



Rainforest Protectors of Sri Lanka

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To: Minister Navin Dissanayake

Deputy Minister Vasantha Senanayake

Director General H.D. Rathnayake

Department of Wildlife Conservation

Request to take immediate action to stop the growing poaching crisis

Wildlife in Sri Lanka, which our forefathers protected and co-existed with for generations, is currently facing many challenges for survival. Herein below, we present a few issues that need your urgent attention, along with suggestions on what can be easily done during the 100 days, and what can be done in the long run.

1. Poaching

While loss of habitat by deforestation and ill-planned development projects has greatly affected the animals' ability to find food and shelter, recent increase in illegal poaching activity is pushing our wildlife towards extinction. A growing taste for bush meat (අඩ මස්) among certain affluent people has created a lucrative black market that many hotels and restaurants around the country secretly engage in.

Certain hotels and restaurants such as _____, are known to take extra steps to hide their illegal bush meat trade. These restaurants process the bush meat elsewhere before storing in their own refrigerators, in an attempt to hide vital clues that Department of Wildlife (DWC) and Police can produce before the courts. This has resulted in the DWC not being able to prosecute the offenders in courts and the culprits freely engaging in the illegal bush meat trade, killing hundreds of innocent wildlife on a daily basis.



Poachers at Lunugamwehera Sanctuary

(<http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2013/05/26/wildlife-sanctuary-or-poachers-paradise/>)

2. Threat to endangered species

While most poachers trap and kill Wild Boar, Deer, Elk, Sambhar and Porcupine, severely endangered animals such as Sri Lankan Leopards have often been unfortunate to get trapped and killed. This year started off with one such unfortunate incident (see photo below). Poachers have also found a growing market for Leopard skin, teeth and other body parts. With less than 500 Leopards living in Sri Lanka, these incidents are gradually pushing these majestic animals towards extinction, and posing the danger of losing revenue from national parks such as Yala. To prevent such incidents in the future, heavy fines should be brought against poachers and hotels/restaurants engaged in bush meat trade, and the licenses of such restaurants revoked if proven in court. More severe fines should be imposed when an endangered species like a leopard is killed.



Leopard killed by poachers on January 29, 2015

(<http://nethfm.com/article/54980>)

3. Animal Cruelty

Another major poaching related issue is the growing use of cruel hakkapatas (හක්කපටස්) to kill wildlife. The victims succumb to a long and painful death, unimaginable in a predominantly Buddhist country like Sri Lanka. Hakkapatas is sold openly for just Rs. 400 and poachers are setting up hakkapatas even on protected sanctuaries. Many villagers who have information regarding poachers have given up hope as the Department of Wildlife has not taken any steps to conduct raids even after being informed. Additionally, these villagers have received death threats by the poachers (see Appendix 1). Unfortunately, even when the Police arrest poachers for use or possession of hakkapatas and produce them before courts, offenders are released for as little as Rs. 5,000 bail (see Appendix 2). Such a lax legal system encourages poachers to continue the use of hakkapatas.



Elephant bites on pumpkin filled with explosives, dies. Baby elephant found by its mother's side, in a severely-malnourished state.

(<http://www.emirates247.com/news/sri-lanka/elephant-bites-on-pumpkin-filled-with-explosives-dies-2014-03-13-1.541311>)

4. So what can be done in the 100-days?

- (i) Enactment of the “Animal Welfare Bill” handed over to the Ex-President Mahinda Rajapakse 8 years ago (Appendix 7)
- (ii) The root cause of all these poaching related issues is the centuries old law against animal cruelty in Sri Lanka. *“The maximum fine of Rs. 100 which may extend to Rs. 200 in the case of a second or subsequent offence, is a ridiculously low amount and hardly acts as a deterrent in today’s context. There has been no change in the quantum of the monetary penalty since 1907. There is no reported case of an offender being given a sentence of imprisonment for causing cruelty to an animal”* (Appendix 6). *“The Law Commission prepared an Animal Welfare Bill repealing the aforesaid Cruelty to Animals Ordinance and substituting heavy punishments for abuse of animals. It was finalized in 2006. Eight years have elapsed since then but there is no sign of this Bill being enacted in Parliament. The lack of political will to extend effective legislative protection to innocent defenseless animals is a national shame”* (Appendix 7). This is something that can easily be done during the new government’s 100-day program. It will raise much support for the government from all animal lovers in Sri Lanka and thus has the potential of becoming a major PR point.
- (iii) Ban “hakkapatas” (හක්කපටස්) from the country.
- (iv) Warn people that cruelty to wild life and even animals such as stray dogs would be dealt with severely.

5. What can be done in the long run

- (i) The relevant departments (DWC, Police, Special Task Force) should be provided with the necessary funds, technology, training and instructions with periodic reviews on the effectiveness of their anti -poaching operations.
- (ii) As aforementioned, heavy fines should be brought against poachers and hotels/restaurants engaged in bush meat trade. The licenses of such restaurants should be revoked once prosecuted before the courts. A more severe fine should be imposed when an endangered species like a leopard is killed.
- (iii) Study examples of countries like Nepal who successfully achieved Zero Poaching and apply suitable methods to Sri Lanka. <https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/how-nepal-got-to-zero-poaching>
- (iv) Many nations facing the poaching issue have successfully used new technology such as DNA testing to effectively identify poachers and hotels selling bush meat. It is important that such DNA testing facilities be established in Sri Lanka and the court procedures updated to give prominence to results of such testing. Law enforcement officers should also be given training and equipment to carry out these tasks effectively and process their evidence through the DNA testing labs and produce the results before the courts.
- (v) We need to protect our wildlife and take every possible measure to ensure that they are not heading towards extinction. We hope you will act in a timely manner to address this serious issue before it is too late. This is the only way to ensure that our growing eco-tourism is also not harmed. The tasks given above as easily achievable during the 100-day program.

Thank you

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Appendix

1. හක්කපටස් භාවිතයෙන් සිදුකරන රජරට සතුන් දඩයම ඉහළට

<http://www.divaina.com/2015/01/21/provin03.html>

2. Fined for keeping Hakkapatas

<http://www.dailynews.lk/?q=police-legal/fined-keeping-hakkapatas>

3. හක්ක පටස් කෑ අලියා මියයයි

<http://www.divaina.com/2014/02/21/provin06.html>

4. Elephant bites on pumpkin filled with explosives, dies. Baby elephant found by its mother's side, in malnourished state.

<http://www.emirates247.com/news/sri-lanka/elephant-bites-on-pumpkin-filled-with-explosives-dies-2014-03-13-1.541311>

5. Petition: Sri Lanka - Stop the practice of Hakka Patas used to KILL elephants!

<https://www.change.org/p/sri-lanka-stop-the-practice-of-hakka-patas-used-to-kill-elephants>

6. Proposed Animal Welfare Legislation for Sri Lanka

<http://www.fercsl.net/ws3p5.pdf>

7. Enact the Animal Welfare Bill of the Law Commission

<http://www.dailymirror.lk/opinion/172-opinion/53308-editorial-enact-the-animal-welfare-bill-of-the-law-commission.html#sthash.3NcGHPiV.dpuf>