Poaching for oil threatens India's National Aquatic Animal

Silent cries of the Ganges River Dolphin
TRAFFIC Post

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

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

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

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

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

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

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TRAFFIC releases new report on illegal Tiger trade in Asia; at least two Tigers a week entered illegal wildlife trade over 16 year study period

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India and Nepal to strengthen wildlife law enforcement at border regions

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TRAFFIC releases new report on illegal Tiger trade in Asia; at least two Tigers a week entered illegal wildlife trade over 16 year study period

A comprehensive analysis of 16 years of Tiger seizures was released by TRAFFIC on the eve of the international conference on illegal wildlife trade that took place in Ha Noi in November 2016. The purpose of the study was to summarize the current trade dynamics for Tigers at a global level, in addition to assessing trade characteristics for each country.

The report titled Reduced to Skin and Bones Re-Examined showed Asia’s failure to ramp up enforcement, close Tiger farms, strengthen laws and reduce demand – all to blame for the persistent illegal trade in Tiger parts. These issues existed to varying degrees across all the 13 Tiger range countries (TRCs) scrutinized, evidenced by the minimum of 1755 Tigers seized from 2000–2015, an average of more than two animals per week.

With at least 758 seized, whole skins represented the most common commodity type in trade. Other items seized included bones and Tiger bone wine, claws, canines, paws, gall bladders as well as dead and live Tigers.

India during the 16-year period under review recorded the greatest number of seizures among all TRCs, accounting for up to 44% of the total. It reported seizures of a minimum of 540 Tigers and a maximum of 622 Tigers, the minimum accounting for 30% of the total.

Location information demonstrated that while the southern region of India remained a hotspot, there also appeared to have been a greater number of seizures reported in the central zone in and around the State of Madhya Pradesh. A smaller cluster of seizures was also observed along the border of Nepal in the State of Uttar Pradesh. Research found that there was a greater probability that Tiger seizures will occur in areas where Tigers exist, underlining the need for site-based enforcement efforts. Furthermore, study also found that the national rail network in India was the preferred method for transporting Tigers and their parts, largely because many rail routes traverse protected areas across India, in contrast to national bus routes for example.

Despite the highest number of seizures being recorded in India, in contrast to all other TRCs, the overall trend line indicates a statistically significant decrease in the number of seizures being reported, particularly since 2010.

In terms of the number of Tigers seized, India was followed by Thailand, Nepal, China and Viet Nam.

The report found there was a growing proportion of Tiger parts seized suspected to be from captive breeding facilities—from just 2% in the 2000–2003 period to at least 30% in 2012–2015. Such seizures were most pronounced in Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Thailand and Viet Nam, where captive breeding facilities were found to be poorly regulated by existing laws.
“The rising number of Tigers suspected to be from captive breeding operations is a sure indication that leakage from Tiger farms is occurring and there is no denying the role these facilities play in worsening illegal trade: these countries have clearly made little meaningful progress in controlling this source of supply,” said Kanitha Krishnasamy, Senior Programme Manager for TRAFFIC in Southeast Asia and a co-author of the report.

The report also established that countries such as India with a majority of wild Tiger populations having the best chance of saving wild Tigers need to tackle the persistent problem of Tigers being poached from the wild. “This comprehensive analysis provides important insights for targeting interventions at critical points in the trafficking chain,” said James Compton, TRAFFIC’s Senior Director for Asia. “Specific recommendations to Tiger Range Countries at national level are complementary to the need for international law enforcement co-operation to disrupt and dismantle criminal activity involving Tigers and Tiger parts.”

The authors of the report said that the persistently high number of seizures was rooted in the lack of intelligence-led law enforcement efforts that could lead to successful convictions, a problem made worse by weak penalties and a lack of successful prosecution of offenders, and a lack of information sharing and bilateral co-operation.

Efforts to strengthen Tiger conservation efforts and cripple the syndicates bent on emptying the forests of Tigers, especially in their strongholds in India, Nepal, Russia, Malaysia and Indonesia, could only be achieved if these problems were addressed, said the report.

Demand, too, has not been quelled according to the report, which cites the clamour for taxidermy specimens of Tigers as a luxury item from the Indonesian elite as an example of additional pressure on the declining Sumatran Tiger population.

The report recommends wild Tiger range countries step up their game to beat the odds of extinction.


Sixteen new wildlife sniffer dog squads to help combat wildlife crime in India

On 5 October 2016, 16 new highly trained wildlife sniffer and tracker dog squads joined the ranks of India’s dog squad forces deployed for fighting wildlife crime and curbing illegal wildlife trade in India. The dogs are the fifth batch of sniffer dogs trained under TRAFFIC’s sniffer dog training programme in India and have joined their 25 illustrious counterparts already deployed across the country. A wildlife sniffer dog squad includes a dog and its two handlers.

The latest phase of TRAFFIC’s wildlife sniffer dog training programme in India began in January 2016 at the
National Training Centre for Dogs (NTCD), BSF Academy, Tekanpur Gwalior, with 16 young dogs and 32 handlers from the seven participating States of West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh.

During the first phase of the training programme the dogs (aged between 6-9 months) were allotted to their handlers and their primary exercise was to bond and build a trusting relationship. Strategic exercises taught the dogs only to accept food from their handlers and to follow their handlers’ instructions in the most savage and intense situations. As the dogs neared the end of the first stage of training, they had all mastered these disciplines that would become the root of their careers as wildlife sniffer and tracker dogs.

During the crucial second stage of the training regime, the dogs began to learn and develop skills to detect wildlife contraband, to conduct wildlife seizures and how to nab poachers. They were rigorously trained for scent detection, tracking, searching and sniffing wildlife products or animal body parts especially of Tiger, Leopard, and Elephant, hidden in the ground, in vehicles, or in premises. The dogs were also trained to detect timber species such as Red Sanders.

The third and final stage of the training took the dogs out into the field. A set up was made for the dog squads to detect and seize illegal wildlife products from almost real time situations. The training was strictly based on conditional learning where a dog was rewarded/appreciated when the task was undertaken with success. For example, after a dog located or dug out the animal skins or bones, it was given immediate affirmation and reward from its handlers.

After the nine-month training programme, the dogs graduated at a passing out ceremony organized at the NTCD. The ceremony was attended by senior officials of the BSF Academy, TRAFFIC and WWF-India from New Delhi. Shri R A Khan, DIG (TPT), BSF Academy, Tekanpur, speaking to the audience at the passing out ceremony, said, “The NTCD at Gwalior is a nodal and established sniffer dog training centre for combating various crimes in India. Since wildlife crime is severe in India and globally, it is important that the sniffer dogs are trained specifically for this purpose. Dogs have profound sniffing and tracking ability which makes them useful in conducting wildlife seizures as well as in nabbing poachers. This is the first batch of wildlife sniffer dogs to have been trained from our centre and we take pride in partnering in this important mission”.

**SUPPORT THE PROGRAMME**

The wildlife sniffer dog training programme needs your support. In 2008, TRAFFIC pioneered the first wildlife sniffer dog training programme in India. Since then, the trained sniffer dogs have been successful in at least 175 wildlife seizures cases and have assisted in arresting about 125 wildlife offenders. However, wildlife crime remains a persistent threat and TRAFFIC needs your support to enable more dogs to be trained to apprehend and deter wildlife criminals. Visit [http://support.wwfindia.org/super_sniffer/](http://support.wwfindia.org/super_sniffer/) to learn how you can help.
India and Nepal to strengthen wildlife law enforcement at border regions

In response to a need to strengthen wildlife law enforcement at the India-Nepal border and restrict the movement of wildlife contraband, TRAFFIC, in partnership with Valmiki Tiger Reserve and with support from WWF-India, organized a trans-border wildlife law enforcement and capacity building workshop in Bihar from 5-7 December 2016.

The workshop, held at the Valmiki Tiger Reserve, was attended by 62 enforcement officials representing India’s departments of Forest, Police and Revenue, officials of the Para Military forces, the Sashastra Suraksha Bal (SSB), and 10 officers from Nepal representing the departments of Wildlife and Parks, Army, Attorney, and Armed Police. Field staff from TRAFFIC and WWF-India were also present.

The three day workshop disseminated information on the latest trends in illegal wildlife trade, trends in changing demand for wildlife products and in their supply. Other topics included identification skills for specimens in illegal wildlife trade; trade of reptiles, birds, turtles and tortoises; new tools and techniques useful in combating wildlife crime; legislation governing domestic and international wildlife trade; techniques for intelligence collection and collation; digital intelligence; tackling online wildlife crime including through social media; standard techniques used in search, seizure and interrogation of wildlife criminals; and forensics and DNA tools available for collecting and establishing evidence. Best practices in the deployment of trained wildlife sniffer dogs were also covered: a few years ago, two such dogs had been deployed at Valmiki Tiger Reserve trained under TRAFFIC’s wildlife sniffer dog training programme in India. Participants also received instruction on use of deep search metal detectors (DSMDs), used to locate metal snares, traps and ballistic materials used in wildlife poaching, and in applying their newly acquired knowledge at simulated crime scenes.

TRAFFIC donated 16 wildlife forensic kits to Valmiki Tiger Reserve and six to the delegates from Nepal, while four advanced DSMDs were given to Valmiki Tiger Reserve’s Field Director.

Participants spoke about how useful the workshop had been for enhancing cross-border co-ordination to address wildlife crimes.

A similar training event involving officers from Nepal and India was also held at Dudhwa Tiger Reserve in July 2016. Both events were part of a strategic approach to combating wildlife crime, with TRAFFIC helping enhance wildlife law enforcement skills and capacity building in vulnerable Tiger Reserves and Protected Areas located close to international borders and traditional wildlife trafficking routes.

Valmiki Tiger Reserve was one of the first Tiger reserves gazetted in India and is particularly vulnerable owing to its critical location along the borders of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in India and Nepal in the terai region. The Reserve has lost several Tigers in recent years to poaching, perpetrated by gangs operating across the borders of India and Nepal and linked to international Tiger trafficking syndicates.
A “wildlife pledge” to combat wildlife crime was also taken by participants, led by Mr A.N. Jha, Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India while more than 700 individuals used a “pledge wall” to say “NO” to buying illegal wildlife products.

Ms Tilotama Varma, Additional Director - WCCB said, “World Environment Day has given us an opportunity to highlight the on-going wildlife crime that has endangered the future of many wildlife species in India. While enforcement agencies like ours are continuously strengthening and evolving ourselves to control this growing menace, it is important that we have support of the end consumers of these wildlife products.”

Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, Head of TRAFFIC’s India office said, “Poaching is driven by consumer demand and if this can be curbed, poaching will stop. Illegal wildlife trade has emerged as one of the most significant threats to wildlife and engaging public support is crucial to eradicating this threat.”

Individuals from all walks of life pledged their support for fighting wildlife crime during an event organized at “Raahgiri”, Connaught Place, New Delhi, during the early hours by the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change, Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), TRAFFIC, WWF-India, United Nations Development Programme, ENVIS Centers, PETA and Maashakti to mark World Environment Day.

Celebrated globally on 5 June every year, World Environment Day highlights various conservation and environmental issues, with the theme changing each year. In 2016, the theme was “Go Wild for Life - Zero Tolerance for Illegal Wildlife Trade.”

TRAFFIC, WWF-India and partner organizations engaged participants at Raahgiri through wildlife films, wildlife quizzes, skits performed by law students, painting competitions, slogan writing competitions, a cultural programme and other activities. The event highlight was a march around the inner circle of Connaught Place with volunteers and supporters holding placards with messages related to wildlife conservation and environmental protection. Another popular activity was “selfie corner” where participants could take selfies with cut outs of various protected species, helping drive home the message that wildlife is ours to protect and not ours to consume.
India adopts “World Elephant Day”: Children pledge to protect and conserve Elephants

On 12 August 2016, India formally adopted “World Elephant Day” to help conserve and protect Elephants in India and improve their welfare. Shri Anil Madhav Dave, Honourable Minister of State (I/C) Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, pledged his support for Elephant conservation and urged the country to co-operate and support the mission of the occasion.

He said: “On the occasion of World Elephant Day, 2016, I pledge to protect the Indian Elephant, declared as a National Heritage Animal, to the best of my ability. The Indian Elephant has been a victim of severe habitat loss, cruelty in private custody and poaching for its tusks. It is important that its habitat is secured to minimize its conflict with people. Strict enforcement of laws to stop poaching as well as co-operation with other countries is sought to reduce the demand for ivory in national and international markets. Elephant conservation in India needs the support of all stake holders”.

During the day an awareness programme was organized at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti Bhawan in New Delhi by Project Elephant, TRAFFIC, Centre for Media Studies- Vatavaran and WWF-India.

Nearly 400 schoolchildren from across Delhi National Capital Region witnessed the ceremony and took the pledge along with the Honourable Minister. They also participated in a conservation march and formed a human chain in support of Elephant conservation with the children holding placards with messages about the immediate threats to Elephants today. The programme also included a painting and slogan writing competition, and a quiz on the theme of Elephant conservation in India.

Various films about illegal trade in Elephants, human-wildlife conflict and other topics were screened during the programme, together with a panel discussion involving experts in the field of Elephant conservation on “Poaching of Elephants and illegal trade in ivory and its products.”

TRAFFIC’s latest poster on Elephant poaching and illegal ivory trade, part of its long running campaign “Don’t Buy Trouble” was released at the event.

Mr Rajeev Kumar Srivastava, Inspector General & Director, Project Elephant, Government of India said, “The Project Elephant Division in the Ministry was established in 1992 to promote conservation and welfare of Elephants in the country. Since then it has been dealing with four major issues: destruction, fragmentation and degradation of Elephant habitats; poaching for tusks to meet demand for ivory in national and international markets; human-elephant conflicts; and issues relating to captive Elephants. The Project Elephant Division is working in co-operation with the Chief Wildlife Wardens
of Elephant range States to help conservation of Elephants and their habitat. However, it is very important to raise awareness among the general public, particularly student communities, about the problems faced by pachyderms in India. World Elephant Day is an occasion to highlight these issues among the general public and policy makers and this day is being celebrated in the country for the first time. Participation of Honourable Minister, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, in World Elephant Day 2016 will promote the cause of Elephants in India. We are thankful to organizations such as TRAFFIC, Centre for Media Studies- Vatavaran, and the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau for assisting us in organizing World Elephant Day 2016.”

Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, Head of TRAFFIC’s India office highlighted various threats to the Elephant from poaching and illegal trade and spoke about how international demand is one of the main drivers for Elephant ivory in India, with usages varying from Japanese hanko, artifacts, wedding bangles, trophies and medicines. Reports have also indicated a domestic demand for ivory with a few communities in western India using it for bangles and others for decorative and ornamental purposes. Poaching for meat and other products such as Elephant tail hair also pose threats to populations, especially in Northeast India. A lack of effective intelligence could be a stumbling block in stopping Elephant poaching in India.

World Elephant Day was launched worldwide on 12 August 2012 to mobilize attention and support for conservation of Asian and African Elephants.

The Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus* was once widely distributed throughout the country, including in States such as Punjab and Gujarat. Currently, they are found in only 14 States, in four fragmented populations in South, North, Central and North-east India. The Asian Elephant has been accorded the highest level of protection under Indian wildlife law through its listing under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 of India. This means that hunting/trading of this species would be punishable by imprisonment of up to seven years and a minimum fine of INR25000. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) has listed the Asian Elephant in Appendix I, which prohibits all commercial international trade in this species or parts of it.

Bidding farewell to Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj

Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, IFS, joined TRAFFIC as Head of the India office in 2013 as an Indian Forest Service officer on deputation from the Government of Tamil Nadu. Dr Niraj’s extensive experience stemmed from his work in Protected Areas as an official in the Indian Forest Service, contributing to combating wildlife trade and poaching. Before joining TRAFFIC, he was responsible for the management of different terrestrial and marine protected areas, including the Gulf of Mannar Marine Biosphere Reserve. He was awarded the International Wildlife Foundation Award at the University of Arizona, USA, in 2007, where he undertook his PhD research on the impacts of sustainable development on illegal wildlife trade and poaching.

On completion of his tenure with TRAFFIC in January 2017, Dr Niraj returned to his parent organisation, Government of Tamil Nadu. TRAFFIC and WWF-India appreciate his contribution towards curbing wildlife crime and illegal wildlife trade in India and wishes him the very best in his future endeavours. Dr Niraj can be contacted at shekhar.niraj@gmail.com
1. Gall Bladder, the main draw for bear poachers in Myanmar

2. China to ban all domestic ivory trade by the end of 2017
Gall Bladder, the main draw for bear poachers in Myanmar

Forty bear poachers across Myanmar have revealed that they primarily poach bears to supply the illegal trade in gall bladders. The findings were published in a TRAFFIC study where data derived from interviews with self-declared bear poachers from 23 separate villages across nine States in Myanmar was analysed. Most of the poachers (38 of the 40) stated they largely hunted bears to obtain gall bladder, and to a lesser extent paws and cubs.

The study “Assessing the illegal bear trade in Myanmar through conversations with poachers: Topology, perceptions and trade links to China” was published in the journal Human Dimensions of Wildlife in January 2017.

Demand for bear parts, like the gall bladder and paws, is driven primarily by China. It also found that bears are poached mostly using snares. While the meat of the bears killed tends to be consumed by the poachers, the more commercially valuable parts like the gall bladder and paws are traded. Bear cubs are coveted too, considered a valuable commodity for commercial trade, often to stock bear bile farms.

“Understanding the intricacies and economics of the international wildlife trade is paramount if we want to curb the illegal trade,” said Vincent Nijman, Professor in Anthropology at Oxford Brookes University and co-author of the study.

Indeed a worrying sign is that most of the poachers interviewed agreed that populations of bears appeared to be declining with fewer bears now in the area where they were living compared to five years ago. “The illegal trade in bears and their parts in Myanmar requires more focused efforts from the Myanmar authorities. Increased law enforcement and effective prosecution is essential if trade networks and markets are to be shut down,” said Dr Chris R. Shepherd, Regional Director of TRAFFIC in Southeast Asia.

For more information, please visit http://www.traffic.org/home/2017/1/26/new-study-finds-gall-bladder-the-main-draw-for-myanmar-bear.html

China to ban all domestic ivory trade by the end of 2017

In an historic announcement, China declared that it will close down its domestic ivory trade by the end of 2017, signaling an end to the world’s primary legal ivory market.

The General Office of the State Council of China announced that China will “cease part of ivory processing and sales by 31 March 2017 and cease all ivory processing and sales by 31 December 2017.

Lo Sze Ping, CEO of WWF China said: “WWF applauds China’s decision to ban its domestic ivory trade so swiftly, underlining the government’s determination and strong leadership to reduce demand for ivory and help save elephants. Closing the world’s largest legal ivory market will deter people in China and beyond from buying ivory while making it harder for ivory traffickers to sell their illegal stocks”.

At the meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) held in South Africa in October 2016, delegates adopted a Resolution calling for all countries with a legal domestic market for ivory that is contributing to poaching or illegal trade to take measures to close their domestic ivory markets. “Now that three of the world’s largest domestic ivory markets—China, Hong Kong SAR and the USA—are being phased out, we hope that other countries will follow suit,” said Lo Sze Ping.

In August 2016, WWF and TRAFFIC released key recommendations that found a ban could be implemented within two years and that it would raise people’s awareness of Elephant conservation and help law enforcement tackle the illegal trade. Read more at http://www.traffic.org/home/2016/12/31/china-to-ban-domestic-ivory-trade-by-end-of-2017-in-huge-boo.html
CITES Update

New CITES trade rules came into effect at the start of 2017
New CITES trade rules came into effect at the start of 2017

If you are crossing a Customs checkpoint at the airport or an international port be aware that new trade regulations for over 500 species of animals and plants entered into force on 3 January 2017. They were adopted in Johannesburg, South Africa, at the 17th meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES CoP17). As the New Year began, the overwhelming majority of the 183 Parties to CITES—the international treaty that regulates global trade in endangered wildlife species—applied the newly agreed controls with the aim of protecting irreplaceable wild fauna and flora from over exploitation for international trade. As well as providing instructions for government agencies on how to regulate trade in particular species and on a large range of issues—everything from misdeclaration of captive breeding, corruption to online trafficking and more—thousands of species are also given different levels of protection through their listings in one of three appendices within CITES. Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction: trade in specimens of these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances. Appendix II includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled in order to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival. Appendix III contains species that are protected in at least one country, which has asked other CITES Parties for assistance in controlling the trade.

Highlights of some of the new species listings:

High value marine species: Continuing a trend from the previous CoP, Parties at CoP17 voted for a higher level of protection for several marine species of high commercial value, most notably through the inclusion of the Silky Shark, all thresher sharks and all devil rays in Appendix II. This will mean that future trade in these species can only happen subject to science-backed evidence that the trade will not be detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild. The entry into force of the new listings will be delayed for 12 months for the shark species and 6 months for the devil rays, namely to 4 October 2017 and 4 April 2017 respectively.

Timber species: The success of CITES in supporting legal, sustainable timber trade and addressing illegal trade saw a further 300+ timber species, including all Dalbergia rosewood and palisander species found across the world, being brought under CITES trade controls. Legal international trade in timber is worth hundreds of billions of dollars every year. CITES Management Authorities establish the veracity of the legal origins of rosewood and palisander species before they enter international trade, and CITES Scientific Authorities advise on the sustainable nature of the harvest and exports. Customs officials at border crossings across the globe will verify CITES permits for all such international shipments.

Pangolins: At CoP17 pangolins, the previously little-known ant-eating species found in Africa and Asia, were under the international spotlight. All eight pangolin species were afforded the highest level of protection under CITES through an Appendix I listing which prohibits all commercial international trade of wild taken specimens. The Appendix-I listing will also serve as incentive for the world’s governments to step up law enforcement and demand reduction efforts to better protect the species.

New species that did not make headlines: Some lesser known but equally important species brought under CITES trade regulations include the Nautilus, the Grandidier’s Baobab Tree, and many amphibians and reptiles, such as alligator lizards, the Psychedelic Rock Gecko, the Chinese Crocodile Lizard, the Titicaca Water Frog, and the Tomato Frog — species often seen in the pet trade, and that need control to ensure the sustainability and legality of supplies.

CITES Secretary-General, John E. Scanlon said “CITES CoP17 was a game changer for the world’s wildlife, with international trade in 500 more species brought under CITES controls, including high value marine and timber species. CITES also adopted a vast array of bold and powerful decisions addressing critical areas of work, such as curbing corruption and cyber-crime, and developing well-targeted strategies to reduce demand for illegal wildlife. We are all now focused on the implementation of these decisions for which we need equally bold concrete actions.” Read more at https://cites.org/eng/new_CITES_trade_rules_come_into_effect_as_2017_starts_02012017
TRAFFIC Alert

1. In a record haul, Police seize over 6000 turtles in Uttar Pradesh

2. Over 70 snakes seized from a residence in Pune, two arrested

3. Five caracals and a wild cat seized in Uttar Pradesh
In January 2017, Police seized more than 6000 freshwater turtles from poachers who had planned to smuggle them out of the country. Live Indian Flapshell Turtles were found stuffed in sacks near Amethi in Uttar Pradesh State, bound for Kolkata. A person suspected of being the kingpin behind the smuggling operation, has been arrested over the 4th haul, thought to be the largest in India’s history.

TRAFFIC adds.....

Indian Flapshell Turtle *Lissemys punctata* is a freshwater turtle largely found in calm and stagnant waters along the Indus and Ganges River drainages. It is listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act of India, 1972, which affords it complete protection against hunting, trade and any other forms of utilisation in India. It is further listed in Appendix II of CITES, which restricts its international trade. However, the legal status of the species has failed to stop its exploitation by poachers and wildlife traders across its range.

The trade in Indian Flapshell Turtle is driven mainly by demand for its meat, calipee (a fatty gelatinous light-yellow substance found immediately over the lower shell of a turtle and esteemed as a delicacy) and for sale as pets. Calipee once extracted and processed is smuggled across porous Indian borders to China where it is used in traditional medicines.

The meat is considered by some to be an aphrodisiac, while the bones are powdered for use in traditional medicines.

Freshwater turtles from various north Indian rivers are also brought into West Bengal where the meat is consumed locally. Kolkata is considered to be notorious for turtle trade. In 2016, the West Bengal Police collaborated with TRAFFIC and placed over 2500 posters on poaching and illegal trade of tortoises and freshwater turtles at strategic locations across the State of West Bengal. Between December 2016 and January 2017, the Police seized over 3000 of these turtles in the State.

Sources:
Over 70 snakes seized from a residence in Pune, two arrested

In December 2016, 41 Russell’s Vipers and 31 cobras kept in wooden boxes and gunny bags were seized from a residential apartment in Pune. The police found the snakes from an apartment where a man, who was arrested, was living with his wife and children. Investigations revealed that the suspect caught the snakes in the wild or procured them from snake catchers. He then allegedly extracted venom from the reptiles for sale or onwards smuggling. Police also found some venom stored in small bottles in the apartment. All the seized snakes were handed over to forest officials.

TRAFFIC adds.....

Russell’s Viper *Daboia russelii* is one of the four most venomous snakes in India. It is found throughout the country, up to Assam. Russell’s Viper is a nocturnal snake and inhabits scrub forests, grasslands and even cultivated fields in urban and rural India. It is listed in Schedule II of the Wildlife (Protection) Act of India, 1972 and under this Act hunting, trade or any other form of exploitation of the species or its body parts and derivatives is banned. International trade is further regulated under CITES where the species is listed in Appendix III, which contains species that are protected in at least one country that has asked other CITES Parties for assistance in controlling the trade.

There are five species of cobra found in India: King Cobra *Ophiophagus Hannah*, Spectacled Cobra *Naja naja*, Monocled Cobra *Naja kaouthia*, Andaman Cobra *Naja sagittifera* and Central Asian Cobra *Naja oxiana*. All of them are listed in Schedule II of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and Appendix III of CITES.

The above snake seizure provides some insight into the illegal venom trade in India. Snake venom is used by pharmaceutical companies to make antidotes. News reports have indicated that some companies procure snake venom through illegal sources. There is also a growing demand for snake venom for intoxication purposes, commonly marketed to youth as a party drug while there are also reports pointing towards international smuggling of venom. TRAFFIC believes that concerted action is needed to address the threats posed by illegal trade in snake venom.

Sources:
http://indianexpress.com/article/india/over-70-snakes-seized-from-pune-flat-two-arrested-4447546/
http://indiansnakes.org/content/russells-viper
In January 2017, Uttar Pradesh Police seized five caracals and a wild cat species, allegedly being smuggled from Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh to Hyderabad. According to the police who intercepted the car in which these animals were being transported in iron cages, it is extremely rare to find live wild cats being smuggled. The arrested suspect said that the animals were brought from Bihar and were on their way to Hyderabad. Reportedly, wild cat species are popular in illegal private zoos located on the outskirts of Hyderabad and Bengaluru.

TRAFFIC adds.....

TRAFFIC is concerned about the seizure of Caracals *Caracal caracal*. These are secretive and elusive wild animals, rarely seen in the wild or surfacing on camera traps. Caracals were once found across the arid and semi arid regions of India but are now found only in pockets of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The species is listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and in Appendix I of CITES, meaning all international commercial trade is prohibited. The main threats to Caracals are habitat loss and alteration and these pressures from human development have taken a severe toll on wild populations. Conservationists fear the Caracal may become extinct in India before much is known about the species in the wild. Poaching and illegal wildlife trade may also be a significant threat: the police consider the above seizure may only represent the tip of iceberg of what could be a highly organised and sophisticated illegal trade in the species.

In recent years, TRAFFIC has been encouraging enforcement agencies to address the poaching and illegal trade of some of the lesser known wildlife species such as pangolins, monitor lizards, bird, snakes, Tokay Geckos and lorises. TRAFFIC considers the trade threat against some of these species may be significant and having a conservation impact. TRAFFIC therefore urges investigation and follow up action in the above case.

Sources:
http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-newdelhi/Five-caracals-seized-from-smugglers/article17016570.ece
In Focus

Snow Leopards: a species living on the edge
The Snow Leopard *Panthera uncia* is found in the mountain ranges of Central and Southern Asia across 12 countries: Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

The species is threatened, intrinsically rare and although it inhabits a large geographical range (1.8 million km²), its global population is estimated at 3920–6390 animals (GSLEP, 2013). It is classified as Endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The Snow Leopard has been listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) since 1975, and hence all international trade in the species, its parts and derivatives is prohibited. Each Snow Leopard range State has its own national legislation to protect the species against exploitation. In India, the Snow Leopard is listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the highest level of protection accorded to a wildlife species in the country.

Threats to the Snow Leopard include illegal killing and the loss of its natural prey owing to competition from livestock, hunting by people, and partly due to habitat alteration. With less natural prey available and with more domestic animals grazing in their hunting territories, Snow Leopards have taken to preying on livestock. This has brought it into continuous conflict with local people, often leading to retaliatory killings.

According to research published in October 2016 by TRAFFIC in the report *An Ounce of Prevention: Snow leopard crime revisited*, an estimated 221-450 Snow Leopards have been poached annually since 2008—a minimum of four animals per week although this number could be substantially higher since many killings in remote areas go undetected.

Using a combination of methods, including seizure records, market surveys and expert interviews to provide the first quantitative estimates of the scale of snow leopard poaching and trafficking since 2003, the report found that the majority of Snow Leopards are killed in retaliation for attacks on livestock (55%) or by non-targeted methods, such as snares (18%).

According to the report, over 90 percent of the reported Snow Leopard poaching occurred in five range countries: China, Mongolia, Pakistan, India and Tajikistan. Nepal was also flagged for having relatively high poaching levels considering its relatively small population of Snow Leopards. China and Russia were most frequently identified as destinations for animals poached in other countries. Afghanistan has also been a major illegal market for Snow Leopard furs over the past decade.
Only 21% of Snow Leopards were poached specifically for the illegal trade in their pelts and products. However, the report found that over half the retaliatory and non-targeted poaching incidents result in opportunistic attempts to sell, contributing to the estimated 108-219 Snow Leopards that are illegally traded each year.

Interestingly, the report also found a steep decline in the number of Snow Leopards observed in trade and in markets, particularly in China, which suggests that demand could be falling—perhaps due to increased enforcement. However, the report found there was a need to strengthen both national and transboundary law enforcement, especially as less than a quarter of known cases of Snow Leopard poaching were investigated and just 14 percent were prosecuted.

To secure the future of the Snow Leopard, it is clearly critical that efforts are made to ensure that people and Snow Leopards can co-exist. These include the introduction of compensation schemes and innovative predator-proof corrals: such schemes are currently not widespread in Snow Leopard range States.

The report also recommends that TRAFFIC maintains the Snow Leopard crime database that was developed as part of the research. The database contains records of seizures and observations of Snow Leopard killing, capture and trade dating back to 1989. Future analysis of the database will help to target interventions at key points across the Snow Leopard’s range.

TRAFFIC thanks the WWF Conservation and Adaptation in Asia’s High Mountain Landscapes and Communities Project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for financial support for the research and publication of An Ounce of Prevention: Snow leopard crime revisited.
Silent cries of the Ganges River Dolphin: Poaching for oil threatens India's National Aquatic Animal
Silent cries of the Ganges River Dolphin: Poaching for oil threatens India's National Aquatic Animal

The Ganges River Dolphin is an ancient species among the whales and dolphins, having evolved around 30 million years ago. The growing threat from drastic habitat changes, targeted hunting and illegal trade may be too much for it to swim through.

River dolphins in India occur as two subspecies: the Ganges River Dolphin *Platanista gangetica gangetica* and the Indus River Dolphin *P. g. minor*. They are also sometimes referred to as Blind River Dolphins. It is one of the few dolphin species found in freshwater: the others include three species found in South American rivers, the Baiji *Lipotes vexillifer*, which once lived in the Yangtze River in China but may now be extinct, while the Irrawaddy River Dolphin *Orcaella brevirostris* of South and South-East Asia can exist in both fresh and saline water.

The Ganges River Dolphin has a long thin snout, a stocky body (which can grow up to 2–2.6 m in length and weigh up to 150kg when fully mature) and large flippers. This dolphin lacks a crystalline lens and therefore is commonly referred to as the blind dolphin. It uses echolocation to navigate and hunt. Ganges River Dolphins give birth to a single calf after a gestation period of 9–11 months every 2–3 years.

The dolphin has a peculiar style of swimming, unique to this species, that is on one side so that its flipper trails the muddy bottom and it is able to find food easily. Being a mammal it cannot breathe under water and surfaces every 30–120 seconds. Due to the sound it produces while breathing, the animal is popularly referred to as “Susu”.

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**Distribution and Habitat**

Ganges River Dolphins inhabit the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu River systems of Nepal, India and Bangladesh. The species prefers slow moving water with deep pools, eddies and counter water currents which attracts their fish prey.

**Population Status**

According to IUCN, surveys of portions of the range of the Ganges subspecies have collectively accounted for 1200–1800 animals, but the true population is believed to be larger because some potentially important areas have yet to be surveyed (e.g., the Indian Sundarbans) and at least some of the counts and estimates are debateable. The greatest densities of Ganges River Dolphins have been observed in the Ganga mainstream in India between Maniharighat and Buxar (particularly the Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary) and just downstream of there between Kahalgaon and Manihari Ghat, and in the lower Sangu River of Bangladesh.

**Legal Status**

The Ganges River Dolphin is listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 giving it the highest level of protection against poaching, illegal trade and any other form of exploitation. It is further listed in Appendix I of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), prohibiting all international trade in the species or its body parts. IUCN lists the species as “Endangered”.

The species has also been granted non-human personhood status by the Government of India, making India the first nation in the world to recognize in law their unique intelligence and self-awareness. They have also been adopted as the National Aquatic Animal of India.

**Threats**

The Ganges River Dolphin inhabits the most densely populated areas of India and its habitat has been severely altered by the construction of more than 50 dams and other irrigation-related projects. Removal of river water, siltation arising from deforestation, pollution and entanglement in fisheries nets (accidental killing) have been the main threats to the Ganges River Dolphin in the wild. The range of the species in the Ganges is now fragmented due to the presence of barrages. In addition, plans to increase cargo shipping in the rivers and dredging of rivers to maintain navigable depth is also likely to negatively impact the dolphins.

Poaching is also a serious threat to the Ganges River Dolphin. In the past, hunting of dolphins was largely as a result of by-catch. Dolphins were caught in gillnets and line hooks and this was a major source of mortality for this subspecies.

The Ganges River Dolphin is also targeted for its meat and oil, which are both used medicinally. The oil is also used to attract catfish, particularly two commercially important species: *Eutropiichthys vacha* and *Clupiso magarua*, both of
which are also declining in the wild. The dolphin oil is rubbed on the fish bait or is used to make a special bait mixed with poultry and fish.

Due to an illegal yet lucrative market for dolphin oil there is little incentive for fishermen to release any net-entangled animals back into the water, although many are already dead by the time the nets are hauled.

TRAFFIC considers there is a strong need to understand the extent of hunting and illegal trade in the Ganges River Dolphin and the threat these pose to the survival of the species. TRAFFIC recommends development and adoption of affordable dolphin oil substitutes by the fishing community, together with education and awareness among the community about the illegality of this trade and its conservation impacts, together with management of catfish stocks to ensure any offtake is at sustainable levels.

Source
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**Hindustan Times/28-8-2016**

**Turtle egg poaching hits conservation bid**

Turtle egg poaching has been a major concern for wildlife conservationists. The recent poaching incidents highlight the need for increased surveillance and enforcement to protect endangered species. Turtle eggs are highly sought after for their commercial value in the black market.

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**The Hindu/17-02-2017**

**Turtle smugglers facing the heat**

Wildlife Bureau has seized over 15,000 turtles and arrested over 30 smugglers.

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**Daily News & Analysis/14-10-2016**

**Contraband of 1,790 antlers seized**

The major breakthrough will also help to check the illegally possessed animal parts originating from poaching.

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**The New Indian Express/02-03-2017**

**Other significant news stories**

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**The Times of India/28/08/2016**

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