

THE ILLEGAL REPTILE TRADE – A CRIMINOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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SUMMARY

The illegal reptile trade quandary in the Western Cape province is strategically and chronologically addressed in this thesis with the implicit intention of revealing its gamut and underlying dynamics, developing a pragmatic, parsimonious and authentic conservation crime category with clearly delineated parameters, and formulating an integrated theoretical explanation regarding its aetiology that will adequately explicate herpetological, and hopefully also other forms of natural resource, crime and deviance. The thesis, by essentially transcending traditional, stereotypical edicts, throws new light on a severely neglected and underestimated form of natural resource exploitation, highlighting the need for reptiles, as the sentinels of the state of our environmental health to be preserved and perpetuated for, in the final analysis, the benefit of human kind.

Through an essentially explorative enquiry, utilising an integrated qualitative - quantitative research approach, the concept of conservation crime, as a vanguard to an innovative and unified conservation criminology, is introduced in this thesis in the form of unambiguous adjunct of the mainstream criminological discipline. It is, furthermore, utilised as a conduit within the herpetological crime framework to enrich the criminological discipline as a whole, broaden its frontiers, promote effective and focussed intervention/mitigation initiatives, as well as stimulate interest for further investigation in this field.

Fragmented, antiquated and nebulous legislation, deficient conservation and related role-player organisational capacity and inconsistent penalties, in concert with apathetic (and decidedly generic) societal attitudes and traditional pessimistic rubric regarding reptiles, emerge as fundamental proclivities impeding the effective intercession and management of the natural resources embodied in this sphere. Injudicious manipulation of the Western Cape's scarce and specialised reptile resources and the biodiversity ramifications such exploitation realises portend the intensification and diversification potential of such criminality.

Conservation criminology, as developed and presented in this thesis, underscores the significant contribution this field of criminology can make in comprehending the illegal manipulation/exploitation of herpetological and other natural resources, expanding and enhancing its theoretical constructs and implementing justice through decisive, dedicated and holistic intervention programmes/strategies in order to defend the inherent right to the continued existence of all reptile species.

KEY WORDS

Conservation crime/criminology, "Environmental/Ecological" crime, reptiles, snakes, lizards, tortoises, illegal exploitation/manipulation/trade, theoretical explanation, herpetological crime and deviance, biodiversity, offender typology, conservation crime concatenation and genesis, motivational and contributory dynamics, conservation compliance capacity, conservation/natural resource policing, illegal reptile trade, deterrence, crime attractors, poaching, Endangered Species Protection Unit, Western Cape Nature Conservation Board, South African National Parks, Customs and Excise.