Alarm bells over rising pet trade in wild animals in India

INFOCUS feature.....
TRAFFIC Post

TRAFFIC Post is TRAFFIC’s newsletter on wildlife trade in India. It was started in September 2007 with a primary aim to create awareness on rampant poaching and illegal wildlife trade in India and how it affects the endangered flora and fauna. Since then it has covered not only issues related to illegal wildlife trade but also highlighted policies and trends related to legitimate wildlife trade especially in timber and medicinal plants.

The newsletter began as a quarterly e-newsletter available only for online distribution. However after a few issues it was converted into a printed edition with three issues coming out every year. The response to the newsletter over the years has been overwhelming and the subscribers continue to increase with every issue.

Besides carrying updates on TRAFFIC’s work in India in a given period, the newsletter focuses on the plight of various species in illegal wildlife trade. It also provides early warning through its various sections on illegal wildlife trade trends. The CITES section and the OUTPOST section especially is meant to keep its readers updated on global news related to wildlife trade.
TRAFFIC INDIA UPDATE

• Wildlife protection stepped up at Tiger Reserves in India

• TRAFFIC urges stakeholders to focus on protection of lesser known wildlife species in India

• Alarming rise in Black Spotted Turtle trade across Asia, finds TRAFFIC report

• CITES releases a report on Elephant poaching and ivory smuggling

TRAFFIC ALERT (Latest news on illegal wildlife trade in India):

• Sri Lankan boat seized for fishing sea cucumbers, 16 men held

• Ivory recovered from wildlife smugglers

• Four poachers held in Manipur with venison

• Alarm bells over rising pet trade in wild animals in India

IN FOCUS

Weaved in illegal wildlife trade, future for Bayas appears bleak
Poaching and Illegal trade of Asian Elephants revisited

Although loss of species is triggered by several factors, habitat loss being important among them, poaching for illegal trade has lately emerged as one of the dominating factors. Rampant poaching has often driven a species close to local or global extinction, as poaching for illegal trade often targets the “best” individuals in a population in order to maximize revenue. The same individuals are also those that constitute the fittest breeding stock in a population. The most well-known example is of the Asian Elephant Elephas maximus in Kerala whose populations had nearly succumbed to poaching pressures in the early 1990s due to selective poaching of males in their prime for their ivory tusks. At that time, poaching of Asian Elephants in Kerala had resulted in a male to female ratio of 1:125 rendering the local populations at a precarious unviable level. Subsequent protection measures, enforcement efforts, and management practices, however, improved the situation and the sex ratio improved to a much safer level. The Elephants in Kerala were thus saved.

Poaching of Elephants for domestic and international trade has been a continuous occurrence in most parts of India, with southern Indian populations affected the hardest, where infamous forest bandit Veerappan is said to have been responsible for the deaths of more than 300 elephants for their ivory. Elephants have also been rampantly poached in eastern India too. As per the estimated trends, Elephant poaching in India rose from 1991-1999 then declined from 1999-2002, with tusk seizures increasing significantly in 2002-2006 compared to 1992-1996 (Niraj et al. 2012).

Spatially, most species that have been poached for illegal trade, e. g., Tiger Panthera tigris, Leopard Panthera pardus, Star Tortoise Geochelone elegans, Indian Rhino Rhinoceros unicornis have shown geographical clustering of seizures either along the country’s borders or around significant locations, e.g. international ports, important tourist sites. In the case of the Elephant, however, no significant clustering of seizures has been recorded either along borders or around significant locations, indicating a more widespread illegal trade, which witnessed an unwelcome resurgence from 2011 onwards. Since October 2013, seizures of approximately 10 tusks, substantial quantities of Elephant bones, and poaching of more than 12 Elephants have been reported from southern and eastern India. There are also reports, yet unconfirmed, of live Elephant trade conducted across India’s land borders through neighbouring countries.

TRAFFIC recently conducted a survey into the live Elephant trade at Sonepur fair in the State of Bihar that uncovered a large-scale trade in live Elephants in clear violation of India’s Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 (WPA). Trade of Asian Elephants has been conducted at Sonepur fair for several decades, however, what was striking was the very high price tag on each adult Elephant, likely an indicator of an organized trade involving wealthy buyers. This fair has been used to launder Elephants illegally purchased or obtained from the wild to such an extent that authorities in Kerala recently issued a notification that no domestic Elephants would be permitted to be moved into the State from Sonepur or elsewhere irrespective of a valid certificate of ownership. Other States in the country could follow up with similar notifications in order to curb the illegal trade in live Elephants from Sonepur fair.

Sonepur has also become a location for black marketing of endangered bird species, promoting illegal pet trade in species such as Black-naped Hares Lepus nigriceps, macaques, and langurs. The fair blatantly displays species, such as Hill Mynah Gracula religiosa, the State bird of Chattisgarh, which has almost disappeared from its natural habitats, cranes (Grus sp.), Munias (Munia sp.), Shikra Accipiter badius, Falcons (Falco sp.) and Parakeets (Psittacula sp.) among others. Trade in non-native species such as Cockatoos (fam. Cacatuidae), Conures (of gen. Aratinga and Pyrrhura), Parrots (mostly Psittacula spp.), and Macaws (Anodorhynchus spp.) among other species has assumed significant proportions. An unrestricted and open trade has a potential of creating new demands and new hobby makers. Recently, a seizure of Chimpanzees Pan troglodytes and Marmoset Monkeys (fam Callitrichidae) in Kolkata helped demonstrate the existence of a widespread network for primates in the pet trade. Investigations revealed a possible trade route involving Central and West African countries, the Middle East, Singapore and Bangladesh before animals were transported by land into West Bengal to cater to a growing pet trade market in India.
Wildlife protection stepped up at Tiger Reserves in India

Building capacity of the enforcement agencies is a key strategy of TRAFFIC to strengthen wildlife protection measures and curb illegal wildlife trade in India. Capacity building workshops are conducted regularly across India to train enforcement officials from the Departments of the Forest, Police, Border Security Forces, Customs, Railway Police and other enforcement agencies. The workshops bring multi-agencies together in order to build the coordination between them that is vital to combat wildlife crimes. Since 2008, over 3000 officials have been trained in India on new tools and techniques to fight wildlife crime. Recently training workshops have been conducted at Melghat Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra State and Achanakmar Tiger Reserve located in Chhattisgarh State.

Melghat Tiger Reserve: The two-day multi-agency capacity building workshop on Wildlife Law Enforcement and Conservation in India was organized by TRAFFIC, in collaboration with the Maharashtra Forest Department, on 9-10 May 2014 at Amravati in Maharashtra. The workshop was attended by 55 officials of the Forest Department, Police, State Reserve Police Force, and a few non-governmental organizations.

Mr Bipin Bihari, IPS Inspector General of Police, Amravati Region, inaugurated the workshop and emphasized the need for agencies to work in tandem for fighting wildlife crime in the region. He said: “The onus to protect wildlife lies with various enforcement agencies like ourselves. If we fail to address these issues pertaining to illegal wildlife trade, the consequences on forests and ecosystems will be disastrous”. Mr Bihari has assured full support of the Police Department in the region for curbing poaching and illegal wildlife trade.

The procedures and protocols for wildlife crime investigation and guidelines for filing complaints and other court case filing procedures were introduced by senior Supreme Court lawyers to the participants. Training sessions, giving an overview of illegal international wildlife trade, wildlife forensics, use of metal detectors and protocols on collection of wildlife samples for forensic analysis were conducted.

Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, Head of TRAFFIC in India introduced various aspects of wildlife crime and investigation techniques and gave an overview of illegal wildlife trade that induces poaching of various species in India and in the region of South Asia. He also introduced the participants to the international wildlife trade convention, CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora).

TRAFFIC’s capacity building workshop was organized to impart technical knowledge and skills to the participants and to build co-ordination between the enforcement agencies working in the region for effective wildlife law enforcement.

TRAFFIC received tremendous support from law enforcement experts from different places in India who participated in the training programme as resource personnel. The team included Mr Varun Kapoor, IPS, IG & Director, Police Radio Training School, Indore, Madhya Pradesh, Dr M. K. Sarkar IFS, APCCF-Working Plan Tamil Nadu- a national expert on medicinal plants; Dr Sunil K Verma, Principal Scientist at Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad who patented primer Technology for DNA analysis, Prof. B. G. Choudhury, an eminent Scientist and a former faculty at the premier Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun; Mr A. K. Jha, Assistant Director of the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau; Mr Abrar Ahmed, a bird trade expert; Dr Mukesh Thakur, a forensic and DNA scientist at WII; Mr Ritwick Dutta, Advocate, Supreme Court of India, Mr Saurabh Sharma, Advocate, Supreme Court and Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, IFS, Head of TRAFFIC in India. TRAFFIC also provided resource materials to the participants including wildlife forensic kits for use in the field for collecting samples for investigation and legal evidences to support the prosecution.

Achanakmar Tiger Reserve: TRAFFIC in collaboration with Chhattisgarh Forest Department conducted a two day multi-agency capacity building workshop on “Wildlife Law Enforcement and Conservation in India” on 10-11 June 2014 at Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh. The training workshop was attended by 55 forest officials, 10 police officers, 10 civil administration and 10 officials from other enforcement agencies. In addition several NGO staff plus print and TV media personnel also participated in the workshop.

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The workshop was inaugurated by Shri Amar Agarwal, Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Medical Education, Commercial Tax, and Urban Development Department. He said that wildlife is a significant part of Indian culture and if we fail to protect and respect wildlife we fail to respect our culture. He appreciated the efforts of TRAFFIC for organizing this training and helping to improve the understanding of officials in wildlife law enforcement. Senior officials of Chattisgarh government including the divisional revenue commissioner Mr KDP Rao, IAS, Mr Anup Srivastava, IFS, CCF Territorial Bilaspur, Mr Tapesh Jha, IFS, CCF and Field Director, Achanakmar Tiger Reserve and Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, Head, TRAFFIC in India also spoke and highlighted the importance of the training in combating wildlife crimes and thus conserving species.

The key resource personnel included Dr Niraj, Dr M. K. Sarkar IFS, APCCF-Working Plan Tamil Nadu and a national expert on medicinal plants, Mr A. K. Jha, Assistant Director of the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, Mr Abrar Ahmed, a bird trade expert, Dr Mukesh Thakur, Wildlife DNA and Forensic Scientist at WII, Mr Mukesh Kumar Sahni Ex-Senior Superintendent of Police from the Central Bureau of Investigation and existing faculty at National Police Training Bureau, Mr Saurabh Sharma Supreme Court Advocate and a legal consultant with WWF-India. Besides providing study materials and wildlife forensic kits prepared by TRAFFIC in collaboration with WII, materials on tools and techniques for investigating wildlife crimes were given to each of the participants. A demonstration was given of a deep search metal detector by Mr Druba Jyoti of TRAFFIC and the instrument was handed over to the to the Tiger Reserve for use in anti-poaching activities.

TRAFFIC urges stakeholders to focus on protection of lesser known wildlife species in India

Every year in India, hundreds of pangolins, lizards and tortoises are poached, thousands of birds are illegally trapped, and tonnes of sharks are caught, yet the levels of exploitation on these species are rarely reported.

In order to throw light on the perceived conservation crisis, TRAFFIC, WWF-India, Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) and Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) jointly organized a “Consultation Meeting on Illegal Trade in Lesser Known Species”, held in New Delhi on 9 June 2014 at the WWF-India Secretariat.

Wildlife experts; policy makers; scientists; research scholars; conservationists; and senior officials from State Forest Departments, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Delhi Administration, enforcement agencies, Wildlife Institute of India (WII), WCCB, and wildlife NGOs brainstormed the steps needed to protect these lesser-known wildlife species.

“While the threat posed by illegal wildlife trade to some of India’s most iconic wild animals, such as the Tiger and Indian Rhinoceros are well publicized, many of India’s lesser-known species are also rapidly vanishing because of poaching, and their fate hangs in balance,” said Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, Head of TRAFFIC in India.
Continued from page 6

"Pangolins are highly threatened because they are subject to a colossal illegal trade internationally, yet their plight is barely publicized in conservation or media circles. Others, like the monitor lizard, mongoose, Star Tortoises, Spiny-tailed Lizards, freshwater and marine turtles also need immediate attention," said Dr Niraj, who presented a thorough data and situation analysis.

Monitor lizards, especially the Bengal Monitor, were once commonly seen across the country but appear to have declined markedly, apparently after becoming a target of poachers and illegal trade.

Little is known about the levels of illegal trade or its impact on species such as sea cucumbers, seahorses or Red Sand Boa, the “double-headed” snake, which has recently been in huge demand due to new superstitions attached to it.

“TRAFFIC has flagged its concern about these lesser known species for some time, highlighting the concerns in our newsletter—TRAFFIC Post—and also through the distribution of posters and other awareness raising materials,” said Dr Niraj.

Key speakers at the meeting included Ravi Singh from WWF-India, Kamal Dutta from WCCB, Belinda Wright from WPSI, Abrar Ahmad a noted bird trade expert, Mr R. Sundar Raju, former Chief Wildlife Warden of Tamil Nadu, and Dr Niraj from TRAFFIC.

To coincide with the meeting, TRAFFIC also released a poster on weaver birds found in illegal trade in India and a leaflet on trade in shark species in India. Both these communiqués will help enforcement agencies and other stakeholders to take the requisite enforcement and conservation actions.

The burgeoning demand for birds is currently a major conservation concern in India with indigenous birds protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 still being traded freely. A recent survey by TRAFFIC at the Sonepur Animal Fair revealed that thousands of birds of at least 20 species were being traded. The bird trade also flourishes in other parts of India, including, Kolkata, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Bangalore.

Ravi Singh, Secretary General and CEO of WWF-India said: “Biodiversity in India is under severe threat from a variety of sources. Increasing competition for natural resources and rising human-wildlife conflict threaten the survival of numerous species found in India’s rich wildlife habitats. In addition to these threats, the burgeoning illegal trade in wildlife species and its articles and derivatives also poses a significant threat to several key species of flora and fauna, with the potential to seriously impact the health and balance of our ecosystems. While the impact and seriousness of this is evident for iconic species such as the Tiger, Elephant and Rhino, illegal trade in other wildlife species and even in live animals also seriously impacts lesser known flora and fauna”.

Kamal Dutta, Joint Director at WCCB said: “The cardinal issue of considering what to focus our attention on is central to the concern surrounding lesser known species in trade. Systematic monitoring by the way of surveys and enhanced field initiatives like identification guides for enforcement personnel and greater sensitization efforts for media stories could be the way ahead for ensuring that wildlife in India reflects beyond the Tiger in all its glory”.

“The focus has been on the mega species, while the lesser known animals valued in the illegal wildlife trade are being quietly and systematically wiped out. In some areas professional Tiger poaching gangs are now focusing on the lucrative pangolin trade. This is a tragedy in the making and we must do something about it before it is too late,” Belinda Wright, Executive Director of WPSI presented detailed analysis of the data collected on pangolins over two decades.
The attractive spotted visage of the Black Spotted Turtle *Geoclemys hamiltonii* may well be its downfall. TRAFFIC's recent investigation into the trade of this species confirms that illegal international trade of the Black Spotted Turtle in Asia has escalated over recent years and can be attributed to the sudden rise in demand in the exotic pet trade. The species was earlier known to be traded for meat, medicine and pets.

Over 1,960 animals were seized between January 2008 and March 2014. Of these, 95 per cent were confiscated in the final 15 months of 2008-2009. A seizure of another 230 turtles on 14 May 2014 underscored the seriousness of the threat. Royal Thai Customs officers in Suvarnabhumi International Airport found the turtles packed in unclaimed bags had been transported on a flight from Kolkata, India.

Seizure information indicates that shipments of the turtles from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan transit through South-east Asian hubs such as Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur, and are destined for East Asia, particularly, Hong Kong. Most of the seizures are from passengers using commercial airlines concealing animals in their baggage. Although the majority of the carriers detected were arrested, only two of the 22 registered cases actually resulted in successful prosecutions.

Dr Shekhar Niraj, Head of TRAFFIC in India said: “In India, this turtle species is collected from Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, and Bihar and usually taken to Kolkata or the Bangladesh border for smuggling out of the country. Of late, the smugglers have also used less known airports at Gaya and Varanasi to transport the animals illegally out of the country to South-East Asia. The species is also in demand domestically as a delicacy food”.

“Enforcement authorities' efforts to detect and apprehend smugglers are commendable, but a lack of follow-on investigations and prosecution is undoing their good work,” said Dr Chris R Shepherd, Regional Director for TRAFFIC in South-East Asia.

The TRAFFIC report Escalating Black Spotted Turtle *Geoclemys hamiltonii* trade in Asia: a study of seizures recommends improving enforcement and prosecution through multilateral and multi-agency coordination. Timely and detailed reporting of seizures to the CITES Secretariat and in the media, together with the outcomes of successful prosecutions, are also urged.

“Wildlife enforcement networks already exist in South and South-East Asia, but given the transnational operations of the criminal networks they are up against, the challenge is to ensure a fully co-ordinated global enforcement response to their activities is delivered,” said Dr Yannick Kuehl, Regional Director for TRAFFIC in East and South Asia.

TRAFFIC’s findings were released on 23 May 2014, World Turtle Day, to highlight the plight of the Black Spotted Turtle and many other species of turtles worldwide, particularly those in Asia which are under threat mainly from habitat loss and over-exploitation for food, medicine and the exotic pet trade.

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**OUTPOST:**  
**Alarming rise in Black Spotted Turtle trade across Asia, finds TRAFFIC report**

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**TRAFFIC Alert**

*Sri Lankan boat seized for fishing sea cucumbers, 16 men held*

After a pursuit of nearly five hours, the Coast Guard captured a Sri Lankan vessel illegally fishing the endangered sea cucumber near Lakshadweep Islands in April 2014. In what is termed as one of the biggest seizures by the Coast Guard, two metric tonnes of sea cucumbers were recovered from a Sri Lankan boat illegally fishing in Indian waters. All 16 members of the crew were arrested. The Coast Guard said Colombo Marine had diving equipment, air compressors, two GPS, high-frequency communication systems, and 1637.5-kg gas cylinders used for boiling and treating the sea cucumbers.

**TRAFFIC in India adds........**

Holothurians in India are listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Harvesting and trade in these species is totally prohibited in the country. However several households in the coastal regions in south-east India and the Andamans and Nicobar Islands remain involved in illegal sea cucumber harvesting and smuggling. However, significant benefits reach only the kingpins who control this trade and the local marginalized coastal communities receive only a pitance. Moreover, these marginalized coastal community members are those caught by the enforcement officials and bear the brunt of law enforcement whereas the major players running the crimes remain, generally, evasive of laws.

Sea cucumber, when dried and processed is known as *bêche-de-mer* (literally "sea-spade") and is used in various fresh or dried cuisines and is highly popular in China and in South-East Asian countries. They are also thought to have medicinal value and are traded as a source of aquaria organisms and specimens for biomedical research.

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TRAFFIC Alert

In India, the Black Spotted Turtle is found along the Indus River of Northern India and the Ganges River. It is protected under national laws in its range countries including India where it is listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972. It is also listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) making all commercial international trade in this species illegal.

OUTPOST:
CITES releases a report on Elephant poaching and ivory smuggling

Poaching levels remain alarmingly high at over 20,000. More large ivory seizures in Africa than Asia for the first time

Over 20,000 African Elephants were poached across the continent in 2013 according to a report that was released in June 2014 in Geneva by the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Although the sharp upward trend in illegal Elephant killing was observed since the mid-2000s, poaching has peaked in 2011. Poaching levels remain alarmingly high and continue to exceed the natural Elephant population growth rates, resulting in a further decline in Elephant populations across Africa.

The report also shows a clear increase in the number of large seizures of ivory (shipments over 500 kg) made in 2013, before the ivory left the African continent. For the first time, the number of such seizures made in Africa exceeded those made in Asia. Just three African countries—Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda—accounted for 80% of those seizures. Large-scale ivory seizures are indicative of transnational organized crime being involved in the illicit ivory trade.

Southern Africa continues to hold the lion’s share of Africa’s Elephants, holding close to 55% of the known Elephants on the continent. Eastern Africa holds 28% and Central Africa 16%. In West Africa, less than 2% of the continent’s known elephants are spread over 13 countries.

Poverty (measured by infant mortality rates) and weak governance (measured by law enforcement capacity and corruption levels), together with increasing demand for illegal ivory in consuming nations are three key factors linked to higher poaching levels. Overall poaching numbers were lower in 2013 than in 2012 and 2011—but they continue to exceed 20,000. The report warns that poaching levels will lead to continuing declines in the African Elephant population.

The report containing the latest figures (2013) from the CITES Monitoring Illegal Killing in Elephants (MIKE) programme and the Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS), which TRAFFIC operates on behalf of Parties to CITES, were discussed at the 65th meeting of the CITES Standing Committee that took place in Geneva from 7 to 11 July 2014. For more information, please visit http://cites.org/eng/elephant_poaching_and_ivory_smuggling_figures_for_2013_released

Source:
http://aquafind.com/articles/Sea_Cucumber.php
http://www.fao.org/docrep/011/i0375e/i0375e00.htm
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8557621.stm
Hunting of wildlife in tropical forests: implications for biodiversity and forest peoples. Biodiversity series-Impact studies, World Bank, Washington D. C., USA.
Ivory recovered from wildlife smugglers

Delhi Police arrested two on suspicion of wildlife smuggling and seized 11 kg of ivory on 4 May 2014. Acting on a tip off, the two individuals were arrested near Red Fort allegedly for selling pieces of Elephant tusks. Several officials of Delhi Police and Wildlife Department in a joint operation caught one of the accused and recovered a piece of tusk from his possession. On being interrogated, he informed the officials that his aide, who was sitting in a car parked near the spot, was also in the possession of three ivory pieces. The officials nabbed the second accused and arrested him as well.

Source:
http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/10/ivory/christy-text
http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2013/02/20132772531868802.html
http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-kerala/kerala-has-no-heart-to-burn-its-illicit-ivory/article6035582.ece

Four poachers held in Manipur with venison

In April 2014, Police with the help of wildlife enthusiasts in Bishnupur district in Manipur arrested four poachers and seized cooked and uncooked venison (deer meat). Poaching of wild animals is prohibited in Manipur, but is a regular occurrence. Most markets in the hill districts openly sell meat. In some cases, rare migratory birds, mountain goats and other live animals have been on sale. Police sources said that there have been reports of professional poachers slaughtering deer in the nearby mountains of Kumbi in Bishnupur district.

Source:
http://www.telegraphindia.com/1140101/jsp/northeast/story_17740050.jsp
http://forumblog.org/2013/06/can-myanmar-crack-down-on-the-regions-illegal-wildlife-trade/
IN FOCUS:
Alarm bells over rising pet trade in wild animals in India
(Unregulated pet trade causes conservation concerns)
Shekhar K. Niraj and Shubhobroto Ghosh- TRAFFIC

Introduction to wild animals kept as pets in India

India reportedly has a population of over 0.75 million pets and over 0.225 million non-native wild animals, used as pets and animals of captivity (Chamikutti, 2014). A wild animal is defined as an animal found wild in nature and is covered under Schedules I-IV of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 and in subsequent amendments (Government of India 1972). The pet industry estimates the pet care business in India to be in the region of INR 500 crore (approximately, USD 83 million) and projects the business to rise further, perhaps manifold (Chamikutti 2014). With the globalized market economy encouraging people to indulge in expensive hobbies and consumerism, the burgeoning pet market is one that has assumed a symbol of status in modern India. It is this trend and the impact of this trade on species conservation for both indigenous and non-native species that leads to current concerns and investigations on wild animals in pet trade in India.

The most common species observed in the wild animal pet trade in India are avian species (Table 1, Page 16). BirdLife International has identified India as the third nation, behind China and Indonesia, with the highest number of bird species that are endangered due to over exploitation. With 61 bird species globally threatened, India shares this negative distinction with Brazil. Many of these are trapped for trade for pets and for consumption (Rahmani et al., 2004). In India more than 700,000 birds are trapped every year, and the scale of the bird trade in India is a serious concern (Ahmed, 2004). In a survey of the Chiriy Bazaar (birds market) in Sonepur, in the eastern State of Bihar, in 2013, TRAFFIC investigators reported approximately 10,000 birds belonging to 20 indigenous species, caged and kept on open display for trade and commerce many in violation of the Wildlife (Protection) Act (WPA) 1972. Trade in indigenous birds in India has been banned since 1991, but the scale of trade nationally and as reported at Sonepur fair, and subsequent investigations, over a period of six months is large enough to ring conservation alarm bells in India (Narayan 2013, Balaji 2014, Nath 2014). Apart from birds, wild animals, popular in the Indian pet trade markets include Rhesus Macaques Macaca mulatta, Langurs Semnopithecus entellus, Black-naped Hares Lepus niger, snakes, Star Tortoises Geochelone elegans, several species of turtles, and Asian Elephants Elephas maximus among others. Evidences have been gathered that several individuals maintain private zoos in India and these facilities fuel the pet trade in exotic animals (Chandran 2009). Pet fairs also help encourage the practice of keeping and trading in non-native exotic animals in India (Map 3).

Dominance of birds in wild animal pet trade in India

Birds remain the most dominant species in the Indian pet trade. The highest number of native birds sold at Sonepur belonged to various species of parakeets, mynahs, including the now highly threatened Hill Mynah Gracula religiosa in India (protected under Schedule I of the WPA 1972) and munias (Table 1, Page 16). They were observed being sold in the thousands and as enquiry revealed, the mortality rate of captured wild birds could be as high as 80% (especially for munias). This would mean that for every bird that makes it to the market alive, many more perish en route and therefore the exact numbers of birds that are affected in this trade would be more than what meets the eye through direct observation.

The pet trade lobby also appears to be organising itself and many traders and breeders now take part in the nationwide International Pet Trade Fairs held all over the country to display their animals. These gatherings of the pet trade industry have been taking place since 2010 (and monitored by TRAFFIC since their inception). Several species of wild animals have been observed in trade including Common Marmosets Callithrix jacchus, Sulphur Crested Cockatoos Cacatua galerita, Sun Conures Aratinga solstitialis, Red Crested Touracos Trichoglossus haematodus, Scarlet Macaws Chrysopholus pictus, Rainbow Lorikeets Trichoglossus haematodus and Golden Pheasants Chrysopholus pictus (Map 1).
There is a growing network of bird markets linking Patna City, Lucknow, Merrut, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Mumbai, and Chennai. Markets are interlinked as wild birds and animals are procured from one market and supplied at the other as per the local demands. Markets in Ahmedabad are linked to those in Jaipur, Meerut, Bareilly, and Lucknow, particularly for wild birds. The railways are the most preferred means of transporting birds to different locations in the country, whereas small distances are covered by using public buses, usually loaded on the rooftops. However, public buses are frequently used for local movements of the contrabands.

Major bird keeping cities in India are Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore and Chennai and most pet fanciers now use non-native species in captivity for display but continue to harbour native species within their premises. These premises are often heavily guarded and remain inaccessible to outside inspection, including those from the forest department. India also has several private zoos that are running without any cognizance from the Central Zoo Authority. Many bird keepers have started large-scale breeding of exotic birds, some also cross breed them to bypass laws and create attractive looking birds for sale. Some of these cross-bred birds in Chennai command high market prices.

Turtles: With over 29 species of freshwater turtles and land tortoises, several of them endemic, India has been a focus of attention for the reptile trade both within and outside the country. Based on the number of confiscations by enforcement authorities in airports, railways and in road transportation, a conservative estimate puts the annual trade in Indian Star Tortoises and Pond Turtles at around 50,000-60,000 animals, with species such as Spotted Pond Turtle and other Pangshura species in the range of 2000-5000 (pers comm B.C.Choudhury). Many turtles are in demand as pets as ownership is believed to bring good luck. In West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Kerala, and metropolitan cities sellers offer Indian Roof Turtles *Pangshura tecta* for INR 800-1000 per individual and Indian Pond Turtles *Geoclemys hamiltonii* for INR 500-800 per individual. Indian Tent Turtles *Pangshura tentoria* are also popular pets, domestically and in international trade transactions.

Growing range of exotic animals in pet trade

The seizure of three chimpanzees in January 2014 along with six Common Marmoset monkeys raised conservation concern in India considering that it constituted the first seizure involving Great Apes in the country (Times of India 2014, Map 2). While the United Nations led Great Ape Survival Partnership estimated 3000 Great Apes were illegally traded during the period 2005 to 2011, the chimpanzee seizure in India turned out to be part of an international trafficking network involving these primates in the pet trade. Moreover, the trader had in his custody six Common Marmosets, one Brown Capuchin Monkey *Cebus apella*, several species of Macaws (*Ara spp*) and Cockatoos (*Cacatua spp*) as well as a single Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus* and a Racket-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus spp*.), the latter two bird species protected under the WPA 1972. The court case against the trader is ongoing.

A recent TRAFFIC survey of the wild animal pet trade in Kolkata provided some valuable insights into the trade. Enquiries with bird trade representatives from Kolkata’s Bird Breeders and Lovers Association revealed that in the past, West Bengal was the leading source state in India supplying the whole country with captive-bred birds, legally or illegally. The well-known bird market at Galiff Street, continues to do a brisk trade in wild birds. A recent TRAFFIC survey found at least 150 indigenous wild birds on sale, including Rose Ringed Parakeets, Alexandrine Parakeets, Red Breasted Parakeets, Plum Headed Parakeets and Brahminy Starlings. Traders encourage potential customers to buy birds by attaching their own price tags to forest department leaflets depicting the indigenous species that are prohibited for sale.

There is a growing network of bird markets linking Patna City, Lucknow, Merrut, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Mumbai, and Chennai. Markets are interlinked as wild birds and animals are procured from one market and supplied at the other as per the local demands. Markets in Ahmedabad are linked to those in Jaipur, Meerut, Bareilly, and Lucknow, particularly for wild birds. The railways are the most preferred means of transporting birds to different locations in the country, whereas small distances are covered by using public buses, usually loaded on the rooftops. However, public buses are frequently used for local movements of the contrabands.

Major bird keeping cities in India are Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore and Chennai and most pet fanciers now use non-native species in captivity for display but continue to harbour native species within their premises. These premises are often heavily guarded and remain inaccessible to outside inspection, including those from the forest department. India also has several private zoos that are running without any cognizance from the Central Zoo Authority. Many bird keepers have started large-scale breeding of exotic birds, some also cross breed them to bypass laws and create attractive looking birds for sale. Some of these cross-bred birds in Chennai command high market prices.

Turtles: With over 29 species of freshwater turtles and land tortoises, several of them endemic, India has been a focus of attention for the reptile trade both within and outside the country. Based on the number of confiscations by enforcement authorities in airports, railways and in road transportation, a conservative estimate puts the annual trade in Indian Star Tortoises and Pond Turtles at around 50,000-60,000 animals, with species such as Spotted Pond Turtle and other Pangshura species in the range of 2000-5000 (pers comm B.C.Choudhury). Many turtles are in demand as pets as ownership is believed to bring good luck. In West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Kerala, and metropolitan cities sellers offer Indian Roof Turtles *Pangshura tecta* for INR 800-1000 per individual and Indian Pond Turtles *Geoclemys hamiltonii* for INR 500-800 per individual. Indian Tent Turtles *Pangshura tentoria* are also popular pets, domestically and in international trade transactions.

Growing range of exotic animals in pet trade

The seizure of three chimpanzees in January 2014 along with six Common Marmoset monkeys raised conservation concern in India considering that it constituted the first seizure involving Great Apes in the country (Times of India 2014, Map 2). While the United Nations led Great Ape Survival Partnership estimated 3000 Great Apes were illegally traded during the period 2005 to 2011, the chimpanzee seizure in India turned out to be part of an international trafficking network involving these primates in the pet trade. Moreover, the trader had in his custody six Common Marmosets, one Brown Capuchin Monkey *Cebus apella*, several species of Macaws (*Ara spp*) and Cockatoos (*Cacatua spp*) as well as a single Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus* and a Racket-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus spp*.), the latter two bird species protected under the WPA 1972. The court case against the trader is ongoing.
Parrots now rank among the most threatened of all bird families with 66 species directly threatened by the illegal bird trade. Huge financial incentives are used to deal in these birds illegally in this clandestine trade. The legality issue also remains vague in the importation and keeping of exotic parrot species in India.

The pet trade in India includes a number of private farms and flourishing pet shops in South India, in cities like Chennai, Bangalore and Coimbatore.

TRAFFIC's own surveys have revealed several native bird species on sale in pet markets in these places, including Rose Ringed Parakeets and several non-native species like Scarlet Macaws, Sulphur Crested Cockatoos as well as primates such as Common Marmosets and Brown Capuchin Monkeys (Table 2).

TRAFFIC investigations show that the trade in exotic wild animals as pets, including birds, may be shifting from West Bengal to South India for reasons that still remain to be investigated. Several traders and breeders, have their private breeding farms where they breed a variety of exotic animals, including Common Marmosets, Sugar Gliders *Petaurus breviceps*, Wallabies (*Macropus* spp.), Ball Pythons *Python regius*, Bearded Dragons (*Pogona* spp.) and Green Iguanas *Iguana iguana* (Table 3). Breeders and traders in Kolkata admit there is a growing demand for these animals in India and they are eager to see this trade takes off significantly (One India News, 2008, Saha, 2009, Gupta, 2014).

The global trade in pet reptiles is huge: a mammoth 350 million live animals a year, (Honnegger 2007). Between 2005 and 2007, the EU imported about 6.7 million reptiles (BBC wildlife magazine, June 2014). There is also evidence that a few individuals maintain private zoos in India and these facilities fuel the pet trade in exotic animals (Chandran 2009).
Unregulated aquarium trade
A 2013 study for the first time assessed the extent, magnitude and conservation implications of the unmanaged trade in endemic and threatened freshwater fishes from India for the global aquarium pet markets (Raghavan et al., 2013). According to this research, more than 1.5 million freshwater fish belonging to 30 threatened species were exported from India during 2005-2012. Among these four species, *Botia striata*, *Carinotetraodon travancoricus* and Redline Torpedo Barbs *Puntius denisonii* and *P. chalakkudiensis* comprised the bulk of the exports. Some of the most important species of conservation concern exported included *Garra hughi*, *Channa aurantimaculata*, *Gonoproktopterus thomassi*, *Glyptothorax housei*.

Currently, India does not have regulations in place for monitoring the aquarium business. Add to this the trade in marine life, including Seahorses and Clown Fish, and there is potentially a significant problem when one considers that mortality rates are up to 98% for wild caught animals. (WWF Philippines, quoted in Wildlife Extra, 2013).

Legal loopholes
Under the WPA 1972, non-native animals are not protected as those are not listed in its Schedules. This leaves room for traders and breeders to take advantage of a non-restricted legal position to import and sometimes smuggle CITES listed non-native species for pet trade. Implementation of CITES guidelines for monitoring and controlling the non-native wild animal trade to or from India and globally has not been robust and adequate. Investigations post the Chimpanzee seizures in Kolkata revealed a possible route linking West Africa, Dubai, Singapore, Bangladesh and West Bengal, while legal loopholes in the WPA and in CITES implementation were exposed in Africa and Asia. In India, although a proposed amendment is seeking to introduce a CITES component in the WPA 1972, the nature of the new statute and its implementation currently remains unclear and ambiguous. The CITES is enforced through the Customs Act 1962, the EXIM Policies of the Government of India, and the Export Import Control Orders 1992, often these Acts or legal instruments are rendered ineffective once wildlife contraband is seized within the territories of the country. This has been reported several times when the seizure cases have been summarily dismissed by the courts of law and trials abandoned. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 may offer little ground for prosecution of traders in exotic wild animals imported illegally in India. The Chimpanzee trader in Kolkata was prosecuted under sections 135 and 111 of the Customs Act 1962, however, it was very difficult to establish evidence of smuggling under the current laws.
Discussion and recommendations to control and monitor wild animal trade in India

TRAFFIC has been monitoring the wild animal pet trade in India for the past two decades and notes a perturbing rising trend in organization of pet trade fairs and wild animal and bird shows across the country, indicating a probable increase in keeping wild animals as pets in India. There have also been few raids and seizures of non-native animals used as pets. However, attempts of enforcement agencies have all ended in prosecution failures due to absence of restrictive or prohibitory provisions under the Indian laws. Pet animals include indigenous and non-native (exotic) species. Recent surveys conducted by TRAFFIC in Delhi, Sonepur and Kolkata bear testimony to this trend and can be damaging for wildlife conservation (Baker et al. 2013). The ongoing surveys establish the general feeling of concern over the unregulated nature of the pet trade in India and the rising recent popularity of non-native species as pets. The variety of species observed firsthand, advertised on the web and those claimed by traders and breeders lend support to the concerns voiced by conservationists that unchecked trade in wild animals as pets could seriously undermine the conservation status of these animals in the wild. Given the fact that the pet industry is showcasing the desirability and the novelty of wild animals kept as pets in India, it is necessary to deal with this trend by developing a framework of action between different agencies working on wildlife protection. The significant role of the Internet in transactions involving exotic species has been recorded by investigating agencies, which facilitates uncontrolled trade with poor standards for animal welfare.

TRAFFIC makes the following recommendations to control the wild animal pet trade in India.

• All centres of trade in wild indigenous birds need to be geo-mapped and monitored for changes in the pattern of trade dynamics.
• The trade in wild animals including primates in Sonepur is in violation of Indian laws and should be stopped.
• A national database needs to be created for all breeders and traders of wild animals.
• CITES permits of breeders and traders in exotic wild animals need to be checked.
• There needs to be regular monitoring of all pet breeding facilities, including private pet zoos run by certain individuals and groups in India.
• Licensed government zoos should stop employing traders and breeders as middlemen in their transactions and develop their own expertise to deal with wild animal exchange.
• Online activities of traders and breeders in wild animals need to be continually monitored.
• Specialised cells need to be set up to monitor the wild animal pet trade in India.
• Specialist agencies like TRAFFIC can assist with surveys, information gathering, and analysis on current trends in the wild animal trade in India.
• Legal initiatives have to be supported and bolstered in prosecuting traders of wild animals who fail to adhere to guidelines and legislation.
• All CITES-listed species (native and non-native) need to be included in the amended version of the WPA 1972.
• Bolster the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and institute the Pet Shop Breeding Rules and Aquarium Breeding Rules with their CITES components.
• Special mobile units need to be created for monitoring the health of animals used in the pet trade.
• Awareness campaigns need to be conducted in the mass media to focus attention on the nature of the wild animal pet trade and its ramifications for conservation.

TRAFFIC can help in achieving the above by providing logistical and technical support, enhanced capacity building initiatives, assistance through the CITES cell, of which TRAFFIC is a member, of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, raising awareness and proving input for legal review processes. These are already an integral part of the mandate of TRAFFIC in India.
Table 1: Indian bird species reported in the pet trade and their legal protection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common name</th>
<th>Scientific name</th>
<th>WPA 1972 schedule listing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parakeet</td>
<td><em>Psittacula spp</em></td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munias</td>
<td><em>Lonchura and Amandava spp</em></td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill Mynah</td>
<td><em>Gracula religiosa</em></td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baya Weaver</td>
<td><em>Ploceus philippinus</em></td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red-headed Bunting</td>
<td><em>Emberiza bruniceps</em></td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Non-native bird species reported in the pet trade in India and their legal protection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common name</th>
<th>Scientific name</th>
<th>CITES appendix listing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scarlet Macaw</td>
<td><em>Ara macao</em></td>
<td>Appendix I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulphur Crested Cockatoo</td>
<td><em>Cacatua galerita</em></td>
<td>Appendix II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crimson Rosella</td>
<td><em>Platycercus elegans</em></td>
<td>Appendix II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golden Conure</td>
<td><em>Guaruba guarouba</em></td>
<td>Appendix I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Crested Touraco</td>
<td><em>Tauraco erythrolophus</em></td>
<td>Appendix II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Exotic animal species reported in the pet trade in India and their legal protection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common name</th>
<th>Scientific name</th>
<th>CITES appendix listing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common marmoset</td>
<td><em>Callithrix jacchus</em></td>
<td>Appendix II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chimpanzee</td>
<td><em>Pan troglodytes</em></td>
<td>Appendix I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar Glider</td>
<td><em>Petaurus breviceps</em></td>
<td>Not listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown Capuchin Monkey</td>
<td><em>Cebus appella</em></td>
<td>Appendix II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ball Python</td>
<td><em>Python regius</em></td>
<td>Appendix II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Wild Cry
(Illegal wildlife trade threatens the future of many species in the wild. This section highlights the plight of one such species in trade)

Weaved in illegal wildlife trade, future for Bayas appears bleak

Abrar Ahmed, Bird Trade Expert

The export and domestic trade in wild birds in India was banned in 1990-91. However, despite more than two decades of this blanket ban, a large number of wild birds are trapped and sold throughout India. In fact, the bird trade is one of the most extensive forms of wildlife trade in India, especially in terms of species diversity and volume (Ahmed 2004). According to studies conducted by TRAFFIC and WWF-India over the years, at least 450 bird species have been found in illegal trade. These birds are primarily caught and exploited for the pet, food or meat trades; merit-release; black magic; medicinal value; feather trade; lab specimens; zoos and bird sport (Ahmed 1997, 2002, 2008, 2010 and 2012).

As there is no restriction on sale of exotic/foreign bird species within India, a lot of Indian birds are often disguised and fraudulently sold as exotics (Ahmed 1999). For instance, males of native weaver birds are often dyed and sold as exotic birds (Ahmed 1999). In Indian culture, the keeping of weaver birds or bayas or their nests has been considered auspicious.

Species found in India: Four species of weaver birds or bayas belonging to the family Ploceidae are found in India (Ali & Ripley 1987), namely the Baya Weaver (Common Baya or Indian Weaver) *Ploceus philippinus*; Streaked Weaver *Ploceus manyar*; Black-breasted Weaver (Black-throated Weaver Bird) *Ploceus benghalensis*; and Finn’s Weaver (Finn’s Baya or Yellow Weaver) *Ploceus megarrhynchus*.

Weaver birds are resident, highly gregarious, small sparrow sized birds ($\geq 15$ cm), popularly known for their excellent nest-weaving skills. During the monsoon season these birds build a vertical oval nest with a side entrance (tunnels). All weaver birds have a breeding and non-breeding plumage. The males acquire a distinctive breeding plumage having a yellow crown, head and breast ornamentation. However during the non-breeding season, the males become brown and streaky, similar in appearance to females.

Distribution: The Baya Weaver, Streaked Weaver and Black-throated Weaver are all common Indian resident birds. Finn’s Weaver is only found in India and Nepal (Ahmed 2012).

Status:
Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule IV (The Act prohibits hunting, trade and any other form of exploitation of the species in India)
CITES: None of the species are listed
IUCN: Finn’s Weaver – Vulnerable, the other species all Least Concern.
**Threat:** All Indian weaver birds are found in the bird trade. A study by TRAFFIC (Ahmed 1997) found that the three species other than Finn’s Weaver were among the top 10 traded wild bird species (by number of individuals) in northern India, contributing 6% of the total wild bird trade in India. Baya Weaver is the most commonly trapped, followed by the Black-throated and Streaked Weavers (Ahmed 2002).

At the time when the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 was formulated, the trade and export of all weaver birds except Finn’s Baya was allowed. The amendment to this Act in 1978 restricted trade in the Black-throated Weaver allowing only trade in Baya and Streaked Weavers until the blanket ban on trade in all Indian bird species was imposed in 1990-91. According to CITES annual reports, 20,309 weaver birds belonging to three species were officially exported from India from 1983 to 1990. As per the TRAFFIC surveys between 1992 to 2001 at least 21,829 weaver birds of the four species was recorded in trade. A minimum of 1265 weaver birds of three species were seized in 21 raids contributing to nearly 2% of the seized birds between 1994 to 2001 (Ahmed 2002).

In India, during the summer months, breeding males of all weaver bird species (along with females) are caught for the cage bird trade since they acquire their nuptial (breeding) plumage during these months. However the non-breeding adults and females are caught and sold for food and for bird release activities throughout the year.

As per the surveys conducted by TRAFFIC, the majority of weaver birds traded for food were recorded in Bihar, Jharkhand and Indo-Nepal border along Uttar Pradesh apart from several places in Tripura, Orissa, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Southern India. The trade in weaver birds was a common sight in some markets such as Patna’s famous bird market – Mirshikar toli. Hawkers sold hundreds of weaver birds as “Bagheri”, the price ranging from INR 150 to 300 for a dozen (Bagheri is a technical term for small bird meat in eastern India that involves meat of sparrows, pipits, larks, wagtails, buntings and similar sized birds that are primarily migratory).

The breeding males of various weaver birds are sold throughout the country, sometimes by dying them various colours (using vegetable dyes) to make them look exotic and attractive as coloured birds are usually preferred by buyers. They are also dyed to prevent detection as wild native birds by enforcement agencies (Ahmed 1999). Most of the weaverbirds are caught by traditional bird trapping tribes, namely by Pardi, Passi-Baheliya, Mirshikar, Jabjali and Pathami trappers. They are usually trapped using a funnel net from their roosting spots (as they roost in large congregations) in Typha grass or sugarcane fields. Between 500 to 600 weaver birds are sometimes caught in a single night. In winter weaver birds are caught by baiting or using clap-traps.

Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, Head of TRAFFIC in India suggests there is a need for stricter enforcement action especially at the open selling points across India. There is also a need to sharpen the identification skills of enforcement agencies so that they can distinguish between native weaver birds and dyed specimens disguised to look exotic. To assist with this, TRAFFIC has produced a poster on weaver birds in India that will help identification of males/females and dyed weaver birds in trade. “We hope that the poster is used effectively by the agencies and a crackdown on open illegal trade is undertaken immediately,” said Dr Niraj.

**Sources:**
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