

Speech: Minister for Africa urges action to tackle illegal wildlife trade

Introduction

The Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson sends his congratulations to everyone involved in the incredible work here. It is a great job to be here with you in beautiful Botswana.

President Khama has been a towering force in what is appropriately named the Giants Club. Botswana's abundance of diverse wildlife is testament to the fantastic job that President Khama, Space for Giants, and many other committed people and organisations are doing to protect these wonders and their natural habitat. I'd like to pay tribute to the founding members of this Club – the Presidents of Botswana, Gabon, Kenya, and Uganda. We've heard the strength of their ongoing commitment today, and they are an inspiration to Africa and the rest of the world.

I want to hear more from the Giants Club, and from the other African delegates here today, about the action you think needs to be taken to realise African ambitions for a type of conservation that brings economic benefit to African communities. I want to say that the UK stands ready to help.

The Illegal Wildlife Trade

We are all here because we understand just how tragically short-sighted the illegal wildlife trade is and because we know that if we don't act now, it will be too late, as many species could be approaching extinction. In 1979 there were 1.3 million African elephants, today there are only 415,000. And their populations are declining at an alarming rate, which is why we need action now.

The illegal wildlife trade is threatening not only elephants, but many of the world's endangered species – species that define national identities, and heavily influence economic development. We are all here because we know we need to preserve these riches, not destroy them. We also know that tragically, the curse of this trade is two-fold; as poaching and the illegal wildlife trade also has a deeply corrosive effect on human society.

Poachers are now coming armed to the teeth, endangering not only animals' lives, but human lives too. They undermine state institutions and governance, they illegally exploit your countries' natural resources, often to benefit people and networks beyond your borders, and they foster the corruption which feeds discontent and insecurity.

This insecurity can damage livelihoods and hold back development as well as robbing people of their economic potential. The criminals responsible must

not be allowed to fracture your societies and plunder your children's futures.

These are the reasons that I and the Foreign Secretary are so passionate about tackling this illegal trade head-on. We believe the work you are doing. We believe in the cooperation between your countries through the Giants Club, and we believe that that is the key to achieving real change.

The Foreign Secretary's commitment

The Foreign Secretary has made the illegal wildlife trade a personal priority, and is dedicated to ending the illegal ivory trade. He wants 2018 to be the year that real changes are made. He is particularly excited by your proposals to create a cross border safe space for wildlife.

Ambitious ideas like this are what is needed if real change is going to be achieved. Which is why Britain is supporting the awareness-raising work being done by Space for Giants, and I know the digital march of the elephants last week really set the tone for the summit.

Tackling poaching

Operations to tackle poaching will be discussed today, and they are another critical part of the Space for Giants programmes. The UK is funding practical action around the world to reduce demand, strengthen enforcement and develop sustainable livelihoods for communities affected by the illegal wildlife trade. Since the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund was launched in 2013 we have funded 47 such projects.

One recent example involves the British military delivering anti-poaching activities with rangers in Gabon, and a follow-up project in Malawi. The project aims to reduce poaching, working with African park rangers for more effective and safer counter-poaching techniques.

London Conference

The UK is hosting an important conference to tackle the illegal wildlife trade in October; and I know many of you will be attending. The conference will enable us to build on the work being done by the Giants Club and others groups. It will focus on three challenges:

Firstly, how to tackle the illegal wildlife trade as a serious organised crime. This will consider how we strengthen law enforcement, and how we snuff out the associated corruption.

Secondly, we are going to build coalitions to help us in this fight. We will harness technology, and share and scale up successful and innovative solutions.

We will look at how we close global markets for illegally traded wildlife products, tackling the demand problem. And yes, the UK will lead by example. We will be shutting down our ivory trade. We will be working with the EU to

do the same. That's something we can do irrespective of whether we are in the European Union or not.

Conclusion

In conclusion to my remarks – we do not currently have the answers to all these challenges; but, if the international community works together, I know we can find the solutions. Together we can halt the alarming disappearance of these unique animals.

[Press release: HS2 workers discover ancient coastline in West London](#)

The layer of black clay is thought to have been formed from densely wooded marshes on the edge of a sub-tropical sea.

The rare discovery was made at a site in Ruislip, West London, when HS2's ground investigation team unearthed a previously unknown material, located up to 33 metres below the surface.

The layer of black clay, which HS2 Ltd has named the 'Ruislip Bed,' is thought to have been formed from densely wooded marshes on the edge of a sub-tropical sea. HS2 Ltd made the surprising find while investigating ground conditions in the area, prior to the construction of the Northolt Tunnel, a 14 kilometre tunnel which will run from West Ruislip to Old Oak Common.

HS2 has been investigating the ground at around 8,000 locations along the first phase of HS2, from London to the West Midlands.

[Ruislip Bed Discovery Animation](#)

Dr Jacqueline Skipper, a geological expert from Geotechnical Consulting Group, said:

Although ground investigations regularly take place across the country, it's really exciting and very unusual to come across a material that no-one has ever seen before. The 'Ruislip Bed' discovery is particularly fascinating, as it is a window into our geological history.

It would have been formed during the Paleocene period, which was a time of intense change, with new animals evolving following the extinction of the dinosaurs. Most of Southern England was covered by a warm sea and this clay helps us to pinpoint where the coastline was.

Steve Reynolds, HS2's Ground Investigation Programme Manager, added:

Since 2015, we have been investigating ground conditions along the route of HS2, so we can design the railway in the safest and most efficient way.

We have been exploring the soil and rocks beneath the surface through various methods, ranging from drilling into the ground and taking samples to using radar technology. Our main investigations are almost complete, with over 1 million laboratory tests undertaken on the samples we have taken. It's the largest ground investigation programme that the UK has ever seen and an unparalleled opportunity to learn about the ground beneath our feet.

The initial ground investigation programme on Phase One of the railway, from London to the West Midlands, will be largely complete by the end of March 2018. This will be followed by supplementary, targeted investigations, led by HS2's main works contractors.

[News story: Successful workshop on allergen detection in spices organised by GC](#)

A joint Defra, FSA, FSS and Government Chemist workshop was held at LGC on 28 February 2018. The event focused on the detection of allergens in spices and herbs using a multi-discipline approach. The workshop was attended by over 20 delegates from Public Analyst laboratories, industry and regulating bodies.

The event was organised by the Government Chemist team as part of a cross government (BEIS, FSA, FSS and Defra) knowledge transfer project that will deliver knowledge from government programmes to stakeholders to help enforce current regulations and prevent future disputes. By pooling funds from each of the four government departments, knowledge transfer events can be planned and coordinated according to priorities received directly from the stakeholder community delivering greater impact.

The workshop was opened with a talk by Dr Chun-Han Chan from the FSA's Allergen team and followed by Greg Corbishley from Barts Spices, who gave the industry perspective into the challenges posed for manufactures by cross contamination. There were also three sessions covering the complementary techniques developed in response to the [cumin](#) and [paprika](#) cases in 2015. Malvinder Singh (LGC) talked about the immunoassay tests which initially

detected allergenic contamination (initially believed to be almond) in cumin and the subsequent preparation of reference materials needed for further investigation. Christopher Hopley (LGC) gave an overview of mass spectrometry and expanded on methods developed for the detection of close species. Timothy Wilkes (LGC) talked about the real-time PCR and melting curve approaches used for these cases. These sessions provided practical information required to enable participants to carry out or commission similar analytical tests . Michael Walker, from the GC team, provided a final overview on result interpretation and reporting on allergen cases.

Dr Walker from the GC team presenting on interpretation and reporting

Feedback from participants was very positive:

First of all many thanks to you all for a very enjoyable course on Wednesday. The content was very useful and I feel the chance to network with such a diversity of people and disciplines that attend these courses is invaluable

Very informative and enjoyable. Always good to have access to a large pool of experts. Confident now to use melt curve analysis in future

If you would like to know more about the techniques covered in this workshop, or the work of the Government Chemist, contact

[Press release: CEO Sir Alan Massey retiring after four-decade maritime career](#)

Sir Alan joined the MCA in July 2010 after a 33-year career with the Royal Navy, where he left as Second Sea Lord.

During his eight-year tenure, Sir Alan has successfully steered the MCA through changes to modernise Her Majesty's Coastguard, new arrangements for the UK's search and rescue helicopter capability, a transformed survey and inspection capability and a more commercially-responsive approach to how the UK Ship Register operates. Sir Alan will continue his role until late 2018, to allow the appointment process for a successor to take place.

Bernadette Kelly, Permanent Secretary of the Department of Transport said: "I want to thank Sir Alan for his leadership of the MCA and his tireless

commitment to improving safety at sea for all and supporting the UK's maritime interests. I know that he will continue to make an exemplary contribution to the MCA and its ambitious plans until he leaves his post later this year."

Sir Alan said: "It has been an immense privilege to work for the MCA and serve the public. I am extremely proud of what we have achieved. Whilst this has been a difficult decision for me to make, I feel that now is the right time for a new Chief Executive to bring a fresh perspective, new ideas and initiatives to the Agency. I'm confident that the MCA will continue to successfully deliver its objectives under new leadership. I will continue to lead the MCA with my full commitment and energy until my successor is found and is ready to take over towards the end of this year."

The Department of Transport will launch a competition to recruit a new Chief Executive on Monday 19 March.

[Press release: Return-to-work placements for scientists and engineers at Dstl](#)

Dstl, part of the Ministry of Defence, has teamed up with Institute of Marine Engineering, Science & Technology (IMarEST) and the Women's Engineering Society (WES) to pilot the [STEM Returners programme](#). The programme is aimed at giving experienced science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) professionals the confidence to step back into their careers after time taking off or the opportunity to transfer into another field.

Natalie Desty from the STEM Returners programme, said:

The science and engineering industry has a shortage of skilled workers, but many highly qualified and experienced people are struggling to get back into work. We want to change employers' perceptions of CV gaps, remove barriers to returning to work and ensure the widest possible pool of talent is being considered for jobs. For example, female professionals returning from career breaks are often underemployed, with three in five likely to move into lower-skilled or lower-paid roles.

The Dstl pilot is open to any gender and offers individuals a paid 12-week placement, where they will work on challenging projects that make a real difference to the UK's defence and security. Successful applicants could work in areas such as platform systems, cyber and information systems, or defence

and security analysis. Placements are also available with the [Defence and Security Accelerator](#), which manages the £800 million Defence Innovation Initiative.

As well as contributing to exciting and rewarding projects, the programme offers 1-to-1 mentoring, networking opportunities and further career support.

Helen Christie, Dstl Resourcing Specialist said:

We're thrilled to be involved in the STEM Returners programme and help break down barriers people face when coming back to work. Dstl has long been committed to a flexible and supportive workplace so that talented people of all backgrounds and circumstances can thrive here and contribute to our country's national security.

While we can't guarantee a permanent position with Dstl at the end of the placement, it's equally important that the wider science and engineering community is full of skilled and experienced people. About half of Dstl's work is delivered externally through industry, universities, and small-and-medium-sized enterprises, so we rely on being able to collaborate with STEM workers all over the UK. We hope by participating in the programme, we can help grow the STEM workforce.

Dstl is also part of the STEM Futures consortium, which is proud to embrace the STEM Returners programme as part of its overall intent to develop talent while actively championing diversity and inclusion.

Interested? [Apply now.](#)