

[ around the world ]

# the killing fields

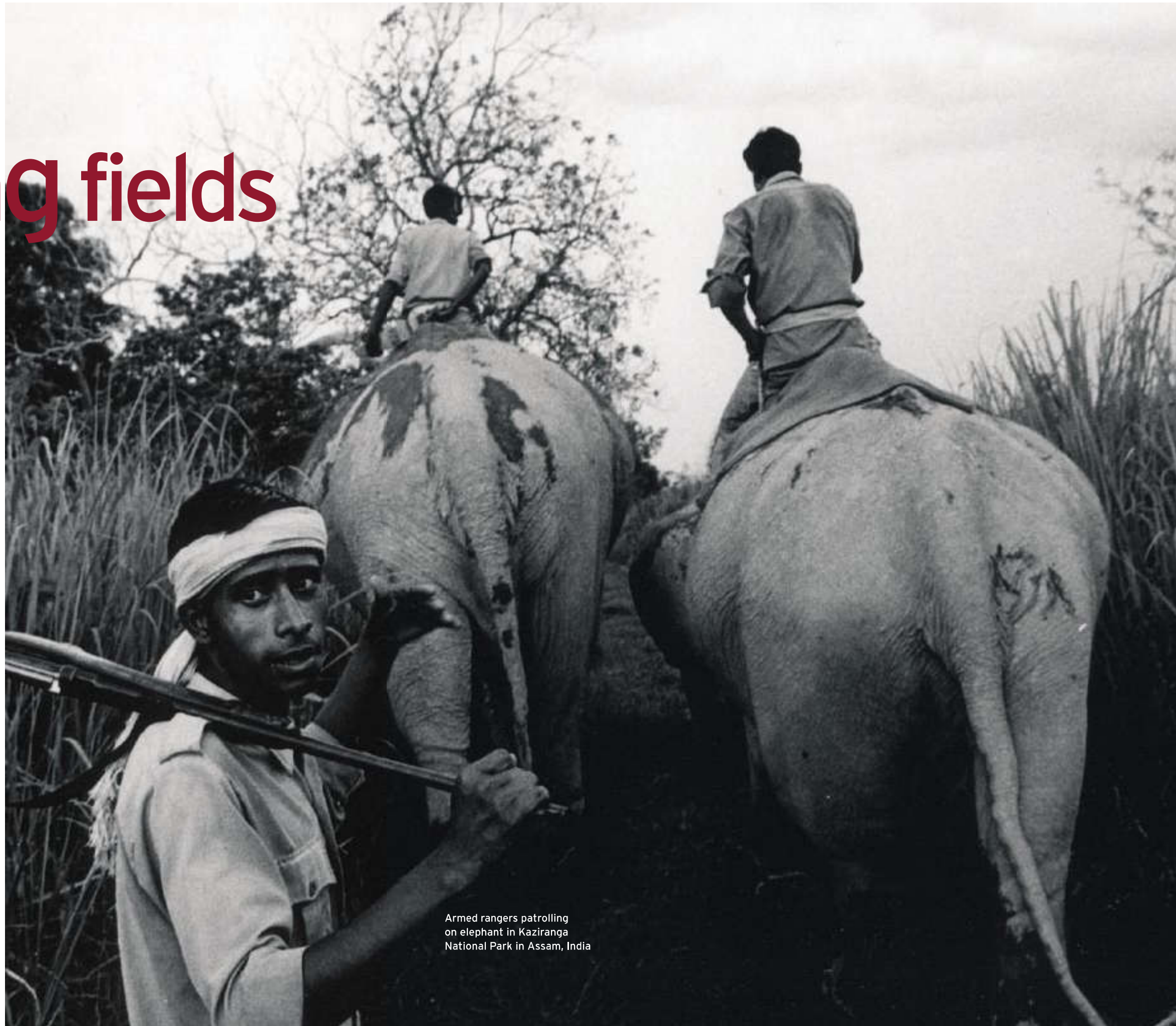
Savage, secretive and fully globalised, Asia's illegal wildlife trade is wiping out millions of rare animals

by **britt collins** ♦  
photographs by  
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**The haunting images offer a stark glimpse** of the thousands of human lives and millions of animals caught in the international wildlife trade. Patrick Brown, an award-winning photographer, felt driven to document this little-known trade after seeing the shocking decline of Asia's besieged wildlife populations.

He has travelled to some of the world's most remote and dangerous places, including Cambodia and Burma, to investigate this multi-national trade in Asia's rarest species, which according to some estimates is worth more than £25 billion a year, exceeding the annual revenues of Coca-Cola. Much of the trade revolves around what Brown describes as 'the big sexy animals – tigers, elephants, bears'. Rhino horn, tiger bone, ivory and rare birds have become a profitable industry for sophisticated organised crime networks and unscrupulous buyers worldwide. 'It's terribly sad,' he says. 'Wildlife trafficking is huge, but only the ignorant and often desperate poachers get caught.'

Conservationists fear that developing nations are doing nothing to stop this soaring black market. 'China is the main consumer of wildlife products,' says Brown, adding that Europeans and Americans account for 40 per cent of the trade. Pharmaceutical research overseas and the demand for monkeys in China and India is quietly wiping out many species. 'But concerned people are taking notice,' he adds. 'What impresses me most are the rangers in the national parks. These guys are earning as little as \$25 a month, and \$10 in India, and they're literally putting their lives on the line in gun battles to protect these animals. These people are unknown soldiers and they're fighting a terrible, bloody war. And hopefully they'll win in some form because at the rate we're going, we will have extinguished some of the rarest species, especially Asia's magnificent tigers, by the decade's end. 🌱



Armed rangers patrolling on elephant in Kaziranga National Park in Assam, India



'At the rate we're going, we will have extinguished several of the rarest species, especially Asia's magnificent tigers, by the decade's end'



A lonely elephant sits with his leg in chains in Chitwar National Park in Bharatpur, India. The 50-year-old bull is restrained as confinement and density-related stress has driven him to kill five handlers in his lifetime

**OPPOSITE FROM TOP** A ranger in Kaziranga National Park takes cover from a rhino; A tranquillised moon bear has bile removed from his stomach at a bear farm in Hanoi, Vietnam. This barbaric practice is done for the Chinese medicine and aphrodisiac trade





'Much of the trade revolves around the big, sexy, animals – tigers, rhinos, elephants and bears'



**RIGHT** Wildlife poaching and trading thrives in the shadows in border towns and war zones among poor people. In the Thai-Burma border, shops openly sell everything from buffalo heads to macaque skulls

from a London raid. London is one of the biggest conduits for animal smuggling – thousands of shipping containers pass through daily, yet only one civilian is employed by Scotland Yard to enforce this.

**OPPOSITE FROM TOP** At Scotland Yard's animal protection unit, a customs officer displays a freshly seized tiger's head

At Bangkok International Airport, a wildlife seizure turns into a media frenzy as photographers focus on a scared pangolin, one of the 482 confiscated in a raid



\* To learn more or to view Patrick Brown's photographs, visit [panos.co.uk](http://panos.co.uk) and [patrickbrownphoto.com](http://patrickbrownphoto.com). His images are featured in a new book by Ben Davies.