Legendary 'Mermaid's' tussle for existence: The Dugong Wild Cry 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.
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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.

Legendary 'Mermaid's' tussle for existence: The Dugong
The past few months have given policy makers, law enforcement officials, conservation scientists, and conservation NGOs many sleepless nights. Despite a lot of hue and cry, and national and international level talks and deliberations, 2013 saw an unprecedented rise in the number of poaching incidents of the Indian Rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis* in the last two decades. Africa too reported its highest number of poaching incidents in the last 20 years. More than 1000 African rhinos were poached in South Africa alone in 2013 despite focused attention and stringent protection measures extended to the Black Rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis* and the White Rhinoceros *Ceratotherium simum*. This level of poaching will prove detrimental to rhino populations and could even lead to the decimation of rhino species.

Rhino poaching in India peaked in the early 1990s. The subsequent years saw a decline in poaching which was attributed to the Assam government’s enforcement techniques and increased resource allocation for prioritizing rhino protection.

Rhino poaching incidents in India—unlike those of the Tiger, Elephant and Leopard—were sporadic and displayed a clear downward trend until 2007. It picked up markedly during 2012. During the late 1990s there was an economic recession in most of Asia and in many western economies. There was a recurrence of the recession phenomenon during 2007-2011, after which economies started bouncing back again. This could indicate there is an intrinsic relationship between economic trends and poaching of some high demand species, like rhinos. If there is a correlation, much greater insights will be required to understand such linkages and identify appropriate follow up action that could include a slew of measures to counter increased threats in some regions in Asia. Poaching of seven rhinos since the beginning of 2014 in Assam may be a testimony to the growing demand for horn, fuelled by a growing economy in the region.

The international community, led by some developed countries, has taken serious notice of the emerging critical situation affecting iconic wildlife species. The United Kingdom organized the London Conference on 12-13 February 2014 in order to mobilize international support and collective resources for fighting wildlife crimes. Forty one countries and 10 NGOs endorsed the London Declaration that pledges to take the fight against poaching and illegal trade in rhinos, elephants, and tigers to a whole new level.

Unfortunately, India, home to three representative species of this international focus—Great Indian Rhinoceros, Asian Elephants, and Tigers—and a country that grapples with the problems of serious and organized poaching, did not participate in the Conference. India did, however, participate in four global teleconferences that were integral to the background preparations for the Conference and, perhaps as a result, the threat from poaching and illegal wildlife trade to other species found in India and South Asia, such as pangolins, was also highlighted at the event.

At the same time, the United States of America made public its comprehensive policy to aid the global fight against poaching and illegal wildlife trade. The document, known as the U.S. National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking, was announced on 11 February 2014 by President Barack Obama. The Strategy establishes guiding principles for the USA’s efforts to stem illegal trade in wildlife, and includes a decision to ban all commercial trade in elephant ivory, including pre-CITES specimens. Furthermore, India and the South Asia region have a serious stake in the above initiatives, and therefore action to protect our fading wildlife icons must be set in motion.
Saving the top predator of the sea: TRAFFIC to launch initiatives to curb illegal trade in sharks

The decision taken by Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Secretariat in March 2013 to accord greater protection to five species of sharks - Oceanic Whitetip *Carcharhinus longimanus*, Scalloped Hammerhead *Sphyrma lewini*, Great Hammerhead Shark *Sphyrna mokarran*, Smooth Hammerhead Shark *Sphyrna zigaena* and the Porbeagle Shark *Lamna nasusa* and two species of Manta Rays. *Manta spp* has been hailed as a historic win for marine conservation.

Traditionally, sharks are traded for their fins and meat while the manta ray and devil ray species are traded largely for their gill plates. India, reportedly, is the world’s second biggest shark catching nation with 70 000 tonnes of sharks caught annually. Therefore, conservationists are keen to use the CITES decision to improve the conservation standards for sharks, rays and skates found in Indian coastal waters.

While the vote to list these shark species in Appendix II of CITES does not prohibit consumption or commercial trade in these sharks, it regulates it. Both exporting and importing countries must issue permits. This listing will document the volume of trade that will take place legally between nations and, therefore, can help gauge the number of sharks caught wild. Of the above five listed species of sharks, four are found in Indian coastal waters, with the exception of the Porbeagle Shark. There is an 18-month grace period before these new listings come into effect on 14 September 2014, while 30 August 2014 is the cutoff date by which the respective national governments will have to make their final submissions on implementation of the CITES provisions related to the sharks.

Shark conservation faces many difficulties in India. The country’s fisheries have recorded a sharp decline in catches resulting in damage to the livelihoods of coastal communities, some of the most marginalized communities in India. There have been no particular steps taken to conserve sharks in Indian waters other than listing some elasmobranchs, including eight species of sharks and whale sharks, the largest fish in the world, under the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972. Unfortunately, although the listing took place in 2001, it has not been reviewed or amended, nor have there been any subsequent efforts made at mapping or documenting the use of sharks either for consumption as food or in trade.

TRAFFIC has attempted to address such gaps from a global perspective and has published several scientific reports on shark conservation, notable among these, and with some relevance to the Indian context, are ‘The Future of Sharks: A review of sharks’ published in January 2011 by TRAFFIC in collaboration with the PEW Environment Group and ‘Into the deep: Implementing CITES measures for commercially-valuable sharks and manta rays’ published in July 2013. These studies (both available online on www.traffic.org) examine the exploitation of different shark and ray species, assess their conservation status and make recommendations for improved measures to safeguard these species in the wild. The Indian government recognizes the need to conserve sharks and to implement measures to ascertain the sustainability of shark catches in India for future CITES discussions. Over 60 species of sharks are found in Indian waters and 18 of these are fished intensively. The current Head of TRAFFIC in India, Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, was previously the Director of the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere reserve and was instrumental in upgrading the protection of sharks in India through their inclusion in the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Shark finning to extract their fins, used for making soup, widely popular in East Asian countries has drawn a lot of attention internationally and in India on conservation and empathy (animal welfare) grounds. Finning involves removing the fins of a captured shark and throwing the body back into the sea. Shark fin is a connoisseur’s delicacy but recent campaigns have led to several countries banning shark fin products and several commercial airlines refusing to carry shark fin cargo. In India, the Ministry of Environment and Forests has issued a directive stating that if sharks are not landed with ‘fins naturally attached’, fishermen could be charged with a ‘hunting’ offence under India’s wildlife laws. TRAFFIC recommends collaboration with fishing communities combined with a robust educational campaign on shark conservation and continued investigation of the sustainability of shark fishing practices in India as being necessary to safeguard the future of India’s sharks. These are all proposed as part of a new project that will involve TRAFFIC in India.
Orissa Police and Forest Department collaborate to rein in poaching and illegal wildlife trade

Poaching of wildlife in the dense forests of Simlipal Tiger Reserve has emerged as one of the most significant threats to various wildlife species in the reserve. Located near Baripada in Odisha in eastern India, Simlipal is abundant with natural resources, wild flora and fauna. It is home to Tigers, Elephants, Leopards, various deer species, Gaur, Giant Squirrel, and various bird species like the Red Junglefowl, Hill Mynah, Peacock, Alexandrine Parakeet, Crested Serpent Eagle, and reptile species like the King Cobra, among other wildlife.

Illegal wildlife trade has now evolved into an organized criminal activity that extends beyond borders. Like many other reserves in the country, it has cast its shadow on Simlipal Tiger Reserve. It is therefore imperative to enforce laws stringently and take tactical actions to combat poaching.

TRAFFIC, in collaboration with the Odisha Forest Department organized a specialized capacity-building training programme for the enforcement officials of Simlipal Tiger Reserve and the police forces. The training programme is aimed at strengthening the skills of enforcement officials, enhancing tactical collaboration and understanding of wildlife crimes and illegal trade to help curb these growing threats.

The workshop, held on 22-23 January 2014, was attended by about 90 officials of the Odisha Forest Department, the police and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

Mr Anup Kumar Naik, IFS, Regional Chief Conservator of Forests cum Field Director of Simlipal Tiger Reserve, Baripada, Odisha, while inaugurating the workshop said that this type of training helps to inculcate knowledge among the ground staff on present scenarios of wildlife crimes. It provides deep insight into the current trade dynamics and new methods adopted by illegal trade operators that result in poaching and illegal killing of targeted species in protected areas.

Mr Nikhil Kumar Khanoriya, IPS, SSP, Baripada, Odisha who attended the inaugural sessions and deputed a large number of police officials for the training said it is necessary for the police and forest officials to co-operate in curbing wildlife crime. The support provided by the police further augments the initiatives undertaken by the forest department and enables enforcement agencies to work together.

Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, Head of TRAFFIC in India who led the training programme with his colleague Mr Dhruba Jyoti Dutta informed the participants that TRAFFIC has recognized the need for training enforcement officials and prioritized this workshop for Simlipal in Odisha due to the reserve's strategic location and specific vulnerability. The participants were provided with an overview of the illegal wildlife trade, current trade dynamics and international illegal wildlife trade trends. They were also introduced to various latest tools and techniques available to enforcement agencies in fighting such crime. An integral part of the training was focused on understanding the use of forensics in successful wildlife crime investigation. The participants were also taken through various domestic and international laws and conventions that have implications for regulating illegal wildlife trade. Resource material related to this was also distributed among the participants.

Dr Niraj, further added, “Capacity-building training programmes have been conducted in the past and have had a significant impact on the enforcement initiatives of various agencies. It is important to bring various agencies together to share experience and knowledge. We appreciate the support provided by the police and forest department for this training programme.”

TRAFFIC deployed a team of eight highly experienced and accomplished resource persons for various sessions at the workshop. Mr Varun Kapoor, Inspector General of Police, conducted an exclusive session on police techniques in combating wildlife crimes, tools and techniques of intelligence collection, collation for improving preventive and investigative techniques for combating wildlife crimes.

The event was covered in national newspapers and electronic media. Afterwards, the Odisha Forest Department headquarters lost no time in sending a request for TRAFFIC to conduct a similar training programme for multiple enforcement agencies in the state. The Odisha Forest Department has offered to fund the programme through a World Bank project which TRAFFIC will conduct in April 2014.
Approximately 25 per cent of drugs acquired from plants and many other drugs are made from synthetic analogues built on prototype compounds isolated from plant species in the modern pharmacopoeia. India has a rich medicinal plant biodiversity with 7500 species of medicinal plants found in the country. This accounts for 44 per cent of the total floral diversity that occurs in India. A large number of local communities are dependent on these resources for medicinal plant species or for food, fodder, timber and other ethnobotanical purposes (Kala et al. 2006).

India's Western Ghats and the North-east are very rich in biodiversity and with the distribution of some endemic species in this zone, it is recognized as a global biodiversity hotspot. The medicinal plants from this region play a critical role in supplying raw material to the traditional Ayurvedic medicine industry as well as the global pharmaceutical industry.

Of late, and due to the recent global changes in consumption, there has been an increase in demand for specific plant species. Excessive demand for a particular species many a times has adverse effects on the biodiversity of the region. The changing consumption patterns also raise issues regarding benefit-sharing of the biological resources. To address these issues of ecological, social and economical sustainability, FairWild Standards are being implemented in the region.

The FairWild Standard assesses the harvest and trade of wild plants against various ecological, social and economic requirements. The use of the FairWild Standard helps support efforts to ensure plants are managed, harvested and traded in a way that maintains populations in the wild and benefits rural producers.

In India, TRAFFIC is leading on popularizing implementation protocols of the FairWild principles with support from various other government and non-government agencies. Lately, the FairWild implementation project in the Western Ghats got a boost with financial support extended by the Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund (KNCF) and the UK's Darwin Initiative. The initiative targets sustainable collection of fruits of two tree species used in Ayurvedic medicine - *Terminalia bellirica* and *Terminalia chebula*. The project is being implemented by the Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF) with UK manufacturer Pukka Herbs supporting and planning to purchase sustainably harvested ingredients from the site. FairWild certification is a goal for the future. Beyond the field-based activities, the FairWild Standard will be promoted more broadly to industry in India in 2014.

The project will increase the capacity of local communities to engage in biodiversity conservation through improved management of MAP (Medicinal and Aromatic Plant) resources and the adoption of ecologically sound livelihoods. The project will further promote the uptake of FairWild Standard principles of sustainable and fair trade by the MAPs industry in order to create an enabling trade environment for sustainable MAP products.

References:

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Heads of State, ministers and high level representatives from 46 countries, including those regions most heavily impacted by poaching and illegal trade of wildlife, have committed to taking “decisive and urgent action” to tackle the global illegal wildlife trade.

The strongly-worded declaration was issued following two days of closed-door negotiations hosted in London by the UK government from 12-13 February 2014. Three UK Royals, Princes Charles, William and Harry also participated in the event.
Red alert on Red Sanders: Sri Lanka apprehends large consignment from India

A large consignment of Red Sanders *Pterocarpus santalinus* that was being smuggled from Chennai (India) to Jabel Ali (Dubai) via Colombo (Sri Lanka) was seized by Sri Lankan Customs authorities on 11 November 2013. The consignment consisted of superior quality Red Sanders weighing 4.5 metric tonnes. The goods declared as sanitary-ware were detected following information received while the consignment was in transit at the Jaya Container Terminal at the port of Colombo.

Red Sanders, also known as Red Sandalwood, Red Saunders, and Ruby Wood, is endemic to only four districts of the States of Andhra Pradesh, in the southern part of the Eastern Ghats, and a single district of Tamil Nadu. For centuries, traditional Japanese wedding dowries consisted of objects and musical instruments carved out of this prized wood. Today, the wood is used in medicines, for food colouring and colouring beer, besides making furniture and carvings. In India, it is also used to make dyes.

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

Many reports have corroborated that hunting and illegal trade in various wildlife species is on the rise in Nagaland. Hence the above seizure is no surprise. Last year, researchers from the Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History and the Near Chang Baptist group entered the Tuensang market in Nagaland and carried out intensive surveys and interviews of vendors selling wild birds or mammals. Eight different species of mammals, 35 species of birds, two species of amphibians and two species of mollusks were recorded after 52 surveys by this team. They estimated that more than 16,000 birds and mammals are sold each year in the Tuensang market alone. The most common bird sold was the Great Barbet *Megalaima virens* and the most common mammal was the Himalayan Striped Squirrel *Tamiops mcclellandii*.

TRAFFIC expresses concern about the apparent level of hunting that continues unabated in Nagaland. The sheer diversity of species killed in the State is of immediate concern and needs urgent action.
Red Sanders has historically been valued in China for making classical furniture, and is referred to in Chinese as Zitan. Traditionally the Chinese have expressed an extreme liking for the red coloured wood for making furniture. It is highly valued because it is rare and endemic to India. Reports have indicated that the huge demand from China has fueled the illegal Red Sanders trade.

Preliminary research by TRAFFIC also suggests that while the use of the rare timber for furniture may be the most significant driver of the recent Red Sanders smuggling. Off-cuts from the furniture industry are also traded for traditional medicine.

The Red Sanders smuggling racket has uncovered concealment or misdeclaration of the timber. Shipments are passed off as jute bags, zinc oxide, mustard oil cake, salt and more recently as sanitary-ware.

Mr Samantha Gunasekra, Deputy Director of Customs, Biodiversity, Cultural & National Heritage Protection Division, Sri Lanka Customs who played a significant role in busting this case said, “This is not the first time we have apprehended Red Sanders coming from India. The consignments are always concealed and often misdeclared as other items to dupe the enforcement agencies. In the past 10 years, we have seized Red Sanders coming from India that was declared as empty glass bottles or as barbed wires or as cotton bales”.

James Compton, TRAFFIC’s Senior Programme Director for Asia, said, “This seizure clearly points to the need for inter-country co-operation to stop illicit trade in protected species. Against this background, TRAFFIC had helped in the establishment of the South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN) that comprises the eight countries of South Asia; Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in order to strengthen, promote and co-ordinate regional co-operation for curbing illegal wildlife trade that threatens the wild flora and fauna of the region.”

“TRAFFIC congratulates the efforts of the Customs agency in Sri Lanka and other supporting enforcement agencies for their prompt action in this case” added Compton.

Mr Gunasekara added: “South Asia, being rich in biodiversity, has become a significant target for illegal wildlife trade. Many South Asian countries are increasingly becoming the source countries for wildlife smuggling while some countries play the role of transit countries or some play both. Therefore, the crucial role of SAWEN is to identify these gaps and help bring countries together for tackling this trade. We are happy to be an active part of SAWEN and have played host to SAWEN meetings in the past.”

Dr Shekhar Niraj, Head of TRAFFIC in India further said, “Many times, Red Sander logs have been intercepted en route by road from India to China via Nepal. However this seizure clearly indicates new trade routes. The wood was being taken from India to Dubai via Sri Lanka which was in contrast to all the previously recorded information on its smuggling routes. Reports of seizures have also been received from North America, indicating the pan global smuggling of this endemic species which has been considerably depleted in the wild.

The tree species has been heavily overexploited and its export, except in special circumstances, is prohibited under India’s Foreign Trade Policy. It is also protected under the Red Sanders and Sandalwood Transit Rules of the Andhra Pradesh Forest Act, 1967 in India and international trade is controlled through the listing of Pterocarpus santalinus in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).
TRAFFIC in India adds........

Using women to smuggle illegal wildlife items is becoming a widespread phenomenon. In 2007, 15 women were arrested for their role in a Gir Lion poaching racket. Women tend to deflect the attention of enforcement authorities because they are seldom viewed with suspicion and can often pass unchecked through security channels due to the lack of women enforcement officers on duty at the time. Poachers and traders exploit this to their advantage by using women operatives for their nefarious activities. TRAFFIC considers enforcement agencies should train and deploy more women staff so that such incidents can be more readily detected.

Source:

Illegitimate wildlife trade racket busted: 250 exotic birds, monkeys recovered

In February 2014, a Customs department team in Kolkata rescued hundreds of endangered and/or rare and exotic birds and animals from a house that looked like a ‘private zoo’.

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TRAFFIC Alert

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According to sources in the Customs department, around 250 exotic birds were seized. The team also rescued three chimpanzees, four marmoset monkeys and a capuchin monkey. Sources said that a father and son duo ran the wildlife trade in exotic species from the house and that the animals were of African origin while the birds were from South America.

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

There are four subspecies of Chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes* spp found across Equatorial Africa. They have already disappeared from four African countries, and are nearing extinction in many others. Chimpanzees are listed in Appendix I of CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) and as Class A under the African Convention. Chimpanzees are protected by law in most countries.

In India, Chimpanzees are not native and hence are not listed under the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 of India, however any import of the animal is restricted by the provisions laid down in the Customs Act 1962. The CITES Management Authority in the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) in India must issue a permit for import of a CITES listed species to the country. If this does not happen and such animals are brought into the country, they can be seized and the person involved can be booked under the provisions of the Customs Act 1962, which, together with the EXIM policies of the Government of India, supports CITES implementation in India. The accused in the above case was booked under Section 135 of the Customs Act. Investigation needs to be supported for the source and trading routes of the animals that allegedly came in via Nigeria, Dubai, Singapore and Bangladesh before arriving in Kolkata, possibly through the land routes.

The Common Marmoset *Callithrix jacchus* is also not covered under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, but is a popular species in the pet trade and is also used in medical research. This species is listed in Appendix II of CITES. TRAFFIC's preliminary investigations have indicated evidence of breeding of this species in India for the burgeoning pet trade. There are around 10 species of capuchin monkeys, all found in the New World. They are popular as pets. The Crested Capuchin Monkey is listed in Appendix II of CITES.

The burgeoning pet trade in India in non-native ('exotic') species appears to be a direct consequence of India's burgeoning economy. There are no established figures available on the extent of the exotic pet trade in India because it is unregulated and there can be no clearer indication of the proper need for monitoring and regulating the trade. Inclusion of CITES provisions in an amended, expanded version of the Wildlife (Protection) Act of India could be a major step in controlling the unregulated trade in exotic animals such as Chimpanzees, marmosets and various birds. It is pertinent to mention that a delay in this respect may bring about irreparable damage to global conservation.


**Ten Tiger poachers caught in Madhya Pradesh**

A well-coordinated operation, involving central and State units of the police force and forest department officials led to the arrest of 10 persons from Madhya Pradesh with wildlife contraband on 28 December 2013. All of them were tribals from Mandsaur district in Madhya Pradesh. The group had landed in Kollegal two days prior to poaching Tigers. When the arrests were made, they were carrying 15 Tiger claws, two Tiger canines and some cash—allegedly the advance amount paid by the prospective buyers of the Tiger skin.

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

The recent seizures in Madhya Pradesh point out the importance of continuing enforcement efforts across agencies for tackling illegal trade. Additionally, given the numerous cases of Tiger poaching that are pending in courts in Madhya Pradesh, it becomes clear that the endeavour to check wildlife crime, especially that against Tigers and other Asian big cats, will require a well co-ordinated approach over a long period of time and effective involvement of the judiciary. Since 2007, TRAFFIC has trained more than 2500 people in India belonging to several wildlife enforcement agencies to tackle poaching of Tigers and other species. TRAFFIC also works closely with the judiciary in India and collaborates with lawyers for effective legal prosecution and conviction of wildlife crime cases. Wildlife forensics is another area of work that TRAFFIC strongly promotes among enforcement agencies and organizes training workshops along with the Wildlife Institute of India.

3) http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-karnataka/antipoaching-campe-on-high-alert/article5521298.ece
Gajendra Moksha, also called The Liberation of Gajendra, is a Puranic legend from the 8th Skandha of Bhagavad Purana, one of the most sacred books in Hinduism. It is one of the famous exploits of Lord Vishnu wherein Lord Vishnu came down to earth to protect Gajendra, the Elephant, from the clutches of Makara, the Crocodile, and awarded him moksha or salvation. This is the ancient legend that lies behind the world famous Sonepur Animal Fair held at Harihar Kshetra on the occasion of Kartik Purnima in Bihar every year (Jain, 2014).

TRAFFIC conducted a survey of the Fair in November-December 2013 and found startling information about the illegal animal trade. The market was also surveyed earlier and the findings publicized in November 2012.

Sonepur Animal Fair is an organized gathering where trading in various species has traditionally taken place. The tradition has been so deep-rooted that there are examples where even after a species has been prohibited for commercial trade under the Wildlife (Protection) Act (WPA), 1972, trading goes on brazenly in denial of legal and prohibitory provisions.

The capture and transportation of elephants to Sonepur appears to be a regular occurrence, with Asian Elephants *Elephas maximus* transported from Assam. As a Schedule I animal, under Section 40 (2) of the WPA, 1972, it is prohibited to possess, acquire, dispose of and transport a captive elephant without written permission of the Chief Wildlife Warden or the Authorized officer under the WPA, 1972. Section 43 of the WPA, 1972, restricts the sale, purchase or transfers of captive elephants from one person to another for monetary considerations or any other profitable gain (MoEF, 2010; Bist et al., 2001). Nevertheless, TRAFFIC observed 37 elephants at the fair in 2013, including six tuskers and six calves. (TRAFFIC 2013, Tripathi; The Telegraph, 2013) Reportedly some of these animals were transported from Assam to Bihar for sale at the Fair. Any such sale would be in contravention of the WPA, 1972, as the WPA 1972 does not permit any commercial transaction of elephant which is a schedule 1 listed animal. Transportation may be permitted, however, with a proper authorization from a legal authority. We did not find any such permit with any of the elephant traders. In fact most traders or the elephant handlers refused even to discuss the matter, bringing non-transparency into the transaction process. We found evidence of trade deals being finalized before the Fair began or, as per the information collected, the deals might have been done after the conclusion of the Fair. Furthermore, information from reliable sources suggests that more elephants are traded privately and are not displayed in Sonepur.

Further information obtained indicates there is a demand for live elephants in Kerala and that full grown tuskers are bought from the Fair for temples and elephants are also bought locally by rich landlords who keep them as status symbols. While the influx of these animals seems to have slowed from Assam due to the tightening of regulations, an overwhelming majority of the elephants from Assam are reportedly wild caught. Important and central as elephants are to the Sonepur Mela, there is another aspect that has substantive relevance to wildlife protection in India. (Ashraf and Mainkar 2004; Varma and Kumar 2010) The bird market or Chiriya Bazaar has attained a scale where, despite the ban on the trade in birds since 1990-91, the trade in indigenous and non-native (exotic) birds remains brisk and thriving. The native birds found on sale were protected species caught and brought from the wild as TRAFFIC has collected information which confirms that permits have not been granted by the designated legal authorities in India to breed and sell WPA 1972 protected species. However, issues relating to non-native (exotic) species in India remain vague in the absence of clear legislation specifically addressing exotic birds and animals. Using these legal loopholes, many traders have started trading exotic birds and animals in different places in India.

During our investigations at Sonepur we found a large number of exotic birds placed on sale. Although there are no specific laws to address the trade of exotic birds or animals, any breeding or trading does require a permit from the appropriate commercial licensing authorities. Since this issue was not the focus of current investigations by the authors, this was not investigated further. The birds were sold at prices varying from INR 200-INR 5000 per individual. However, exceptions were Golden-fronted Chloropsis, offered for sale at INR 10000 per bird and Shikras, at around INR 7500. Findings indicate that munias and parakeets are brought in from several areas including Muzaffarpur, Lucknow, Delhi, Patna and Kolkata. Two main sources for indigenous birds for the Sonepur Fair are the Nakhas market in Lucknow and Mir Shikar Toli in Patna. A trader also admitted that trade in non-native (exotic) birds is used a cover for the trade in indigenous birds.
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Bird species observed and approximate number

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With a figure touching upon more than 700,000 birds being trapped every year in India (Ahmed, 2004), the scale of bird trade at Sonepur Fair acquires an air of grave concern. BirdLife International (Islam and Rahmani, et al. Editors 2004) has identified India as a range State for 61 globally threatened bird species affected by overexploitation—the third highest national total worldwide—including trapping for trade, both as pets and for consumption.

TRAFFIC also observed primates being sold in the Fair—Rhesus Macaques Macaca mulatta and Hanuman Langurs Presbytis entellus. There were 25 Rhesus Macaques on sale and two Hanuman Langurs. The monkeys were priced at INR 5000 per pair and langurs at INR 7000 per pair. Many of these animals are reportedly bought for medical experiments and obtained from Nepal and Uttar Pradesh as well as Patna’s Mir Shikar Toli. Two Black-naped Hares Lepus nigricollis were seen in the fair.

TRAFFIC also found out that many birds and animals at the Fair are brought in from West Bengal, especially those who trade in live animals at Galiff Street in Kolkata. Hill Mynas are obtained from Assam and are brought in for sale in Mir Shikar Toli and Sonepur. Many parakeets are also imported from Nepal.

TRAFFIC also observed a young Nilgai Boselaphus tragocamelus on display on the premises with onlookers poking and probing the animal.

Welfare concerns are obvious, because scores of birds are crammed in cages thereby exponentially increasing the mortality rates of the captured birds. Many birds would simply die of suffocation and due to duress caused by cramped conditions, lack of adequate food and water and proper veterinary care, not only in transit but also in situ. (Baker et al., 2013). Prices of native birds illegally on sale vary, while Chiriya Bazar has many non-native (exotic) birds also on sale, including Cockatiels Nymphicus hollandicus, Budgerigars Melopsittacus undulatus, Zebra Finches Taeniopygia guttata, Bengalese Finches (a captive-bred variety of White-rumped Munia Lonchura striata) and geese Anser spp.

The entire investigative survey was carried out by TRAFFIC in 10 field visits during two trips by two investigators. The exact numbers were determined for elephants and primates but only an approximate number for birds. First-hand observations of the Fair were noted and past literature on Sonepur was referred to, including published reports on the presence of elephants as well as generic newspaper reports on the gathering.

Despite enforcement agencies having been alerted to evidence of illegal trade taking place at Sonepur, there have been no reported enforcement initiatives there to date. For a detailed report on the Sonepur Mela 2013, please contact TRAFFIC in India at trafficind@wwfindia.net

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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)

Legendary 'Mermaid's' tussle for existence: The Dugong

The Dugong Dugong dugon, popularly known as the Sea Cow, is the only marine herbivorous mammal. In the past, Dugongs have been the main inspiration for legendary mermaid myths and traditionally hunted for their meat and oil. Today, these gentle and benign marine mammals are threatened by habitat degradation, fishing-related fatalities and hunting for their meat, underbelly fat, skins and bones.

Dugongs have been recorded in lengths ranging from 1-3 metres and weights of approximately 400 kg. Dugongs are generally found in warm waters around the coast with large numbers concentrated in wide and shallow protected bays. Large numbers also exist in wide and shallow mangrove channels and around leeward sides of large inshore islands where seagrass beds are common.

Distribution: Dugongs are found in warm coastal waters from the western Pacific Ocean to the eastern coast of Africa. Reports have indicated that they disappeared from the waters of Hong Kong, Mauritius, and Taiwan, as well as parts of Cambodia, Japan, the Philippines and Viet Nam.

In India, there is a highly isolated breeding population in the Gulf of Kutch, the only population remaining in western India. A population exists in the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Strait between India and Sri Lanka, but it is seriously depleted.

A study conducted by the Gujarat Ecological Education and Research (GEER) Foundation in 2008-2010 noted Dugong trails in the Gulf of Kutch, Piroton Island, and even Dwarka. The study, sponsored by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests, estimated that there are about 250 Dugongs in India, the highest number being in the Gulf of Mannar on the southern coast, followed by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Palk Bay and the Gulf of Kutch.

Status:
Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I (The Act prohibits hunting, trade and any other form of exploitation of the species in India)
CITES: Appendix I (All international trade in the species and its products is banned)
IUCN Red List: Vulnerable

Threats: Hunting, habitat degradation, chemical pollutants and fishing-related fatalities such as gill netting are the main threats to the species in the wild. Dugongs are reportedly slaughtered for their meat which is considered a delicacy and much revered by various coastal communities. Its consumption in the Gulf of Mannar, Palk Bay and Andaman and Nicobar Islands has been reported (Nair et al. 1975; Bensam and Menon 1996; Ilangakoon et al. 2004; Das 1996, pers. comm. (K. Sivakumar, WII)). In the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay, gill nets, shore seines, trawl nets, drift nets, ray nets and explosives were used to hunt Dugongs, and records show captures of 25 Dugongs per year in 1960-80 and 200 Dugongs per year in 1983-84. This number dropped to nine Dugongs per year in 1986-88, (Bensam and Menon 1996).

Dr Shekhar Kumar Niraj, currently the Head of TRAFFIC in India and the former Director of the Gulf of Mannar Marine Biosphere Reserve, Government of Tamil Nadu said: “In the 1950s and 1960s the Dugong population was around 50,000-60,000 individuals in India. However, reports have indicated that there are fewer than 200 Dugongs left in the wild in India today. Even though very few poaching cases have been reported, it does not really imply that there is no organized poaching. The sheer decline in their numbers over the years is a clear indication of a grave threat to the species in the wild.”

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Although there are media reports of a decline in the number of poaching incidents in recent years, there are places in Ramanathapuram District, particularly near Keezhakarai in Tamil Nadu that are known for poaching Dugong for its meat. A few reports also indicate that there could be intentional poaching in the region other than accidental trappings of Dugongs caught in fishing gear which are later killed for their meat.

Dugongs mainly swim in family groups usually consisting of a single youngster and its parents. Their attachment with each other usually results in the capture of the entire family if just one of them is netted or harpooned.

With its long lifespan of 70 years or more and slow rate of reproduction, the Dugong is especially vulnerable to extinction. A sharp decline of the population from an estimated 50000-60000 animals a few decades ago to the currently estimated fewer than 200 is a poignant reminder of this.

Dugongs are unintentionally killed through boat strikes and propeller injuries caused when motorized boats traverse their shallow feeding grounds. Fast-moving boats give Dugongs less time to evade a collision (Marsh et al. 2002, Hodgson 2004). The animals are particularly vulnerable to boat strikes because they spend 3.5 per cent of the day resting near the surface with routine surfacing at over two-minute intervals (Anderson 1981; Hodgson 2004).

According to a United Nations Environment Protection (UNEP) report (Marsh et al. 2002), incidental catch of Dugongs in gill nets is one of the major causes of Dugong mortality. In the waters off the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Bay, extensive use of gill nets was reported to have caused yearly Dugong mortality, with an average of 40 Dugong deaths in a year (Lal Mohan 1976; Nair et al. 1975). Recent reports suggest that awareness and protection provided by joint efforts of the Government of India and Tamil Nadu Forest Department have greatly reduced incidental catches of dugong (Ilangakoon et al. 2008).

Dr Niraj also adds, “In the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve and the Palk of Bay to its north, there are over 20 000-25 000 fishing boats including trawlers, more than 200 landing sites and about 45 forest department staff. It is very difficult to monitor hunting and illegal trade in the species. A sound intelligence network may help to bridge this gap. Sensitization programmes in collaboration with local NGOs and the coastal community about the critical future of the Dugong is imperative”.

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