Unlock secrets of ‘astounding pangolins’ in beautiful children’s animation, with plea to keep them safe

Friday 16 February, 2024

With a call for daring heroes and an invitation to adventure, TRAFFIC introduces a heartwarming animated story on pangolins and the trafficking threat that imperils them in celebration of World Pangolin Day (Sat 17 Feb).

The Astounding Secret Pangolin animation is based on the picture book of the same name by UK-based illustrator Jeanette Ward, and author and book designer Mary Hays. It tells of the pangolin’s scales being both an armour and a vulnerability; the reason it is sought by poachers and traffickers.

Pangolins are believed to be the most trafficked mammal in the world. Several species have been hunted to near extinction because of demand for the scales which are wrongly believed to have medicinal properties. TRAFFIC works globally to prevent illegal trade in wild species.

Animation, lesson plans, activities

The book was brought to life by Malaysia-based animator Faril Izzadi Mohd Noor for TRAFFIC’s Southeast Asia programme office, where he previously served as a graphic designer and continues to volunteer after leaving for the private sector.

The almost four-minute animation is tailored for young students and is designed to be used in tandem with English language and art exercises to showcase the many unique features that make pangolins special.

These lessons and a factsheet for teachers have been designed to help them broach the issue of poaching and illegal trade with a young audience, especially those that live in countries with wild pangolins or where the pangolin may be consumed.

Mary first had the idea of the picture book when she heard about the plight of pangolins and approached Jeanette to illustrate it. Inspired by TRAFFIC's work on pangolins, the duo donated the use of the book’s words and images to the organisation.

They worked with TRAFFIC’s Southeast Asia communications team to develop the animation and learning materials that encapsulate the wonder of the species and its fight for survival.

"In 2016 I was looking for an idea for a children’s story when I came across a Cambridge Museum of Zoology fact sheet on Pangolins. Astonished that I’d never heard of this extraordinary mammal, I wondered how to tell, in some respects, this devastating story specifically to children. It needed to be both factual and endearing, and I knew Jeanette would be the perfect illustrator for the task! Her attention to detail and sensitive, empathetic approach has perfectly conveyed both the unique charm of these creatures and their precarious situation. It is fantastic to see it brought even further to life with Faril’s gentle animation," said Hays.

"I loved developing the pangolin characters for Mary’s beautifully written and engaging story. It's wonderful working with TRAFFIC and to play our part in helping young people understand just how important and astounding pangolins really are,” said Ward.

Kanitha Krishnasamy, Director for TRAFFIC in Southeast Asia thanked Hays, Ward and Faril for their masterful work creating the stunning visuals and captivating storytelling, and for choosing to partner with TRAFFIC.

“We hope it ignites curiosity and interest in conservation, in young minds and educators alike,” she said.

Eleanor Hays narrates the video. She takes viewers through descriptions of the pangolin’s one-of-a-kind features and behaviour, the threat of poachers in the forest, and the call for “someone bold and someone caring” to make the forest safe again.

The illustration of a mother pangolin and its pup is inspired by the Sunda Pangolin Manis javanica. It is one of the world’s eight recognized species of pangolin and calls Southeast Asia its home.

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The region is not only a major source and consumer of Asian pangolin species but also a destination and transit point for trafficked African pangolin species.

Since 2019, all pangolin species have been prohibited from commercial international trade. Despite this, criminal networks continue to source and traffic pangolins in alarming numbers.

During the decade from 2014 to 2023, more than 2,300 pangolin trafficking seizures were recorded across Asia. A total volume of 419 tonnes of pangolin parts was confiscated, comprising almost 48,500 whole individuals and 319 tonnes of pangolin scales.

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