

TOP 10 NOMINATION FORM

2020 Topic: Illegal wildlife (plants and animals) trafficking and unsustainable trade

Species must meet these qualifications:

- Must be native U.S. species or international species with significant U.S. demand
- Must be experiencing substantial decline (do not have to be threatened/endangered listed)
- Must be directly or indirectly impacted
 - Direct: exploited as trophies, pets, medicines, etc.
 - Indirect: impacted by imported exotics or imported disease vectors (e.g., chytrid)

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Nominated Species (Common Name & Scientific Name):

Hawksbill Sea Turtle

Eretmochelys imbricata

Question 1: Threat to the Species

How is the species and/or its habitat threatened by illegal wildlife trafficking and/or unsustainable trade? Note the extent of the threat and whether it is direct or indirect. Include references to relevant scientific studies. Does the species face any associated political threats?

The Hawksbill Turtle is classified as critically endangered by the IUCN redlist. The decline of the Hawksbill is largely attributed to the tortoiseshell trade, a practice that has continued since the ancient Egyptians. Even though the Hawksbill global trade in 1977 was prohibited by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the practice continues to operate in international and domestic trade in the Americas, Asia, and some areas in Africa (Fleming 2001, Chacon 2002, TRAFFIC Southeast Asia 2004, van Dijk and Shepherd 2004, Brautigam and Eckert 2006, Reuter and Allan 2006). Hawksbill shell products, known as bekko trade, have shown increases in Vietnam according to a survey in 2002 (van Dijk and Shepherd 2004). Japanese dealers continue to import Hawksbill shells, with studies showing that the Japanese government spending up to 140 million yen to support projects continuing their international trade.¹

Bekko are created into jewelry and ornaments and are sold throughout the world (van Dijk and Shepherd 2004). In addition to its illegal trade, the Hawksbill Turtle is threatened by

¹ <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/8005/12881238#use-trade>

habitat loss as more coastal development occurs, limiting nesting habitats. Hawksbills are also frequently caught as bycatch in fishing gear and ingest fishing line, plastics, and other marine pollution which similarly causes mortality.²

Question 2: Role of the Species

What is the ecological and/or scientific importance of the species? Note if it is a keystone species and describe its role in its environment. Include references to relevant scientific studies.

Hawksbill Sea Turtles are important for the maintenance of a healthy coral reef ecosystem. Studies have shown they prevent the over population of sponges by their targeted consumption when grazing (Leon and Bjorndal 2002). Reefs without controlled sponge populations prevent new coral from growing and expanding. In a similar fashion, Hawksbill turtles graze on algae which prevents the proliferation of macroalgal communities, contributing to the health of resilience of coral reefs (Bjorndal and Jackson 2003). Hawksbills are additionally important as they contribute to transporting nutrients between marine and coastal food webs (Bouchard and Bjorndal 2000).

Question 3: Message

What is the most important message about this species for decision-makers and the public?

The Hawksbill Turtle is currently listed as critically endangered due to the cumulative effects of centuries of over exploitation in turtle shell trading. Hawksbill turtles presently are not only threatened by the illegal trade of their shells, but also by a plethora of other dangers that make them especially susceptible to human-induced mortality. The Hawksbill turtle is an important species for the conservation of coral reefs, an ecosystem already greatly jeopardized by climate change. Hawksbill turtles carry significant cultural and tourist importance and therefore efforts are needed to fully stop the illegal trading of turtle shells and promote the conservation of this vulnerable species.

Final Selections

If my nomination is selected for inclusion in the report, I would like the first draft of the species profile for the report to be written by (choose one):

X You (ESC), and then my NGO will edit the profile and approve the final draft.

Me (my NGO). I understand that I (and other participating writers) will need to adhere to ESC's writing guidelines.

Deadline: May 8, 2020

Send to: top10@endangered.org

² <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/8005/12881238#use-trade>