

The Case of Wildlife Trafficking in Lebanon

COM 499: Capstone Project

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## **Abstract**

This project is about wildlife trafficking, a problem that is often left unaddressed by the media, citizens and even policy-makers in many countries including Lebanon. Secondary research was conducted to get more information about wildlife trafficking in Lebanon, the region, and the world. Previous work and campaigns that have been done on the subject were also reviewed. Afterwards, an online survey was conducted among students from the Lebanese American University (Beirut Campus) to get a deeper insight on the awareness and attitude of our target audience towards this problem. Based on this primary and secondary research, an online magazine was created, and an online campaign was planned and implemented in order to increase awareness about the issue among LAU Beirut students. NGOs Animals Lebanon and Lebanese Wildlife both contributed to this project with interviews and feedback, alongside the LAU Animal Care Club which allowed us to use its Instagram page for the campaign.

*Keywords:* Department of Communication Arts, Wildlife Trafficking, CITES, Lebanon, COVID-19.

The trafficking of wildlife is considered to be one of the largest illegal trades in the world. The survival of species such as tigers, bears, rhinoceroses, elephants and many others are threatened because of this illegal business. Throughout the years, many research studies about wildlife trade have been made and many campaigns have been implemented around the world in order to spread awareness about the issue. However, when it comes to the Arab world, and more specifically to Lebanon, not much has been made in order to spread awareness about wildlife trafficking even though previous research showed that a very large number of wild specimens are traded illegally in this country (Abi-Said et al, 2018). This is why the current study aims at getting more information on the amount of awareness that the youth residing in Lebanon have on wildlife trafficking. What is important about this research is that it sheds light on a problem that people are not aware of and that is rarely being discussed or researched in Lebanon even though it has many negative and dangerous effects on the environment and our health (UN Environment Program, 2016). The following literature review will talk briefly about the history of wildlife trafficking and will also look at some of the campaigns that have already been done around the world and in Lebanon in order to spread awareness about the issue.

This topic is significant as it addresses an issue underlying in our live as a silent time bomb with no one realizing it due to the lack of awareness. Our society as a whole pushes back anything that doesn't serve their need, especially when talking about a different species. Wildlife trafficking affects us in more than one way and it has an influence on our existence as research will indicate. The choice of topic stems out from our personal love for animals. It started off as adoring stray animals and as we met with Jason Mier, the executive director of the NGO Animals Lebanon, we discovered the issue

of wildlife trafficking. After he revealed to us that this is an important problem that needs to be addressed, we chose to adopt it as ours for the capstone and do further research on it. Our genuine appreciation for different species and knowledge of how important it is to care for everything around us motivated us to let the world know about it too.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)**

First, we surely cannot talk about wildlife trafficking without mentioning CITES, an international agreement made between governments over the world to regulate the trade of wildlife, and make sure that the survival of some species is not threatened because of this trade (CITES, 1975). The diverse trade of animals and plants which includes millions of species and which is worth billions of dollars per year is a factor that could lead to the extinction of these species (CITES, 1975). This is why the CITES agreement which was first drafted in the 1960s and entered into force in 1975 is important to protect these species from exploitation and extinction (CITES, 1975). CITES lists species of animals and plants on 3 appendices depending on how endangered species are, and declares that the trade of these listed species should be banned or authorized by condition of having a permit (CITES, 1975). It is worth mentioning that CITES is an agreement that does not replace the laws of the country, however, the members of the agreement should respect it and find their own ways and legislations to implement it in their country (CITES, 1975). So far, 183 parties joined CITES including Lebanon which joined the agreement in 2013 (CITES, 1975).

## **What is Wildlife Trafficking?**

According to the resources used, the terms “wildlife trafficking” or “illegal wildlife trade” are used for the illegal side of this activity. The legal side is addressed as “wildlife trade”. Wildlife trafficking is a business worth millions of dollars which includes the trafficking and selling of species such as exotic and endangered animals or the selling of their parts like elephant ivory or tiger bones (Bending, 2015). South and Wyatt (2011) define the activity as “any environment-related crime that involves the illegal trade, smuggling, poaching, capture or collection of endangered species, protected wildlife (including animals and plants that are subject to harvest quotas and regulated by permits), derivatives or products thereof.” The animals which are trafficked have many uses. Some are brought to houses and become pets, others become food or clothes, and other wild animals are killed and shipped to other countries to become house decorations or religious amulets (Patel et al, 2015). For example, the rhinoceros horn has many uses which include the use of it in religious ceremonies, or in houses where it is placed as a trophy, or even in traditional Chinese medicine (Bendin, 2015). However, due to the many uses of the rhinoceros horn and the high demand on it, 3 of the 5 remaining species of the animal are currently critically endangered, but the trafficking is still persisting even though CITES has banned the trade of rhinos in 1977 (Bending, 2015).

## **The Impacts of Illegal Wildlife Trafficking**

The illegal trade of wildlife can have many impacts not only on the species that are being trafficked but also on the entire ecosystem. First, just like the rhinoceros case that was previously mentioned, the illegal trade of wildlife could lead to the

endangerment and even to the extinction of many species. For example, the Spix macaw is now considered to be extinct in the wild due to the illegal trafficking of this species of birds (UN Environment Program, 2016). Second, this illegal activity could impact species that aren't even targeted mainly due to non-selective illegal methods of harvesting. For instance, the use of dynamite fishing leads to the death of many non-targeted aquatic creatures and corals, and leads to the destruction of the environment as well (UN Environment Program, 2016). Third, wildlife trafficking could increase the risk of spreading diseases to other animals and even to humans. Kruse et.al (2004) revealed that the World Health Organization deemed 64% of known pathogens as of zoonotic origin, meaning they are of animal origin. When captured, animals could catch diseases due to human contact or due to being put under stressful conditions, and if brought back to the wild, these animals could transmit the disease to other animals (UN Environment Program, 2016). These diseases can even be transmitted to humans. For example, it was found that hawk-eagles which were being trafficked had a type of influenza virus which doesn't only cause a danger to other birds, but to humans as well (UN Environment Program, 2016). Another recent form of virus that is most likely caused by traded wildlife is the Coronavirus which, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), probably emerged from bats coming from an animal market in Wuhan (Khadka, 2020). As a result of this virus which has already spread all over the world and affected millions of people, campaigners are urgently asking for a permanent ban on the wildlife trade in China (Khadka, 2020). Fourth, all species of animals perform a role in ecosystems and the extinction of species due to wildlife trafficking can have a great impact on these ecosystems even if this impact is not visible instantly, it will show over time (UN

Environment Program, 2016). These are only a few of the many consequences that could result from wildlife trafficking.

### **The Situation of Wildlife Trafficking in Lebanon**

It was reported by CITES that Lebanon became an official party in 2013 the country would automatically have to meet the convention's rules. However, news of wildlife trafficking are still found in local news. Beta and Animals Lebanon are the main two NGOs fighting for wildlife rights in Lebanon.

According to the NGO Animals Lebanon, Lebanon is responsible for smuggling animals such as lions, cheetahs, tigers, chimpanzees, parrots and even elephants. Some of them end up in zoos which are unregulated, while others are sold in pet shops or become part of a private collection as exotic pets, and others are trafficking through Lebanon to other countries.

According to Mounir et al. (2018), Beirut as the capital of Lebanon holds strategic importance to wildlife trafficking as its location serves as a crossroad between the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe and a gateway to the east. Despite the fact that trafficking exotic pets is illegal, Abi-Said et al. (2018) estimated through their research that around 40 locations in Lebanon keep exotic pets on private or public display. These locations include zoos, pet stores, and even family homes.

Other than that, Abi-Said et al. (2018) believe that wildlife trade in Lebanon has economic importance as they were able to derive during the time of study the estimated value of wildlife trade in Lebanon to be 431,371 US dollars and 97% of it is for birds.

This number shows the economic importance of the trade of wild animals in Lebanon. The sample of shops chosen for their study showed 70% of these shops not owning an official license and making the animals live in poor conditions (Abi-Said et al, 2018). Soumar Dakdouk (2009) revealed that the trade in the Spur thighed tortoise (*Testudo graeca*, popular in the pet trade) in Lebanon got the attention of the international community. However, the conflicting reports CITES received show how uncertain the trade of this species is. Two of these reports showed two different gross exports amounts for this species between the years 1996 – 2002 (Dakouk, 2009).

Abi-Said et al (2018) also revealed that there is a high level of wild and captive species exported such as bird species like the *Serinus syriacus* and reptiles such as the Spur-thighed Tortoise *Testudo Graeca*. Abi-Said et al. (2018) believe that this is a matter of concern in Lebanon, because these species are considered vulnerable according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), meaning they are at a high risk of extinction in the wild.

According to Dakdouk (2009), during the time when Lebanon was not under CITES, the law still demanded CITES certificates for wild animal's trade operations. However, various species still entered and left the country illegally or with questionable CITES certificates. Dakdouk (2009) reported a lack of transparency and the presence of considerable amount of corruption involved in the trade of wildlife in Lebanon. Despite having the government issuing an export ban at one point, captive-bred Spur thighed tortoises were still being exported. The investigation led to a previously questioned breeding center in Lebanon which was abandoned, with dead tortoises found all over the farm (Dakdouk, 2009).

Another form of animal abuse observed through local news and Animals Lebanon's website is private ownership of wild animals such as tigers, leopards, and lorises which happen to be highly endangered species (Animals Lebanon, 2018). These reports took place even after Lebanon had joined CITES and after the animal welfare law had been enforced. The cases reported included Animals Lebanon saving a loris which was being sold in a pet store in 2018. There was also news about the said NGO saving three dehydrated baby tigers stuck at the airport in 2017. This was a significant event because it happened despite having a ban issued against trafficking big cats and keeping them in zoos or as exotic pets due to it leading to their death from malnourishment, mistreatment, and abandonment. According to New Arab News (2018), Animals Lebanon's Vice President Maggie Shaarawi reported that they spent a week inside a wooden crate at the Beirut airport, due to confusion regarding their travel arrangement. Shaarawi said "They were swimming in their feces and urine with no bowl for water and the crate which was barely a third of a cubic meter, was screwed together, with just small holes for ventilation" (New Arab, 2018)

Jason Mier, executive director of Animals Lebanon, believes that there is a shocking presence of ignorance toward animal welfare. Based on the previously mentioned experiences, he believes that the culture approves of acts such as wild pets' ownership for the sake of showing off, and the public is unaware of the dire consequences which some might take seriously and stop supporting such processes (Deutsche Welle, 2016).

### **Awareness about Wildlife Trafficking in the Middle East**

Spee et al. (2019) conducted a study around the MENA region and chose the major regions with royal families and no turmoil. The study presented a reality which could be generalized to the Middle Eastern culture as it revealed that the majority of the people respond positively to public figures putting their wild pets under the spotlight (Spee et al., 2019). It was also revealed that 85% of the species displayed on the studied social media posts were listed at risk on CITES, such as big cats, apes, and birds (Spee et al., 2019). The results of the study represent the mentality present there as the people are unaware of the dire consequences behind wildlife ownership, which could explain the minimal amount of animal rights campaigns found around the Middle East.

### **Campaigns that Have Been Done Against Wildlife Trafficking in Lebanon and the Middle East**

Many campaigns have been done around the world to raise awareness about wildlife trafficking. A recent campaign that could be used as an inspiration for our campaign is “Be Their Bodhisattva” which has been implemented in Vietnam starting late January of 2019 (Tatarski, 2019). The campaign constituted of statues of bloody elephants, rhinos, and pangolins that were put in Buddhist temples in Vietnam (Tatarski, 2019). This initiative received plenty of media coverage and interaction from the public, reaching around 30 million Vietnamese with the majority of them having a positive attitude towards the campaign (Tatarski, 2019).

When it comes to the Middle East, international organizations have implemented animal rights campaigns in the region. LUSH cosmetics, a company founded in the United Kingdom and known for its ethical and environmental values, released the “I am

NOT a pet” campaign in 2014 into the Middle East under the hashtag #WildIsWild (Rushforth, 2014). The campaign aimed to highlight the dangers of keeping wildlife in captivity as pets in the Middle East.

According to Fahmi (2018) the campaign “animal shot watch Egypt” was first created by a group of activists after receiving news of a huskie and a cat dying outside a pet shop. The activists aimed to shut down pet shops that did not have the suitable conditions to keep the animals healthy and alive (Fahmi, 2018). The campaign is still ongoing but its members complain that a lot of shop owners do not cooperate and believe that animal welfare should not be prioritized over their own livelihood (Fahmi, 2018).

A Saudi Arabian activist, Aram Alrayes, initiated a social media campaign (Arab News, 2019). Her twitter account attracted countless followers as she shed the light on the lack of awareness her society has regarding raising wild animals as pets (Arab News, 2019). Activist Aram Alrayes reported that the reason behind this popular act is the lack of awareness and punishment in the country (Arab News, 2019).

Many other campaigns that held the same goal have been implemented all around the world, mostly through airports and airlines, with the goal of raising awareness and gaining support from the public to fight wildlife trafficking. However, very few campaigns have been implemented and given attention in Lebanon even though it was found that illegal wildlife trade happens a lot in this country. But there is still some awareness that is being spread on social media when it comes to animal cruelty in Lebanon. For example, when frozen birds were being sold by Goodies at the Beirut Rafic Hariri Airport, the Committee Against Birds Slaughter in the Mediterranean region

posted about it on their social media accounts and the birds were removed from the airport (CABS, 2019). There is also a certain amount of awareness that is being spread by committees and NGOs against animal abuse and cruelty. But the very little attention this subject is given leads us to question how much awareness residents of Lebanon and more specifically LAU Beirut students who are the population we are targeting have about the wildlife trafficking.

**RQ1:** Are LAU Beirut students aware of the illegal trade of wildlife that is happening in Lebanon?

**RQ2:** What is the attitude that LAU Beirut students hold regarding the abuse, death, and threatened extinction of wildlife caused by wildlife trafficking?

## **Methodology**

The survey that was created aims at gaining a deeper insight about the attitude that LAU Beirut students have towards the abuse of animals and about the awareness they have on wildlife trafficking in Lebanon. The survey was created on google docs and its link was shared online through WhatsApp and Instagram.

The target audience is constituted of the students of the Lebanese American University, specifically in Beirut campus. Both male and female individuals who are undergraduate or graduate program students are part of this audience. The reason behind targeting students is because their minds are generally more open and receptive to change, to new ideas and to education. Therefore, introducing a new idea that is not really common in our culture such as countering wildlife trafficking would be easier with the younger generation who have the ability to change the reality of the problem to the better

in the future. Moreover, targeting an audience that fits this description in LAU Beirut seems more realistic given the deadline set for the project. Thus, LAU students convey the persona the campaign is going for in general.

## **Results**

The survey was completed by 102 LAU Beirut students, among which 38 were males and 64 were females. The participants' age was between 18 and 28 years old.

When asked to rate their likability for animals on a scale of 1 to 10, 88% of the participants had a rating of 7 and above while only 12% of them had a rating below 7. Next, when they were asked if they own a wild animal as a pet, 3 of the participants revealed that they own parrots, 2 of them reported owning monkeys and one of them had a snake. 13 participants also admitted to owning animal parts as accessories or house decorations such as elephant ivory, carpet of foxes, leather jackets, fur clothing and so on. Most of the participants rarely (once every few years) or never went to zoos, and only 12% of them revealed that they go once a year.

Participants were then shown a series of statements and were required to share to which extent they agreed with these statements from a scale of 1(disagree) to 5(agree) with 3 being neutral. Almost half of the participants disagreed with the idea of owning a wild animal and 27 of the other participants were neutral about it. Most of the participants also disagreed with the idea of buying real animal parts to decorate the house/use them as accessories. 69% of the participants disagreed as well with the statement that says "people who fight for animal rights are too sentimental" and 17% were neutral about it. When asked if they thought that humans have the right to use animals as they pleased,

only 3 participants were okay with the idea while 94% of them disagreed. 6 participants thought that it was acceptable to sell wild animals in pet shops while a big majority disagreed on that. 8 were neutral. Next, 40% of the participants were either okay or neutral with the idea of bringing wild animals to zoos. The rest were against it.

Finally, participants were asked about their awareness on certain topics related to wild animals. 53% of them were not aware that wild animals are being illegally imported to Lebanon. 57% were not aware that there is an animal welfare law in Lebanon. Similarly, 57% of them also were unaware that the coronavirus outbreak is caused by the trade of wildlife.

## **Discussion**

The results revealed that most participants showed a positive to extremely positive attitude towards animals in general. However, a total of 6 participants admitted owning a wild animal which confirms the research by Abi-Said et al., which states that there are some locations in Lebanon which keep exotic pets despite the fact that trafficking these pets is something illegal (2018). Results also showed that owning a wild animal as a pet or as a house decoration/accessory/clothing was not something very common between LAU students, but it was still happening and a number of these animals/animal parts were probably here as a result of wildlife trafficking.

Most participants showed that they do not encourage the activity of wildlife trafficking (by not owning a wild animal and never/rarely going to zoos). However, some of the participants are probably not aware that they would actually be encouraging wildlife trafficking if they own a wild animal or went to the zoo since half of the

participants still agreed or were neutral with the statement “owning a wild animal as a pet is something nice”, and 40 of them also agreed or were neutral with the idea of bringing wild animals to zoos.

It was revealed that most of the participants had a negative attitude towards the abuse of animals since the majority was against humans treating animals as they see fit, and also against selling wildlife in pet shops. In addition, the fact that most participants do not see people who fight for animal rights as too sentimental prove that they do take the issue of animal rights seriously. Further, these people would probably agree on being against wildlife trafficking, if they knew about the impacts it has and the animals that are hurt by it.

Finally, a bit more than half of the participants revealed that they were unaware of the animal welfare law, of the fact that animals are being illegally imported in Lebanon and also unaware that the new coronavirus is a result of traded wildlife. This shows the need for campaigns in Lebanon to spread awareness about this problem so people can have more knowledge about it, be aware of the negative impacts that it produces and consciously be able to participate in making wildlife trafficking stop.

## **Limitations**

Our first limitation is about the means of spreading the survey. Alongside spreading it online, we were also planning to approach student directly on the LAU campus and ask them to fill the survey. However, we were not able to do so due to the coronavirus pandemic which led to the closure of the LAU alongside all other universities in Lebanon. Therefore, we had to only rely on online platforms which made

the number of participants more limited, since we only could reach out to our personal contacts and could no longer go up to students we do not know and ask them to complete the survey.

Another limitation is caused by the limited information that could be found about wildlife trafficking in Lebanon specifically. We actually could only find around 2 good scientific research studies about wildlife trafficking in Lebanon. The rest of the information we found was from articles of events related to our topic, other than official sources which dealt with animal trade such as CITES.

A third limitation is that because of limited time and resources, we were restricted to study LAU Beirut students only and could not spread the survey to students from other universities which would have provided us with a deeper insight.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, wildlife trafficking is a worldwide problem. However, our research shows that many are unaware of it. The literature review defined this problem and studied the negative impacts that it produces not only on the environment, but on humans as well. Secondary research also revealed the situation of wildlife trafficking in Lebanon and the need for campaigns to spread awareness about this issue. The survey we conducted afterwards revealed that more than half of the LAU students who filled the survey were unaware of the problem, but it also revealed that the majority of participants have a positive attitude towards animals and are against hurting and abusing them. It was found that some participants encouraged wildlife trafficking --most probably without being aware of it-- by owning wildlife animals or having wildlife animal parts as house

decorations/accessories/clothing. The information we received confirmed that our campaign should focus on spreading the awareness that is highly needed as the target already has the empathy for animals, but needs to be more aware of the facts and impacts concerning wildlife trafficking. In addition, the campaign should also raise awareness on what to do to stop encouraging this activity.

Lastly, an important point this research has revealed is that the corona virus could be an angle that our campaign could approach. It was revealed that one of the impacts of wildlife trafficking is the spread of diseases among humans. While it has not been confirmed yet, there are high chances that the new coronavirus outbreak in China occurred as a result of wildlife trafficking. Our message will therefore include the idea that fixing the pandemic should take more than hygiene and medicine as people need to become aware that illegal wildlife trade as it continues could result in serious health issues, and that is something that already happened in the past. It will also reveal a timeline of previous epidemics which had reportedly occurred due to wildlife trafficking as a way to further strengthen our point. Therefore, people will become more aware of this dangerous impact that wildlife trafficking could cause. With more awareness spread throughout the world, people would stop encouraging wildlife trafficking and therefore decrease this activity, and decrease the chances of a potential dangerous virus being spread because of wildlife trafficking. Of course, we are not saying that our campaign will reach this goal, but it is hopefully going to make a contribution on a smaller scale, in order to eventually reach this goal in the future.

## **Campaign: Wildlife Counts**

### **Aim**

The aim of this campaign was to spread awareness about wildlife trafficking to as many LAU Beirut students as possible, to let them know about how dangerous this activity is and about what they can do to stop it.

### **Social Media posts on Instagram**

For this campaign to achieve its goals, a total of 21 posts were created and posted on the Instagram account of the LAU Animal Care Club. 3 posts per day were posted during a period of 7 days starting from the 28<sup>th</sup> of April and ending on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May. Posts were mainly informative and captions included information taken from the magazine which will be discussed in the next section. Various hashtags were also used in posts to reach out to even more people. In addition, a minimum of 3 Instagram stories containing small quizzes/polls/facts/games were posted in order to reach more followers and spread the needed awareness in a fun and interactive way. We also followed as many LAU students as possible from the Instagram account, and that was a useful method that made more students follow the account back and notice our campaign.

### **Magazine**

For this campaign, a magazine about wildlife trafficking of 56 pages was created. The magazine “Wildlife Counts” was launched on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the campaign. Most of the posts and stories on Instagram didn’t only spread awareness about wildlife trafficking but also served as a way to promote this online magazine.

The magazine “Wildlife Counts” contains articles and facts about the issue, as well as interviews with Animals Lebanon and Lebanese Wildlife, two NGOs that work on the protection of wildlife. Articles about wildlife trafficking cases the 2 NGOs receive are also part of the magazine. In addition, “Wildlife Counts” includes some games and ads we created ourselves, all related to wildlife trafficking.

This magazine was published online on the LAU Communication Arts website. The link of this magazine, which was made into a “bit.ly” link so the number of clicks could be tracked, was shared on the Instagram page of the campaign and on our personal accounts. The link was also emailed to all LAU Beirut students, and that it thanks to the collaboration with the LAU Animal Care Club. Since their page was used for our campaign, the magazine was considered as a club activity and this is how we were able to get it emailed to all students. A last method of sharing the magazine is by sharing the link with our friends through WhatsApp.

### **Timeline**

<b>Day</b>	<b>Activity on Instagram</b>	<b>Topics</b>
April 28, 2020	3 posts, 5 stories	Introduction  What is wildlife trafficking?  The uses of wild animals

April 29, 2020	3 posts, 3 stories	The impacts of wildlife trafficking
April 30, 2020	3 posts, 9 stories	Wildlife trade vs wildlife trafficking  The world's most trafficked animal  The uses of the rhino horn
May 1, 2020	3 posts, 3 stories  Launch of the Magazine	Covid-19 and other diseases caused by wildlife trafficking  Announcing the launch of the magazine
May 2, 2020	3 posts, 5 stories	Facts about wildlife trafficking in Lebanon  Cases of wildlife trafficking in Lebanon
May 3, 2020	3 posts, 7 stories	The animal welfare and protection law  Ad and quote from the magazine
May 4, 2020	3 posts, 8 stories	How to stop wildlife trafficking  Ad from the magazine

## Outcomes

During the campaign and after it was over, we collected data on the students' reactions towards the topic in order to see if we were able to reach and make an impact on our target audience. The data evaluated was based on the insights provided by Instagram and the different comments and feedback that we got.

From the 28th of April to the 4<sup>th</sup> of May, a total of 1,828 accounts were reached on Instagram and 16,054 impressions were registered. There were also 1,280 actions taken on the account and 1,237 profile visits during this week.

Before the campaign started, the number of followers on the Instagram account of the LAU Animal Care Club was around 260, and we were able to raise that number to almost 600 followers by the end of the campaign. When it comes to the audience, 84% of the audience reached was between 18 and 34 years old, with 67% being women and 63% from Beirut. This shows that we were able to reach the audience we were initially targeting when it comes to the age group and location.

Most of the posts we posted were viewed more than 300 times with one post reaching more than 1,000 views. Some posts were also shared and saved by followers.

Our audience gave us positive feedback on the campaign and the magazine, some of the comments we got include:

- Great initiative!
- This helped me a lot!! I have a persuasive speech due tomorrow and the topic I'm writing on is "should you go to zoos?" All the information I need is in this article.  
Thanks a lot!
- This is very good. It's enjoyable to read.

- I love it!
- Wow...that is awesome! Your theory on COVID-19 was interesting. I learned a lot.

All these numbers and comments show that the campaign got a great amount of engagement and that we successfully were able to spread awareness and encourage more individuals to take action against wildlife trafficking. We were also able to make of the Animal Care Club Instagram page a bigger platform through which the club will be able to spread awareness not only about wildlife trafficking, but about other animal-related problems as well.

In addition, this campaign made more people aware of the presence of NGOs such as Animals Lebanon and Lebanese Wildlife to which wildlife trafficking cases can be reported.

Lastly, the link of the magazine has for now a total of 280 clicks and the magazine is currently on the first page of the Google search results of “Wildlife Trafficking”.

### **Limitations**

Initially, an event was being planned at LAU with the collaboration of the Animal Care Club to spread awareness about wildlife trafficking and its impacts. However, due to the spread of COVID-19 and the lockdown, we were unable to make this event happen and were forced to limit ourselves to an online campaign. Although we were able to reach many people online, an offline event would have helped us reach even more LAU students whom may not be active on social media.

In addition, the magazine link did get a total of 250 clicks but we can't know for sure if the people who clicked on the link actually read the magazine and became more aware of the issue.

## **Conclusion**

We went into this topic racking our brain with how we can capture the attention of the people over something they barely knew anything about and had no idea how this was affecting their lives. We live in a world we know very little about and act in ways according to what we only know which in turn affects us greatly. This campaign is surely not enough to make all Lebanese citizens more aware of wildlife trafficking and on how they can stand against it, but it is surely a step to get to that goal. Even if it is not a great number of people, we were still able to make a small impact and make some people realize how dangerous this activity is. With more awareness spread, we will hopefully be able to reach a future in which people are more aware of how actions they might not think much about can have dire consequences on the environment and on themselves.

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siberian-tiger-cubs-en-route-to-syria](https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/society/2017/3/18/lebanon-rescues-siberian-tiger-cubs-en-route-to-syria)

## **Appendices**

### **Informed Consent**

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project by completing the following survey. I am a student at the Lebanese American University and I am completing this research project as part of my capstone project. The purpose of this survey aims to understand your awareness and opinion regarding wildlife in general, and wildlife trafficking in Lebanon.

There are no known risks, harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life. The information you provide will be used to enhance and improve our data regarding our target audience and how we can tailor our campaign's message to become more effective. You will not directly benefit from participation in this study. The study will involve between 150 and 300 participants.

Completing the survey will take 3 minutes of your time.

By continuing with the survey, you agree with the following statements:

1. I have been given sufficient information about this research project.
2. I understand that my answers will not be released to anyone and my identity will remain anonymous. My name will not be written on the questionnaire nor be kept in any other records.

3. When the results of the study are reported, I will not be identified by name or any other information that could be used to infer my identity. Only researchers will have access to view any data collected during this research however data cannot be linked to me.

4. I understand that I may withdraw from this research any time I wish and that I have the right to skip any question I don't want to answer.

5. I understand that my refusal to participate will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which I otherwise am entitled to.

6. I have been informed that the research abides by all commonly acknowledged ethical codes and that the research project has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the Lebanese American University

7. I understand that if I have any additional questions, I can ask the research team listed below.

8. I have read and understood all statements on this form.

9. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research project by completing the following survey.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or you want to talk to someone outside the research, please contact the:

Institutional Review Board Office,

Lebanese American University

3rd Floor, Dorm A, Byblos Campus

Tel: 00 961 1 786456 ext. (2546)

irb@lau.edu.lb

This study has been reviewed and approved by the LAU IRB

### **Survey**

- 1) Are you a student at LAU Beirut? –yes –no (if not please end this survey now)
- 2) How old are you? ---
- 3) What is your gender? –male –female –other
- 4) From a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you like animals? (with one being not at all and 10 being very much)
- 5) Do you own a wildlife animal as a pet? (such as exotic birds, reptiles, monkeys...) –yes –no
  - If yes, what is the animal you own? ---
- 6) Do you have any real animal parts placed as decoration in your house or used as accessories/clothing material? (such as bear skin, elephant ivory, crocodile skin...) –yes –no
  - If yes, what is the animal part you own? ---
- 7) How regularly do you go to zoos? –once per month –once every few months –once per year –once every few years –never

Questions using Likert Scale: (Strongly Agree- Agree- Neutral- Disagree- Strongly Disagree)

- 8) It is nice to own a wild animal (such as a wild cat, a parrot, a monkey...)

- 9) There is nothing wrong with buying exotic animal skin to decorate the house with or use it as an accessory (elephant ivory, snake skin...)
- 10) People who fight for animals rights are too sentimental.
- 11) Humans have the right to use animals as they see fit.
- 12) Selling endangered wild animals in pet shops is acceptable.
- 13) It is okay to have wild animals brought to zoos in Lebanon.

Questions with Yes/No options:

- 14) I am aware that the Corona virus is due to the wildlife trade industry.
- 15) I am aware that wildlife animals are being illegally imported to Lebanon.
- 16) I am aware that there is an animal welfare law in Lebanon.

# IRB Approval



Institutional Review Board (IRB)

لجنة الأخلاقيات

## NOTICE OF IRB EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

**To:** Ms. Rawane Itani & Ms. Ghaidaa Hreiby  
Advisor: Dr. Gretchen King  
Assistant Professor  
School of Arts & Sciences

**APPROVAL ISSUED:** 20 February 2020  
**EXPIRATION DATE:** 20 February 2022  
**REVIEW TYPE:** EXEMPT CATEGORY B

**Date:** February 20, 2020

**RE:** **IRB #:** LAU.SAS.GK1.20/Feb/2020

**Protocol Title:** *The Case of Wildlife Trafficking In Lebanon*

Your application for the above referenced research project has been reviewed by the Lebanese American University, Institutional Review Board (LAU IRB). This research project qualifies as exempt under the category noted in the Review Type

This notice is limited to the activities described in the Protocol Exempt Application and all submitted documents listed on page 2 of this letter. **Final reviewed consent documents or recruitment materials and data collection tools released with this notice are part of this determination and must be used in this research project.**

### CONDITIONS FOR ALL LAU NOTICE OF IRB EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

**LAU RESEARCH POLICIES:** All individuals engaged in the research project must adhere to the approved protocol and all applicable LAU IRB Research Policies. **PARTICIPANTS must NOT be involved in any research related activity prior to IRB notice date or after the expiration date.**

**EXEMPT CATEGORIES:** Activities that are exempt from IRB review are not exempt from IRB ethical review and the necessity for ethical conduct.

**PROTOCOL EXPIRATION:** **PROTOCOL EXPIRATION:** The LAU IRB notice expiry date for studies that fall under Exemption is 2 years after this notice, as noted above. If the study will continue beyond this date, a request for an extension must be submitted at least 2 weeks prior to the Expiry date.

**MODIFICATIONS AND AMENDMENTS:** Certain changes may change the review criteria and disqualify the research from exemption status; therefore, any proposed changes to the previously IRB reviewed exempt study must be reviewed and cleared by the IRB before implementation.

**RETENTION:** Study files must be retained for a period of 3 years from the date of project completion.

**IN THE EVENT OF NON-COMPLIANCE WITH ABOVE CONDITIONS, THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR SHOULD MEET WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE IRB OFFICE IN ORDER TO RESOLVE SUCH CONDITIONS. IRB CLEARANCE CANNOT BE GRANTED UNTIL NON-COMPLIANT ISSUES HAVE BEEN RESOLVED.**

If you have any questions concerning this information, please contact the IRB office by email at [irb@lau.edu.lb](mailto:irb@lau.edu.lb)

BEIRUT CAMPUS	BYBLOS CAMPUS	NEW YORK OFFICE
P.O. Box: 13-5053 Chouran Beirut 1102 2801 Lebanon	P.O.Box: 36 Byblos Lebanon	475 Riverside Drive Suite 1846 New York, NY 10115
Tel: +961 1 78 64 56 +961 3 60 37 03 Fax: +961 1 86 70 98	Tel: +961 9 54 72 62 +961 3 79 13 14 Fax: +961 9 54 62 62	Tel: +1 212 870 2592 +1 212 870 2761 Fax: +1 212 870 2762

[www.lau.edu.lb](http://www.lau.edu.lb)



The IRB operates in compliance with the national regulations pertaining to research under the Lebanese Minister of Public Health's Decision No.141 dated 27/1/2016 under LAU IRB Authorization reference 2016/3708, the international guidelines for Good Clinical Practice, the US Office of Human Research Protection (45CFR46) and the Food and Drug Administration (21CFR56). LAU IRB U.S. Identifier as an international institution: FWA00014723 and IRB Registration # IRB00006954 LAUIRB#1

**Dr. Joseph Stephan**  
Chair, Institutional Review Board



**DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED:**

IRB Exempt Protocol Application	Received 17 February 2020
Proposal	Received 17 February 2020
Informed Consent	Received 18 February 2020
Survey online link	Received 18 February 2020
<b>IRB Comments sent:</b> 18 February 2020 19 February 2020	<b>PI response dated:</b> 18 February 2020 19 February 2020
CITI Training – Gretchen King	Cert.# 30400643 Dated (1 February 2019)
CITI Training – Rawane Itani	Cert.# 35396160 Dated (13 February 2019)
CITI Training –Ghaidaa Hreiby	Cert.# 35395755 Dated (13 February 2019)



**Magazine Link:** <https://bit.ly/Wildlife-Counts>

**Instagram Page Link:** <https://www.instagram.com/animalcareclub.lau/>

The posts for our campaign were posted from April 28 to May 4, and the Instagram stories can be found in the highlight section of the page. The name of the highlight is “Wildlife Campaign”. (Current Instagram Username of the page: @animalcareclub.lau)

# Outcomes (Screenshots from Instagram)

## Discovery ⓘ



Reach 1,828

+1599 vs. Apr 21 - Apr 27

Impressions 16,054

+13606 vs. Apr 21 - Apr 27

599 followers

+333 vs. Apr 28 - May 5

## Growth ⓘ

[See Posts](#)

Overall	316
Unfollowed You	11
Followed You	327



## Overview ⓘ

57 posts and stories this week

+31 vs. Apr 28 - May 5

## Posts

[See All](#)



Feed posts ordered by number of times they were seen.

## Interactions ⓘ



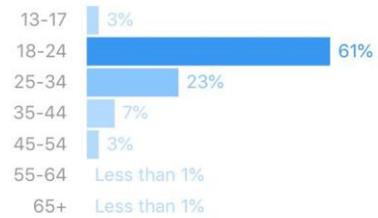
Profile Visits

1,237

+1172 vs. Apr 21 - Apr 27

## Age Range ⓘ

All Men Women



## Gender ⓘ



67%  
Women

33%  
Men

## Top Locations ⓘ

Cities Countries

