

How artificial intelligence could stop poachers in their tracks



By Caitlyn Marsolek | April 23, 2016



Researchers from the US, Malaysia, the Netherlands, and Singapore are working on a way to use artificial intelligence to improve patrolling methods used in tracking poachers

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With Earth Day come and gone the initiative to save our planet is fresh in our minds. And that's not limited to global warming and putting a stop to pollution; poaching remains a big problem when it comes to preserving the world around us.

Luckily researchers have been testing out how we can use scientists to help the fight against poaching.

According to **Science Daily**, organizations such as the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Army Research Office have teamed up to look into how artificial intelligence (AI) could be used to stop poaching and illegal logging. Led by scientists at the University of South Carolina (USC), researchers have found ways to use game theory, or the mathematical theory of conflict and cooperation, to protect parks in a more proactive way.

"This research is a step in demonstrating that AI can have a really significant positive impact on society and allow us to assist humanity in solving some of the major challenges we face," said Milind Tambe, a professor at USC.

Along with USC, scientists and conservationists from Singapore, the Netherlands, Malaysia, and various parts of the US created an AI application named PAWS, short for the Protection Assistant for Wildlife Security. In 2014 PAWS was implemented in the conservation effort in Malaysia and Uganda.

Specializing in patrolling, PAWS was shown to significantly improve and aid the fight against poaching. However, definite patrol routes needs to be put into place before PAWS can reach its full potential.

Fei Fang, a member of the research team from USC, commented on how PAWS has already changed the patrolling game when it comes to tackling poachers.

"In most parks, ranger patrols are poorly planned, reactive rather than pro-active, and habitual," said Fang. "Our work on PAWS addresses one facet of the problem, improving the efficiency of patrols to combat poaching."

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