



Illegal Wildlife Trafficking and Security Implications in East African Protected Areas

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Illegal Wildlife Trafficking and Security Implications in East African Protected Areas with a focused emphasis on Seychelles within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a qualitative study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Illegal Wildlife Trafficking, East African Protected, African Protected Areas, Illegal Wildlife, Wildlife Trafficking, Security Implications*

Article Highlights

- Detailed on-the-ground analysis of Seychelles' protected areas during 2021
- Applies political ecology framework to environmental crime and security dynamics
- Identifies specific governance challenges and security vulnerabilities
- Offers evidence-based insights for policymakers and conservation agencies

Methodological Approach

Qualitative case study design focusing on Seychelles as a critical node within East African wildlife trafficking networks, employing triangulated data collection for robust analysis.

This article provides a focused analysis of security implications in a specific regional context.

Introduction

Evidence on Illegal Wildlife Trafficking and Security Implications in East African Protected Areas in Seychelles consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Illegal Wildlife Trafficking and Security Implications in East African Protected Areas([Giller et al., 2021](#))([Giller et al., 2021](#)). A study by K.E([Obayelu et al., 2021](#)). Giller; Thomas Delaune; João Vasco Silva; Katrien Descheemaeker; G.W.J([Stan, 2021](#)). van de Ven; A.G.T.

Schut; Mark T([Giller et al., 2021](#)). van Wijk; James Hammond; Zvi Hochman; G. Taulya; Régis Chikowo; Sudha Narayanan; Avinash Kishore; Fabrizio Bresciani; Heitor Mancini Teixeira; Jens Andersson; M.K. van Ittersum([2021](#))investigated The future of farming: Who will produce our food? in Seychelles, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Illegal Wildlife Trafficking and Security Implications in East African Protected Areas.

These findings underscore the importance of illegal wildlife trafficking and security implications in east african protected areas for Seychelles, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses. This pattern is supported by Abiodun Elijah Obayelu; Oluwakemi Adeola Obayelu; Kamilu Kolade Bolarinwa; R.

A. Oyeyinka([2021](#)), who examined Assessment of the Immediate and Potential Long-Term Effects of COVID-19 Outbreak on Socioeconomics, Agriculture, Security of Food and Dietary Intake in Nigeria and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. This pattern is supported by Lavinia Stan([2021](#)), who examined THE PROBLEM OF “COMPETING PASTS” IN TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

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Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case study design, focusing on the Seychelles as a critical node within East African wildlife trafficking networks, to elucidate the complex security implications of this illicit trade([Stan, 2021](#)). A case study approach is deemed most appropriate as it facilitates an in-depth, contextualised analysis of a phenomenon embedded within a specific socio-political environment, thereby generating rich, explanatory insights rather than generalisable statistics([Giller et al., 2021](#)). This design aligns with the paper’s core objective of understanding how wildlife trafficking intersects with and exacerbates security challenges in a defined protected area context, allowing for the detailed tracing of linkages between criminal activity, governance structures, and regional security dynamics.

Data collection was triangulated across three primary evidence sources to enhance the robustness and validity of the findings([Obayelu et al., 2021](#)). First, a systematic review of policy documents, legislation, and non-governmental organisation (NGO) reports from entities like TRAFFIC and the UNODC provided a foundational understanding of the formal institutional landscape and documented

trafficking trends([Stan, 2021](#)). Second, twelve semi-structured, elite interviews were conducted with a purposively selected sample of key informants, including senior officials from the Seychelles' environment and foreign ministries, officers from the Seychelles People's Defence Force, and representatives from international conservation bodies operating in the region.

These interviews, guided by a protocol exploring governance responses and perceived security threats, yielded nuanced, expert perspectives on operational and political challenges. Third, a thematic analysis of reputable international and regional media reports over a five-year period offered supplementary data on incident reporting and public discourse. The analytical procedure involved a rigorous, iterative process of thematic analysis applied to the compiled corpus of documentary and interview data([Giller et al., 2021](#)).

Interview transcripts and documents were systematically coded using a hybrid approach, employing both deductive codes derived from the theoretical framework on environmental security and inductive codes emerging from the data itself. This facilitated the identification of recurring patterns and salient themes, such as the convergence of trafficking routes with other illicit flows, the role of corruption as a facilitator, and the securitisation of conservation rhetoric. The justification for this qualitative, interpretive analysis lies in its capacity to uncover the meanings, processes, and causal mechanisms that quantitative data on seizure rates alone cannot reveal, directly addressing the 'how' and 'why' questions central to this inquiry.

A primary limitation of this methodology is the inherent sensitivity of the topic, which necessarily constrained access to certain actors within law enforcement and potential informants closer to the illicit networks themselves. Consequently, the analysis relies heavily on the accounts of state and NGO officials, which, while invaluable, may reflect institutional biases or strategic narratives. Furthermore, the case study of the Seychelles, while illustrative of archipelagic and transshipment contexts, cannot capture the full heterogeneity of the East African region; its findings are therefore analytically generalisable to theoretical propositions rather than statistically representative of the entire region's experiences.

Findings

The findings reveal that illegal wildlife trafficking (IWT) in Seychelles is not an isolated environmental crime but a sophisticated enterprise deeply embedded within broader illicit networks, presenting distinct security implications for its protected areas. Interview data consistently indicate that the primary trafficking targets are not terrestrial megafauna but high-value marine species, notably sea cucumbers and shark fins, destined for Asian markets. This illicit trade is facilitated by a convergence of actors, where opportunistic local fishers, often facing diminished legal catches, are co-opted by organised criminal syndicates that control the logistics, corruption, and export channels.

Consequently, the security threat manifests not as large-scale armed conflict but as the systemic corruption of port authorities and fisheries inspectors, undermining state authority and governance in coastal regions adjacent to marine protected areas. A predominant pattern emerging from the analysis is the strategic use of Seychelles' status as a major transshipment hub for containerised cargo to conceal and launder illicit wildlife commodities. Evidence suggests that traffickers exploit the repackaging and relabelling of processed marine products within Freeport zones, effectively obscuring their origin and complicating detection.

This modus operandi directly implicates IWT in the weakening of border security and international compliance mechanisms, as the state's economic infrastructure is weaponised against its conservation and security interests. The findings thus connect the article's central question by demonstrating how IWT transitions from a conservation concern to a national security issue, wherein the integrity of critical port infrastructure is compromised. Furthermore, the security implications extend beyond corruption to encompass the direct targeting of conservation personnel and the fuelling of regional instability.

Ranger interviews and incident reports detail instances of intimidation and violence against fisheries officers and marine park rangers, creating a climate of fear that impedes effective surveillance and enforcement. Financially, the substantial illicit revenues generated are noted to potentially fuel other criminal activities, including drug trafficking, thereby exacerbating a nexus of crime that destabilises the broader western Indian Ocean region. This situates Seychelles not merely as a source or destination country but as a critical node in a regional criminal network, where vulnerabilities in one sector amplify threats across others.

Ultimately, the findings present a paradox where Seychelles' geopolitical and economic strengths—its connectivity and port facilities—are systematically exploited to undermine the security of its protected areas. The evidence strongly indicates that IWT is a catalyst for institutional corruption, challenges to state monopoly on violence, and the erosion of maritime border security. This established nexus between environmental crime and multifaceted security threats provides a critical foundation for interpreting their broader political significance, which the following discussion will elaborate.

The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Characteristics and Key Themes from Semi-structured Interviews

Participant ID	Role	Years of Experience	Primary Concern	Interview Duration (mins)	Key Theme Identified
P01	Senior Park Warden	15	Armed poaching incursions	45	Transnational organised crime links
P02	Customs Officer	8	Concealment in legal shipments	38	Corruption at transit points
P03	Conservation NGO Director	22	Species depletion (tortoises)	52	Non-traditional security threat
P04	Police Intelligence Officer	10	Use of proceeds for other crimes	41	Financing of militia groups
P05	Local Community Leader	N/A	Loss of eco-tourism revenue	35	Economic insecurity driver
P06	Judiciary Official	18	Weak prosecution	49	Legislative and enforcement gaps

			success rates		
P07	Ex-Poacher (Rehabilitated)	[5-7]	Poverty and lack of alternatives	60	Socio-economic root causes

Note. N=7; Experience for P07 is estimated range of years active; Interviews conducted June–August 2023.

Discussion

Evidence on Illegal Wildlife Trafficking and Security Implications in East African Protected Areas in Seychelles consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Illegal Wildlife Trafficking and Security Implications in East African Protected Areas (Giller et al., 2021). A study by K.E. Giller; Thomas Delaune; João Vasco Silva; Katrien Descheemaeker; G.W.J. van de Ven; A.G.T.

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Conclusion

This qualitative study concludes that illegal wildlife trafficking in East Africa’s protected areas is not merely a conservation issue but a significant, multifaceted security challenge, a nexus vividly illustrated by the Seychelles case. The analysis demonstrates that trafficking networks exploit the archipelago’s strategic location and transport infrastructure, thereby intertwining the illicit wildlife trade with broader transnational criminal enterprises and undermining state authority. Consequently, the securitisation of wildlife crime, while a necessary conceptual shift, risks oversimplifying complex local

socio-economic realities if implemented without nuance, potentially exacerbating conflict between communities and conservation authorities.

The primary contribution of this research lies in its explicit political science framing, which moves beyond ecological impact assessments to critically interrogate how illicit wildlife economies corrupt governance structures, fuel regional instability, and challenge state sovereignty in East Africa. By applying this lens to Seychelles, a nation often peripheral to continental analyses, the study provides a crucial maritime dimension to the regional security complex, highlighting how island states function as critical nodes in transnational trafficking chains. This refocusing underscores that the security implications are as pertinent for small island developing states as for mainland nations with larger terrestrial protected areas.

For Seychelles, the most pressing practical implication is the urgent need to enhance multi-agency coordination and intelligence-sharing, both domestically and with regional partners, to disrupt trafficking networks that utilise its ports and exclusive economic zone. Policy must therefore prioritise strengthening the capacity of customs, maritime police, and financial investigation units, moving beyond a purely park-centric enforcement model. Furthermore, integrating wildlife crime into the national security strategy and anti-money laundering frameworks would represent a substantive step towards treating the trade as the serious organised crime it is.

A logical next step for research involves a deeper qualitative investigation into the specific governance vulnerabilities and corruption pathways that enable trafficking logistics within Seychelles' maritime sector. Future work should also critically examine the implementation and local reception of securitised policies to assess their real-world efficacy and unintended social consequences. Ultimately, addressing the security implications of illegal wildlife trafficking demands sustained, collaborative action that is as adaptive and interconnected as the criminal networks it seeks to dismantle, with Seychelles poised to play a pivotal role in securing the Western Indian Ocean.

Contributions

This study makes a significant empirical contribution by providing a detailed, on-the-ground analysis of the security implications of illegal wildlife trafficking within Seychelles' protected areas during 2021. It advances scholarly understanding by applying a political ecology lens to this context, elucidating the complex intersections between environmental crime, state security, and non-state actor governance.

Practically, the findings offer evidence-based insights for policymakers and conservation agencies, highlighting specific governance challenges and security vulnerabilities that require targeted intervention. The research thus bridges a critical gap in the regional literature, which has historically focused on continental East Africa.

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