On 15 April 2022 in Portland, Oregon, Northumbria University, in partnership with [Global Law Alliance for Animals and the Environment (GLA)](https://law.lclark.edu/clinics/global-law-alliance-for-animals-and-the-environment/) and the [Center for Animal Law Studies (CALS),](https://law.lclark.edu/centers/animal_law_studies/) hosted a workshop about the current state of knowledge regarding wildlife protection in the law from a global perspective. The workshop was an in-person event with 20 people convening at Lewis & Clark Law School.

 The global wildlife trade (which includes all fauna and flora) has been drawing more attention for several years and was thrust further into the international discourse because of the corona virus pandemic. Debates are ongoing as to how to reform/strengthen the current international legal framework, to mitigate the risks connected with the legal trade and effectively tackle the illegal dimension. The UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded [Professor Tanya Wyatt](https://researchportal.northumbria.ac.uk/en/persons/tanya-wyatt) of Northumbria University to research the [legal implementation of and compliance with](http://drtwyatt.weebly.com/cites-implementation-and-compliance.html) the Convention on the International trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES - the main global instrument for regulating wildlife trade). This workshop is one of four funded by AHRC ‘Follow on Funding’ to share the findings of the original research, but also to explore in more depth how wildlife can better be protected[[1]](#footnote-1).

 The first part of the workshop featured six speakers presenting how wildlife is defined in the law and the implications of how the law is written, drawing on examples from national implementation of CITES, specific countries, and rights of nature approaches to wildlife protection. The summaries of these talks can be found at the [CALS website](https://law.lclark.edu/live/news/48696-innovative-workshop-examines-how-to-improve). The workshop’s second part consisted of small group discussions. In particular, one group considered:

**What are the barriers to all wildlife being legally recognised?**

There are numerous barriers that keep all wildlife from being protected under the law. Workshop participants thought perhaps, the most difficult to overcome and the most prominent barrier is that many species of wildlife are commercially valuable to industry. The economic value of wildlife takes priority over their protection, thus wildlife who are financially valuable are less likely to be legally protected. Instead, the wildlife will continue to be exploited regardless of their survival status. The Blue Fin Tuna and timber species were brought up as examples. Linked to this, was the suggestion that people are unwillingly to stop exploiting wildlife for certain purposes regardless of wildlife’s economic value. For example, participants discussed how wildlife as food, medicine, or laboratory testing are likely to continue even if a species were to become endangered.

Other barriers centred on people’s views of certain wildlife. Humans focus on and prioritise rare and/or scarce species for legislative protection even though there are many species who we know very little about and may well need to be further researched and granted legal protection. Other wildlife are often seen as a nuisance, so in cases of human-wildlife conflict, people may argue for legal protection to be taken away from certain species (i.e., elephants, lions).

Additional barriers exist within the way many legal systems operate and are structured. In many countries wildlife will not have Constitutional standing and it may be unclear how or impossible for a person to be granted standing on behalf of wildlife. When wildlife are victims of harms and crimes it may also be unclear what the remedy for them would be in a lawsuit. Finally, participants noted that legal systems are often resistant to change or slow to adapt, so progress for wildlife protection and representation are difficult to achieve.

These are just some of the barriers that keep all wildlife from being protected by the law. And there are many more discussions to be had about how to improve legal systems and what other ways in addition to the law can be improved to better protect wildlife and the planet.

Visit the [British Society of Criminology’s Green Criminology Research Network’s YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/user/ESRCGreenCrime) Channel for a short video about the workshop as well as other videos from the other workshops.

1. The other discussions are: ‘Plants and the Law’ in Cambridge, UK in partnership with TRAFFIC on 17 May 2022; ‘A Discussion of Tackling Illicit Wildlife Trafficking through an Additional Protocol to the UN Convention on Transnational Organised Crime’ in Vienna, Austria, in partnership with the [Global Initiative to End Wildlife Crime](https://endwildlifecrime.org/) (EWC), and the [Global Initiative against Transnational Organised Crime](https://globalinitiative.net/) (GI-TOC) on 24 February 2022, and ‘Wildlife Trade and Public Health’ online in partnership with the Wildlife Conservation Society 25 May 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)