



For syndicates that smuggle animals it's a numbers game. Many animals won't survive the journey

Poaching of wildlife species is big business. Every year millions of Australian native wildlife are sold around the world to feed the insatiable greed of cashed-up collectors.

Earlier this year, news reports revealed a kookaburra on sale for US\$1200 in a pet shop in America. In Australia it's illegal to keep a kookaburra as a pet, but such laws don't exist in the U.S. state of Virginia, where the bird was found.

Whilst some wildlife trade in Australia is legal, many animals are captured from the wild illegally to supply an illicit global wildlife trade worth billions of dollars. Some of these smuggled species are listed as endangered.

Sadly, illegal wildlife trade has made some species, like African Grey parrots, critically endangered or even locally extinct, according to World Animal Protection. In fact, Australia is the leader of the highest mammal extinction rate of species anywhere in the world!

What's more horrifying is the suffering they go through. Many of these animals don't survive the journey across the border, slowly suffocating their way to cashed-up collectors across the ocean. It's clear wildlife smugglers will do anything to avoid getting caught, even if it means putting an animal's life at risk.

Wildlife trafficking is the fourth most lucrative global crime, according to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). The illegal trade in wildlife is a global problem, estimated to be worth up to US\$ 20 billion per year and getting worse, according to the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)².

"Wildlife trafficking has surged in recent years, generating billions in illicit profits. Simply put, criminals are helping themselves to the environment's precious resources without a care for the cost to our planet," said INTERPOL Secretary General Jürgen Stock in a press release.

INTERPOL's transcontinental operation (codenamed Thunderstorm) against the illegal trade in wildlife (and timber), and involving 92 countries including Australia,

has seen hundreds of seizures worth millions of dollars worldwide, as well as suspects arrested. It also revealed how wildlife trafficking groups use the same routes as criminals involved in other crime areas – often hand-in-hand with tax evasion, corruption, money laundering and violent crime.

It's difficult to know exactly how much of Australia's wildlife is smuggled out of the land Down Under. According to an ABC news report from a year ago, convicted animal smuggler Niall Cooke said Australians would be horrified if they knew how many animals are dying in black market trade while being smuggled to cashed-up collectors in Europe and Asia.³ More disturbingly, organised crime is increasingly getting involved, he added.

How serious is the Australian Government about protecting its unique wildlife? Pet Industry News explores how various departments are working to crack down on illegal wildlife trade.

The Australian Government is a signatory of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) and having a national environmental law, the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act). The EPBC Act enables the Government to join with the states and territories in providing a national scheme of environment and heritage protection and biodiversity conservation.

A number of Australian Government departments have a role to play in the detection and enforcement of laws designed to protect our environment including wildlife. These include the Australian Federal Police, Department of the Environment, Australian Border Force, Australian Fisheries Management Authority, Australian Maritime Safety Authority, Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service and state government agencies.

Wildlife trafficking has severe penalties including fines of up to \$210,000 and imprisonment for up to 10 years, as listed on the Department of Environment and Energy website.

Australia's state and territory governments also have laws on keeping wildlife within their borders and regulate the export (and import) of wildlife across their borders with permits. In serious cases, breaches to permits can lead to the suspension or cancellation of permits, and prosecution.

Leading wildlife trade organisation TRAFFIC states, "the conservation community has never been so well equipped to combat the motivations, rewards and enablers of wildlife crime. Yet, advances in technology and rising globalisation mean that wildlife traffickers and highly organised criminal syndicates are increasingly able to capitalise on regulatory loopholes and weak enforcement."



ALARMING REPORT ON AUSTRALIA'S WILDLIFE PROTECTION POLICIES

In November 2015, the Australian Auditor General's Department completed an alarming report on legal and illegal wildlife trade, revealing the effectiveness of the Department of Environment and Department of Immigration and Border Protection (two main government departments armed with the responsibility of wildlife trade provisions) have been undermined by the absence of appropriate and tailored policies and procedures⁴.

The report made recommendations for improvement, including better

