



Killing Wildlife for Profit

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Next time you see a pretty ivory carving in a shop window, think of the elephant that died for it. Animal heads stuck on a wall as trophies, tiger skins on the floor, butterflies within glass frames – all decorative items, but do we really need them?

Take Elephants!

The fatalities are horrifying. Between 1868 and 1900, over forty thousand elephants were captured or killed in India. Today bull elephants with tusks have all, but disappeared from Kerala forests. African elephants are depleting at an alarming rate. The bad news is that now even walrus are hunted in the Arctic for their tusks. The use of elephant tusks can over time be substituted by Brazil nut, sandalwood, bone or other material. Some indigenous craftsmen are using plastic instead of



ivory for inlay work in wood. The use of rhinoceros horn in Chinese medicine, and for making dagger handles, is another example of how callous the animal trade can be. Prized by oil-rich Arabs, every dagger means the killing of a rhino. There were 65000 black rhinos in Africa in 1970. Twenty years later, only 2400 are left. No other animal has been threatened with such rapid extinction before, all for



dagger handles and dubious oriental medicine. In Zimbabwe and Namibia, a unique experiment was attempted to save the rhino. The rhinos are being scientifically dehorned. It was thought that as the poachers are not interested in anything else, the killing would too. The problem is that the horn grows back and dehorning is an expensive process.

DEADLY VANITY

Fashion models swaying down the catwalk in fur coats, perfumes made with musk from musk deer, not to mention snake skin bags. They all mean the needless killing of beautiful animals to feed the vanity of humans. Can you imagine anything more disgusting? Magnificent animals like the tiger, leopard and snow leopard have long been hunted for their fur. Although, the trade in their furs has been banned, poachers are poachers are still going after these and other animals like the palm civet, pallas cat, red fox, rusty spotted and desert cats. Our fur coat may need the skins of 20 to 40 animals. It is important to make people realize that an excellent range of artificial furs is available, while there are synthetic substitutes for musk.

HOW CAN YOU EAT THAT?

For some people, eating an exotic dish is a way to flaunt their riches. Otherwise how can you explain anyone eating such unappetizing dishes such as bear paw or moose nose soup, barbecued monkey, cooked snakes in rice or frog legs? Sadly, animals die because humans want to make money at their expense. For example, whales are being hunted into extinction because big profits can be made out of whale meat, bones, skin and even oil. These gentle animals are already hit badly by marine pollution and over-fishing. Whaling ships equipped with rocket harpoons are killing them by the thousands once the majestic humpbacked whales surged across the seas in huge members. Now, they are hard to find. In 1900, there were two hundred thousand blue whales. Today, just a few hundred remain. Countries



such as Japan, Norway and Iceland are the biggest culprits. Despite a worldwide whaling ban since 1986, they continue to kill under the disguise of 'research' and 'scientific hunting'. Today, every whale product is replaceable by synthetic ones and humans can surely survive without whale meat.

MOSTLY SUPERSTITION

Traditional medicine is another cause for the slaughter of wildlife. Parts of various animals like the spiny tailed lizard, slender loris, tiger, bear and rhino are used in Chinese, Tibetan, and tradition Indian medicine. Today, the tiger faces extinction in Asia because of the use of tiger bones in Chinese medicine. These powders and potions promising magical cures are way to fool gullible people. There is no proof as yet that these medicines actually work. Eighteen tigers were killed in the Ranthambore National Park last year and it hit the headlines across the world. To stop this poaching, World Wildlife Funds (WWFs) undercover team codenamed Scorpio has been on the trail of criminals who trade in wildlife. Members of Scorpio often act as rich customers interested in buying skins and furs to lure traders. With their help, a huge haul of animal skins and bones was made by the police in Delhi recently. In China and Taiwan, tiger bones and rhino horn were openly available at medicine shops. Finally, when the United States threatened the countries with trade sanctions, they agreed to ban their sales. However, reports suggest that the ban has not worked.

CAN SCHOLARS HELP?

Scholars can do a lot. First, you can spread the message of the dangers of wildlife trade among the people you know. Talk about it with your friends, write about it in your school magazine, hold debates, paint posters, etc. you can also educate adults. You will discover that many are quite thoughtless about killing of animals. For instance, if you meet a woman in fur coat, tell her how ridiculous she looks in it. Stop people from buying traditional medicines that use animal parts. Tell your friends that birds should not be imprisoned in cages. They deserve to be free. Brave children can even save animals from poachers. In Orissa, the Olive Ridley turtles come to the beach to lay eggs. These nests are raided by people because it's easy to follow the tracks of the mother turtle on the sand. So, children go and rub out these tracks and many eggs are saved. You see, there is lot you can do. All you need is determination and a little imagination.