

THE BIG CAT TRADE IN MYANMAR AND THAILAND

ADAM H. OSWELL

A TRAFFIC SOUTHEAST ASIA REPORT



TRAFFIC
the wildlife trade monitoring network



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Cover: Tiger skin displayed and for sale at one of many retail outlets for Tiger products in Mong La Special Region 4, Shan State, Myanmar, June 2010

Photo credit: Adam Oswell/TRAFFIC Southeast Asia

The Big Cat Trade in Myanmar and Thailand

Adam H. Oswell



Adam Oswell/TRAFFIC Southeast Asia

A Chinese trader inspects an Asiatic Lion for sale in Mong La, Special Region 4, Shan State, Myanmar

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Adam Oswell/TRAFFIC Southeast Asia

Chinese customers discuss the cost of Tiger teeth in Mong La, Special Region 4, Shan State, Myanmar

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between January 2001 and June 2010 a total of 493 big cat parts were observed at markets and during covert investigations in Myanmar and Thailand. Live big cats were also observed and recorded, including all four species of big cats that occur in Myanmar and Thailand (Tiger, *Panthera tigris*; Leopard, *Panthera pardus*; Clouded Leopard, *Neofelis nebulosa*, Snow Leopard, *Uncia uncia*) and one non-indigenous species (Asiatic Lion, *Panthera leo persica*).

Both Myanmar and Thailand are signatories to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), completely prohibiting all commercial trans-border trade of big cats (including their parts and derivatives) listed in CITES Appendix I, and requiring permits for export of species listed in Appendix II. Myanmar has been a signatory to CITES since 1997 and Thailand since 1983. All Asian big cats including Tiger, Leopard, Clouded Leopard, Snow Leopard and Asiatic Lion are classified as Appendix I under CITES. The indigenous big cats are also protected by national law in both countries. All indigenous cat species in Thailand fall under the *Wildlife Reservation and Protection Act B.E. 2535 (AD1992)*. In Myanmar, they are under the *Protection of Wildlife and Wild Plants and Conservation of Natural Areas Law (State Law and Order Restoration Council Law No. 583/94.1994)*.

All observations and investigations took place in border areas and in markets on the Thai/Myanmar border, Myanmar/China border and the Thai/Lao PDR border where the trade in wildlife and big cats is very active and is conducted in most cases with impunity despite national and international laws to prohibit the trade in these species. The fact that the majority of this trade occurs in non-government controlled areas in northern Myanmar bordering China underscores the difficulty in implementing effective enforcement in these areas. If significant progress is to be made in reducing or ending the trade in big cats and other protected wildlife, the groups that control these areas and allow traders to operate must be engaged and influenced either to establish and enforce their own conservation legislation or to implement existing national laws.

Non-government controlled areas in northern Myanmar play a major role in facilitating regional trade in big cats and many other endangered species. Some groups resident in strategically important areas bordering China, India and Thailand maintain significant militia forces, which enables these self-governed entities to exist and operate illegal trade in arms, narcotics, humans and wildlife. The extreme decentralization of northern Myanmar makes the situation more difficult to monitor and control. Parts and derivatives of big cats, and live animals are sourced in Myanmar, Thailand, Lao PDR, Malaysia and India and trafficked across national borders into these non-government controlled areas where they are stored, wholesaled and retailed to local and international buyers. The products are easily transported by boat or road into China and Thailand where some continue via national postal systems, road and/or air transport to domestic and international buyers and markets.

The trade documented in this report poses a real and immediate threat to the survival of big cat species in Asia.

Wildlife traders interviewed in Mong La, Panghsang, Mong Mit, Mong Hsat, Keng Larb and Tachilek in the Shan and Wa States of northern Myanmar and Boten, Vieng Thong and Thakek in Lao PDR

openly admitted to dealing in prohibited wildlife, especially big cats as the profit margins on these animals are so large — and the traders’ ability to bribe corrupt authorities from the proceeds are so great — that they have little fear of recrimination (see Figure 4). These retail traders and wholesalers dispense large quantities of big cat parts and derivatives to international traders and consumers. They continue to operate in both government-controlled areas, where rampant corruption and indifference allow it, and in loosely governed areas where laws are simply ignored.

National wildlife laws in Thailand are considered well-written with no significant loopholes to allow any trade in big cats or their parts and derivatives. Myanmar has not received similar endorsement under CITES, but its laws are clearly articulated. It is only the egregious lack of enforcement that allows this illegal trade to continue in government-controlled areas. Effective suppression of trade will only be achieved when the countries involved significantly increase their enforcement efforts, allocate more resources to conservation and work more closely with enforcement officials and agencies in neighbouring countries of India, Bangladesh, China, Lao PDR, Thailand and Malaysia.

At the Special Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for the Implementation of CITES, in Bangkok, Thailand, on the 1st of December 2005, the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) was formally established. ASEAN-WEN, of which Myanmar is a member, is a regional intergovernmental law-enforcement network designed to combat the illegal trade in wildlife, with objectives to provide a proactive response to Southeast Asia’s alarming levels of wildlife trafficking and biodiversity loss and implement a mechanism by which countries can share information and learn from each other’s best practices. This broad based initiative has the potential to improve dramatically ASEAN Member States’ law enforcement effectiveness. However, ASEAN-WEN has yet to realize a significant impact on big cat conservation. Such an impact will require a committed effort to suppress illegal activities in the ASEAN region where open trade in big cats and many other legally protected species continues.



A Leopard kept to draw in customers to a large crocodile farm outside Bangkok, Thailand. Many theme parks in Thailand use big cats and other exotic species to attract visitors. This also perpetuates market demand for big cats

Based on the results of this report, TRAFFIC makes the following recommendations:

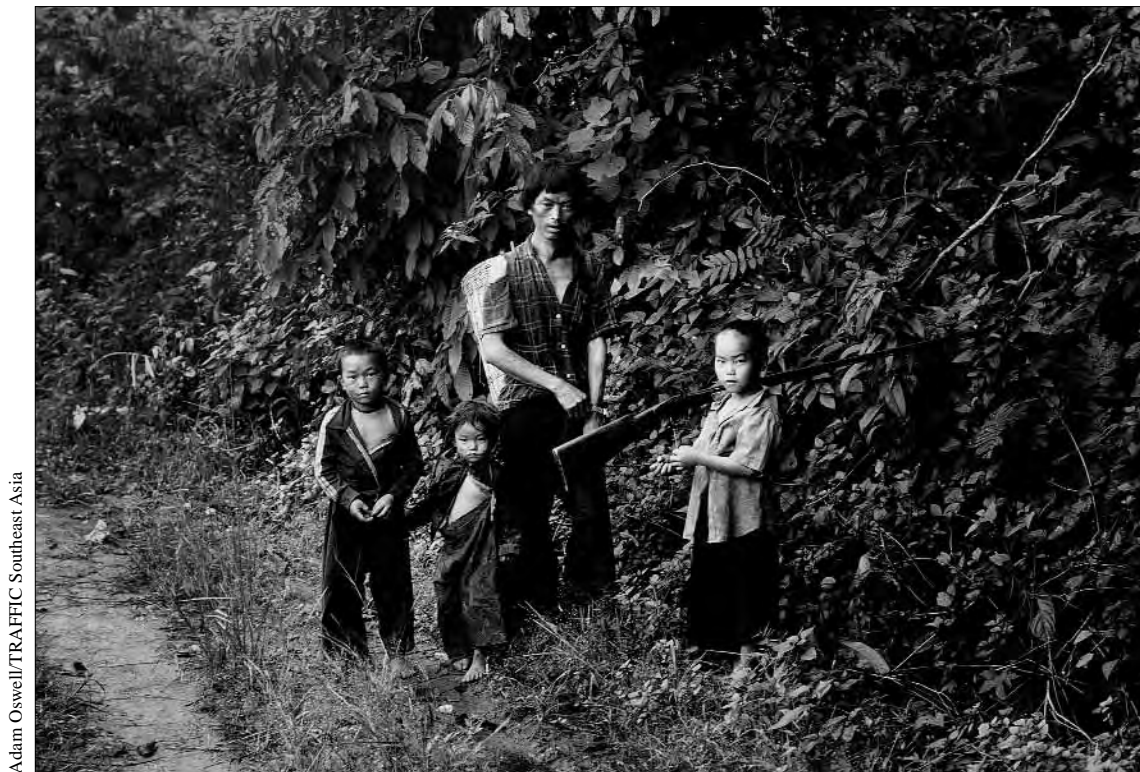
- Myanmar and Thailand should enforce existing national laws. Markets dispensing protected wildlife should be shut down and offenders prosecuted to the full extent of the law.
- The governments of Myanmar and Thailand should work more closely with enforcement officials and agencies in neighbouring countries. International co-operation with neighbouring countries is essential in reducing the illegal trade in big cats and other endangered wildlife.
- The ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network should be further utilized to increase intelligence sharing between governments regarding traders and criminal syndicates dealing in big cats and their derivatives. Follow-up collaboration should be focused on improving co-ordinated enforcement responses.
- Insofar as possible, the Government of Myanmar should work to create a common wildlife trade enforcement framework with non-government groups operating within its national borders. The international community should also encourage these groups to recognize the enormous impact the trade is having on endangered big cats.
- Authorities at international border points must be more vigilant in monitoring the movement of goods across borders. Both Myanmar and Thailand should ensure staff at these checkpoints are sufficiently trained in CITES implementation, enforcement of national laws, and species/parts identification.
- Appropriate species identification material should be provided to staff placed at all border points to ensure the correct identification of nationally and internationally protected species.



Adam Oswell/TRAFFIC Southeast Asia

A Tiger skin openly displayed and for sale at a retail outlet in Mong La Special Region 4, Shan State, Myanmar, June 2010

- Regular and systematic monitoring of markets in Myanmar and Lao PDR should continue to facilitate effective enforcement efforts as well as to detect trends in trade dynamics.
- Long-term intelligence gathering and law enforcement assistance should be expanded in big cat range states. It is essential for the governments of Tiger range States to monitor trade dynamics continuously to enable effective interdictions against traders.



A family of ethnic Hmong hunters and gatherers in Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand, bordering Myanmar. Many traditional hunters in Myanmar and Thailand (including the small family in the above image) are now being exploited by Chinese companies gaining business concessions in Myanmar. Interviews with community leaders indicate most of these companies actively distribute cash incentives to local communities to supply big cats and other wildlife

INTRODUCTION

Background

Of the nine original sub-species of Tiger, three have become extinct in the last 60 years. The Bali Tiger became extinct in the 1930s. The Caspian Tiger was forced into extinction in the 1970s. The Javan Tiger followed in the 1980s. In the early 1900s, there were around 100 000 Tigers throughout their range. Numbers dropped to approximately 4000 in the 1970s due to massive economic development in Tiger range States which destroyed habitat and led to significant increases in poaching and the black market trade in Tigers and their derivatives.

Today all six remaining Tiger sub-species (Bengal, Indochinese, Siberian, South China, Malayan and Sumatran) are Endangered or Critically Endangered. According to the range States themselves, wild Tiger numbers are possibly as low as 3200 individuals (Walston, *et al.* 2010). All remaining tigers now live in small, isolated populations — mostly in widely scattered protected areas throughout Asia and the Russian Far East. All of these protected areas are under threat by hunters to supply an insatiable market demand for big cats. The most recent estimates of wild Tigers in Myanmar indicate as few as 150 individuals remain and may be on the verge of extinction if steps to eliminate threats are not removed (Lynam, 2003).

All the other big cats considered in this report, Leopard *Panthera pardus*, Clouded Leopard *Neofelis nebulosa*, Snow Leopard *Uncia uncia* and Asiatic Lion *Panthera leo persica*, are fully protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES), which prohibits all international commercial trade. The Clouded Leopard is currently classified as Vulnerable and the Snow Leopard as Endangered under the IUCN Red List (Table 1). Both the Leopard and



Villagers in Myanmar with a slain Tiger circa 1922

Clouded Leopard are commonly targeted and traded in Myanmar and Thailand. With their skins and body parts commanding high value on the international black market, their numbers will continue to decline rapidly without increased enforcement efforts. All Asian Leopards are actively targeted for the same reasons as the Tiger, for their skins as trophies, magic amulets and decoration and their body parts for use in traditional medicine.

History and Legislation

Humans have hunted Asia's resident fauna for centuries. In the past, wildlife populations were only nominally affected by small human populations with inefficient weapons. Difficult access and simple technologies served to limit off-take. However, the advent of modern technology and the colonization of Asia by Europeans brought a massive increase in human numbers, and the Second World War facilitated the availability of sophisticated weapons (Lintner, 2005).

Conflict has also figured prominently in issues relating to natural resources. Early in their colonial history, there was no systematic management of teak forests along the Burma (Myanmar)-Thailand border by the British. However, the lack of formal controls led to deforestation, which forced development of a new approach following the 1852 Second Anglo-Burmese War. Reserved forests were created to promote long term timber production, but conflict subsequently ensued as local people were excluded from access to resources. Conflict also ensued during later efforts to adapt native shifting taungya forestry systems to teak cultivation, and in the regulation of cutch, an extract of the Sha (*Acacia catechu*) tree that is used for tanning and dyeing purposes. The pattern continued in post-colonial Burma to modern times. To this day, resistance forms a part of a broader dynamic of control that characterizes natural resource management in Myanmar (Bryant, 1993).

On top of this, both Myanmar and Thailand have a long history in the trade and exploitation of big cats. Tigers especially have traditionally been both revered and persecuted in Asian cultures, but within the last century commercial trade and exploitation have become a real factor in the rapid demise of big cat populations (World Bank, 2005).

Booming markets created by globalization and the ease of smuggling have now boosted the trade in wildlife to new and uncontrollable levels. Estimates vary widely about the global worth of the illegal wildlife trade (U.S. Interagency Working Group 2000; United Kingdom National Wildlife Crime Unit, 2010). Nonetheless, there is general agreement that it is of very high value and comparable to other illicit trades like those in drugs and arms. The specific trade in big cats is one of the most



Jean Duplay

Pressure on Tigers has steadily increased in Asia. Here a European hunter poses with a trophy kill in southern Laos, circa 1910

profitable elements of this industry and is currently the most urgent and immediate threat to their survival. Illegal groups involved in the extraction and supply of big cats on the international black market operate both inside and outside of Tiger range States.

By the mid 20th century it had become obvious that without effective legal protection, Myanmar and Thailand were at risk of losing key elements of their rich natural heritage.

Thailand was the first of the two countries to adopt national legislation. The country's *Wild Animals Reservation and Protection Act*, was passed on 26 December 1960 (B.E. 2504). Later, *The Wildlife Reservation and Protection Act 1992 (B.E. 2535)* was adopted on 19 February 1992 to replace *The Wild Animals Reservation and Protection Act 1960 (B.E. 2504)*. This updated Act provided for the establishment of lists of reserved and protected wild animals. The act limited hunting, controlled the trade in wild animal products, allowed for the preservation of wildlife habitat and made provisions for the creation of the Wildlife Conservation Division within the Royal Forest Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives. In Thailand the punishment for possession, sale or export of protected species, or their parts, covered under the *Wildlife Reservation and Protection Act 1992 (B.E. 2535)* is a fine of up to THB40 000 (USD1200) and/or imprisonment of up to four years.

A magazine advertisement from the 1950s offers wildlife, including Tigers and Leopards, for sale. This and many other businesses that actively caught and sold exotic wildlife were operating freely before Thailand's first wildlife protection legislation was passed on 26 December 1960. Even after this landmark legislation was enacted, big cats were still hunted and trafficked to supply the international market demand, a trade that continues to this day

A similar scenario developed in Myanmar, one of the richest countries in Asia in terms of natural resources and biodiversity (CIA, 2010). In 1994 the *Protection of Wildlife and Wild Plants and Conservation of Natural Areas Law (State Law and Order Restoration Council Law No. 583/94.1994)* was passed. This law is enforced by the Myanmar Forest Department (which also serves as the country's CITES Management Authority). Possession, sale or export of animals or their parts of species covered by this law is punishable by a fine of up to Myanmar Kyat - MMK50 000 (USD7680) and/or imprisonment of up to seven years.

Considering the extremely high profit margins that can be gained on the international black market for big cats and the lack of enforcement capacity, insufficient penalties and poor political will, there is little to discourage determined traders in engaging in illegal activity.

Both Myanmar and Thailand are CITES Parties with Thailand becoming a party in 1983 and Myanmar in 1997.

Table 1

Status of big cats in Thailand and Myanmar - National Legislation, CITES and IUCN Red List

Species	National Legislation	CITES	IUCN Red List
Tiger <i>Panthera tigris</i>	Completely Protected	I	EN
Leopard <i>Panthera pardus</i>	Completely Protected	I	LC
Clouded Leopard <i>Neofelis nebulosa</i>	Completely Protected	I	VU
Snow Leopard <i>Uncia uncia</i>	Protected*	I	EN

Source: Myanmar - Forest Department Notification No. 583/94 (26 October 1994)

Thailand - Wild Animal Reservation and Protection Act B.E. 2535 (1992)

EN = Endangered, VU = Vulnerable, LC = Least Concern

* Official announcement of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment B.E. 2548 (23rd December 2005) CITES enabling legislation

Regional Protection

The trade in big cats in Myanmar and Thailand is driven largely by international demand. Both countries are big cat range States and both play a major role in facilitating the movement and supply of big cats to regional buyers and markets. Although there is still a domestic market for Tiger derivatives within the ethnic Chinese communities and to some extent the tourist industry in both Myanmar and Thailand, the majority of big cats and products are trafficked to East Asian markets, primarily China (Shepherd and Nijman, 2007; Shepherd and Nijman, 2008). However, some products, mostly skins, have been seized in Europe and the United States (Davies, B. 2005).

Tigers and Leopards are listed in Appendix I of CITES, which completely prohibits the international trade of whole animals and their parts and derivatives. As Parties to CITES, both Myanmar and Thailand are fully obligated to implement and enforce the requirements of the Convention through their national legislation. Myanmar's Category 3 national legislation rating is of concern, as it is considered inadequate to implement and enforce CITES effectively. Myanmar is one of the few countries in Asia with large parts of the country controlled and contested by large well-armed ethnic groups. This, coupled with its strategic geographical position between India and Thailand, is a major reason why Myanmar plays a key role facilitating the trade in big cats.

In December 2005 in Bangkok, at the Special Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for the Implementation of CITES, Myanmar and Thailand committed to a regional action plan to be implemented through the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN). This plan was established with the aim of creating a regional intergovernmental law-enforcement network designed to combat the illegal trade in wildlife, provide a proactive response to Southeast Asia's alarming levels of wildlife trafficking and implement a mechanism by which countries can share information and increase collaboration between government agencies. While ASEAN-WEN has undergone significant development since its inception, it has yet to realize a significant impact on big cat conservation. This will require a committed effort from the ASEAN-WEN signatory countries to suppress illegal activities at border markets like those surveyed in the context of this assessment.

Considering the international nature of the trade in big cats, ASEAN-WEN could provide the multi-lateral framework and information sharing mechanisms to increase the enforcement effectiveness within ASEAN Member States. It has the potential to reduce significantly the movement and supply of big cats and big cat products.

Wildlife markets and big cat traders operate with impunity in border markets on the Myanmar/China/Thai border and in Lao PDR at Thakek and Chong Mek on the eastern Thai border. For example, Boten in Luang Namtha Province in northern Lao PDR was established in 2002 and is leased from the Lao PDR government by Lin Ming Xian, the same overlord who established and maintains control of Mong La in Special Region 4 in northern Shan State, Myanmar. Boten, like Mong La, is now visited by thousands of Chinese visitors who come to gamble and consume exotic wildlife. Like Mong La, the site is used to facilitate the storage and sale of big cats and other endangered wildlife from the region into China.



Wildlife 1 Foundation

Police at a checkpoint in Hua Hin Province, Thailand, with seized Tigers and Clouded Leopards from Malaysia. Big cats are sourced in Malaysia and Indonesia and smuggled through southern Thailand en route to Lao PDR and Myanmar from where they are smuggled into China and other east Asian markets. It is important to note that the carcasses of these animals have been cut into pieces indicating these Tigers are not destined for the skin trade. The bones and meat presently hold the most value on the international black market for Tigers and other big cats

Figure 2
Known regional trans-border transportation routes of big cats and their derivatives





WWF Malaysia

A large Malayan Tiger being sedated to remove a snare in Belum-Temengor Forest Complex on the Thailand/Malaysian border. This protected area is one of the most important remaining habitats for big cats in Asia. Hunters from Malaysia, Thailand and sometimes other countries regularly target this protected area for Tigers, Leopards and Clouded Leopards. The animals and/or products are quickly transported over the porous border with Thailand to be shipped through either Myanmar or Thailand to markets and buyers in China, Lao PDR or Viet Nam

METHODOLOGY

Between January 2001 and June 2010, 13 surveys of two major wildlife markets in Myanmar were conducted by TRAFFIC researchers. Surveys were conducted in Mong La, Special Region 4, Northern Shan State on the Chinese border and in Tachilek on the Thai border opposite the northern Thai town of Mae Sai, Chiang Rai Province. Both these markets play major roles in the supply and distribution of big cats and their derivatives to both local and international buyers.

No wildlife parts or derivatives were purchased during these surveys or the investigations conducted in other locations. Each survey consisted of both interviews with traders and observations and counting of wildlife parts and derivatives at the market over the period of one day. Source areas for wildlife in Figure 2 were determined through interviews with hunters and traders who verbally described supply sources.

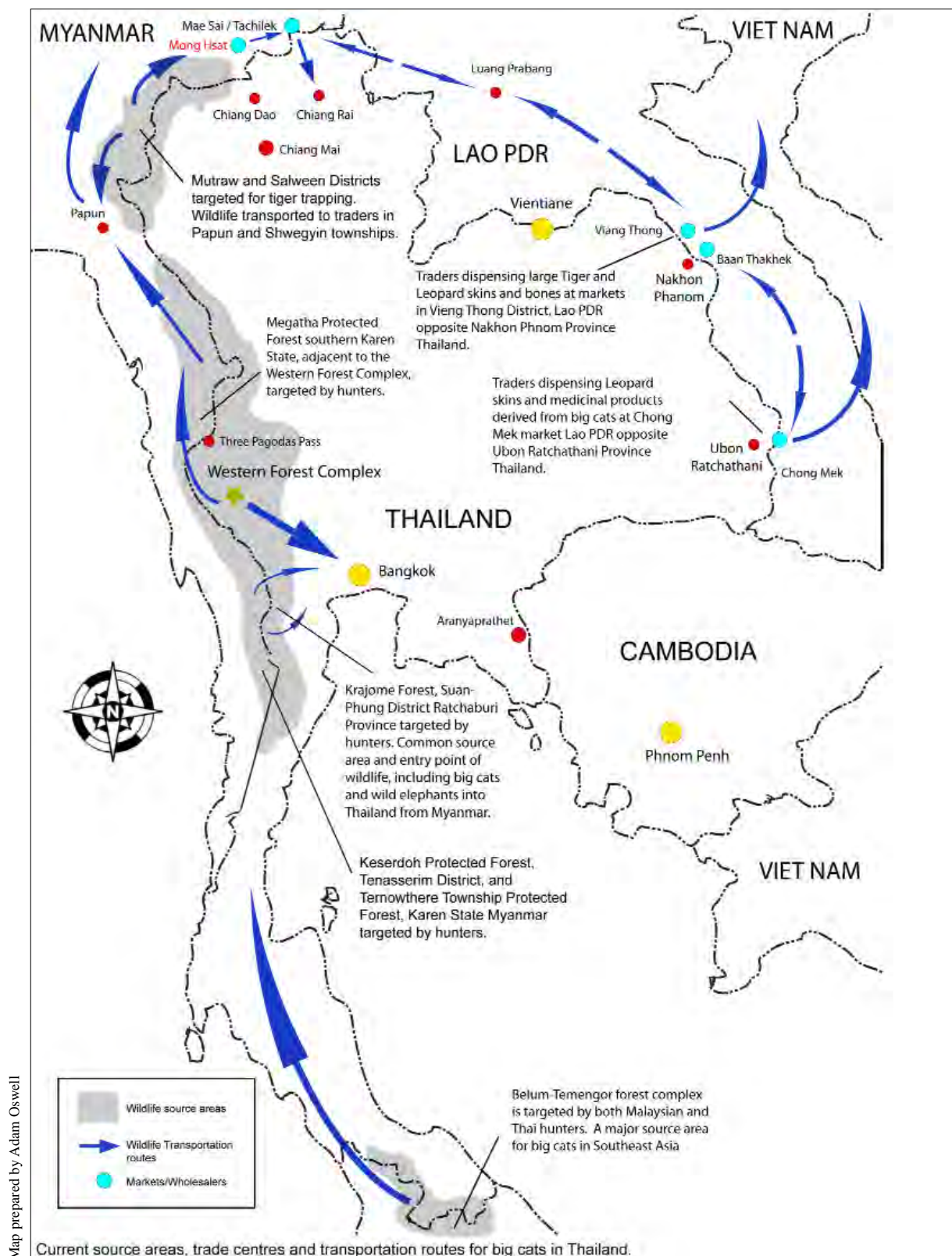
One survey in 2008 was conducted at markets on the Thai/Lao PDR border at Chong Mek, opposite Ubon Ratchathani Province, at Thakek and Amphur Tha Uten opposite Nakhom Panom Province in northeast Thailand, and in Boten on the Lao/China border. These markets were also found to display big cat products for sale with relative impunity, despite their close proximity to Thai and Lao PDR police and border officials.

Monitoring and investigations into the activities and business contacts of hunters and traders were also conducted covertly at Three Pagoda Pass and around the protected areas that make up the Western Forest Complex (WEFCOM) in Thailand, which borders several non-government controlled areas in south-eastern Myanmar. Key areas along this border were targeted in response to obtaining local intelligence from conducting interviews with village and district leaders and military personnel both in Myanmar and Thailand and local traders and informants operating along the border between Chiang Rai and Phetchaburi Province.

Estimates of minimum numbers of cats in trade were calculated based on the parts and quantities of parts observed. For example, cats have 4 paws, if 4 or fewer were found in one observation it would be equivalent to at least one animal, if 8 paws were found in one observation it would be equivalent to at least 2 animals. Other cat parts such as canines, skulls, and skins were treated similarly, with each quantity of parts equivalent to one cat providing the basis for the counts.

Figure 3

Trans-border transportation routes, source areas and market destinations for big cats and derivatives in Thailand, Myanmar and Lao PDR



RESULTS

Market surveys 2001-2010 Myanmar

During the 13 surveys carried out in Mong La and Tachilek, all big cat skins were counted and big cat parts that could be positively identified to the species level were recorded. Considering the large range of products on sale and the large numbers of small trinkets and derivatives manufactured from big cats it was not always possible to record every item. There were numerous pieces of skin, bones, teeth and penises and many other products from a wide range of species including big cats for sale at the open markets and retail outlets in both Mong La and Tachilek and parts that could not be identified were not counted. Arguably, these two market sites represent the largest and most active wildlife markets in Myanmar.

Table 2

Total number of parts and minimum individuals of big cats observed in Myanmar 2001-2010

Species	Total Parts Observed	Total Minimum Number of Individuals Observed
Tiger	157	91
Leopard	171	167
Clouded Leopard	162	149
Asiatic Lion	1	1
Snow Leopard	2	2
Total	493	410

Whole skins were the most commonly traded item observed at these markets, followed by paws, skeletons and penises. Skins are sold and used as trophies, magic Buddhist amulets and for use in decoration and the fashion industry in China and the west. Skeletons, bones, paws and penises are used primarily as aphrodisiacs for the visitors to Mong La as there is a large and active sex industry present. Large vats of Tiger bone wine, which is promoted as a health tonic and potent aphrodisiac, were frequently observed in shops and outlets catering to Chinese customers. Customers come specifically to visit brothels, gamble and consume exotic wildlife. Traditional medicine accounts for a large portion of the products sold and exported to China, Lao PDR and Viet Nam.

The absolute minimum number of individual big cats represented by the total of 493 parts was 410 animals (Table 2). It is important to note that this number represents an underestimate because the methodology for counting was conservative. In all the 13 surveys conducted at markets and in retail outlets at these two market sites, large numbers of additional skins and products kept in storage areas were observed. It was not possible to record an accurate count of items in these storage areas as traders were hesitant to provide access when asked and it was not possible to obtain video or still imagery on which rough estimates may otherwise have been based.

The species most frequently recorded was Leopard, with a total of 171 parts observed and recorded, representing 167 individuals. Second and third respectively were the Clouded Leopard (with 162 parts and 149 individuals), and Tiger (with 157 parts representing at least 91 individuals).

Table 3

Observations of big cat parts recorded in trade in Myanmar, 2001-2010

(note that the absolute minimum number of big cats the parts could represent from each survey is in red)

Species	Parts	Market and Date of Survey												Total	
		Mong La Jan 2001	Tachilek Jan 2001	Mong La July 2004	Tachilek July 2004	Mong La Aug 2006	Tachilek Aug 2006	Mong La Oct 2008	Tachilek Oct 2008	Tachilek Dec	Mong La Feb 2009	Tachilek Jun 2009	Mong La Jun 2010		Tachilek Jun 2010
Tiger	Whole Skin	4	1	15	2	9		4	2	1	22	1	17	2	80
	Skull	2									3	1	6	5	17
	Paws	1		3		6		6					4		20
	Skeleton			1		1		3			1		3		9
	Penis	2		4		3				6		2	7	7	31
	Total Parts	9	1	23	2	19	0	13	2	7	26	4	37	14	157
Leopard	Min. No. of Individuals	4	1	15	2	9	0	4	2	6	22	2	17	7	91
	Whole Skin	16	11	9	18	29	7	7	18	12	7	12	12	9	167
	Skull										3		1		4
	Total Parts	16	11	9	18	29	7	7	18	12	10	12	13	9	171
	Min. No. of Individuals	16	11	9	18	29	7	7	18	12	7	12	12	9	167
	Clouded Leopard	Whole Skin	6	9	13	6	19	11	21	4	7	5	4	18	14
Skull											17		2	6	25
Total Parts		6	9	13	6	19	11	21	4	7	22	4	20	20	162
Min. No. of Individuals		6	9	13	6	19	11	21	4	7	17	4	18	14	149
Asiatic Lion	Live					1									1
	Total					1									1
	Min. No. of Individuals					1									1
Snow Leopard	Whole Skin									2					2
	Total Parts									2					2
	Min. No. of Individuals									2					2

*Note: Mong La is a town located on the Myanmar/Chinese border in Special Region 4, northern Shan State.**Tachilek is a market town located on the Myanmar/Thai border in Myanmar*

The detailed results of market surveys are shown in Tables 3 and 4, which represent data collected in Mong La and Tachilek markets between January 2001 and June 2010. Observations indicate that over the period of 9 and a half years, a minimum of 91 Tiger, 167 Leopard, 149 Clouded Leopard, one Asiatic Lion and two Snow Leopard individuals were recorded in trade. Similar surveys conducted in the same border areas indicate a minimum of 167 Tiger, 215 Leopard and 301 Clouded Leopards were in trade over a 15 year period. (Shepherd and Nijman, 2008).

Table 4

Observations of big cats parts observed in trade in Mong La, Myanmar, 2001 - 2010

(Min. No. of Individuals represents the absolute minimum number of individual animals the parts could represent)

Species	Parts	Market and Date of Survey						Total
		Mong La Jan 2001	Mong La July 2004	Mong La Aug 2006	Mong La Oct 2008	Mong La Feb 2009	Mong La Jun 2010	
Tiger	Whole Skin	4	15	9	4	22	17	71
	Skull	2				3	6	11
	Paws	1	3	6	6		4	20
	Skeleton		1	1	3	1	3	9
	Penis	2	4	3			7	16
	Total Parts	9	23	19	13	26	37	127
	Min. No. of Individuals	4	15	9	4	22	17	71
Leopard	Whole Skin	16	9	29	7	7	12	80
	Skull					3	1	4
	Total Parts	16	9	29	7	10	13	84
	Min. No. of Individuals	16	9	29	7	7	12	80
Clouded Leopard	Whole Skin	6	13	19	21	5	18	82
	Skull					17	2	19
	Total Parts	6	13	19	21	22	20	101
	Min. No. of Individuals	6	13	19	21	17	18	94
Asiatic Lion	Live			1				1
	Total			1				1
	Min. No. of Individuals			1				1

Table 5

Observations of big cat parts recorded in trade in Tachilek, Myanmar 2001 - 2010

(Min. No. of Individuals represents the absolute minimum number of individual animals the parts could represent)

Species	Parts	Market and Date of Survey							Total
		Tachilek Jan 2001	Tachilek July 2004	Tachilek Aug 2006	Tachilek Oct 2008	Tachilek Dec 2008	Tachilek Jun 2009	Tachilek Jun 2010	
Tiger	Whole Skin	1	2		2	1	1	2	9
	Skull						1	5	6
	Paws								0
	Skeleton								0
	Penis					6	2	7	15
	Total Parts	1	2	0	2	7	4	14	30
	Min. No. of Individuals	1	2	0	2	6	2	7	20
Leopard	Whole Skin	11	18	7	18	12	12	9	87
	Skull								0
	Total Parts	11	18	7	18	12	12	9	87
	Min. No. of Individuals	11	18	7	18	12	12	9	87
Clouded Leopard	Whole Skin	9	6	11	4	7	4	14	55
	Skull							6	6
	Total Parts	9	6	11	4	7	4	20	61
	Min. No. of Individuals	9	6	11	4	7	4	14	55
Snow Leopard	Whole Skin					2			2
	Total Parts					2			2
	Min. No. of Individuals					2			2

It is clear that the primary national-level wildlife trade legislation in Myanmar, the *Protection of Wildlife and Wild Plants and Conservation of Natural Areas Law (State Law and Order Restoration Council Law No. 583/94.1994)* is not being enforced in Tachilek or Special Region 4 and Mong La. Both centres continue openly to offer endangered species for sale in large volumes.

Despite the official closing of the Myanmar/China border in 2004, large numbers of Chinese nationals continue to cross the border freely to gamble, visit brothels and consume exotic wildlife. This consumption poses a public health risk due to the unsanitary way wildlife is kept both before and after being butchered and brought to market. Volumes of wildlife to supply these markets are high, as they are linked to a sex trade that encourages the use and supply of exotic wildlife products and aphrodisiacs derived from big cats.

Special Region 4 is controlled by the overlord Sai Leung (Chinese name: Lin Ming Xian) and policed by the 3000 strong National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) of Eastern Shan State who enforce their own set of locally developed laws (Shan State Constitution Drafting Commission, 2008).

The total number of big cat parts observed in Mong La between 2001 and 2010 was 313, with a total of 180 parts being observed and recorded in Tachilek. These two market centres are probably the biggest outlets for the direct sale and supply of endangered big cats in the world.



Chinese traders try to sell wildlife parts on the streets of Mong La, Special Region 4, Myanmar. The vendor on the right is holding a purported Tiger penis



Inspecting Leopard skins at a retail outlet in Mong La Special Region 4, Shan State, Myanmar

Tachilek market continues openly to offer endangered species for sale, including big cats. According to traders surveyed in Tachilek and Mong La over the survey period 2001-2010, the majority of all big cat parts and derivatives were sold to international buyers. Seven traders in Mong La, two traders in Tachilek indicated source areas for wildlife during informal interviews.

In December 2008, two Snow Leopard skins were observed in Tachilek, both were offered for sale for THB25 000 each (USD750). This is, to TRAFFIC's knowledge, the first time Snow Leopard has been recorded at this market. On average, Leopard skins in good condition were offered for sale between THB1500 and THB20 000 (USD450-600) per item. Tiger skins were on sale in Mong La for between CNY50 000-70 000 (USD7300-10 200) with whole Tiger skeletons selling for CNY100 000 (USD15 000). These prices remained fairly constant during the period of the surveys between 2001 and 2010.

A total of 11 outlets selling wildlife in Tachilek were recorded in December 2008, these included shop houses and street market stalls. Two black, or melanistic, Leopard skins were also observed during this survey and contact was made with the vendor. When asked if orders for large amounts of skins and other big cat products could be placed it was explained the products could be supplied and shipped to Bangkok via the Thai postal system. The trader also stated that many of his customers were international, especially from Korea and Taiwan, and came specifically to Tachilek to order and purchase big cat products.



Leopard skins stacked in a warehouse in Tachilek



Trader measuring Leopard skins in Tachilek

During informal interviews, traders in Tachilek claimed Tiger and Leopard products were mainly sourced from India and Myanmar as it is relatively cheap and low risk to transport goods over the Indian/Myanmar border and through non-government controlled areas to Mong La, Tachilek and onwards to Boten in Lao PDR. The relatively low cost involved in paying local taxes and commissions to corrupt officials and local militia groups en route to these markets ensures high profit margins can be maintained. Some big cat skins and bones were also said to come from Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia. All these source countries were also cited by traders interviewed in Mong La.

As CITES signatories, Myanmar and Thailand are required to prohibit any cross-border trade of Appendix I listed wildlife, including protected cats. They are also required to implement the provisions of CITES *Resolution Conference 12.5*, which stipulates special consideration of Asian big cat species. Indeed, the dealers in both Mong La and Tachilek openly acknowledge that the trade is illegal. In most cases they also offer advice and services to buyers on methods of transporting the products across the border into China and Thailand. According to the UNEP-WCMC CITES trade database (managed by the United Nations Environment Programme's World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC)), no big cat of any species has been reported as legally exported from Myanmar since the country became a party to CITES in 1997.



Traders tanning fresh Clouded Leopard skins in Tachilek



A trader in Tachilek openly selling Clouded Leopard skins and other endangered wildlife products



A retail outlet in Mong La, June 2010, operated by Chinese traders selling Tiger and other endangered big cat parts and derivatives. Note the large vat of Tiger bone wine with plastic spigots above on the right

Non-government controlled areas and the big cat trade

Non-government controlled areas in Myanmar play a major role in illicit activities. The strategic geographical position of these areas bordering China, India and Thailand and the fact that they are self-governed and maintain significant militia forces, enable these groups to exist and conduct illegal trade in arms, narcotics, humans and wildlife. This research found these areas facilitating regional trade in big cats and many other legally protected species.

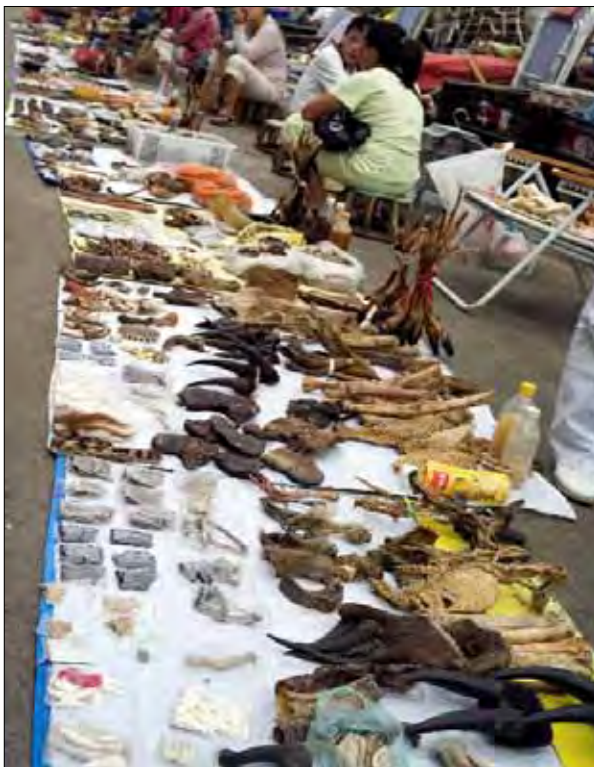
The Karen National Union (KNU), the government and military expression of the Karen independence effort, controls large areas adjacent to Thailand's Western Forest Complex (WEFCOM). Although the KNU maintains its own forestry department, it is desperately under-resourced and enforcement in contested areas is difficult. Recently the KNU also lost important strategic territory to the Myanmar Government and is trying to raise revenue to counter these losses through allowing logging concessions in some areas under their control (Buadaeng, 2007).

Various areas in Myanmar adjacent to Thailand's WEFCOM are also controlled by other armed rebel groups such as the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), the Karen Peace Force and the New Mon State Party (NMSP).

The leaders of these groups have indicated that they all hunt wildlife to supplement funding for operations against the central government and regularly target protected areas in Thailand as it is relatively easy to move across the porous border.



Tiger skin openly displayed in Mong La retail outlet



All photographs by Adam Osweil/TRAFFIC Southeast Asia

Local traders in the central market in Mong La display a large range of wildlife products (above left), these include bear paws and gall, various wild cat parts, Loris and deer horn. The larger wildlife and big cat traders operate out of shop houses and retail outlets where Tiger penis, claws and bone (above right) are sold largely as aphrodisiacs for the thriving local sex industry present



Prostitutes line up waiting for customers in Mong La, Special Region 4, Shan State, Myanmar. Many of the markets and retail outlets selling wildlife and Tiger products here cater to customers utilizing the sex trade



A child soldier from the Karen National Union (KNU). Resistance groups with easy access to automatic weapons hunt big cats to supply a profitable black market

Hunters from Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia and Malaysia have been reported by local informants and local village leaders to be operating in these non-government controlled areas adjacent to the WEFCON, and within the WEFCON itself. Information received in early 2009 by informants suggested some villages on the border within the WEFCON ordered several traps to catch Tigers for Thai traders.

Megatha Protected Forest in southern Karen State is a KNU controlled area. It is located adjacent to the WEFCON and is also targeted by hunters to supply big cats to Thai traders operating along the border. In early 2009 Karen military commanders granted logging concessions to Thai businessmen who are now extracting large quantities of hardwoods from KNU controlled areas including Megatha and the Kyunchaung protected areas (Weng 2008). According to research and surveys conducted by the Karen Environment and Social Action



Karen National Union soldiers prepare to butcher a Tiger freshly killed by a landmine in the Dawna Range area adjacent to the Western Forest Complex in October 2009. Mines are often set as traps for wildlife, rather than as military defences

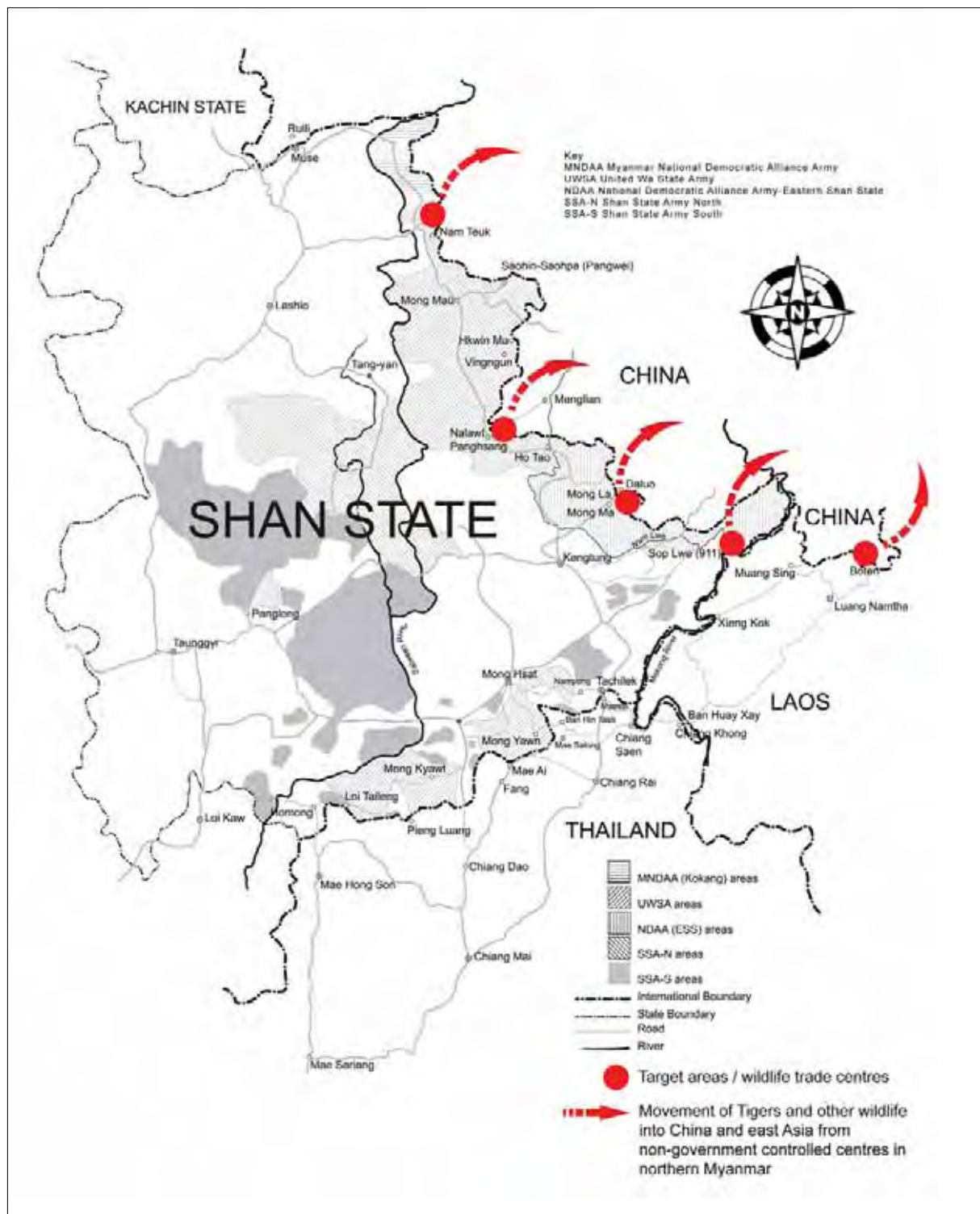


A hunter with a freshly killed Leopard in Megatha Protected Forest, opposite Thailand's Western Forest Complex. This animal was sold to Thai traders operating along the Thai/Myanmar border

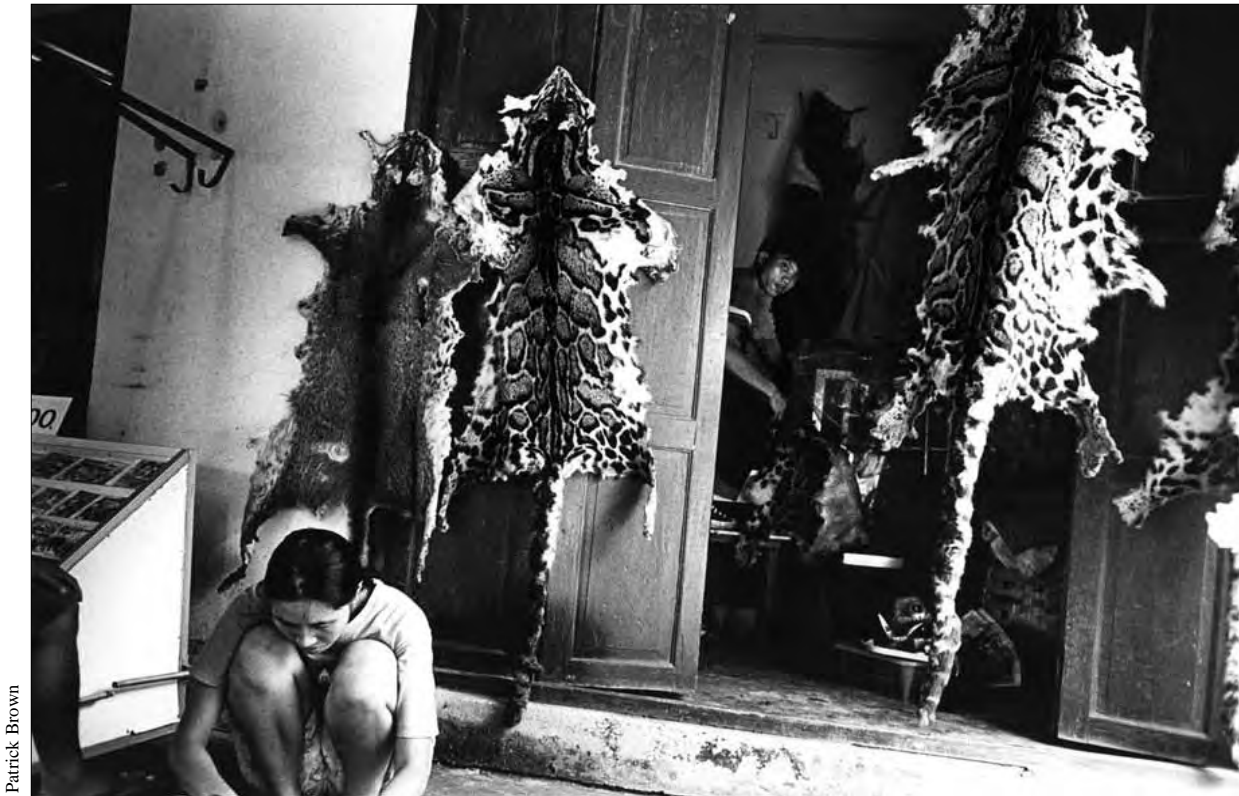
Network (KESAN), these areas still have viable populations of big cats present but with free access now given to Thai logging companies, these protected forests will become vulnerable to increased levels of hunting and illegal trade.

Parts and derivatives of big cats and live animals are sourced in Myanmar, Thailand, Lao PDR, Malaysia and India and trafficked across national borders into these non-government controlled areas where they are stored, wholesaled and retailed to local and international buyers. The products are easily transported by boat or road into China and Thailand where some continue via national postal systems, road and/or air transport to domestic and international buyers and markets. Thirty three wildlife traders interviewed from Mong La, Panghsang, Mong Mit, Mong Hsat, Keng Larb and

Figure 4
Trans-Border Trade Dynamics



Tachilek in the Shan State of northern Myanmar and Boten in Lao PDR openly admitted to dealing in prohibited wildlife, especially big cats, as their profit margins are so large and there is little fear of recrimination from government or non-government officials. These retail traders and wholesalers distribute large quantities of big cat parts and derivatives to international traders and consumers.



Traders in the market in Tachilek, opposite Mae Sai on Thailand's northern border, openly displaying Clouded Leopard skins for sale

Observations indicate that Keng Larb, located on the Mekong River in northeast Shan State, is emerging as a new centre for trans-national wildlife trade, with large volumes of traffic heading to China via the Mekong River and Lao PDR (Figure 5). Its location on the Mekong River makes Keng Larb an ideal place for transporting goods by river to China, Lao PDR and Thailand. Local development aspirations play a part in this. It was with the aim of turning Keng Larb into a “regional trading hub” that it was upgraded to a township in 2004 (Lahu National Development Organization, 2009).

According to local traders, the real advantage of Keng Larb is that it is cheaper to do business there than in neighbouring areas. Compared to Tachilek, which still openly provides market space for large volumes of endangered wildlife, there are fewer road checkpoints and department offices, therefore fewer bribes and taxes to be paid en route.

Due to these types of expenses in Tachilek, Keng Larb has become an attractive alternative and is consequently now a centre for drug-running, wildlife trade, illegal logging and human trafficking (Lahu National Development Organization, 2005). Keng Larb's location is geographically and politically ideal for transporting wildlife and wildlife parts to Chinese markets. For example, interviews with traders indicated that Mong Hta and Maisoong villages of Mong Ton township, under control of the United State Wa Army's South 171 Brigade, have become a major market for bear meat for export to Thailand. Instead of Thai or western buyers that used to frequent the markets in Tachilek, the majority of buyers in Keng Larb are Chinese traders based in the town. They use local Lahu hunters as contractors to catch or kill rare animals including big cats and collect forest products. The Lahu contractors receive a better price in Keng Larb than in Tachilek.

One major Chinese rubber company, Hong Yoong Co, regularly sends agents to villagers in the region with cash incentives to source and provide wildlife (Lahu National Development Organization, 2009). Mong La on the Chinese border in Special Region 4 also remains a major centre for storage, distribution and direct retail and wholesale sales of endangered species to Chinese and international buyers. During the first half of 2009 Mong La received a significant facelift with hotels, restaurants and local businesses being renovated and the numbers of Chinese tourists and gamblers increasing significantly. The number of restaurants openly selling live wildlife, including many endangered species, has increased in comparison to the period directly after the border closure in 2006. Retail outlets and wholesale businesses still openly dispense threatened wildlife such as Tiger, Snow Leopard, Leopard, Clouded Leopard, ivory, rhino horn, bear, fox and otter.

In May 2009, two shops were observed exclusively stocking large numbers of cash counting machines indicating an expectation for a large increase in casino patronage, which in turn will lead to greater consumption of wildlife. Additional evidence of this impending increase is a survey conducted in October 2008 on Chinese businessmen who visited Mong La to gamble. Of 23 people surveyed, 18 indicated they consumed wildlife and/or wildlife products at restaurants and/or businesses selling threatened wildlife while visiting Mong La.

Boten in Lao PDR's Luang Namtha Province bordering China and Sop Lwe on the Mekong River bordering Lao PDR are two other sites being developed by Lin Ming Xian, the Chinese overlord who established Mong La. Boten is already in operation and welcomes thousands of Chinese gamblers every month. Sop Lwe is also being developed but so far progress has been slow. It is yet to be established whether this will become another site in Myanmar's non-government controlled region in Shan State to facilitate trade in exotic wildlife.



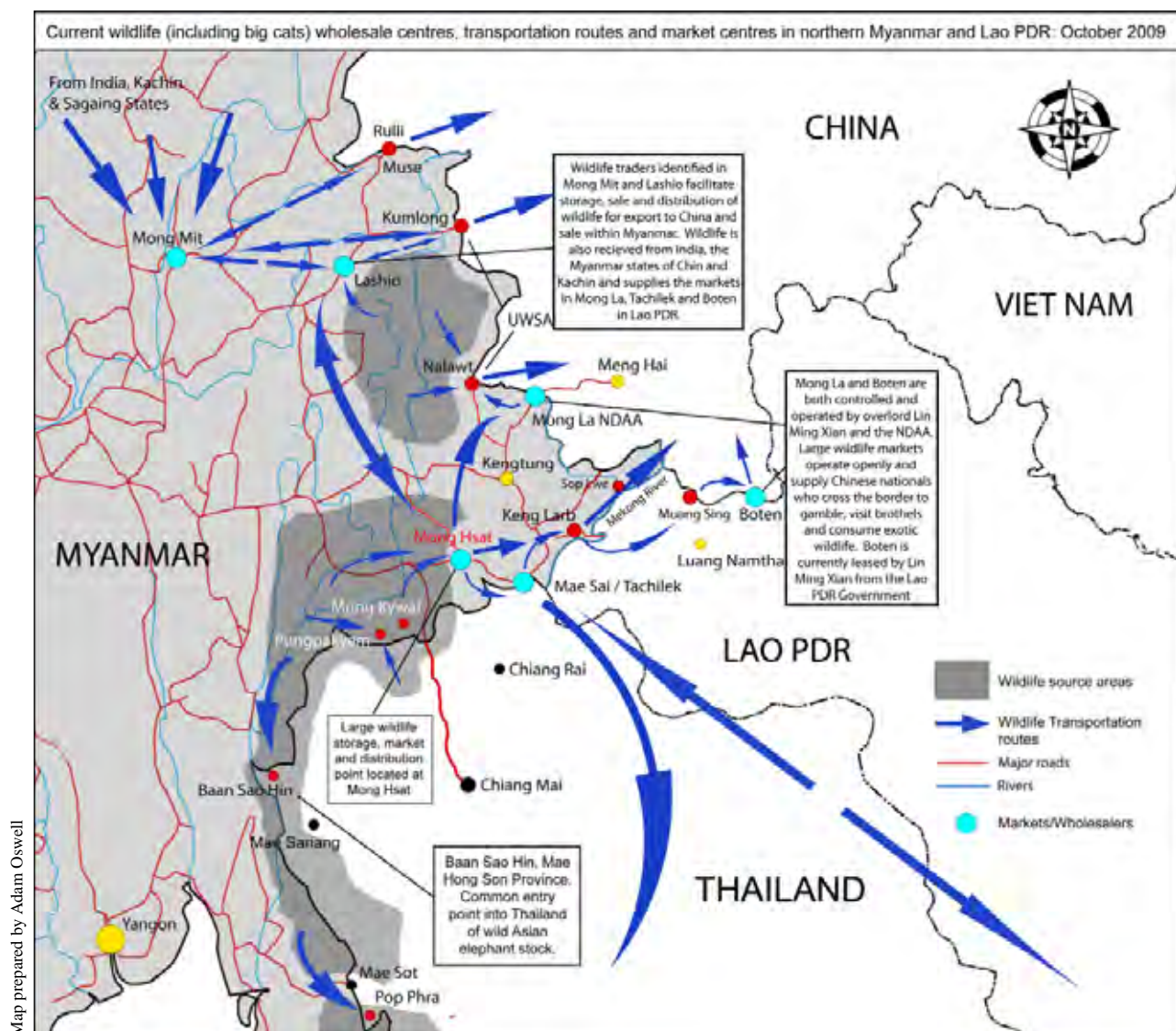
The Salween river, which makes up a large section of the northern Thai/Myanmar border, facilitates the transport of illegal goods, including big cats, north into non-government controlled areas in northern Myanmar

LAO Peoples' Democratic Republic connections to the big cat trade

During informal interviews, one vendor openly stated that Tiger and Leopard products originated in Luang Province, Lao PDR. Two traders in Thakek and three in Boten indicated the same source areas for wildlife as those reported by traders in Mong La and Tachilek.

At the market in Thakek in Lao PDR opposite Nakhon Phanom, several traders were found to be openly selling Leopard and Clouded Leopard skins and products at their stalls in the market. Police and forestry officials were also observed patrolling the market but appeared to have no interest in the vendors dispensing illegal wildlife. When the vendors were asked if they had Tiger skins for sale they were quite open to inviting investigators to a storage room where they displayed several large fresh Tiger skins along with several large fresh Leopard skins for sale.

Figure 5
Trans-border wildlife trade dynamics in Myanmar, Thailand, Lao PDR and China





The Mae Sai-Tachilek border crossing in Chiang Rai Province northern Thailand. Goods, including wildlife, are easily transported from the market in Myanmar over the border into Thailand. This is a common entry point for illegal wildlife from Myanmar and south Asia entering Thailand

DISCUSSION

Tiger, Leopard, Clouded Leopard and Snow Leopard were observed for sale in Myanmar and at markets in Lao PDR bordering Thailand. Information obtained through informants and provided by traders suggests a burgeoning trade in these species from and through Myanmar. Markets offering big cat parts and derivatives for sale did so openly, with sellers indicating awareness that their activities were illegal. This shows disregard for the law and a fundamental lack of enforcement capability by the authorities. The well established market at Tachilek was particularly blatant in this regard. Enforcement at this market has not shown signs of improvement over many years.



Tiger and Leopard skins being offered for sale by a vendor in Tha Uten, Thakek, Lao PDR

Observations at Keng Larb point to a new hub of illegal wildlife trade emerging in Shan State, Myanmar with a network of buyers from China placing huge demands on species in the region. Over the past two years trade has shifted significantly to this new market.

While survey efforts undertaken by TRAFFIC were variable from year to year, results nonetheless indicate that the overall trade in Asian big cats is flourishing.

Many areas involved in this study were under the control of resistance groups, and research indicated these groups take a hand in the illegal big cat trade. Factors contributing to this situation may include: refusal to recognize or accept laws enacted by Myanmar's central government, active attempts to undermine laws put in place by the central government, and capitalization of natural resources (wildlife products) to fund resistance. Whatever the case, the groups involved are not adhering to their own stated objective of developing local conservation governance.

The situation is particularly alarming because areas proximate to the Thai border with Myanmar represent some of the last remaining viable big cat habitat in Asia. Surveys indicate these places to be sources for the illegal extraction of big cats.

At the heart of this region is Thailand's WEFCOM. It is comprised of 17 protected areas with World Heritage Site Huai Kha Khaeng and Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuaries forming the core of the complex. These protected areas are located along the western Thai border and form a priority biodiversity corridor with the adjacent Tanintharyi Forest Complex in Myanmar. This area, part of Myanmar's Karen State, is also the site of a longstanding conflict between Karen insurgents and Myanmar's central Government, which has worked actively to suppress Karen and other independence movements.

Weak governance and corruption resulting from border instability present conditions conducive to illegal trade in big cat species. Government controlled areas are lacking in proactive enforcement efforts. Non-government controlled areas in Myanmar facilitate trade more directly. They provide the facilities to manage the sale and distribution of big cats across national borders. Consequently, Myanmar is not meeting its domestic and international commitments to conservation; the trade in all big cats observed in this research is illegal under both Myanmar's national legislation and under the governing documents of Karen and Shan groups.

Implications are serious not only for big cat species, but also for the region's biodiversity. Ten years after becoming a CITES signatory, Myanmar is not fulfilling its obligations as a party to the Convention. Even the adoption of additional enforcement specific agreements like ASEAN-WEN have not reduced trade through the border markets covered by this report.

On the Thai side, international enforcement co-ordination stipulated under ASEAN-WEN is not having its desired impact either. While there have been some high profile interdictions by Thai authorities against the illegal trade in Tigers and other species, these efforts have not been well co-ordinated internationally. Consequently, the border remains porous and Thailand continues to play a major role as both a source and conduit for illegal commerce in big cats.

Thailand's strategic geographical position and developed infrastructure are certainly contributors to problems with the trade in big cats. However, a lack of consistent enforcement actions at the Mae Sai

– Tachilek crossing and at other known border hotspots is problematic. It begs questions about the capacity and engagement of local officials addressing illegal wildlife trade. To deal with this shortfall, Thailand, Myanmar and Lao PDR could employ ASEAN-WEN’s mandate to develop and implement multi-agency enforcement operations to target unrestricted dispensation of big cat parts. Such operations could also occur at the Myanmar/China and Thai/Lao PDR borders.



Thai authorities in Nong Khai Province, Thailand, seize Tiger and Leopard carcasses being smuggled across the Mekong River into Lao PDR and Viet Nam. Thailand continues to play a major role as a regional hub for trade in big cats

RECOMMENDATIONS

Myanmar and Thailand should enforce their existing national laws. Markets for trading protected wildlife should be shut down and offenders prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Without this basic level of commitment, other attempts to address the international trade in big cats will be crippled.

The governments of Myanmar and Thailand should work more closely with one another and with neighbouring countries to address the illegal trade in big cats. Given the myriad political and ethnic groups operating in the landscape, unilateral action by a single government is unlikely to prove effective. Smugglers will simply change routes and markets in response to enforcement. International co-operation is therefore essential in reducing the illegal trade in big cats and other endangered wildlife.

The ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network should be utilized to increase intelligence sharing between governments seeking to interdict criminal syndicates trading big cats and their derivatives. Closer collaboration between neighbouring countries can provide a level of trust necessary for joint operations. It can also allow development of new mechanisms to carry out cross-border, intelligence-led investigations.

Insofar as possible, the government of Myanmar should work to create a common wildlife trade enforcement framework with non-government groups operating within its national borders. The international community should also encourage these groups to recognize the enormous impact the trade is having on endangered big cats. The vast majority of the big cat trade in Myanmar is conducted within non-government controlled areas. Effective enforcement of national legislation is not possible within these areas. Nonetheless, conservation of natural resources is a common denominator goal of both government and opposition groups in Myanmar. It therefore stands to reason that it is in the interest of all to create and enforce consistent and effective conservation laws, shut down markets dispensing protected wildlife and prosecute offenders illegally trading and trafficking in big cats and their derivatives. International bodies and NGOs may have a role to play in this process.

Regardless of the governance situation in Myanmar, authorities at international border points must be more vigilant in monitoring the movement of goods across borders. Myanmar, Thailand and China should ensure staff at these checkpoints are sufficiently trained in CITES implementation, enforcement of national laws, and species/parts identification. Until such capacity exists in consumer and transit countries, source country borders will continue to be porous to smuggling.

Appropriate species identification materials should be provided to officials stationed at all border crossing points to ensure the correct identification of nationally and internationally protected species. Such materials are available in local language formats from TRAFFIC.

Regular and systematic monitoring of markets in Myanmar and Lao PDR should continue in a way that facilitates effective enforcement efforts and detects trends in trade dynamics. Long-term intelligence gathering and law enforcement assistance should be expanded. Non-governmental organizations should continue collection of data on trends in trade dynamics and offer law enforcement support to government authorities of big cat range States. Mechanisms for sharing the information gathered should be developed.

Improved resources must be made available to support long-term intelligence gathering and enforcement assistance in big cat range States. If countries are to meet their general CITES and *Resolution Conf. 12.5* commitments, it is essential to monitor illegal trade dynamics continuously. Only accurate information will enable effective interdictions against traders.



A leopard is displayed to attract tourists in a market at the River Kwai Bridge in Kanchanaburi Province, western Thailand. Continued patronage by tourists and the general public helps perpetuate market demand for big cats

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

ASEAN-WEN	Association of South East Asian Nations-Wildlife Enforcement Network
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CITES MA	CITES Management Authority
CoP	Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (to CITES)
DNPWP	Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (Government of Thailand)
IUCN	The International Union of Conservation of Nature
KESAN	Karen Environment and Social Action Network
KNU	Karen National Union
LNDO	Lahu National Development Organization
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
MoNRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (Government of Thailand)
NDAA	National Democratic Alliance Army – Eastern Shan State
SAR	Special Administrative Region
SSA-N	Shan State Army North
SSA-S	Shan State Army South
TRAFFIC	The wildlife trade monitoring network, a joint programme of WWF and IUCN
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UWSA	United Wa State Army
WARPA	Wild Animal Reservation and Protection Act 1992
UNEP-WCMC	Wildlife Conservation Monitoring Centre
WEFCOM	Western Forest Complex (of Thailand)

TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, works to ensure that trade in wild plants and animals is not a threat to the conservation of nature.

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