

Wildlife Trade and Trafficking Position Statement

Trafficking in wildlife species is a globally pervasive phenomenon that impacts One Health, biodiversity, and wildlife rehabilitation on all levels.

Wildlife rehabilitators are a voice for wildlife health, welfare and well-being; whether in the wild or in human care. The IWRC acknowledges the inhumanity, suffering, and often irreversible habitat-, population-, and ecosystem- level damage imposed upon wildlife species in the act of trapping, trafficking, and removal of individuals from the wild.

Policy

- The IWRC condemns wildlife trafficking and supports stringent, evidence based, controls on the legal trade of wildlife to prevent neglect, harm, and life-threatening conditions faced by trafficked wildlife, unchecked and unintentional spread of contagious and zoonotic diseases, the loss of biodiversity, and acceleration of anthropogenic impact on wildlife populations and ecosystems.
- Trafficking of wild animals and their parts is a direct threat to the health and welfare of wildlife, domestic animals, humans, and the environment¹⁻¹¹. As such, we support actions by governmental wildlife agencies, public health agencies, and public and private organizations to ban or eliminate all commercial trade in wildlife, both legal and illegal for purposes other than evidence based conservation management or humane import/export that benefits the individual animal or their population.
- The IWRC supports treaties, laws, enactments, and other legal instruments supported by independent research and science-based evidence which define, delineate, control, enforce and manage illegal trafficking, legal trade, and wildlife health.
- The IWRC supports policies and law enforcement practices that promote good environmental stewardship, recognizing that wildlife needs safe and appropriate habitat for successful release.
- The IWRC will work with rehabilitator organizations, educational institutions, veterinary, biological, One Health, and other professional organizations - as well as within the IWRC - to promote awareness, education, and research. These efforts aim to condemn the illegal wildlife trade and highlight its detrimental effects on wild populations.
- The IWRC encourages cooperation between wildlife rehabilitators and enforcement agencies to rehabilitate and return confiscated trafficked wildlife to the wild when feasible and in alignment with CITES resolution Conf. 10.7 (Rev CoP15). We further encourage

governments to reimburse caregivers for the costs associated with care or euthanasia of the animals, ideally using funds retrieved from traffickers following prosecution.

- The IWRC encourages legislative bodies and judiciaries to ensure that appropriate penalties are available and utilized to impose meaningful administrative, civil and criminal penalties for wildlife trafficking.

Context

Professional wildlife rehabilitators are best suited to receive, triage, and stabilize confiscated live wild animals intended for return to the wild. Their expertise significantly reduces the risk of habituation or imprinting, and of potential cross contamination between individuals taken from wild populations and long-term captives. Experienced rehabilitators possess invaluable insights into biosecurity measures, health management, and the welfare requirements specific to various species coming from wild populations. This depth of knowledge, coupled with hands-on experience in preparing animals for a successful life in the wild, renders wildlife rehabilitators valuable partners in the effective management of confiscated species¹².

Wildlife rehabilitators are uniquely positioned to offer recommendations and counseling to organizations, animal hospitals, law enforcement officers, and other parties managing trafficked species and individuals. They can assist by (a) advising on care and welfare decision-making and policy regarding confiscated wildlife, (b) designing protocols and setting standards for the welfare of trafficking victims, (c) contributing to policies to mitigate and minimize the spread of infectious diseases to and from trafficked individuals, and (d) processing and assessing trafficked wildlife for appropriate medical attention with the end goal of repatriation and release to the wild if possible, and (e) collaborating with scientifically managed conservation programs to introduce non-releasable individuals to captive-breeding populations as valuable genetic donors for sustainable breeding and captive assurance populations, thereby bolstering genetic diversity and sustainability efforts. This multifaceted approach underscores the vital role of wildlife rehabilitators as catalysts for effective conservation strategies, bridging the gap between captive care and successful reintroduction into natural ecosystems.

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