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"Scarcity, Alterity and Value: Decline of the Pangolin, the World's Most Trafficked Mammal"

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The pangolin, now recognised as the world's most trafficked mammal, is currently undergoing population collapse across South and Southeast Asia, primarily because of the medicinal value attributed to its meat and scales. This paper explores how scarcity and alterity (otherness) drive the perceived value of these creatures for a range of human and more-than-human stakeholders: wildlife traffickers, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) practitioners, Asian consumers of their meat and scales, hunters and poachers, pangolin-rearing master-spirits, and conservation organisations. Based on archival research and long-term ethnographic study with indigenous hunters in the Eastern Himalayas, the paper analyses the commodity chains linking hunters and consumers of pangolin across South, Southeast and East Asia. It shows that whilst the nonlinear interaction of scarcity, alterity and value is driving the current overexploitation of pangolins, for some indigenous hunters in the Eastern Himalayas, these same dynamics interact to preserve these animals in the forests where they dwell. (Text from author's abstract)

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