

# Buyer Beware!

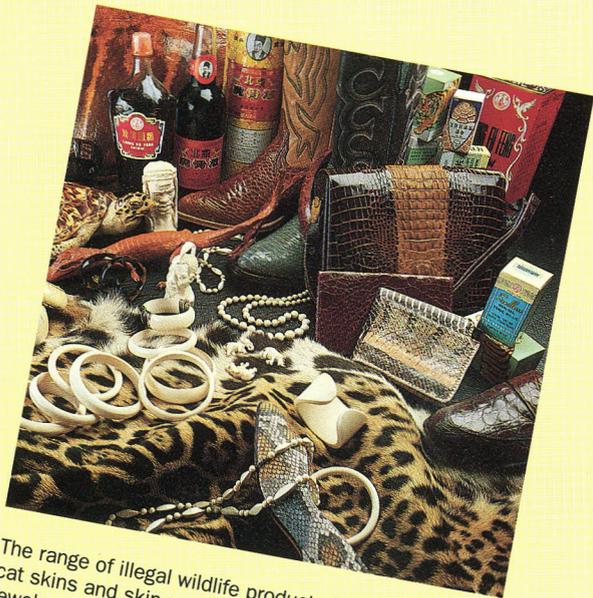


**Some  
souvenirs  
you buy  
overseas  
could  
end up  
costing a  
lot more  
than you  
paid for  
them.**

## Buyer Beware!

Going abroad? Think twice about the things you buy. If they're made from the hides, shells, feathers, or teeth of endangered species—and it's quite possible that they are—you risk their seizure by government inspectors and may face a substantial fine.

Seemingly innocuous products made from tortoiseshell, coral, ivory, and reptile skin, for example, are available in marketplaces all over the world. But just because wildlife items are on sale in another country does not necessarily mean that they are legal to import to the United States. Travelers don't realize that several U.S. laws and an international treaty make it a crime to bring many of these wildlife souvenirs into our country.



The range of illegal wildlife products includes spotted cat skins and skin products, sea turtle shells, jewelry, certain reptile products, and ivory. Be aware of the laws governing the import of wildlife and wildlife products before buying.

## At The Heart of the Issue: Protecting Endangered Wildlife

More and more species are declining in numbers because of destruction of their natural environment and increased exploitation. Modern transportation now makes it possible to provide exotic pets, pelts, and other wildlife products to a steadily growing worldwide market. To combat declines from excessive exploitation, most countries have adopted laws that regulate imports, exports, and sale of wildlife.

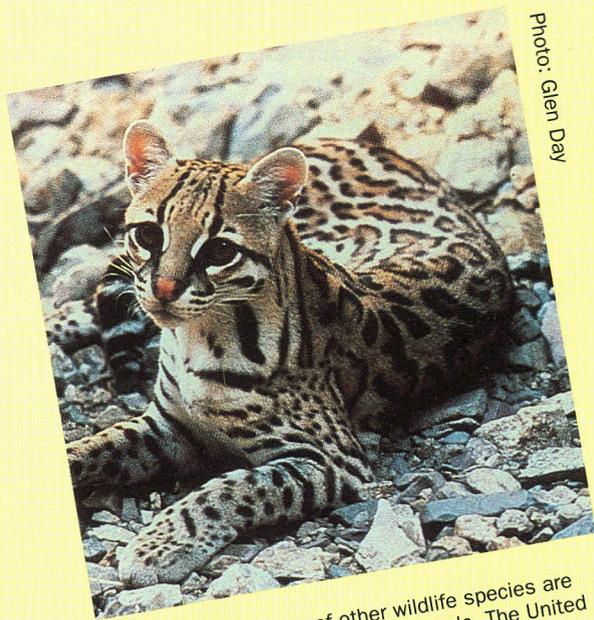


Photo: Glen Day

Ocelots and hundreds of other wildlife species are threatened by illegal international trade. The United States prohibits the import of protected wildlife.

## The Laws That Affect What You Buy

The regulations governing wildlife imports are complicated enough to make the U.S. consumer think twice before buying any wildlife overseas. If you are considering the purchase of a live animal or plant or a product made from one, you should be familiar with certain laws:

**Endangered Species Act**—prohibits the import and export of species listed as endangered and most species listed as threatened.

**Lacey Act**—prohibits the import of animal species that have been taken, possessed, transported, or sold in violation of foreign law. Many countries completely ban or strictly limit wildlife trade.

**CITES**—a comprehensive wildlife treaty signed by over 115 countries, including the United States, that regulates and in many cases prohibits imports and exports of wild animal and plant species that are threatened by trade.

**Marine Mammal Protection Act**—prohibits the import of marine mammals and their parts and products. These species include whales, walruses, narwhals, seals, sea lions, sea otters, and polar bears.

**African Elephant Conservation Act**—prohibits imports of ivory products from any country, and only permits non commercial import of whole tusks from elephants that have been legally hunted in certain African countries.

**Wild Bird Conservation Act**—regulates or prohibits the import of many exotic bird species.

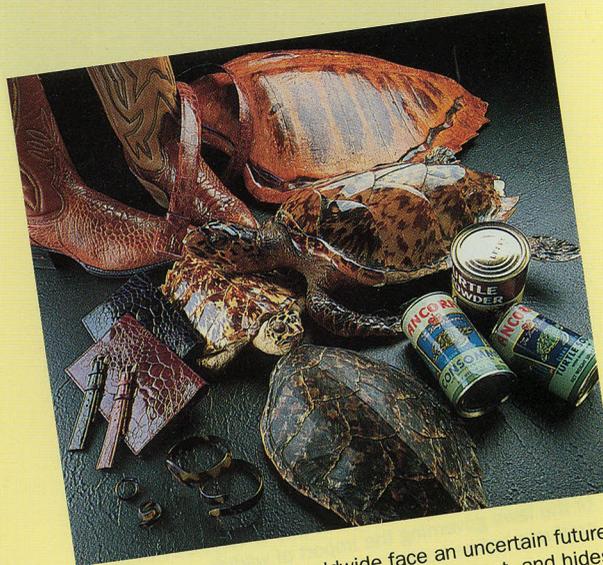
## Guidelines To Follow

Wildlife is sometimes illegally killed or collected in one country, smuggled into another, and then exported with false permits to a third, making its origins hard to trace. If you're considering the purchase of any wildlife or wildlife product while abroad, you should first try to determine its origin and any U.S. restrictions on its import.

**Reptile Skins and Leathers** are most commonly used in watchbands, handbags, belts, and shoes. The legality of importing these products depends upon the species and the country of origin.

### Prohibited imports include

- All sea turtle products
- Products made from black caiman, American crocodile, Orinoco crocodile, Philippine crocodile, and, in many cases, the common caiman.



Sea turtle populations worldwide face an uncertain future due to extensive hunting for their shells, meat, and hides.

- Most lizard-skin products originating in Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, India, and Nepal.
- Many snakeskin products originating in Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Venezuela, and India.

**Other Leather Products** made from pangolin (sometimes labeled “anteater”) skin originating in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia may not be brought into the United States.

The survival of many **wild bird species** is threatened by habitat destruction and trade, and alarming numbers of birds die during capture, transit, and quarantine.

### Prohibited from import are

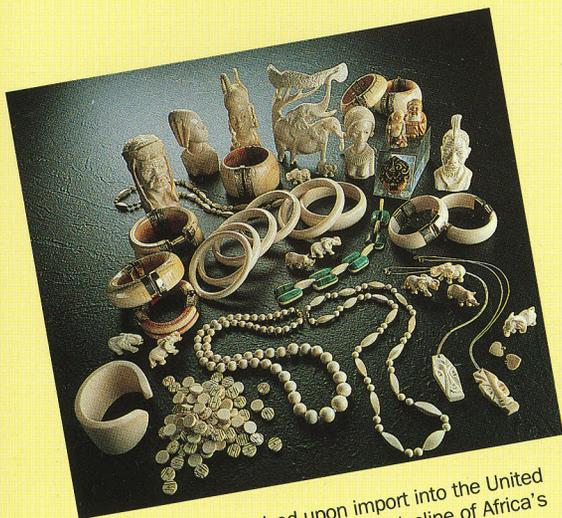
- Many live birds, except as authorized by the Wild Bird Conservation Act. This includes many parrots, macaws, cockatoos, and certain finches.
- Most wild-bird feathers, mounted birds, skins, and some skin products.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife and Customs Service inspectors seize many illegal exotic leather products readily available on world markets.

**Ivory** from elephant tusks is traditionally carved into products such as jewelry, figurines, and piano keys. Imports of ivory, including many antiques, from both Asian and African elephants are now generally prohibited. Purchase of ivory may provide an incentive to poachers and illegal traders and threaten the survival of the African elephant. Imports of ivory and scrimshaws from whales, walrus, and narwhals are also prohibited.

**Furs** from most larger spotted cats, such as jaguar, snow leopard, and tiger, and from most smaller cats, such as ocelot, margay, and tiger cat, cannot enter the United States legally, nor can furs of marine mammals, such as seals and polar bears.



This illegal ivory, seized upon import into the United States, contributed to the drastic decline of Africa's elephants, which are now beginning to recover.

**Coral reefs** are the building blocks of important marine communities and serve as natural barriers against beach erosion. Recognizing this, many countries in the Caribbean, the Pacific, and Southeast Asia prohibit the collection, sale, and export of corals, and international commercial trade is regulated. Yet corals, including precious and semiprecious, are often fashioned into jewelry and decorative ornaments and sold in enormous quantities. Coral collection is only one of several reasons for the destruction of coral ecosystems. So check for restrictions on coral trade before you buy.

**Plants**, like animals, are subject to illegal trade through laundering, smuggling, and improper documentation. As a result, many plant species are in danger of extinction and receive protection under United States law. Species prohibited from import into the U.S. include many orchids, cacti, and cycads. Whether endangered or not, all imported plants must undergo inspection by the Department of Agriculture and be accompanied by documents certifying they are free of disease and pests.



Photo: Mel Goodwin

Coral reef destruction brings coral jewelry and trinkets to a demanding and largely illegal market.

# A Final Word

The United States is the world's largest wildlife-consuming country. Despite strong prohibitions, a significant percentage of the international wildlife trade still involves protected or endangered species, but you can play a significant role in curbing this illegal trade by becoming a better-informed consumer and traveler.

**Remember**, when you are unsure of the regulations, check with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or TRAFFIC USA, the wildlife trade monitoring program of WWF, well before you go, or, once there, with the local authorities or the U.S. embassy before making a purchase. **When in doubt, don't buy!** You may save yourself some frustration and the loss of your purchase.

## For More information, contact:

**World Wildlife Fund**  
1250 24th Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20037

Division of Law Enforcement  
**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
P.O. Box 3247  
Arlington, VA 22203-3247

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The United States prohibits the import of many bird species, like this scarlet macaw.

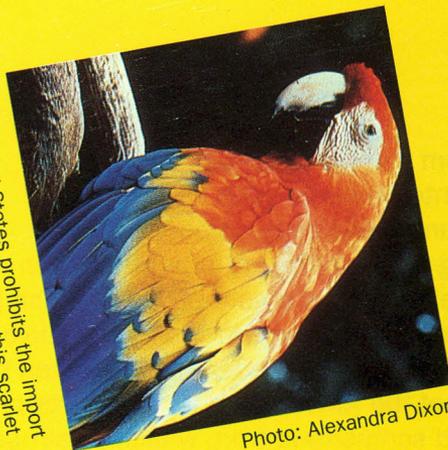


Photo: Alexandra Dixon



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