

Coronavirus lockdowns increase poaching in Asia, Africa

By Aniruddha Ghosal and Michael Casey
The Associated Press

NEW DELHI — A camera trap photo of an injured tigress and a forensic examination of its carcass revealed why the creature died: a poacher's wire snare punctured its windpipe and sapped its strength as the wound festered for days.

Snares like this one set in southern India's dense forest have become increasingly common amid the coronavirus pandemic, as people left jobless turn to wildlife to make money and feed their families.

Authorities in India are concerned this spike in poaching not only could kill more endangered tigers and leopards but also species these carnivores depend upon to survive.

"It is risky to poach, but if pushed to the brink, some could think that these are risks worth taking," said Mayukh Chatterjee, a wildlife biologist with the nonprofit Wildlife Trust of India.

Since the country announced its lockdown, at least four tigers and six leopards have been killed by poachers, Wildlife Protection Society of India said. But there also were numerous other poaching casualties — gazelles in grasslands, foot-long giant squirrels in forests, wild boars and birds such as peacocks, and purple morhens.

In many parts of the developing world, coronavirus lockdowns have sparked concern about increased illegal hunting that's fuelled by food shortages and a decline in law enforcement in some wildlife protection areas. At the same time, border closures and travel restrictions slowed illegal trade in certain high-value species.

One of the biggest disruptions involves the endangered pangolin. Often caught in parts of Africa and Asia, the anteater-like animals are smuggled mostly to China and Southeast Asia, where their meat is considered a delicacy and scales are used in traditional medicine.

In April, the Wildlife Justice Commission reported traders were stockpiling pangolin scales in several Southeast Asia countries awaiting an end to the



ILLEGAL ACTIVITY INTENSIFIES. A pangolin looks for food on private property in Johannesburg, South Africa, in this February 15, 2019 file photo. Often caught in parts of Africa and Asia, the anteater-like animals are smuggled mostly to China and Southeast Asia, where their meat is considered a delicacy and scales are used in traditional medicine. (AP Photo/Themba Hadebe, File) Nepal.

pandemic.

Rhino horn is being stockpiled in Mozambique, the report said, and ivory traders in Southeast Asia are struggling to sell the stockpiles amassed since China's 2017 ban on trade in ivory products. The pandemic compounded their plight because many Chinese customers were unable to travel to ivory markets in Cambodia, Laos, and other countries.

"They are desperate to get it off their hands. Nobody wants to be stuck with that product," said Sarah Stoner, director of intelligence for the commission.

The illegal trade in pangolins continued "unabated" within Africa but international trade has been disrupted by port closures, said Ray Jansen, chairman of the African Pangolin Working Group.

"We have witnessed some trade via air while major ship routes are still closed, but we expect a flood of trade once shipping avenues reopen again," Jansen said.

Fears that organized poaching in Africa would spike largely have not materialized — partly because ranger patrols have continued in many national parks and reserves.

Emma Stokes, director of the Central Africa Program of the Wildlife Conservation Society, said patrolling national parks in several African countries has been designated essential work.

But she has heard about increased hunting of animals outside parks. "We are

expecting to see an increase in bushmeat hunting for food — duikers, antelopes, and monkeys," she said.

Jansen also said bushmeat poaching was soaring, especially in parts of southern Africa. "Rural people are struggling to feed themselves and their families," he said.

There are also signs of increased poaching in parts of Asia.

A greater one-horned rhino was gunned down May 9 in India's Kaziranga National Park — the first case in over a year. Three people, suspected to be a part of an international poaching ring, were arrested on June 1 with automatic rifles and ammunition, said Uttam Saikia, a wildlife warden.

As in other parts of the world, poachers in Kaziranga pay poor families paltry sums of money to help them. With families losing work from the lockdown, "they will definitely take advantage of this," warned Saikia.

In neighboring Nepal, where the virus has ravaged important income from migrants and tourists, the first month of lockdown saw more forest-related crimes, including poaching and illegal logging, than the previous 11 months, according to a review by the government and World Wildlife Fund, or WWF.

For many migrants returning to villages after losing jobs, forests were the "easiest source" of sustenance, said Shiv Raj Bhatta, director of programs at WWF

Was new Chex flavor worth South Koreans' 16-year wait?

By Juwon Park and Jaimie Ding
The Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — South Koreans have waited 16 long years for a savory, crispy bite that would satisfy their taste buds and right an infamous wrong. This month, they finally could fill a bowl with the cereal they wanted all along: green onion flavored Chex.

Kellogg's Korea's limited-edition flavor, complete with a catchy ad and an apology for the wait, has taken on surprising cultural significance for an odd culinary

experiment.

In 2004, the company advertised a public vote for a new product: chocolate flavored Cheki or green onion flavored Chaka.

Chaka led by an overwhelming margin, but duplicates were said to mar the online vote and Cheki was declared the winner.

Many South Koreans saw the outcome as more than a marketing mishap.

"It's kind of representative of bigger issues in South Korean society," said Raphael Rashid, a Seoul-based

freelance journalist who writes about South Korean politics and culture. "South Koreans are used to or have experienced, you know, like years, if not decades, of dictatorship."

The chocolate victory was "kind of reminiscent" of that, he said.

It brought to the surface long-buried memories for Yoon Gunhee, who voted in the infamous election.

She said she was around 13 or 14 when she discovered an advertisement for the flavor election on the back of a cereal box.

"At the time, I was young so I voted for chocolate," said Yoon, a freelance game graphic designer. "Green onion really didn't sound appetizing."

She remembered people around her voted for the green onion flavor because they found it funny.

Yoon said she was amused this week by the light-hearted commercial for green onion Chex — featuring a popular South Korean singer declaring, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry that the green onion flavor arrived so late" and "the promise must be kept," with scientists in white gowns in a laboratory laboring to develop the perfect flavor. The video quickly racked up 900,000+ views on YouTube.

Yoon said she would like to buy it "at least once."

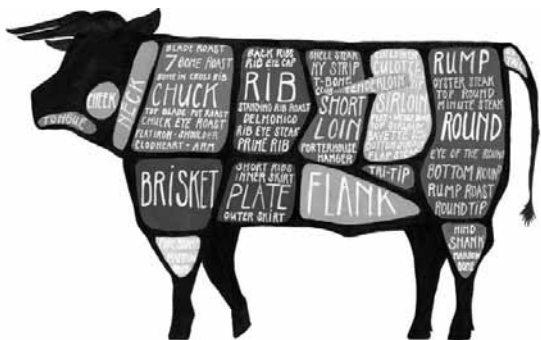
"The rigged voting at the time was such an unpleasant experience," she recalled. While the memory was a small one, she was reminded of it whenever she saw a box of Chex.

"I think I will be able to sort out my feelings after eating green onion flavored Chex," Yoon said.

South Korean Twitter has been rejoicing by uploading photos of their Chex. Some, feeling adventurous, sprinkled green onion cereal pieces as garnish on South Korean signature dishes including kimchi and spicy ramen noodles.

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