

National Wildlife Week 2022

WCT's #TrappedInTrade Campaign Brief Note



Myriad species of exotic animals, including several species of monkeys, are kept as pets in India and this demand for exotic species is on the rise. This is a representational image. Credit: pxfuel.com

Owning exotic animals is a growing and a disturbing trend seen across India in recent times. Every year thousands of wild animals are smuggled into and from India as part of the much larger and notorious **exotic pet trade** and owned illegally with no accountability. The **illegal wildlife trade** is one of the biggest organised crime sectors in the world, ranking only below drugs, arms and human trafficking, and is ravaging more than just biodiversity. It is also destroying livelihoods and is reportedly even funding terrorist and militia activities, putting national security of nations and basic human rights at risk.

In 2020, in response to a Government advisory, over [30,000 Indians](#) came forward voluntarily to disclose their possession of exotic animals for which they had no legal permits or documentation. Various exotic species of kangaroos, tortoises, pythons, parrots, marmosets, lemurs, other primates, etc. among others, made up the ostentatious and long list of exotic animals (some of them critically endangered and

particularly rare in their native countries) possessed by people in the country. The recent distressing incident of [kangaroos showing up in](#) West Bengal is a symptom of a much deeper, larger rot perpetuated by wildlife trafficking and the lack of necessary wildlife laws in the country.

Purchasing a single African grey parrot, or an Arapaima fish, or even a Red-eared slider turtle to keep as a pet may seem like a harmless transaction to many. But it is hard to ignore the shocking levels of animal cruelty involved in its trade. The conditions in which animals are captured from the wild, transported, kept captive, bred and displayed is the stuff of nightmares. The problem runs far deeper, rupturing layers across ecology, environment, humanity, and ethics.

The lack of a concerted law in India that extends protection to exotic species and/or regulates their trade is a matter of grave concern. In India, trade in native species is prohibited under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. But, the trade in exotic species does not fall under the ambit of this Act, leaving a gaping legal hole in India's wildlife protection system. This glaring lacuna has been well-exploited by those involved at various levels of the wildlife trade supply chain. Even the provisions of the international treaty to regulate trade in wild species called **CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna)**, which India has been a signatory to since 1976, are not well legislated or enforced on the ground. Currently, CITES provisions in India are implemented largely only through the Customs Act, 1962, and are enforced only at the border where smuggled animals and animal parts are seized. Once inside Indian territory consignments are more or less untouchable, as no law or policy has been designed to apprehend the people illegally owning exotic animals.

Thankfully, this status quo is on the precipice of change for the better. One of the new amendments included in the **Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2021**, is to implement the CITES provisions to regulate international trade in wild animals and plants. The bill is at an advanced stage in the parliamentary process, and has been passed in the Lok Sabha as of August, 2022. This law when passed will come with its own challenges of enforcement and capacity, but it is a much-needed step in the right direction.

While amending the law is necessary to combat illegal wildlife trade, it is equally necessary to create awareness among the masses and sensitise people to the stark truths of the brutal live animal trade. It is time to bring this matter to the forefront of people's consciousness as ignorance is the crux of this problem. Highlighting the illegal pet trade and educating the masses about this multi-layered issue is crucial, and the **Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT)** is working towards this.

Last year, in October 2021, WCT launched the **#TrappedInTrade awareness campaign** to start a mainstream conversation regarding the rapidly growing demand for exotic wild animals among Indians. WCT highlighted the ills of the exotic pet trade, their impact on biodiversity, ecosystem and people. Through this campaign, WCT also highlighted the urgent need for stronger laws for regulation of trade in exotic animals in India, and wrote to the authorities in lieu of this.

Since then, WCT has organised online talks and discussion with experts to further educate the audience about this deep-rooted issue, and bring about a shift in mindset, so that more and more people are discouraged from purchasing, keeping, and breeding exotic animals. A [series of popular articles](#) on the issue have been written and published by WCT. When the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2021, was introduced in parliament in December 2021, WCT wrote a letter to the Chair, Standing Committee on Science, Technology, Environment and Climate change with its list of recommendations and suggestions on the amendments proposed to the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, and even offered to assist in the process to make the Bill robust, more CITES-compliant and best suited to curb the illegal wildlife trade internationally.

This year too, on the occasion of the **National Wildlife Week 2022** that falls in the first week of October, WCT will take this campaign forward to sensitise people to the serious issue of exotic pet trade and educate them about the recent legislative developments in the form of the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2021.

The time is now ripe for the people of India to understand the fact that illegal wildlife trade is one of the major causes for **species extinction** on the planet. The COVID-19 pandemic further illustrates the urgent need to at best regulate trade in wildlife as the conditions in which these animals are captured, transported, kept captive and bred increase the risks of animal-to-human transmission of zoonotic (transmissible between animals and people) diseases. With climate change already upon us, restoring biodiversity is the need of the hour.

Writers, journalists, podcasters, artists and others who wish to cover WCT's #TrappedInTrade campaign or to support/collaborate with us to amplify the campaign, please get in touch with -

Purva Variyar, Conservation & Science Writer| Editor, WCT, at purva@wctindia.org

Rizwan Mithawala, Conservation Writer, WCT, at rizwan@wctindia.org

C. Samyukta, Forensics Expert, WCT, at samyukta@wctindia.org

Shrutika Mulaye, Social Media Strategist, WCT, at shrutika@wctindia.org

Mridula Vijairaghavan, Environmental Lawyer, WCT at mridula@wctindia.org

Campaign resources -

Blogs:

<https://www.wildlifeconservationtrust.org/indias-growing-fetish-for-wildlife-of-the-exotic-kind/>

<https://www.wildlifeconservationtrust.org/indias-burning-exotic-pet-trade-crisis/>

<https://www.wildlifeconservationtrust.org/why-india-needs-stronger-laws-to-protect-exotic-species-on-its-soil/>

<https://www.wildlifeconservationtrust.org/expert-speak-law-over-advisory-is-the-urgent-need-of-the-hour/>

Experts' Roundtable:

<https://www.wildlifeconservationtrust.org/portfolio/trapped-in-trade-experts-roundtable/>

Social media content links -

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CVVgCg4rhIF/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CUt9uWHgixb/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

https://www.instagram.com/p/CUm72p_KUBU/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CUkhrCqKEfQ/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CUkOpWsK81m/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

https://www.instagram.com/p/CUj_somgulW/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CUh0KCZq2ld/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CUhZKrHN971/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CUfQcYZMho1/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>