

Date: Fri, Sept. 13th
Time: 16:00 (UTC+8)
Venue: 3N01 + Zoom



Overexploitation of wildlife has been demonstrated as one of the greatest threats to the survival of species. Yet whilst many people appreciate the threat posed by illegal wildlife trade, the threat posed by legal trade is often underappreciated, and legal trade is often conflated with sustainable trade, despite the lack of evidence in the majority of cases that it is infact sustainable.

Few countries both database and publically release their data on wildlife trade, however the Fish and Wildlife Service of the United States is one of the few that does through the Law Enforcement Management Information System (LEMIS). We explore 22 years of data (2000–2022) collated through LEMIS, quantify what is in trade across all major taxa. LEMIS included 21,097 species traded across this time, which increases to 29,445 when CITES is included. Gauging sustainability also requires understanding the origins of wildlife, as animals collected from the wild or bred in captivity, yet for many taxa at least half individuals come from the wild, and over 2.85 billion whole individuals were traded over this period. These volumes of trade pose not only a potential risk to wild species, but also a risk of spread of pests and pathogens, and this trade included the import of species regarded as “injurious invasive” species.

Finally, we discuss the implications of this trade, and highlight the need for better data to monitor trade more widely. Despite many issues associated with the use of LEMIS, few Nations collate and release data on wildlife trade, undermining any attempt to understand the true dimensions of trade, or to regulate it to ensure sustainability. We highlight the urgent need for better, more standardised data collection, especially in major import regions such as the European Union to bolster our ability to mitigate the risks posed by trade to the survival of traded species

Understanding the magnitude of legal wildlife trade



Alice C. Hughes

Alice Hughes is an Associate Professor at the University of Hong Kong and formerly a Professor at the Chinese Academy of Sciences following from positions in Thailand, the CSIRO in Canberra, and a PhD at the University of Bristol. She is the author of over 200 papers and was in the top 2% most cited researchers in Ecology globally in 2023. She is President of INTECOL, Chief editor of Climate Change Ecology, on various task forces for the UN, working groups for a number of NGOs and IGOs, and a data ambassador for GBIF, and a Lead Coordinating Author for an upcoming IPBES report. Through these roles and others she seeks to better mobilise and translate data to enable change in policy and practice.

ALL ARE WELCOME!