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IT'S A TRAP! VENUS FLYTRAP POACHING LAWS

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The Venus flytrap is a carnivorous plant species that was first discovered by a colonial governor of North Carolina in the 1700s.^[i] Since its discovery, people have been enthralled by the plant's worldly beauty and strange feeding habits. Charles Darwin thought it was one of the world's most magnificent plants.^[ii] However, in recent years poachers have become the flytrap's newest admirer.

Poaching is a big problem for this tiny plant, as it only grows wild in the swamps near Wilmington, North Carolina.^[iii] This limited range translates into a limited number of plants. It has been estimated that there may only be 35,000 plants growing in the wild.^[iv] Most of these plants grow in one of the only three remaining populations of Venus flytraps left in the wild.^[v] Poachers have only exacerbated the problems caused by the flytrap's limited range. Over the last few years, tens of thousands of Venus flytraps have gone missing every year.^[vi] These plants have fallen victim to what is essentially a Venus flytrap crime ring.^[vii] The actions of this crime ring have resulted in the flytrap being listed as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and North Carolina's State Department of Environment and Natural Resources.^[viii] However, this does not mean all is lost for the noble Venus flytrap, as steps are being taken to ensure this alien species continues to grow here on Earth. One such measure to ensure the longevity of the plant involves increased criminal penalties for those caught poaching Venus Flytraps.



(http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wunc/files/styles/x_large/public/201412/venus2.jpg?

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North Carolina is seeking to protect this precious plant and stop these dastardly criminals by imposing much harsher criminal penalties. As of December 1, 2014, it is a felony, punishable by up to twenty-five months in prison, to be caught poaching Venus flytraps.[ix] This is a seismic change from previous penalties, which were essentially a slap on the wrist. Under previous laws, poachers were only penalized by a fine ranging from \$10 to \$50 per plant and had no chance of incarceration.[x] The new law has no limit on the fines that may be levied against a poacher.[xi] Law enforcement officials are hopeful that the harsher penalties will be a deterrent to those who would illegally collect Venus Flytraps.[xii] They also hope the felony charge will loosen the lips of poachers thus helping law enforcement discover who is organizing the Venus flytrap crime ring.[xiii] This is the end goal of this new law; to stop Venus flytrap poaching once and for all. This is a reachable goal as flytraps are remarkably easy to grow from tissue cultures in a greenhouse.[xiv]

If this new law can remove the incentives for poaching it will be a massive success. However, only time will tell if the new law is able to achieve this accomplishment. Let us hope the Venus flytrap has found a permanent home here on Earth in the swamps surrounding Wilmington, North Carolina.

[i] Marti Maguire, *North Carolina Cracks Down on Venus Flytrap Poachers*, Reuters (Sept. 18, 2014), <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/19/us-usa-north-carolina-flytrap-idUSKBN0HE00L20140919>.

[ii] *Id.*

[iii] Carol Jackson, *North Carolina Enacts Venus Flytrap Theft Laws*, WUNC (Dec. 3, 2014), <http://wunc.org/post/north-carolina-enacts-venus-flytrap-theft-laws-how-big-problem-really#stream/0>.

[iv] *Id.*

[v] Kaleigh Rogers, *Who Killed the Venus Flytrap?*, Motherboard (Aug. 18, 2015, 8:30AM), <http://motherboard.vice.com/read/who-killed-the-venus-flytrap>.

[vi] Jackson, *supra* note iii.

[vii] *Id.*

[viii] Rogers, *supra* note v.

[ix] Jorge Valencia, *Poaching A Venus Flytrap In North Carolina Could Now Get You Two Years In Prison*, WNUC (Dec. 1, 2014), <http://wunc.org/post/poaching-venus-flytrap-north-carolina-could-now-get-you-two-years-prison#stream/0>.

[x] Maguire, *supra* note i.

[xi] *Id.*

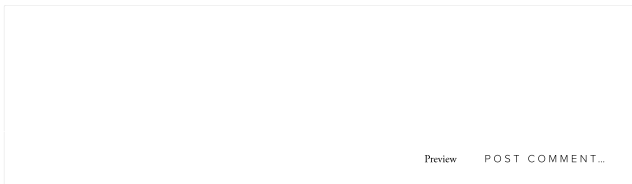
[xii] *Id.*

[xiii] Rogers, *supra* note v.


[xiv] *Id.*

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