Illegal Wildlife Trade

Why in news?

Indian authorities have arrested six individuals in Jharkhand for allegedly being involved in illegal online trading of wildlife parts, including a substance called Hatha Jodi.

What is illegal wildlife trade?

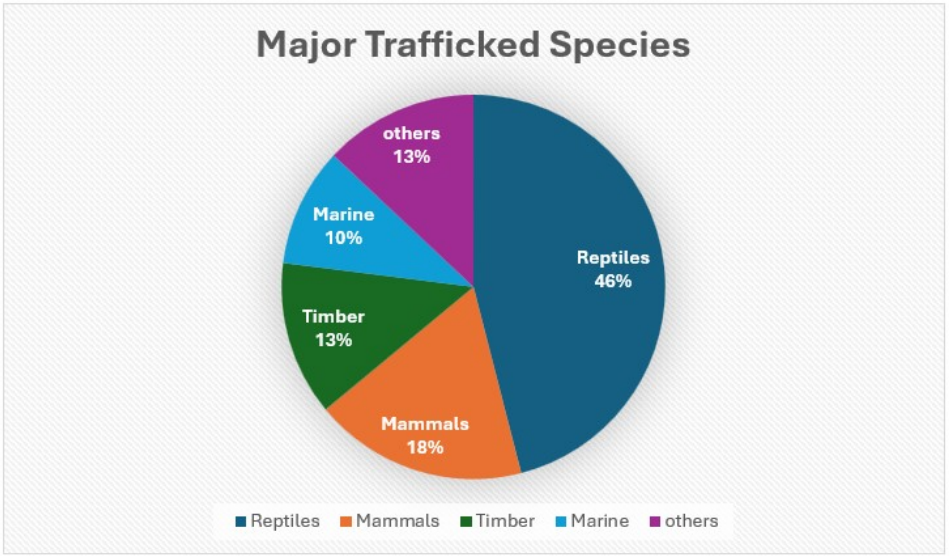
- **Illegal wildlife trade**- It refers to the illegal buying, selling, or exchange of wild animals, plants, and their derivatives.
- It includes the trafficking of endangered species protected by law and the trade of wildlife products without proper permits or in violation of national and international regulations.
- **Types of illegal wildlife trade**

    o **Live animals and plants-** Trafficking of live specimens for pets, zoos, or private collections.

    o **Animal parts-** Trade in products like ivory, rhino horn, pangolin scales, and tiger skins.

    o **Plants and plant products-** Illegal trade in timber, medicinal plants, and rare flora.

- **Magnitude of illegal wildlife trade-** Between $7 and $23 billion per year globally.



- **Top countries of wildlife trafficking**

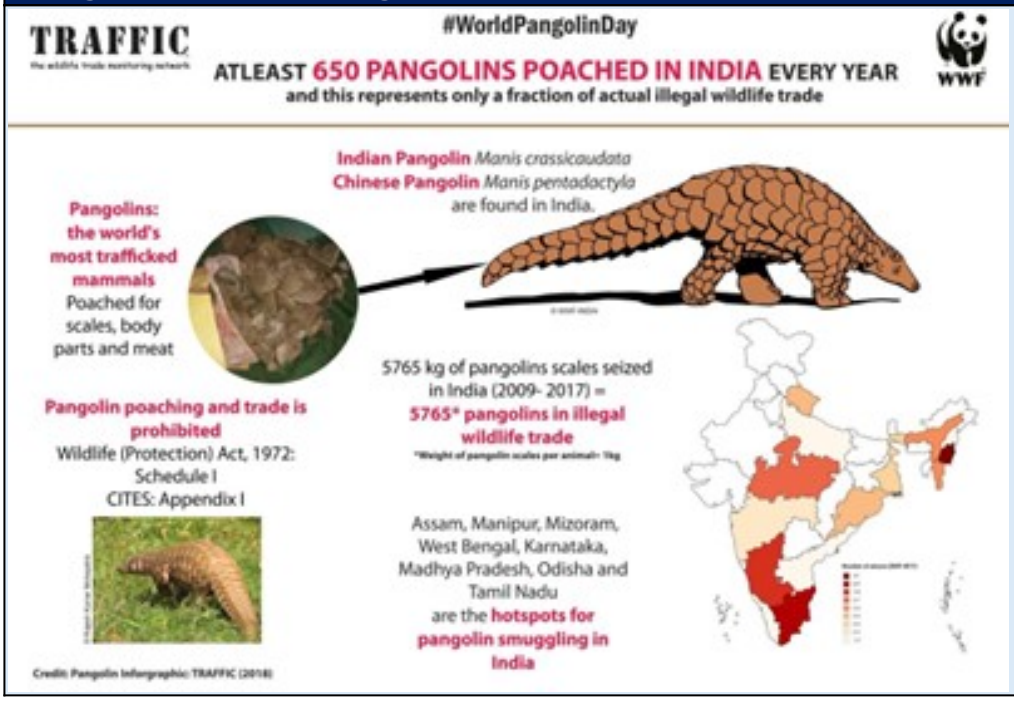


Hatha Jodi

• Hatha Jodi is the hemipenis of the monitor lizard (Varanus spp),
• It is illicitly obtained and falsely marketed as a sacred charm or root with mystical properties.
• Monitor lizards are protected under Schedule I of the ***Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972.***



Pangolin Trafficking



What are the causes of illegal wildlife trade?

- **Demand for Luxury goods -** Items like ivory, rhino horns, and tiger skins are seen as status symbols in some cultures.
- **Use in Traditional medicine-** Certain wildlife parts are believed to have medicinal properties, driving demand in traditional medicine markets.
- **Exotic pets-** The demand for rare and exotic pets leads to the capture and trade of wild animals.
- **Use as food -** Pangolins are trafficked mostly due to demand for meat and scales.
- **High profit margins-** The illegal wildlife trade is a lucrative business

with high profits, especially for rare species.

- **Inadequate legal frameworks-** Some countries lack strong laws or penalties to deter illegal wildlife trade.
- **Border control challenges-** Poorly managed borders make it easier for smugglers to transport illegal wildlife products.
- **Superstitions and Demand -** Belief among people that some animal parts like Hatha Jodi have magical powers in solving financial and health issues.
- **Lack of awareness –** Most of the perpetrators do not understand the gravity and impact of the crime.

What are the emerging challenges in controlling illegal wildlife trade?

- **Social Media** – Social Media is increasingly being used to propagate false information about wildlife products.
- This fuels the thriving illegal market for endangered animals.
- **Encrypted communication** - Privacy protection features such as encrypted chat and private social media groups further add challenges to tracing the illegal wildlife trade.
- **New trade channels** – Unregulated cyberspace channels and E-Commerce platforms being used for selling wildlife products pose new challenges to identifying and preventing wildlife crimes.
- **Air Ports** – Airports in India are major conduits for trafficking wildlife contraband.
- **New methods of evading checks –** New methods are used for evading the enforcement agencies in hiding articles through checked luggage and personal baggage.
- Wrong declaration of protected species.

What are the impacts of illegal wildlife trade?

- **Species decline-** Illegal trade often targets endangered species, pushing them closer to extinction.
- **Ecosystem disruption-** Removal of key species can disrupt ecosystem function and harm other wildlife.
- **Tourism impact-** Loss of wildlife can reduce ecotourism revenue, which many local economies depend on.
- **Economic costs-** Management and enforcement against illegal trade can be costly for governments.
- **Organized crime-** Wildlife trafficking is often linked to other forms of organized crime , corruption and terrorism.

- **Local communities-** Indigenous and local communities may lose traditional livelihoods tied to wildlife.
- **Disease transmission-** Illegal wildlife trade can spread zoonotic diseases (diseases transmitted from animals to humans).

What are the regulations in India?

- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972-** It provides for the establishment of wildlife sanctuaries and national parks and imposes penalties for illegal trade.

    o Hunting or trading parts of Schedule I species under WPA act can result in imprisonment for 3 to 7 years and a minimum fine of Rs 25,000.

To know more about WPA act , Click Here.

- **CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora)-** India is a signatory to CITES, which regulates international trade in endangered species.
- **Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB)-** Responsible for tackling wildlife crime across the country.
- **Forest departments-** Local Forest departments play a key role in monitoring and enforcement at the ground level.
- **Project Tiger and Project Elephant-** Government programs focused on conserving tiger and elephant populations.
- **Protected Areas Network-** A system of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries to safeguard habitats and wildlife.
- **Awareness campaigns-** Various NGOs and government bodies conduct campaigns to educate the public about the impacts of illegal wildlife trade and the importance of conservation.
- **Cross-Border efforts-** Collaboration with neighboring countries and international organizations to combat wildlife trafficking.

    o **TRAFFIC -** Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network to monitor the international trade in wild plants and animals.

What lies ahead?

- **Updating laws-** Ensure that wildlife protection laws are comprehensive and adapt to emerging threats and new trafficking methods.
- **Harmonizing regulations-** Align national laws with international

agreements like CITES to create a unified approach to wildlife protection.

- **Training and capacity building-** Provide training for law enforcement and customs officials on wildlife trafficking detection and investigation.
- **Cross-Border collaboration-** Foster collaboration between countries and international organizations to tackle the global nature of wildlife trafficking.
- **Information sharing-** Create networks for sharing intelligence and best practices among nations.
- **Public awareness campaigns-** Implement global and local awareness campaigns to educate the public about the impacts of wildlife trafficking and the importance of conservation.
- **Advanced monitoring-** Use technology such as drones, satellite imagery, and genetic tools to monitor wildlife populations and detect illegal activities.
- **Data management-** Develop robust data systems for tracking wildlife trade and enforcement actions to enhance analysis and response.
- **Scientific research-** Support research on wildlife populations, trafficking methods, and conservation strategies to inform policy and action.

References

1. Down to Earth | illegal online trade of wildlife
2. Global Environment Facility | Illegal wildlife trade

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