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Many wildlife species like the pangolin are threatened by the wildlife trade. I try to figure out how we can get people to stop buying wildlife products such as rhino horn or pangolin scales.

Abstract

Most people in the UK have never even heard of a pangolin, but they are the most trafficked mammal in the world (i.e., more people illegally buy and sell pangolins than any other mammal). They look a bit like armadillos and are covered in scales made of keratin, the same protein that makes up our own hair and nails. Unfortunately, their scales are in great demand in Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Tackling the illegal wildlife trade is a top international priority, as it poses a major threat to many species. Traditionally, conservationists have focused on stopping the trade by blocking hunting, e.g., through the creation of protected areas. However, these attempts to reduce the supply of wildlife products have largely failed and poaching of many high-value species such as tigers, elephants and pangolins is on the rise. The “war on poaching” can be compared to the war on drugs – unless we change the attitudes and behaviours of the end consumers the fighting won’t stop.