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Anti- poaching



Module # 1 - Introduction to anti-poaching

Component # 1 - The who, what and why of poaching

Module # 2 - The APU (Anti-Poaching Unit)

Component # 1 - Anti-Poaching Unit setup

Component # 2 - Active and passive prevention

Module # 3 - Poaching

Component # 1 - Poaching methods

Component # 2 - The economics of rhino poaching

Module # 4 - Anti-poaching

Component # 1 - Anti-poaching equipment

Component # 2 - Anti-poaching action plan

Component # 3 - The legalities of anti-poaching

Module # 5 - Anti-poaching practical

Component # 1 - Anti-poaching practical training

Module # 6 - Plant poaching

Component # 1 - Introduction to plant poaching

Component # 2 - Indigenous medicinal plant trade

Module # 7 - SWAT for the APU

Component # 1 - Advanced technical equipment

Component # 2 - Special weapons and tactics part # 1

Component # 3 - Special weapons and tactics part # 2

Component # 4 - Special weapons and tactics part # 3

Module # 8 - Marine poaching

Component # 1 - Marine poaching - key species

Component # 2 - Marine poaching overview

Module # 9 - Summary

Component # 1 - Course summary

Module # 1 – Component # 1

The who, what & why of poaching

Introduction

This course provides a theoretical background into the prevention of poaching, theft and mutilation of game animals, from a game reserve environment. **If you are a reserve, conservancy, wildlife or game farm manager; game ranger, game guide, game guard, trails guide or field guide; or simply want to learn more, this course is for you.** This course aims to provide you and your team with the necessary skills and knowledge to eradicate poaching in your area.



"These, then, are the men in the vanguard of conservation and law enforcement - men whose primary task is to protect the game reserves from the armed incursions of poachers; to protect the fences and other installations; to observe and report game movements, and to do a hundred and one other jobs, some difficult, almost all dangerous to a degree."

Nick Steele, in *"Bushlife of a Game Warden."* (1979).

Disclaimer

This course is written as a **general guide** to anti-poaching activities on game reserves. The advice, recommendations, protocols, suggestions, and instructions provided should be treated as guidance only. While this course is based upon direct counter-poaching experience, this activity is potentially dangerous and life-threatening and those involved must be **practically trained by experienced personnel** before taking any action regarding the subject matter. Therefore, **WildlifeCampus** and **KaiNav Conservation Africa**, take **no responsibility** for how you may utilise the information contained within this course and any consequences thereof.



What is poaching?

Poaching is the illegal taking of wild plants or animals contrary to local and international conservation and wildlife management laws. Violations of hunting laws and regulations are normally punishable by law and, collectively, such violations are known as poaching.

Poaching is in effect the illegal “hunting” of fauna and flora.

In this course, we will concentrate on poaching, which can be described as killing, trapping, capture, removal or possession of any product of fauna or flora without a permit or permission.



Flap-necked chameleon – (*Chamaeleo dilepis*)

It is illegal to take these animals out of the wild without permission from the relevant nature conservation authorities in the form of a valid permit. It is also illegal to buy or sell these animals. In fact, it is illegal to capture, buy or sell any indigenous reptiles in South Africa.

What is anti-poaching?

Anti-poaching is the approach, implementation and execution of controlling and elimination of poaching activities. What is an **Anti-Poaching Unit (APU)**? Law enforcement, preventing the illegal harvesting of fauna and flora.



Who make the best anti-poaching team members?

People often say the best APU members are former military personal. Some people say the best APU are ex-poachers. **Both have positive aspects.** The best person, however, is a passionate conservationist, a person willing to provide more effort than just a highly trained person who does it as a job.



In this course, we aim to impart the skills required by you and your team to enable effective anti-poaching activities. One needs to be aware that the skills needed to be effective at anti-poaching comes from practical experience and training that a written course cannot provide. However, this course will give you the necessary skills to manage anti-poaching in most forms.

Three levels of poaching

Poaching can generally be divided into **three different classes**:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Subsistence poaching | → Level 1 |
| 2. Commercial poaching | → Level 2 |
| 3. Syndicate poaching | → Level 3 |

All poaching levels are as equally critical, as they are often interlinked, and intelligence passes through all three levels.



Snares are widely used throughout Asia and Africa by both subsistence and commercial poachers.

Subsistence poaching - Level 1

This is a person that usually hunts/traps for himself and his family. He will often live in the surrounding areas of his poaching position and will know the terrain, habitat, infrastructure, routines and resident species remarkably well having most often grown up in and around the immediate wilderness area.

Characteristics of a subsistence poacher:

- This individual is often driven by poverty at first but can quickly cross over to becoming a commercial poacher.
- He will use whatever he has available to achieve his goal of “food”.
- In a large reserve, this person can and often lives on the reserve without anyone being aware of his presence.
- He will generally have the ability to live off the land.
- He will often know the reserve equally or better than the reserve management team and will certainly know that you are there before you know he is there.
- He is usually armed with his poaching weapons, as well as a knife or machete/panga and axe.
- He may also pose a threat to any lodges, homesteads or labourer compounds in the form of petty theft.
- He will almost always avoid any form of confrontation and will attempt to hide from or flee from anti-poaching units.
- He most often operates alone or as a pair.
- He will generally give up once caught.
- He may hunt indiscriminately and will eat whatever caught.

The threat level to the anti-poaching units is low: 1 - 2/5

Methods: this person's methods include snares and traps, spears and bow & arrows. If he can obtain a firearm, he will frequently progress to a level of commercial poaching.

Commercial poaching - Level 2

Poaching for bushmeat, traditional medicine and narcotic sales

This person cannot be easily profiled. He may be the farm manager next door or the subsistence level poacher that has “upped his need” or has been requested to obtain certain products. Traditional healers and those who supply them also fall into this category. Some are simply opportunists who move along fence lines looking for vulnerable subjects. Lastly, included in this category are plant (cycads and others) collectors.

Characteristics of a commercial poacher:

- They generally operate as a group and are frequently armed with firearms.
- They are driven by money or even “sport”.
- They will often sell the meat to butchers or back door street vendors.
- They may use poison to target certain species for traditional medicine trade.
- When poaching for meat, they will hunt indiscriminately.
- When poaching for traditional medicine (Muti-trade) they may well target expensive wildlife and plants to fulfil specific requests.
- They are often opportunistic with poaching.
- Their meat sales can look legitimate and will often come with proof of purchase. However, this can be very area dependant, as some markets are extremely informal.
- They can be well equipped with firearms, telescopic sights, night vision spotlights, radio communications and vehicles.
- They will try to avoid confrontation and work on a “kill and get out” principal before anyone comes.
- They may consider fighting back if their numbers allow but will generally rather flee when confronted.
- They usually target various locations in and around their living environment.
- They may also work seasonally or at specific times of the month.
- They generally operate at night. Preferring **full moon** - Also referred to as “**Poachers’ Moon**”.
- They may remain in larger reserves, living there for several days while they obtain their required harvest; this is particularly prevalent during the winter months.
- This level of poacher may also kill for sport and leave the carcass where they shoot it.
- They certainly pose a significant threat to wildlife.

Level of threat to the anti-poaching unit is moderate: 3-3.5/5

Methods: These include snares, trapping, spears, bow and arrow, hunting with dogs and hunting with rifles.

Syndicate poaching - Level 3

This is sophisticated organised crime, well-funded, well networked and internationally orchestrated. They recruit large networks of individuals, mostly locals, to do the actual poaching. Where syndicate level poachers are encountered it is the lowest level of the syndicate.

Characteristics of syndicate poachers:

- They are highly organised, resourced and operate within a sophisticated intelligence network.
- They always operate in groups, often very large groups of between 5 and 50 members.
- The upper echelons of the syndicate are driven by a significant financial motive. The lower levels are also financially motivated, but at a fraction compared with their masters. Ironically the higher the risk of the operation, the lower the operatives are paid.
- They are exceedingly well equipped with light aircraft, helicopters, assault rifles, explosives, night vision optics, vehicles, (encrypted) radio communication, dart guns and camouflage clothing.
- They utilise overt or covert surveillance followed by rapid "hit and run" tactics and do not linger after making their kills.
- Will try to avoid confrontation but will not hesitate to exercise excessive force when confronted.
- They operate during the day and at night
- They are target selective, with species including black & white rhino, elephant, lion and leopard. Marine species such as abalone are also included in this level.
- They have the resources to target large areas.
- The syndicates work as businesses.
- They are professionals, frequently with a military or Para-military background and training.
- Syndicate poachers have extensive skills, knowledge and motivation.

The threat to the anti-poaching unit is extremely high: 3.5 - 5/5

Methods: darting and hunting with firearms on foot, vehicle or helicopter.

The illegal pet trades

The profile of the illegal pet-trade poacher falls within the subsistence and commercial poacher level. The category is separated since this poacher, unlike the others, **does not confine his activities to formal reserves**. The targeted species of this poacher are mainly reptiles, usually **tortoises, chameleons and snakes**. While all species certainly occur within formal conservation areas, they are also readily available outside of these areas.

This type of poacher is also **most difficult to catch red-handed** as they do not carry weapons and should they feel they are in an imminent position of being confronted, they simply let their captured animal go. When encountered, they are only guilty of **trespassing**. This type of charge is not frequently pursued unless the individual becomes a repeat offender. However, when encountered, the area should be searched, and poached species should be **removed**. Poachers will often return to areas where they may have “left” their last capture.

The animals removed from formal or informal reserves are generally **sold on the side of the road**. **Recently, online sales have also become a significant threat**. This practice is illegal. Indigenous species are **NEVER** allowed as pets. Only research and rehabilitation permits are issued for the capture and collection of indigenous species. When the informal traders are encountered, local police should be informed and **the animal for sale should never be purchased**. People frequently purchase the species, not necessarily to keep them as “pets” but rather with the idea of returning them to the bush. While noble in intention, this practice simply fuels the demand and thus encourages poaching. If nobody bought, the trade would naturally dissolve.



Quartz gecko - (*Pachydactylus latirostris*)

Species targeted

Subsistence → Level 1
Commercial → Level 2
Syndicated → Level 3

Species	Poaching Level	Product
Baboons Savanna	2	Muti trade
Birds of prey	2	Muti trade and live sale
Blesbok	1 & 2	Meat
Bontebok	1 & 2	Meat
Buffalo	1 & 2	Meat and live sale
Burchell's zebra	1 & 2	Meat and skin
Bushbuck	1 & 2	Meat
Bushpig	1 & 2	Meat
Crocodile	1,2 & 3	Meat, skin, eggs and live sales
Damara Dik-dik	1 & 2	Meat
Duiker blue	1 & 2	Meat
Duiker grey	1 & 2	Meat
Duiker red	1 & 2	Meat



Removing a snare that got caught around a zebra's neck. Luckily, this animal made a full recovery. Not all animals caught in snares are so lucky.

Eland	1 & 2	Meat
Elephant	2 & 3	Ivory
Gemsbok	1 & 2	Meat
General birds	2	Muti trade and live sale
Giraffe	1 & 2	Meat
Grey Rhebok	1 & 2	Meat
Grysbok Cape	1 & 2	Meat
Grysbok Sharpe's	1 & 2	Meat and retail live
Hartebeest Lichtenstein's	1 & 2	Meat
Hartebeest red	1 & 2	Meat
Hippo	1,2 & 3	Meat skin and ivory
Hyaena spotted	2	Muti trade
Impala black faced	1 & 2	Meat
Impala common	1 & 2	Meat
Jackal	2	Muti trade
Klipspringer	1 & 2	Meat
Kudu	1 & 2	Meat
Leopard	2 & 3	Skin and Muti trade
Lion	2 & 3	Skin, bones, live sale and Muti trade
Monkeys vervet	2	Muti trade



"The Panthera study provides evidence of an emerging threat to African lion conservation: the targeted poaching of lions for body parts - specifically teeth and claws. The study warns that this growing threat could have devastating impacts on lion populations that mirror similar implications for wild tiger populations". Africa Geographic, January 2020.

Mountain reedbuck	1 & 2	Meat
Mountain zebra cape	1 & 2	Meat and skin
Mountain zebra	1 & 2	Meat and skin
Hartmann's zebra	1 & 2	Meat and skin
Nyala	1 & 2	Meat
Oribi	1 & 2	Meat
Ostrich	1 & 2	Meat
Pangolin	1,2 & 3	Meat, muti trade and scales
Plants	2	Muti trade and live sale
Reedbuck common	1 & 2	Meat
Rhinoceros black	2 & 3	Horn
Rhinoceros white	2 & 3	Horn
Roan antelope	1 & 2	Meat and live sale
Sable antelope	1 & 2	Meat and live sale
Small cats	2	Muti trade and live sale
Springbuck	1 & 2	Meat
Steenbok	1 & 2	Meat
Suni	1 & 2	Meat
Tsessebe	1 & 2	Meat
Warthog	1 & 2	Meat
Waterbuck	1 & 2	Meat
Wildebeest black	1 & 2	Meat
Wildebeest blue	1 & 2	Meat



A poached rhino in the Gauteng Province

Pangolins and pangolin poaching

By: Kailen Padayachee
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About pangolins

Pangolins are a group of African and Asian mammals which survive entirely on ants, termites and larvae. With no teeth, they collect their preferred food with an incredibly long, sticky tongue. This is the **only mammal on earth that is completely covered in scales**. These scales are made of keratin and are extremely hard. When threatened, pangolins curl up into a ball with their head tucked away safely beneath these protective scales.



Four species of African pangolin:

1. **The Temminck's ground pangolin**, which is the most widespread of the African pangolins. It is the **second-largest** African Pangolin species and inhabits **primarily arid habitats**.
2. **The giant ground pangolin** is the **largest** of the African pangolins. These pangolins inhabit mainly forest habitats of west and central Africa.
3. **The white-bellied pangolin**, unlike the Temminck's and Giant Pangolins, they are **arboreal**. Like the Giant pangolin, this species inhabits forest habitats and are found predominantly in west and central Africa.
4. **The black-bellied pangolin** is the **smallest** of Africa's pangolins. This small pangolin species is **strongly arboreal**, frequenting tropical riverine and swamp forests of west and central Africa.



Four species of Asian pangolin:

1. **The Chinese pangolin** is a **fossorial** (burrowing) species and in China, their distribution is believed to be closely correlated with two termite species (*Coptotermes formosanus* and *Termes formosanus*). This species is considered **critically endangered** and found throughout Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Hong Kong, India, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, Taiwan, Province of China; Thailand and Vietnam.
2. **The Indian pangolin**, like the Chinese pangolin, is **predominantly fossorial** and their scales are the **largest of the Asian species**. Also **critically endangered**, they have the most western distribution of all Asian species, occurring throughout Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
3. **The Philippines pangolin**, as its name suggests, is **restricted to four islands** of The Philippines. They too are considered **critically endangered**. One of the smallest Asian pangolin species, we know relatively little about its ecology and reproduction. This species was only recently described as a separate species to the Sunda pangolin.
4. **The Sunda pangolin** has the **largest distribution** of the southeast Asian pangolins. They have a long history of being traded internationally and while regarded as the most commonly found mammal in the illicit wildlife trade in Asia, they too are **critically endangered**.



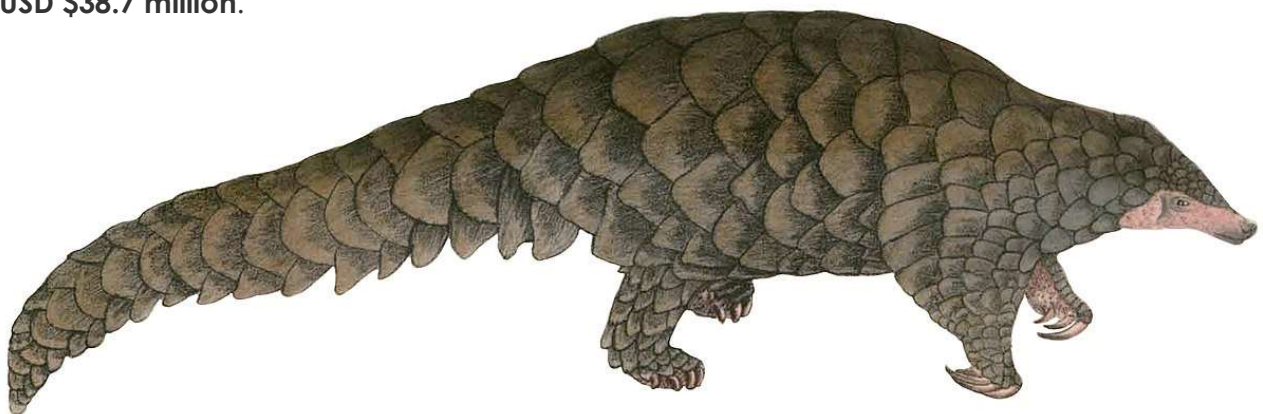
A Chinese pangolin

Threats to pangolins

Dubbed the most trafficked mammal in the world, the pangolin's greatest threat comes from **poaching**. An extremely shy and slow-moving animal, pangolins, when found, are simply picked up and placed in a bag by poachers. Between the year 2000 and 2019, it is estimated that **895 000 pangolins were trafficked globally**. These animals are highly sought after for their **scales** and **meat**, with the bulk of the poached pangolins being trafficked to east and southeast Asia. The demand for these scales as an ingredient in **traditional medicine** made primarily in China and Vietnam has seen the four Asian pangolin species becoming **critically endangered**. These scales are believed to have a myriad of medicinal properties and used to treat everything from heart disease to cancer and even thought to help lactating women produce milk. However, like rhino horn and human fingernails, pangolin scales are made from **keratin** and there has been **no scientific evidence** to prove its medical efficacy.

The use of these animals in traditional medicine, however, is not restricted to Asia. Pangolins in west and central Africa have been used for generations in the “Muti” or African traditional medicine trade. Similarly to the scales, **pangolin meat** has been utilized by indigenous people throughout their geographic ranges as a source of protein for generations. While the meat today is regarded as a rare, luxury product in east and southeast Asia, pangolins are continuously poached for bushmeat in Africa, specifically west and central Africa. This rare, delicacy status afforded to pangolin meat, particularly in Asia, has resulted in a **high economic value** and an increased demand for these animals. Due to the significant reduction in Asian pangolin populations, poaching of the African species has steadily increased since 2008. Since 2016, **all pangolin species** have been placed on the CITES Appendix I list, banning the commercial trade in wild-caught pangolins and their derivatives internationally.

Despite this **international ban**, pangolin scales and meat continue to be confiscated by customs authorities globally as populations of these shy creatures continue to dwindle. In January 2019, **8 tonnes** of pangolin scales - estimated to come from more than **14,000 pangolins** - were confiscated at a Hong Kong customs facility, along with other illicit wildlife products. The contraband was uncovered on a cargo ship originating from Nigeria, destined for Vietnam. The illicit shipment was valued at almost USD\$ 8 million and was the **largest wildlife product seizure ever in Hong Kong**. Just three months later, in April 2019, nearly **12 tonnes** of pangolin scales were seized in Singapore - representing **36,000 pangolins**. The 40-foot container was yet again, on its way to Vietnam from Nigeria when it was intercepted by Singapore customs. The scales were packed in 230 bags alongside almost 400 pounds of carved elephant ivory. The total shipment was worth an estimated **USD \$38.7 million**.



Conserving Africa's pangolins

Pangolins are **notoriously difficult to find** and are significantly impacted by poaching throughout their ranges. These challenges often impede effective and efficient conservation action of these species. This enormous lack of knowledge and need for focused conservation intervention has resulted in many pangolin monitoring programs, **anti-poaching campaigns** and **rehabilitation operations** throughout the world. Monitoring programs focus on providing data on numbers and distribution of existing individuals as well as assist in understanding pangolin populations and the impact unsustainable utilization of these animals has on the population and ecosystem as a whole.



Interactive Map of Pangolin Centred Conservation Projects and IUCN SSC Pangolin Specialist Group Members: www.pangolinsg.org. The African Pangolin Working Group has developed the **Pangolin K9 Unit**, which is a **counter-poaching unit** dedicated to the protection and conservation of **all African Pangolins**.

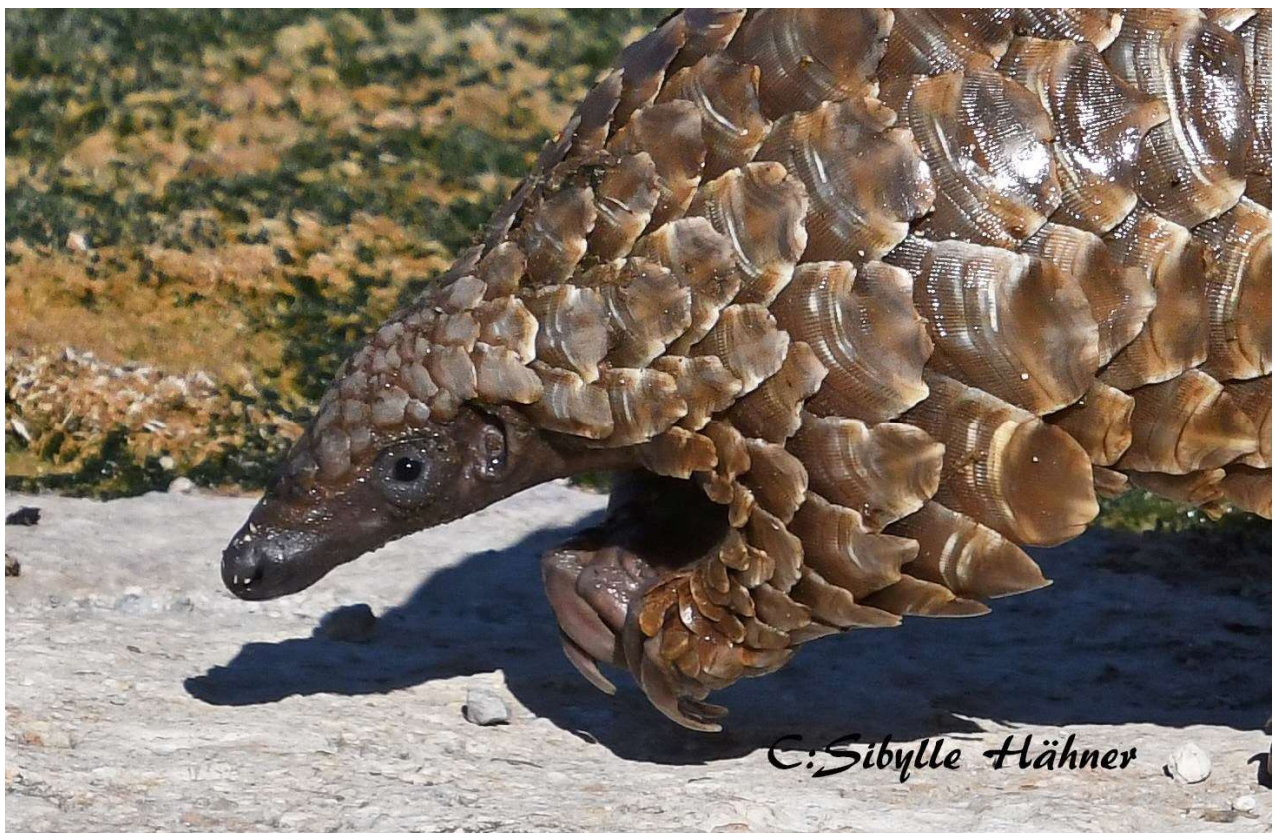


This specialised unit utilizes specially trained canines to detect the scent of **all four species** of African Pangolin. They are deployed throughout South Africa to assist the South African Police Service, Department of Environmental Affairs Law enforcement (Green Scorpions) and many other anti-poaching and law enforcement agencies in the detection of poached and smuggled pangolins.



The **African Pangolin Working Group** is also significantly involved in educating various national agencies including the **South African Police** (the Hawks), **anti-poaching units**, **Department of Environmental Affairs - Green Scorpions**, **prosecutors, magistrates** and **customs** (SARS) ports authorities regarding pangolins and pangolin conservation. These efforts paved the way for the **first-ever successful prosecution** of a suspect in a pangolin poaching case in South Africa. In October 2016, the magistrate in Mankweng regional court sentenced an accused pangolin poacher to a jail term of **three years**.

In January 2017, a Zimbabwe national was sentenced to a term of **seven years**, setting a landmark precedent for pangolin poaching in South Africa. Since the first jail sentence, there have been further jail terms handed down, including three to seven years each.



Despite all the education and law enforcement campaigns, pangolins continue to be targeted by poachers throughout Southern Africa. This has led to multiple individuals being smuggled throughout South Africa and globally. This necessitated the need for a rehabilitation program dedicated to treating and releasing pangolins rescued from smugglers back to the wild. **The African Pangolin Working Group** has also been tasked with ensuring rescued pangolins are hospitalized, treated and released back to the wild efficiently and effectively. Once the pangolins have been treated, they are usually monitored by dedicated personal for a period of time to ensure they are able to forage on their own. Once deemed ready for release, tracking equipment is usually attached to each individual and they are released into undisclosed natural areas, safe from poachers.

Resources and information from:

1. IUCN SSC Pangolin Specialist Group: <https://www.pangolinsg.org/pangolins/threats/>
2. African Pangolin Working Group: <https://africanpangolin.org>
3. African Wildlife Foundation: <https://www.awf.org/blog/27-million-pangolinsarepoached-every-year-scales-and-meat>
4. African Pangolin Working Group: <https://africanpangolin.org/conservation/lawenforcement/>



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