

Illegal wildlife demand reduction campaigns in authoritarian Vietnam: ungrounded environmentalism

Abstract:

The demand side of illegal wildlife trade (IWT) receives limited academic attention despite its potential to shape global conservation efforts. This article addresses this lacuna in the literature by analysing illegally traded wildlife demand reduction campaigns in Vietnam, a country that has been named and shamed by transnational conservation elites as a key perpetrator of species loss across Africa. Conspicuous consumption of 'rare' and 'prestige' wildlife by the wealthy and nouveau riche of Vietnam has been identified as a principal factor threatening the survival of many wild species, and has led to significant amounts of donor and government money being channelled to consumer-targeted interventions and campaigns in this country. Yet, analysis reveals that these 'staged' campaigns are limited in effectiveness as they represent 'ungrounded' environmentalism. Consumers are deeply embedded within long-standing socio-cultural, social, political and institutional landscapes, and as such it is essential that consumer-targeted campaigns are informed and underpinned by these forces, especially in the complex societies and authoritarian contexts such as Vietnam. Theoretically, the article offers a novel contribution to scholarly debates on environmentalisms.