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SENT TO LSU AGCENTER/LOUISIANA FOREST PRODUCTS DEVELOPMENT CENTER - FOREST SECTOR / FORESTY PRODUCTS INTEREST GROUP



(Having a number of guitars with rosewood fretboards, this story resonated with me-illegal logging remains a global scourge for so many species.)

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Not so rosy: time to halt trafficking of coveted tropical timber

The multipurpose rosewood tree is famed for its beautiful smelling and sturdy ruby-colored wood used in the manufacture of furniture, walking canes, boats, musical instruments, agricultural tools and religious artefacts.

The tree species, whose name is a generic one for several dark-red hardwood species found in tropical regions across the globe, fetches very high prices because it's strong, heavy, has a beautiful red hue and takes well to polishing.

Ironically, these properties which endear it to so many appear to be its Achilles heel. The tree which grows between three to four feet annually, and to a maximum height of about 100 feet, is on the verge of extinction in some parts of the world. It is also the world's most trafficked wildlife product with a trade value that's higher than elephant ivory, rhino horn and tiger parts combined.

Cognizant of this threat to biodiversity in 2013, delegates from 170 countries agreed to include over 40 rosewood species from various countries in the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species Appendix II](#), meaning that international trade in their timber would be more strictly regulated.

However, although many countries had laws protecting the biological genus known as *Dalbergia*, smuggling was causing so much deforestation that the Convention agreed, in December 2016, to protect every species of the tree.

From Guatemala to Madagascar to Thailand to Zambia, rosewoods have been targeted by timber traffickers who seek to profit especially from its growing demand in China.

"China imports large amounts of dark-red tropical hardwood species in the form of logs to make hongmu (literally, red wood) antique furniture. Used historically by the imperial elite, hongmu is now coveted by the rising middle class," said the Center for International Forestry Research in a May 2018 policy brief [titled *Mukula \(rosewood\) trade between China and Zambia*](#).



*The massive illegal harvesting of rosewood threatens vulnerable communities and some of the planet's rarest wildlife.
Photo by Wikimedia Commons.*

In Zambia, it is estimated that the annual harvesting, trade and export of local rosewood—locally known as mukula—could be at about 110,000 cubic metres, but the country loses about 3.2 million dollars in revenue from the trade. This is as a result of timber being exported as logs, rather than sawnwood, despite the government enacting export, production and transport bans, which have sometimes created a confusing and conflicting legal framework whose loopholes have been exploited by traffickers.

Other countries are also strengthening regional initiatives. In July 2019, Ghana hosted a regional meeting to address the threat to rosewood in Accra.

According to the most recent [assessment](#) by the Convention's Secretariat, in 2017 exports from Gambia, Ghana and Nigeria represented 85 per cent of the reported global trade in *Pterocarpus erinaceus* rosewood.

“An important characteristic of the rosewood market is the amount of money involved in this trade, which appears to be in the order of half a billion dollars per year in recent years, as highlighted in the rosewood chapter of this report. This is worth far more than most other illegal wildlife markets, and with the increase in revenues comes a greater propensity from illegal loggers and traders to use violence to protect them,” says the Secretariat in the assessment, while urging constant monitoring of large timber markets in each of the sub-region's countries.



Workers concealing illegally logged rosewood in Madagascar at a beach near Cap Est, adjacent to Masoala National Park. Photo by Wikimedia Commons.

Tim Christophersen, UN Environment Programme’s Head of Freshwater, Land and Climate Branch, said, “Degradation and deforestation of the world’s tropical forests are cumulatively responsible for about 11 per cent of net global carbon emissions. Tackling the destruction of tropical forests, which host rosewoods among other trees, plays a crucial role in combating wildlife crime, preventing conflict over access and use of natural resources as well as combating climate change.”

Forests cover a total of 4 billion hectares worldwide, equivalent to 31 per cent of the total land area. Although this figure may seem high, the world’s forests are disappearing fast. Between 1990 and 2000 there was a net loss of 8.3 million hectares per year, and the following decade, up to 2010, the net loss was estimated at 6.2 million hectares per year. Although the rate of loss has slowed, it remains very high, with the vast majority occurring in tropical regions.

UN Environment collaborates with key partners including the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, to assess global and regional environmental threats caused by the illegal trade in wildlife and timber.

Through its [Wild for Life](#) campaign, it aims to prevent and reduce demand for illegally traded and endangered wildlife products, which includes plant and forest species.

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