

THE ANIMAL

They can get \$6,000 for a single jaguar skin, \$5,000 for a grizzly bear's gallbladder and \$42 an ounce for elk antlers. No wonder illegal trafficking in wildlife is booming, despite intensive efforts by law-enforcement agencies to put profiteers on the endangered list.

By Michael Dorman

SICKER than he had ever been in his life, John Gavitt lay in misery on the floor of a thatched hut high in the rugged mountain country west of Ciudad Victoria, Mexico. The stomach cramps were excruciating. He had been unable to eat for two days. His body was covered with ticks — hundreds of them. And his only companions were two Mexican guides who spoke no English and who would probably kill him if they knew

Michael Dorman, a freelance writer, is the author of 16 books, several of them about crime and punishment.

why he was really there.

Just past 30, the son of a retired Navy captain, the holder of bachelor's and master's degrees from Virginia Tech, Gavitt could hardly be blamed for asking himself: What the hell am I doing, twisting in agony on some godforsaken Mexican mountainside? But he knew all too well what he was doing there. He had ridden up the mountain on a mule to take part in an illegal hunt for jaguars. And the reason he was hunting jaguars was that he was an undercover agent for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, trying to infiltrate an extensive network of smugglers and poachers engaged in the astonishingly lucrative illegal wildlife traffic — a traffic estimated at \$1 billion a year in the United States and \$5 billion worldwide.

After 48 hours of suffering, Gavitt recovered from the dysentery sufficiently to resume the hunt. He and his guides hid by night in the brush along the mountainside. One guide carried a simple lure consisting of a gourd attached to a strip of leather. He pulled his hand periodically along the outside of the gourd, producing a noise approximating the sound of a jaguar's grunt. The second guide then swept the nearby brush with a flashlight to see if the lure had drawn a jaguar within range of Gavitt's rifle. Only a week earlier, the federal agent had been told, another hunter had shot a jaguar at four-foot range on this very mountainside.

Although Gavitt hunted for a week, he never even saw a live jaguar. But that was a

great relief to him, since it spared him the complication of being forced to fire illegal shots to conceal his undercover role. More important, his masquerade amounted to an unqualified triumph.

The connections he made on that trip to Mexico enabled him to work his way into the confidence of one animal smuggler and poacher after another — setting in motion a three-year "sting" investigation that eventually produced the arrests of almost three dozen illegal wildlife traffickers in 14 states from New York to Montana and Florida to Alaska. The case, code-named "Operation Trophy-kill" by federal authorities, became one of the most significant of its kind in the world. And it underscored both the enormity of the illegal wildlife traffic and the intensive efforts by law-enforcement agencies to combat that traffic.

Day in and day out, generally without the public's knowledge, a bitter, sometimes dangerous struggle is being waged between illegal wildlife profiteers and their adversaries — notably the agents and inspectors of the Fish and Wildlife Service, but also such officers as state game wardens and U. S. Customs agents. The stakes may be reckoned on several levels. For society, there is the risk that endangered species may become extinct if the illegal traffickers are not controlled. For the traffickers themselves, there are the risks of physical danger and possible imprisonment but, simultaneously, the temptation to shoot for big money. It mat-



ters little whether the wildlife at stake is dead or alive. In either state, if it is the right animal specimen, somebody is invariably available to pay top dollar. Some examples:

• A large, fierce hawk called the gyrfalcon — which weighs almost five pounds, flies up to 200 mph and is prized by falconers — sells illegally for as much as \$120,000 in Europe and the Middle East. In one case broken by Fish and Wildlife agents, there was testimony that an attempt was made to smuggle six gyrfalcons from the United States to Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdullah, a leading falconer. A defendant who pleaded guilty to smuggling charges ad-

SMUGGLERS



NEO LEVINE

mitted flying the birds in a private plane from Montana to Dulles Airport outside Washington. From there, a federal agent testified, the gyrfalcons were driven to New York in a limousine provided by the Saudi Embassy. They were then taken to John F. Kennedy International Airport, where another accused smuggler bought seven first-class tickets on Saudi Arabian Airlines — one of which, the agent testified, was presumably intended for the smuggler and the other six for the caged birds.

• Rings of illegal hunters, operating in the American West, are threatening the survival of the grizzly bear and other bear species. The

hunters sell the bears' hides to collectors and the claws to jewelers. But their biggest profits come from smuggling the bears' gallbladders and paw pads to Asia. The bladders, small enough to fit inside film canisters, are marketed in dried form for up to \$5,000 apiece in Asia — where they are used as medicines and aphrodisiacs. The paw pads are sold as food delicacies, with one pad making a dinner that goes for about \$150.

• Bald eagles and other eagles are being slaughtered illegally by hunters catering to the trade in American Indian artifacts. An Indian war bonnet made from feathers of the bald eagle — an endangered

species that cannot be hunted legally — sells for more than \$5,000. One "sting" investigation mounted by Fish and Wildlife agents broke up a South Dakota ring supplying feathers and other eagle parts to a black market in Indian artifacts reaching across the United States and as far as Europe.

• Every year, an estimated \$2 million worth of elk antlers are taken illegally from Yellowstone National Park. Ground antlers, sold primarily to Asians both in the United States and abroad, are used in an assortment of products ranging from vitamins to aphrodisiacs. They sell for about \$42 an ounce in ground form. Often,

the antlers can be collected without killing elk. So-called horn hunters sneak through Yellowstone every spring, picking up antlers the bull elk have shed. But, in other cases, poachers kill the animals. In one incident, poachers chased eight elk through Yellowstone until the animals collapsed from exhaustion. The poachers then hacked the antlers from their heads and left them to bleed to death. No matter how the antlers are obtained, it is illegal to take them from the park.

• Parrots, parakeets and other exotic birds are being smuggled into the United States by the thousands. Some are anesthetized and brought across the Mexican



Loren Ellison, left, Bob Johnson, center, and Claudie Lee Buttrell were convicted of violating U.S. wildlife laws. The photo was taken by a federal undercover agent.

border inside spare tires. Others have been found inside hollow watermelons. One rare bird was discovered taped to a woman's thigh. And many of these are far from low-budget items destined for neighborhood pet stores. The spectacularly colored hyacinth macaw from the Amazon country, for example, sells for upwards of \$12,000 on the illegal U.S. market.

Federal agents' authority to control the wildlife traffic derives chiefly from two laws and from a treaty signed by the United States and 87 other nations. The Lacey Act, originally passed by Congress in 1900 but amended four years ago to provide for broader prosecutions and tougher penalties, prohibits transportation of illegally taken wildlife across state or national borders. The Endangered Species Act of 1973 bars the importation of ani-

mals designated as "endangered" or "threatened." And the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna, a 1975 treaty commonly known as CITES, bans commercial trade in a specified list of endangered species and monitors trade in others that might become endangered.

Under the federal laws, animals may not be imported into the United States if it is illegal to export them from their native countries. To combat these laws, smugglers resort to complex animal "laundering" operations similar to those used to cover up the illegal transfer of funds. Brazil, for instance, bans export of most of its wildlife. But illegal traffickers regularly smuggle wildlife and wildlife products from Brazil into Paraguay and Bolivia, then on to the United States — where the

import documents attest the animals originated in Paraguay or Bolivia.

Some idea of the extent of such "laundering" was provided by a study conducted by an organization called TRAFFIC (Trade Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce), whose operations are financed by the World Wildlife Fund. The study covered 250,000 alligator and crocodile skins imported into the United States, chiefly for use in manufacturing of such products as shoes and pocketbooks. It showed that 90 percent of the skins came from the spectacled caiman, a South American crocodile that exists in four subspecies — two of which are covered by the Endangered Species Act and cannot legally be imported. A third of the skins that entered the country with import documents asserting they were from one of the legal subspecies were, to say the least, suspect. They listed as their points of origin one or another of 11 countries where that animal does not even exist.

It takes an unusually sophisticated, highly specialized investigator to enforce laws as complicated as those dealing with hundreds of species of wildlife. William Donato, the agent who heads the Fish and Wildlife Service field office near Kennedy Airport (the country's leading wildlife-importation center), used to be a federal narcotics agent. He sees vast differences between wildlife investigations and those in other fields.

"Take narcotics," he says. "The laws are very cut-and-dried. You can't do this, you can't have that. But in this job, it's not that simple. We're dealing with laws from all over the world. The work is so specialized that it takes many months for us to train our people, and they go back for additional training every year."

The job is also far more

dangerous than most law-enforcement work, Donato says. Sitting in his unprepossessing office in a bank building on Rockaway Turnpike in Lawrence, the solidly built investigator explains:

"We do a lot of undercover work. We get involved, for example, with guides providing hunts for moose, black bear, waterfowl and other game. These guides will allow you to take part in illegal activity when they're supposed to be preventing it. The only way to make cases is to get out with them. There are lots of risks when you're undercover. The most difficult part of the job is that, unlike other undercover work, you don't have any backup. It's impossible to put backup people out there because of the terrain and the circumstances. Often, one or two agents [and other hunters] will be out with nine guides in the middle of the woods. You're one of one with people who are armed. If they want to take you out [kill you], they can. We're on the receiving end of eight times more assault than any other kind of law-enforcement officer."

Fish and Wildlife Service work can be dangerous even when no criminal activity is involved. On Oct. 7, 1982, Fish and Wildlife Inspector Robert Manna was on duty at the KLM Royal Dutch Airlines cargo terminal at JFK examining 30 imported poisonous snakes, 10 of them king cobras, to ensure they were not members of endangered species. Manna watched as Robert Hughes, Freeport, owner of a firm called Reptile Traders, opened a wooden crate and removed a burlap bag containing one of the king cobras. The two men expected the nine-foot cobra to slither into a Plexiglas tube Manna held at the mouth of the bag as snakes usually do.

Instead, the cobra bit through the burlap, knifing its fangs into Hughes' right thumb and injecting him with

The snake then slipped out of the bag, shot between Manna's legs and "hooded" behind him — standing up, with its head five feet high, in striking position. Manna had been trained that, in case anyone were bitten by a poisonous snake, the snake must be killed so that its precise species could be determined and the proper antivenin given to the victim. Grabbing a hand tool, Manna clubbed the cobra to death.

Under a recently initiated system for treating snake-bite victims, a helicopter flew Hughes from JFK to Jacobi Hospital in the Bronx. The dead cobra's species was quickly determined, and the Bronx Zoo rushed the appropriate antivenin to the hospital. Although Hughes was reported in critical condition on arrival at the hospital, he made steady progress once given intravenous injections of the serum. He eventually recovered. The U. S. Interior Department, of which Fish and Wildlife is a branch, presented Manna with its medal of valor for his part in helping save Hughes' life.

To cope with the burgeoning illegal wildlife traffic, Fish and Wildlife has only a small band of investigators — fewer than 200 agents — to police the entire country. The FBI, by comparison, has 8,800 agents to cover its broader jurisdiction.

The small Fish and Wildlife staff makes it necessary to concentrate on major investigations — referring less important violations to game wardens and other law-enforcement officers. It also requires unusually close cooperation among the various Fish and Wildlife offices across the country. Often, an agent from one office will be pulled off his regular assignment and rushed elsewhere to help shorthanded agents working on a pressing case. And, as in other law-enforcement work, leads developed in one part of the country frequently pro-

duce arrests thousands of miles away.

Bill Donato and his New York agents, as well as agents in other sections of the country, eventually were drawn into the investigation made possible by John Gavitt's agonizing jaguar-hunting expedition in Mexico. It was, all agree, a team effort. But the *sine qua non* in that effort was Gavitt's three-year masquerade — a classic example of the art of undercover investigation.

John Gavitt is a wiry man with unruly blond hair, a drooping blond mustache and the rolling gait of a cowhand. His Operation Trophykill assignment was mounted in response to persistent reports of highly organized, large-scale animal smuggling and poaching throughout the western states. Fish and Wildlife agents, working closely with Justice Department prosecutors, decided the best chance for breaking up such rackets lay in an undercover infiltration.

GAVITT approached a reputable taxidermist named Jim Bensley, who ran a company called Rocky Mountain Game Processors in Fort Collins, Colo. He guardedly described the planned investigation, explained that he would need a long-term cover story and asked Bensley to help provide it by pretending to hire him as the firm's business manager. Bensley agreed to cooperate "because he wanted to help wildlife," Gavitt says.

Shortly after Gavitt began working with Bensley in the fall of 1981, they established a tannery in Fort Collins. Ostensibly to promote the tannery, they placed advertisements in hunting magazines circulated throughout the United States. Actually, Gavitt hoped the ads would help him make connections with illegal wildlife traffickers.

"There was nothing illegal in the ads," he recalls. "They just said bighorn sheep and exotic cats were our specialties." Nonetheless, the ads served their purpose.

A wildlife smuggler from Oklahoma asked Bensley and Gavitt to tan some skins for him. "I developed a business relationship with him," Gavitt says. "Through him, I was able to travel into Mexico and see the inner workings of the smuggling of jaguar, ocelot and margay skins into the United States."

The agent was introduced in Mexico to a suspect from McAllen, Texas, who arranged illegal jaguar hunts. "I told him I wanted to go on a hunt," Gavitt says. "He questioned me very closely. He even told me I'd have to sign a release saying I was not a Fish and Wildlife agent. I had State Department approval to be in Mexico, but I was worried about a leak. I was very apprehensive about that. The wilds of Mexico are not a very safe place to be."

Eventually, Gavitt persuaded the Texan he was not an agent and was turned over to the two Mexican guides who would lead him on the hunt. They drove through a rainstorm in a truck to the point where they would pick up their horses and mules. Despite the storm, the driver never turned on his windshield wipers. A puzzled Gavitt did not discover until later that the guides had hidden a contraband rifle under the truck's hood, just beneath the wiper mechanisms, so the wipers would not work. "Along the way, we were stopped at gunpoint by *federales* and searched for guns," Gavitt says. "But they never searched under the hood, so they didn't find our rifle."

After the rugged climb into the mountains, the fruitless hunt for jaguars and the siege of dysentery, Gavitt concluded he had accomplished his immediate mission — to prove a conspiracy between the Texan and the



Dead eagles seized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service during a 1983 investigation of illegal trafficking.

Mexican guides to arrange illegal hunts. But there were two bonuses. First, the men involved in the jaguar hunt took him to the Rio Grande and showed him exactly how illegal wildlife is smuggled across the border. Second, they put him in touch with other wildlife traffickers operating in the United States.

"They were using several methods of smuggling skins across the border," Gavitt says. "Sometimes, they would hide the skins in the roof linings of trucks. They knew Customs used dogs at the border to sniff for narcotics. The dogs might detect animal skins, but not if they were hidden high up in the trucks. The smugglers also paid runners — called 'mules,' just like in the narcotics business — to cross the Rio Grande at night with a shipment of skins in a bag."

Returning to Fort Collins to pursue the leads he had de-

veloped on other animal traffickers, Gavitt penetrated layer after layer of the illegal wildlife network. He and other agents working with him made a succession of undercover buys from the suspects — everything from bear gallbladders to a mounted jaguar to the skins of a snow leopard, a tiger, jaguars, cougars and bears.

Among the agents' main targets were illegal traffickers who arranged so-called guaranteed-wildlife hunts in Montana and Wyoming. For a hefty fee, often \$7,500 or more, a hunter was guaranteed he would return from the wild with a trophy-size specimen of whatever animal he chose — usually a bighorn sheep, elk, bear, mountain goat or deer. If the hunter could not shoot the desired animal, the guides would. Trophies from some large animals killed in such hunts sold for as much as \$20,000. The prized "grand slam" — the head and shoulders from each of the four wild sheep indigenous to North America — could bring \$50,000.

Gavitt says the investigation indicated a man named Loren Ellison from Big Timber, Mont., was one of the most significant illegal wildlife traffickers in the area. "He was the nucleus of a large group," the agent recalls. "I went to Big Timber and met Ellison at a bar. He was very suspicious of me at first. He told me that, if I were a federal agent, there'd be no place for me to go. If he went to jail, he'd get back at me somehow. I came right back at him. I told him that if he was trying to set me up, I'd never forget it either. After a while, he got to trust me enough to deal with me."

Another suspect had told Gavitt that Ellison was trying to sell a grizzly bear hide, but Ellison denied having one. "Then I asked whether he'd be interested in taking some of my clients on illegal hunts," Gavitt says. "He said he would. The 'clients' were



Cheetah skins and parts of bighorn sheep were among the items seized in October, 1984, in Operation Trophykill.

actually undercover agents. On one hunt for mule deer, Ellison pointed out a herd of mountain goats to Agent Peter Nylander. He said: "There's some goats. Do you want to get a goat?" Then Nylander, at Ellison's direction, shot a goat illegally. When they got the goat and packed it on a horse, Ellison pulled a sawed-off shotgun. He shot it into a tree three times and said: "That's what we do to game wardens. We blow their heads off."

ALTHOUGH Ellison remained suspicious of Gavitt, he continued dealing with him and introduced him to other illegal traffickers. Gavitt developed evidence that Ellison had shot and sold a dozen federally protected golden eagles, that he had illegally sold elk antlers and arranged additional illegal hunts. Periodically, Ellison challenged Gavitt anew — accusing him of being an agent. "Once, when we were in a bar, the bartender called him over and told him he had a phone call," Gavitt says. "After Ellison took the call, he came back and told me: 'I just got a call from a friend of mine in the sheriff's office. She called to tell me there's a fed in town.' I told him: 'I'm tired of hearing this stuff. Until you can tell me who your friend is, I don't want to talk about it.'"

Still, the dealings between Gavitt and Ellison continued

to percolate. "One day, Ellison asked me if I was interested in mountain lion skins," Gavitt recalls. "I said, 'Sure.' He said he knew a guy whose specialty was mountain lions. He introduced me in a cafe to this guy — a fellow named Ken Fike. Fike told me he killed over a dozen mountain lions a year, even though the limit is one. He said he hadn't had a license to guide or to hunt mountain lions for five years. He wasn't about to follow the law."

During the conversation in the cafe, Gavitt says, Fike offered to sell him two mountain lion skins — conceding "they're illegal, though." Gavitt eventually bought not only those skins from Fike but also two other mountain lion skins, two bald eagle tail fans and 25 eagle talons.

Meanwhile, the circle of suspects taken in by the "sting" investigation continued to spread to other states. Gavitt was told that, if he wanted to get his hands on some illegal African skins, a man in New York could oblige him. The man was Brian Gaisford, part owner of a Second Avenue gallery dealing in African wildlife artifacts. Gaisford was said to present himself as a conservationist — displaying pictures in which he appeared with Britain's Prince Philip, the international president of the World Wildlife Fund.

Working with agents from Bill Donato's New York office

of the Fish and Wildlife Service, Gavitt made connections with Gaisford. They discussed a variety of items Gaisford was offering for sale — including tiger, leopard and cheetah skins — and Gaisford shipped two cheetah skins to Gavitt in Fort Collins. The cheetah is among the animals protected by the Endangered Species Act, and may not be imported, possessed or sold in the United States. An affidavit sworn by John Meehan, a New York Fish and Wildlife agent, would later charge that Gaisford had made false entries in his office records reflecting that the illegal cheetah skins sent to Gavitt had actually been zebra skins.

On Oct. 4, 1984, John Gavitt's long masquerade finally ended. Almost 200 federal and state agents snapped the spring on Operation Trophykill with simultaneous raids and arrests in Montana, Colorado, New York, Florida, Texas, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Wisconsin, Missouri, Alaska, Arizona, Oklahoma, Oregon and California. Thirty-four persons were arrested.

Some were charged with smuggling into the country the skins of animals protected by the Endangered Species Act, among them the crocodile, cheetah, jaguar, leopard and margay. The criminal complaints charged that the smuggling had been accomplished in a variety of ways — including the mails, automobiles and cargo-ship containers. Other complaints charged illegal trafficking in the skins of tigers, mountain lions, ocelots, bears, great horned owls, flamingos and sandhill cranes, and both illegal hunting and trafficking in golden eagles, bighorn sheep, black bears, mountain goats, mountain lions and elk.

Many of the defendants, including Brian Gaisford, pleaded guilty. (Gaisford was sentenced to three years' supervised probation, a \$10,000 fine and 200 hours of community service.) But others, most notably Loren Ellison and Ken

innocent and went to trial. At Gavitt not only described his deal with the man but also played extensively of secretly recorded telephone conversations with them. Both were convicted and given prison sentences — with Ellison drawing a 15-year term, the stiffest ever imposed in the United States for wildlife violations. James Kilbourne, assistant chief of the Justice Department's Wildlife and Marine Resources Section and one of the prosecutors in the Operation Trophykill case, said Ellison's sentence would "send a message to other violators that this type of activity will not be condoned."

But if illegal wildlife traffickers are getting that message, they do not seem to be heeding it in any substantial numbers. All indications are that the traffic continues to boom. As John Gavitt puts it: "There's been an increase in poaching recently because wildlife is becoming more and more valuable. As populations become smaller, the animal becomes more valuable. And that means the illegal kill also becomes more detrimental to the species."

To combat the increasing illegal traffic, Fish and Wildlife agents turn repeatedly to the "sting" investigation:

• In a suburban Atlanta industrial park, agents established an undercover enterprise called the Atlanta Wildlife Exchange. The agents put out word they were in the market for a wide assortment of reptiles that cannot legally be traded or shipped across state lines. Soon they were inundated with offers from every section of the country. During the 18-month investigation, the agents bought and sold almost 10,000 reptiles. When the time came to apply the sting, 27 persons were arrested, another 150 were brought in for questioning and more than 1,000 live reptiles were seized in 14 states.

• Along the Atlantic coast, undercover agents bought 6,700 pounds of fish to build a case against traffickers in illegally caught striped bass. Posing as fish dealers, the agents made the illegal "buys" of oversize fish at the Fulton Fish Market in New York and other markets in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D. C. Criminal charges were filed against 130 commercial fishermen, retailers, wholesalers and transport companies.

• In South Dakota, agents made undercover "buys" of 24 illegally killed bald eagles, two golden eagles and parts of 25 other eagles in breaking up a thriving traffic in American Indian artifacts. They said about 300 eagles had been killed in the Karl E. Mundt National Wildlife Refuge in South Dakota and Nebraska, established as a sanctuary for migrating eagles. Parts of the eagles had been used to make Indian war bonnets, rattles, jewelry, lances, hair ties, fans, whistles and other ornaments. Twenty-eight defendants from South Dakota, North Dakota, Florida, California, Utah, Oklahoma, Montana and Colorado were arrested in the investigation.

• In Montana, an investigation known as "Operation Falcon" broke up a multimillion-dollar international black market in birds of prey such as the Arctic gyrfalcon and the peregrine falcon. Thirty-nine persons were arrested in the case in 14 states and another 19 were seized by Canadian authorities cooperating with the Fish and Wildlife agents. "Operation Falcon" produced evidence that more than 400 high-priced birds — most of them used for falconry — had been illegally taken from the wild and offered for sale to buyers in the United States, Europe and the Middle East.

At one point in the "Operation Falcon" investigation, a 21-year-old suspect from West Germany handed \$26,000 in \$100 bills to an undercover agent for six illegal gyrfalcons.

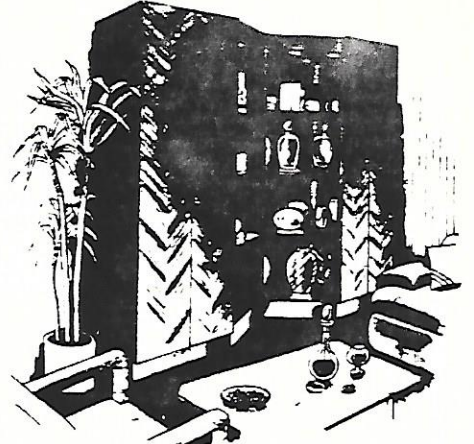
"It is too much money, this business," the suspect complained into a hidden microphone. "They shoot each other for this kind of money. It's like drugs or some other business."

The reference to the drug traffic was, perhaps inadvertently, apt. Agent Bill Donato puts it this way: "A lot of times, wildlife and drugs are smuggled together. Smugglers sometimes try to pay for illegal wildlife with hashish and other drugs. It's kind of like a cult. Drugs and animals seem to go together — especially snakes and, most especially, the deadly ones." Smugglers have also been known to hide narcotics inside dead animals. One shipment of 80 parrots that originated in Bolivia was found to contain two dozen dead birds stuffed with cocaine. Another shipment from South America was said to contain a load of crocodile skins coated with pure cocaine. The smugglers reportedly persuaded port inspectors that the powder was a preservative and later removed the cocaine with a vacuum cleaner.

The government official responsible for supervising prosecution of federal wildlife cases across the country is F. Henry Habicht, a tall, lean man with a chiseled visage who serves as assistant attorney general in charge of the Justice Department's Land and Natural Resources Division. Sitting in his spacious Washington office — seemingly a world removed from the rough-and-tumble of the backwoods — Habicht tells an interviewer about the government's struggle against illegal wildlife traffickers.

"The cases we're prosecuting represent a recognition that this is more than just people hunting out of season," Habicht says. "We're most interested in people who deal in illegal wildlife for a living. This is an increasingly sophisticated type of crime. An investigation sometimes takes two to four years. We hope the message is getting out that significant trade in animals is going to get serious treatment."

Habicht says there has been an "interesting reaction" from hunters who have served on juries in wildlife cases. "It's not, 'Government, get off my back.' It's, 'By God, I'm a law-abiding citizen. I obey the



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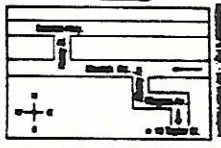
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want these people get... visiting the law."... has also been in... Habicht says, in spur... action to toughen... laws recently. "Wildlife protection galvanizes broad bipartisan support on the Hill," he says.

Defendants in "sting" cases conducted by the Fish and Wildlife Service have repeatedly argued that they were entrapped by the investigating agents. Habicht vehemently disputes that contention. "The sting operation is an essential means of getting at this type of crime," he says. "Fish and Wildlife agents are very circumspect. The tricky argument has been rejected by the courts." Take Operation Trophykill.

Although Habicht credits Fish and Wildlife agents with "a superb job," he makes no overblown claims that they are wiping out the enormous illegal traffic. "They're making a dent," he says. A short drive from Habicht's office, at the unassuming headquarters of TRAFFIC (U.S.A.) on Washington's Connecticut Avenue, Ginette Hemley offers an even less upbeat assessment. Hemley is assistant director of TRAFFIC (U.S.A.), part of the international TRAFFIC network that monitors trade in wild animals and plants and the products made from them. "Fish and Wildlife is doing a pretty good job with what it has, but it just doesn't have enough," Hemley says. "Historically, the United States has had a good record in protecting wildlife. But with all the cutbacks in the Reagan administration, wildlife — not being a priority — gets the short end of the stick. There's a need, for example, for an increase in Fish and Wildlife inspectors. The trade in wildlife is increasing."

Hemley describes as "tremendous" the profits to be made on illegal wildlife. "Take a parrot smuggled out of, say, Bolivia," she says. "A native catches the parrot and sells it to a river trader for the equivalent of a nickel or a dime. The trader goes downriver and sells the parrot to an exporter for fifty dollars. The exporter sells it in La Paz, Bolivia, to a Miami importer for a hundred dollars. The importer flies it (illegally) into Miami. He sells the parrot wholesale for, say, a thousand dollars. A pet store then buys it and resells it for two thousand dollars. Some macaws go for five thousand or more. And it all started with the native who got a nickel or dime."

What more can be done to combat the illegal wildlife trade? "We're

trying to get people not to create a demand for endangered species," Hemley says. "Before people buy a parrot, for instance, they should know a little more about where it came from. The same goes for a pair of crocodile shoes." But getting

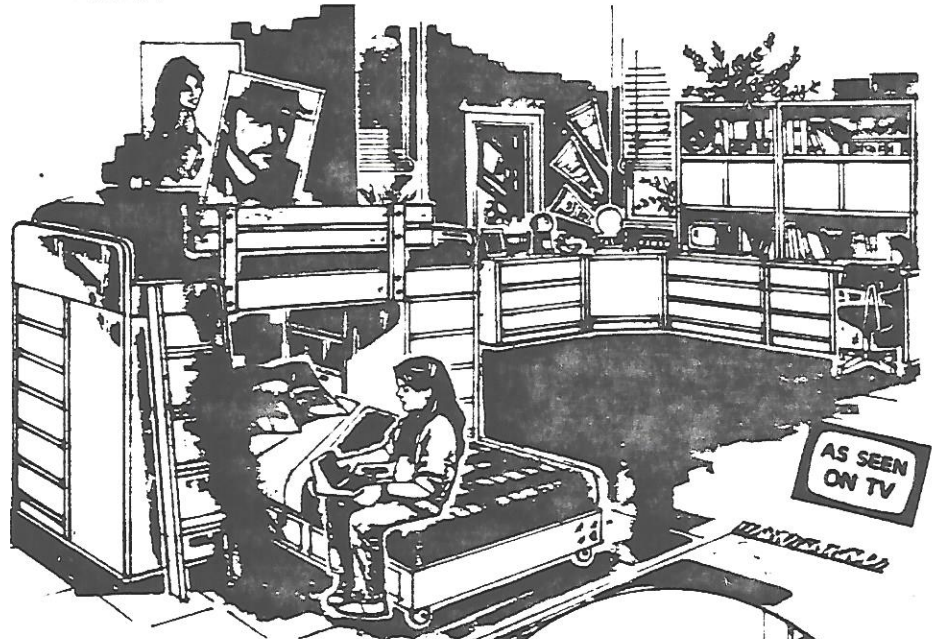
that message across to the public — in other countries as well as the United States — is not nearly so easy as it may sound. Tom Milliken, who heads the TRAFFIC office in Japan, discovered that one day while walking down a Tokyo street.

He spied a woman wearing a spotted-cat coat and accosted her.

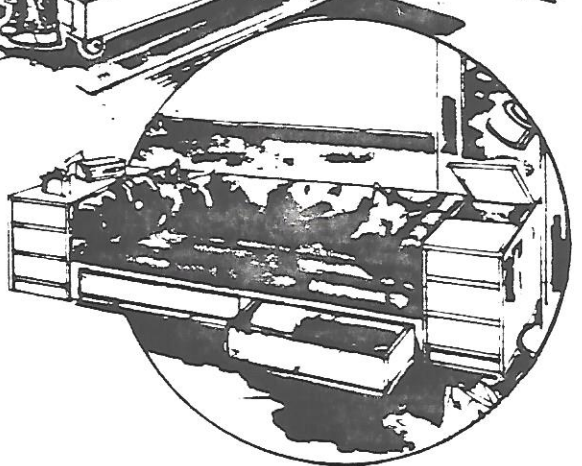
"Do you know that coat is made from an endangered species?" he asked.

"Yes," the woman replied. "And I'm taking very good care of it." ☺

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