

### **National Geographic Special Investigations Unit Fact Sheet**

Wildlife crime is an urgent problem facing our planet today. Nearly 100 African elephants are being lost every day to poaching. In 2014, a record 1,200 rhinos were poached in South Africa. Everywhere, wildlife is under siege. Wildlife trafficking is big business conducted by transnational criminal syndicates that recognize the profits from rare wildlife are high and the risks of going to prison for trafficking are statistically miniscule.

This year, National Geographic launched the Special Investigations Unit (SIU), with support from The Woodtiger Fund and The BAND Foundation, to combat the wildlife trafficking crisis by actively investigating and reporting on wildlife crime. The unit is exploring the intensely challenging frontier of wildlife crime to expose the transnational crime syndicates and their kingpins; to analyze policy in ways that engender fresh solutions; and to empower communities around the world to take action. Feature stories in National Geographic magazine, online news stories and television documentaries aim to raise global awareness and galvanize public support to curtail wildlife crime.

Fueled by its belief in the power of science, exploration and storytelling, National Geographic began reporting on this critical wildlife issue with a 2010 story, "[The Kingpin](#)." The piece was the result of a three-year investigation led by lawyer-turned-journalist [Bryan Christy](#). The story exposed Malaysian wildlife trafficker Anson Wong's international wildlife trafficking syndicate and resulted in government raids on Wong's facilities, seizure of his animals, shutdown of his zoo and passage of the first new wildlife trade legislation in Malaysia in 40 years.

Christy's subsequent two-year investigation into the illegal ivory trade resulted in the October 2012 National Geographic magazine cover story, "[Blood Ivory: Ivory Worship](#)." In it, religion was uncovered as a major driver of high-end ivory consumption; weaknesses in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) ivory policymaking system were exposed; and the disastrous role of the Chinese government in driving and manipulating the international ivory market was revealed. National Geographic Studios and PBS also produced and aired a documentary in 2013 featuring Christy's "Blood Ivory" investigation called "Battle for the Elephants," which brought viewers inside a Chinese ivory carving factory for the first time. As a result of this reporting, police in Italy raided ivory dealers in Vatican City and Abruzzo. The story also inspired grassroots efforts against ivory trafficking around the world, including by religious leaders in Africa, school children in Hong Kong and participants in a worldwide march for elephants.

To kick off SIU coverage, National Geographic magazine will publish "Tracking Ivory," a cover story by Christy in the September 2015 issue that exposes the trail of Africa's elephant poachers by using fake tusks carrying hidden GPS devices. National Geographic Channel, in conjunction with the magazine and National Geographic Studios, premieres "Explorer: Warlords of Ivory," an investigation led by Christy into the violent world of ivory trafficking and the kingpins controlling the trade, on Sunday, Aug. 30, at 8 p.m. ET/7 p.m. CT. Outside of the United States, "Warlords of Ivory" will air on National Geographic Channel starting Aug. 30.

The SIU is headed by Christy, a National Geographic Fellow, and is supported by a core team of investigative reporters and researchers. The fundamental objectives of the unit are to:

- Prioritize key species at risk from criminal exploitation;
- Empower civil society in key countries to take ownership of stories exposed by National Geographic and to implement change;
- Penetrate international criminal syndicates efficiently; and
- Apply traditional law enforcement investigative techniques to wildlife investigations.

The SIU is part of National Geographic's broader initiative focusing on wildlife protection. To support SIU and National Geographic's efforts to protect elephants and other critical species, visit [donate.nationalgeographic.org/HelpSIU](http://donate.nationalgeographic.org/HelpSIU) or text ELEPHANT to 80000 to donate \$10.