

SNAKES IN SOCKS AND OTHER SMUGGLING STORIES

On a cold December day in 2015, a man was stopped crossing the border from the USA into Canada. The border agent had noticed strange lumps in the man's pants. It turned out that he had 51 turtles taped to his legs! He was trying to sneak the turtles into Canada so he could ship them to China for sale. Another man tried to get into Australia with a fish tied around his neck in a plastic bag. Yet another man is facing five years in prison for trying to smuggle snakes into Canada in his socks.

These are pretty small-time crimes. But wildlife smuggling is a big business. One investigation found more than [6000 turtles for sale](#), many of them endangered species. The value of these turtles was over three million dollars. In fact, [wildlife smuggling is the third largest source of criminal earnings](#) in the world, after drugs and weapons.

Turtles aren't the only animals that are traded and sold. In some places, animal parts are used for traditional medicines, jewelry or special foods. Elephants are poached for their tusks and rhinos are killed for their horns. Sharks are butchered to make shark fin soup. The most trafficked animal in the world is one you've probably never heard of. The pangolin is a strange-looking creature sort of like an anteater. Its scales are in big demand for Chinese medicines and American cowboy boots. Now it is almost extinct.



But mostly, these smuggled animals become exotic pets. Lizards, scorpions and monkeys are captured from their native habitats and end up in family homes. Up to 5 million birds, from hummingbirds to eagles, are trafficked every year. Big cats are also trophy pets. For every lion or tiger in a zoo in the USA, experts guess that there are probably 10 in private estates.

It is against the law to capture and sell wild animals. For one thing, it's cruel to the animals themselves. Also, removing animals from a habitat upsets nature's balance. Most importantly, animal trafficking overkills. Illegal hunting is one of the biggest threats to the world's endangered animals.



If that's not enough, there's also a very real danger to humans. Wild animals can carry diseases that are harmful to people. Scientists estimate that [75% of all new infectious diseases come from animals](#). In fact, [one study in China](#) has found that pangolin smuggling might be linked to the Corona Virus that is devastating the world.

Governments around the world are working to crack down on illegal animal trafficking. But so far, the criminals are winning. And it's hurting the animals, the people and the earth.



BEFORE READING

Did you know that it's illegal to capture and sell wild animals? So, why do people pay big money for everything from cockroaches to elephants, when it's against the law? Read to find the answer to that question and why it's a big problem all over the world.

There are several words in this article that describe animal trade. **Poaching** is illegally hunting or catching animals, usually because they're protected or on someone else's land. When those animals are moved into or out of a country, it's called **smuggling**. And buying and selling those creatures illegally is called **trafficking**.

DURING READING

As you read, highlight or circle any words that are new or confusing to you. Put a check mark beside any facts you already knew. Put a star beside any facts that are new to you.

AFTER READING

Things to think about...

1. In the last paragraph, what do you think "crack down" means?
2. How does animal trafficking harm "animals, people and the earth"?
3. Why do you think people want tigers and snakes for pets?
4. What do you think the punishment for smuggling wild animals should be?

Something to do: RACE CAR READING and WORD SORTING

Read like a race car! Run your eyes quickly over the passage to look for the list of words on the next page. Run your eyes down the page as quickly as possible to search for the words. You don't have to read every word; try to make your eyes light on the focus words. This is called "SCANNING." Then sort the words into groups that go together.



WORD SORTS

Find each of these words in the passage. Highlight them in the passage when you find them.

habitats
smuggling
thefts
endangered
trafficking

poaching
illegal
predator
prey

exotic
extinct
species
criminal

Now sort the words into two groups: words involving crime and words involving animals.

WORDS RELATED TO CRIME	WORDS RELATED TO ANIMALS

BONUS! Highlight the *verbs* (doing/action words) in green.
Highlight the *adjectives* (describing words) in yellow.

