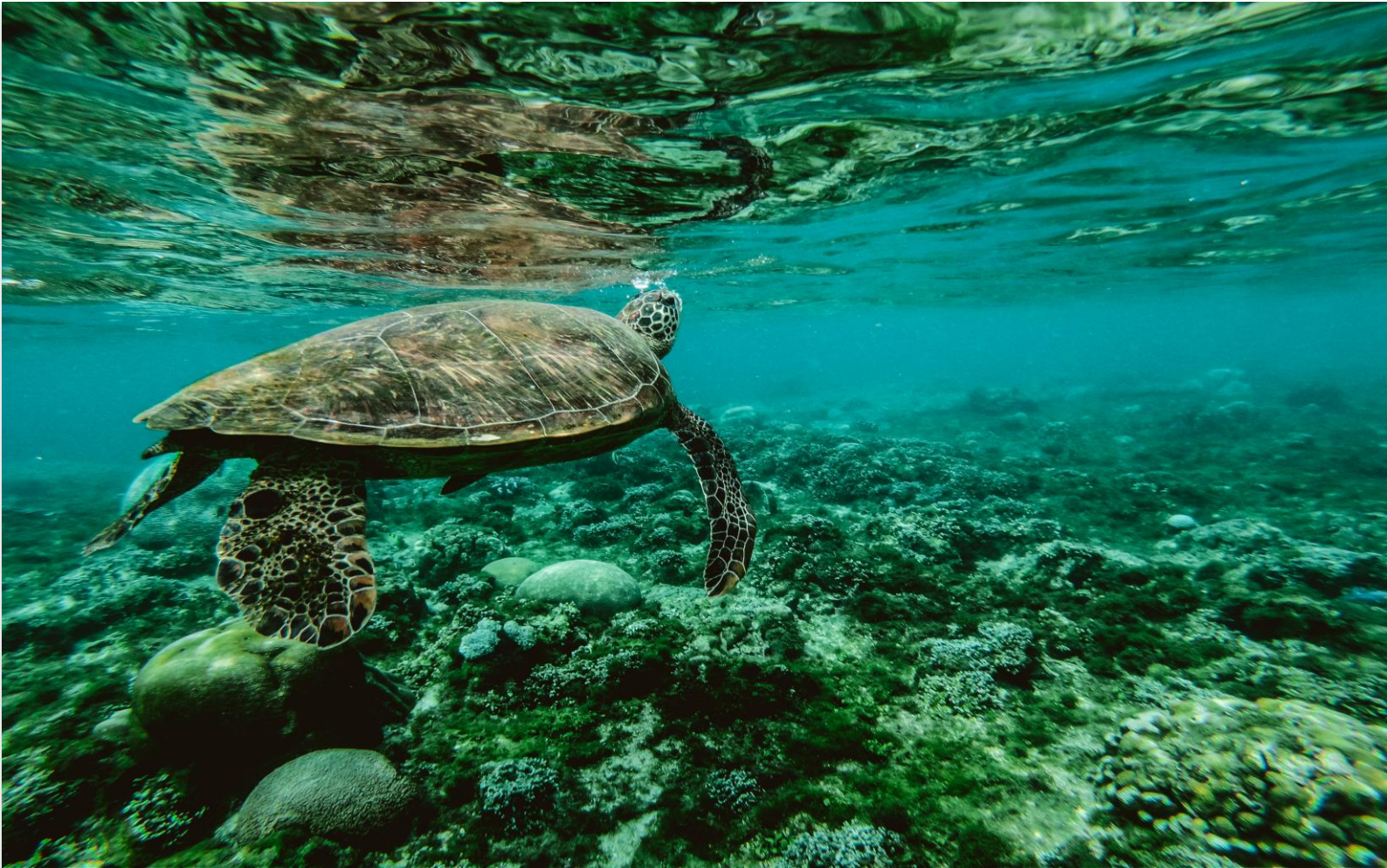




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ISSUES BRIEF: GHANA COMBATTING WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING

Ghana is rich in biodiversity but struggles to protect its natural resources against illegal poaching and trafficking because of weak legislation and low enforcement capacity.

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Ghana is part of the Upper Guinea rain forest, identified by the Convention on Biological Diversity as one of the world's 25 biodiversity hotspots. Its unique ecosystems, ranging from forests to coastal savannah, are home to 3,600 species of flora and as many as 221 species of amphibians and reptiles, 728 species of birds and 225 mammalian species. This natural heritage is under threat from increasing levels of illegal poaching and trafficking. Between 2000 and 2016 the most commonly trafficked species in Ghana were reptiles, 17% of which were royal pythons and 7% emperor scorpions.

Several smuggling routes converge in Ghana. It is a staging area for illegal exports of rosewood from Burkina Faso, the Gambia, and other West African countries. Several seizures in 2017 of large shipments of pangolin scales and live birds from Ghana also point to its importance as both an origin and transit country for the illegal trade in wildlife.

WEAK LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Ghana is a Category 3 country under the CITES National Legislation Project, meaning that its legislative framework does not yet meet the requirements for the implementation of CITES. Ghana's wildlife legislation does not offer a strong foundation for enforcement and there are gaps and inconsistencies that limit authority to regulate the trade in CITES-listed species. For instance, there is a lack of clarity on which government agencies are authorized to issue wildlife permits. The main laws regulating wildlife trade, the Wild Animals Act and the Wildlife Conservation Regulations, include only species that are native to Ghana and so do not cover the range of species covered by CITES. They also do not cover plant species. Some sectors are better regulated, such as timber and fisheries resource management, but overall Ghana falls short of the requirements to fully implement CITES.

Ghana's penalties for wildlife crimes are weak. None meet the definition of a "serious crime" per the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNOTC) standard, which is an offence punishable by a maximum deprivation of liberty of at least four years or a more serious penalty. However, Ghana's Customs Law provides for strict penalties for related offenses, such as smuggling and conspiracy, that could be leveraged to strengthen Ghana's enforcement response.

LOW CAPACITY FOR ENFORCEMENT

The lack of a strong legislative framework to combat wildlife crime is compounded by low capacity in Ghana's enforcement agencies. Frontline officers lack basic knowledge and equipment necessary to detect wildlife crime.

CITES KNOWLEDGE. Stakeholders in enforcement agencies have identified the lack of knowledge about CITES requirements as a key gap in the capacity of frontline officers which limits their ability to detect and investigate wildlife crime. Customs officers in general know little about CITES and most border control officials have never received basic training on CITES regulations such as permit and certificate requirements.

DETECTION OF WILDLIFE CONTRABAND. Frontline officers have inadequate capacity to detect and investigate wildlife crime. While some agencies such as the Forestry Commission and Veterinary Service train their officers in detecting and responding to wildlife trafficking, these officers are rarely posted at entry and exit ports. Enforcement officials are largely unfamiliar with the identification of CITES-listed species and specimens, as well as investigative techniques such as domestic and

international controlled deliveries, forensic technologies, and financial investigations that are important tools to combat wildlife trafficking.

STAFF AND EQUIPMENT. The number of staff from national law enforcement agencies responsible for investigating wildlife trafficking is insufficient. Those that exist rarely receive on-the-job training or mentoring to improve their capacity to enforce Ghana’s wildlife laws. Furthermore, equipment and tools for border control officers to use to respond to wildlife trafficking are limited. Ghana’s main entry and exit ports are equipped with x-ray scanners, but have no tools specifically designed for the detection of illegal wildlife products such as detector dogs imprinted for wildlife contraband and thermal imagers.

LOW AWARENESS AMONG KEY STAKEHOLDERS. Low awareness about CITES and wildlife crime is prevalent among frontline enforcement officers, senior government leadership, and the public. This hampers the response to wildlife crime as frontline staff lack the skills and resources to enforce their mandates, and high-level officials are not sensitized to the threats of wildlife crime to Ghana’s biodiversity, society, and economy. There is also little public awareness about the detrimental effects of wildlife crime. More awareness would provide a stronger basis for more strategic responses to wildlife crime, such as interagency and international coordination.



Bushmeat Market, Accra – Photos by Charles Niekerk

LIMITED INTERAGENCY AND INTERNATIONAL COORDINATION

Ghana does not currently have a national strategy or formalized systems to promote interagency and international cooperation on combatting wildlife trafficking. The few joint enforcement operations that take place are on an ad hoc basis and rarely lead to follow-on investigations.

NATIONAL STRATEGY. Ghana does not currently have a national strategy to combat wildlife crime. The agencies mandated to enforce wildlife laws work together on an ad hoc basis without any formalized framework for cooperation or sharing of information. More inter-agency coordination is required in order to share information and pool expertise. A national strategy could also foster stronger responses to wildlife crime by creating a multi-agency approach with a clear framework of roles and responsibilities.

JOINT ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS. Ghana rarely conducts joint enforcement operations at the interagency or international level. Those that do take place do not fall under a broader strategic response to wildlife crime. Intelligence gathering and analysis is also weak, with no central agency mandated to collate, analyze and disseminate wildlife crime information to support enforcement operations. At the international level, Ghana has participated in some INTERPOL and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) joint operations to combat wildlife trafficking but does not do so regularly. It also lacks strong agreements on Mutual Legal Assistance with partner governments in the region and in destination countries that could strengthen the prosecution of wildlife crime and deter future offenders.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Enhance the capacity of enforcement agencies** to identify and enforce wildlife crime by supporting training on CITES regulations and providing additional detection equipment at key entry/exit ports.
2. **Improve the collection and sharing of intelligence information** by establishing protocols and a central database for collecting and disseminating information and intelligence.
3. **Improve coordination at national and regional levels** by developing a national strategy to fight wildlife crime and standard procedures for interagency collaboration.
4. Improve procedures and storage for managing confiscated specimens, including live animals.
5. **Prioritize and improve awareness of wildlife crime** at the national level through CITES outreach campaigns and a survey of wildlife stocks.

ABOUT THE BIODIVERSITY THREATS ASSESSMENTS

WA BiCC conducted a series of biodiversity threats assessments across 15 ECOWAS member states including Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Cabo Verde, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. This was done to understand the threats to West African biodiversity and linkages to wildlife trafficking. Stakeholder, policy, and legislation analyses related to wildlife protection and law enforcement were also done across these countries. Recommendations emanating from this project, including the ones found in this issues brief, intend to provide guidance to donors and high-level decision makers on priority activities that support and contribute efficiently to the eradication of wildlife crime in the region.

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