



Rethinking our Relationship with Nature

The global pandemic has thrust the illegal wildlife trade into the spotlight. While the trafficking of pangolins and rhino horns may seem remote from most businesses, there are potential links to these crimes via our distribution systems and financial networks, **Emma Carroll** reports



Business purpose is high on many corporate agendas, but if it is to be seen as more than just a PR exercise, leaders must commit to fully understanding the ecosystem in which they operate. This includes their impact on the health of our planet.

At the height of the global pandemic, CriticaEye brought together its diverse community to explore the issue. We ask how today's business leaders can influence policy, drive change and play their part in mending our broken relationship with nature.



Niall McCann

Niall McCann is Conservation Director and a founder of [National Park Rescue](#), a direct-action NGO that aims to identify and resurrect protected areas in Africa that are in the most need of help.

Research has revealed that over two thirds of all emerging infectious diseases come from animals. Of these, around 71 percent come from wild animals. This phenomenon isn't new, but the rate of zoonotic spillover has quadrupled in the last half century due to destruction of natural habitats and the growing trade in and consumption of wild animals.

A huge proportion of this trade is illegal. The World Bank has estimated that the Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) generates around \$20 billion per year in illicit proceeds, which rises to \$200 billion if you include the illegal trade in fish and timber. Despite this, anything to do with wildlife has traditionally been seen as a conservation issue and of little concern to politicians, business, law enforcement and society at large.

Right now, it is hard to look beyond the human toll of the crisis and the trillions of dollars wiped off the global economy, but once the immediate impact has subsided it is vital that the international community comes together and stops this ever happening again.

A global response is needed. We must stop the poaching and flow of wildlife at its source, and this requires truly effective organisations on the ground. There must also be profound changes in how we, as a global community, protect natural habitats and combat wildlife crime.

Wildlife crime must be embedded in the UN convention against transnational organised crime, and ecocide should be added to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court – and these laws have to be enforced.

Banning live wildlife markets and properly enforcing the laws around wildlife crime is an obvious place to start, but we need a seismic shift in the way we treat our natural resources. Creating laws on ecocide and incorporating planetary health into national and international budgets would be that seismic shift.



Mike Geldard

Mike Geldard is UK Defence Attaché for Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Botswana. In this role he is the UK Government's focal point for countering the illegal wildlife trade on the ground in Africa.

The reality is that COVID-19 is very unlikely to be the last coronavirus outbreak. We have seen the devastating

effect such a global pandemic has had, not just on human health but on global economics as well. COVID-19 has affected every fabric of global society, and we need to be better prepared to counter future zoonotic spillovers.

One part of the jigsaw in preventing future outbreaks is to continue to put pressure on countries who are demanding ivory, rhino horn and pangolin scales. We need to reduce the demand, because until we put international pressure on the market, we won't see it slowing.

We must also disrupt the criminal networks that supply IWT. Understanding those networks and targeting illusive criminals is a key line of activity. The same criminals are often involved in human trafficking, narcotics and even terrorism. Understanding the human terrain analysis – the 'who is who' in these networks is crucial, and then we must pick this up with international policing and the ability to make arrests.

Another part of the jigsaw is the ability to disrupt the poachers at the tactical level, with well-trained rangers, anti-poaching units and, in some cases, defence forces.

We also need to make sure the work of NGOs is meaningful in terms of building relationships and understanding the demands of the communities living around the national parks. These communities must be embraced and brought into the debate and actions, so they can inform the intelligence to disrupt poaching. There is much to do, and time is not our friend. ➤



David Fein

David Fein is Group General Counsel of Standard Chartered Bank and Vice Chair of the United for Wildlife Financial Taskforce, a global network of financial institutions and public and civil society partners working together to reveal, disrupt and prevent illegal wildlife trafficking.

Before COVID there was already some transformational work underway. HRH The Duke of Cambridge formed a taskforce of major transport companies to raise awareness of how their routes – land, sea and air – are being used for IWT, and to get their commitment to stop this by better detection and reporting. The Transport Taskforce now comprises around 140 companies.

It has been augmented with another group, a Financial Taskforce, of almost 40 financial institutions, which is working to detect where the financial system is being used by traffickers to facilitate the flow of money. Members include large global banks, headquartered in Europe and the US, as well as regional and local banks in Kenya, South Africa, Namibia, China, Vietnam and Singapore.

For too long IWT was perceived as simply a conservation crime – it is this, but it is also a massive financial crime. From the financial industry perspective we are treating it as we do arms, narcotics and human trafficking, by developing algorithms to detect where it might be happening in a financial institution; reporting suspicious activity to law enforcement; and encouraging countries to prioritise this crime.

At Standard Chartered Bank it is important to us, as we are a long-standing trade bank with markets in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Our footprint includes the major source, transportation and destination countries for IWT.

When we started talking about IWT and the nature of the crime, it resonated well with our 85,000 employees, our clients and other stakeholders. It's not just philanthropy – it involves all levels, from a bank teller in Johannesburg playing their part to the financial sustainability team looking at how they can support investment in conservation causes.

As the pandemic has limited air travel, we expect to see IWT shift more to online shopping, and so it is important we reach out to that sector as well.



Mark Spelman

Mark Spelman is an Executive Committee Member of the World Economic Forum, where his involvement includes the Digital Economy and New Value Creation global challenge, which is examining issues of responsible digital transformation, digital identity and new digital business models. Mark is also a Board Mentor at Criticaleye.

In the World Economic Forum's (WEF) global risk report for 2020, the loss of biodiversity was recognised as the second most impactful and third most likely risk for the coming decade. Environmental concerns dominate the top long-term risks. Biodiversity loss has critical implications from collapse of food and health systems to the disruption of entire supply chains. Businesses now need to

think much more carefully about what impact these risks will have on them.

However, we also need to think about the benefits of dealing with nature in a more positive way. The WEF has calculated that every \$1 spent on nature restoration could drive around \$9 of economic benefits and create millions of jobs - this reflects the shift that is underway from shareholder capitalism towards stakeholder capitalism, where business recognises its role and responsibilities to a wider range of stakeholders, of which nature could be one.

For some businesses, 'purpose' can be a PR exercise. If you are serious about purpose, you need to be able to measure it. At Davos this year WEF launched a [report](#) which provides a set of metrics looking at the governance of planet, people and prosperity. Business leaders who are serious about purpose, need to be serious about metrics, and these must include those on people, wellbeing and our responsibility to the planet.

We don't have the full answer yet, but there are some significant trends. To achieve a carbon neutral, nature-positive economy and halve biodiversity loss by 2030, business as usual is no longer an option. Technology can help us address some of the urgent problems in our food, land and ocean systems. For example, sensor technology in agriculture and rainforests can help boost yields and prevent wildlife loss. However, you must use technology in combination with human capital.

Businesses need to think about their purpose and what their license to operate is. Transparency is increasing and businesses must recognise that how they impact nature affects trust, their brand and reputation. ■

This article is based on Criticaleye's virtual roundtable, [COVID-19: Time to Rethink Our Relationship with Nature](#).