and 1970, thence has served again in Somalia as consultant for wildlife conservation to the National Range Agency between 1977 and 1982, in Zaire for FAO in 1973. Has done field work in cooperation with the University of Kabul in 1977 and in cooperation with the Zoological Survey of India between 1983 and 1996. Full professor of Zoology and Comparative anatomy at the University of Camerino from 1970 to 1994 and thence as professor of Zoology at the University of Florence.