

Izabela Kapera¹, Artur Kapera²

¹ Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow University, Faculty of Law, Administration and International Relations, Poland

² VIII Prywatne Akademickie Liceum Ogólnokształcące Kraków, Poland

ORCID: ¹<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1691-5275>, ² <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5090-9197>

Corresponding Author: Izabela Kapera, email: lowczowska@poczta.onet.pl

Illegal wildlife products as tourist souvenirs – an outline of the problem from the perspective of Poland

Abstract: The article aims to outline the problem of transporting illegal plant and animal souvenirs by tourists and to analyse the issue from the perspective of Poland. Tourists' interest in buying wildlife souvenirs is varied, ranging from live animals and plants to food products, leather and wooden goods, and medicines. Travellers buying illegal souvenirs of plant and animal origin often unwittingly contribute to the extinction of the most endangered plant and animal species. The number of CITES specimens seized in Poland annually is approximately 134 between 2009 and 2018 on average. In 2018 alone, nearly 14 thousand specimens were confiscated. These confiscations were largely directed towards Ukraine. However, despite the fact that the problem is acknowledged in the country, and legal regulations have been introduced to counteract it, the tourism sector seems to be oblivious to the problem, and the subject does not appear in the scope of activities pursued by organizations related to the development and promotion of tourism. So far it has rarely been mentioned in the scientific literature, including the field of tourism. The authors hope that the presented analyses will draw attention to the problem and lead to the implementation of more sustainable practices in Polish tourism.

Keywords: sustainable development, tourism, travel, souvenirs, animals, poaching

1. Introduction

Tourists' interest goes beyond the values and tourist development of the visited area. They also often buy souvenirs. They support the market of local manufacturers. It happens, however, that these souvenirs stem from illegal activity. The article focuses on the part of the topic related to illegal travel souvenirs concerning plants and animals. The issue is still relatively rarely addressed in scientific literature in Poland, although the problem itself is visible throughout the country. The intention is therefore to outline the problem of the transport of illegal plant and animal souvenirs by tourists and to analyse the phenomenon from the perspective of Poland. The authors set out to discuss available academic deliberations on the subject, which serves as a starting point for outlining the problem, determining its nature and estimating its propagation in Poland, bearing

in mind applicable regulations and the scale of the occurrence in comparison to the European Union. Consequently, the research questions that arise concern primarily the general characteristics of the phenomenon. In this context, the authors attempt to determine which wildlife products are sought after as tourist souvenirs, and whether there are legal regulations concerning their transport. With regard to the situation in Poland, apart from the above, the authors seek to discern how the products are transported and indicate the main countries of their origin.

Due to the complexity of the presented problem and its obscure nature, assessing the scale of the phenomenon in tourism poses a challenge. The authors hope that the analyses presented will enable the identification and implementation of sustainable practices in tourism

in Poland, and as such will be accounted for within the policies of governments, scientists,

entrepreneurs, and people involved in tourism and nature conservation.

2. Flora and fauna as souvenirs from travel – the state of research on the subject in Poland

According to the Polish Dictionary, a souvenir is a small object reminiscent of a person, a place or an event (Słownik Języka Polskiego, 2021). In relation to tourism, a souvenir is a tangible part of the tourist experience and at the same time an excellent opportunity to advertise places around the world. Souvenir production is a potentially profitable business. Tourists buy souvenirs for personal use, as a gift, or for commercial purposes. They make purchases in shops, at fairs, souvenir stalls, often at accommodation facilities and airports. The spectrum of tourists' interest includes jewellery, textiles, clothing and fashionable accessories, decorative articles and handicrafts, antiques and cosmetics. However, whether or not a tourist elects to procure a souvenir as well as their choice of a particular item depends on a number of variables. As Podemski (2004) points out, the purchase of souvenirs is approached differently by, for instance, a holidaymaker, eco-tourist or researcher-discoverer. Although the purchase of souvenirs is an important element of tourism consumption, the analysis has so far been limited in the context of Polish literature. It is increasingly often the subject of legal regulations and appears in the activities of some organisations. It is also the subject of scientific deliberations among foreign authors,

e.g. publications by Gómez and Aguirre (2008), Rosen and Smith (2010), Verissimo et al. (2012), Underwood et al. (2013), Wittemyer et al. (2014), Harrison et al. (2015), Kideghe-sho (2016), van Uhm (2016), Felbab-Brown (2017), Haenlein and Keatinge (2017), Harfoot et al. (2018). The range of issues raised by the above-mentioned researchers, however, does not exhaust the entirety of the subject, but only signals certain problems related to it. Apart from Podemski (2004), the group of authors dealing with this subject on the basis of Polish publications also includes: Sosenko (2009), Banaszekiewicz (2011), Buczkowska (2012), Wojciechowska and Kupis (2014), Klimczyk and Zwolińska (2017). Said authors did not, however, refer strictly to the subject matter of nature souvenirs. In Poland, this issue appears rarely and is usually treated only fragmentarily, e.g. in relation to trends in the import of nature souvenirs among young people (Pabian et al., 2020) or a look from the perspective of the Customs Chamber – the works of Chackiewicz and KostECKA (2017), Chackiewicz (2008, 2012, 2015, 2016). Literature analysis allows us to conclude that so far there has been no comprehensive presentation of the problem in relation to tourism in the country.

3. Transport of illegal souvenirs by tourists – outline of the problem

Contemporary tourism is becoming increasingly complex and difficult to evaluate unambiguously. One of the controversial areas is the use of endangered animal and plant species as souvenirs from travel. The interest of tourists in this regard ranges from live animals and plants to a broad spectrum of wildlife products, including food products, leather and wooden items, as well as medicines. The lattermost in particular has become a severe worldwide problem, as the demand for supposedly miracle cures is ever growing. Rhino horn powder, tiger

bones and tiger hair are just some examples of this type of medicine, the demand for which is contributing to the killing of animals and an increase in poaching. One of the most popular souvenirs from warm countries are pieces of coral and shells found on the beach. Bottles containing reptiles, the so called *wężówki*, are popular as souvenirs from South Asia. The most sought-after illegal souvenirs include ivory ornaments, as well as bags and shoes made of crocodile or tiger skin. Products created at the expense of tigers also include jewellery, charms

or medicinal items made from whole or powdered tiger bones.

Thousands of wild animals around the world pay dearly for tourist entertainment, some of them with their lives. Many animals, including endangered species, are inhumanly trapped, hunted, bred and killed for gifts. Some are collected on an industrial scale and then sold to local craftsmen, giving tourists the impression that they are buying sustainable products. The ingenuity and brutality of the producers of this kind of souvenirs is once again surprising when we find pendants with live animals trapped inside, which die after a while in this decoration. The level of exploitation of certain animal and plant species is high, and trade in them, together with other factors such as loss of habitats, can lead to significant depletion of their populations and even result in the extinction of certain species. The main cause of species extinction is human activity, including the loss of natural habitats that results from the development of agriculture, road and rail infrastructure, as well as other anthropological changes to the environment, illegal trade in endangered species and poaching (Listos et al., 2016). The illegal wildlife trade is estimated to be in the top five of illegal transnational trade transactions, including arms and drugs (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, 2020). Criminal groups and individuals are involved in the illegal trade. On the one hand, it is an area dominated by large-scale smuggling of, for example, ivory or rhinoceros horns, and on the other hand, by tourists themselves. Most often, however, it is tourists who unwittingly become

criminals, as they buy items not realising that they are made out of a species threatened with extinction.

Every year, hundreds of millions of plants and animals are extracted from their natural environment and then sold as travel souvenirs. They are often traded legally, but some of these activities go against the law. At the root of this are high profits and, in many cases, high prices paid for rare species. The trade varies from live animals and plants to products derived from them, including food items, leather goods, wood and medicines. The exact profits from this trade are difficult to measure, but various sources estimate the profits from illegal wildlife trade at between EUR 8 and 20 billion per year (European Commission, 2015). The fact that the problem is global and international is evidenced by data from the World Wildlife Crime Report 2020, which indicates that the suspected traffickers are representatives of around 150 nationalities (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime, 2020). Illegal trade in wildlife not only affects the species that are exploited directly, but it can also harm other species. Moreover, it has a direct impact on the lives of millions of people – especially the poorest, who depend mainly on local nature (WWF, 2006). The problem is also the introduction of alien species into ecosystems where they did not previously exist. Invasive species disturb the ecosystem, compete for food with native species and drive them out of their habitats. Diseases add to this, as exotic viruses spread due to the smuggling of animals from country to country.

4. Legislative provisions

Although awareness regarding regulations on tourism is growing, many people remain oblivious to the existence of laws prohibiting the transport of illegal items of natural origin, violation of which can have very severe consequences. The situation is further complicated by the fact that many souvenirs are purchased legally in their home countries, which does not mean they can be legally imported into another country. As the trade in wild animals and plants crosses borders between countries, efforts to regulate it require international cooperation

to protect certain species from over-exploitation. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an expression of this endeavour. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not jeopardise their survival. CITES was created under a resolution adopted in 1963 at the meeting of the members of IUCN (The World Conservation Union). The text of the Convention was finally decided upon at the meeting of the representatives of 80 countries on March

3rd, 1973, and on July 1st, 1975, CITES entered into force (What is CITES?, 2021). It was drawn up in Washington on March 3rd, 1973. It is an international agreement to which States and regional economic integration organisations join voluntarily. CITES does not replace national legislation. Rather, it is a framework that each party must respect. CITES has become a major, widely endorsed nature conservation agreement, which currently brings together 183 parties. (What is CITES?, 2021). In Poland, the Convention entered into force on March 12th, 1990, and the ratification of its accession took place on December 12th, 1989 (Konwencja Waszyngtońska, 2020).

CITES operates by subjecting international trade in specimens of selected species to certain means of control. A specimen of a CITES-listed species may be imported into a country that is a party to the convention or exported (or re-exported) from that country, only if a relevant permit is obtained and presented for clearance. Currently, more than 38 700 species –including some 5 950 animal species and 32 800 plant species –are protected by CITES from over-exploitation in international trade (The CITES species, 2021). These are listed in three CITES Appendices. These species are grouped according to the level of threat imposed by international trade. The CITES Treaty allows for an exception: captive bred specimens do not enjoy the same protection as those living in the wild (Christy, 2019). The EU has an important role to play in combating this practice, as Europe is now a market and a hub for transit traffic to other regions. The European Union became a party

to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) on July 8th, 2015. The basis for the EU accession to CITES is Council Decision (EU) 2015/451, which was adopted on March 6, 2015 and published in Official Journal L 75 of March 19th, 2015 (EU Accession to CITES, 2015). The CITES Convention is implemented in the European Union by means of a set of regulations (European Commission, 2007). In many cases, EU law goes beyond CITES requirements. In addition to this basic legislation, there is a Commission Recommendation to Member States. Although EU wildlife trade legislation is deemed applicable across the EU, each member state is expected to implement their own legislative solutions to facilitate the process. In February 2016, the European Commission adopted a Communication on an EU Action Plan against trade in wildlife, which sets out a comprehensive plan for joint efforts to combat wildlife crime in the EU and to strengthen the role of the EU in the global fight against these crimes. The plan has three main strands –better law enforcement, enhanced cooperation and more effective prevention. The EU report shows that in 2018, 6012 reported seizures of CITES-related specimens were recorded in Member States, up from 5644 compared to the previous year (European Commission, 2020). Over 49% specimens were seized on import (Table 1).

The main seizures were 1381 medicines, 654 corals, 540 reptile bodies, parts and derivatives, 496 live birds, 468 live reptiles, 420 ivory, 40310 mammal bodies, parts and derivatives (European Commission, 2020).

Table 1. Seizures of CITES-listed wildlife in the European Union in 2018 (based on: European Commission, 2020)

Import	Internal	Export	External-internal transit
2969	580	267	204
(49%)	(10%)	(4%)	(3%)

The rest (1992 seizure records) was unknown/other or no information was provided

In the case of Poland, generally speaking, the objectives, principles and forms of protection of living and inanimate nature and landscape are regulated by the Act on Nature Conservation adopted on April 16th, 2004, which also addresses the subject matter of this paper. Among other things, it follows from the act

that: Wild plants or fungi of species under protection may be banned from being imported or exported. A similar provision applies to protected species of wild animals (Ustawa z dnia 16 kwietnia 2004 r. o ochronie przyrody). The Act on the Protection of Animals (Ustawa z dnia 21 sierpnia 1997 r. o ochronie zwierząt) is also

related to this issue. In principle, however, the subject of international illegal trade in specimens of endangered species in Poland was not recognised, and, as a result, its provisions were not applied until 1998. The detentions were carried out at random, and one of the reasons for this situation was the lack of regulations enforcing the Convention and the inability to impose penalties on persons conducting illegal transport (Tusiński, 2009). The first national

regulations, together with criminal provisions, appeared in 1997 in the Animal Protection Act, and infringement of CITES provisions was a criminal offence (Tusiński, 2009). Currently, transporting specimens that belong to endangered species across the EU border in contravention of the regulations is a crime, and any offender is subject to imprisonment from 3 months to 5 years (Ustawa z dnia 16 kwietnia 2004 r. o ochronie przyrody).

5. The scale of the problem in Poland

Illegal wilderness souvenirs are difficult to identify, and it is virtually impossible to distinguish between them and products from sustainable sources. Most products made from animals at risk of extinction are stopped by customs and revenue authorities at airports, because there are direct connections to exotic countries. According to the data on CITES specimens detained by the Customs and Tax Service in Poland in 2018, 13811 specimens were detained, including the ones from the country of origin: “5551 live animal specimens (including 53 specimens of live reef-forming corals *Scleractinia* spp.), 6 live

plant specimens (*Cactaceae* spp.), 8238 specimens of *Asian medicaments* (TAM), and also: 37.8 kg of European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*), over 20 kg of calcareous skeletons of reef-forming corals (*Scleractinia* spp.), 164.6 kg of caviar specimens (*Acipenseriformes* spp.) (CITES seizures made by the Customs and Revenue Service, 2020). Based on the aforementioned webpage, the number of CITES specimens kept in Poland annually amounted to an average of 134 in the years 2009–2018, with 100 arrests in 2018, and 2531 in 2009. In 2019, there was a total of 145 arrests (Table 2).

Table 2. CITES seizures made by the Customs and Revenue Service in 2019 (Authors’ own study based on: CITES seizures made by the Customs and Revenue Service, 2020)

Number of arrests	Number of specimens seized	Number of live animal specimens	Asian medicine specimens	Other
145	368 631	137	368 103	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 guitars made with wooden elements (<i>Dalbergia latifolia</i>) • over 30 kg of limestone skeletons of reef-building corals (<i>Scleractinia</i> spp.) • 0.13 kg of caviar specimens (<i>Acipenseriformes</i> spp.)

In the year preceding Poland’s entry to the European Union there were 169 arrests, in 2004 –130, and in the year of Poland’s accession to Schengen – 230. Additionally, the number of CITES specimens detected does not reflect the value of smuggled plants and animals. The analysis of statistical data shows that during the year, the largest number of detentions of specimens took place in Rzeszów in the period from August to December. The majority of performed detentions involved goods smuggled to and from Ukraine. Among the exported and imported specimens there

were: live parrots, calcareous skeletons of reef corals (*Scleractinia* spp.), stuffed common buzzard, stuffed hawk specimen, but the largest number were capsules containing seahorse derivatives, sturgeon roe, live leeches, lotions containing leech derivatives, lotions containing bear derivatives (CITES seizures made by the Customs and Revenue Service, 2020). Traffic to/from Ukraine is also notable when analysing the case of Lublin, with an increase in the number of detentions during a similar period of the year. Apart from live leeches and parrots, other live specimens were also

detained: e.g. in Białystok a tiger python, a Boa constrictor, a yellow anaconda, a *Phelsuma madagascariensis* and a *Brachypelma smithi*. The data cited indicate the predominance of the Ukrainian direction, especially in the case of Rzeszów and Lublin, but there are also attempts to transport to/from other des-

tinations, including the USA, the EU market, China, Mexico, the Maldives, South Africa, Israel, Egypt, Cuba, Switzerland, Russia, Belarus and Mozambique. Analysing data from previous years, the list of these countries has been extended compared to year 2018, and so has the range of detained specimens.

6. Discussion

The purchase of travel souvenirs is not a new phenomenon and also applies to Polish tourists. Research conducted among young travellers in Poland has shown that 80.7% of individuals taking part in tourist trips bring souvenirs to their places of residence and as much as 61.4% collect natural souvenirs (shells – 53.9%, rocks – 22.7% and sand from seaside beaches – 18.0%) (Pabian et al., 2020). Only 9.8% of them oppose bringing natural souvenirs, 5.2% consider such practices to be illegal and 11.2% see their harmful effects on local tourist attractions (Pabian et al., 2020).

In general, Polish tourists, when going to exotic places, often do not know that souvenirs imported from these trips are made from animals or plants in danger of extinction. The study carried out at the Rzeszów airport indicates that only 24% of the respondents declared their knowledge of the CITES convention and their knowledge of the related documents (Chackiewicz and Kostecka, 2017). In order to foster their awareness, extensive information campaigns are necessary. In this respect, the activity of international organisations such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), which is trying to make tourists aware that many of these products are made from endangered animal species, is not without significance. However, this is not the only sign of action to stop the practice.

In 2018, more than 100 companies met within the World Travel and Tourism Council to sign the Buenos Aires Declaration on the illegal trade in wildlife, a commitment to take a stand against wildlife trade. The signatories to the Declaration agreed to ‘adopt or encourage the adoption of a policy of zero tolerance with regard to the illegal trade in wildlife’. At the UN General Assembly, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) signed

a Memorandum of Understanding with the World Travel and Tourism Council on cooperation towards sustainable tourism, plastics and wildlife conservation (World Tourism Day 2019: sustainable travel and the plight of wild animals, 2019). Similar undertakings have been observed sporadically in Poland. Maps of the disappearing world –leaflets informing about dangerous souvenirs, i.e. what is not allowed to be brought from foreign expeditions –have arrived at airports all over Poland. Live animals taken away from smugglers and tourists are taken to the zoo, plants to botanical gardens, and dead specimens are stored in customs warehouses. However, they do not remain there idle. The specimens are sometimes placed at airports in showcases, as showpieces to warn travellers. Some of them are used for training and educational purposes, which extends to the police, customs, border guards, biology teachers, prosecutors and judges. The customs officers also organise exhibitions and lessons in schools. However, manifestations of such initiatives on the part of tourism organisations in Poland, including the Polish Tourist Organisation, are generally not visible. One of the most powerful tools for combating illegal trade in wild animals is to convince consumers to make informed choices when buying wild animals and their products. This applies not only to tourists buying souvenirs, but also to shopkeepers and, in general, all those involved in servicing the tourist traffic in Poland. So far, this subject has not even appeared at the planning stage –in tourism strategies or in marketing campaigns concerning its development in Poland.

7. Summary and conclusions

Tourism is both an immense source of protection and a threat to wildlife and fragile habitats. The phenomenon described in the paper can be used as a basis for seeking optimal solutions to improve the situation. Tourists who bring exotic souvenirs from their travels decide whether the vanishing species will be offered for sale by buying or refusing to buy them.

Travellers can therefore play a role in conservation efforts. However, the problem does not concern the tourists themselves, but also other parties involved in the development of tourism. Therefore, the tourism industry in Poland should unite to incorporate sustainable natural tourism into mainstream policy and play a greater role through regulation and awareness among its customers. To this end, activities are needed both at the level of institutions related to tourism management and promotion (man-

ifestations of such initiatives on the part of the Polish Tourism Organisation are generally not visible), and in relation to education of both present and future employees of the tourism sector. Undoubtedly, cooperation of the tourism industry with other parties interested in the issue is also desirable. Although there are several initiatives, so far there has been no coordinated commitment on the part of the tourism sector in the country to counteract the phenomenon of tourists carrying illegal plant and animal souvenirs.

A significant increase in awareness, political will and, ultimately, action on the ground is needed in order to improve the situation. Further studies by tourism researchers in Poland are also desirable for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon described.

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