

New Laws Protect Endangered Pangolins

By MARGAUX WINTER

Nicknamed "scaly anteaters," pangolins have become the new interest of the mass media. These tiny animals, weighing about 3.5 pounds during adulthood, have finally been recognized for their role in the poaching industry.

Although previously unknown to most of the public, pangolins were once one of the most highly trafficked animals in the illegal wildlife trade industry. Fortunately, they have finally been protected under a 100-country agreement to install a ban on their trade.

The pangolin is said to be a descendant of the Stegosaurus. Its scales and humpy body shape are certainly reminiscent of these ancient creatures, the similarity augmented by the fact that pangolins previously existed in a gargantuan size.

On a more shocking note, pangolins are actually close relatives to deadly carnivores, being sisters of the Carnivora on the phylogenetic tree.

More recently, pangolins have become known for their unique scales and living habits. The eight different species of pangolins are found across Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Their keratin scales come in many shades of brown, from an off-yellow to a more dark olive. Under certain conditions, pangolins are known to replicate living artichokes, their

overlapping scales strongly resembling the fruit.

Although these animals may look ferocious, they actually lack teeth. Instead they have long, sticky, and muscular tongues. Compensating for their poor vision, pangolins have a heightened sense of smell, making it easy for them to find the termite nests from which they feed.

They are fantastic diggers, fast runners, and may be seen rising on their hind legs to sniff the air, similar to the stance of a Meerkat.

The pangolin's tongue actually attaches near its pelvis, and as such it is longer than its body. Pangolins are adept swimmers, and while some are completely terrestrial, others enjoy climbing trees, using their claws and tails to clutch the bark.

Although it is unknown how long pangolins live in the wild, they can live up to 20 years in captivity. Pangolins are very difficult to study in the wild. They are nocturnal and secretive, often maneuvering themselves away from areas in which they perceive human habitation.

Those Pangolins that can climb have been known to sleep in trees while the sun is out. When threatened, the pangolin's scales are its greatest assets. Pangolins curl up into balls, protecting their soft underbellies with their hard exte-



JUDY HURD/THE TELEGRAPH

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riors.

The most famous organization for pangolins is SavePangolins. SavePangolins was founded in 2007 by members of the Emerging Wildlife Conservation Leaders Program, an international training and mentoring initiative that brings together emerging leader in the wildlife conservation field. After coming out with the app, Roll with the Pangolins,

Prince William learned about and publically endorsed the organization.

Furthermore, in 2012 Sir David Attenborough chose the Sunda pangolin, a species distributed throughout South East Asia, as one of his ten favorite species he would 'save' from extinction.

Estimates have been made that say pangolins may account for up to 20% of the il-

legal animal trade. Although many grassroots organizations have been around for decades, the worldwide trade ban will hopefully do the most work to lower these numbers.

Although the ban may do little to deter the poachers, it will allow law enforcement to install harsher repercussions and create more awareness around those trafficking pangolins.

Fake News Incites Controversy

By ISABELLA LI

On Nov. 13, the top Google News article for the 2016 Presidential Election results led a website called 70 News, which stated that Donald Trump had defeated Hillary Clinton in the popular vote.

In fact, Clinton won by a margin of over two million votes.

Google's latest controversy aligns with mounting criticism over news-aggregating sites regarding their handling of fake information. The prime target of such criticism has been Facebook.

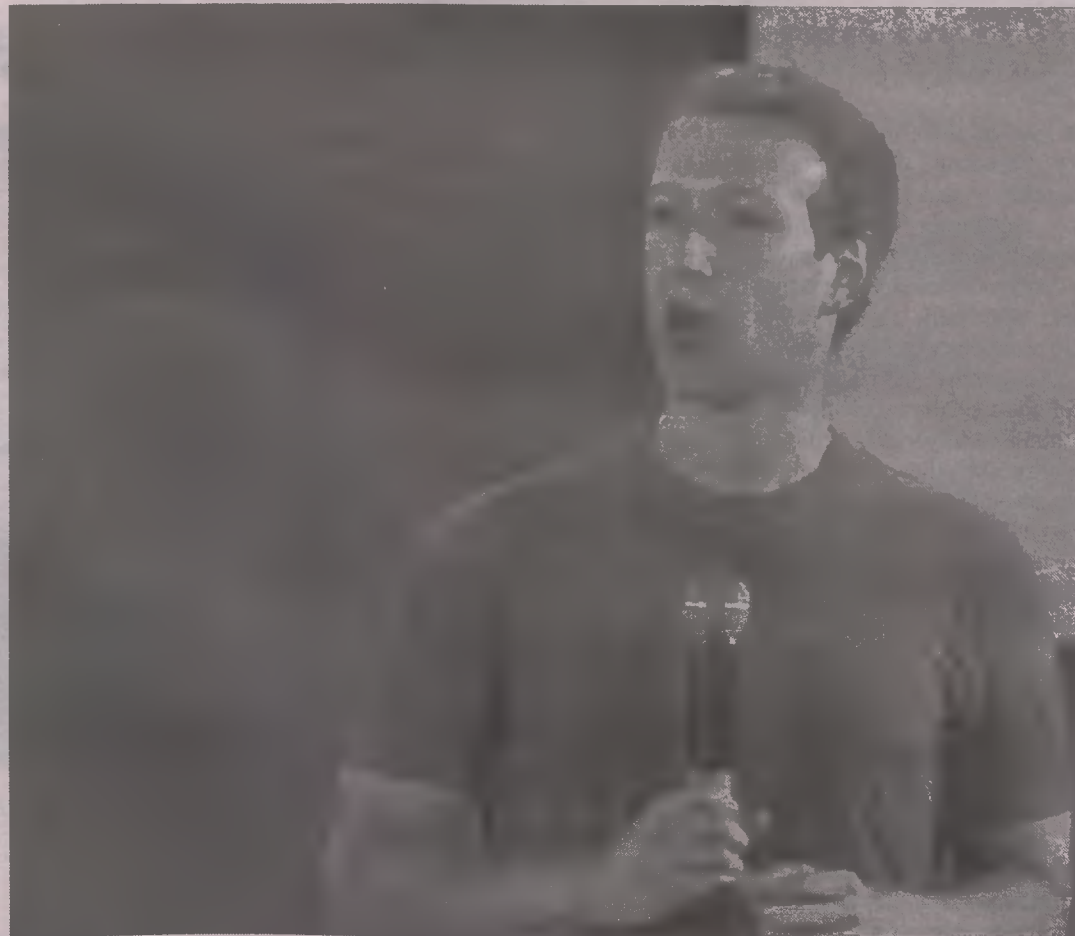
A Pew Research poll found that 62% of Americans get news from social media. As such, false news headlines on Facebook -- including one that Donald Trump had been endorsed by the Pope -- have been implicated in influencing the election.

Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook founder and CEO, responded to such criticisms in a post on his own Facebook page.

"Of all the content on Facebook, more than 99% of what people see is authentic," he said.

He further elaborated on the difficulties he saw in providing accurate news.

"Identifying the 'truth' is complicated. While some hoaxes can be completely



THE INDIAN EXPRESS

Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, has come under fire for his company's seeming apathy to the negative consequences of the spreading of fake news.

debunked, a greater amount of content, including from mainstream sources, often gets the basic idea right but some details wrong or omitted."

Facebook's troubles arose after it fired its team of news

curators in August, adopting an algorithm that displays news items based on popularity. Facebook claimed that such actions were driven by an ability to deliver an increased volume of news stories at

greater specificity to individual users.

"Our goal is to enable Trending for as many people as possible, which would be hard to do if we relied solely on summarizing topics by hand,"

said a company representative.

News algorithms, used by Facebook and Google alike, have limited ability to check for accuracy.

Both companies have recently taken measures to limit the prevalence of false news stories. On Nov. 14, both companies announced intentions to remove digital ads from misleading websites, taking away their ability to generate revenue.

Google has directly acknowledged the role its algorithm played in the perpetuation of fake news.

In response to the prominence of the incorrect 70 News article, Andrea Faville, a spokeswoman for Google, said, "The goal of search is to provide the most relevant and useful results for our users. In this case, we clearly didn't get it right, but we are continually working to improve our algorithms."

While companies like Google and Facebook bear responsibility to provide users with accurate information, users themselves must also be aware of the perils of the Internet news. If you've ever been online, you must have heard this before: Don't believe everything you read on the Internet.