

Crossing the language barrier: a wildlife trade and zoonotic disease lexicon

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The possible role of wildlife trade in the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has attracted strong media, public and political attention during recent months. A wide variety of commentators have called for action through government regulation and other means to reduce the risks of zoonotic disease emergence in future. These calls typically set-out to describe the perceived danger and then to designate types of activity (e.g. trade and consumption) that might be prohibited or controlled to minimize the chances that it will occur.

For good reason, such recommendations are being treated seriously by public and private policy-makers. Some governments have introduced emergency legislation to restrict aspects of wildlife trade and many are considering longer-term interventions. Similarly, companies in transport and other relevant business sectors face decisions about what responsible action they might take in future to ensure they do not contribute to zoonotic disease risks.

In all such considerations, the effective translation of calls for action into meaningful policy responses depends not only on access to evidence of problems and solutions, but also on clear understanding of language and concepts in play. Without such clarity, both effort and time will inevitably be wasted as different stakeholders in policy development speak across each other. Worse still, there is a real risk that interventions taken miss their target and potentially do more harm than good.

The purpose of this wildlife trade and zoonotic disease lexicon is to help clarify language and concepts in common use right now. It describes the meanings attached to different terms, the challenges in their usage and some possible solutions to achieve greater clarity. As policy considerations continue, we will add to the list. This document is not intended to provide commentary or opinion on policy prescriptions.

Term	Meaning(s)	Issues	Solutions
Wildlife	Defined by IUCN as “living things that are neither human nor domesticated”. Variously understood to mean “wild animals and plants” or just “wild animals”.	Although this definition is inclusive of animals, plants, fungi and other living organisms, there are some contexts in which this term is used to refer to wild animal species only (or even a subset of animal species, such as terrestrial mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibia). The term “wild animals” should be taken to refer to all animal species (ie including fish and invertebrates), but sometimes this needs to be emphasised.	Be aware of the wide range of interpretation of this term and be clear about intended scope by using terms such as “wild animal species” or “wild plants and fungi”.
Wildlife trade	TRAFFIC uses this term to refer to the commerce in wild animals, plants and fungi, inclusive of parts and products derived from them.	Aside from confusion arising from differing understanding of the scope of the term “wildlife”, there are contexts in which “trade” is taken to refer only to international (cross-border) commerce (for example the	Be aware that the inclusive definition of this term (ie. all wildlife species and all forms of commerce) is widely understood, so if a

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	This is inclusive of both local/domestic and international commerce.	usage of this term in CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora). Another important distinction is between “commerce” and other forms of exploitation, such as subsistence use.	narrower focus is intended, be specific about what that is.
Wild species	Non-domesticated wildlife species.	“Domesticated” is not simply defined (see below) and there many intermediate cases for plants and animals for which domestication as a process is underway, but may not have yet reached a clear “break’ from the wild variety.	Probably best to clarify this simply means “non-domesticated”.
Domesticated species	Species that are bred in captivity, and modified from their wild ancestors to make them more useful to humans, who control their reproduction (breeding), care (shelter, protection against predators) and food supply.	Domestication is a long-term process of genetic and behavioural modification, the mechanisms and stages of which are subject to on-going academic debate. There are captive populations of some wild species that currently fall somewhere in a grey area as this modification process proceeds. Nevertheless, there are accessible lists of species commonly designated as domesticated (e.g. through FAO) and this differentiation is often specified in relevant legislation. Sometimes confused with ‘farmed”, which is a management mode distinction that could apply to domesticated or wild species.	Generally fine for common usage, but clear legislative distinction will often require listing of species intended to fall within this category. Be aware of the risk of using “farmed” as a synonym.
Wild-sourced	In simple terms, wild animals, plants or products collected or harvested from free-living (non-captive) populations.	For wild animals plants and fungi there is a wide spectrum of management scenarios between “pure” sourcing from “natural” habitats and closed cycle production in captive/agricultural conditions. A term used in CITES and other policy contexts, where separate definitions have evolved over time.	Important to be clear that this term describes a form of production, rather than the wild/domesticated status of the species involved.

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Farmed, captive-bred and cultivated	In the context of wild animal and plant trade, such terms designate management and production modes that are distinct from “wild-sourcing”, with breeding and raising taking place in controlled-conditions.	Again there is a wide spectrum of different management models applicable. Some such terms are used in CITES and other policy instruments, where specific definitions have evolved over time. Note that an additional term, “ranching” is often used in wildlife trade management to refer to production systems involving take from the wild of eggs or juvenile individuals that are subsequently raised in captivity.	What needs to be kept clear is that trade in “wild species” may derive from different production systems, including “wild-sourcing”, “farming”, “ranching” or “cultivation”.
Illegal wildlife trade (IWT)	Wildlife commerce in contravention of some relevant legal provision. Such provisions could include legislation and/or regulations related to one or more policy concerns: e.g. resource ownership or access rights; nature conservation; human or animal health protection; animal welfare; taxation or other fiscal provisions. <i>See note 1 for specific usage in international fisheries policy.</i>	The challenge in usage is that so many very different legal provisions might be relevant, so two commentators referring to “illegal trade” may be talking about completely different policy concerns. A further complication with understanding is that this term has become shorthand for “illegal and unsustainable trade”, despite the fact that these are two quite different issues. Trade may be illegal, but not at unsustainable levels that cause conservation harm and vice versa.	Care needs to be taken with scope of understanding and sometimes it will be better to spell out what sort of legislation is being contravened – it should not be assumed that laws with a conservation purpose are always those applicable. All too often commentators call for IWT to be “banned” – a bad case of tautology best avoided.
Legal trade	In simple terms, trade that is not in contravention of applicable laws and and/or regulations.	Again the range of laws and/or regulations that might be applicable is very wide (see “illegal trade” above). Also, it needs to be clear that “legal” does not necessarily mean that trade is sustainable and not causing conservation harm.	As with the term “illegal trade” care needs to be taken to be clear about scope. For example import of a wildlife species or its products might be illegal in a certain country, but sale of those specimens after import could be legal. A trade transaction

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			could be in compliance with conservation laws, but in contravention of animal health or tax laws.
Unregulated trade	At best an ambiguous term, sometimes taken to refer to trade that is not subject to any legal constraints and sometimes taken to refer to trade for which legal constraints are relevant, but are not being effectively applied. <i>See note 2 for specific usage in international fisheries policy.</i>	The same challenge in terms of possible breadth of regulatory scope faced when using the term “illegal”, but further complicated by the dual purpose illustrated by the FAO definition.	Considering the multiple purpose for which this term is employed and different ways it is understood, its use is best avoided or elaborated for clarity.
Regulated trade	Again, dual usage is common, meaning trade for which legislative provisions exist (whether applied or not) or trade for which legislative provisions exist AND are being actively implemented.	See “unregulated trade above”. A further challenge in policy discourse is that calls to shift unregulated to regulated trade are sometimes perceived as encouragement to legalise or promote increased commerce, though often quite the opposite meaning is intended.	Considering the multiple purpose for which this term is employed and different ways it is understood, its use is best avoided or elaborated for clarity.
Wildlife consumption	The act of using up a wildlife resource.	Although in common usage inclusive of a wide range of end uses (food, pets, leather goods, timber etc), this term is sometimes used to refer specifically to human ingestion (eating or drinking) of wildlife parts and products (meat etc).	If the intention is to refer specifically to eating/drinking, then better to be specific owing to the range of application of this term.
Wet market	A marketplace selling fresh meat, fish, produce, and/or other perishable goods (including vegetables) as distinguished from "dry markets" that sell durable goods	Main rule – a wet market is not the same as a wildlife market. Such market venues are not only found in Asia, for example “farmers markets” in Europe and the US are basically the same thing. Wet markets do not always involve sale of live animals. In	Do not use this term as a synonym of “wildlife markets”.

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	such as fabric and electronics.	some locations they could include wildlife products on sale, but even where they do, this is likely to be a niche activity within a larger marketplace.	
Wildlife market	A venue (physical or online) where wildlife commerce is active.	A term that can be taken to include a wide range of situations where wild animals, plants and/or fungi (live specimens, parts or products) are bought and sold, whether exclusively or alongside other commodities. Sometimes taken to refer only to physical venues where wild animal sales predominate – but such places are not widely encountered.	Better to be specific about what is intended: venue for sale, physical and/or online; or specific types of venue that can be defined: such as “specialist seafood retail outlets” or “traditional medicine wholesale markets”.
Zoonotic disease	Defined by WHO as those diseases and infections naturally transmitted between people and vertebrate animals.	Sometimes referred to as “Zoonoses”. Important to note that pathogens may also be carried and transmitted to humans by invertebrate animals, plants and fungi, though they fall outside the WHO definition.	Be aware of the specificity of the WHO definition.
Reservoir, host and vector species	Wild or domesticated animal species involved as sources or along pathways of zoonotic disease transmission	There is a range of use of some these terms (e.g. “disease reservoir” may be applied to a single species or to multiple species involved in a disease pathway).	In policy terms, probably best to use general language, such as “animal sources of zoonotic disease” unless specificity of the particular role of an organism along the disease transmission pathway is important.

Notes

1. Illegal fishing is defined by FAO as that being:

- conducted by national or foreign vessels in waters under the jurisdiction of a State, without the permission of that State, or in contravention of its laws and regulations;
- conducted by vessels flying the flag of States that are parties to a relevant regional fisheries management organisation but operate in contravention of the conservation and management measures adopted by that organisation and by which the States are bound, or relevant provisions of the applicable international law; or
- in violation of national laws or international obligations, including those undertaken by cooperating States to a relevant regional fisheries management organization.

2. Unregulated fishing is defined by FAO as that taking place:

- in the area of application of a relevant regional fisheries management organization that are conducted by vessels without nationality, or by those flying the flag of a State not party to that organization, or by a fishing entity, in a manner that is not consistent with or contravenes the conservation and management measures of that organization; or
- in areas or for fish stocks in relation to which there are no applicable conservation or management measures and where such fishing activities are conducted in a manner inconsistent with State responsibilities for the conservation of living marine resources under international law.