



ANNUAL REPORT 2022



LOOKING OUT FOR THE UNDERDOGS

It is all too easy to overlook what we don't know - to ignore the little guys, the 'ugly' ones, the unnamed, the non-iconic, the cryptic or the forgotten. These neglected little (and sometimes remarkably big) species are at the heart of Monitor's work. We fill a niche that is so often ignored, by looking beyond iconic megafauna to turn our gaze to lesser-known - or in some cases, virtually unknown - species in trade. These species are often at heightened risk and could tragically disappear without anyone even noticing.

We hope that our work will inspire you to support our efforts.



WHAT WE DO

We investigate illegal wildlife trade and its drivers at national and international levels, advise policy and conservation interventions, and create and raise consumer awareness and public concern.

To advocate for positive conservation measures, we publicise our findings which include evidence-based recommendations to address the identified gaps and issues.

OUR MISSION

We are dedicated to stopping the decline in species negatively impacted by trade by providing objective and evidence-based scientific research.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK

2022 was a challenging year.

Adapting to global pandemic-related restrictions and a rapidly changing funding landscape placed more obstacles in our path than ever before. But in the face of these, it was nonetheless a productive year.

Wildlife trade is more complicated than what is usually portrayed in the media. It goes beyond poachers, traffickers, buyers and users. Fraught with exploitative abuse of systems designed to protect wildlife by sophisticated criminal networks, and underscored by corruption at multiple levels. These complexities are further magnified when tackling lesser-known species, and lesser-known issues.

Numerous species are very obscure and traded under the radar, being pushed towards the brink of extinction largely, or completely, unnoticed. This list of highly threatened species is growing longer at a frightening pace. Improving our understanding of the impact trade has on wild populations is key to crafting solutions – and our core business.

Last year, we published evidence on the need to better protect key groups of heavily traded but very poorly studied species from illegal and/or unsustainable trade, such as songbirds, serow and tortoises and freshwater turtles.

We developed new partnerships around the globe and laid foundations for future work on species we have not yet focused on, such as parrots, pigeons, doves, skinks and agamids.

Investigating illegal and unsustainable trade and filling evidence gaps to inform policy decisions, support enforcement efforts, reduce consumer demand and catalyse conservation actions is absolutely essential. It is what we are all about.

Putting this evidence to use is the core of our contribution to conservation, and we hope you find the highlights of these in this Annual Report interesting and useful. Working with my **team** of hard-working and motivated experts is extremely rewarding, and I hope you can join me in thanking them for their inspired efforts. Overcoming our funding challenges is the key to a successful future for Monitor but I am confident that we will secure the support we need and play an even greater role in the fight against the illegal and unsustainable trade in wildlife in 2023, and beyond.



Chris Shepherd

Chris R. Shepherd, PhD.

2022 PROJECTS

Black-crested Macaque



Bushbabies



Wild sheep and goat trade in Myanmar



Hornbills in Thai Zoos



Online bird trade in Vietnam



Blue Tree Monitor



MAMMALS

BIRDS

REPTILES

Saiga Antelope



Sumatran Serow



Silvery Pigeon



Lombok bird trade



Southeast Asian Box Turtle



Online reptile trade in Thailand





MAMMALS

Mammals are traded illegally and unsustainably for their parts used in traditional medicines, their meat for consumption and live for the pet trade. Some species are also traded to meet demand for luxury goods such as trophies, furs and ivory.



In 2022, we documented the trade in highly threatened species such as the trafficking of the Sulawesi endemic and critically endangered **Black Crested Macaque** *Macaca nigra* from Indonesia to the Philippines and the commercial trade of the critically endangered **Saiga Antelope** *Saiga tatarica* in Thailand.

Viral videos on social media of other nocturnal primates have previously led to increased demand for pets, so we took a closer look at posts of **bushbabies** on TikTok and Instagram to learn more about the influence on followers' attitudes and desire to keep them as pets.

Serow are the most heavily traded of the wild sheep and goats in Southeast Asia, yet few people have ever heard of this mountain goat.

Last year, we studied the illegal trade of the **Sumatran serow** *Capricornis sumatraensis sumatraensis* for traditional medicine in Indonesia and the trade in **wild sheep and goats** for meat, medicine, and trophies in Myanmar, with links to China, India, and Thailand. Our research on the illegal serow trade in Southeast Asia was used in the IUCN Red List assessments for the Red Serow *C. rubidus* and Mainland Serow *C. sumatraensis*.





BIRDS

Birds are illegally trapped and trafficked internationally and traded at regional and local levels for various purposes. Some species are targeted for consumption and belief-based use, while many are in demand as pets.



Photo by James Eaton | Birdtour Asia

Constant monitoring of wildlife trade is of the highest importance, not only to detect trade trends over longer periods, but also to flag critical issues as they arise. The latter is exactly what happened last year when members of the Monitor Songbird Lab were alerted to online trade records of the Critically Endangered **Silvery Pigeon** *Columba argentina*.

Silvery Pigeons occur across several small islands off the coasts of Indonesia and Malaysia and are extremely rare. It was even thought to be extinct in the wild until the late 2000s. The species' small and fragile population is threatened by habitat destruction and invasive predators, so any trade pressure poses a serious danger to its survival.

After being alerted to a Facebook post offering the species for sale, we investigated further and found that no less than 10 individuals had been offered for sale online in a matter of months. To alert the international conservation community and governments, we published a peer-reviewed note outlining the issue and as a result of our initiative, plans are underway to create a Silvery Pigeon Action Plan.



Hornbills are a popular feature in Thai zoos but there is no central registry of captive birds in Thailand, neither has their welfare condition in captivity been recorded, which prompted our study of **hornbills in Thai zoos**.

BIRDS

Songbirds (Passeriformes) are among the most heavily traded birds in the world. Whether for consumption, use in traditional medicine, ritual purposes, or use as pets, songbirds are in demand around the globe. This demand has been present for a long time, however, with human wealth and populations increasing, and trade expanding beyond the local level to regional and global levels, ensuring the sustainability of this potentially harmful trade is crucial.

To investigate songbird trade, Monitor created the **Monitor Songbird Lab**, comprising a group of leading experts and researchers all over the world. The primary mission of the Lab is to assess songbird trade issues and share knowledge to enable timely and effective conservation action.

Songbird trade is a global issue, but most intense in Asia, particularly Southeast Asia. Dubbed the Asian Songbird Crisis, trapping wild songbirds to meet the high demand for cage birds has led to the local extinction of several species.

To address this crisis, the **IUCN SSC Asian Songbird Trade Specialist Group (ASTSG)** was founded in 2017. Monitor is an active member and in line with the ASTSG's goals, we fill gaps with much-needed evidence-based knowledge.

We published overviews on the **bird markets in Lombok**, Indonesia, and on the **bird trade on Vietnamese online platforms**. Both studies highlight the increasing significance of online bird trade.



We welcomed two important songbird **listings** at the 19th Conference of Parties of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Panama:

1. Uplisting of the critically endangered Straw-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus zeylanicus* from Appendix II to I, effectively prohibiting commercial international trade.

2. Listing of the much-in-demand White-rumped Shama *Kittacincla malabarica* in Appendix II, enabling better regulation and monitoring of international trade in the species

Monitor has studied the trade in Straw-headed Bulbuls and White-rumped Shammas extensively, and our work was used in the creation of the proposals that led to these listings.

As part of efforts to raise the profile of songbirds in the international conservation arena, we joined the European Association for Zoos and Aquariums, Lincoln Park Zoo, Species 360, BirdLife International, TRAFFIC and Wildlife Conservation Society in organising the Songbird Side Event at the CITES CoP19. Attended by government officials, ornithologists and conservation experts, it shone the spotlight on the under-representation of songbirds in CITES and the need for CITES to regulate international songbird trade.





REPTILES

Reptiles are among the most heavily traded wildlife species in the world, and along with amphibians, accounted for over half of new listings at CITES CoP 18 and CoP19.



Photo by Jordi Janssen | Monitor

In 2022, we focused on learning more about the fundamentals of wildlife trade, using reptiles as case studies.

Millions of tortoises and freshwater turtles are traded annually to supply demand for meat, traditional medicines, and pets, with the latter involving the greatest number of threatened species. Much of the international trade in these species is regulated by CITES, but not all. For some, a lack of evidence to support listings remains.

While a few species are bred in captivity, the majority are taken from the wild, such as the critically endangered Ploughshare Tortoise *Astrochelys yniphora* and Radiated Tortoise *Astrochelys radiata*, both endemic to Madagascar.

We identified weaknesses along the trade chains where illicit harvest or trade may be taking place. We studied the legality, livelihoods, sustainability and overexploitation of **Southeast Asian Box Turtles** *Cuora amboinensis* in Indonesia.

We invested in more active engagement with the global tortoise and freshwater turtle conservation effort, presenting to global experts at the Turtle Survival Alliance annual conference in Arizona, USA and contributing to working groups focused on cracking down on illegal trade.

There are also a number of red flags in the legal trade of reptiles. Harvest and trade quotas are often ignored in countries where species occur. Wild-caught animals are brought into breeding facilities, falsely claimed as captive-bred and laundered into the global market. Last year, we delved into the trade Indonesian endemic **Blue Tree Monitor** *Varanus macraei* captured from the wild in violation of Indonesia's harvest and trade quotas.

We studied how the COVID-19 pandemic - which drew attention to zoonotic risks of wildlife markets - impacted **online reptile trade in Thailand**, and found that although reduced, the market shifted towards native species.

LOOKING AHEAD

We are inspired by the progress we have made towards our conservation goals in this time of biodiversity crisis and we are motivated to make greater strides in the future.

As we recognize the complexity of illegal and unsustainable trade, our long-term strategic plan is designed to inform multiple interventions.

Our programmes are expanding, and we affirm our commitment to work on historically neglected species and issues, such as links between the trophy hunting industry and international trafficking of bear parts from Russia, trade in freshwater turtles and tortoises, porcupines, leopards and pangolins in Asia, commercial captive lion trade in South Africa and songbird trade in Europe and the Americas.

We look forward to launching the Songbirds in Trade Database (SiTDB) – the world’s first global open-source songbird trade database – a free tool that aims to fill knowledge gaps that have resulted from research and data biases towards commonly traded species and species that are already protected in legal frameworks.

We are also innovating new methods to assess trade impacts to identify priority species, applying criminological frameworks to provide insight into why some species are taken illegally more frequently than others and exploring ways in which to reduce supply and demand of illegally or unsustainable traded wildlife through the use of various deterrents.





Our work would be impossible without the generous support of our donors and partners since Monitor was established in 2017. We would also like to acknowledge the individuals who have made personal donations.

Your trust and belief in our work is truly appreciated.

ACT NOW: DONATE TO MONITOR



@mcrsociety

PO Box 200 Big Lake Ranch
British Columbia
V0L 1G0 Canada
www.mcrsociety.org
info@mcrsociety.org