

Letter

Illegal pangolin trade in Nepal: a response to Suwal et al.

Suwal et al. (2023) analysed nationwide information on seizures of pangolins (the Chinese pangolin *Manis pentadactyla* and Indian pangolin *Manis crassicaudata*) during 2010–2020 to investigate the patterns and extent of hunting and illegal trade of these two threatened species in Nepal. Given that pangolins are one of the most heavily trafficked mammals and the role of Nepal as both source and transit location for wildlife trade (Paudel et al., 2020; Bashyal et al., 2021), it is helpful to have updated information on the extent of illegal trade of pangolins in the country.

There have been a number of recent studies on the illegal pangolin trade in Nepal (see Bashyal et al., 2021, for references) but most of these were either not nationwide in scope and/or did not provide information on the people involved in this trade. In addition to Suwal et al. (2023), Paudel et al. (2020) and Bashyal et al. (2021)—the latter not cited by Suwal et al. (2023)—examined nationwide patterns of illegal pangolin trade in Nepal by considering source and destination information, the former for 2010–2015 and the latter for 2015–2020.

These three recent articles on illegal trade of pangolins in Nepal (Paudel et al., 2020; Bashyal et al., 2021; Suwal et al., 2023), are similar in terms of data source (i.e. seizure incidents) and data acquisition, analysis and presentation. They conclude that illegal pangolin trade is widespread in Nepal and encompasses the majority of pangolin range in the country. Additionally, these studies identified Kathmandu and districts around it, along with districts

bordering the Nepal–China border, as major points of illegal pangolin trade. Bashyal et al. (2021) also analysed information on convicts sentenced for their role in the illegal pangolin trade, to examine their demography, ethnicity, gender and district of origin. Such information is helpful in identifying target groups and locations for interventions to discourage involvement in wildlife poaching and trade.

There is no doubt that the illegal pangolin trade in Nepal is widespread, yet the volume of seizures and confiscated derivatives reported in these recent studies is most likely an underestimate of the actual trade in pangolins. Considering the clandestine and multi-layered nature of the illegal wildlife trade, collaborative action needs to be designed and implemented to curb this illegal trade.

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