

Combating poaching and illegal trade in animal species in Bulgaria

Transfer project in the framework of the Klaus Toepfer Fellowship Programme

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Executive summary

Illegal exploitation and trafficking constitute one of the most serious threats to wildlife today (Interpol). Criminal networks and syndicates, motivated by high profits and low risk have established an international industry that:

- Diminishes the biological viability of wildlife population
- Compromises the natural heritage and ecological integrity
- Imposes unacceptable cruelty on living animals
- Flouts wildlife laws as well as many other laws

In addition to these cases there are some made from unawareness of what are the restrictions existing in the area of international trade of certain species or what are the national regulations for picking/gathering wildlife. Restrictions when crossing borders are not so widely recognized by the society as for examples restrictions for alcohols, for cigarettes, for all the goods or quantities of goods with imposed customs duties. Moreover, many of the cases when people are crossing borders refer to people that face this requirement once in their lifetime, or for the first time, they are not professional companies, or any professionals connected with wildlife border crossing (as keen hunters or curators in museums). That is the reason for the low awareness in comparison to other more commercial, more popular goods that cross borders more often. Hence, the project was aimed at strengthening communication for and capacity in both professionals and the general public.

The project "*Combating poaching and illegal trade in animal species in Bulgaria*" was an entirely communication based project. It included activities aimed to meet some existing shortcomings of lack of information and awareness in the general public and shortcomings in the effective cooperation between the relevant authorities through conducting of 11 inter-institutional 1-day seminars, through 12 media press conferences, 11 from which were conducted during the seminars events and 1 subsequently. Within the project 6 000 brochures with 3 designs and 3 000 posters with 3 designs embracing the topic of CITES, poaching and illegal trade within the national borders were produced and distributed within the country. Also for the custom border points 79 permanent sign boards with different design and in different languages (Bulgarian, English, Turkish and Serbian were produced and installed). Another 6 signboards with different topics were given to Sofia Zoo and Varna Zoo (which act as rescue centers), Wildlife Rehabilitation and Breeding Centre-Green Balkans, to three Regional Inspections of Environment and Water (in cities of Sofia, Plovdiv and Borgas). With this concerted actions, it is hoped that the general public can gain more information,

where contacts of the relevant services/NGOs are pointed, and the manner of inter-institutional work regarding the poaching and illegal trade in animal species is improving.