

TRAFFIC

NEWSLETTER

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TRAFFIC **POST**

NEWSLETTER ON WILDLIFE TRADE IN INDIA

A large monitor lizard, possibly a Nile monitor, is resting on a sandy ground with some dry leaves and twigs. In the background, there are green plants with large, serrated leaves. The lizard has a brownish-grey body with a lighter, patterned underbelly and limbs.

**Calcutta Snake Park, a
breeding ground for wildlife
trafficking in India**

TRAFFIC Post

TRAFFIC Post is TRAFFIC's newsletter on wildlife trade in India. It started in September 2007 with a primary objective of creating awareness about poaching and illegal wildlife trade in India.

Illegal wildlife trade is reportedly the fourth largest global illegal trade after narcotics, counterfeiting, and human trafficking. It has evolved itself into an organised activity threatening the future of many wildlife species.

TRAFFIC Post was born out of the need to reach out to various stakeholders including decision makers, enforcement officials, judiciary and consumers about the extent of illegal wildlife trade in India and the damaging effect it could be having on the endangered flora and fauna.

Since its inception, TRAFFIC Post has highlighted pressing issues related to illegal wildlife trade in India and globally, flagged early trends, and illuminated wildlife policies and laws. It has also focused on the status of legal trade in various medicinal plant and timber species that need sustainable management for ensuring ecological and economic success.

TRAFFIC Post comes out three times in the year and is available both online and in print. You can subscribe to it by writing to trafficind@wwfindia.net

All issues of TRAFFIC Post can be viewed at www.trafficindia.org; www.traffic.org

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From the Desk



Tigers in trouble again

Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj,
Country Head of TRAFFIC's India Office

Tigers *Panthera tigris* are the religious and cultural icons of Asia, adorned as the national animal in some countries, and figuring prominently on the flags of others. Their charismatic appeal is used to sell everything from gasoline to sporting goods and confectionery. Yet, paradoxically, wild Tigers are on the brink of extinction.

Tigers are an umbrella species and symbolize the plight of wildlife across Asia. Poised as they are at the top of the ecosystem, loss of Tigers indicates ecosystems under stress. Within a century wild Tiger numbers have plummeted from over 1 00 000 to below 4 000 animals. The existing wild populations inhabit fragmented and isolated patches of land constituting a meagre seven percent of their historic range. If current trends persist, Tigers are likely to be the first species of large predator to vanish in modern times. Tiger subspecies and populations have already disappeared from Java, Bali, and Central Asia and throughout much of China. The only region in which populations have recovered is the Russian Far East, where habitats are secure and poaching pressures are modest. The challenge of saving wild Tigers has become a global one and calls for a global solution and commitment.

The successful conservation of wild Tigers and the natural capital that sustains them are among the key indicators of sustainable development and require greater global resources and attention. Among many factors as I have stated above, poaching for illegal trade has taken precedence over the others, if we carefully consider a certain rise in the number of illegal takes from the wild in the last two years. Most notably, the loss of cubs—which certainly indicates a growth factor in a population, and the breeding males, brings up a serious question of survivorship of the Tiger.

Paradoxically, in India, population estimates in 2015, project a sharp increase in the Tiger population to a magical figure of above thirty percent. Parallel to this, the budget year 2016-17 also witnessed a phenomenal rise in budget allocation for Tiger conservation in India. On the other hand, there has been the shocking news of the seizure of five Tiger skins near Corbett Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand State, known to be better protected than most other regions in India, the loss of more than six Tigers in Valmiki Tiger Reserve in Bihar, and, most shocking of all, the poisoning of four cubs and their mother in Pench Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra State. If poaching takes such a course, conservation efforts are thwarted, local communities are robbed of economic resources, and biodiversity is reduced when species are taken from the wild. The loss in ecosystem resilience affects fresh water supplies and food production.

Organised crime is attracted to wildlife trafficking owing to its profitability and small risk of prosecution, as well as the light fines and imprisonment even if caught. Criminals, deliberately cross international borders and violate national laws with relative impunity, and attempt to corrupt government officials, and become a serious threat to the stability, economy, and natural resources of a country.

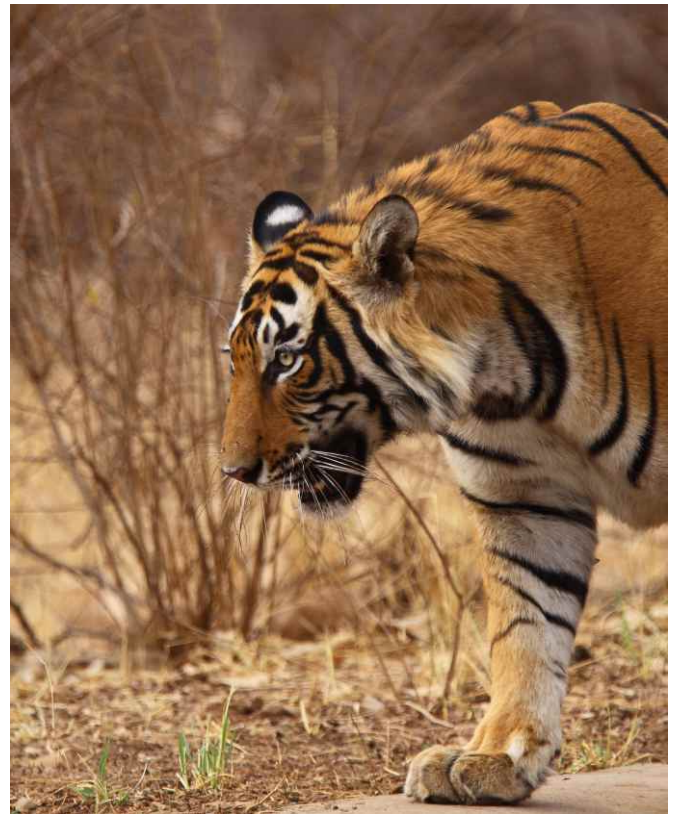
Wildlife crime does not exist in isolation and is interlinked with various other severe and large scale global crimes. In Cameroon, for example, the proceeds from poached ivory will likely finance the purchase of weapons and ammunition, further exacerbating conflict in the region.

The economy of a country is always associated with demand for poaching and this is not a new phenomenon.

Similarly for India, demand has led to poaching before and after independence in 1947. For example, by the 1930s, the horn of the Greater One-horned Rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis* was expensive enough to induce poaching in Kaziranga, an area set aside for protection in 1908. In mid-1992, poaching had occurred on a large scale in Ranthambhore National Park. Poaching had been supplying a known source of demand for Indian poachers: oriental Tiger-based medicine. The situation seems exacerbated now with two striking adverse developments- apparent rise of a domestic demand for Tigers, and a dangerous nexus creation of various trade syndicates dealing in different species and different products. Such nexus gives a new access to a bigger syndicate and a bigger market- a force multiplier in illegal business.

India has lost 43 Tigers including cubs- many of them to poaching and others to suspected poaching, in a six month period from October 2015 until March 2016. There are not enough Tigers to supply to such a large market demand. When there is not enough to supply to market demand, a look alike species will often substitute the product. Does then the common Indian Leopard *Panthera pardus* or the Snow Leopard *Panthera uncia* substitute Tiger parts and derivatives in illegal trade? And this might explain why we are witnessing a constant rise in Leopard poaching. Snow Leopard also falls on a similar loop; however, its specialised habitat saves the species to some extent.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) could have a direct, adverse effect on wildlife. Internal GDP that is the GDP of the country in which the wildlife exists, could have direct effects on the habitat of Tiger and the density of the species in its habitat. The growth of GDP leads to a fall in the abundance of Tiger and the GDP can also increase the demand for poached wildlife. An increase in the demand for poached wildlife species will increase the price of poached Tiger. This leads to an increase in expected profit from poaching Tiger, and encourages greater poaching of Tiger. Greater poaching of Tiger leads to a decrease in the abundance of Tiger, and this increases the demand for Tiger. Thus, an increase in the demand for poached wildlife species can be self-reinforcing. Increases in external and internal GDP can increase incomes and the demand for poached Tiger. Increased financial resources from taxes in a growing economy can enhance poaching control, and reduce illegal wildlife trade.



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The wildlife protection mechanisms in India for Tiger or any other economic wildlife species does not have adequate capacity to combat the emergent situation at the current investment and management level. The most challenging, and often an ignored aspect is poor human resource development, may even be non-existent, in forest and wildlife departments across India. There is a serious lack of planning and strategies in fighting poaching in India. As a result most Tiger reserves or the national parks close to the borders perhaps witness the most negligence, be it Buxa or Valmiki- each of them with above sixty percent vacancies in frontline enforcement staff.

Analysis suggests that the border region protected areas are the most vulnerable ones due to the impact of the international borders. In the present scenario, an alternative answer could be joint combative missions with the paramilitary forces guarding the borders and other enforcement agencies that have presence and often more combative capacities. However, any such strategies will require sustained efforts on their capacity building for wildlife law enforcement as much as an effort of mainstreaming control of poaching and illegal wildlife trade in their own mandates.

01

TRAFFIC India Update

- 1. India's first national workshop on capacity building for effective wildlife law enforcement organised in Tamil Nadu**
- 2. TRAFFIC issues warning of illegal wildlife trade at Sonapur Fair**
- 3. New batch of TRAFFIC's Super Sniffers begin training at Tekanpur, Madhya Pradesh**
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SUPER SNIFFERS

A film on TRAFFIC's pioneering initiative on sniffer dog training programme for combating wildlife crime in India.



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HELP STOP ILLEGAL TRADE OF TURTLES AND TORTOISES

Poaching and illegal trade of Indian turtles and tortoises species has escalated, driven mainly by the demand for their meat, use in medicine and for the pet trade. The future of these long-lived animals has been shortened by the ever burgeoning domestic and international illegal wildlife trade.

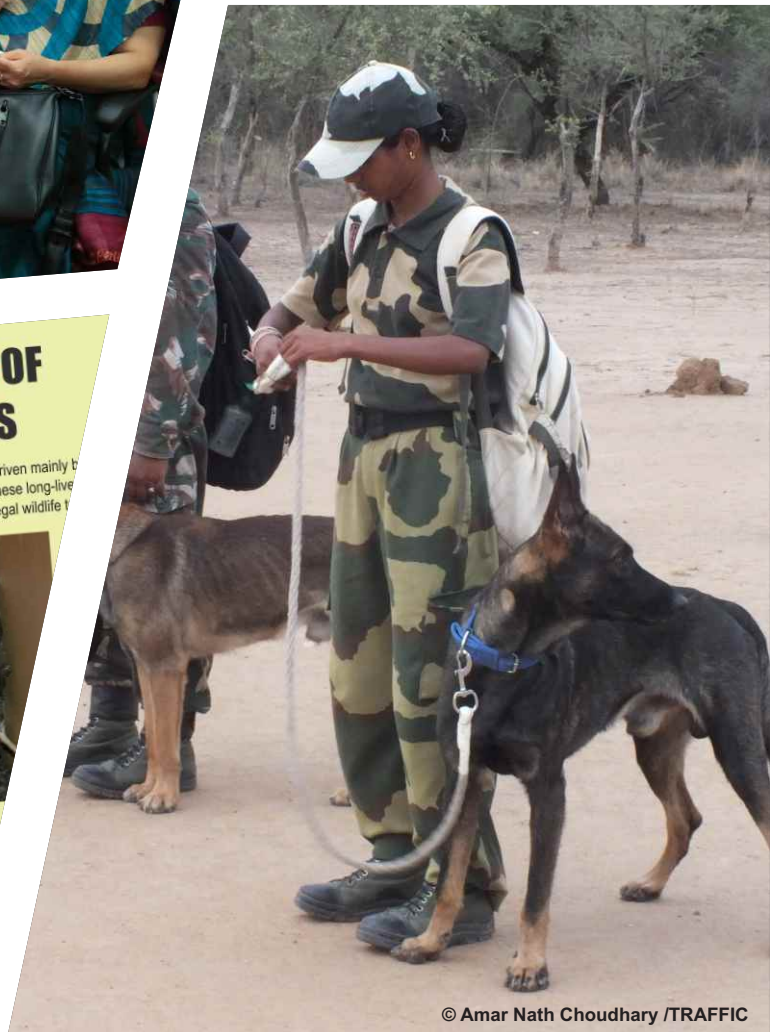


IT'S ILLEGAL: Hunting, trapping and trade is a punishable offence under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. International trade is restricted and liable for prosecution.

SUPPORT: Your support is crucial for the protection of wildlife. Report illegal trade to the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (www.wccb.gov.in); local Forest Guard.

#StopIllegalWildlifeTrade

<http://support.wfwindia.org/links/pangolin.html>
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India's first national workshop on capacity building for effective wildlife law enforcement organised in Tamil Nadu

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Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, Head of TRAFFIC India, addressing the participants

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Dr V. K. Melkani, IFS, PCCF (Wildlife) and CWLW, Government of Tamil Nadu (left); Dr N. Krishnakumar, PCCF and Head of Department, Tamil Nadu; Ms Tilotama Varma, Additional Director of the WCCB (right)

India's first National Workshop on Capacity Building for Combating Wildlife Crime was organised in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu by TRAFFIC in partnership with Tamil Nadu Forest Department, Tamil Nadu Forest Academy (TNFA), Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), and WWF-India. It was held from 4 to 6 February 2016 at the TNFA in Coimbatore, a heritage building and seat of forestry learning, in Tamil Nadu state in Southern India

It was for the first time that representatives from wildlife law enforcement agencies from across the country came together to undergo training to enhance their knowledge and skills for curbing poaching and illegal wildlife trade - an increasingly significant factor affecting biodiversity conservation. The workshop was also an important forum for discussions with a potential for developing a national level strategy and protocol for combating wildlife crime.

Attended by 150 senior level officials representing 20 States and Union Territories that included nine wildlife

law enforcement agencies such as the State Forest Departments, WCCB, Border Security Force (BSF), Police, Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), Customs, Indian Coast Guard, and Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), the training workshop was successful in bringing together enforcement officials from across India to a common forum. Several reputed media personnel and representatives of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) also attended various sessions to consider how they could be effective stakeholders in the mission of combating wildlife crimes across India and especially in the trans-border regions.

Honourable Forest Minister, Government of Tamil Nadu, Shri M.S.M. Anandan, in a message to all the participants during the inaugural said "Poaching and illegal wildlife trade are grave threats that endanger India's wildlife. Tiger, elephants, rhinos, and many lesser known species such as monitor lizards, pangolins, turtle and tortoise species, bird species such as parakeets, munias and many others are poached from the wild and

smuggled across borders to international markets. Unfortunately, India's rich wildlife is always a target for poachers, wildlife smugglers and international traders and this threat needs to be curbed in order to secure the future of Indian wildlife."

The Honourable Minister was pleased that the Government of Tamil Nadu hosted India's first National Workshop on Capacity Building for Combating Wildlife Crime and congratulated TRAFFIC and its partners WCCB, TNFA, Tamil Nadu Forest Department and WWF-India for taking the initiative and co-ordinating efforts for this important step towards curbing wildlife crime.

Dr N. Krishnakumar, Indian Forest Service (IFS), Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) and Head of Department, Tamil Nadu had taken keen interest in organising the National Workshop and provided his full support. He said, "Wildlife crime cannot be dealt with in isolation and requires involvement of various stakeholders and enforcement agencies. Local communities living around the forest areas have a strong potential of becoming the game changers in our efforts to stop wildlife crime. It is important that they are sensitised and involved with strong incentives for combating poaching and smuggling of wildlife".

Another important aspect stressed by Dr Krishnakumar during the workshop was the involvement of the judiciary at various levels. He stated that effective and timely prosecution of wildlife cases can prove to be an important deterrent in curbing wildlife. The conviction rate for wildlife cases in India is extremely low, placing the efforts of the enforcement agencies in vain. Therefore, it is important to strengthen the judicial system of the country.

Dr V. K. Melkani, IFS, PCCF (Wildlife) and Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW), Government of Tamil Nadu further added, "Wildlife crime has grown to become one of the largest well organised crimes in the world and therefore needs an organised response. Therefore, it is important for law enforcement officers to learn and use the latest tools and techniques available to fight wildlife crime. We are hopeful that the participants will take back from this workshop, knowledge and skills that are needed to curb this growing menace."

Ms Tilotama Varma, Indian Police Service (IPS), Additional Director of the WCCB, New Delhi, said: "WCCB is a nodal agency for fighting wildlife crime in India. However, it is important to secure co-operation and participation of other law enforcement agencies such as the Police, Railway Protection Force, Customs, and BSF among others. This workshop provided a significant

platform for WCCB to share its experience and learning on techniques which have proved effective in nabbing poachers, conducting wildlife seizures and other aspects of wildlife law enforcement."

Mr Rajeev Srivastava, Director - TNFA while welcoming the participants to the Academy spoke about the important role played by the Academy in training forest officials for combating wildlife crime. He shared his experience as a senior forest officer about dealing with wildlife crime issues across India. He spoke about the need to highlight

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Release of TRAFFIC India's Wildlife Law Enforcement Training Manual

more on poaching of lesser known species such as monitor lizards, pangolins, turtles, tortoises and many others and implementing robust conservation and protection plans to safeguard the future of such species.



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Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, Head of TRAFFIC in India said “Keeping in view the global crisis of wildlife trade that has also engulfed India, the national workshop in Tamil Nadu is an appropriate initiative to provide much needed co-ordination among key law enforcement agencies. At this crucial juncture, improvised skills and protocols need to be provided to all the relevant officers so that they employ best practices to combat wildlife crime and contribute to the global effort to save rare and endangered species from the threats of poaching, trafficking and illegal consumption.”

The National Workshop was conducted by Dr Niraj along with a team of highly skilled resource personnel who were experts in their respective fields related to wildlife protection, conservation strategies, and crime prevention. The overall sessions during the workshop included identification of species in trade and strategies in combating crime; application of forensics and DNA techniques in wildlife crime investigations; standardising wildlife forensic-based protocols for investigating wildlife crimes; intelligence collection and collation and methodologies for cyber tracking; techniques for investigation and prosecution to combat illegal wildlife trade; significance of various wildlife laws for improving prosecution in wildlife crimes; SMART patrolling methods in the field for better surveillance;

identifying core strengths and weaknesses of wildlife crime prosecution in India and addressing them; improving investigation in wildlife cases; India's role in South Asia's fight against wildlife crimes, and many other related topics.

TRAFFIC's capacity building training workshop also included, for the first time, a media panel discussion with the personnel from various media agencies across the country. The purpose of the panel discussion was to reinforce the important role media can play in curbing wildlife crime and the need to undertake ethical media reporting on wildlife crime issues.

For the first time ever, a wildlife law enforcement training and capacity building workshop had a live demonstration by sniffer and detector dog squads exhibiting their special skills in conducting illegal wildlife seizures as well as in nabbing poachers. The dog squads have been trained under TRAFFIC's pioneering programme to deploy sniffer dog squads in and around Tiger reserves and other Protected Areas across the country. The workshop also provided



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an opportunity for TRAFFIC to launch its latest film on the sniffer dog training programme in India titled “TRAFFIC's Super Sniffers”. The film showcases how dogs and their handlers are trained to make them sniffer dog teams. The film covered the nature of training provided and the process of deployment of trained dogs in the field and was produced in partnership with a well known wildlife filmmaker, Mr Himanshu Malhotra.

Dr Kumar said: “The feedback received from representatives of different enforcement agencies and participants has been unending and overwhelming, clearly indicating that the workshop made a substantially positive impact on them. Some participants said that their perception about wildlife crime had changed after attending the three-day workshop sessions and their agencies would be keen in joining hands with others to combat wildlife crime and illegal wildlife trade. This sentiment was endorsed by several others who pledged their support to these initiatives”.



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Enforcement officers in the States of West Bengal and Kerala undergo rigorous hands-on training to combat wildlife crime

The TRAFFIC organised National Workshop on Capacity Building for Combating Wildlife Crime in Coimbatore, was preceded by similar workshops in West Bengal and Kerala.

West Bengal: A two-day capacity building workshop was organised on 2-3 December 2015 jointly by TRAFFIC and WWF-India at Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary in Sukhna, West Bengal in partnership with the Directorate of Forests, West Bengal. Eighty officials from the Departments of Forest and Wildlife, Police, Customs and Central Excise, SSB, Railway Protection Force, BSF and Indian Army attended.

This workshop was inaugurated by Mr Manoj Verma, IPS, Commissioner of Police, Siliguri, and Dr P.T. Bhutia IFS, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Addl. PCCF), North Bengal and like other TRAFFIC's capacity building workshops it aimed to strengthen the knowledge and skills of the enforcement officials and build partnership and co-operation among agencies to curb wildlife crime in the State.

TRAFFIC's team of highly skilled and knowledgeable resource personnel included Mr Varun Kapoor, IPS officer; Dr M.S. Kachhawa, a senior lawyer; Dr S.P. Goyal, Scientist Emeritus at the renowned Wildlife Institute of India (WII) located at Dehradun; and Mr Nishant Verma, Regional Deputy Director of WCCB, northern region.

Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, Head of TRAFFIC in India, stressed the importance of West Bengal's forest landscape, its strategic location, its rich biodiversity and propensity for activities involving poaching and illegal wildlife trade due to its proximity to international and interstate borders. He gave an overview of illegal wildlife trade in India with a focus on the trans-border regions and presented the latest information on trade trends and drivers, species in trade and related domestic and international demands. To find out more, please visit <http://www.traffic.org/home/2015/12/28/west-bengal-enforcement-officials-learn-about-latest-technol.html>

Kerala: A workshop on capacity building on wildlife law enforcement was organised by TRAFFIC and WWF-India at Parambikulam Tiger Reserve (PTR), Kerala, in partnership with the Parambikulam Tiger Conservation Foundation (PTCF) and WCCB on 20-21 August 2015.

Mr Anjan Kumar, Deputy Director and Chairperson of PTCF inaugurated the workshop at this Tiger Reserve that is located in the interior of the Western Ghats and home to about 50 Tigers.

Fifty five enforcement officials, including those from 13 forest divisions in Kerala, the Police Department and Customs and Central Excise Department in the State of Kerala completed the two-days of intensive wildlife law enforcement training where they received a hands-on field training session on surveillance, seizure and interrogation, wildlife crime scene investigation, identifying and dismantling poaching traps, suspect interrogation, sample collection and packaging, and utilization of deep search metal detectors from Tamil Nadu-based Special Task Force trainers. TRAFFIC presented a deep search metal detector to the staff of PTR.

Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, Head of TRAFFIC in India, spoke about the rich biodiversity and high endemism of wildlife found in the Anaimalai-Parambikulam landscape of the southern Western Ghats and its susceptibility to poaching and illegal wildlife trade.

He gave an overview of illegal wildlife trade in India and presented the latest information on the trends in this field, the various drivers of the trade and poaching, the species involved and what lies behind the domestic and international demand for wildlife. To find out more, please visit <http://www.traffic.org/home/2015/8/25/kerala-enforcement-agencies-ready-to-tackle-wildlife-crime.html>

TRAFFIC issues warning of illegal wildlife trade at Sonepur

Sonepur Fair is reportedly the largest cattle fair in Asia and has immense cultural and sacred significance. However, the Fair is also seen as an opportunity by illegal wildlife traders openly to sell protected species of wildlife.

Last year, TRAFFIC issued an Advisory to various enforcement agencies in Bihar and other neighbouring States asking them to take immediate action to curb nefarious and illegal wildlife trade activities at Sonepur Fair that was to begin on 25th November at Sonepur in Bihar.

Although TRAFFIC has previously highlighted rampant and illegal trade in various protected species of wildlife at

the popular Sonepur Fair, including in the pages of this newsletter, this may be the first time any organisation has issued an advisory to enforcement agencies prior the onset of the Fair, calling for action to curb wildlife crime.

Parakeets, Hill Mynahs, bulbuls, doves, munias, shikras and many other protected species of Indian birds have been found on display at the Fair, highlighting its role a major hub for illegal trade in bird species. In 2013, TRAFFIC observed at least 18 protected Indian bird species and about 26 such bird species in 2014 for sale at the Chiriyaa Bazaar located at the fair.

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* has been the most commonly seen bird species at the Fair followed by



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Black-headed Munia *Lonchura atricapilla*, Red Munia *Amandava amandava*, and Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria* with numbers ranging from 2500 to 7000 birds on display at any given time. Since non-native birds are not as strictly protected due to lacunas in legislation and policies, their trade is used as a cover to further the trade of indigenous birds.

TRAFFIC's investigation over the years has revealed a continuance of wildlife trade in violation of the Wildlife (Protection) Act of India, 1972.

TRAFFIC observed the presence of 37 Asian Elephants *Elephas maximus* at the Fair in 2013, including six tusked and six calves and 39 Elephants including five tusked and five calves in 2014. Capture of elephants and their transportation to Sonapur is a regular occurrence substantiated by reports that many of these animals are transported from Assam for sale at the Fair in contravention of the law.

Other species such as Rhesus Macaques *Macaca mulatta* and Hanuman Langurs *Semnopithecus entellus* were also found on sale at the Fair along with other mammals such as Black-naped Hare *Lepus nigricollis*, Nilgai *Boselaphus tragocamelus* and Indian Porcupine *Hystrix indica*.

Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, Head of TRAFFIC India said, "It's concerning to witness open violation of wildlife laws at Sonapur Fair year after year despite several reports. There is no doubt that the Fair has evolved into a hub for illegal wildlife trade especially in indigenous bird species. TRAFFIC recommends co-ordination among various enforcement agencies such as the Forest Department and Police in Bihar and other States for appropriate action to end the illegal wildlife trade that threatens the future of many endangered and protected wildlife species".

TRAFFIC's Advisory recommends prohibiting the presence of elephants on the fairground premises through a gradual phasing out of the elephant display at the Fair. Importantly, agencies need to maintain adequate checks on the animal and bird inventory at the Fair, to ensure that no protected species are being sold. Efforts should be made to collect more data on wild animals traded and displayed at Sonapur. The continuous presence of effective wildlife law enforcement staff at the Fair during the period would be significant in achieving this goal. The Advisory also recommends publicity campaigns in and around the premises of the Fair to educate participants about the illegality of the trade and its legal implication for both sellers and buyers.

Observations from 2015: This was the third year in succession that TRAFFIC conducted surveys at the Fair after random surveys had indicated that the wild animal trade is deeply rooted in its traditions. Despite campaigns by several organisations and the advisory issued, the 2015 survey found that wild animal sales continued. On average, 8000-10000 birds were on display for sale any time at various shops at the Chiriya Bazaar while the sale of macaques, Common Langurs, and mongooses was also observed. Monkeys were crammed into tiny cages while birds such as ducks and cranes were often kept without water in open cemented troughs. The field investigators also noted sale of many non-native birds including conures, macaws and other parrots. The fact that the managers of the Chiriya Bazaar collected 'sales tax' just before the exit gate on all purchases made at the bazaar, and that there was a list of 'tax rate' displayed up on the wall before the exit gate testifies that the activities were blatantly illegal. The tax collectors did not allow photography of the rate list, nor were they keen on talking about it. The field investigators also found that although trade of protected species may have been scaled down at Chiriya Bazaar it appears to have been scaled up in nearby locations, which the field investigators collected some information on.

New batch of TRAFFIC's Super Sniffers begin training at Tekanpur, Madhya Pradesh

On 20th January 2016, TRAFFIC's sniffer dog training programme successfully entered its fifth phase in India. The current rigorous nine month long training programme with 16 new dog squads (16 dogs and 32 handlers) commenced at the National Training Center for Dogs (NTCD) managed by the Border Security Force at Tekanpur near Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh State.

The 16 dogs currently under training are between the ages of 6-9 months and will be deployed in the States of Andhra Pradesh (2 dog squads), Chhattisgarh (2 dog squads), Kerala (2 dog squads), Madhya Pradesh (3 dog squads), Karnataka (3 dog squads), West Bengal (1 dog squad), and Tamil Nadu (3 dog squads) by the end of this year.

Started in 2008, TRAFFIC's sniffer dog programme has assisted the training and deployment of 27 professionally trained dogs and their handlers in nine States across India. The programme, conducted by TRAFFIC jointly with the States and with support from WWF-India, is a significant part of TRAFFIC's long term strategy to fight wildlife crime in India.

The last batch of 14 wildlife sniffer dogs and their handlers passed out in June 2015 from the 23rd Battalion of Special Armed Reserve Police to join the wildlife sniffer dog brigade, thereby doubling India's strength in wildlife sniffer dog squads. The squads have been instrumental in at least 16 seizures and arrests, by tracing consignments of bones and their derivatives of species such as Leopard, Tiger, Wild Boar, Sloth Bear, Sambar and Spotted Deer among others. Since its inception, the sniffer dogs have been successfully deployed in over 100 seizures and arrests.

Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, Head of TRAFFIC in India said,



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“India has a huge forest cover and with only 27 trained sniffer dogs, pressure for protecting India's wildlife remains intense on these four legged creatures. It is TRAFFIC's vision that at least four to five dog squads are deployed in each State in the next few years for boosting wildlife enforcement and protection efforts.”

Even though the dogs are trained for sniffing out products such as Tiger and Leopard body parts, elephant ivory and bear bile, they have detected other wildlife contraband such as deer meat, live bird species, Red Sand Boa, Blackbuck, hare, python, Rat Snake, porcupine, turtle carapaces and even the presence of weapons. Their role has become critical in the field of wildlife investigation and prosecution.

TRAFFIC acknowledges its new partnership with the NTCD for its proactive support in strengthening wildlife protection across the country. Taking this opportunity, the organisation also thanks the donors and supporters from different regions of India and the world for their contribution to the sniffer dog training programme.

Super Sniffers: A film on TRAFFIC's sniffer dog training programme in India

TRAFFIC has recently produced a film on its pioneering sniffer dog training programme for combating wildlife crime in India. The 8.5 minute long film was written and directed by well known wildlife filmmaker Mr Himanshu Malhotra and captures the journey of a young dog from the day it is enrolled into training until it is deployed as a trained detector and sniffer dog.

The film gives an overview of illegal wildlife trade in India and the threat it poses to our wildlife. It also highlights the important role that these detector and sniffer dogs play in combating wildlife crime and the need to use the dog squads effectively for surveillance and in wildlife crime investigations, and in the seizure and arrest of criminals.

The film was launched at the National Workshop on

Capacity Building for Combating Wildlife Crime in India in Coimbatore on 4th February 2016 and encapsulates the experiences of dog trainers and handlers who have been involved in the sniffer dog training programme and have been part of the dog squads in the field.

Through the film, TRAFFIC hopes to raise support for the sniffer dog training programme so that more dog squads can be trained and deployed. The support and association of State governments, which TRAFFIC is currently pursuing, is vital to enhance the programme.



To watch the film, please visit

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22OYAG7tvvE&feature=youtu.be>

TRAFFIC's latest poster campaign highlights the plight of lesser-known wildlife species

On the eve of World Pangolin Day on 20th February 2016, TRAFFIC released a poster, **"Scaly future for the Indian Pangolin"**, highlighting the extreme impact of extensive poaching and illegal trade in pangolins and asking for support and action to secure the animals' future in India.

As part of the campaign, a second poster was produced

highlighting poaching and illegal trade in turtles and tortoises in India titled **"Illegal trade shrinking the future of the longest living animals"**.

TRAFFIC has previously stressed the need to publicise and initiate immediate actions to curb illegal trade in non-charismatic, lesser-known wildlife species that has largely remained unreported. With little knowledge and

understanding about population status, numbers poached, illegal wildlife trade hubs and trade dynamics of these non-charismatic species, it is difficult to ascertain the impacts of illegal trade on their populations.

Pangolins in India are poached in large numbers mainly for their scales that are smuggled across international borders for use in traditional Asian medicines. Their meat is consumed locally and is also considered a delicacy in many Asian countries. On the other hand, various turtle and tortoise species are plundered from the wild for

sale in pet trade markets, for meat as well as for use in traditional Asian medicines. They are consumed locally as well as smuggled in large numbers abroad.

Reports have indicated that trade in pangolins, turtles and tortoises is underhand and extensive. While, it is important to strengthen wildlife law enforcement initiatives to curb poaching and trade, it is equally important to sensitise general masses to gain their support. TRAFFIC's latest posters are a step in this direction.



SCALY FUTURE FOR INDIA'S PANGOLINS

Netted, trapped, shot or snared, pangolins in India are poached for their scales and other body parts that are smuggled in large numbers to other countries for use in traditional medicines.



Hunting, trapping and trade in pangolins is a punishable offence under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Their international trade is restricted and liable for prosecution.

WILL YOU LEND YOUR HAND?
Help Stop Pangolin Poaching And Trade

Report poaching, smuggling or illegal trade to the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (www.wccb.gov.in), local Forest and Police Departments.

TRAFFIC India Office
C/O WWF-India, 172-B, Lodi Estate
New Delhi-110003
Tel: 011-41504786/43516290
Email: trafficindia@wwfindia.net

#StopIllegalWildlifeTrade
<http://support.wwfindia.org/its/pangolin.html>
www.trafficindia.org, www.traffic.org, www.wwfindia.org

The posters were jointly produced by TRAFFIC, WWF-India and WCCB as an extension of a digital media campaign highlighting the plight of lesser known but highly traded species in illegal wildlife trade including pangolins, mongoose and owls, amongst others that was launched and executed by the same organisations in February 2015. The digital campaign was successful in reaching out to nearly 1.4 million individuals on Facebook, Twitter and Google.

For a copy of the poster, please send an email to dilpreet.chhabra@traffic.org or download at http://www.wwfindia.org/about_wwf/enablers/traffic/publications/posters/



HELP STOP ILLEGAL TRADE OF TURTLES AND TORTOISES

Poaching and illegal trade of Indian turtles and tortoises species has escalated, driven mainly by the demand for their meat, use in medicine and for the pet trade. The future of these long-lived animals has been shortened by the ever burgeoning domestic and international illegal wildlife trade.

ILLEGAL TRADE SHRINKING THE FUTURE OF THE LONGEST LIVING ANIMALS

IT'S ILLEGAL: Hunting, trapping and trade is a punishable offence under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. International trade is restricted and liable for prosecution.

SUPPORT: Your support is critical for conservation and protection of wildlife. Report poaching, smuggling or illegal trade to the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (www.wccb.gov.in), local Forest and Police Departments.

TRAFFIC India Office
C/O WWF-India, 172-B, Lodi Estate
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#StopIllegalWildlifeTrade
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Celebrating Wildlife Week 2015: TRAFFIC reaches out on poaching and illegal wildlife trade

Every year in India, Wildlife Week is celebrated in the first week of October to highlight issues related to wildlife conservation. Wildlife Week is an opportunity to draw attention to the threats that wildlife faces today, celebrate various milestones achieved in wildlife conservation and garner further support for protection and conservation of wildlife.

In 2015, TRAFFIC participated in a Wildlife Week Celebration organised by the Government of Tamil Nadu and the Forest Department at Tirupur on 2 October 2015. The programme was inaugurated by Shri M S M Anandan, Honourable Minister of Forests, Government of Tamil Nadu and was presided over by Mr Hans Raj Varma, Indian Administrative Service, Principal Secretary, Environment and Forests, Government of Tamil Nadu.

A TRAFFIC exhibit displayed important communiqués on illegal trade in various wildlife species including trade in lesser-known species and encouraged visitors to take some of the reading material for better understanding of this issue. The exhibitors also showed various films highlighting trade in threatened species including TRAFFIC's 'Don't Buy Trouble (a film on illegal wildlife trade in India)' and 'Closing the Deadly Gateway (a film



© Amar Nath Choudhary/TRAFFIC

on poaching and illegal trade in Tigers across Tiger range countries)'. TRAFFIC representatives at the exhibition interacted with visitors who showed a keen interest in understanding the threats from poaching and illegal wildlife trade.

At least 20 different organisations including TRAFFIC, WWF-India, Nilgiri Natural History Society, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON), Keystone Foundation, Wildlife and Nature Conservation Trust among others participated in the exhibition, which was visited by over 15 000 enthusiastic individuals. Cultural programmes highlighting the importance of wildlife conservation were also organised during the exhibition.

Subsequent to the wildlife exhibition, and also as part of the Wildlife Week celebration activities, TRAFFIC organised a seminar and an interactive session with nearly 500 students of Gyan Bharati School in New Delhi on 6th October. An audio-visual presentation for the Students on the nature and extent of poaching and illegal wildlife trade in India was followed by a short quiz. The students, largely belonging to senior classes, displayed a high level of enthusiasm and understanding about wildlife issues and interacted actively with the TRAFFIC speakers.



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02

Outpost

- 1. Unseen harvest: Southeast Asia's illegal orchid trade**
- 2. Chinese TCM industry says NO to illegal wildlife trade**

Unseen harvest: Southeast Asia's illegal orchid trade

A thriving and illegal wildlife trade in Southeast Asia which threatens rare orchid species is going largely unnoticed in Thailand and across its borders. This was found during a joint study undertaken by TRAFFIC and the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), findings of which were released in November 2015 in Bangkok, Thailand.



Conservative trade figures documented during the study suggest that tens of thousands of orchids are illegally traded across Thailand's borders every year without either domestic harvest permits or CITES permits, violating range, State and international restrictions on wild orchid harvest.

Surveys carried out during 2011–2012 in four of the largest wild plant markets in Thailand, at the country's borders with Myanmar and Lao PDR, recorded 348 species of orchid for sale, representing 13 to 22 percent of the target countries' known orchid flora. The survey even found species from genus *Paphiopedilum*, which are listed in Appendix I of CITES, which bans the international trade of wild-collected specimens.

At least 16 percent of orchid species observed could be classified under some category of threat or were rare species found in small or specific areas. TRAFFIC's study **A Blooming Trade: Illegal trade of ornamental orchids in mainland Southeast Asia** identifies Bangkok's

Chatuchak market as a regional centre of botanical trade, hosting a large and unique richness of wild plant species, many of them illegally harvested.

"The Chatuchak market has long been notorious as a major hub for the illegal trade in a wide variety of plants and animals—everything from orchids to tortoises, from ivory to eagles," said Dr Chris R. Shepherd, Regional Director TRAFFIC Southeast Asia. "We strongly urge the authorities in Thailand to shut down the illegal trade in this market for good."

Interviews with plant harvesters, traders and middlemen identified significant illegal international trade in orchids from Lao PDR and Myanmar into Thailand, confirming the country's demand for wild ornamental plants from local and regional sources.

"Despite being amongst the most protected group of plants in the world, we found clear evidence of an open illegal trade. It is time to take

trade and conservation of plants seriously - alongside efforts to reduce the illegal trades in elephant ivory, rhinoceros horn and pangolin scales as this is no different," said Dr Jacob Phelps, author of the report and lecturer in Tropical Environmental Change and Policy at Lancaster Environment Centre.

The report also revealed complex trade chains involving highly organised middlemen specialised in orchid and ornamental plant trade. Growing internet-based trade and laundering of wild plants via registered commercial greenhouses was observed, including trade in orchids for medicinal purposes in Viet Nam and China. The report calls on Thai government agencies, CITES parties, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations- Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) and conservation organisations formally to recognize this phenomenon and urgently improve monitoring of not only the trade in charismatic animals species, but also in wild plants.

Given considerable implications of illegal wildlife trade, the author of the report further appeals for greater attention from Thailand's CITES Management Authority for plants, as well as the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation and the Royal Forest Department. To download a copy of the report, please visit <http://www.traffic.org/home/2015/11/24/unseen-harvest-southeast-asias-illegal-orchid-trade.html>.

Chinese TCM industry says NO to illegal wildlife trade



On 15th October 2015, representatives of leading Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) companies affirmed their commitment not to use endangered plants and animals protected by national legislation and CITES in their medicinal products.

The pledge was made at an event in Beijing initiated by TRAFFIC in collaboration with the China Association of Traditional Chinese Medicine and China Wildlife Conservation Association. Some of the

most famous TCM companies in China and worldwide were present including Tongrentang, Leiyunshang, Pianzaihuang, Yunnanbaiyao, Lerentang and China TCM Co. The reaffirmation by these leading companies follows earlier commitments made by the TCM sector in 2010 and 2013.

The use of products such as the Tiger bone, rhino horn, musk and Saiga horn was formerly widespread in the making of TCM medicines such as Tiger bone wine, Angon Niu Huang

Wan (for detoxification and as an antipyretic), Liushen Wan (as an anti-inflammatory), Lingyang Qingfei San (for nourishing lungs and relieving sore-throat). However, in May 1993, the State Council of the People's Republic of China banned trade in rhinoceros horn, Tiger bone and their medicinal derivatives in order to support international conservation efforts to address the threat posed by commercial trade in parts of rhinos and Tigers. The ban was imposed through the removal of these items from the official pharmacopeia of China, and the

cessation of all formal manufacture and commercial trade within China.

At the October event, speaking on behalf of the TCM companies present, Tongrentang, the world's leading TCM Company, confirmed that they would never purchase or sell TCM products using derivatives from illegal sources of wildlife and that any TCM company contravening the national legislation or international convention, would be seriously punished.

According to China's Criminal Law, those who are engaged in the purchase, transportation or trading of Tiger products would be sentenced to five years or more in jail.

"We are delighted to hear leading Chinese TCM companies pledge zero tolerance towards illegal wildlife trade," said Zhou Fei, Head of TRAFFIC in China.

"TCM has played and continues to play a very important role in protecting the health of Chinese citizens. Today's pledge sends a strong message that TCM companies are conscious of and serious about the conservation of endangered species."

Zhang Shanning, Director of China's CITES Management Authority, said "Today's pledge is firm evidence of the TCM industry's commitment towards the Chinese government's efforts to protect endangered species."

03

CITES Update

New tool launched to showcase the important role of local communities in sustainable management of CITES-listed species

New tool launched to showcase the important role of local communities in sustainable management of CITES-listed species

A new handbook on CITES and Livelihoods has been launched to support the effective implementation of the Convention by enabling countries to assess impacts of the CITES listings on livelihoods of poor rural communities that live alongside wild plants and animals. It is jointly produced by CITES and the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (OAS).

The Handbook targets CITES Management and Scientific Authorities, as well as local and municipal officials responsible for the implementation of national biodiversity-related regulatory frameworks, regional/international organisations, civil society organisations, and researchers that work on linkages between people and the environment. This handbook is the result of a collaborative effort involving experts, communities and institutions.

In welcoming the launch of the new handbook, CITES Secretary General John Scanlon said “Resolution 16.6 on CITES and Livelihoods adopted by CITES Parties in Bangkok in 2013 is a powerful expression of the Parties' commitment to sustainable livelihoods for rural communities through the

implementation of the Convention. The handbook is an important tool that guides commitment into practice and has links to the Sustainable Development Goals.”

The new handbook, which is currently available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#), is being deployed to enable rapid assessment of the impact of CITES-listings on local communities and develop case studies that consider how to maximize positive impacts and mitigate negative ones. It is based on the existing toolkit and guidelines, and in line with Resolution Conf.8.3 (Rev.CoP13) on the recognition of the benefits of trade in wildlife, and Resolution Conf. 16.6 on CITES and livelihoods, as well as Decision 16.16 to 6.25 on CITES and Livelihoods.

The French version of the handbook is under preparation and will be available soon.



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04

TRAFFIC Alert

- 1. Two hundred Indian Star Tortoise seized at Chennai airport**
- 2. Ivory weighing 200 kg seized in Delhi**
- 3. Red corals weighing more than 15 000 kg seized in Delhi**

TRAFFIC ALERT

1

Two hundred Indian Star Tortoises seized at Chennai airport

In October 2015, security personnel at Chennai airport in Tamil Nadu seized 200 Indian Star Tortoises while they were being smuggled to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, detaining two people for interrogation. Both the accused were to board two separate flights to Kuala Lumpur and the final destination for the tortoises was believed to be Jakarta in Indonesia.

TRAFFIC adds.....

Indian Star Tortoise *Geochelone elegans*, is listed in Schedule IV of India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and in Appendix II of CITES. Domestic trade in the Indian Star Tortoise is prohibited while international trade in the species is regulated under CITES. Despite this, the trade in tortoises has been blatant and ongoing for many years now.

World Animal Protection has reported illegal trade in at least 55 000 tortoises from just one site in Southeast India each year. The study also put forth evidence of a thriving international criminal operation, with tortoises being smuggled in boxes hidden under food items like vegetables or fish. Many don't survive the long journey in confined spaces. Often they die from malnutrition, suffocation or the stress of confinement.

Given the high levels of trade, reports have indicated that some traders are breeding Indian Star Tortoises illegally in captivity to cater to the demand for wild-caught animals. Over the past two years, several large seizures of Indian Star Tortoises have been made from different parts of India, especially in Tamil Nadu. TRAFFIC calls for more stringent enforcement initiatives especially at the transit points and collection centres to end this ongoing conservation crisis.



© Peter Parshag

Sources: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/200-star-tortoises-seized-at-Chennai-airport-two-carriers-detained/articleshow/49275676.cms>

<http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2015/12/17/over-1400-tortoises-seized-in-last-quarter-smuggled-wildlife-mostly-from-india-were-en-route-to-mala/>

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/legal-loopholes-driving-indian-star-tortoise-to-extinction/article7871328.ece>

2 Ivory weighing 200 kg seized in Delhi

A raid on a Delhi artifact salesman's house on 11 October 2015 led to the seizure of 487 kg of ivory, believed to be one of the largest in recent years. This amounts to the poaching of at least 40 Elephants. The accused, dubbed the Sansar Chand of ivory trade, was arrested after a raid at his residence in Delhi following the interception of call records of his middlemen arrested in Kerala in June.

TRAFFIC adds.....

Although the origin of the ivory in this case has not yet been established, it is likely to have originated from poached Asian Elephants *Elephas maximus*. In India, the Asian Elephant was once widely distributed throughout the country, including in States like Punjab and Gujarat. Currently, they are found only in four fragmented populations, in South, North, Central and Northeast India in 14 States. The Asian Elephant has been accorded the highest possible protection through its listing under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 of India. This means that hunting/trading this species can attract rigorous imprisonment of up to seven years and a minimum fine of INR 25000. CITES has listed the Asian Elephant in Appendix I, which prohibits all commercial international trade of the species.

This legal protection has not deterred poachers and smugglers as domestic demand is one of the drivers for elephant ivory trade in India, with a few communities in India using it for bangles and other decorative ornamental purposes. Poaching for meat and other products like tail hair also pose threats to populations, especially in Northeast India. Ivory is also smuggled out to countries like Japan and China via Thailand, Singapore, and the Philippines. Usages vary from Japanese hanko, artifacts, wedding bangles, trophies and medicines.

TRAFFIC finds that the current poaching hotspots are similar to what they were about two decades ago, in the elephant rich habitat of the Western Ghats, spanning the States of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, as well as Orissa and Assam. There is clear evidence of increased poaching of elephants in the last few years although, it is early to comment on the ongoing investigations, it is being speculated that some of the ivory entering the market could be from privately owned or 'captive' elephants, which is equally illegal. In the case of captive elephants, the ivory is generally trimmed at the tip of the tusk, which takes about a year to re-grow, making it a steady source. Lack of effective intelligence could be a stumbling block in stopping elephant poaching. Price of ivory products has catapulted to new heights thus becoming a very strong driver for poaching.

The poignant message of 2016's World Wildlife Day was that the future of elephants (and of all wildlife) is in our hands.

Sources: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/kerala-cops-seize-ivory-of-40-tuskers-from-delhi-smuggler/story-U1xmodGSUr2vxTMhVuK4rJ.html>

http://www.wwfindia.org/news_facts/?15201/Indias-mammoth-problem-Elephants-threatened-by-poaching-and-illegal-wildlife-trade

3

Red corals weighing more than 15 000 kg seized in Delhi

In February 2016, the Customs Department seized more than 15 000 kg of red corals at the Inland Container Depot in Tughlaqabad, Delhi. The items were found hidden inside a container, which was being smuggled into the country from China. A Delhi-based importer was arrested in connection with the seizure.

TRAFFIC adds.....

TRAFFIC is highly concerned by such large scale exploitation and smuggling of red corals in the South Asian region. The seized corals were reported to be Organ Pipe Corals *Tubipora musica* that are mostly found in the waters of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This is a soft coral but has a hard skeleton of calcium carbonate that contains organ pipe like tubes. The skeleton is bright red in colour and is typically obscured by numerous polyps that can be grey or green in colour.

Trade in Organ Pipe Corals is illegal in India as they are protected under Schedule I of India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Their international trade is further regulated under CITES where they are listed in Appendix II. Due to the domestic restrictions on their trade, experts believe that corals are often collected from Indian waters, smuggled to other countries and later imported back into the country for sale or re-export. Importing into the country also requires adequate permits from CITES, which in the above case were found to be missing.

There are between 800 to 1000 known species of corals in the world and possibly many more in unexplored deepwater territories. Two hundred and six species are known from the Indian coral reef with a large number found in the waters of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Of these, the Organ Pipe Coral is one of the 15 most traded coral species and is under considerable pressure from overharvesting.

Organ Pipe Corals are largely used for making artifacts and jewelry. They are also crushed and sold in spice shops in countries like Yemen, and are a popular species in aquariums as they are easy to maintain and fairly tolerant of aquarium conditions. Some nature based medicine systems use corals in large amounts.

TRAFFIC strongly recommends further research into the illegal collection and trade in various marine species including corals. Coral reefs protect our shorelines from damage and erosion and act as breeding grounds and shelter for many marine organisms, making them a marine biodiversity hotspot. Coral reefs make habitats for several other marine species for their spawning and nursery activities in their life cycles.

Sources:

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/Smuggled-from-China-red-corals-worth-1-8-crore-seized-1-nabbed/articleshow/50978824.cms>

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05

In Focus

Calcutta Snake Park, a breeding ground for wildlife trafficking in India



Calcutta Snake Park, a breeding ground for wildlife trafficking in India

Talk about a snake park and an image of a well maintained reptile sanctuary with the purpose of aiding research and conservation of reptile species comes instantly to our minds. Unfortunately, the experience with the Calcutta Snake Park located at Badu in Madhyamgram, Kolkata, has been just the contrary and worrisome since its inception by Mr Deepak Mitra on 2 October 1977.

Calcutta Snake Park had housed various reptiles' species including snakes, monitor lizards, crocodiles and many bird and mammals species contrary to the permits of the park. Investigations by various NGOs, government agencies as well as TRAFFIC clearly reported on the inability of the park to maintain or display captive collection of reptiles for promoting knowledge about species or create empathy among the public about their conservation status. The Park had also established for itself a dubious reputation of being an important holding

and breeding facility for various protected wildlife species supplied in illegal wildlife trade and TRAFFIC had been alerted to this over many years.

Based on field reports, emanating from various quarters, on regular illegal wildlife trade being carried out at Calcutta Snake Park, TRAFFIC conducted a survey of the park on 30 October 2014. The findings and photographs were submitted to the Central Zoo Authority (CZA), the federal agency that regulates and monitors zoos and captive wild animal facilities in India.

The information provided by TRAFFIC gave valuable leads on how illegal wildlife trade was being carried at the facilities, along with photographic evidence of animals that were captured from the wild. The CZA conducted their own inspections of these facilities with experts on 20 November 2014 and found gross violations of both animal welfare and husbandry standards and an absence and lack of maintenance of proper stock registers at both these places indicating violations of Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. The Forest Department of West Bengal conducted their own investigations and even raided the residence of the Calcutta Snake Park owner on 29 January 2015.

Broad observation indicating that the Park was acting as a holding and probable breeding facility for illegal wildlife species that were further supplied to illegal markets are as below-

1. Lack of record of inventories for the protected wildlife species at the Park- There were no records of monkeys that were displayed at the park, a clear violation of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 as no Schedule I or II species can be acquired or transferred without the permission of the CZA. The records for various species on display at the Park did not tally with the records maintained by the Park.
2. There were numerous species of snakes and crocodiles acquired by the Park without any knowledge of the CZA. This included 20 Monocellate Cobra *Naja kaouthia*, three King Cobra *Ophiophagus hannah*, four Indian Rat Snake *Ptyas mucosa*, two Common Krait *Bungarus caeruleus*, one Burmese Python *Python bivattatus*, two Indian Rock Python *Python molurus*, and

one Indian Marsh Crocodile *Crocodylus palustris*. Besides, there were many other species that were also taken in from time to time without requisite permissions including Red Sand Boa *Gongylophis colubrinus*, Spotted Deer *Axis axis*, Rhesus Monkey *Macaca mulata mulata*, and Star Tortoise *Geochelone elegans*.

3. According to the inventory 2013-2014, there were 35 Monocellate Cobras, 34 Checkered Keelback *Xenochro pispiscator*, 10 March Crocodiles *Crocodylus palustris*, 30 Monitor Lizard *Varanus bengalensis* and 17 Water Monitors *Varanus salvator*. Keeping such large numbers in cramped dingy environment was neither necessary for education nor for planned breeding purpose. Furthermore, this inventory did not match up with the physical verification done at the park by the investigating agencies simply implying that many individuals disappeared from the Park without any records.

4. There were no signage present at the exhibit about the species displayed clearly indicating that the Park did not promote any knowledge or education about the species displayed.

5. The Park was managed by the owner himself who was also involved with various other activities related to wildlife trade. Mr Deepak Mitra was the President of the Bird Breeders and Lovers Association in Kolkata and had displayed native species of birds like Rose-Ringed Parakeets under the guise of non native species at the Snake Park.

6. No scientific or veterinary staff was employed at the Park, mandatory if the Park was run on the pretext of aiding and assisting research on reptiles.

7. There were many welfare issues related to the upkeep of the animals at the park including dingy, tiny and littered cages. There was no enrichment in the enclosures clearly implying that the welfare of the housed animals was not a priority for the Park.

The whole investigative process after the initial TRAFFIC investigation led to paving the path that eventually saw the CZA directing the Forest Department

of West Bengal to seize all animals and relocate them to the Deer Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre and Alipore Zoo in Kolkata. Calcutta Snake Park refused to accept any of CZA or Forest Department notices or directives. The Calcutta Snake Park was then raided by Forest Department on 5 December 2015 and 51 animals were recovered and sent to Alipore Zoo in Kolkata putting an end to a 37 year old long saga of clandestine wildlife trade.

The adjacent West Bengal Snake Park in Badu, Madhyamgram, had raised similar concerns that were conveyed to several governmental and non governmental agencies including TRAFFIC. This Park was closed down on 2 December 2015.

Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, Head of TRAFFIC India adds, "The findings of the investigation at the Calcutta Snake Park clearly indicates how so called Snake Parks and other captive facilities running on the grounds of promoting wildlife education or research facilities in India unless monitored properly can become a haven for wildlife trafficking- breeding and supplying protected species of wildlife to various illegal markets in India and across the border. We are hopeful that the authorities will take this case of the Calcutta Snake Park as an eye opener and work on better monitoring of such facilities in India".

Mr Shubhobroto Ghosh from TRAFFIC India, the prime investigator of the Calcutta Snake Park, who had lead the case till the closure of the Park in 2015 further states, "This case clearly brings to the forefront a new and an important dimension of illegal wildlife trade in India. It questions the involvement of various captive wildlife breeding facilities including zoos, in trafficking of protected and endangered wildlife. TRAFFIC strongly recommends closer monitoring and evaluation of zoos and other captive breeding facilities in India to ensure that all records are maintained and that all wildlife species are accounted for at these facilities".

Note: The article is based on information provided by Shubhobroto Ghosh from TRAFFIC India. Photographs of the Park are on the next page, and are courtesy Shubhobroto Ghosh.



Signpost

Other significant news stories

DRONES TO EYE POACHING

THE NATIONAL TIGER CONSERVATION Authority (NTCA) is awaiting a final nod from the Ministry of Defence to start its ambitious drone monitoring project for combating wildlife poaching and man-animal conflict.



HOW WILL IT WORK? FITTED WITH GPS device and hi-resolution cameras, the unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) also known as drones, are fast becoming a necessary hi-tech tool in wildlife management all over the world..

MOU SIGNED NTCA HAD LAST week signed an MoU with WII to start monitoring by drones in five tiger reserves of Panna, Jim Corbett National Park, Kaziranga, Sundarbans and the Sathyamangalam forest of Tamil Nadu. ₹3.5 crore earmarked.

Deccan Chronicles/03-02-2016

ORPHANS IN THE WILD

Never heard of the pangolin, the dugong, or the slender loris? That's because discrimination persists within the world of endangered species. A look at why this is a bad news for you and your world








RED LING TONGUE BARB
This small, colorful fish is found in the waters of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It is a critically endangered species.

PANGOLIN
This scaly mammal is one of the most endangered species in the world. It is hunted for its scales, which are used in traditional Chinese medicine.

SEA CUCUMBER
This marine invertebrate is found in the waters of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It is a critically endangered species.

SEA HORSE
This small fish is found in the waters of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It is a critically endangered species.

SLENDER LORIS
This small primate is found in the forests of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It is a critically endangered species.

ALL-AT-SEA
This small fish is found in the waters of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It is a critically endangered species.

FOREST OWL
This owl is found in the forests of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It is a critically endangered species.

Hindustan Times/13-03-2016

Forest guards get GPS-enabled digital assistants

TECH SUPPORT After detection of offence, a guard can geo-tag location and upload a photo on central server; it will then be tracked by seniors



Maha's wild wealth
Forest uses record largest portion of land after agriculture in Maharashtra. The state's recorded forest areas constitute 20.0% of the geographical area. The National Forest Policy, 1988, has set a target of 33%. It has six national parks, 4 wildlife sanctuaries and four conservation reserves with a tiger population of around 190 in 2014, up from 169 in 2010.

Once an offence is registered, we can track its progress," noted a senior forest department official involved with the exercise.

Once a guard detects any offence on his beat, he will geo-tag the location on the PDA - which is like a mobile phone - click a photo and upload it on the central server, after which it will be tracked by those in the chain of command. This is faster than the manual system, wherein paper work could take days to reach senior officials.

He added that they planned to cover all 7,000 forest guards, in addition to range forest officers (RFOs) and foresters at a later stage. The officer said they were also trying to link digitised maps on GPS to satellite maps to know real-time changes in forest areas. A similar PDA-based system was also being used by the Maharashtra Pradesh forest department.

"This is useful to record illegal felling and encroachments," noted a forest service officer, posted in one of the thickly forested districts in Maharashtra, adding that it also helped them ensure that the best guards kept their boots on the ground.

"If there are frequent offences in a particular area, we can direct protection activities there. Moreover, the presence of a forest guard on the beat and his foot patrolling is important. His movement in the area also ensures protection. We can monitor the presence of the guards on their beats," the official added.

The case and subsequent developments, such as lodging of an FIR, arrests and the progress of the case till it reaches the court, can be tracked and monitored on the system," said a forest department official. Moreover, the PDAs can be used to track the status and measure the extent of plantation, something that could not be done earlier, and also record crop losses due to wild animals.

Daily News & Analysis/26-03-2016

CITES expresses concern over rhino poaching



RHINO HORNS ARE IN VERY HIGH DEMAND FOR PREPARING TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE. EVEN ITS OTHER BODY PARTS AS NAILS AND SKIN ARE SOUGHT AFTER IN THE ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE

PNG IN NEW DELHI
The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) has expressed concern over increasing rhino poaching in the country, asking it to remain vigilant in its efforts to combat rhino poaching. The issue came up for discussion in the recently concluded 66th CITES Standing Committee meeting in Geneva.

This particularly assumes significance following the three consecutive rhino poaching in Kaziranga National Park, which is a major stronghold of Asian one-horned rhinos. One of a world population of about 3,500 individuals, nearly three-fourth rhinos are found in Assam alone.

A report prepared by the Rhino Task Force of the National Tiger Conservation Authority that was discussed in the CITES meeting pointed out that rhinos are being targeted by trans-national criminal groups and rhino poaching in the country is driven by demand outside the country. While rhino horns are in very high demand for preparing traditional Chinese medicine, even its other body parts as nails and skin are sought after in the illegal wildlife trade.

The report pointed out that rhino poaching is an organised crime, involving national and international gangs, who work in close coordination. It has components of arms smuggling, money laundering, cross-border smuggling, terrorism and international illegal wildlife trade.

The rhino trade, as revealed during investigation of arrested poachers, is multi-layered and trans-national. It said there was no denying that rhino poaching has international dimensions, and there are long chains crossing many borders of states and countries. Action within the park boundaries may result in only partially eliminating the menace by killing poachers, seizure of arms or seizing poachers. The efforts inside the national park, must therefore be supplemented by equally strong action outside its boundaries, it said.

The task force had recommended that the CBI and Wildlife Crime Control Bureau must work in close coordination with cross-border wildlife crime investigation agencies such as in Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, China, Taiwan, Australia and South Africa.

According to Bibhab Talukdar, Chair, Asian Rhino Specialist Group, CITES management authorities need to work closely with Nepal and Myanmar through which rhino poaching is being carried out from India, to break the network. This should be a priority as rhino horns trade is a threat to our national security.

As per official data, 10 97 rhinos were poached between 2013-2016 from the national parks of Kaziranga, Manas, Orang, Pobitora in Assam besides Jaldapara and Gorumara in West Bengal. The highest number of 76 rhino deaths have been reported from Kaziranga, with 16 cases reported in 2015.

Meanwhile, CITES is an international agreement between governments of 181 nations across the world. The issue of rhino poaching according to sources is expected to figure in Conference of Parties (CoP) 17 of CITES scheduled in South Africa in November this year.

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The dark side of Diwali: Death for owls

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LUCKNOW: If owls could howl, they would have certainly done so on the Diwali night. Like every year, many of these birds will fall prey to human greed on the festival of lights that is held on the year's darkest night considered the best for occult practices.

These birds will be sacrificed in the belief among those wedded to superstition that snuffing out the winged creature's life will fetch fame and fortune. Owls are believed to be the carriers of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.

"It's an illegal practice but unfortunately it's on the rise," says Hasan Tahir, an occultist. "Shamans use the owl's skull, bones, feathers and blood in praiseworthy rituals that are believed to bring prosperity and wealth to the person (for whom the birds are killed)," adds Hasan. The practice originated in Rajasthan but has spread fast to Uttar Pradesh, he says.

"Tortoiseshells are also used for the purpose," he adds.

City-based bird-sellers say the sale of owls starts about three weeks before the festival of lights. "The city market witnesses a sudden rise in the demand for owls after Dussehra," says Rashtrapati, a bird seller in Chowk.

He discloses that the owls are sold at high prices as the buyers are ready to shell out any amount. "The price depends on the weight of the bird," he adds. The price starts from ₹2,000 and goes up to lakhs, he says, while at the same time making it clear that he is not involved in the owl trade. For their part, the zoo authorities in the state capital have sounded a high alert and increased vigil.

"It's indeed a tough time for owls. We have made arrangements near their cage to ensure complete security," zoo veterinarian Dr. Vikas Singh said. Singh says the administration and the forest department should act in complete coordination to counter the practice that is endangering the owls.

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