

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

How the war has changed Russia

GREEN THINK TANK, JUNE 2024

Analytical Review, June 2024

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Assessment of Changes during 2022 — early 2024

Published by: **Green Think Tank**

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The Green Think Tank is a community of experts dedicated to analyzing the current situation in Russia and designing sustainable reforms for the future
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Notes on Authorship and Accessibility

Since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian army, many Russian environmental experts have been publishing under pseudonyms to hide their identities. For those working in Russia, this helps to reduce the risk of repressions by Russian security services and harassment by government-controlled media and public associations while allowing them to continue participating in important discussions and sharing expert opinions. You can contact them via our email address peresborka@proton.me.

In this analytical review, the authors refer to government data sources. Many of these sources are not accessible to users with Internet providers outside Russia. To access these sources, you may need to use a VPN service that connects through Russia. Please ensure that the use of VPNs complies with the legal requirements in your country.

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Summary

The article analyzes the situation with the development or degradation of legislation regulating wildlife conservation, trends in the hunting of marine mammals, and the dynamics of cross-border trade in wild animals that have occurred since the outbreak of hostilities on February 24, 2022.

According to experts on nature conservation, the situation with wild animals and protected areas, where they live and should be protected, is currently developing according to a negative scenario, as the Russian authorities and industry are interested in developing transport, industrial and tourist projects in protected areas. The “expulsion” of international environmental organizations from Russia and the declaration of many Russian NGOs opposing the exploitation of nature as “foreign agents”, has an extremely negative impact on the protection of both protected areas and wild animals. Adopted and planned amendments to environmental legislation that facilitate or cancel environmental assessments, permit logging, construction of roads, power lines, tourism infrastructure, oil and gas transport infrastructure in protected areas lead to a reduction in their area, fragmentation of landscapes and increased disturbance for wild animals. In addition, new roads make protected areas more accessible to poachers.

In relation to the protection of wild animals, the most powerful of the “dark forces” is the lobby of high-ranking hunters, who have already achieved changes allowing enclosure hunting and trophy hunting. Recently, their efforts have been focused on seizing the areas they deem the most valuable from protected areas for the organization of hunting grounds.

The authorities are also encouraging the hunting of marine mammals by indigenous peoples. A significant portion of the produce goes for dog food and to fur farms. Paradoxically, the interests of Russian officials align here with the International Whaling Commission, which issues permits (within the quota for indigenous peoples) for the annual catch of 140 gray and bowhead whales which are listed in the Red Book.

At the same time, animal protection organizations and activists are less subject to pressure from the authorities. The movement to protect wild animals in aquariums and circuses is supported by a number of Russian political parties and deputies. This appears to be the only area in which positive change can be expected in the coming years. However, it is unknown how long this trend will last. In February 2024, a deputy from the “A Just Russia” political party, Yevgeny Dunayev, [proposed declaring](#) all animal protection organizations foreign agents.

Introduction

Laws regulating wildlife conservation

Currently, wildlife conservation issues are regulated by the laws “On Environmental Protection”, “On the Animal World”, “On Hunting”, “On Fishing and Conservation of Aquatic Biological Resources”, as well as international legal acts to which Russia has previously acceded. It is also necessary to add to this list the law “On Specially Protected Natural Areas”, which regulates the protection regime in wildlife habitats.

The Russian Federation Federal Law “On the Animal World” determines that the animal world is the property of the peoples of the Russian Federation, an integral element of the natural environment and biological diversity of the Earth, a renewable natural resource, an important regulating and stabilizing component of the biosphere, fully protected and rationally used to meet the spiritual and material needs of the citizens of Russia.

Main threats to wild animals

[A report from WWF suggests](#) that the main threats to the planet’s biodiversity are agriculture, hunting, deforestation, pollution, invasive species, and climate change. At the moment, the greatest negative impact comes from land use that destroys the natural habitats of animal and plant species on land and in water. However, unless global warming is contained to 1.5°C, climate change will be the leading cause of biodiversity loss.

According to WWF, the main global threats to species are directly related to human activities. The most common reason for their decline is the loss and degradation of animal habitats, as well as overexploitation of species (unsustainable fishing, hunting and poaching), pollution, alien species and diseases, and climate change.

According to experts who previously worked in the Russian branches of Greenpeace and WWF, the main threat to wild animals in Russia is the reduction and fragmentation of habitats, in particular, the degradation and weakening of the protection regime of protected areas, to a lesser extent, poaching and uncontrolled fishing and related trade in wild animals and their derivatives, catching and trapping of animals for entertainment establishments, as well as diseases.



Sea lions. Kamchatka coast, 2023 / Photographer Arthur Bakuriani

Laws And Bills

Bills and legislative initiatives aimed at reinforcing the protection and conservation of wildlife

In late 2018, the Federal Law “On the Responsible Treatment of Animals” was adopted, which had been under development for 8 years. A special law that regulates the relationship between humans and animals, and enshrines at the federal level the need for a humane and responsible attitude towards them as sentient beings, appeared in Russia for the first time, and this is a big step in the legal development of our country. However, despite many years of discussion of the law, it still causes some criticism from experts and animal rights activists.

One of the significant points of criticism that concerns the humane treatment of wild animals is that [the provisions of this Federal Law](#) are primarily aimed at protecting domestic animals, and do not apply in the fields of protection and use of wildlife, fishing and conservation of aquatic biological resources, aquaculture (fish farming), hunting and conservation of hunting resources, even though there are a large number of cases of cruelty to animals in these areas.

As noted [on the website of the State Duma](#), “at the federal level there is only one criminal law norm aimed at combating cruelty to animals — Article 245 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, ... the problem of the low efficiency of the fight against animal abusers lies not so much in the lack of existing legislative instruments, as in the unwillingness of law enforcement agencies to fully and properly investigate cases of cruel treatment of animals and to convict those who have committed such crimes, sometimes this unwillingness leads to simple inaction on the part of law enforcement officers.”

BAN ON THE CAPTURE OF MARINE MAMMALS FOR CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES

On June 20, 2023, the State Duma adopted a law prohibiting the capture of marine mammals for educational, cultural and educational purposes. It was for these purposes that in the years 2010-2020s, orcas, beluga whales, dolphins, walruses and other pinnipeds were being caught for Russian and foreign dolphinariums and oceanariums.

The public and scientists actively sought the adoption of such a ban after the scandal with the infamous “whale prison”, which in 2018 housed 90 beluga whales and 11 orcas caught in the Sea of Okhotsk and intended for sale to Chinese aquariums. The bill banning such capture was introduced to the State Duma in December 2021; it was supported by the Ministry of Natural Resources (Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources) and [opposed by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Culture](#). Prior to this, in 2021, the State Duma adopted a bill that prohibits industrial and coastal whaling, but [experts called it an imitation](#), since these types of whaling ceased in the late 80s when the country joined the international moratorium within the International Whaling Commission.

As experts note, the significant advantages of the adopted version of the bill are the inclusion of a ban on capture not only for cultural, but also for educational purposes, as well as the expansion of the ban to all marine mammals.

THE DOWNSIDE, AND A SERIOUS ONE, IS THE REMAINING LOOPHOLE — THE POSSIBILITY OF CAPTURE AUTHORIZED BY THE GOVERNMENT COMMISSION.

In mid-April 2024, activists of the coalition “Freedom for Orcas and Beluga Whales” [spread information](#) that Federal Agency for Fisheries (Rosrybolovstvo) started public discussions on the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) of aquatic bioresources for 2025 in the Far East and included the catch of 14 orcas and 20 beluga whales in the Sea of Okhotsk. The coalition called on all those concerned to write letters of protest. The very next day, [officials announced](#) that whales would not be caught in the Sea of Okhotsk in 2025 and that the information posted about this was due to a technical error. The activists believe that the document, which carefully justified the number of whales proposed to be caught, could not have been prepared and published on the Internet by mistake.

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RULES ON ANIMAL WATCHING (KAMCHATKA)

In 2022, the Ministry of Natural Resources of the Kamchatka Krai, together with public organizations, developed a draft decree regulating the rules for observation of terrestrial animals, which continue to be fed and disturbed, and some tour operators include feeding Arctic ground squirrels as part of their program for visiting natural areas.

According to the document [draft](#), in order not to disturb the animals it will be prohibited to observe small animals (hare, ground squirrel, squirrel, muskrat, etc.) from a distance closer than 20 meters. Medium-sized animals (wolf, fox, lynx, wolverine) can be observed from a distance of at least 50 meters, and large animals (bear, moose, snow sheep) from at least 200 meters. The rules prohibit feeding wild animals, getting in contact with them, throwing any objects at them, as well as attracting their attention in any way. It is also stipulated that it is forbidden to pursue animals, including using drones. The rules note that filming animals from a drone is permitted from a distance of no closer than 200 meters. The rules [prohibit](#) recreational feeding of wild animals by amateur travelers and tourists in all categories of habitats.



Orca, Kamchatka coast, 2023 /
Photographer Arthur Bakuriani

BAN ON THE USE OF ANIMALS IN CIRCUSES

In the fall of 2023, State Duma deputies put forward a [bill](#) proposing to ban the activities of circuses involving animals in Russia. The main purpose of this bill is to protect the life and welfare of animals used in circus performances.

ACCORDING TO THE [EXPLANATORY NOTE](#) TO THE BILL, ITS RELEVANCE IS DUE TO THE **INCREASED CASES OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS IN CIRCUSES**.

During an inspection by the prosecutor's office in February 2022, 116 cases of illegal use of animals and 48 cases of cruelty to them were identified. It is noted that circuses that use animals often do not ensure their humane treatment and proper level of care, which leads to their physical and psychological problems, increased aggression and suffering. The use of wild animals in circuses involves the forcible removal of them from their natural habitat and deprivation of their freedom. Effectively, the animal is doomed to constant psychological and physical suffering for the rest of its life for its participation in circus performances. Scientific research shows that circus animals are subject to chronic stress and often suffer from injuries and illnesses.

The initiative enjoys great public support;

A 2019 RPORC (RUSSIAN PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH CENTER) [STUDY](#) SHOWED THAT **41% OF RUSSIANS ARE AGAINST PERFORMANCES WITH ANIMALS IN CIRCUSES**, AND **THE YOUNGER** THE RESPONDENTS, THE MORE OFTEN THEY **SPEAK CRITICALLY** OF SUCH PERFORMANCES.

[The bill was supported](#) by many public organizations: Delfa, Orcinus, Lynx Patrol, Voices for Animals, Zoo Patrol and others. At the same time, experts note the insufficient quality of the bill and assume that at some point it will be reduced to a ban on the use of wild animals in circuses.

ANIMAL RIGHTS COMMISSIONER

In November 2023, a bill [was introduced](#) proposing to elect an animal rights commissioner from the Public Chamber of Russia. The explanatory note to the document states that today the issues of responsible treatment of animals are dealt with by various federal departments and this leads to a blurring of responsibility when exercising state control over compliance with the legal requirements for the responsible treatment of animals and their protection from cruelty. The authors of the initiative believe that additional protection of animals in the person of an ombudsman for animal rights will increase the effectiveness of such protection and the level of humanity in society. At the beginning of 2024, the conclusion of the State Duma's Legal Directorate was published, which noted that this initiative "is not fully consistent with the goals and objectives of the Public Chamber." It seems that this conclusion is not prohibitive, but rather advisory. With appropriate elaboration of the legislative initiative and the introduction of a number of changes to Federal laws, the bill may be adopted.

THE CONCEPT OF RESPONSIBLE TREATMENT OF ANIMALS

In the fall of 2023, it [was announced](#) that the development of a concept on responsible treatment of animals would begin, which would describe everything related to interaction with the animal world (from stray and domestic animals to farm and wild animals), that is not affected by a relevant law.



A sea lion and a diver. Kamchatka coast, 2023 / Photographer Arthur Bakuriani

Bills and legislative initiatives undermining wildlife conservation

The weakening of the regime of wildlife protection began before 2022, so this section also provides data for 2 years (2020-2021) preceding the start of military action.

ABOLITION OF MARINE MAMMAL PROTECTION ZONES (2020-2021)

In 2020, [the previously existing Rules](#) for the Protection and Hunting of Marine Mammals were abolished. These rules, among other things, regulated the protection of habitat, breeding grounds and migration routes, the prevention of the death of marine mammals caused by marine traffic, the provision of assistance to marine mammals in the event of natural disasters and other threats, the establishment of specially protected territories and water areas. In addition, certain activities were prohibited in the zones of protection — passage of ships closer than a certain distance, signaling, helicopter flights below a certain altitude, etc.

Over time, the hunting of marine mammals ceased, these animals became of no interest to the Federal Agency for Fisheries (Rosrybolovstvo), and permits were no longer issued for their hunting (with the exception of indigenous peoples). As a result, Rosrybolovstvo proposed to cancel the Rules, which was done in 2020.

The reason for the cancellation, [according to representatives of the fishing industry](#), was that the Rules established the obligation to notify the fishery authorities about crossing the boundaries of prohibited zones, prohibited economic activity, and did not allow fishermen to transship their catch in such zones.

At the same time, while restrictions on fishing in marine mammal protection zones remained in the fishing rules, other issues (marine traffic, refueling of vessels, signals, helicopter flights, visits by people) fell out of the legal field.

NEITHER ROSRYBOLOVSTVO NOR THE MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES WANT TO DEAL WITH **MARINE MAMMALS.**

For Rosrybolovstvo, it is because they are not commercial species, and for the Ministry of Natural Resources, because aquatic biological resources, according to the current legislation, fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture, to which Rosrybolovstvo is subordinate. None of these agencies monitor these animals. Occasional work on studying the current state of marine mammals is carried out by the Russian Academy of Sciences and the [Marine Mammal Council](#) (a public organization).

A solution to the problem of recreating “safety zones” and carrying out environmental monitoring of marine mammals could be to transfer them from the sphere of responsibility of Rosrybolovstvo (Ministry of Agriculture) to Rosprirodnadzor (Ministry of Natural Resources). The (remaining) few representatives of the environmental community are currently working on this issue (spring 2024).

ENCLOSURE HUNTING (2020-2021)

In early 2020, amendments to the laws “On Hunting” and “On the Animal World” were [adopted](#), legalizing the so-called “enclosure hunting”. Until this moment, only the keeping and breeding of hunting resources (this is how wild animals are called in the law) were allowed in semi-free conditions and artificially created habitats. The authors of the bill introduced a new article, according to which amateur and sport hunting will be allowed on hunting resources kept in semi-free conditions and artificially created habitats (enclosures). The catch limit and quotas, as well as seasonal restrictions, will not [apply](#) to such animals.

[According to](#) the new law, the minimum area of enclosure hunting grounds is 50 hectares, and therefore it has been [suggested](#) that amendments to the laws could be used to seize valuable forest areas for subsequent construction or creation of tourism infrastructure. The law was passed despite the resistance of the public, who [believe](#) that the main and only purpose of enclosure hunting is entertainment through the killing of animals that are in a restricted area and have no opportunity to escape. About 100 deputies from three opposition factions also [opposed](#) the bill. The [petition](#) against enclosure hunting has collected half a million signatures; scientists and even representatives of the hunting community [have spoken](#) against the bill.

TROPHY HUNTING (2020-2021)

Since August 2021, the federal laws “On the Animal World” and “On Hunting” [have come](#) into force in Russia. They [allow](#) the hunting of rare animals in “exceptional cases.” Hunting is permitted for monitoring Red Book animals, regulating their numbers, protecting public health, eliminating threats to human life, protecting livestock and other domestic animals from mass diseases, and supporting the traditional way of life of the indigenous peoples of

Russia. However, Greenpeace experts believe that the amendments legalize trophy hunting, and [suggest](#) that the hunting lobby in the Duma prompted these amendments in order to be able to periodically, under the guise of hunting for scientific purposes for example, hunt Red Book animals.

THE NEW LAW EFFECTIVELY LIFTS THE **BAN** ON KILLING RED BOOK ANIMALS.

WINTER BEAR HUNTING (2022-2023)

In July 2023, the Ministry of Natural Resources introduced a [bill](#) proposing to change the hunting dates. In particular, if previously it was permitted to hunt bears from August 1 to December 31, now the season is allowed to be opened on July 1 and closed on February 28. If adopted, the law will come into force on September 1, 2024.

ATTEMPTS TO STIMULATE MARINE MAMMALS HUNTING (2022-2023)

For several years now, officials in Russia have been trying to significantly [expand](#) the marine mammal hunting industry. In the summer of 2023, a government decree [was published](#), according to which seal oil, walrus tusks, meat and skins, decorative bones and oil were included in the list of agricultural products. The authorities [are providing](#) additional state support to marine mammal hunters, [including](#) preferential taxation. According to [estimates](#) by VNIRO (Russian Federal Research Institute of Fisheries and Oceanography), marine mammal hunting can bring Russia 15–20 thousand tons of products annually. At present, the hunting is carried out mainly in Chukotka; up to 2.5 thousand tons of marine mammals are harvested annually.

According to [VNIRO](#) data, the TAC (Total Allowable Catch) and the actual catch of walrus and beluga whales in Chukotka were (in heads):

Table 1. TAC and the actual catch

YEAR	WALRUS		BELUGA	
	TAC	ACTUAL CATCH	TAC	ACTUAL CATCH
2020	1496	978	200	0
2021	1496	837	30	9
2022	1492	880	30	11
2023	1496	no data	30	no data

According to Rosrybolovstvo, 2,846 marine mammals were caught in 2020, and 2,171 in 2021. In addition to walrus and beluga whales, fur seals, spotted seals, ringed seals, as well as gray and bowhead whales are hunted. The hunting is carried out by indigenous minority peoples of the North (IMPN) – Chukchi, Koryaks, Eskimos, Aleuts. Indigenous people use [the products](#), among other things, [to feed dogs](#) and as food on fur farms.

In addition, in Chukotka, under the quota of the International Whaling Commission, indigenous people [are annually allowed](#) to catch 140 gray and several bowhead whales, which are included in the Red Book of Russia. In 2023, [127 gray whales](#) and [one bowhead](#) whale were caught, in 2022 – [122 gray whales](#), in 2021 – 127 gray whales, in 2020 – 136 gray whales.

In 2023, a plant for processing skins, fat and meat of marine mammals was built in Lorino, with a design [capacity](#) of 400 tons per year. It [is planned](#) that it will produce food for an arctic fox farm and minced meat for sale to the public. The food and minced meat will be made from processed marine mammals.

In the coastal villages of Chukotka, where marine mammal hunting is carried out, 1,762 sled dogs were registered as of April 2023. On average, one dog [eats](#) about 800 g of meat per day, that adds up to 1.4 tons of meat per day for all dogs in these villages, or more than 500 tons per year. Since the meat of marine mammals is significantly cheaper than the meat of domestic animals or salmon, it is mainly used to feed dogs. Thus, taking into account the annual catch of marine mammals in Chukotka [at 2.3 thousand tons](#),

MORE THAN 20% OF CAUGHT MARINE MAMMALS GO TO FEED DOGS.

In February 2024, the Governor of the Arkhangelsk Oblast [proposed](#) to resume the hunting of seals in the White Sea. In his opinion, “an overabundance of sea animals seriously affects fisheries resources. One seal eats 40 kg of fish a day, and their population numbers 1.5 million.” At the same time, the official cited the residents of the region, who, according to him, would like to hunt “sea animals.” However, scientists [believe](#) that the population data is seriously outdated and does not take into account the climate change that has occurred over the 20 years and the increased fishing in the White Sea, which have a serious negative impact on the state of the population.



Orca, Kamchatka coast, 2023 /
Photographer Arthur Bakuriani

Wildlife Trade

[According to WWF](#), wild animal populations have shrunk by 68% over the past 50 years due to human intervention in natural processes. The main causes of species extinction and declines in wild animal populations include the destruction and fragmentation of animal habitats as a result of agricultural and industrial development, logging and fires, accelerated rates of urbanization and climate change. But there is another no less important reason — animals are captured or killed to be sent to wildlife markets.

The global market for [legal](#) trade in wild animals is estimated at USD 300 billion, and [illegal](#) trade at USD 7-23 billion. An average of 25–30 thousand primates, 2–5 million birds, 10 million reptile skins, and several million frog legs [are involved](#) in just the legal trade each year. [According to the University of Sheffield](#), one in five land-based animal species is involved in the wildlife trade, with more than 5,500 of the known 31,500 species of land-based birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles traded.

SOME SCIENTISTS BELIEVE THAT THE WILDLIFE TRADE IS THE LEADING CAUSE OF SPECIES EXTINCTION IN THE MODERN WORLD.


Russia is an active participant in the international wildlife market. Growing global demand and the lack of necessary controls over the industry within the country stimulate both legal and illegal trade. According to a [WWF report](#), for the period from 2012 to 2018, there were attempts to illegally import more than 100 thousand live specimens and 12 million derivatives (parts of animal bodies), and to export about 3,000 live specimens, more than 22,700 derivatives.

For commercial turnover in the domestic and foreign markets, derivatives of the saiga, Amur tiger, as well as brown and Himalayan bear and musk deer are of [greatest interest](#). Orcas and beluga whales caught in Russian seas were in great demand in Chinese Ocean Theme Parks. In the Gulf countries, live falcons are bought for traditional hunting. The main markets for wildlife derivatives are China and Southeast Asian countries. In Southeast Asia, tiger and leopard body parts, frog fat, reindeer antlers, saiga antlers and musk deer musk are in demand. Bear paws are a New Year's delicacy.

One of the [most popular](#) export goods, along with musk deer musk and bear derivatives, are live birds of prey. Active demand is supported by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait. Experts [estimate](#) that every year about 400 gyrfalcons alone are exported from Russia. This demand is tens of times greater than the natural nesting potential of birds.

[According](#) to experts, in Kamchatka gyrfalcons have been completely exterminated for sale. Peregrine falcons and saker falcons are actively caught in the Altai-Sayan region. Large Falconiformes are in very high demand in the Middle East, where they are sought after for elite falconry.

An [analysis](#) of the online market for wild animals in Russia conducted by WWF in 2020 showed that 90% of all advertisements contain information about the purchase or sale of live exotic animals, mainly reptiles, birds and primates included in the CITES lists. Sellers claim that the animals were bred in captivity, but in most cases these are illegally imported animals taken from the wild.



[According](#) to the Main Directorate for Prevention of Smuggling, of the Federal Customs Service of Russia, the trafficking of wild animals in Russia, as a form of illegal trade, is comparable in scale to the illegal trafficking of cultural property, precious stones and metals, and is second only to smuggling of military products (data for the period up to February 24, 2022).

LEGAL CROSS-BORDER TRADE IN WILD ANIMALS IN 2018-2023 BETWEEN RUSSIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES

The trade analysis was carried out based on customs statistics [data](#) for 2018-2023*.

For adequate comparison, the time series includes, in addition to 2022 and 2023, two years that fell on the COVID-19 pandemic and preceded the outbreak of hostilities (2020 and 2021), and two pre-Covid years (2018 and 2019).

Table 2. Import of reptiles (Customs Code 01062) to Russia, number of declarations submitted (number of cargo places**)

COUNTRY \ YEAR	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
China	36 (380)	34 (387)	11 (180)	9 (168)	4 (50)	9 (181)
USA	8 (38)	16 (42)		1 (1)		
Singapore	7 (13)	2 (2)	2 (2)	8 (45)	4 (17)	
Indonesia	6 (12)	4 (4)		2 (3)		2 (3)
Canada	2 (4)	3 (5)				2 (7)
Madagascar	2 (2)			2 (2)		
Canada	2 (4)					
Vietnam	1 (4)					
Sudan	1 (5)			1 (1)		
Czech Republic	1 (2)	2 (4)	1 (7)			
El Salvador	1 (7)					
Togo		4 (10)	2 (4)	2 (4)		4 (11)
Thailand			6 (7)	5 (7)	4 (5)	1 (1)
Egypt				1 (1)		2 (18)
Ukraine				3 (3)		
Germany				7 (36)		3 (10)
Azerbaijan					4 (8)	
Ghana						2 (3)
Israel						1 (4)
TOTAL	67 (471)	65 (454)	22 (200)	41 (271)	16 (80)	25 (238)

* 2023 data are given for the first 9 months

** when importing reptiles, the number of cargo places is additionally indicated; that number is significantly different from the number of declarations for this category. A piece of cargo corresponds to one animal; one declaration can be submitted for several pieces of cargo.

Import of reptiles has decreased significantly (more than 2 times) with the beginning of the pandemic, falling even more in the first year of the war, and amounting to 80 cargo places in 2022 against 450-470 in pre-pandemic years (2018 and 2019), but in 2023 grew again, primarily due to increased supplies from China. It should be noted that the USA, Canada and the Czech Republic disappeared from the list of importers with the outbreak of hostilities.

Table 3. Export of reptiles (Customs Code 01062) from Russia, number of declarations submitted

COUNTRY \ YEAR	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
USA	1	4	2	3		
Canada		1				
Tajikistan		1	3			
Czech Republic		1				
Poland		1				
Sri Lanka		1				
Germany		1	3	4		
Croatia		1				
Azerbaijan				6	4	
Israel						1

* 2023 data are given for the first 9 months

Legal export of reptiles from Russia has never been significant; due to the small number of declarations, it is difficult to evaluate it statistically; we can only note that while the pandemic had virtually no impact on it, its volume decreased significantly during the war years of 2022-2023: 18 declarations for 2018+2019, 21 declarations for 2020+2021, and only 5 declarations for 2022+2023.

Table 4. Import of primates (Customs Code 010611) to Russia, number of declarations submitted

COUNTRY \ YEAR	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Vietnam	6	2			4	
Czech Republic	3	4	1	2		
France	2	1				
Germany	1	2		4		
Estonia	1					
USA	1	1				
Slovakia		2				
Belgium		1		1		
Ukraine		1				
Guyana			4			
Sudan				3	5	
Denmark				1		

* 2023 data are given for the first 9 months

Table 5. Export of primates (Customs Code 010611) from Russia, number of declarations submitted

COUNTRY \ YEAR	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Spain	1					
Czech Republic	2		1			
Israel		2				
China		1				
Moldova				1		
Latvia				1		
Thailand				2	2	3
Indonesia						2

* 2023 data are given for the first 9 months

Import and export of primates is also difficult to evaluate statistically due to the small number of declarations, however, one can note a decline in imports with the beginning of the covid pandemic from 14 declarations per year for 2018-2019, down to 5 in 2020; an increase to 9 in 2021 and 2022 and the absence of declarations for the first 9 months of 2023. It should also be noted that the vector of trade has shifted with the outbreak of hostilities from European to Asian (Thailand, Indonesia) and African (Sudan) countries.

Table 6. Import of birds (Customs Code 01063 non-poultry birds) to Russia, number of declarations submitted (number of cargo places**)

COUNTRY \ YEAR	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Czech Republic	6 (32)	11 (40)	3 (8)			
Belgium	2 (4)					
USA	3 (42)	4 (24)				
France	1 (1)					
Suriname	3 (21)	6 (69)		1 (10)		
Japan	1 (1)					
Slovakia		3 (6)	1 (11)			
Germany		1 (2)		2 (4)	10 (100)	
Poland		1 (1)				
Hungary		1 (1)				
Mali		3 (12)	3 (21)			
Macedonia		1 (4)				
Cyprus			2 (6)			
Azerbaijan			1 (2)			
Thailand			1 (4)		10 (31)	2 (6)
UAE						14 (36)
Uzbekistan					1(1)	
Congo						2 (3)
Lebanon						1 (10)
Total	16 (101)	31 (159)	11 (52)	3 (14)	21 (132)	17 (55)

* 2023 data are given for the first 9 months

** when importing birds, the number of cargo places is additionally indicated; that number is significantly different from the number of declarations for this category. A piece of cargo corresponds to one animal; one declaration can be submitted for several pieces of cargo.

Imports of non-poultry birds into Russia have decreased significantly since the onset of Covid. With the outbreak of hostilities, the vector of trade changed from the United States and European countries to Asian (Thailand), Middle Eastern (UAE, Lebanon) and African (Congo) countries.

Table 7. Export of birds (Customs Code 01063 non-poultry birds) from Russia, number of declarations submitted (number of cargo places**)

COUNTRY \ YEAR	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Moldova	2 (4)					
France	1 (2)					
China	1 (38)					
Qatar	7 (98)	12 (289)	9 (218)	9 (185)	3 (93)	
UAE	2 (74)	12 (105)	6 (109)	8 (92)	7 (67)	1 (29)
Lithuania	1 (5)					
Czech Republic	1 (1)					
Uzbekistan		3 (133)				
Bahrain		1 (28)				
DPRK		2 (45)				
Sweden			1 (2)			
Latvia				1 (1)		
Macedonia				1 (6)		
Slovakia				2 (2)		
Czech Republic				1 (1)		
Saudi Arabia				2 (22)		
Portugal				1 (1)		
Kuwait					6 (154)	1 (80)
TOTAL	15 (222)	30 (600)	16 (329)	25 (310)	16 (314)	2 (109)

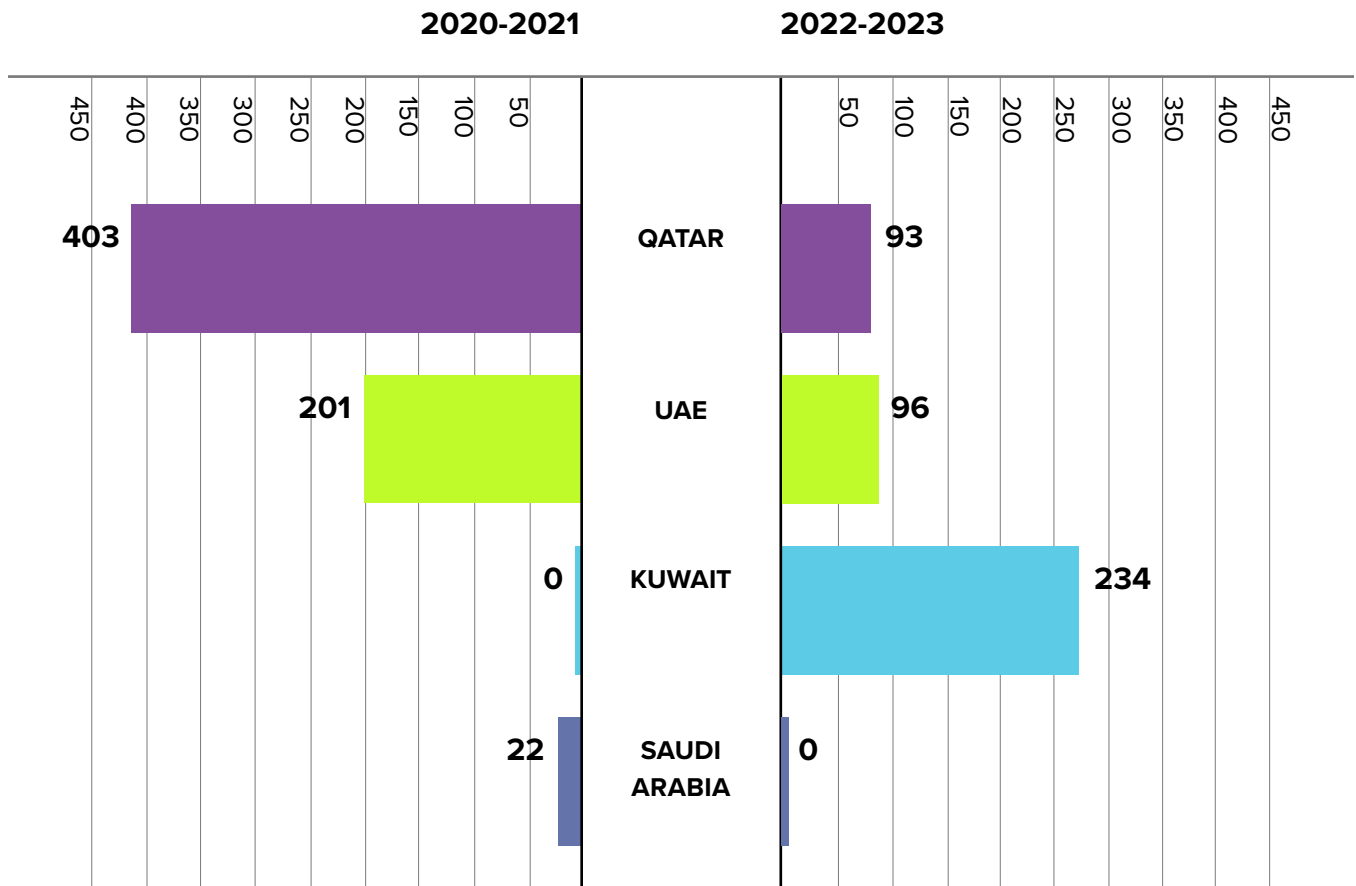
* 2023 data are given for the first 9 months

** when exporting birds, the number of cargo places is additionally indicated; that number is significantly different from the number of declarations for this category. A piece of cargo corresponds to one animal; one declaration can be submitted for several pieces of cargo.

The peak of exports of non-poultry birds from Russia over the past 6 years occurred in pre-Covid 2019; with the outbreak of hostilities, trade with European countries ceased, but this did not actually affect the total volume of exports, as they were small in this segment.

THE MAIN SHARE OF TRADE OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS HAS BEEN WITH MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRIES — THE UAE, QATAR, KUWAIT.

Graph 1. Export of birds from Russia to Middle Eastern countries



Import of marine mammals (Customs Code 010612) to Russia

For the period 2018–2021 imported to Russia:

In 2018, 20 Cape fur seals from Angola and 6 South American fur seals from Uruguay;

In 2019, 2 dolphins and 2 fur seals from Abkhazia, 2 fur seals from Uruguay;

In 2021, two sea lions from Georgia and one seal from Lithuania;

In 2022-2023, there was no import of animals from abroad.

Thus, the import of marine mammals to Russia decreased significantly during Covid times and ceased with the start of the military operation.

Export of marine mammals (Customs Code 010612) from Russia

For the period 2018-2023 exported from Russia:

In 2018: 151 animals, including 81 spotted seals, 27 bearded seals, 20 Baikal seals, 15 beluga whales, 2 dolphins and 1 sea lion to China. 3 dolphins and 1 sea lion to Morocco, 1 bottlenose dolphin to Ukraine.

In 2019: 57 animals, including 40 spotted seals, 9 bearded seals, 2 pilot whales and 1 walrus to China, 5 Baikal seals to Japan, 1 fur seal to Abkhazia.

In 2020: 29 animals, including 15 bottlenose dolphins, 7 sea lions, 5 fur seals and 2 Black sea bottlenose dolphins to Ukraine.

In 2021: 4 animals, including 2 walruses to Belgium, 2 dolphins to the UAE.

In 2022: 3 animals, including 1 walrus to China, 2 fur seals to Abkhazia.

In 2023: 3 animals, including 2 belugas to China, 1 bottlenose dolphin to the UAE.

The export of marine mammals from Russia decreased significantly with the onset of the covid pandemic and practically ceased with the outbreak of hostilities. It should be noted that this also coincided with a public campaign against the fishing catching and export of marine mammals, primarily cetaceans.



Sea lion. Kamchatka coast, 2023 / Photographer Arthur Bakuriani

Civil Society Activity

Recently, civil society activism for wildlife conservation appears to be the last type of environmental activity that is not blocked or prohibited by Russian authorities.

Along with bills directly concerning wild animals and their protection, either by weakening it (legalization of trophy and enclosure hunting), or expanding it (banning the capture of marine mammals), highly important are the legislative initiatives regulating the activities of protected areas in which the animals live.

Letters from citizens sent to the State Duma and relevant agencies can provide significant support for progressive bills and, conversely, an obstacle to environmentally destructive amendments. For example, when considering the bill banning the capture of marine mammals, the State Duma [received more than 1.5 million letters](#). Most often the preparation and sending of such letters would be initiated by public organizations such as Greenpeace Russia or the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), which ceased their operation in the country in mid-2023.

ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS THAT CONTINUE TO WORK IN RUSSIA ALSO WORK IN THIS DIRECTION, BUT THE SCALE OF THEIR ACTIVITY HAS BEEN SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED SINCE THE DEPARTURE OF THE “HEAVYWEIGHTS”.

The website [“Help Needed”](#) regularly publishes materials on topical issues of wildlife conservation and preservation of protected areas; it also contains instructions on how to send letters to the authorities. However, the traffic of this resource (and related social networks) is significantly lower compared to large international organizations such as Greenpeace. For example, [a call](#) posted on the Ecowiki website in December 2022 to send letters against

the adoption of a bill that would allow landscaping and logging for the construction of capital facilities for tourism and sports on an unlimited area in the forests around cities was viewed by 8 thousand people, and letters were sent by 1,400.

Petitions are one of the effective ways to draw attention to environmental problems. Until recently, change.org, act.greenpeace.org and to some extent roi.ru (Russian Public Initiative) could be considered the most popular and effective petition platforms operating in Russia. In some cases, legislators even cite data on the number of signatures collected on petition platforms in explanatory notes to bills. For example, the explanatory note to the bill banning the capture of marine mammals for the entertainment industry states: “In defense of the initiative, signatures were collected on the following resources: on the official website of Greenpeace — 173,969 signatures, on the website of the Russian Public Initiative (ROI) — 100 thousand signatures; petition created by Anastasia Ivanova on change.org/ivanova — 176,377 thousand signatures; petition created by Sofia Belyaeva at change.org/belyaeva — 94,933 thousand signatures.”

PETITIONS ON THESE PLATFORMS HAVE ATTRACTED HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF SIGNATURES, WITH THE MOST SUCCESSFUL PETITION ON CHANGE.ORG TO FREE ORCAS AND BELUGA WHALES FROM THE WHALE PRISON REACHING 1 MILLION 590 THOUSAND SIGNATURES.

Due to the [closure](#) of the Russian branch of Greenpeace in May 2023, the petition platform of this organization stopped working.

Petitions on roi.ru, a petition platform [created](#) in accordance with the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of March 4, 2013 N 183 “On the consideration of public initiatives sent by citizens of the Russian Federation using the Internet resource “Russian Public Initiative,” initially looked promising. It was reported that if a legislative initiative collects 100,000 signatures (verified through [State Services](#)) within one year, the initiative will be considered by an expert group to decide on measures for its implementation. However, in practice, insignificant initiatives are being implemented, but for significant ones, instead of a decision on implementation, the decision of “inexpediency” is made. This was the case with the signatures collected against [raising](#) the retirement age or [banning](#) the capture of cetaceans for aquariums.

Currently, in addition to the above-mentioned pro-state ROI, there are petition platforms on [Demokrator](#), on the website of the parliamentary party “[New People](#)”, small platforms posted on [private websites](#) and platforms of [recently established NGOs](#). For various reasons, their

popularity and effectiveness are not very high. Petitions on change.org are easy to create and gather signatures well, but officials try to position this platform as hostile to the interests of the state. At the same time, if an initiative on change.org gathers a significant number of signatures – 500,000 or more, the same officials start to take such an initiative more seriously.

Animal rights petitions on Democrator

Petition for tougher penalties for cruelty to animals	65 thousand signatures
Petition against animal torturers	59 thousand signatures
Petition against dog killers	30 thousand signatures
Petition in support of the law on the responsible treatment of animals	15 thousand signatures
Petition for the adoption of a law on the protection of animal rights	3 thousand signatures
Petition to punish the animal abuser who crushed a bear	3 thousand signatures
Petition for a ban on spring-summer hunting	10 thousand signatures
Petition for the introduction of the position of Commissioner for Animal Rights	8 thousand signatures
Petition for a ban on testing cosmetics on animals	7 thousand signatures
Petition against petting zoos	7 thousand signatures
Petition to punish those responsible for the deaths of animals at the Primorsky Dolphinarium	5 thousand signatures
Petition in support of an animal defender	5 thousand signatures

At the same time, there is also a [petition](#) on Democrator to declare Greenpeace and WWF as foreign agents (14 thousand signatures).

Petitions in defense of protected areas and animals on the platform of the “New People” party

[Petition to preserve the Losiny Ostrov National Park](#) 3 thousand signatures

[Petition](#) and [petition](#) against the bill on construction within protected areas 3 thousand signatures each

[Petition to ban circuses with animals](#) no data on signatures

At the same time, there is a [petition](#) for the preservation of the Murmansk Dolphinarium on the New People platform (3 thousand signatures)

Petitions on the [website of activist Pavel Pashkov](#)

[Petition in defense of old-growth forests](#) 686 thousand signatures

[Petition to ban winter hunting of bears in dens](#) 21 thousand signatures

Petition on the website [EcoSever](#)

[Petition to protect wolves](#) 11 thousand signatures

Petition on the website of the ["Earth Touches Everyone"](#) project

[Petition to lift the ban on the creation of New Year's plantations on agricultural lands of the NGO "Earth Touches Everyone"](#) 5 thousand signatures

As mentioned before, protest activity in the field of animal protection is less toxic for the authorities compared to other types of environmental activities. Below are examples of pickets and actions held in 2022-2023.

Graph 2. Protest activity of wild and domestic animal defenders in 2022-2023

According to the [Alliance for Animals](#)



Pressure on animal activists

On November 10, 2023, the head of the Alliance for Animals, Yuri Koretskikh, was sentenced to 10 days of administrative arrest for organizing an action in defense of wild animals at the Great Moscow Circus. The reason for the action at the circus [was a video in](#) which the trainers brothers Zapashny beat tigers with sticks, hose them down and break heavy props on them.

Forecast Of Situation Development

According to experts, the situation with protected areas and the wild animals living there will most likely develop according to a negative scenario; the authorities and industry are interested in the development of transport, industrial and tourism projects in protected areas.

Adopted and planned amendments to environmental legislation that facilitate or cancel environmental assessments, permit logging, construction of linear structures and tourism infrastructure in protected areas lead to a reduction in their area, fragmentation of landscapes and increased disturbance for wild animals. In addition, new roads increase the accessibility of protected areas, including for poachers.

The outlook of the situation with the protection of wild animals looks somewhat better. There are fewer commercial stakeholders in this area and they are not as powerful. Perhaps the most powerful here is the high-ranking hunter lobby, but they have already achieved changes allowing for enclosure and trophy hunting.

It seems quite likely that in the future we should witness a series of scandals related to the withdrawal of areas from protected areas in the interests of hunting grounds development there, and the issuance of permits for the hunting of Red Book animals for the purposes of “ecological monitoring” or “population regulation.” Attempts to catch cetaceans for aquariums are also possible by decision of the interdepartmental commission for the development of the fishing industry. The law banning the capture of marine mammals, adopted in 2023, leaves such a loophole.

The authorities are also trying to encourage the hunting of marine mammals by indigenous peoples. As already noted, a significant share of the production goes to feed dogs and to fur farms. Perhaps the corruption factor plays an important role here. Paradoxically, the interests of Russian officials align here with the International Whaling Commission, which issues permits (within the quota for indigenous peoples) for the annual catch of 140 gray and bowhead whales included in the Red Book.

Until recently, animal protection organizations and activists were less subject to pressure from the authorities. The movement to protect wild animals in aquariums and circuses is supported by a number of political parties and deputies. This is evidenced by the adoption of a ban on the capture of marine mammals for the entertainment industry and the recently put forward bill to ban the keeping of animals in circuses, as well as [initiatives](#) aimed at organizing sanctuaries (fenced off sea bays where marine mammals are kept in a semi-free condition) for cetaceans located in Ocean Theme Parks and aquariums. This appears to be the only area in which positive change can be expected in the coming years.

However, it is unknown how long this trend will last. In February 2024, a deputy from the “A Just Russia” party, Yevgeny Dunayev, [proposed](#) declaring all animal protection organizations foreign agents.