

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Poaching a threat to our natural heritage

A South Dakota man was recently convicted in federal court for smuggling leopard parts into the United States in a case that exposed illegal hunting in South Africa and the laundering of rare animal parts through Zimbabwe.

However, illegal trade in plants and animals is not limited to cats from Africa or orchids from South America. Sadly, it happens right here in the Southern Appalachians as well.

The region is home to the bog turtle, North America's smallest turtle, and the victim of a vibrant trade in rare reptiles despite being federally protected. Some of the bogs this turtle calls home also provide habitat for the green and mountain sweet pitcher plants – a pair of carnivorous plants that are also federally protected. On our mountain tops, Heller's blazing star and Gray's lily, both rare plants, have suffered from poaching, as has, perhaps surprisingly, the rock gnome lichen, one of only two lichens on the federal endangered species list.

Public lands belong to all Americans, and should be places where our planet's rarest species are safe from collection. Removing anything from National Park Service lands, including the Blue Ridge Parkway and Great Smoky Mountains National Park, without a permit is against the law. Removing rare species from our National Forests without a permit is also against the law. If you're at a trailhead or overlook and see behavior you consider suspect, contact your nearest Park Service or Forest Service office and let them know what you saw.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.