



**TRAFFIC**

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# ASIAN BIG CATS

Special Issue

# TRAFFIC *POST*

NEWSLETTER ON WILDLIFE TRADE IN INDIA

# TRAFFIC Post

TRAFFIC's newsletter on wildlife trade in India was started in September 2007 with a primary objective to create awareness about poaching and illegal wildlife trade.

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

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

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

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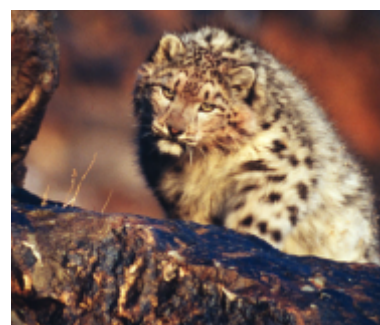
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© Fritz Pölking / WWF

# From the Desk



Dr Saket Badola, IFS  
Head of TRAFFIC, India Office

Dear Readers

India delighted the world when it announced the results of All India Tiger Estimation on the Global Tiger Day 2019, and showed that the Tiger population in the country has reached near 3,000 mark, which is more than double to that in 2006. Fortunately, the numbers of other Asian Big Cats viz., Asiatic Lion, Common Leopard and Snow Leopard have also shown an upward trend, while there is no systematic census for Clouded Leopard in the country. This increase in the numbers also heighten conservation challenges due to persistent demand for Big Cat products in the international market, leaving them vulnerable to threats of poaching and illegal wildlife trade.

If we have to secure the future of these charismatic species in the country, several urgent steps need to be taken. In the present issue, which is dedicated to Asian Big Cats, we analyse various challenges to ABCs and also discuss the actions required to surmount them. We delve even deeper into the illegal wildlife trade of Common Leopards as they are the most widely distributed and possibly worst persecuted species among the Big Cats in India.

Spreading awareness about illegal trade of wildlife is considered one of the most potent tools to conserve the targeted species. To achieve this, on one hand we collaborated with the VISTARA airlines to spread the message of conservation among the air travelers via their in-flight magazine, on the other hand we utilised the coronavirus led lockdown period to make people aware about the plight of commonly traded species via an online campaign titled '#21DaysLockdown' campaign.

The present Issue also gives an overview of the study done by TRAFFIC's India Office to assess the status of Illegal trade of Red Panda in India and neighbouring countries. The report shows that though the incidences of targeted poaching have shown reduction in the country, incidences of incidental poaching are still quite high. Nepal emerged as a major trading centre for Red Panda trade in the region.

The Issue also introduces our new team members who are helping in expanding our work in the long-neglected areas of Wildlife Cybercrime, illegal marine trade and illegal trade of lesser known species.

Today when the worst pandemic in recent times grips the world, leaving unprecedented impacts on human health, environment and economies and when the necessity to repair our fractured relationship with nature should have been considered the top and the most urgent priority, things are unfortunately still not on the right track.



# From the Desk

Continued

A quick study to analyse the impact of COVID induced lockdown on wildlife crime in the country reveals that the poaching of several groups of animals has in fact more than doubled during the lockdown period. This is certainly not the way towards a safer and sustainable future. We should realise, at least now, that reducing environmental degradation and protecting wildlife, are the most potent ways to make a more resilient society and to reduce the incidences of pandemic outbreaks in the future.

It's we humans, who have shredded the delicate fabric of nature and only we can weave it back with care and precaution. Hope we do that. And soon.

Stay safe. Stay protected.

Happy Reading!



Dr Saket Badola, IFS  
Head- TRAFFIC, India Office



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## **In Focus**

### **Understanding challenges in conservation and protection of Asian Big Cats in India**

Merwyn Fernandes and Saket Badola  
( TRAFFIC, India Office)





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## Understanding challenges in conservation and protection of Asian Big Cats in India

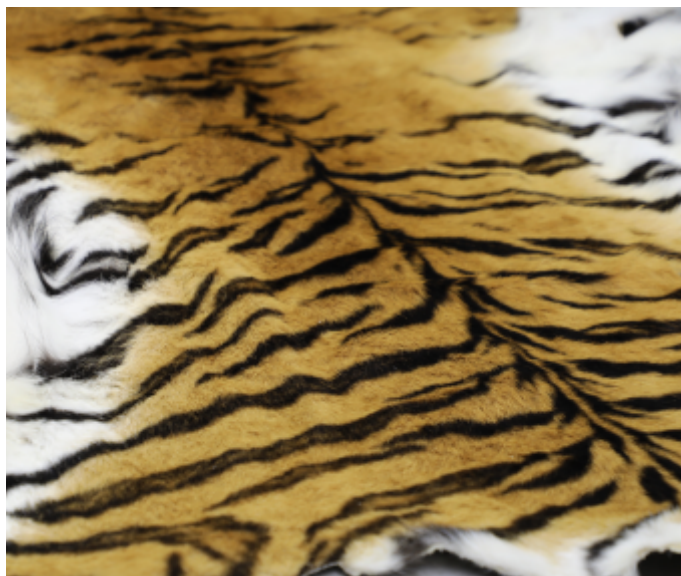
**A**sian Big Cats (ABCs) are a group of wild cats which represent large body sized wild cats such as Royal Bengal Tiger *Panthera tigris tigris*, Common Leopard *Panthera pardus fusca*, Asiatic Lion *Panthera leo persica*, Snow Leopard *Panthera uncia* and Clouded Leopard *Neofelis nebulosi*. All these wild cats are apex predators and are umbrella species for the ecosystem they represent. All the species are categorised as Endangered except the Snow Leopard which has recently been shifted to the Vulnerable category and the Common Leopard. These species are under considerable pressures of survival, one of them is the pressure of poaching and illegal wildlife trade, an issue that has remained unresolved for decades.

In 2010, the 13 Tiger Range Countries (TRCs) came forward with an ambitious plan to double wild tiger numbers known as the St. Petersburg Declaration. Since then a few TRCs have undertaken significant strides in conserving the species, however it is not the same across all TRCs. The main drivers impacting Tigers are habitat loss, unsustainable development and poaching of the species and its prey. Just less than two years are left to reach the

TX2 goal, which is to double Tiger numbers. It is at this crucial juncture that we need to set our collective sights at understanding the various challenges in the sojourn to conserve the Tigers and other Asian Big Cats. Similarly, efforts are being put forth by Snow Leopard range countries with the Bishkek Declaration having formulated broad contours for the Snow Leopard and the ecosystem which it represents. The Indian government also has a project for the conservation and protection of the Asiatic Lion which is the last known population for this subspecies in the world. While there are targeted actions for these three species, it is assumed that the efforts of conservation will spillover to the other two ABC's namely Common Leopard and Clouded Leopard.

India is a leader in conservation of ABC species and so it was rightly celebrated with enthusiasm when the latest nationwide census showed that Tiger numbers in India had reached nearly 3,000 (2,967 - Jhala *et al.*, 2019) which is more than double the figure of 1,411 Tigers found during the first ever all India census conducted with the new technique of camera trapping in 2006. To reach close to 3,000 is not a small achievement nor was it easy to attain. Many efforts have gone in from various stakeholders with the government leading from the front to save the “national animal.” While the population has reached a level of pride, it adds more responsibility on India to protect these Tigers which now represent nearly 60% of the global wild Tiger population. This population trend is similar to that of the Asiatic Lion, which has seen numbers rise to 650 individuals in 2017, from a precariously low number a few decades ago. While there are no country level estimates for the remaining three species, namely Snow Leopard, Common Leopard, and Clouded Leopard making it even more difficult to plan targeted conservation measures especially for species which are known to have large home ranges such as the Snow Leopard or species which are known to occur in a wide range of habitats such as the Common Leopard, where there are increasing new records of the species in semi-urban and urban areas.

Conservation of ABCs and protection of their habitats has also had a positive impact on several other species sharing the same space such as elephants, rhinos, gharials, gaur, red fox and several species of deer and other herbivores. However, despite the increasing number of ABC's they still face several threats which need to be addressed for the long-term survival of these species in India. Out of all the issues, poaching and illegal trade of ABCs is one of the most immediate issues to handle.



## **Co-operation among range countries and implementation of international conventions such as CITES / CBD and the Asian Ministerial Congress.**

To keep the momentum for conservation and protection of the species in a country, a strong political will and commitment assumes prime importance. Multilateral agreements among governments such as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) etc., provide instruments to achieve this on a sustained basis. This can facilitate co-operation among ABC range countries and provide ways for exchanging information on poaching and illegal wildlife trade for these species. These engagements also provide a platform where support can be garnered at an international level. These engagements can facilitate in implementing consistent enforcement actions across transboundary areas and also facilitate in knowledge and skill development across the borders in other range countries.

## **Improving co-ordination among law enforcement agencies**

Tigers are high on the conservation agenda and policies of the Indian Government, but the other Asian Big Cats such as Asiatic Lions, Snow Leopards, Common Leopards and Clouded Leopards have not got the desired level of attention and focus from law enforcement agencies. There

is a need to have a collaborative and co-ordinated mechanism among various law enforcement agencies, especially in areas near the trans-border regions and the high altitude areas of the Himalayas. These co-ordinated efforts can be through joint patrols, especially along the trans-border regions, regular meetings, information sharing, data exchange etc. Sharing of critical and sensitive information on poaching and illegal wildlife trade across all law enforcement agencies which includes Customs, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), Para-military, Police Department, Forest Department and Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) is of prime importance for timely and rapid action.

## **Provenance**

India is the topmost country for tiger seizures, accounting for nearly 40% of all seizures (2000–2018) in tiger range and non-range countries (Wong and Krishnaswamy, 2019). Thus, indicating a constant pressure of poaching on existing wild tiger populations. Since this analysis was undertaken by considering seizure records, we suspect that the actual loss of tigers due to poaching is much larger as the seizure data presumably represent only a fraction of poaching and illegal trade.

Despite strong enforcement action against ABC related crime in India incidences such as the seizure of 142 claws in Bengaluru, Karnataka, undertaken in February 2019 or the seizure of a leopard cub smuggled in to India indicate that all is not well. Important is establishing the origin of these products. With increasing use of molecular genetics, some prime questions about the species, sex and number of individuals can be answered now, but questions regarding the actual origin of these products often remain unanswered. Understanding their provenance is critical for developing or instigating mechanisms to monitor and protect the more vulnerable populations of tigers and other Asian Big Cats.

Efforts are being made to establish the provenance of any seized skins through use of camera trap images to identify individual tigers from their stripe patterns. This technique has immense potential in establishing the place of origin of seized skins and has been successfully used to identify tiger skins seized in Nepal to their point of origin in India (<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/from-madhya-pradesh-to-nepal-tale-of-madhya-pradeshs-most-breeding-female-which-went-missing-with-two->



[cubs/articleshow/56429566.cms](https://cubs/articleshow/56429566.cms)). However, this requires a centralised database of stripe images, preferably at the global level with easy access and retrieval of relevant information.

Similarly, such robust mechanisms for establishing provenance using skin patterns can be established for other species of ABCs such as Snow leopard, Common Leopard and Clouded Leopard too. This would go a long way in facilitating investigations and strengthening law enforcement mechanisms at vulnerable sites to address issues of IWT in India and around the world.



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Another issue arises when the seizure is of products other than skin, i.e. bones, meat, claws, nails, hairs etc. with no visible means of identification even to the species level. The only way to establish the origin in such cases is through use of standardised DNA markers, agreed upon at an international level.

Once a national repository of DNA profiles of individual animals and of skin stripe images under a centralised setup has been established (efforts are on-going), India can play a leading role at the international level to facilitate similar action in other range countries of Tigers, Snow Leopards, Clouded Leopard and Common Leopard.

## **Centralised Database on mortality for ABC's**

*Tigernet* is unique, being the only database for tiger mortality in a tiger range country and is instrumental for demonstrating transparency and accountability. Such a system is lacking for other ABC's despite Common Leopard mortality being reported in many Tiger bearing areas of India. The MoEFCC as a nodal agency can anchor this database making it mandatory for states to report into the centralised database.

## **High rates of dispersals and turnover**

The 2019 All India Tiger Estimation exercise recorded that nearly 30% of the tiger population lives outside the Protected Areas network (Jhala *et al.*, 2019), while TRAFFIC's analysis of mortality reports of tigers (2014–2016), found nearly 47% of all tiger poaching incidences from areas outside Tiger Reserves. This is enough to realign our strategies and to re-focus our attention on Tiger populations outside tiger reserves, which may be more vulnerable than those inside. Although such detailed mortality assessments are not available for other ABCs, the picture is unlikely to be different if not starker, considering that the Common Leopard is more widespread in its distribution.

The detailed scientific assessments needed to understand the dynamics of a high turnover rate for tigers in certain protected areas should be urgently taken up. There are many more questions than answers to be resolved, especially when there are transboundary issues prevailing and when there are no protected areas in the near vicinity. The status for other ABCs such as Snow Leopard, Common Leopard and Clouded Leopard, are also unclear.

## **Linear infrastructure as drivers for poaching**

Linear infrastructure such as roads, railway lines, powerlines, canals, and other intrusions into natural ecosystems are known to have negative effects on wildlife species directly as well as indirectly through modification of habitats. These effects not limited to mortality, habitat loss, stress due to barriers, and genomic changes in the population are known to have drastic repercussions on precariously small populations of endangered species.

Though there are guidelines which have been devised to mitigate the effects of linear infrastructure on wildlife and habitats (WII 2016), their implementation is necessary to address long term detrimental effects on affected wildlife and habitats.

Roads help in connecting human populations, support ecotourism and even facilitate patrolling in difficult terrains, however recent studies have indicated that roads in tiger habitats have reduced the abundance of mammals by about 20% as compared to what they would have been if the road density was less. What is more concerning is that 43% of areas where tiger breeds and 57% of tiger conservation landscapes are within 5 km of a road (Carter *et al.* 2020). A note of concern for India is that approximately 16% of the world's tiger conservation landscapes exist close to high density roads in the country.

Earlier studies on drivers have indicated road networks as one important factor which facilitates poaching of tigers and their prey species which are crucial to sustain carnivore populations (Raza *et al.*, 2010; Sharma *et al.*, 2014). As these drivers of poaching are being assessed it is important for wildlife law enforcement agencies to build in measures to tackle these issues in their protection strategies.

## Electrocution and poisoning

The supply of electricity is an essential component of human life, especially in far flung villages near the periphery of forested areas. However, the nefarious use of electricity as a method for poaching, seems to be on the rise, especially in central India since poachers feel it is a much safer mechanism as it leaves little trace for investigation. Since this method is not targeted many wildlife species succumb to use of this method. To inflict the most damage, live electrical wires are routed to water pools or areas where animals come to quench their thirst. The technique is also used to ward off carnivores from village areas.

Similarly, the use of poisons has seen a rapid increase in poaching of ABCs. The usual method is poisoning of the kill or of waterholes. A robust protection strategy is needed to protect against loss of protected species involving co-ordinated working by governmental agencies mandated to address these developments.



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## Behaviour change

Globally the conservation scenario is overwhelmingly focused on the biological aspects of conservation despite involving human behaviours. Gradually, we have learnt that human behaviours can be influenced but to do so requires a different skill set. Borrowing theories of social marketing, where the use of concepts and techniques to influence human behaviour and subsequently the choice being made. These techniques create, communicate, and deliver values to influence behaviour patterns (Kotler and Lee 2011). These methods have now been used for various conservation projects where the target audience needs to be defined, and studied prior to embarking on this long journey. Transforming behaviour is a slow but steady process.

Strategies must emerge to tackle markets and with reducing demand for pets and wildlife products primarily for traditional Asian medicine, tiger farms, or consumption of tiger products in domestic markets. Several incidences of targeted poaching indicate that there is some domestic demand for tigers mainly for pagan practices. Understanding this behaviour and devising strategies to tackle the beliefs behind it is needed to reduce the poaching pressure on tigers. Such target driven campaigns have been successfully used to reduce demand for the animal products such as the Chi-initiative for rhino horn in Viet Nam.

There is huge human angst when there are negative interactions between animals and humans. Tolerance is considered one of the most important factors which has allowed species to survive in India, despite having one of the largest human populations along with the largest cattle population in the world. However, human-animal interactions are being much more frequently reported with losses either to human lives or losses to livelihoods due to



the killing of livestock. Managing these negative interactions are necessary especially when it involves retaliatory killings. This has been reported for all ABCs except Clouded Leopard, while studies have indicated links between retaliatory killings and illegal wildlife trade eg: retaliatory killing of Snow Leopards is a major cause of concern in the conservation of that species.

There is a need to have transformations about the way one thinks of conservation while we all accept and recognise the multitude of benefits that one gets from these iconic species living in the wild and their habitats and the ecosystem services that they provide through forests, air, and freshwater.

As anthropogenic activities are impacting not just the society but also the ecosystem where we live, newer mechanisms such as "Corporate Ecological Responsibility" must be devised to help address the problems that ail the ecosystem due to negative human actions. This will bring in a new way of addressing various conservation issues and meeting the high costs of maintaining species and their habitats.

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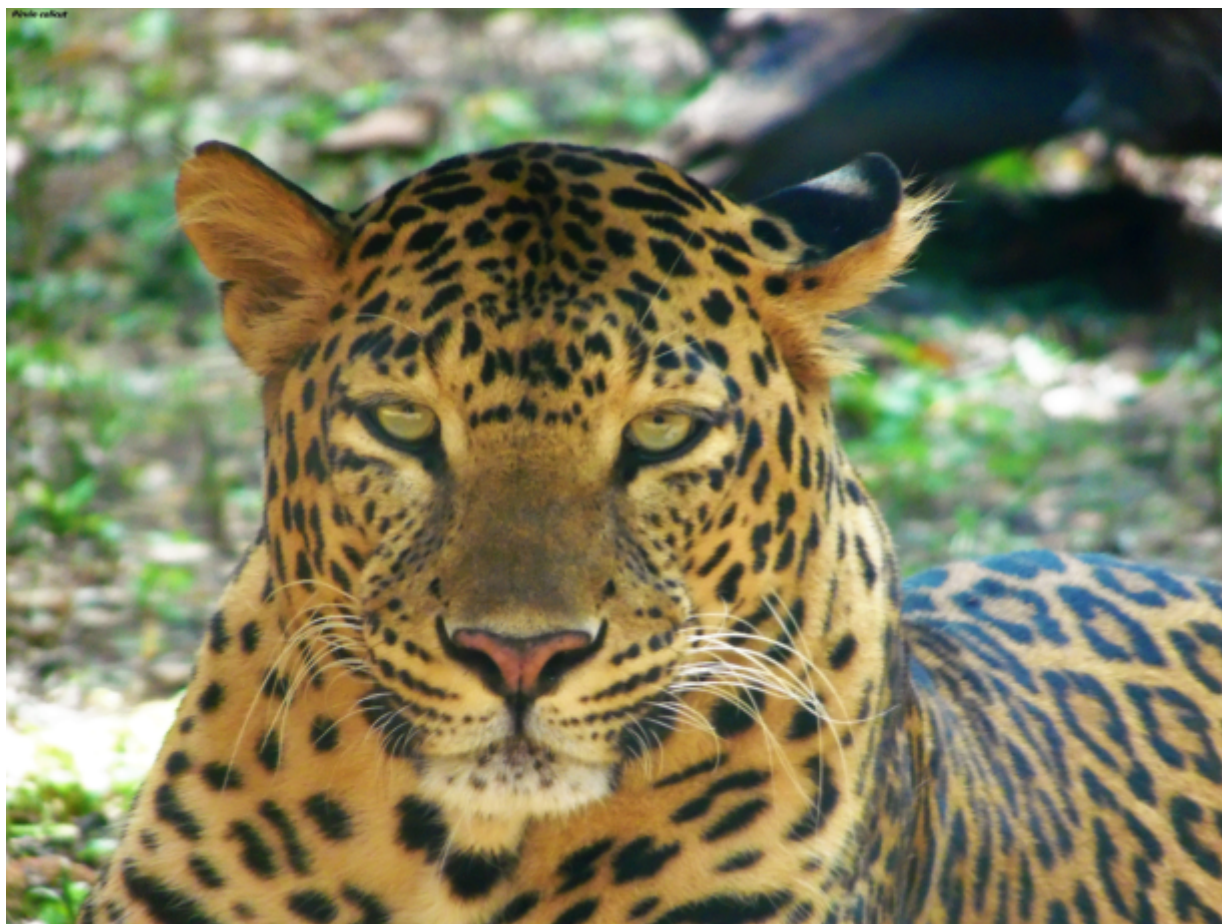
## Wild Cry

**“SPOTTED” in illegal wildlife trade: A peek into on-going poaching and illegal trade of Leopards in India**

Astha Gautam and Saket Badola  
(TRAFFIC, India Office)



## “SPOTTED” in illegal wildlife trade: A peek into on-going poaching and illegal trade of Leopards in India



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India is home to five majestic big cat species—Asiatic Lion *Panthera leo persica*, Royal Bengal Tiger *Panthera tigris tigris*, Common Leopard *Panthera pardus fusca*, Snow Leopard *Panthera uncia* and Clouded Leopard *Neofelis nebulosa*. Of these, Common Leopard has the widest distribution range across India and is found in almost all forest types including tropical rainforests to temperate deciduous and alpine coniferous forest. It is also found in dry scrubs and grasslands.

Leopards are beautiful animals with an exquisite appearance made up of rosette-filled golden fur embellishing their slender appearance. Leopards are nocturnal beings, more active at night thus giving them an elusive nature. The fascinating nature of Leopards has interested artists and writers in the country for years with prominent storytellers like Rudyard Kipling, Jim Corbett and Ruskin Bond making them part of their popular stories.

However, a sad outcome of their grandeur and vast range is that it has attracted the attention of poachers and wildlife smugglers seeking to make a profit. While the plight of the Tiger is renowned, the Leopard is suffering in its shadow. Even though the Lion (Gujarat), Snow Leopard (Himachal Pradesh), and Clouded Leopard (Meghalaya) enjoy national and state animal status, the Common Leopard is left out of this recognition. The trend presents an urgent need for empathy for the animal by lawmakers and the public alike which would help gather attention and action towards safeguarding the future of the animal in India.

### Distribution

The Common Leopard is widely distributed and has adapted itself well to its habitats (Bhatt *et al.*, 2020). Leopards' presence all over India is reflected through area-specific research done over the years in the states of

Uttarakhand (Joshi and Agarwal, 2012; Harihar, Pandav and Goyal, 2011), Gujarat (Vijayan and Pati, 2002), Rajasthan (Kumbhojkar *et al.*, 2019; Mondal *et al.*, 2012), Assam (Borah *et al.*, 2013), Tamil Nadu (Kalle *et al.*, 2011), Madhya Pradesh (Karanth *et al.*, 2012), Maharashtra (Dhanwatey *et al.*, 2013), Karnataka (Athreya *et al.*, 2015), Haryana, Odisha, Telangana, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh (Jacobson *et al.*, 2016). The presence of Leopards is also indicated in major cities like Mumbai (Bhatia *et al.*, 2013).

The Common Leopard subspecies *fusca*, found in India as well as Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan, has more than 75% of its extant range in India. It occupies 12.5% of the extant range of all Leopard species and has lost 70 to 72% of its original range (Jacobson *et al.*, 2016).

## Conservation status

The Common Leopard is the only big cat to have its conservation status elevated from Near Threatened (2008) to Vulnerable (2015) by the IUCN (Stein *et al.*, 2016) in recent times. Currently the Common Leopard, like many large mammals, is gravely threatened by increasing habitat destruction and human-wildlife conflict around the country arising out of shrinking habitats and illegal trade (Karanth *et al.*, 2010). There are various anthropological causes of leopard mortality other than poaching (shooting, electrocution, poisoning etc) such as road accidents (Gubbi, 2014), train accidents (Roy and Sukumar, 2017) and injury due to manmade structures (Gubbi *et al.*, 2019). Leopards along with tiger and elephant are majorly involved in incidences of human-wildlife conflict (Naha, Sathyakumar and Rawat, 2018) in the country.

## Legal status

The Common Leopard is listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Hunting or trade in the species or its body parts and derivatives is a punishable offence in India and its international trade is further restricted under CITES.

## Poaching and illegal trade of Leopards in India



TRAFFIC's report "*Illuminating the blind spot*" (Raza *et al.*, 2012) estimated that at least four Leopards entered illegal wildlife trade every week in India in the years 2001–2010 establishing that poaching and illegal wildlife trade were a significant threat to the existence of the species in the wild. Other reports by TRAFFIC at the global level indicated that every year a large number of these animals end up in illegal wildlife trade as skins and bones (Stoner & Pervushina, 2013) to fuel the demand in markets in Southeast Asian countries.

Leopard skin is most commonly traded wildlife product and is used in clothing and as a decorative item for households, mainly as a status symbol. While many reports have claimed that locations such as Japan, South Korea, and Tibet Autonomous Region have reduced the demand for skin, other places continue to seek the product. Various seizures of other leopard derivatives such as claws and canines indicate towards their ongoing demand in illicit trade.

Recently, TRAFFIC conducted a short study and analysed seizure and mortality reports involving Common Leopards between 2015–2019 in India. A total of 747 Leopard mortalities were reported in the five-year span of which 596 were linked to illegal wildlife trade and poaching related activities. These records indicated that 140 Leopards were killed by poachers and their carcasses were recovered from the forest areas, whereas body parts belonging to the equivalent of 456 leopards were seized during various operations by law enforcement agencies during the study period. This list is not yet exhaustive and is still being

updated with additional information from various enforcement agencies and hence the total number of incidence are likely to be much more.

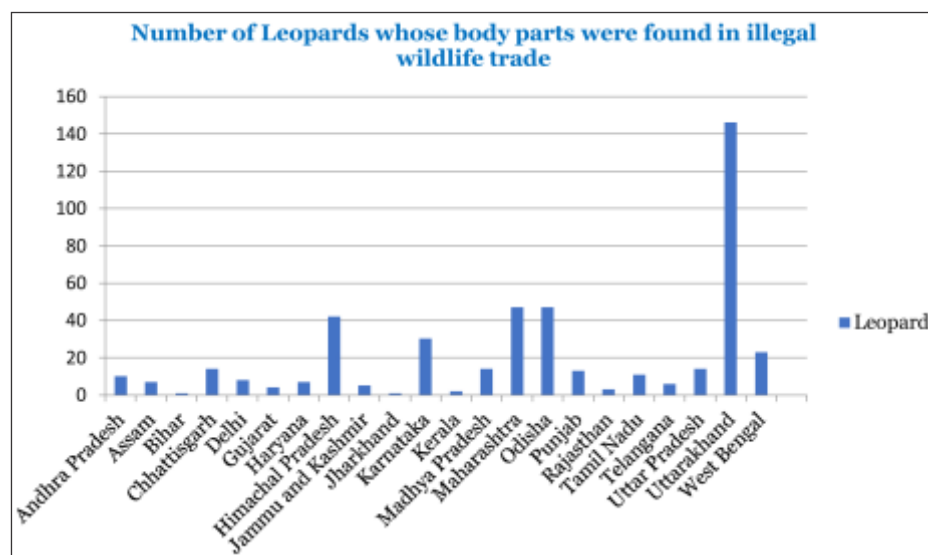
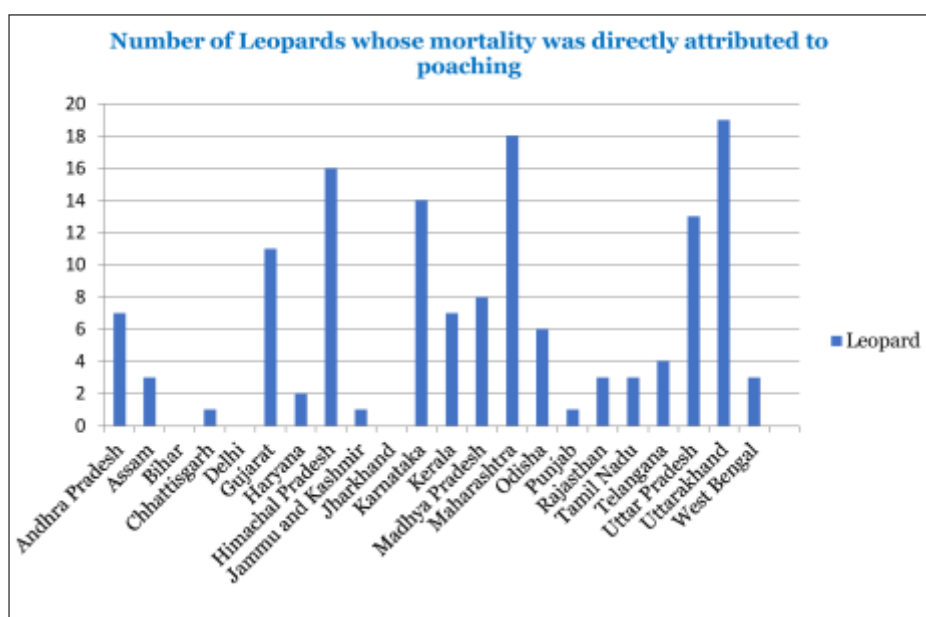
Highest number of poaching incidences were reported from the states of Uttarakhand and Maharashtra. Among all the derivatives found in illegal wildlife trade, skin remained the most in-demand product, accounting for 69% of all seizures, while derivatives like claws, teeth and bones were also traded. It is also believed that bones of the leopard are possibly traded as tiger bones as they have a larger international demand for traditional medicines.

A growing concern has been the frequent incidences of live animal trade, majorly involving cubs of the species reflected in seizures in Chennai and Maharashtra of one

and two cubs respectively which might indicate a brewing demand for live animals in India for illegal pet trade.

Poachers are also using poisoning and snaring as silent and clandestine methods of hunting, both cruel and indiscriminate in its execution. Studies also point to wide spread use of snares in many Indian forests.

The co-existence of Leopards and humans in their shared habitat sometimes lead to increased incidences of human-leopard conflict often resulting to loss of human life and livestock, which in turn leads to retaliation through killing of animal. Human-wildlife conflict leading to retaliatory killing is a major concern in India as it inflicts loss on both the sides.





## Conservation Efforts

In order to address issues related to poaching and illegal wildlife trade, there have been many efforts by government and non-government organisations to highlight the plight of the Leopard as well as to strengthen law enforcement practices.

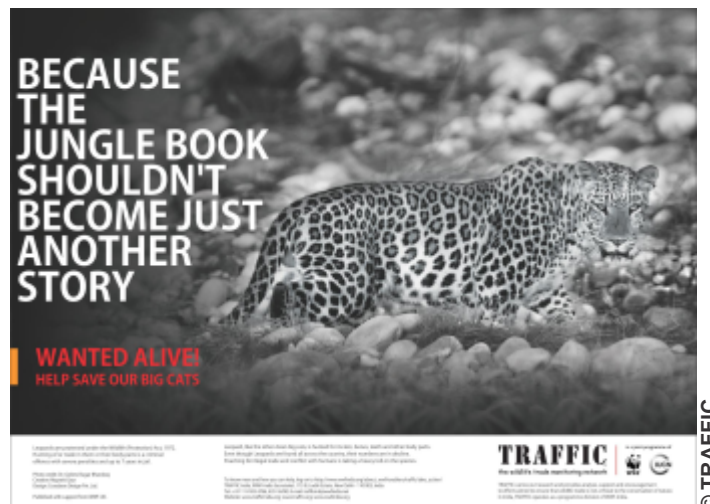
The recent wildlife seizures involving Leopards' body parts and derivatives highlight participation and co-ordination among multiple enforcement agencies alongside forest departments and the police including the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), SSB (Sashastra Seema Bal), CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force), Customs and others. Continued and well-co-ordinated efforts of these agencies will help strengthen the security of national borders that are being utilised as trade routes by wildlife traffickers. Since its inception in 2007, TRAFFIC has conducted over 50 capacity building workshops across the country to strengthen the skills of various wildlife law enforcement agencies. Such endeavours have also been useful in bringing together multiple agencies and developing co-operation and collaboration among them.



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TRAFFIC also provides deep search metal detectors (DSMD) to tiger reserves and wildlife sanctuaries across India to detect metal traps and snares set up by poachers to trap wild animals. A pioneering wildlife sniffer dog programme of TRAFFIC is also contributing towards detecting and deterring leopard poaching and illegal trade in the country. Sixty six wildlife sniffer dogs are deployed

in 19 states and have assisted in over 350 wildlife seizures involving an array of species and wildlife parts and derivatives.



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In 2012, TRAFFIC launched an awareness campaign entitled “Wanted Alive” to garner attention towards the wild big cat species threatened by illegal trade in India. The campaign included informative visuals on four big cats including the Leopard. This was displayed as hoardings at airports, metro stations and major highways. Similar campaigns such as “Don't buy trouble” have been organised in recent years to curb the demand and trade of wildlife products.

## Conclusion

The plight of Leopards in illegal wildlife trade has been highlighted from time to time through investigative reports and studies and through various wildlife enforcement actions across the country. However, this has not deterred wildlife smugglers who are lured by high profits and low risk of detection to target the species.

In many regions, Leopards are perceived as pests and eliminated due to their conflict with humans. Poaching for both illegal wildlife trade and human-wildlife conflict is taking a heavy toll on the species.

TRAFFIC strongly recommends conducting a population census of the species and mapping its extent of distribution. This will help to develop robust conservation and protection strategies both at the national and state levels. Habitat protection by minimising developmental activities in the Leopard's natural range will be crucial in reducing human-Leopard conflict. Awareness about the species and its role in

the ecosystem among the communities living close to or sharing its habitat is also important. Stronger wildlife enforcement initiatives including speedy conviction in a court of law is also crucial to protecting the future of Leopards in India.

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## **TRAFFIC Updates (India)**

- 1. Illegal trade of Red Pandas in India and across borders: TRAFFIC releases new study on World Wildlife Day**
- 2. TRAFFIC's latest report highlights wildlife poaching crisis during COVID-19 lockdown in India**
- 3. Odisha Forest Department prepares to grab online wildlife crime under TRAFFICs 'CyberCLAW'**
- 4. TRAFFIC's #21DayLockdown online campaign in India highlight victims of illegal wildlife trade**
- 5. Air Vistara's inflight magazine features an awareness advert on wildlife poaching**
- 6. MEET THE NEW TEAM MEMBERS: TRAFFIC's India Office**





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## Illegal trade of Red Pandas in India and across borders: TRAFFIC releases new study on World Wildlife Day



India is home to one of the two (sub)species of Red Panda which is found in the eastern and north-eastern Himalayan subalpine conifer forests and the eastern Himalayan broadleaf forests, which geographically falls in China, India, Nepal, Bhutan, and northern Myanmar.

Due to its distribution in the less accessible higher reaches of the Himalayas, information about the illegal trade of Red Pandas is patchy and difficult to collect, hence a study of [illegal trade-related threats to Red Panda in India and selected neighbouring range countries](#) was crucial to fill these information gaps.

On 3rd March, World Wildlife Day, TRAFFIC's India Office released a new assessment of the poaching and illegal trade of Red Pandas *Ailurus fulgens* in India and the neighbouring countries of Nepal and Bhutan. The findings indicated that these animals were at risk of incidental snaring but not of targeted poaching, except in Nepal.

Over a ten-year period from July 2010 to June 2019 the authors found neither India nor Bhutan had reported any incidences of poaching or illegal trade in Red Pandas, but in Nepal a total of 13 seizure records were reported between 2016 and 2019, accounting for a total of 29 pelts. All except two took place in Kathmandu.

Consultations with experts had revealed a similar low-level incidence of Red Panda trade in Bhutan and India with one case of accidental trapping of a Red Panda in a snare in Jigme Dorjee National Park from Bhutan and six incidents of poaching accounting for six individual animals in India, aside from a 1999 case involving more than 20 pelts.

By contrast, in Nepal, experts shared knowledge of about 25 incidences of Red Panda poaching, involving approximately 55 animals and also claimed to have witnessed and/or have confirmed reports related to poaching on six occasions involving 15 animals.

The authors also carried out extensive interviews with local villagers across three states in northern India. In Arunachal Pradesh, a total of 968 people from 147 villages in 20 Districts reported one recent poaching incidence and six older cases in Anjaw District where they said Red Pandas get accidentally trapped in snares set for other wildlife species, in particular deer. They also reported a 2009 case when three Red Panda cubs were said to have been traded to a Bhutanese national in Lumla, Tawang District. In Dibang Valley villagers reported two recent instances of foreign tourists offering to buy captured live Red Pandas.

In West Bengal, 171 interviewees had no specific knowledge of Red Panda poaching but said the area was visited by wildlife hunters from Nepal, while in Sikkim two thirds of the 761 people interviewed were aware of Red Pandas in their area and the species' protected status.



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Dr Saket Badola, Head of TRAFFIC's India office and author of the report highlighted that although the current study did not find large numbers of Red Pandas in illegal wildlife trade in India and Bhutan, there is a serious threat from habitat destruction and degradation in these countries while there were also a number of cases of illegal trade in Nepal that need in-depth investigation.

The report recommends that in order to secure the future of Red Pandas in India, it is important that community-based conservation and protection measures are implemented, including mitigation of non-targeted trapping practices. Cross border co-operation and co-ordination are also necessary for protection of wildlife that migrates beyond borders.

The study was conducted by TRAFFIC's India office to understand the impact of poaching and illegal trade on Red Pandas across India, Bhutan and Nepal with funding support from WWF Germany through their collaboration with the Association of Zoological Gardens (Verband der Zoologischen Gärten e.V., VdZ) of Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

To download the report, visit [https://www.wwfindia.org/news\\_facts/?19061/Illegal-trade-of-Red-Pandas-in-India-and-across-borders-new-TRAFFIC-study-released-on-WorldWildlifeDay](https://www.wwfindia.org/news_facts/?19061/Illegal-trade-of-Red-Pandas-in-India-and-across-borders-new-TRAFFIC-study-released-on-WorldWildlifeDay)

## TRAFFIC's latest report highlights wildlife poaching crisis during COVID-19 lockdown in India

**A** TRAFFIC analysis released on 3rd June 2020, found a significant increase in reported poaching of wild animals in India during the COVID-19 lockdown period that is not restricted to any geographical region or state or to any specific wildlife area. Reports of poaching for consumption and local trade more than doubled during the lockdown although there was no evidence of stockpiling of wildlife products for future trade.

The analysis was carried out by comparing media reported instances of poaching during a six week pre-lockdown period (10<sup>th</sup> February to 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2020) to those from six weeks of lockdown (23<sup>rd</sup> March to 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2020). Reported poaching incidences rose from 35 to 88, although it is unknown how reporting rates have changed because of the lockdown.





The findings were released in the form of a short report *“Indian wildlife amidst the COVID-19 crisis: An analysis of poaching and illegal wildlife trade trends”*. The study indicates that despite consistent efforts by law enforcement agencies, wild animal populations in India are under additional threat during the lockdown period.

The highest increase in poaching was reported to be of ungulates mainly for their meat, and the percentage jumped from nearly eight out of 35 (22%) total reported cases during pre-lockdown, to 39 out of 88 (44%) during the lockdown period. The second group which showed a marked increase was poaching of “small mammals” including hares, porcupines, pangolins, giant squirrels, civets, monkeys, and smaller wild cats. Although some have always been in high demand in international markets, most hunting during the lockdown period is presumably for meat or for local trade. Cases for these rose from 6 (17%) to 22 (25%) between the pre-and lockdown periods.

Among big cats, leopard poaching showed an increase during the lockdown period as nine Leopards were reported to have been killed compared to four in the pre-lockdown period. A total of 222 persons were arrested in poaching related cases by various law enforcement agencies during the lockdown period across the country, significantly higher than the 85 suspects reported as arrested during the pre-lockdown phase.

Incidences related to wild pet-bird seizures came down significantly from 14% to 7% between the pre-lockdown and lockdown periods, presumably due to a lack of

transport and closed markets during the lockdown period. Larger birds such as Indian Peafowls and game birds such as Grey Francolins, which are popular for their meat, were reported to be targeted during the lockdown. There was less reporting of poaching and illegal trade in tortoises and freshwater turtles, with almost no seizures of these species during the lockdown period.

Dr Saket Badola, Head of TRAFFIC's India Office and the author of the report added, “The more than doubling of reported poaching cases, mainly of ungulates and small wild animals for meat is doubtless placing additional burdens on wildlife law enforcement agencies. Therefore, it is imperative that these agencies are supported adequately and in a timely manner so they can control the situation”.

Mr Ravi Singh, SG & CEO, WWF-India added, “If poaching of ungulates and small animals remains unchecked it will lead to depletion of prey base for big cats like Tigers and Leopards and a depletion of the ecosystems. This in turn will lead to higher incidences of human-wildlife conflicts and will undermine the significant successes that India has achieved in the field of wildlife conservation”.

Download report at

<https://www.traffic.org/publications/reports/reported-wildlife-poaching-in-india-more-than-doubles-during-covid-19-lockdown/>

## Odisha Forest Department prepares to grab online wildlife crime under TRAFFICs

### 'CyberCLAW'

A training programme, the fifth in a series organised by TRAFFIC in collaboration with WWF-India, NTCA and PRTS under its programme to curb online wildlife crime entitled 'CyberCLAW', was held this February in Odisha.

Curbing the expansion of illegal wildlife trade activities in cyberspace has become an immediate conservation

priority making it imperative to strengthen the skills of enforcement agencies to monitor and track such illicit online activities.

In light of this, TRAFFIC in partnership with the Odisha Forest Department, National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), Police Radio Training School (PRTS), Indore and WWF-India organised a training workshop on 1st–2nd



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February 2020 at the Office of the Chief Wildlife Warden, Bhubaneswar, to strengthen skills for tracking, monitoring and investigating online wildlife crime.

This was attended by 26 forest officials of different cadres, including Divisional Forest Officers, Assistant Conservator of Forests, Range Forest Officer, Forester and Forest Guard selected from 13 forest divisions of Odisha i.e. Keonjhar Wildlife Division, Rairangpur Forest Division, Karanjia Forest Division, Baripada Forest Division, Balasore Wildlife Division, Simlipal (North) Tiger Reserve, Redhakhhol Forest Division, Koraput Forest Division, Sambalpur Forest Division, Baliguda Forest Division, Nayagarh Forest Division, Sundergarh Forest Division, and Kalahandi (North) Forest Division.

The training was imparted by experts in the field of monitoring cybercrime through sessions on intelligence, investigation, and search and seizure techniques; communication device investigation; cybercrime scene management; digital intelligence collection; wildlife forensics; telecom surveillance and Call Detail Record (CDR) analysis and IPDR – (CDR of IP address) analysis. Mr Varun Kapoor IPS, Additional Director General, Madhya Pradesh Police; Mr Malay Mahant, Sub Inspector/ Incharge Training, PRTS, Indore and Mr Afzaal

Khan, Sub Inspector / Incharge Technical Cell PRTS Indore along with TRAFFIC staff led the two-day training.

With approximately 26 Royal Bengal Tigers *Panthera tigris*, including the rare melanistic form, Asian Elephants *Elephas maximus*, Indian Pangolins *Manis crassicaudata*, Olive Ridley Turtles *Lepidochelys olivacea*, among several other endangered wildlife species found in Simlipal Tiger Reserve, as well as in other wildlife and territorial forest divisions of the state, Odisha is undoubtedly a bright spot of biodiversity. However, due to this, it also remains a prime target for wildlife poachers, smugglers and traders who have now extended their nefarious activities to cyberspace to reach out to the ever-growing number of internet users.

Dr J.D. Patti, IFS, Deputy Director Similipal Tiger Reserve, appreciated the effort and stressed the use of cyber patrolling for curbing online wildlife trade.

Mr Shashi Paul, IFS, Addl. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) highlighted that technology is a double edged sword and one must be careful while dealing with it. He said that it is paramount that present investigations can and must use these technologies for wildlife crime investigation.

# TRAFFIC's #21DayLockdown online campaign in India highlight victims of illegal wildlife trade

A new coronavirus, designated SARS-CoV-2, has caused a worldwide health pandemic with people infected by a new disease known as COVID-19 that can have fatal consequences. To help curb the aggressive spread of the disease, India announced a 21 day complete lockdown beginning 25th March 2020.

At the time, the epicentre of the outbreak was widely considered to be a seafood market in Wuhan known to have been selling wild animals—suggesting a strong likelihood of a connection to the trade in wild animals.

Therefore at the beginning of the lockdown period, TRAFFIC's India office launched a #21daylockdown due to #coronavirusoutbreak awareness initiative to highlight the plight of one species every day that is threatened by illegal wildlife trade in the country. This ran successfully on TRAFFIC India's Facebook and Twitter handles and was later adopted by various schools across India.

Species highlighted were—Indian Star Tortoise *Geochelone elegans*, sea cucumbers, parakeets, bears, mongoose, owls, Red Sand Boa *Eryx johnii*, Royal Bengal Tiger *Panthera tigris*, orchids, pangolins, sharks, Common Leopard *Panthera pardus*, monitor lizard, shells, Greater One-horned Rhino *Rhinoceros unicornis*, Caterpillar Fungus *Ophiocordyceps sinensis*, corals, Spotted Pond Turtles *Geoclemys hamiltonii*, Snow Leopard *Panthera uncia*, munias and Caracals *Caracal caracal*.

The online campaign was successful in reaching out to over 50,000 individuals on online portals while 11 schools including the Shri Ram Schools, Shri Ram Millennium School and Educare Schools took the programme further and reached out to over 25,000 students of various age groups. A large number of parents' communities attached to these schools were also sensitised through campaign visuals and other related information.





## Vistara's inflight magazine features an awareness advert on wildlife poaching



**I**llegal wildlife trade has the potential of destroying the future of wildlife species. Raising awareness of this is crucial for wildlife protection and conservation. Acknowledging this, the latest (May and June 2020) Issue of the popular and informative inflight magazine of Vistara features awareness adverts about the plight of Tigers *Panthera tigris* and Common Leopards *Panthera pardus*.

With nearly 3,000 wild tigers in India, the national animal is constantly on the radar of wildlife smugglers and traders both in India and beyond its borders. Live tiger cubs are smuggled for the pet trade; body parts and derivatives are used as an ingredient in traditional medicines in East and Southeast Asian countries; tiger skin is used to make clothing, rugs, wall hangings etc and tiger claws and teeth are used to make amulets and jewellery.

The plight of the Common Leopard is equally of concern with at least four animals poached every week during the period 2001–2010, according to a TRAFFIC study. The Common Leopard is also a victim of habitat destruction and human–wildlife conflict.

Recent years have seen a major surge in illegal trade of wildlife and derived products with many smugglers misusing the complex international aviation system to evade customs and other enforcement agencies. Furthermore, there is also lack of awareness among passengers about the illegality of some wildlife trade. Many tourists to India are duped into buying protected wildlife products and derivatives that are illegal for sale or purchase. Therefore, the support and co-operation of the aviation industry is critical for curbing illegal wildlife trade.

Dr Saket Badola, Head of TRAFFIC's India office said, “TRAFFIC is extremely grateful to Vistara for coming forward to support the cause of wildlife protection and conservation in India. These awareness adverts will help to inform and educate wildlife consumers about the devastating impact of illegal wildlife trade on the future of India's wildlife and will encourage them to refrain from engaging in such trade”.

Ms Rashmi Soni, Vice President, and Head of Corporate Communications, Vistara said, “At Vistara, we understand the value of conservation of nature and wildlife, and as an eco-conscious brand, we are more than happy to support this cause and increase awareness among our flyers through our inflight magazine.”



View the newsletter at

<https://www.airvistara.com/th/en/vistara-experience/on-board/inflight-magazine/read-magazine?Issue=May2020>

## MEET THE NEW TEAM MEMBERS: TRAFFIC

### Mayuri Chopra, Senior Programme Officer (Marine)



Growing up in a desert in Western India is where Mayuri's curiosity for the ocean began. After finishing high school, she embarked upon a solo journey down south to the coastal city of Mumbai. Spending a lot of time by the sea and confronting the extensive environmental damage

developed a strong desire within herself to make a difference. It was in Mumbai that she got inspired to become a marine biologist. On the quest to delve deeper, she moved to the pristine West Australian coast of Perth to pursue her Master's in Marine Biology from The University of Western Australia.

Mayuri has travelled and worked as a marine biologist across continents in Africa, Asia and Europe. Working on wetland restoration and ecotourism efforts in Mauritius taught her the importance of working with local communities and embracing their cultures to the fullest. At a seal rescue and rehabilitation experience in Ireland, she worked hands-on with injured and abandoned seal pups. Additionally, she was also the Global Ambassador for a marine conservation campaign by the Australian non-profit organisation Positive change for marine life. Mayuri is an open water certified diver and has conducted several field surveys for her projects in the past.

After returning to India, Mayuri worked with CSIR-National Institute of Oceanography to understand the research that India is undertaking in the marine sector, where she sailed for several months in the Bay of Bengal on central government projects. These experiences led her to join TRAFFIC's India Office in March 2020.

### Vihang Jumle, Project Officer, Wildlife Cybercrime Project

Vihang Jumle joined TRAFFIC in India in February 2020 to help develop and implement projects

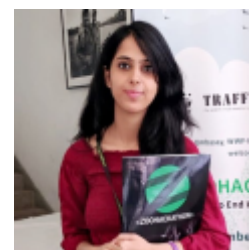


related to curbing wildlife cybercrime. He graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Information Technology and specialises in data analytics. Vihang's first interaction with TRAFFIC was at Zoohackathon 2018 organised in Mumbai. He was enthused to learn about the opportunities to use technology for curbing wildlife crime and his desire to explore diverse policy landscapes early on in his career brought him to TRAFFIC's India Office. At TRAFFIC, he focuses on tackling wildlife cybercrime and illegal trade. In line with his work responsibilities, Vihang's professional interests are interdisciplinary—they fall on the lines of using emerging computational methods to advance social science research and evidence-based policymaking. He also takes an academic interest in diplomacy and international political economy.

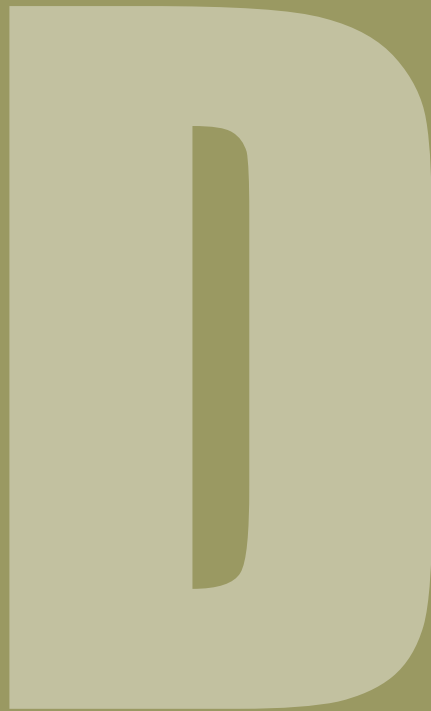
Before joining TRAFFIC, Vihang worked as an Associate at Ikigai Law—a new age tech focused law firm—and has interned or worked in a similar capacity with the Reserve Bank of India, Ministry of External Affairs – Government of India, the Indian Institute of Management Indore, Quant Capital and Red Dot Foundation. You can find his TEDx talk, opinion articles and academic writing on the internet.

### Neha Shukla – Assistant Project Officer

Neha Shukla joined TRAFFIC's India Office in January 2020 to assist in research, communications, and outreach related projects. She is a Bachelor of Science graduate with a major in zoology and is currently pursuing a Post Graduate Diploma focused on Environmental Law and Policy through WWF-India and the National Law University, Delhi. She has a keen interest in wildlife, and during her graduation undertook an independent research project under the guidance of her professors on "Distribution and Abundance of Common Birds in Delhi NCR".



Neha is not new to TRAFFIC or WWF-India and has been associated with them since September 2017 through various internship and volunteer programmes over a period of 15 months. Neha's interest and love for the environment has motivated her early in life to undertake projects that allow her to learn and support such causes.



## **SUPER SNIFFER digest**

### **1. SUPER SNIFFERS on the trail of big cat poachers and smugglers in India: An overview**

Amar Nath Choudhary; Senior Project Officer; TRAFFIC, India Office

Neha Shukla; Assistant Project Officer; TRAFFIC, India Office

### **2. Bidding adieu to ‘Offer’, a wildlife sniffer dog at Tamil Nadu**



**SUPER**

**SNIFFER digest**

## SUPER SNIFFERS on the trail of big cat and smugglers in India: An overview

### Background

Threatened by illegal trafficking of their body parts, the Asian Big Cats of India—Asiatic Lion *Panthera leo persica*, Royal Bengal Tiger *Panthera tigris tigris*, Common Leopard *Panthera pardus*, Snow Leopard *Panthera uncia* and Clouded Leopard *Neofelis nebulosa*—face a severe conservation crisis in their natural habitats. Among them, the Common Leopard is the most widely distributed across India followed by the Tiger. Demand for their body parts including skins, claws, bones, paws, canine, and fat both in international as well as domestic markets drives poaching and illegal trade of these big cat species in India.

A TRAFFIC study [19] for the period 2000–2018 highlighted that the highest number of incidents of Tiger seizures globally were recorded from India (40.5%, 463) resulting in 26.5% (626) of Tigers seized globally. Therefore, India, home to the world's largest wild Tiger population (2967\*), also remains a country with the highest overall number of Tiger-related seizures in world. Another TRAFFIC study[15] on poaching and illegal trade of Leopards in India had found that at least four Leopards entered in illegal wildlife trade every week during 2001–2010, and over 2,294 Leopards were trafficked in India during the study period. Another TRAFFIC study on poaching and illegal trade of Snow Leopard found that globally 221–450 Snow Leopards had been poached annually since 2008, of which India accounted for 21–45[12].



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### Use of wildlife sniffer dogs for wildlife crime prevention and detection

The use of dogs in conservation detection first emerged in the 1890s, when dogs were successfully used to locate Kiwis *Apteryx spp.* and Kakapo *Strigops habroptilus* in New Zealand [6, 16]. Up until the early 1990s, detection dogs focused predominantly on detection of live birds [2, 8]. In recent years, there has been a rapid expansion in this field. Conservation detection now encompasses an array of activities, including detection of live wildlife [3, 5, 10, 15], carcass detection for birds and bats around

wind turbines [1,7,11,14], and detection of scats, pathogens, and other biological materials [9,4,17,18]).

Use of wildlife sniffer and tracker dog squads for crime detection and prevention is one of the many proven practices being deployed across several countries and has become a robust conservation strategy for the detection and prevention of illegal wildlife trade. Learning from the experience of using wildlife sniffer dog squads in other countries, where TRAFFIC and WWF had collaborated with governments to use sniffer dogs to sniff out elephant ivory, rhino horn, leopard skin, tiger claws, shark fin and bushmeat at airports, seaports and other major transit points, India's pioneering wildlife sniffer dog training programme was launched in 2008.

Since its inception in the country, 66 wildlife sniffer dog squads have been trained and deployed across 19 states and the Union territory. Eight more wildlife sniffer dog squads will finish their training in June 2020. These extremely skilled and enthusiastic wildlife sniffer dogs popularly known as SUPER SNIFFERS have been specially trained to detect Tiger and Leopard skin, bones, canines, and teeth, along with other crucial wildlife contrabands. So far they have successfully assisted in over 350 wildlife crime cases across the country.

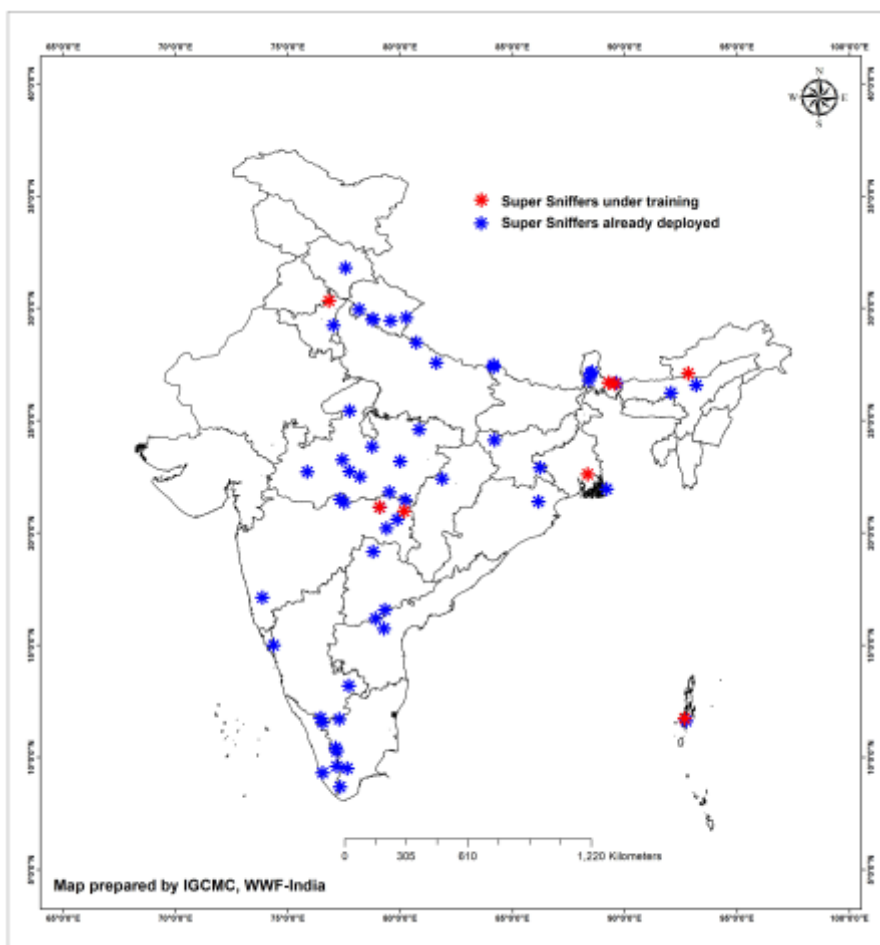
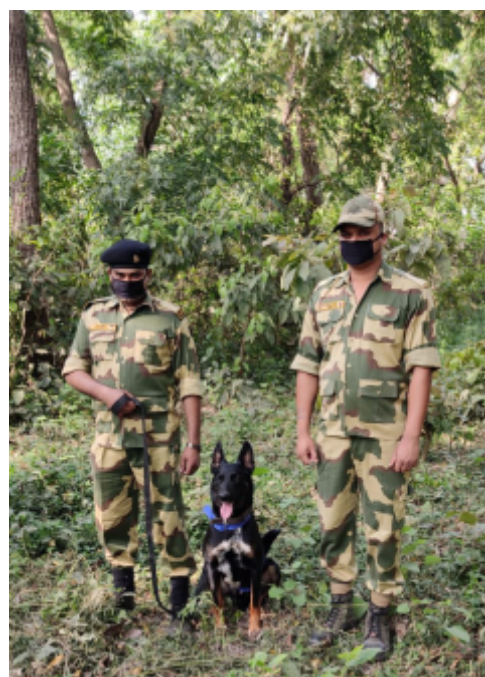


Figure 1: Wildlife sniffer dogs deployed in India

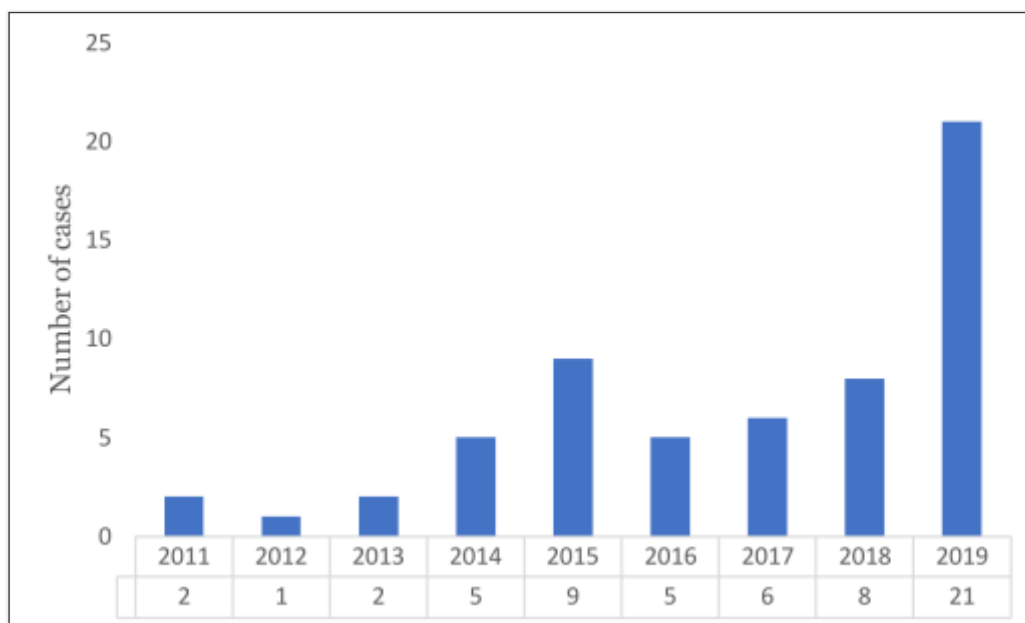


### Contribution of SUPER SNIFFERS to combating crime related to big cats in India

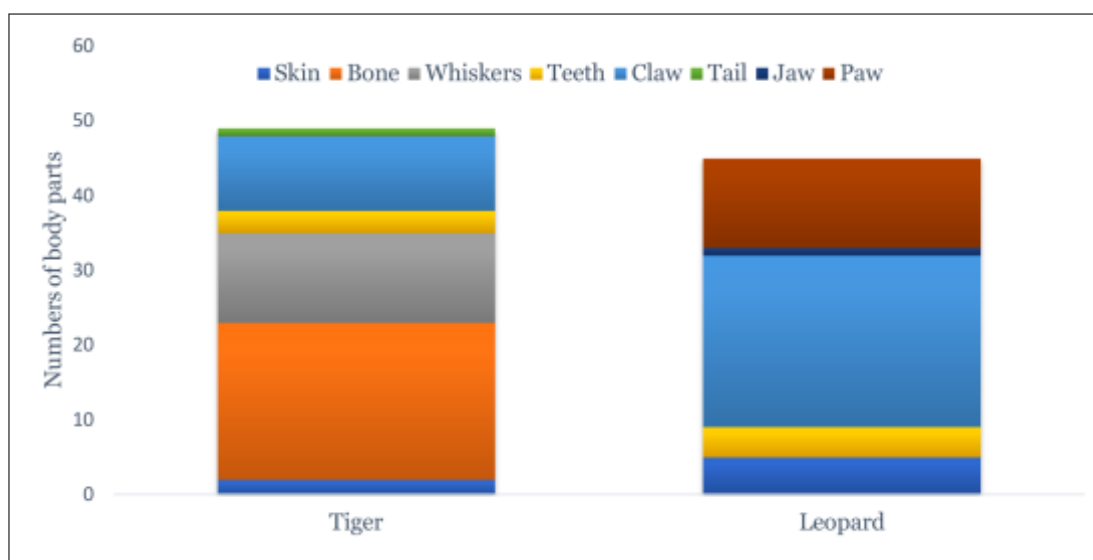
Strategically, most of the wildlife sniffer dog squads trained under TRAFFIC's programme are deployed mainly in the tiger bearing areas in India and have exhibited a proven track record of curbing poaching and trade of big cat species. From the data shared by the forest department, it was found that these dogs have helped in at least 59 wildlife crime cases related to Tigers (21) and Leopards (38).

While providing their assistance in solving these cases, these dog squads have also proven their skills in tracking and detecting hidden body parts of Tiger and Leopards, while in transit, hidden underground or in premises or fields. So far these dog squads have helped in recovering skins (2), bones (21), whiskers (12), teeth (3), claw (10), and tail (1) of Tigers; and skins (5), claw (23), teeth (4), jaw (1), paw (12), canine, whiskers, and bones of Leopards (Figure 3). Apart from these seizures, these highly skilled canines have also helped in solving at least 36 poaching cases related to Tigers (11) and Leopards (25) by either tracking the poacher or by providing crucial evidence to investigating officers.





**Figure 2: Year-wise cumulative number of Tiger and Leopard cases solved with help of wildlife sniffer dogs**



**Figure 3: Different body parts of Tigers and Leopards seized with the help of wildlife sniffer dogs**

## Discussion

Super Sniffers have proven their potential and capabilities wherever they have been deputed, however there is still a need to strengthen the wildlife sniffer dog force in India and have more wildlife sniffer and detector dog squads deployed across Tiger reserves and protected forest areas, transit points i.e. railway stations, ports, airports, state borders and national borders to combat poaching and illegal wildlife trade of Asian Big Cats. A better collaboration between dog training centres, enforcement agencies and conservation organisations is the need of the hour and will help facilitate deployment of these highly skilled force multipliers in the vulnerable areas in order to help stop wildlife crime. At present TRAFFIC has collaborated with state Forest Departments, Railway Protection Force, and three different government dog training centres/schools under this programme. TRAFFIC also strongly recommends deployment of these dogs at airports and seaports for multi-layered screening of luggage as well as cargoes—a preferred mode of transportation of wildlife products across long distances.



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## Bidding adieu to ‘Offer’, a wildlife dog at Tamil Nadu



© TRAFFIC

**O**ffer, a wildlife sniffer dog trained under TRAFFIC's programme in India was laid to rest on 5th May 2020 after succumbing to an acute liver and kidney infection. Offer was about five-years-old and a highly skilled Super Sniffer deployed at Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu.

In a short span of three and a half years of active service, Offer had helped in solving numerous wildlife cases ranging from tiger-related crime to sandalwood smuggling. Offer's exceptional tracking skills once even helped enforcement agencies to track a person who was lost in the forest.

Offer's services to wildlife conservation and protection started in 2016, when Tamil Nadu Forest Department asked TRAFFIC to help train a wildlife sniffer dog squad for Mudumalai Tiger Reserve. It was then that a young male Belgian Malinois dog along with his two handlers—Mr Vadivel, Forest Guard and Mr V. Sasidharan, Forest watcher—began their nine-month long training at the National Training Centre for Dogs (NTCD), BSF Academy, Tekanpur, Gwalior. After completion in October 2016, the dog squad joined forces at the Masinagudi Range of Mudumalai Tiger Reserve.

Offer not only served the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve but also surrounding Protected Areas. One of the most memorable wildlife cases included a sandalwood theft case when the dog led the investigating team to the hiding spot of the criminal. Similarly, in a tiger poisoning case, the sniffer dog led investigating officers from Mudumalai to Satyamangalam and helped in the arrest of the poachers and recovery of tiger bone, claw, tail, poison, snares and weapons.

Offer's short yet fruitful journey as a wildlife sniffer dog is heartwarming. He will be deeply missed by his handlers, staff of Mudumalai Tiger Reserve and TRAFFIC.



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## Outpost

**Tech companies take down 3 million online listings for trafficked wildlife including live tigers, reptiles, primates and birds**



## Tech companies take down 3 million online listings for trafficked wildlife including live tigers, reptiles, primates and birds

Online technology companies in the *Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online* reported removing or blocking over 3 million listings for endangered and threatened species and associated products from their online platforms to date. These listings included live tigers, reptiles, primates and birds for the exotic pet trade, as well as products derived from species like elephants, pangolins and marine turtles.

*Offline and in the Wild*, a report released on 2nd March 2020 highlighted the progress made by companies involved in the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), TRAFFIC and International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) Coalition and found that the efforts taken by these companies were helping to shut down the cloud-based trade routes cybercriminals rely on for exploiting wildlife.

The Coalition's progress has resulted from strengthened wildlife policies, an increase in staff ability to detect potential illegal wildlife products and live wild animals, regular monitoring and data sharing from wildlife experts, reports sent in by volunteers through the Coalition's Wildlife Cyber Spotter Program, enhanced algorithms—thanks to key search word monitoring and collation—and shared learning.

“Criminal networks are taking advantage of internet platforms at the expense of the rarest species nature has to offer,” said Crawford Allan, Senior Director for TRAFFIC. “But the vastness of the internet presents a challenge for law enforcement to regulate. The online companies in our Coalition now have the tools to fight back against wildlife trafficking online, and can help ease the burden on law enforcement.”

The Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online was born out of the global proliferation of internet access and the



resulting shift in illegal wildlife trade transactions from physical to online markets. The extensive number of listings removed by the Coalition's second anniversary demonstrates both the long-term effectiveness of the partnership and the continued commitment of the companies to prevent wildlife trafficking on their platforms. <https://www.endwildlifetraffickingonline.org/>.

For more information, please <https://www.traffic.org/news/tech-companies-take-down-3-million-online-listings-for-trafficked-wildlife/>



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## **CITES Update**

**CITES Standing Committee postpones the Animals & Plants Committee meetings until 2021**

# CITES Standing Committee postpones the Animals & Plants Committee meetings until 2021



© Dr Saket Badola

**T**he CITES Standing Committee has advised the Secretariat that the 31<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the CITES Animals Committee and the 25<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Plants Committee should be postponed until 2021. The 2020 meetings were originally scheduled to take place in Geneva, Switzerland, on 13–17th July and 17th–23rd July respectively.

The CITES Secretariat raised concerns with the Standing Committee over the health and safety of participants, as well as the implications of sanitary measures, border controls and travel restrictions currently in place to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus, some of which are likely to remain in place in July and even later.

After considering these concerns, the Standing Committee could not envisage holding face-to-face meetings as was originally intended. Looking at other proposals by the

Secretariat, the Committee came to the conclusion that a virtual meeting using an online platform with simultaneous interpretation would present challenges in terms of connectivity, equitability and timing for various participants, while the option of a short-term postponement would still be affected by uncertainties regarding travel.

Most members of the Standing Committee therefore concluded that extended meetings of the Animals and Plants Committees could be considered for 2021.

CITES Parties have been officially informed of these developments through the Notification to the Parties No.2020/045. The Secretariat will be announcing arrangements as well as new proposed dates for the meetings in due course.

The Animals and Plants Committees are made up of experts tasked with providing scientific and technical advice regarding species of wild fauna and flora that are or might become subject to CITES trade regulations in accordance with instructions from the Conference of the Parties. These two Committees gather twice between meetings of the Conference of the Parties.

[https://cites.org/eng/statement\\_AnimalsPlants\\_Committees\\_29052020](https://cites.org/eng/statement_AnimalsPlants_Committees_29052020)





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## **TRAFFIC Alert**

- 1. Tiger skin seized in Kolkata, three held**
- 2. Uttarakhand to get first Snow Leopard conservation centre in India**



## Tiger skin seized in Kolkata, three held

In January 2020, acting on a tip-off, officials of the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (eastern region) and West Bengal forest department conducted a joint raid in a hotel on the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass in east Kolkata. The raid led to the recovery of a tiger skin and arrest of three people. According to the news report, the tiger skin seized was reported to be an old one and not from a recent case of poaching. It was stuffed and likely to be on its way to a foreign buyer.

### TRAFFIC adds.....

With nearly 3,000 wild Royal Bengal Tigers *Panther tigris tigris* in India, the national animal has been constantly on the radar of wildlife smugglers and traders both in India and across borders. Live tiger cubs are smuggled for the pet trade; body parts and derivatives are used as an ingredient in traditional medicines in East and Southeast Asian countries; skin is used to make clothing, rugs, wall hangings etc and tiger claws and teeth are used to make amulets and jewellery.

In India, the tiger is listed in Schedule I of India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 making it illegal to poach or trade tigers or their parts and derivatives. Their international trade is further restricted under the CITES.

TRAFFIC's report on tiger poaching and illegal trade released in August 2019 analysed the 1,142 seizure incidents involving tigers for a 19-year period from 2000–2018 globally. The vast majority of these occurred in Tiger Range Countries (TRCs), accounting for 95.1% (1,086 incidents) of all tiger seizures globally. India (40.5%), China (11.0%) and Indonesia (10.4%) recorded the highest number of seizures.

Tiger skins and bones were the top two seized commodities in India, Indonesia, Nepal, and China according to seizure records. India in particular, accounted for 38% of the skins and 28% of the bones seized globally between 2000 and 2018. Claws and teeth were most frequently captured in India, Macau SAR and Indonesia.

India recorded the largest overall number of seizures (463), headed at the state/province level by Maharashtra (13.0%), followed by Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh (both 11.8%).

This clearly indicates that despite the robust protection status of tigers in India and the concerted efforts in place for conservation and protection of the species, poaching and illegal wildlife trade continues to remain a major threat.

### Sources:

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/tiger-skin-seized-in-kolkata-three-held/story-VrS7oE1bcZwMSnTK3ExiSP.html>  
"Skin and Bones Unresolved: An Analysis of Tiger Seizures from 2000-2018 at <https://www.traffic.org/publications/reports/skin-and-bones-unresolved/>



# 2

## Uttarakhand to get first Snow Leopard conservation centre in India

**U**ttarakhand is set to open the country's first dedicated Snow Leopard conservation centre for an animal considered to be one of the most enigmatic wild cat species due to its reclusive nature.

The project aims at protection and propagation of the species in higher reaches of the hill state which are the natural habitat of the elusive big cat. The centre will be built at the entry point of Gangotri National Park some 2,800 metres above sea level. However, no time limit has been set for the project. It will be built under a central government scheme "SECURE Himalaya". The centre has been designed by experts from the Netherlands.

In Uttarakhand, Snow Leopards are found in Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve, Gangotri National Park, Askot Wildlife Sanctuary and other places of altitude between 3,000–4,500 metres.

### TRAFFIC adds.....

Snow Leopards *Panthera uncia* are found in the western Himalayas in the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and in the eastern Himalayas in the states of Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. The global population of Snow Leopards is estimated between 3,920 and 6,390 animals while in India there are reported to be between 450–500 animals.

In India, Snow Leopards are protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, under which poaching, trade and any other forms of utilisation are punishable offences. Globally, the species is listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) prohibiting its international trade.

TRAFFIC and WWF's report *An Ounce of Prevention: Snow leopard crime revisited* released in 2016 had found hundreds of these endangered big cats being killed illegally each year across their range in Asia's high mountains. It had estimated that between 221–450 Snow Leopards were poached annually since 2008—a minimum of four per week. But this number could be substantially higher since many killings in remote areas go undetected. TRAFFIC's analysis confirmed the worrying scale of illegal killing of Snow Leopards. A dedicated conservation centre for Snow Leopards is crucial to enhancing measures for long term protection of the species in the wild.

Under the SECURE Himalaya project led by the Government of India through the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP-India), State Forest Departments and TRAFFIC, surveys are being undertaken in the habitat of Snow Leopards to understand poaching threats and to map these sites, while also working with law enforcement agencies to strengthen protection measures for the species. n and protection of the species, poaching and illegal wildlife trade continues to remain a major threat.

### Sources:

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2020/jan/30/uttarakhand-to-get-first-snow-leopard-conservation-center-of-india-2096800.html>

<https://www.traffic.org/publications/reports/an-ounce-of-prevention/>



# Signpost

Other significant news stories

## Air passenger held for smuggling leopard cub from Thailand

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
CHENNAI, FEBRUARY 2

A 45-YEAR-OLD passenger from Thailand was arrested and a nearly one-month-old leopard cub seized from his luggage at the Chennai International Airport in the early hours of Saturday. An official statement from the customs commissioner said the passenger and the leopard cub have been handed over to the state forest department in Chennai for further investigation.



The month-old leopard

The air intelligence unit had received a tip-off about possible smuggling of wild animals and officers were on alert when the

Thai Airways flight from Bangkok landed around 2 am. Among the many random suspects whose movements were being watched by sleuths at different points, Kaja Moideen was among the few who were stopped after completing necessary security checks.

"A close watch was kept on his movement and after he collected his checked-in luggage, he was noticed walking in a rather hurried manner. It was observed that a faint trill sound was coming from his luggage," an official statement said.

Sunday Express, New Delhi; 02/02/2020

## Farmer held with 14 lion claws in Gujarat's Amreli

**Ahmedabad:** A farmer has been apprehended with 14 claws which he had removed earlier in February from a dead lion in the Tulshishyam Range of Gujarat's Gir Forest, senior official said on Monday.

The farmer, identified as 45-year-old Vashram Dhapa of Pachapachiya village in Khambha taluka from Amreli, was nabbed Sunday from his farm in nearby Sonariya based on a tip-off, DT Vasavada, Chief Conservator of Forests, Junagadh Wildlife Circle said.

"In February, a lion, aged between five to nine years, was found dead in the Tulshishyam

range Gir East division by forest staff. Fourteen of its claws were missing. We had then formed a special team to nab the person responsible," Vasavada said.

"We zeroed in on Dhapa who has confessed that he had removed the claws and hid them near his farm in Sonariya. We have recovered all 14 claws," he informed. He added that, as of now, it had not been established whether Dhapa killed the lion for its claws but the angle was being pursued. "Claws are worn by some people as pendants. We are probing if Dhapa had a connection to gangs dealing in such items," he said. **PTI**

Pioneer; Delhi; 02/04/2020

## Tigers could be wiped out in Myanmar, Thailand: Study

Nichol M. Ghera  
nichol.ghera@chandra.net

**New Delhi:** While tigers in South Asia and Russia are thriving, Thailand and Myanmar could probably see their tiger populations get wiped out in 11 years and four years respectively, a risk assessment by the Global Tiger Forum (GTF) revealed at the third global stocktaking meet on tiger conservation. The GTF's assessment also showed that India topped the score on the global tiger recovery programme (GTRP), followed by Russia, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh.

Eleven of the 13 tiger range countries are participating in the meet to review the St Petersburg declaration goal of doubling wild tiger population globally.

The GTF carried out a risk assessment, scientifically known as population and habitat viability assessment, in all tiger range countries to ascertain the challenges they faced in recovery of tigers. However, at the habitat loss and low prey base in the Southeast Asian countries as one of the primary reasons for



The GTF carried out a risk assessment, scientifically known as population and habitat viability assessment, in all tiger range countries.—PFE

### CAUSAL EFFECT

Based on the risk assessment study, experts said the absence of political leadership on wildlife in Southeast Asian countries has hampering the tiger recovery programme.

national intergovernmental organisation that focuses on global tiger conservation.

The assessment pointed at the habitat loss and low prey base in the Southeast Asian countries as one of the primary reasons for

decline in the health of tiger ecosystems and highlighted the best practices in South Asian countries. These included intensive monitoring, regional co-operation, technical surveillance and habitat conservation.

Thailand, currently, has an estimated 189 tigers while Myanmar is said to have between 20 and 30 tigers, as per rough estimates.

"A mid-term review and revamping of the 2003 declaration is necessary," said SP Yadav, former deputy secretary general, GTF and currently, secretary, UP Biodiversity Board.

DNA, Mumbai; 29/01/2020



Forest officials with leopard hide and the accused at Kanjolia (Amreli)

## Leopard hide traders gang busted, 3 held

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
Ahmedabad

**KANJOLIA** Forest officials of Marjandhap district on Monday claimed to have busted a gang of animal hide smugglers and arrested three persons. The officials also seized a 125 cm long leopard hide from their possession.

The trio have been identified as Shri Ashok and Shri Ramesh of Kanjolia village and Shri Chandra of Kanjolia village.

Conservation of Forest (ACF) the Indian Forest Dept. and acting on a tip-off, a special team comprising forest of Kanjolia Pradeep Kumar Patil, Suresh Kumar Patil, and Suresh Kumar Patil was formed.

As per the direction of Kanjolia Divisional Forest

Officer P. Sharma, the gang had kept a close eye on the movement of the accused. The official caught Ashok and Ramesh in Kanjolia under their house and arrested them on Sunday night when they were carrying the animal hide on a motorcycle from Tule to Kanjolia.

While the leopard's age is around five to six years, its gender is yet to be ascertained. Further investigation is continuing to catch others who are involved in the racket. The hide traders have been arrested under the provisions of Wildlife Protection Act 1972. They were produced in Kanjolia Sub Divisional Judicial Magistrate Court on Monday.

The New Indian Express; Bhubaneswar; 26/03/2020

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#StopIllegalWildlifeTrade

**TRAFFIC**  
the wildlife trade monitoring network



50  
YEARS IN INDIA