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# Book review: The Geography of Environmental Crime: Conservation, wildlife crime and environmental activism

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The Geography of Environmental Crime:  
conservation, wildlife crime and environmental activism

Gary R. Potter, Angus Nurse and Matthew Hall (eds.)

Reviewed by Jason Lowther

Criminological interest in environmental crimes and the resultant law and management is a well-trodden contemporary path. A coherent and multi-layered *green criminology* has been in evolution for at least two decades, and is a well-resourced subset of the wider discipline. This title makes a useful contribution, providing a thematically consistent examination of some key dimensions of wildlife and other environmental crime. The book is set out over nine chapters. The first, jointly written by the editors, provides an overview of the common threads that link the collection of chapters. In essence it is a navigational tool which presents the reader with a useful introductory platform with which to frame the following chapters. There are three distinct parts to the edited collection. The first provides three perspectives on conservation crimes; the second, three investigations of issues surrounding wildlife crime prevention and detection; and the third is comprised of two chapters which provide critical perspectives on policy and enforcement. Taken as a whole the book provides a good jump-off point into the green criminological approaches deployed to the appreciation and understanding of wildlife crimes and the factors involved in constructing responses to them. To be clear to the readership of an ostensibly law journal, this is not a 'law' book: it does not purport to be. It provides little by way of a traditional legal analysis of the issues presented and there is not an abundance of systematic examination of the detail of the legal frameworks applicable to the subject matters presented. That is not to detract in any way, though, from the obvious craft, scholarship and broad range of illuminating perspectives on the subject matters that are presented within.

First, on perspectives: Saif and MacMillan's chapter on tiger poaching and related offences in the Sundarbans of Bangladesh showcases research focused on the motivations, which are often although by no means exclusively market-driven, behind the various activities which pose an ongoing threat to an already critically endangered population. It concludes that law enforcement by itself is unlikely to provide the most effective long-term solution and that greater community engagement and longer-term conservation planning are essential, something returned to in other contributions. In the following chapter, Ciannchi explores the extent to which a reverence for the natural world – at times appearing close to the spiritual – is a key and often personally transformative motivation behind radical environmental activism. Development of relationships of agency, and moving beyond simple anthropocentrism locates the natural world as integral to the activist. The author explores these and related concepts in two distinct and absorbing contexts, activists opposing the clear-felling of ancient Tasmanian forests and anti-whaling activists working with the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society in the Southern Ocean.

Neatly following on from this chapter and concluding this first part, the 'otherness' of the environmental activist, framed in terms of a constructed 'Green Scare', is considered by Sauvart *et al.* The extent of the powers imbalances inherent in corporate interests and those in opposition when those interests impinge on the natural environment lies at the heart of the chapter. The chapter considers the extent of the broad spectrum of environmental activism, from the more genteel legal protest to more radical violent direct action. At that more extreme end of the spectrum there is an engaging consideration of so-called eco-terrorism with a focus on the Earth Liberation Front, the Unabomber and specific actions. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the extent to which state responses are proportionate, who the ultimate beneficiaries might be and wider impacts upon a raft of civil and political rights.

The second part of the book is focused on the prevention and detection of crime. Hinsey *et al.*'s contribution focuses on the use of a variety of technological methods to improve the traceability of specimens of wild fauna and flora (or their components or derivatives). This is an important and rapidly moving area, which had significant shadow-market implications where illegal wild-sourced material may be laundered into legitimate markets – something that has tainted ivory and other high profile markets in endangered or otherwise protected species for some years. The conclusion that traceability is an important regulatory and enforcement tool is powerfully articulated and well-grounded in the relevant technologies. Some highly disturbing ethical conservation dilemmas are presented in the chapter by McClanahan and Wall relating to the, literally, existential struggle between elephant poachers and armed militias, euphemistically presenting as park rangers or security consultants, operating a *de facto* shoot-to-kill policy. The chapter makes reference to the concept of so-called 'fortress conservation' - essentially a geographically designated and protected physical space where conservation rules apply and which may result in both the enclosure of indigenous lands and/or the exclusion of indigenous people from these areas. It further expands on the analysis to consider a further typology: that of warrior conservation. The authors chart the involvement of groups such as the International Anti-Poaching Foundation (IAPF) and Veterans Empowered to Protect African Wildlife (VETPAW). A definite tension with contemporary post-colonial thinking is discernible in the means by which these organisations are constituted and operated, their rules of engagement and the sense that they represent a militarised means by which to approach conservation which sits uneasily with more inclusive conservation methodologies.

The final contribution in this part is the chapter by Reuter and Bisschop which provides an insight into rhinoceros poaching, and a specific initiative in the guise of the Balule Nature reserve and the conservation model which has grown from it. It reflects concerns around the displacement of poaching effort when an area has been more heavily 'policed', for want of a better expression. The model is described as a public-private partnership engaging numerous stakeholders working towards the common aim of reducing poaching impact on black rhino populations. Through the creation of value in the rhino beyond the horn, a sense of community ownership of the wildlife resource is generated, bringing with it increased opportunities for the communities, and an avoidance of the more aggressive militarised solutions described in the chapter previously.

The final section presents two case studies to reflect critical perspectives on policy and enforcement. The situations in two Scandinavian countries Finland and Sweden, are considered by Sahramäki and Rytterstedt respectively. The former is concerned with construction and subsequent enforcement of environmental crime in Finland. It charts a broad spectrum of offences and provides some statistical

analysis over a set period of time. The author presents a series of professional bodies' framing of environmental crimes and the motivating factors that shape their enforcement responses. Familiar considerations of economic value are brought to bear, with agencies, as has been noted in many jurisdictions, treating environmental crime as somewhat 'hidden', in terms of its reporting, which potentially enables enforcement gaps. The final chapter reflects research undertaken to appreciate the motives of illegal hunting in a specific geographical area. The author charts how the hunters break down their own moral barriers to their conduct through a process of neutralization, and contains some compelling interview materials as to how that process is driven.

In terms of readership, alongside the obvious criminological market this edited collection would be of interest principally to academic environmental lawyers, particularly those with an interest in broader theoretical constructs of environmental 'problems' and responses to them, as well as those with cross-disciplinary interests. It will also be useful to students of criminology at various stages of study as it provides an excellent resource-base. In framing perspectives, and considering methodologies around prevention and detection of, specifically, wildlife crimes the book provides a welcome and insightful addition to the range of critical materials available.