

Executive Summary

State of the Apes

Killing, Capture, Trade and Conservation



CAMBRIDGE

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Introduction

There is nothing new about the killing, capture and trade in wildlife. Across the globe, in a variety of ecological and cultural settings, people have long hunted wild animals as a source of protein, income and status. In ape range states across Africa and Asia, our closest cousins have been no exception. In the Old Testament, apes are among the riches imported by Solomon, along with gold, silver and ivory. While apes are protected from hunting by longstanding cultural taboos in several regions, in many others they have been eaten for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

What is new is the scale of the illegal trade in live apes, ape meat and body parts. Over the past four decades, what was once primarily a subsistence activity with strong cultural associations has grown into a global multimillion-dollar trade run by sophisticated transboundary criminal networks. Today, trade in wildlife occurs within and between virtually all countries. Environmental crimes rank among the most lucrative illegal activities in the world: the annual value of the illegal wildlife trade (excluding timber and fisheries) has been estimated at US\$8–10 billion. The trade in apes is not an insignificant part of this market, and demand continues to grow. Accurate assessments of scale are difficult to obtain due to the illicit nature of the trade. Nonetheless, it has been estimated that, between 2005 and 2011, more than 22,000 great apes were killed or captured in Africa and Asia to supply the wildlife trade, and more recent estimates put this figure at nearly 3,000 individuals per year. The extent to which killing, capture and trade affect gibbons is less well understood and even more difficult to quantify.

Given the likelihood that available figures are underestimates, and in view of the slow reproductive rates of apes, the rate of extraction from the wild is clearly unsustainable. Furthermore, the killing, capture and trade in apes form part of a larger web of increasing pressures. The global economy—which, as detailed in the first volume of *State of the Apes*, is predicted to expand by a factor of 2–4 between 2010 and 2050 (especially in the middle class)—will require additional raw materials, infrastructure and land for food production. The demand for apes as food, cultural items, pets and entertainment is likely to grow concomitantly, threatening apes with extinction across much of their range in the next decades. The need to address the drivers of the illegal trade is therefore urgent.

To be effective, efforts to protect apes need to be based on an understanding of the type and scale of the trade, as well as the impacts on both apes and the wider environment. Drivers and impacts are multidimensional, species-specific and vary

greatly depending on geography. Furthermore, some types of trade are more visible, have received greater attention, and are thus better studied and understood than others. Urgent, substantial and long-term research is needed to fill knowledge gaps with respect to the illegal ape trade and its impact on all ape taxa, so that stakeholders in governments, the private sector, civil society and the development and conservation sectors may be better placed to respond to related threats.

The *State of the Apes* series has previously covered extractive industries, industrial agriculture and infrastructure development. This, the fourth volume, expands on one of the indirect impacts of these activities, which is also one of the biggest threats to apes in its own right: the illegal ape trade. It presents in-depth analyses of the trade's impact on apes, the relevant legal and regulatory frameworks, the cultural and socio-economic drivers of the trade, and the responses from different stakeholders, including conservation initiatives and enforcement strategies in ape range states. The second section of this volume provides robust, up-to-date statistics on the status of wild and captive apes; a review of current threats to wild ape populations; a summary of different monitoring approaches; an overview of evidence-based conservation; and details on the history and current status of the campaign for nonhuman rights for apes and other animals.

Drivers of the Illegal Trade

The killing, capture and trade in apes are motivated by diverse cultural and economic drivers that vary greatly depending on geographic location, the type of trade and individual circumstances. In some areas, poor access to markets can limit economic opportunities for rural residents and thus encourage hunting; in others, increased per capita wealth can stimulate the trade in apes as more affluent individuals seek to procure live apes and wild meat as status symbols, and as infrastructure development provides greater access to both apes and markets. Other drivers include changing consumer preferences for wild meat or exotic pets, increased internet and mobile device access, and evolving cultural practices, as well as resentment over conservation regulations and human–wildlife conflict.

People use apes, their meat and body parts in a multitude of ways. Live apes have value as prestige pets and commercial photo props, as well as in zoos, circuses and safari park attractions around the world. Demand for ape body parts is often linked to traditional medicine, while ape meat may be consumed as a subsistence protein, as a perceived source of physical benefits (such as strength or immunity), in the context of cultural traditions, or as an exotic, expensive delicacy that confers status on the provider.

Other Titles in this Series

Arcus Foundation. 2018. *State of the Apes: Infrastructure Development and Ape Conservation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Arcus Foundation. 2015. *State of the Apes: Industrial Agriculture and Ape Conservation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Arcus Foundation. 2014. *State of the Apes: Extractive Industries and Ape Conservation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Other Language Editions

Bahasa Indonesia

Arcus Foundation. 2020. *Negara Kera: Pembunuhan, Penangkapan, Perdagangan, dan Konservasi*.

Arcus Foundation. 2018. *Negara Kera: Pembangunan Infrastruktur dan Konservasi Kera*.

Arcus Foundation. 2015. *Negara Kera: Pertanian Industri dan Konservasi Kera*.

Arcus Foundation. 2014. *Negara Kera: Industri Ekstraktif dan Konservasi Kera*.

Chinese

类人猿现状：
捕杀、捕捉、贸易和类人猿保护
类人猿现状：
基础设施开发与类人猿保护

French

Arcus Foundation. 2020. *La Planète des grands singes : La destruction, la capture, le trafic et la conservation*.

Arcus Foundation. 2018. *La planète des grands singes : Le développement des infrastructures et la conservation des grands singes*.

Arcus Foundation. 2015. *La planète des grands singes : L'agriculture industrielle et la conservation des grands singes*.

Arcus Foundation. 2014. *La planète des grands singes : Les industries extractives et la conservation des grands singes*.

State of the Apes uses “hunting and trade” to refer to the illegal killing, capture, transport, sale and possession of live apes, their body parts or meat. The “live trade” is defined as the capture and sale of living wild apes, while the “wild meat trade” involves the sale of fresh or prepared ape meat for human consumption and the “trade in ape body parts” involves the sale of specific body parts believed to have cultural or symbolic significance.

Economic incentives are particularly powerful in the live ape trade, as an individual ape can fetch between US\$10,000 and US\$50,000. Such lucrative returns have attracted professional criminal networks, for whom the huge profit potential overrides the risks associated with dealing in protected species, especially where poor law enforcement, corruption and challenges in species identification all reduce the likelihood of successful prosecution.

Impacts of Hunting on Apes and Habitats

The direct and indirect impacts of the illegal killing, capture and trade in apes can be observed among ape populations and in their natural habitats. The primary direct impact is population decline or local extinction in areas where apes are hunted. Even hunting practices that do not specifically target apes can have a significant impact on ape well-being and reproductive potential; snares, for instance, can cause injuries that may lead to infections, the loss of a limb and death. Wounded individuals may encounter difficulties accessing food, lose their social rank, have limited breeding success and suffer from reduced immune system function. The hunting of other species can also indirectly affect apes by altering ecosystems and habitat structure, which can lead to changes in food availability.

For surviving individuals in the wild, ape hunting also has socioecological consequences, such as changes in social groupings, interaction and feeding behaviors. Remaining individuals can experience social stress and a loss of local habitat knowledge or of socially acquired behaviors. Furthermore, hunting can cause individuals and groups to range in new areas to avoid humans, which among chimpanzees especially can increase inter-group conflict and lead to a higher rate of intraspecific killings.

In addition to the direct impacts on ape survivorship and behavior, hunting also has indirect impacts on ecosystem function in ape habitats. Apes are important seed dispersers, and research has shown that for some plants they also improve the germination and survival rates of seeds that they swallow and defecate. Eliminating apes from a forest area therefore also affects the vegetation.

Moreover, there is concern about the increased risk of disease transmission between humans and apes wherever hunting is widespread, particularly when apes are prepared as food and consumed. More research is required to allow for an analysis of the extent to which the transmission of diseases (zoonoses) is linked to hunting.

Responses to Killing, Capture and Trade

Numerous approaches have been employed in attempts to address the threat of the illegal ape trade. Conservationists, policymakers, animal welfare activists, economists and social scientists have designed interventions that fall into a variety of categories, ranging from demand reduction initiatives, law enforcement efforts, protected area management and conservation education, to community engagement, development of alternative livelihoods and tourism. Such interventions may interact in ways that exacerbate inequality, further marginalizing individuals who live in proximity to apes. Much work is still required to ensure that actions are just and effective.

Establishing robust legal frameworks and protections as part of a broader strategy that focuses on and is led by the social and economic priorities of people who live near forests and depend on forest resources is crucial. Reducing demand for apes and promoting community engagement require context-specific approaches that consider culture, beliefs, values and lifestyles, as well as financial and non-financial incentives that reduce the benefits and increase the costs of poaching, so as to deliver greater net benefits to local communities than could be secured through involvement in hunting and the ape trade.

The problem of how best to tackle the illegal killing, capture and trade in apes is complex and will not be solved quickly or easily, but this volume highlights that much of the knowledge and expertise required to do so is already available. What is needed is agreement on the necessity and importance of conservation, cooperation and collaboration among diverse stakeholders, and strategies that are grounded in an understanding of the economic, historical, political and social conditions that have shaped different local contexts.



The illegal trade in live apes, ape meat and body parts occurs across all ape range states and poses a significant and growing threat to the long-term survival of wild ape populations worldwide. What was once a purely subsistence and cultural activity now encompasses a global multimillion-dollar trade run by sophisticated transboundary criminal networks. The challenge lies in teasing apart the complex and interrelated factors that drive the ape trade, while implementing strategies that do not exacerbate inequality. This volume of *State of the Apes* brings together original research and analysis with topical case studies and emerging best practices, to further the ape conservation agenda around killing, capture and trade.

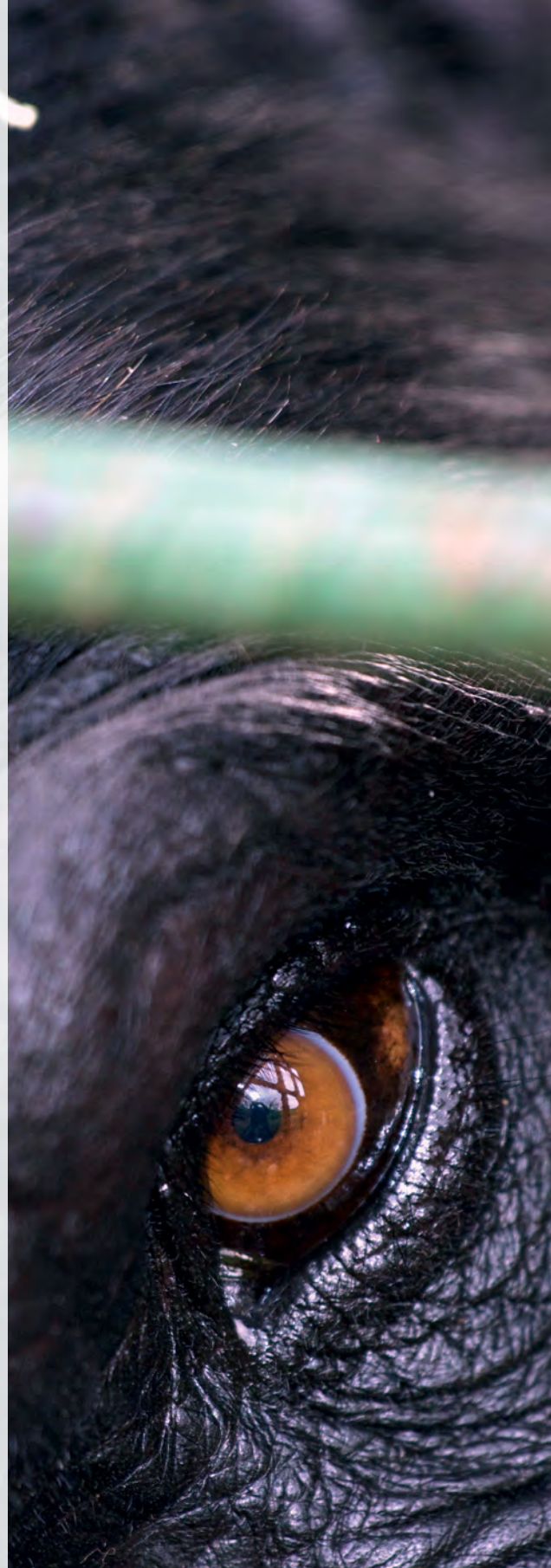
“Continuing their quest to address the severe threats and endangerment to the world’s great apes and gibbons, the Arcus Foundation has published the powerfully impactful and critically awakening series on great ape and gibbon conservation, *State of the Apes*.

State of the Apes explores the complexities between the human drive for socio-economic development and the continued struggle for survival of all apes. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us, we need to better understand the interlinkages between humanity and our natural world. The State of the Apes series provides potential solutions to minimize and mitigate biodiversity impact by deploying conservation efforts led through collaboration, financial investments, policies and education. Intended for both decision makers and stakeholders, this publication provides the analytical foundations to influence debate, practice and policy, aimed at reconciling ape conservation, human welfare and the pressures of economic and social development.

Every generation is not without its challenges; however, very few times in history are we presented with the ability to forever influence every subsequent generation. Great apes and gibbons are critical links to our evolutionary past and to our future, and conserving these species is, in fact, the act of saving a part of ourselves.”

Inger Andersen

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and
Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme



Photographs

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