

The SHERLOC Team is pleased to share with you Issue No. 15 of our newsletter regarding our recent efforts to facilitate the dissemination of information regarding the implementation of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto, and the international legal framework against terrorism.



In this issue

FEATURED CASE:
USA V MALDONADO -
PASSAGE

RECENT ACTIVITIES

DID YOU KNOW?
VIRTUAL SHERLOC
CONSULTATIONS

MEET A CONTRIBUTOR

EDITORIAL: WILDLIFE AND ORGANIZED CRIME

If anything, the current COVID-19 pandemic has shown us how vulnerable our societies are to disruptions. Moreover, it has made painfully clear the impact of organized crime on public health.

With its tendency to avoid sanitary regulations, the illegal trade in wildlife has received negative publicity as a potential facilitator of the spread of zoonotic diseases. While this illegal trade has been at the heart of many debates throughout recent months, it is by no means a new phenomenon. Wildlife trafficking - the illicit trade in wild species of fauna and flora - has been recognized as a threat to our environment, national security and - as this crisis made us painfully aware - public health. While some wildlife trafficking supplies illicit retail markets, trafficked wildlife specimens and products also find their way into legal markets.

The existence of such parallel, legal markets renders law enforcement difficult as the legality or illegality of trade in a specimen can depend on a number of different factors.

A striking example of legal markets of wild animals is the usage of tigers and other big cats in tourist facilities across the globe.

One case of roadside zoos in the US has attracted significant international attention this year, with the production of the Netflix TV series *Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness*.

This issue of the SHERLOC newsletter goes behind the series to investigate the legal proceedings against the real “Tiger King”, *USA v Maldonado-Passage*.

Take care and stay healthy,
the SHERLOC team

FEATURED CASE:

USA V MALDONADO-PASSAGE

Joseph Maldonado-Passage, also known as “Joe Exotic”, was the owner and operator of Greater Wynnewood Exotic Animal Park in Oklahoma, USA. In 2020, he rose to notoriety as the subject of the Netflix-produced TV series *Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness*. This series successfully leveraged the flashy personality of Mr. Maldonado-Passage to become an instant hit worldwide.

Amidst the success of the series, the sensational and salacious details of Mr. Maldonado-Passage’s life overshadowed the issue of captive breeding facilities in the US—facilities where privately-owned commercial entertainment organizations engage in breeding and crossbreeding of big cats. This industry has grown to such a size that it is now estimated that there are more captive tigers live in the US than there are tigers left in the wild. In captive breeding facilities, big cat cubs are used to attract visitors, who are lured in by the temptation of taking pictures of themselves petting baby tigers. Petting and feeding of cubs is a fundamental pillar of the business model of such wildlife facilities, as it is the cubs that generate the majority of revenue for the parks. Whereas cubs are at the heart of the success of such facilities, they are considered an economic burden by park operators once they grow older than three months.



Joseph Maldonado-Passage, known as Joe Exotic"
Image: National Geographic

After passing this threshold, cubs are considered too dangerous to cuddle with, disqualifying them for any of the most-profitable tourist activities. This sets economic incentives for park operators to dispose of the cats.



Joseph Maldonado-Passage, known as Joe Exotic
Image: Netflix

In some cases, tigers, lions and hybrids older than three months are illegally sold on the black market to private collectors or unauthorized facilities. In other cases, the animals might be killed off to make room for newly arriving cubs, or simply neglected and left alone, often in inhumane conditions.

In the United States, the private possession of big cats and exotic pets is not addressed by any federal ban. Legislation on this issue is left to the states, with the result that legislation in several states permits the private possessions of tigers and lions. The absence of harmonized legislation banning the possession of big cats and exotic pets makes the industry of captive breeding vulnerable to exploitation by organized crime and other black-market actors.

Mr. Maldonado-Passage cashed in on this lack of harmonized legislation. His animal park relied heavily on tourists seeking out opportunities to interact with big cat cubs.

In 2017, Mr. Maldonado-Passage, expecting a delivery of a new group of big cats, including little cubs, shot and killed five adult tigers and illegally sold off several tiger cubs to make room for the new arrivals.

In January 2020, Mr. Maldonado-Passage was found guilty of 17 counts of wildlife offences contrary to the Lacey Act and the Endangered Species Act, including for the deliberate killing of tigers, as well as two counts of murder-for-hire charges relating to attempts to have a public opponent of his big cat operations assassinated. He was sentenced to a total of 22 years' imprisonment, including 18 years of imprisonment for the murder-for-hire charges, and four years of imprisonment for the wildlife offences.

This feature has been adapted from the original SHERLOC case entry. To find out more about this case, click [here](#) to access it on SHERLOC.

RECENT ACTIVITIES

Launch of the World Wildlife Crime Report

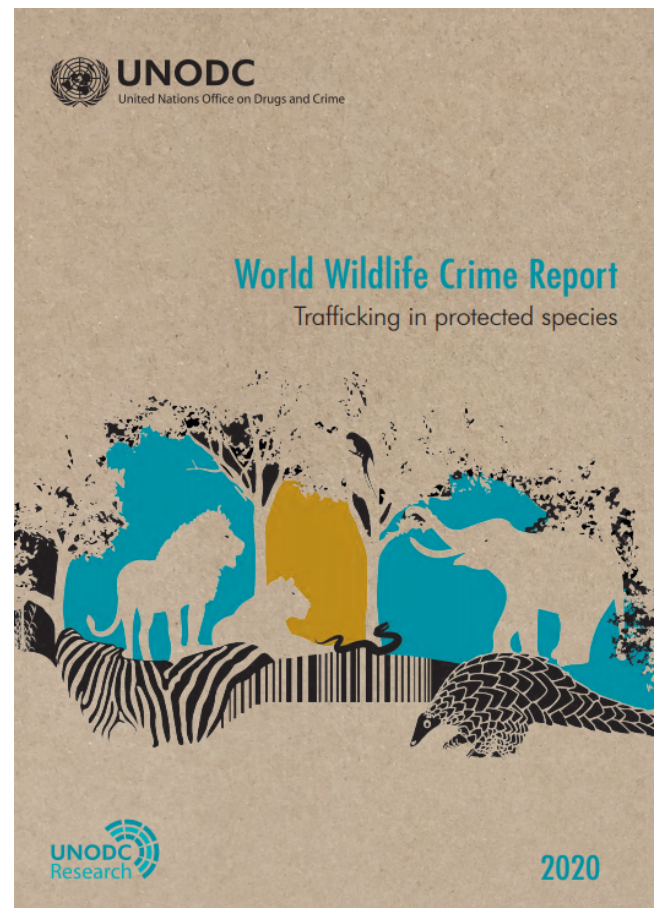
On July 10th the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) launched the World Wildlife Crime Report 2020, which emphasizes the threat that wildlife trafficking poses to nature, the biodiversity of the planet and human beings. The report highlights the trafficking of a number of wild species of flora and fauna, including pangolins, birds, turtles, tigers, rosewood and many more.

The report also draws attention to the danger that wildlife trafficking poses through the spread of zoonotic diseases such as SARS-CoV-2, the disease that has caused the COVID-19 pandemic. Zoonotic diseases are diseases which are caused by pathogens that spread from animals to humans. When wild animals are poached from their natural habitat, butchered and sold illegally, frequently in poor hygienic and sanitary conditions, the potential for transmission of zoonotic diseases increases. As noted in the report, zoonotic diseases represent up to 75 per cent of all emerging infectious diseases.

As noted in the report, zoonotic diseases represent up to 75 per cent of all emerging infectious diseases. The report further notes that pangolins, which were identified as a potential source of coronaviruses, are the most trafficked wild mammals in the world, with seizures of pangolin scales having increased tenfold between 2014 and 2018.

The World Wildlife Crime Report discusses and refers to a number of cases from SHERLOC's Caselaw Database to provide concrete examples how wildlife trafficking has been tackled in different countries and at different stages from investigation to prosecution and adjudication. To learn more about prominent cases of wildlife trafficking, visit [SHERLOC's Caselaw Database](#).

Recalling UNODC Executive Director Ghada Waly's words, it is important to remember that "[t]ransnational organized crime networks are reaping the profits of wildlife crime, but it is the poor who are paying the price" and that as the COVID-19 crisis has shown us, we cannot afford to ignore wildlife crime. *"The 2020 World Wildlife Crime Report can help to keep this threat high on the international agenda and increase support for governments to adopt the necessary legislation, and develop the inter-agency coordination and capacities needed to tackle wildlife crime offences."*



UNODC, World Wildlife Crime Report, 2020
Image: UNODC

Webinar Series



Image: pch.vector

In the past months, the SHERLOC team joined UNODC's Education for Justice (E4J) Initiative in organizing a number of webinars on organized crime, including in connection with other crime types and in light of recent developments due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the pandemic, organized criminal groups have not halted their activities. With States' resources focused on responding to the health emergency and criminal justice responses impeded by restriction of movement, it is all the more important to understand the ways organized crime operates and the role we all can play to fight against it. Against this backdrop, two webinars have been held in the last month. Further webinars are planned for autumn 2020.

The first webinar of this series was organized on 26 June and focused on the rise of a parallel global "pandemic"- the proliferation of substandard and falsified medical products. Since 11 March 2020, the day that the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic, millions of dollars' worth of falsified medical products have been seized by law enforcement agencies.

Operating both online and offline, criminals are exploiting fearful populations, shortages of drugs and personal protective equipment caused by the crisis to profit from falsified medical products. These medical products may fail to treat or may worsen disease and in worst-case scenarios can lead to death. This webinar centred on the rise of these products during the pandemic, the involvement of organized crime in this illicit market as well as the role UNODC can play in supporting States to address this scourge.

The second webinar was held on 2 July and concerned linkages between organized crime and wildlife crime in Eastern and Southern Africa and the role education can play in tackling these threats. Organized crime and wildlife crime threaten Eastern and Southern Africa's security, development and environment.

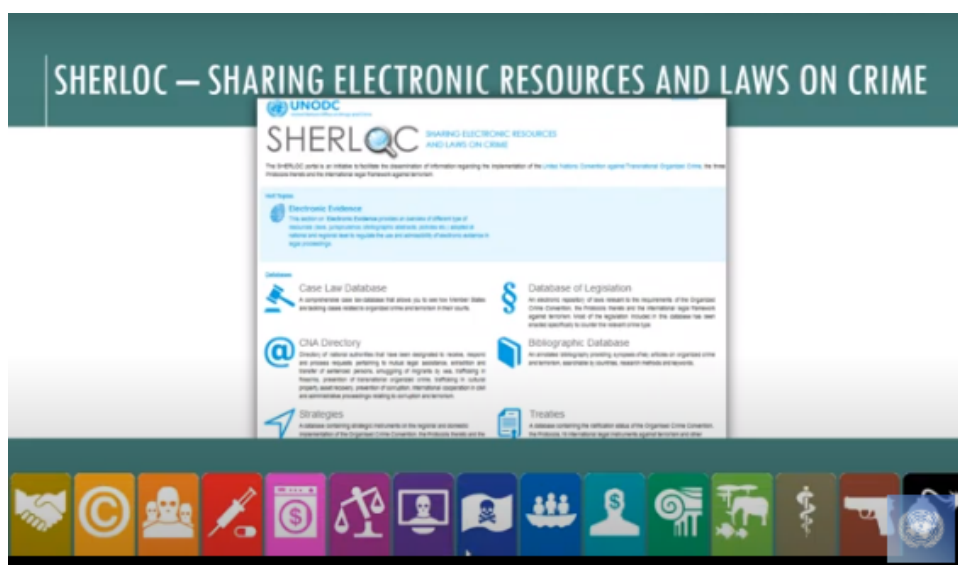
Even though not all cases of wildlife crime involve organized crime, evidence shows that some organized criminal groups do engage in wildlife crime, with devastating effects on biodiversity, public health as well as the sustainable management of natural resources.



If you are interested in staying up-to date and learn more about the linkages of organized crime with different crimes, follow us on Twitter as more webinars are about to come after the summer break!



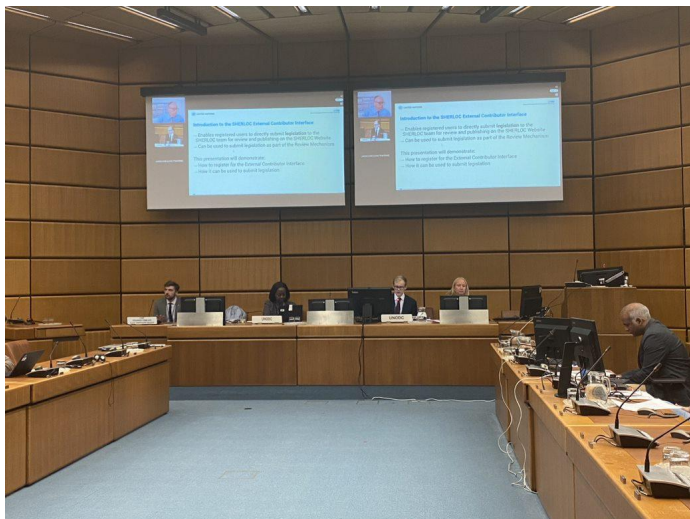
[@UNODC_SHERLOC](https://twitter.com/UNODC_SHERLOC)



Working Group on Technical Assistance

From 9 to 10 July 2020, the SHERLOC team took part in the twelfth session of the Working Group of Government Experts on Technical Assistance of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Held virtually, this meeting gathered experts from 80 States and 4 intergovernmental organizations to discuss tools and methods of technical assistance and capacity-building on UNTOC-related matters.

The SHERLOC knowledge management portal was mentioned extensively by the participants as one of the most successful tools for technical assistance in this context. In reflection of this, many of the discussion points for further consideration produced by the Working Group point to the central role of the SHERLOC knowledge management portal in UNODC's capacity-building on UNTOC and suggest ways for the further development of the portal.



Above left and right: Working Group of Government Experts on Technical Assistance of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime held in July 2020

In the meeting, case studies on the national implementation of UNTOC provisions in Singapore, Namibia and Canada were also presented. **Learn more about** some of the cases discussed by the panelists on SHERLOC, simply by clicking on the buttons.



The full report on the meeting will be made available soon on UNODC's website, through official distribution channels in six UN languages.



DID YOU KNOW? VIRTUAL "SHERLOC CONSULTATIONS"

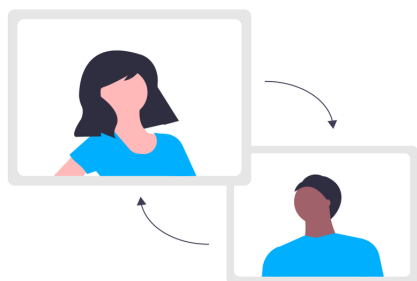


Image: Katerina Limpitsouni

These consultations allowed the team to connect directly with representatives of States Parties to UNTOC, ranging from delegates of Permanent Missions in Vienna, to practitioners and focal points working on criminal justice and crime prevention in the capitals to illustrate the portal, its functions and the latest developments. It also provided the opportunity for bilateral discussions on the information available for each State party on SHERLOC's databases and to further strengthen collaboration with national authorities.

On the margins of the Working Group on Technical Assistance, the SHERLOC team held for the first time a new format of targeted briefings – virtual "SHERLOC Consultations".

Over the two days of the Working Group, a total of 25 consultations were booked with the SHERLOC team. Consultations took place virtually and were bookable in over 10 languages, including Arabic, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

Following the success of these consultations, the SHERLOC team has decided to offer additional opportunities for consultations to States from July to September.

During such a consultation, you can:

- Learn more about the various databases of the SHERLOC portal and the resources they host;
- Review the legal information of your country on SHERLOC;
- Discuss possible ways of cooperating directly with the SHERLOC Team in enriching the data on your country available on the portal;
- Get acquainted with the brand-new External Contributor Interface of the portal;
- And much more!



Image: Katerina Limpitsouni

Virtual SHERLOC consultations can be arranged by contacting us at unodc-sherloc@un.org.

MEET A CONTRIBUTOR

This issue's featured contributor is Felix. Felix joined UNODC's Global Programme for Combating Wildlife and Forest Crime in late 2018. Since then, he has been the focal point for wildlife-related matters for SHERLOC and the Education for Justice (E4J) initiative. Before his time at UNODC, Felix was a criminal police detective and gathered experience working in the field of drug trafficking, crime scene forensics and as a first responder.

His professional experience comprises the public and private sector, including governments, across Europe and the Americas. He holds a degree in International Business with a specialization in Emerging Markets as well as a master's double degree in International Management.

Outside of his work for UNODC, Felix is interested in various topics of criminology. He co-hosts a podcast series on organized crime and has contributed as an instructor to a Massive Online Open Course on International Security Management.

