



Wildlife Trade and the U.S. Military Abroad: Raising awareness and reducing demand

Project # 09-444

Background:

Military personnel and affiliates posted overseas have significant buying power that influences local markets, including the ability to drive the demand for wildlife products. Purchase and transport of many wildlife products violates U.S. law and obligations to international agreements such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the Endangered Species Act. Demand for wildlife and wildlife products poses one of the greatest threats to wild species, leading to local, regional and potentially global extinctions.



Arabian Sand Gazelles, a CITES species ©Eric Beden

In May 2007, staff from the Wildlife Conservation Society’s (WCS) first noticed illegal items for sale on military bases near Kabul and witnessed military personnel purchasing the items. A survey of 395 Soldiers at Fort Drum in June 2008, revealed that more than 40% of those surveyed purchased or saw someone else in the military purchase wildlife items yet less than 12% knew about CITES. Military personnel who either knowingly or unknowingly purchase, transport, or attempt to import illegal wildlife trade products risk confiscation of items and legal action including fines or imprisonment for violating U.S. Law, International Law, and Military Regulations.



Sand cat (*Felis margarita*)
Photo by Xavier Eichaker,
used with permission



On-base market selling furs. ©Elisha Hubbard

Objective:

The goal of this Department of Defense Legacy Program-funded project is to decrease the demand for wildlife products by U.S. military stationed abroad by communicating the legal and environmental concerns regarding wildlife trade to military personnel who may be deploying to or stationed in Afghanistan or Iraq.



Local market in Kabul © WCS

Summary of Approach:

WCS has partnered with Legacy to develop outreach and education materials targeting U.S.-based military who are about to be deployed or stationed overseas with a particular focus on soldiers going to Iraq and



Afghanistan. We are networking with military personnel to develop clear messages that resonate with military personnel about the potential concerns pertaining to the purchase of wildlife products while stationed overseas. We are communicating these messages through outreach materials: an officer training fact sheet, a Smart Card for Soldiers, several power point presentations of varying lengths that can be downloaded and used by military staff to train enlisted personnel, a website to house the information and display materials for Safety Day at Fort Drum and other exhibit opportunities.



Safety Day at Fort Drum © Leslie Karasin

Benefit:

The conservation benefits are 1) reducing demand for products from species whose populations are near extinction or whose status is unknown, 2) raising awareness within the military, especially with the military police, about the issues of wildlife trade. The military benefits are 1) bringing U.S. military personnel into compliance with U.S. and international wildlife trade laws, 2) reducing potential for military personnel to violate laws governing wildlife trade because they were not aware of the laws, 3) raising the military conservation image for addressing the purchase of illegal wildlife items by military personnel, 4) contributing to the mission of the U.S. military 'Winning Hearts and Minds' by reducing demand for potentially scarce and/or culturally significant natural resources thereby avoiding local instability in rural, subsistence, or tribal communities which often depend on natural resources for survival, 5) reducing potential corruption due to connections between illegal wildlife trade and trade in other illegal substances (e.g., drugs, arms, etc).



On-going partnership with WCS and the military-WCS Afghanistan used with permission



Smart Card developed for soldiers ©WCS

Accomplishments:

To date, we have developed several outreach products that will be distributed to key personnel within the military. The products include a Smart Card, a training fact sheet for officers, Form 4658 with information on wildlife trade, displays for Safety Day at Fort Drum and other installations as available, and several power point presentations. We are developing a web site to house the products. In addition we have networked via email, phone and by attending the DoD Sustaining Military Readiness Conference with numerous military staff to discuss best approaches to addressing the issue. Our work has been recognized as an innovative partnership for addressing the issue of wildlife trade in *The New York Times*.



Business Card Reminder ©WCS

Contact Information:

Heidi Kretser, Ph.D.
 Livelihoods and Conservation Coordinator
 North American Program
 Wildlife Conservation Society
 7 Brandy Brook Avenue
 Saranac Lake, NY 12983
 Phone: 518-891-8872 (ext. 105)
 Fax: 518-891-8875
 Email: hkretser@wcs.org
 Website: www.wcswildlifetrade/military