

2014 *What Matters?* Competition

YEAR 5/6 CATEGORY WINNER

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Animal Smuggling: It's Wrong

Argentinian X-ray technicians got a nasty shock when the suitcase of Karel Abelovsky started to shake violently. The airport workers were even more disturbed when they discovered 250 rare and endangered snakes stuffed into plastic tubes, CD holders and socks inside the suitcase. Unfortunately, almost half of these snakes were dead from lack of oxygen and dehydration. This is a classic example of the illegal trade of animal smuggling. Even today many animals are stolen from their natural habitats and shipped to other places under the most barbaric conditions to be sold as exotic pets, or to be butchered to make into medicines, clothing, interior decorations and even food delicacies.

Animal smuggling is inhumane and also fatal to animals. Often, smugglers bound small exotic animals such as snakes, lizards, turtles and birds using tape and shove them into luggage or even the insides of their clothes while they pass border security. Larger animals are usually locked up in cages and shipped in illegal cargo planes or ships. Under these appalling conditions, many of these animals die from starvation, dehydration and heat stroke, to name a few. According to the German customs agency, "the rate of animal mortality is about 80 to 90 percent in animal smuggling". The rest of the 10 to 20 percent of animals, which survive, go through a harrowing ordeal which can result in mental traumas. Some of them are slaughtered to be made into clothing, medicines, interior decorations and food delicacies. These highly expensive luxuries are expendable, and many medicines which use animal parts are not scientifically proven to work. The Black Rhino is one example. So many Black Rhinos have been hunted down for their special horn, which is used in dubious medicines, and they are now critically endangered. As we all know, animals are crucial to the ecosystems of our planet. The lives of entire species being wiped out are not sacrificeable, unlike the luxuries made from these animals. What is unmoral and utterly wrong about smuggling is that it targets already endangered species, as well as causing other species to become endangered.

Animal smuggling does not only harm animals but also endangers a human being's life. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a smuggled crocodile broke free on a flight and caused the small plane to unbalance and crash, killing the 17 people on board. A 600 pond Bengal tiger was smuggled from its habitat in the most repulsive conditions, mentally scarring it. The Bengal tiger was then bought and raised as an exotic pet. One day, the Bengal tiger suddenly went psychopathic and mauled its guardian and his grandson to death. The tiger had to be put down by veterinarians. Smuggled animals can also spread deadly diseases. Recently, there had been several monkey pox outbreaks in Midwestern America. All of them had been traced to an illegally smuggled Gambian rat in an animal smuggler's shed in Illinois, America.

The trade of animal smuggling is barbaric and harmful to animals and human beings. Although the United Nations legislated CITE (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild

Fauna and Flora), the animal smuggling trade is booming in South America, Africa, Asia and even Australia. We need stricter laws on animal smuggling internationally, and should apply heavy penalties to the smugglers. The valiant efforts of the RSPCA and PETA are not enough. We need everyone on board to tackle this menace to animals.