

BBC Learning English
6 Minute English
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Animal species 'extinction crisis'



Rob: Hello, I'm Rob, welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm joined today by Feifei.

Feifei: Hi there, Rob.

Rob: Hello Feifei. Today we're discussing the issue of the illegal trade in wildlife. And we'll be looking at some of the words and phrases associated with this sad and increasing activity. I think we all know there are many rare species of animals that are being illegally **hunted** to make money. And 200 governments have been meeting in Bangkok to talk about how to tackle this problem. More on that in a moment but as always, we like to start with a question.

Feifei: Hmm, and this question is for me isn't it?

Rob: It is Feifei. Let's see if you can answer this question correctly this time! The dodo bird has been **extinct** for a very long time – that means there have been no living members of the species for quite a long time. But when did this bird become extinct?

- a) In the late 1600's
- b) In the late 1700's
- c) In the early 1900's

Feifei: I will go for answer a) in the 1600's.

Rob: Ok, well let's find out if you are right at the end of the programme. The expression '**dead as a dodo**' refers to this bird and can be used to describe something that is completely dead or no longer working. And there is no doubt that many other animal species are facing extinction – or dying out.

Feifei: Yes. Some experts are predicting a global 'extinction crisis'. So it's an extremely urgent matter – and that's what governments have been discussing at a meeting in Bangkok.

Rob: They want to come up with ideas on how to stop the illegal trade in wildlife. They want to stop animals, such as elephants and rhino, being killed for their horns and tusks. **Conservation groups** – the people who try to protect the animals – claim the scale of the **slaughter** is accelerating.

Feifei: So they mean the killing is increasing. So Rob, why is this problem on the increase?

Rob: Well, Mary Rice from the Environmental Investigations Agency blames the way the illegal trade is policed – or to use her words, 'enforced'. Let's hear from her now and see if you can hear the word she uses to describe how some people organise this illegal trade:

Mary Rice, Environmental Investigations Agency

The enforcement effort tends to end at seizure. The poachers get arrested and convicted. You might get the odd middleman. The guys who mastermind the efforts, the guys who invest in the operations to acquire large amounts of ivory, for example, have never been intercepted.

Rob: That's Mary Rice talking about the 'enforcement effort' – or where the authorities spend most of their time trying to stop the trade in wildlife.

Feifei: And that effort is concentrated on stopping the **poachers**. Poachers are the people who catch and kill the animals. They get caught and the tusks, horns and other body parts they have taken are seized and confiscated – so taken away by the police.

Rob: But, of course, the animal has already died. Mary Rice says it is the people who mastermind the trade – in other words, the people who organise the poaching and fund the trade, who are never caught – or intercepted.

Feifei: And it's not just individual people. Thailand itself has been accused of being a **transit route** – a place endangered animals pass through while they are being shipped between Africa and China. And this highlights another issue too. If there is a demand for buying parts of the wild animals, someone will always try to supply them.

Rob: It's a good point. In China and Hong Kong for example, there is a huge appetite for shark-fin soup and it's claimed 100 million sharks are killed by commercial fishing every year to supply this demand.

Feifei: Well luckily for the Oceanic white tip shark, delegates at this year's meeting have voted to add it to a long list of **endangered species** that are being protected.

Already, 35,000 animals and plants are protected by the convention on the international trade in endangered species – CITES for short.

Rob: This agreement was signed in 1973 and the convention works by licensing commercial trade in species – so it allows a fixed amount of controlled trading to take place.

Feifei: But illegal wildlife trading still continues. The BBC's David Shukman says more needs to be done. What three things does he think needs to happen?

David Shukman, BBC correspondent:

Having an international agreement clearly isn't enough; it'll take a combination of forensic science, police co-operation and political will to halt the killing. Conservation groups warn that if this rate continues, some populations of elephant and rhino will face extinction.

Feifei: So he thinks having an international agreement - CITES – isn't enough. He suggests using forensic science, police co-operation and political will – that means a desire by politicians to do something to stop this illegal activity.

Rob: David Shukman warns that if nothing is done, some populations of elephant and rhino will face – or will be under threat of – extinction.

Feifei: Well that's what happened to the dodo.

Rob: Ah yes, earlier I asked you: when did the dodo bird become extinct?

- a) In the late 1600's
- b) In the late 1700's
- c) In the early 1900's

Feifei: And I said in the 1600's.

Rob: And you were absolutely right. Its last confirmed sighting was in 1662. Before we go, Feifei, could you remind us of some of the words we learned today?

Feifei: Yes. We heard:

hunted

extinct

dead as a dodo

conservation groups

slaughter

seizure

poachers

a transit route

endangered species

Rob: Thanks Feifei. Well, that's it for today. Please join us again soon for 6 Minute English from bbclearningenglish.

Both: Bye.

Vocabulary and definitions

hunted	caught and killed
extinct	no longer exists
dead as a dodo	something that no longer exists or works properly
conservation groups	people who work to protect wildlife and nature
slaughter	the killing of animals
seized	something taken by force
poachers	people who illegally catch or kill animals, birds or fish
a transit route	a way for moving goods from one place to another
endangered species	animals (or plants) whose survival is under threat

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