

Poachers stock stores with illegal wildlife

Baby leopard cats snatched from the wild and stuffed into cages to be sold at a Bangkok market.

Exotic birds taken by the thousands from Australia's coast and surreptitiously boated to Singapore for sale.

Rhinoceros slain so their horns can be fashioned into dagger handles.

All are victims of illegal wildlife trade, according to the National Geographic Society.

Even the lizard-skin trim on the trendy boots in a chic New York store might be illegal, imported under false permit.

Illegal wildlife trade is big business, although the past decade has seen laws passed by many nations to restrict sales of endangered animals. With some tiger skins and birds going for \$10,000 each, there are plenty of middlemen who will circumvent laws to satisfy demand for animal products in affluent countries.

THOSE COUNTRIES include the United States. More than 1.5 million live birds, reptiles, and amphibians were imported into this country in 1979, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Officials estimate that for every 10 shipments of wild animals or their products that enter by proper channels, as many as four shipments enter illegally.

Wildlife smuggling costs millions of dollars to police and has spread disease that would have been detected in quarantine. Perhaps more ominous, it contributes to extinction of species around the world.

"The worst thing about the wildlife trade is that it provides the means for people who do not need them," said William Conway, director of the New York Zoological Society.

"No one really needs a leopard coat. And certainly not a toucan."

Smugglers often use elaborate schemes to disguise the origin of their cargo. A Singapore businessman enriched by the animal trade described how exotic birds are taken from Australia, which bans their export.

"A fishing boat is chartered and sailed to Bali, then to the east coast of Australia, outside the Great Barrier Reef," he said.

"From there, twin-engine speedboats make a dash to shore and pick up perhaps 2,000 birds — rosate cockatoos, sulfur-crested cockatoos and parakeets."

"The smugglers return to Indonesia and buy papers saying that that's where the birds are from. Then the birds are taken ashore under cover in Singapore and sold, mostly to European dealers."

"After expenses, such a trip can clear a million dollars. . . ."

"Of course, there is the chance that the trip may make nothing. Each cage has a rope tied to it with a rock at the end. If a patrol boat chases them, the smugglers can dump the birds overboard."

PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE in controlling wildlife traffic, especially since 1973, when 80 nations drafted the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. The agreement, which has been called the most remarkable trade pact ever devised, bans trade of wildlife species on the world's critical list and limits trade in others.

The treaty apparently has squeezed out some smugglers, but enforcement

has been uneven, and many smugglers continue to operate.

At a pharmacy in Macao on the South China coast, for example, a chunk of rhino horn is offered at \$450 an ounce. Many European men consider it an aphrodisiac, although there is no evidence of such powers.

Rhino horns also are prized in North Yemen, where men shape them into handles for their traditional daggers.

The demand for its horn has pushed the black rhino population to dangerously low levels, probably no more than 25,000 in all of Africa. In Kenya, there are now fewer than 1,500.

Poachers also are hot on the trail of the elephant, whose ivory tusks have become increasingly valuable. Ivory prices have risen 1,500 percent in the last 10 years, making elephant slaying lucrative for poor village and big operator alike.

Dealers say many people are hoarding raw tusks in the belief that elephants soon will be extinct.

Although most African nations have limitations on ivory exports, official-looking documents can be bought. By the time the documents are sold and resold in international markets, their origin is so vague that no one can say

whether a carved figurine in a Hong Kong ivory shop came from an elephant legally taken or one that was poached.

Forgery-proof documents are being introduced for ivory and other valuable products.

ELPHANTS AREN'T the only animals hunted for their ivory. More than 5,000 walrus are expected to be killed this year for their tusks. Fish and Wildlife agents recently confiscated five tons of illegal walrus ivory in a five-state raid, the biggest in agency history.

Some wildlife trade goes on in spite of the international pact, taking advantage of a clause that allows nations to "take exception" to certain restrictions. France, Italy, West Germany, Japan and Switzerland, for example, take exception to the treaty's ban on saltwater crocodile trade because they use the skin for leather goods industries.

Fashions trends such as crocodile handbags and spotted catskin coats have contributed to the use of many animals, but a newly aware public is buying fewer of these products.

Major showrooms in Paris have agreed to stop creating coats from endangered species.

volunteers

The Oakland County Volunteer Bureau, a program of the Volunteer Action Center of United Community Services, has weekly listings of volunteer opportunities. Further information about these and other volunteer needs at more than 200 agencies may be obtained by calling the bureau at 647-7272. Any non-profit organization needing volunteer assistance may also call the bureau.

TUTOR — Pine Lake school in Bloomfield Hills needs volunteers 18 and older to help children on an individual basis. No special training is required. However, volunteers interested in developing more in-depth skills will be offered instruction in special education techniques, individualized programming and operation of audio-visual equipment.

PLUS — People Listening, Understanding and Sharing, a program of the Birmingham Youth Assistance, has openings for adult volunteers interested in developing one-to-one relationships with area young people who need a friend. Registration is open for spring training.

ACTIVITY ASSISTANT — Volunteers with an interest in the elderly are needed by Bortz Green Lake Village, a nursing home in West Bloomfield. Duties would vary depending on interests of volunteers but could include teaching arts and

crafts, reading or writing letters, playing games or just visiting. Hours are flexible.

COMMUNITY INFORMATION — WRIF radio is in need of volunteers able to communicate well with others. Volunteers direct callers to appropriate agencies for specific problems, help answer questions concerning public service announcements and do other similar tasks. The station is in Southfield and a time commitment of five hours daily, three days a week between noon and 10 p.m. is asked.

Piano talk set

The 20th annual Piano Teachers Institute of Oakland University will be held on Thursday, May 7, with Helen Briggs Crosier featured as performer-lecturer.

Mrs. Crosier will demonstrate and discuss original interpretations of French music that is not generally known, including selections by Debussy, Faure and Ravel.

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