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LIZARDS

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.

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

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

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CONTENTS

From the Desk

Dr Saket Badola, IFS
Head of TRAFFIC, India Office

Dear Readers

Lives of all of us have changed dramatically in the last few months as the world faced, and continues to face, the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic. As of November 2020, more than 1.2 million human fatalities had been reported worldwide with over 51 million confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Aside from the fact that COVID-19 is a zoonotic disease, everything else about SARS-CoV-2's origins is open to question, including the critical question of how it made the species jump from animals to people. The virus has demonstrated the devastating impact of zoonotic diseases on human health and economies, and the urgent need to mitigate against such future outbreaks.

India, while fighting the battle against coronavirus, also faces the problem of illegal wildlife trade for meat consumption; use of wild animal's parts and derivatives in traditional medicines, as well as illegal import of exotic animals for the thriving pet trade. With little knowledge about the risk of zoonotic diseases, communities continue to poach, trade and consume wild animals and in even higher numbers during the pandemic, as revealed by TRAFFIC's report *Indian wildlife amidst the COVID-19 crisis: An analysis of poaching and illegal wildlife trade* published in June 2020.

Large numbers of wild animals have become victim to poaching for illegal wildlife trade in India, some better known than others. One group that has received little attention has been “lizards”.

Did you know that India is home to over 230 lizard species of which only a handful are protected under India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972? Issue 34 of the *TRAFFIC Post* focuses on threats to wild lizards from illegal wildlife trade in India and brings to the forefront information regarding targeted lizards species, gaps in wild law enforcement and various drivers of illicit trade.

Under the WILD CRY section, an article entitled “Lizards impacted by illegal wildlife trade” focuses on the drivers of illegal trade of lizards in India, in particular the local consumer demand for their body parts and derivatives made out of them. The meat and internal organs of wild lizards are consumed as delicacies, while many parts and derivatives are used as ingredients in traditional medicines, particularly from monitor lizards and Tokay Geckos. Additionally, sizeable numbers of lizards are also trafficked out of the country for the global pet market.

The illegal trade in lizards also flourishes in various part of India. While monitor lizards Varanus spp. are targeted primarily for their meat, skin, oil, and genitalia (sold as *Hatha Jodi*), Indian Spiny-tailed Lizards *Saara hardwickii* are hunted for their meat and fat, consumed as food and medicines.

There is also a global demand for several lizard species found in the country such as leopard geckos *Eublepharis* spp., Flying Dragon *Draco volans*, Indian Chameleon *Chamaeleo zeylanicus*, and Andaman Island Day Gecko

© Dr Saket Badola

Phelsuma andamanense for the illegal pet trade. The Flying Gecko *Gekko kuhli* is targeted both for the illegal pet trade and for consumption.

Another interesting read under the INFOCUS section of the *TRAFFIC Post* is on the internet emerging as a new platform for trade in wildlife, including lizards. The article recommends creating a coalition of India's internet companies and wildlife organisations to deal with this ever-increasing menace and provides details about global experiences in achieving this objective.

This issue of *TRAFFIC Post* also introduces a new section entitled WEIRD & WILD that allows the reader to explore strange and unknown world of illegal wildlife trade, providing a glimpse of lesser known unique wildlife products and derivatives in high demand.

I trust that readers of this issue will develop a better understanding about the drivers and treats of the ongoing, dynamic and illegal trade of wildlife, which in turn is depleting planetary biodiversity and making all of us more vulnerable for pandemics like the ongoing one.

Happy Reading!

Dr Saket Badola, IFS
Head- TRAFFIC, India Office

A

In Focus

The internet: an emerging platform for illegal trade of wildlife

(A study of reptile trade in cyberspace)

Vihang Jumle and Saket Badola
(TRAFFIC, India Office)

The internet: an emerging platform for illegal trade of wildlife

(A study of reptile trade in cyberspace)

Wildlife is being freely traded online, a trend which is believed to have exponentially increased in recent times with the increase in penetration of the internet. Although several kinds of wildlife or their derivatives appear on cyberspace, reptiles are one of the favourite groups of animals traded (legally and illegally) there. A 2018 study in Germany found reptiles were the "most traded" wildlife group traded online[1]. An examination of the reptile trade also provides insight into the practices employed for trading other wildlife species online.

According to the 2018 German study, most posts selling reptiles were found on online German forums and "closed" Facebook groups. Once purchased, live specimens (including some CITES-listed species) were then delivered to buyers via courier services. While the online trade in snakes is relatively well known, the trade in lizards is also significant, although they receive limited attention from enforcement agencies or in the media. The animals are traded as pets, for food or for their body parts, at levels potentially posing a conservation threat. An example is the Earless Monitor Lizard *Lanthanotus borneensis*, which is only found in Borneo and was barely seen in the wild since its description in 1878. Following its rediscovery and publication of enough detail to disclose its location, although no export permits were issued by range states, the species began to appear in online trade from 2012 onwards, with high demand from Japan, Ukraine, France, Germany, and the Czech Republic[2], which in turn threatened the species's very survival.[3]

Online trade of reptiles and their products is also widespread in India. Communities across the country have been found to trade in "*Hatha Jodi*", which are the genital organs of monitor lizards but are falsely claimed to be of plant origin and are prescribed for religious activities and used in black magic. *Hatha Jodis* were found to be readily available for sale on prominent e-commerce websites until the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) under "Operation Wildnet" took steps to detect and delist *Hatha Jodi* advertisements on several of them. Despite this, advertisements[4] soon reappeared and continue to do so, showing the difficulties of regulating this trade in cyberspace. There is potential for other reptile species and products to appear online in India: in March 2020, law enforcement agencies started probing a huge Spiny-tailed Lizard oil trade racket in Banni district.[5] TRAFFIC will be looking for signs of this trade appearing online.

Is the internet a boon for humanity but a bane for wildlife?

While the internet has become the backbone of many people's work and a huge boost to many businesses, it is also fuelling a burgeoning problem: online illegal wildlife trade. This has been an ongoing phenomenon that has mushroomed as access to the internet has become easier and cheaper and with the establishment of e-commerce as the new-norm of carrying out business.

Broadly speaking, illegal wildlife trade used to be a clandestine activity operating through and within a closed network of regional traders. E-commerce (and newer internet technologies), however, suddenly gave all traders a platform to connect with global buyers from the comfort of their homes. The sheer scale of online commerce has enabled some of those trading wildlife illegally to hide in plain sight and trade in wildlife products that contribute to the erosion of global biodiversity. Other technical advances, such as masked identities, financial transactions using cryptocurrency and easy access to logistics, have helped facilitate online wildlife trafficking.


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The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased poaching in some regions, such as India[6] and in China[7], it has speeded up the transition from physical to online markets as wildlife traders sought alternative outlets. This sudden and unchecked proliferation of online trade has introduced many wildlife traders to the advantages of using these platforms whilst significantly impacting the capacity of law enforcement staff to monitor, investigate and act on any illegal activities. The network effect also plays a role in bringing in new online traders: if your friends use WhatsApp, why would you not use it too? And with each new trader joining the internet, the network grows wider and becomes more difficult to monitor. In some geographies, the online network extends down to those poaching wildlife products. The internet enables wildlife traders—both legal and illegal operators—to reach out to a transnational clientele, creating significant monitoring and regulation challenges.

Although the internet (world wide web) is inherently global in nature, national internet and data sharing laws are not globally compatible. Numerous legal impediments often delay or completely restrict data sharing between countries to resolve international cybercrimes. This leads to low conviction rates for the already suppressed number of cybercrime detections. However, there is some progress with countries signing the Budapest Convention or the recent UN resolution for "*Countering the use of information and communication technologies for criminal purposes*"[8] although much more is needed to tackle international cybercrime effectively. Additionally, many countries are yet to develop national frameworks to address cybercrimes and IT laws globally face scrutiny in trying to regulate new digital technologies. Circumstances have led to private internet companies upholding their social responsibility and voluntarily restricting suspect trade in wildlife on their platforms while global law enforcement agencies develop adequate capacity. Fortunately, this seems to be a workable solution currently.

A significant portion of online trade is facilitated by a small number of internet platforms. These platforms are mainstream, branded, secure, and operate as multinational companies. Hence, they also attract most buyers, and (wildlife) sellers too. While there is an on-going debate over whether these companies can curate product listings on their platforms (remain as neutral intermediators and not

be held responsible for illegal activity), they do have a say in delisting products that violate platform guidelines (such as in narcotics, weapons), when reported or as directed by national law enforcement agencies. Simply, these companies—depending how their systems are designed—can search, delist, and restrict certain products on their platform. The companies also store valuable seller data that can potentially help law enforcement agencies quickly to nip online illegal wildlife trade in the bud. It could prove rewarding if private internet companies and law enforcement agencies team up to share responsibility for curbing the activities of those seeking to trade prohibited wildlife.

The Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online[9]—a collaborative group of largely US and Chinese private internet companies jointly facilitated by TRAFFIC, WWF, and IFAW—sets a precedence for other countries, especially India, to form such a voluntary grouping to tackle online illegal wildlife trade. The coalition partners have adopted tailored "Illegal Wildlife Trade Free" policies and have so far collectively removed (or blocked) over 3 million species listings in just two years. Establishing an inspired version of this coalition in India as the number of online wildlife traders surges (owing to India's fast paced internet use and penetration) should facilitate proactive curtailment of illegal trading of reptiles and other wildlife and products thereof. Any Indian group should involve national law enforcement agencies to increase government-industry collaboration and take targeted, collective, and legal action against wildlife criminals. In September 2019, an important "*Stakeholders meeting to find measures to help curb illegal wildlife trade on cyberspace in India*" was organised by TRAFFIC and the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), Government of India in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy, New Delhi and WWF-India at the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEF&CC). Delegates expressed collective interest in establishing such a coalition in India to increase dialogue on online wildlife crimes in the country. Today's challenging times could be used as an impetus to formalise this arrangement.

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Wild Cry

Lizards impacted by illegal wildlife trade

Neha Shukla and Merwyn Fernandes
TRAFFIC, India Office

Lizards impacted by illegal wildlife trade

© Magnus Lundgren / Wild Wonders of China / WWF

Lizards have inhabited the earth for millions of years and have lived in our surroundings ever since the advent of humanity. They help in balancing ecosystems by playing the role of both a predator feasting on insects, rodents, bird eggs, snakes, fish, and crabs, thus regulating their populations; and are in turn prey for other predators.

Out of nearly 6,000 species of lizards found in the world (Khalid *et al.*, 2019), India is home to 231 species (Aengals *et al.,* 2018). However, various human induced factors are posing a serious threat to the future of lizards across the globe and also within the country. Habitats have been degraded or altered due to expansion of agricultural lands and pollution, affecting the wild population of lizards in India. Besides this, humans also persecute these animals out of unwarranted fear of having them around.

One of the most serious and immediate threats to lizards comes from ongoing poaching and illegal wildlife trade to meet domestic and international demand. Lizard meat is consumed, and their body parts are used as an ingredient in traditional medicines. They are also smuggled as pets and poached for their skin to make articles like bags, shoes, and other accessories.

Legal status of lizards in India

Of the 231 lizard species found in India, merely a handful are protected under India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (WPA,1972). These include the Indian Chameleon *Chamaeleo zeylanicus*, Bengal Monitor *Varanus bengalensis*, Desert Monitor *V. griseus*, Water Monitor *V. salvator*, Yellow Monitor *V. flavescens*, Golden Gecko *Calodactylodes aureus*, Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard *Saara hardwickii*, and Tokay Gecko *Gekko gecko*.

Species	Scientific name	WPA, 1972 Schedule	CITES Appendix	IUCN* Red List
Indian Chameleon	*Chamaeleo zeylanicus*	II	II	Least Concern
Bengal Monitor	*Varanus bengalensis*	I	I	Least Concern
Desert Monitor	*Varanus griseus*	I	I	Not Listed
Golden Gecko	*Calodactylodes aureus*	I	-	Least Concern
Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard	*Saara hardwickii*	II	II	Not Listed
Tokay Gecko	*Gekko gecko*	IV	II	Least Concern
Water Monitor	*Varanus salvator*	I	II	Least Concern
Yellow Monitor	*Varanus flavescens*	I	I	Least Concern

* **IUCN:** International Union for Conservation of Nature

India's WPA,1972, prohibits poaching, trade, and any other forms of utilisation of the species listed under various Schedules of the Act. International trade is further regulated through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The IUCN Red List provides an insight into the conservation status of the species in the country and globally.

Drivers of poaching and illegal trade of lizards in India

The main driver of poaching and illegal wildlife trade of lizards is consumer demand for their body parts and derivatives made out of them. Meat and internal organs of wild lizards are consumed as delicacies while many parts and derivatives are used as ingredients in traditional medicines, particularly from monitor lizards and Tokay geckos. A sizeable number of lizards are also traded for the illegal pet trade.

The illegal trade in lizards also flourishes in various parts of India. While monitor lizards *Varanus* spp. are targeted primarily for their meat, skin, oil, and genitalia (sold as *Hatha Jodi*), Indian Spiny-tailed Lizards *Saara hardwickii* are hunted for their meat which is consumed as food and medicines.

There is also a global demand for several lizard species found in the country such as leopard geckos *Eublepharis spp*., Flying Dragon *Draco volans*, Indian Chameleon *Chamaeleo zeylanicus*, and Andaman Island Day Gecko *Phelsuma andamanense* for the illegal pet trade. The Flying Gecko *Gekko kuhli* is targeted both for the illegal pet trade and for consumption.

The main drivers of lizard trade and the respective species targeted are as follows:

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DRIVER 1: Occult practices
SPECIES TARGETED: Monitor lizards

Several products from protected wildlife species are traded for occult practices including *Hatha Jodi* used in sorcery and for making amulets. The demand for *Hatha Jodi*, a term traditionally used for the root of a plant, Tiger's Claw *Martynia annua*, is one of the major drivers of poaching and illegal trade of monitor lizards in India today. Structurally, the dried genital organ (male hemipenes) of a monitor lizard resembles a Tiger's Claw root, and are

deliberately traded as such as these find diverse uses in traditional Ayurveda medicine. Poaching of monitor lizards in India mainly impacts populations of Bengal Monitor, followed by other species *viz*. Yellow Monitor and Water Monitor (Bhattacharya and Koch 2018). Across India, poachers accumulate *Hatha Jodi* either after killing a lizard or separating the genitals while it is still alive and trade it to various regions within the country.

DRIVER 2: Food and Healthcare
SPECIES TARGETED: Monitor lizards, Tokay Geckos, Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard

Monitor lizards (Bengal and Water) are also widely poached for their meat which is regarded as a delicacy and believed to have rich medicinal attributes. The meat is considered a delicacy and an aphrodisiac in southern India (Subramanean and Reddy 2012; Seshan and Niraj 2015), West Bengal (Varadaraju 2013) and Assam (Choudhury and Choudhury 2019). The derivatives obtained from it are believed to cure several diseases, including asthma, haemorrhoids, rheumatism, arthritis, burns, as well as spider and snake bites (Subramanean and Reddy 2012). Apart from the meat, the eggs, skin, and internal organs are also consumed in other regions such as the Sunderbans (Varadaraju 2013).

The Tokay Gecko is also targeted for its meat, tongue and internal organs which are used in traditional Asian medicines as a remedy for illnesses including asthma, cancer, diabetes, impotence, and skin diseases. There has been excessive poaching and illicit trade of Tokay Geckos in northeast India, largely to meet demand in East Asia for the species's purported medicinal properties (Subramanean and Reddy 2012).

In 2009, a new global trend in the illicit trafficking of Tokay Geckos arose, as a potential cure for Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). The species's tongue and internal organs were in demand as a purported antidote for HIV/AIDS and cancer (Caillabet 2011). In parts of Asia, Tokay Geckos are consumed in wine or whisky to increase strength and vigour. Some tonics involve the whole lizard, or extracts with other ingredients like ginseng *Panax* spp., goji berries *Lycium* spp., scorpions *Scorpiones* spp., seahorses *Hippocampus* spp. and snakes *Serpentes* spp. imbued in alcohol (Caillabet 2013).

The Indian Chameleon is also poached for medicinal purposes and as pets, however, estimates of the number smuggled are small, about 100 individuals per year (Srinivasulu *et al.*, 2014) although this may simply reflect a lack of information on a species that draws little attention from either researchers or law enforcement authorities.

The Indian Spiny-tailed lizard is poached for its oil that is derived from the skin and tail of the lizard. This oil is believed to be an aphrodisiac and to possess medicinal properties, particularly as a cure for impotence. Across its range, this species is poached for its meat that is consumed as a delicacy and the meat and oil as a source of sustenance by local communities (Chauhan *et al.*, 2019).

DRIVER 3: Fashion items
Species targeted: Monitor lizards

The skin of monitor lizards is extensively utilised to manufacture leather goods and products and is expensive (Subramanian and Reddy 2012). The population of Desert Monitor in Rajasthan is reported to be declining due to poaching for skins (Das 2017). Water Monitor Lizard skins are the most conspicuous in trade (Koch *et al.*, 2013).

DRIVER 4: Pet trade
Species targeted: Monitor lizards, Tokay Gecko, Leopard Gecko, Indian Chameleon

Monitor lizards are among the most prevalent reptile groups in the global pet trade due to their large size, appearance, and intelligence. Water Monitors are said to be one of the seven most frequently encountered monitor lizard species exported illegally for the pet trade (Koch *et al.*, 2013).

Tokay Geckos are targeted to a lesser extent as pets (Caillabet 2013). In September 2020, 14 live Tokay Geckos were seized by the Border Security Force (BSF) that were being trafficked into India from Bangladesh across the border in North 24 Parganas District in West Bengal (Singh 2020).

Leopard Geckos are under threat from poaching for the illegal pet trade (Mirza *et al.,* 2014). In 2015, two Leopard Geckos were seized and one person apprehended in Baikunthyapur forest division, northern West Bengal. The lizards were allegedly destined for markets in Nepal (The Statesman 2015).

Indian Chameleons are also seen in illegal pet trade, with approximately 100 individuals seized annually (Srinivasulu *et al.,* 2014). In one incident in 2018, forest officials detained two people and seized a 45 cm chameleon from them. The two caught the lizard in Kharnashi reserve forest, Mahakalapada forest range in Kendrapara, Odisha, and were smuggling it abroad through Paradip port for the pet trade (Panda 2018).

Way forward

In its effort to conserve biodiversity, India was one of the proponents for inclusion of Tokay Gecko in Appendix II of CITES during the 18th Conference of the Parties (CoP18) in 2019. Parties considered its inclusion was warranted given the species's excessive poaching for traditional medicines and the international pet trade, and the Tokay Gecko was successfully included in CITES Appendix II.

Despite India's WPA, 1972, providing legal protection to wild animal species, poaching and illegal trade continues today, posing a significant threat to the survival of some lizard species in the country. To help curb lizard trafficking in India, TRAFFIC recommends the following:

Research and monitoring

- Academic institutes should be encouraged to help collect information on current populations and distribution of many lizard species, which is currently lacking, to help understand which species are vulnerable to poaching.
- Reports of illegal captive breeding of some lizard species should be investigated and appropriate action taken.
- Effective measures should be put in place to counter illegal online trade of lizard species, whether via ecommerce sites, social media sites or through use of mobile technology. This can be done by collaboration between business managing these sector and the MoEF&CC.

Capacity building of law enforcement agencies

- As some of these lizard species are listed in Schedule I of WPA, 1972, effective protection and implementation of India's WPA, 1972, should be undertaken—through awareness and capacity building for law enforcement agencies, in particular the Forest Department, Customs, Railway Protection Force, Border Police Force, and Police.
- Awareness amongst the judiciary of the legal protected status of lizards is needed, especially in states prone to poaching and illegal trade of these species.

Strengthening legal status

- The Leopard Gecko, Flying Gecko and Flying Dragon should be brought under appropriate Schedules of the WPA, 1972—currently these species are not included in the legislation.

Awareness

- Targeted awareness programmes are essential in certain regions and districts where lizard species are targeted for occult practices and where their products are consumed as medicines.
- It is critical to build support for conservation of lizards through educational programmes in schools and institutes, highlighting the role of lizards in the ecosystem.

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C

TRAFFIC Updates (India)

1. Special TRAFFIC and WWF-India section on wildlife issues features in Vistara's inflight magazine

2. TRAFFIC shifts wildlife law enforcement training and discussions in India online due to COVID-19

3. Secure Himalayas! Secure your Future: TRAFFIC appeals to communities in Uttarakhand

OWL

PROTECT THE WILD

Owls have been a source of fascination for both young and old occupying a prominent place in story books and folklore.

#DYK that an owl can turn its head 270 degrees in each direction, and that a group of owls is called a

Generally nocturnal by nature, owls are a crucial part of the ecosystem. They are top predators in the food chain and especially beneficial to farmers as they help keep a check on rodent populations in agricultural areas.

Spotted Owlet © Manish Hariprasa

STITION THREATENS THE FUTURE OF OWLS IN INDIA

are reported to be trapped magic and sorcery every k magic practitioners l parts such as the skull, ws, heart, liver, kidney, tears, eggshells, meat, nial *pujas* and rituals. und Diwali making the reminder of the dark

er India's Wildlife aking it illegal to them or their body nd trade of owls

Brown Fish-owl © TRAFFIC

- India is home to over 30 species of owl of which 13 have been found in illegal wildlife trade.
- Rock Eagle-owl, Brown Fish-owl, Dusky Eagle-owl, Collared Scops-owl and Mottled Wood-owl are most common in illegal wildlife trade.
- Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Uttarakhand have emerged as hotspots for this trade.

YOU CAN HELP!

trade of owls. **EDUCATE** others. **SUPPORT** initiatives that help protect

ian wildlife amidst the COVID-19 crisis:

n analysis of status of poaching and illegal wildlife trade

Saket Badola

2020

Special TRAFFIC and WWF-India section in wildlife issues features in Vistara's inflight magazine

Spotted Owlet© Manish Hariprasad

Travelling on a Vistara flight anytime soon? Dive into the “Soul Issue” of their inflight magazine, available on Vistara World, to get acquainted with wildlife conservation issues in a special section titled "Protect the Wild". This initiative was launched in September 2020 by Vistara, TRAFFIC and WWF-India.

The “Soul Issue” of the Vistara inflight magazine featured "Victims of an Elephantine Crisis" drawing attention to issues that threaten wild elephants in India, including poaching for their ivory tusks, used to make jewellery, artefacts and other decorative items; or for other body parts such as skin, tail hair, molar teeth, bones etc. in demand in national and international illegal wildlife markets.

The “Muse Issue” of the Vistara inflight magazine highlights the threat of poaching and illegal trade to owls that peaks around the festival of Diwali when thousands of owls across the country are trapped and killed for black magic and sorcery purposes linked to superstitions, totems, and taboos.

In the coming months, Vistara will support TRAFFIC and WWF-India through a series of inflight magazine issues highlighting different wildlife species, the conservation crisis around them and how can the public make a difference.

Ms Rashmi Soni, Vice President and Head of Corporate Communications, Vistara said, "At Vistara, environment and sustainability are at the core of our operations. While we are committed to providing travellers with the finest flying experience, we strive to follow sustainable practices in every possible way. It gives us great joy to join hands with TRAFFIC's India Office to increase awareness on illegal wildlife trade through our well-regarded Vistara inflight magazine".

Dr Saket Badola, Head of TRAFFIC’s India Office said "We are extremely grateful to Vistara for coming forward to help us raise awareness on wildlife protection issues in India through their inflight magazine. This is not the first time Vistara has shown its support, as in the past too they have actively engaged in driving initiatives by TRAFFIC and WWF-India".

To view the elephant advertorial, please visit https://www.airvistara.com/in/en/vistara-experience/on-board/inflight-magazine/read-magazine?Issue=September2020 and the owl advertorial on https://www.airvistara.com/in/en/vistara-experience/on-board/inflight-magazine/read-magazine?Issue=November2020.

PROTECT THE WILD

Asian Elephant

#DYK that elephants spend nearly 19 hours a day feeding and producing about 220 pounds of dung while wandering. This helps to disperse germinating seeds across a large area crucial to the health of the forest. Elephants use tusks to dig wells to access water and, in the process, create watering holes for other animals.

VICTIMS OF AN '*ELEPHANTINE*' CRISIS

With a population of 27000+ distributed across 23 states of India, the Asian Elephant Elephas maximus is found in subtropical broadleaf forests, tropical broadleaf moist forests, dry forests, and grasslands of the country. It has been accorded the highest protection under the Indian wildlife laws. The international trade of elephants and their body parts is also prohibited.

Elephants in India are revered, and hold a significant position in the nation's culture and religion. Despite this, the largest herbivore of the country has been facing a serious conservation crisis. Encroachment of forests, degradation of habitat and loss of migratory corridors are leading to escalation in human-elephant conflict, often with harmful outcomes on both the sides.

Elephants in India have also been a victim of poaching and illegal wildlife trade. Elephants are hunted mainly for their tusks (ivory) which are used to make jewellery, artefacts and other decorative items. Their body parts like skin, tail hair, molar teeth, bones and others are also in demand in national and international illegal wildlife trade markets.

YOU CAN HELP!

DO NOT BUY wildlife products made from elephant ivory. SUPPORT initiatives that help protect and conserve wildlife. CONTRIBUTE! Scan the QR code to know more.

TRAFFIC
the wildlife trade monitoring network

TRAFFIC is a leading non-governmental organisation working globally on trade in wild animals and plants in the context of both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. In India, it operates as a programme division of WWF-India.

www.trafficindia.org ; www.wwfindia.org; www.traffic.org

WWF 50 YEARS IN INDIA

TRAFFIC shifts wildlife law enforcement training and discussions in India online due to COVID-19

In order to continue with efforts to curb poaching and illegal wildlife trade during the COVID-19 pandemic, TRAFFIC has moved its training programmes, discussions and other operations in India to online platforms. Below are some examples of the online engagements organised by TRAFFIC.

1. **Environment Education for Sustainable Development: Role of Universities, NGOs & Civil Society:** A webinar under the environment and sustainability colloquium was organised by the Jindal Law School, WWF-India and TRAFFIC on 29th July 2020.

   Dr Saket Badola, Head of TRAFFIC's India Office participated as a panelist in this webinar that highlighted rapidly increasing carbon emissions, exposure to disproportionately decreasing air quality, the threat of extinction to a million animal and plant species and other pressing environmental challenges we face today. The meeting also highlighted the important role played by educators, NGOs and civil society for protection of the environment, creating awareness and promoting a greener lifestyle. A streamlined collaboration between universities, NGOs and civil society to drive change and also scale it in a sustainable manner was emphasised by various panellists during the webinar.

2. **Pandemics and Illegal Wildlife Trade: Are we learning our lessons?** A webinar to explore and understand the correlation between illegal wildlife trade and pandemics was organised by The Wildlife Preservation Society in collaboration with TRAFFIC's India Office on 2nd August 2020. As a keynote speaker, Dr Saket Badola spoke about zoonotic diseases that have impacted humanity in the past and warned about the potential link between illegal wildlife trade and new and emerging zoonotic diseases.

3. **Countering Wildlife Trafficking:** A specialised wildlife law enforcement training event was organised online for officials of the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) by the National Academy of Customs, Indirect Taxes & Narcotics (NACIN) and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) on 27th August 2020. TRAFFIC's India Office participated in this important meeting that helped develop the knowledge and skills of Customs officials for curbing illegal wildlife trade. TRAFFIC's Dr Saket Badola led a session on the role of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), illegal wildlife trade, and how Customs can play a leading role in the efforts to stop wildlife trafficking especially across borders.

4. **The Rich Wildlife of India: With a focus on endangered animals:** At the request of the British School, New Delhi, TRAFFIC's Ms Neha Shukla held an online interactive session on wildlife protection and conservation for over 70 Year IV students aged between 8–9 years on 4th September 2020. She spoke about the abundant wildlife of India and the country's rich natural resources and highlighted the threats faced by wild animals and how students can contribute to and support wildlife conservation initiatives in the country.

5. **Orientation on issues related to wildlife crime for forest guards of Valmiki Tiger Reserve:** In September 2020, Bihar Forest Department with support from WWF-India

organised an online two-day orientation and capacity building programme for 96 newly recruited Forest Guards of Valmiki Tiger Reserve, Bihar.

Nine sessions took place covering an overview of wildlife crime and illegal wildlife trade, basic law enforcement monitoring, camera trapping, MSTrIPES, wildlife signs identification, wildlife crime scene investigation, an overview of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Forest Act 1980, environmental Laws, human rights and community rights. Ms Mayuri Chopra, Programme Officer and Dr Merwyn Fernandes, Coordinator from TRAFFIC's India Office led sessions on wildlife crime and illegal wildlife trade; and wildlife crime scene investigation and evidence collection.

Secure Himalayas! Secure your Future: TRAFFIC appeals to communities in Uttarakhand

The Himalayan region of India is a rich biodiversity hotspot comprising nearly 50% of flowering plants, 65% of mammals, 50% of birds, 35% of reptiles, 36% of amphibians, and 17% of fish species found in India. Extending across 11 Indian States and Union Territories including Uttarakhand, wildlife in the Himalayas is under constant threat from poachers and wildlife smugglers.

Uttarakhand has nearly 71% of its geographical area under forest cover and is endowed with rich natural resources, especially mountains, rivers, forests and wildlife and the region has been a hotspot for wildlife smuggling. Local communities living in and around forest areas are the first line of defence for curbing wildlife crime. In light of this, TRAFFIC in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Uttarakhand Forest Department designed and launched an information leaflet during India's Wildlife Week celebration in October to raise awareness about illegal trade in wildlife, the species targeted and the motivational drivers behind trade, what local people can do to help and the legal and conservation implications of engaging in illicit activities. The leaflet is available in both English and Hindi and can be obtained from TRAFFIC's India Office by contacting trafficind@wwfindia.net

SUPER SNIFFER digest

1. **Eight new Super Sniffers join India's wildlife sniffer dog brigade in 2020**

2. **SUPER SNIFFERS ON THE PROWL**
(Update on TRAFFIC's wildlife sniffer dogs deployed for curbing wildlife crime in India)

SUPER SNIFFER digest

Eight new Super Sniffers join India's wildlife sniffer dog brigade in 2020

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Eight wildlife sniffer and tracker dogs—popularly known as Super Sniffers—trained under TRAFFIC's programme in India, joined their new enforcement agencies to take the total number of India's wildlife sniffer dog trained so far to 74.

The eight young German Shepherd dogs along with their handlers finished their nine-month long training at the Police Training School (Dogs), Special Armed Forces, 23rd Battalion, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh under TRAFFIC and WWF-India's programme of training and deploying sniffer dogs to combat wildlife crime. The dog squads passed their graduation test with flying colours and participated in a ceremony organised at the training centre, allowing them to show case their skills.

Of the eight dog squads, two have been deployed by the Railway Protection Force (RPF)–one each at the Northern and Eastern Zone; two each by Maharashtra and West Bengal Forest Departments; and one each by the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, and Arunachal Pradesh Forest Departments.

Although it is the first time the RPF has deployed sniffer dogs for controlling the smuggling of wildlife contraband, railways are often a preferred mode of transportation for wildlife criminals, hence the need for the deployment of the dog squads at critical locations.

The Forest Department of Arunachal Pradesh has also deployed wildlife sniffer dogs for the first time at Pakke Tiger Reserve.

Mr R.P. Pandey, DSP (ADMIN) PTS (DOG), 23rd Batallion, SAWF Bhopal said, "The Police Dog Training School has experience of training sniffer dogs for curbing various crimes and we were happy to expand this training to include wildlife sniffer dogs. We wish the TRAFFIC Super Sniffers good luck in their mission to help curb wildlife crime in India and look forward to many more associations."

TRAFFIC's Super Sniffers have been successful in helping solve approximately 400 cases of wildlife seizures and poaching in India, and have helped in the arrests of many criminals and in the recovery of body parts including skins and bones of tigers and leopards, bear bile, ivory, star tortoises, deer antlers, skins and meat, live birds, porcupines, pangolin scales, snares, traps and weapons.

SUPER SNIFFERS ON THE PROWL

(Update on TRAFFIC's wildlife sniffer dogs deployed for curbing wildlife crime in India)

1 Newly trained Super Sniffer cracks his first wildlife crime case

Ramu, one of the eight recently graduated wildlife sniffer dogs, has already helped Maharashtra Forest Department crack a wild boar poaching case at Nawegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve (NNTR), Maharashtra.

On 20th September 2020, following a tip off and after investigation of an alleged poaching scene, Ramu, along with his handlers, Mr Amit Raut and Mr Pakhmode, and forest guards from the Special Tiger Protection Force, Rapid Response Team led officials to a house where the skin of a wild boar, pieces of meat and hair were recovered from the backyard. The occupant was later arrested on suspicion of poaching.

© TRAFFIC

2 Nirman helps recover Chinkara and Wild Boar parts at South Panna Forest Division, Madhya Pradesh

On 15th October 2020, Super Sniffer Nirman deployed by the Tiger Strike Force, Satna Division, Madhya Pradesh since 2016 along with handler Rajkishore Prajapati, assistant handler Ashok Kumar Gupta and deputy ranger Ashok Kumar Khare, helped in solving a wildlife poaching case.

During the dog squad's regular patrol with the South Panna Forest division in Shahnagar range, the officials found a blood soaked sack in the forest. Nirman led the team to a track where they found Chinkara and Wild Boar parts. Later Nirman followed the scent to a nearby house where the forest officials found cooked meat. On seeing the officials, two individuals fled, leaving a third who was arrested. One rifle and a tractor were also confiscated at the site.

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SUPER SNIFFERS ON THE PROWL

(Update on TRAFFIC's wildlife sniffer dogs deployed for curbing wildlife crime in India)

3 Rana helps nab Tiger poachers in Karnataka

© TRAFFIC

Rana had helped forest officials nab poachers and solved a sandalwood smuggling case in Srirangapatna | EXPRESS

Sniffer dog Rana tracks poachers who shot tiger dead

BOSKY KHANNA @Bengaluru

RANA, the dashing German Shepherd of the forest department, sealed the case of the tiger shooting, leading foresters to a poacher hiding in a hamlet, and seven of the animal's claws.

The sniffer dog, aged 7, who lives in Bandipur Tiger Reserve, was brought to Nagarahole Tiger Reserve (NTR) to find the culprits, after foresters learnt that the 5-year-old male tiger had been shot dead. The carcass was found on Tuesday night.

"Since it's a serious case, we brought Rana. He led us to the poacher, who was arrested on Wednesday, and also to the house of a coffee estate worker where we found the seven fresh canines," NTR Director Mahesh told TNIE.

Rana has come to the aid of the department after three years of rest. He had helped them nab poachers and solved a sandalwood smuggling case in Srirangapatna, and in 2017, had tracked those who had escaped with the claws of Prince, a popular male tiger of BTR. Rana has solved 15 cases so far.

Mahesh said the foresters had recovered wildlife meat from the house of Santosh (35), who was nabbed on Wednesday. Santosh had confessed that it was 1.2kg of deer meat. The team also seized 250 gm of iron balls used to make cartridges and bullets. "Santosh said he was part of a gang of four members who had entered the forest to hunt deer. They had stumbled upon the tiger lying near the bushes. Not sure that the tiger was dead, they shot it. Santosh revealed that Sharanu, who stayed on a coffee estate in Kodagu, had taken the claws. By the time we reached, Sharanu had escaped but we recovered the claws. Santosh revealed the whereabouts of the three other poachers, who are absconding. We have sought police help to catch them," he said.

Chief Wildlife Warden Ajai Misra said that a tiger being shot is a serious matter, and that staffers and people residing in the hamlet are being questioned.

Pointing out that Santosh's confession had many loopholes, Misra added that camera trap images have given some information.

In September 2020, five suspects who had allegedly poached a five-year old male Tiger were nabbed within 10 days of the incident with the help of wildlife sniffer dog Rana in Nagarahole Tiger Reserve, Karnataka.

Rana, a sniffer dog trained and deployed in Karnataka in 2015 under TRAFFIC's Super Sniffer programme along with his handlers Prakash Somaning Honnakore and Kalaklakar Mage, were called in after forest officials reported the unnatural death of a Tiger that was missing its teeth and paws. Rana was brought to the location and after sniffing the area thoroughly led the enforcement officials to a neighbouring village. Five suspects were arrested and a gun allegedly used to kill the Tiger, Tiger claws, canines and deer meat seized.

In subsequent days, several arrests and searches led to the recovery of seven more Tiger nails hidden in a nearby coffee estate.

The Honorable Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, Shri Prakash Javadekar tweeted his appreciation and praise for the excellent efforts of the forest guards and the wildlife sniffer dog Rana in investigating the case.

Outpost

Fourteen international organisations call for practical and scientifically informed responses to zoonotic diseases

Fourteen international organisations call for practical and scientifically informed responses to zoonotic diseases

The members of the Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management (CPW) have set out guiding principles aimed at reducing the risk of future pandemics originating from wild animals while strengthening the conservation of wildlife, and at the same time respecting livelihoods, food security and the culture of diverse groups of people.

The CPW principles stress the importance of maintaining and restoring healthy and resilient ecosystems to reduce risks of zoonotic spillovers and future pandemics, while recognising the importance of the use of wildlife for many communities, including Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), in policy responses. The CPW also warned that killing of wild animals suspected to transmit diseases will not address the causes of the emergence or spread of zoonotic diseases, and underlined the need for countries to regulate, manage and monitor harvesting, trade and use of wildlife to ensure it is safe, sustainable and legal.

TRAFFIC's Director of Policy, Sabri Zain, noted that there have been calls to halt all commercial use of wildlife and the permanent closure of markets where wildlife is sold. "Such blanket injunctions that do not consider the socio-economic and cultural impact of these actions, the biological status of species, or the institutional challenges for implementing such measures, can be counter-productive."

Some uses of wildlife are indeed unsafe and pose risks to human health, including zoonosis.

"Management and regulation of wildlife harvest, use and trade is therefore critical for conservation, animal and human health, and for combating illegal, unhealthy or unsustainable practices," Zain stressed. "Such regulations require sound guidance, standards, risk assessment, risk management tools and effective enforcement and monitoring measures."

TRAFFIC is working with governments and international organisations across the globe in order to strengthen measures that ensure the legality, sustainability and traceability of wildlife specimens and products in international trade, and ensure wildlife trade monitoring mechanisms are in place to mitigate against the risk of disease emergence.

The CPW is a voluntary partnership of 14 international organisations, including the Secretariats of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), as well as NGOs such as TRAFFIC. The CPW was established with the aim of promoting the sustainable management of terrestrial vertebrate wildlife in all biomes and geographic areas, contributing to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and to human food security and livelihoods.

Read more at https://www.traffic.org/news/practical-and-scientifically-informed-responses-to-zoonotic-disease/

CITES Update

New Guide to identify smuggled ivory published by CITES, TRAFFIC and WWF

New Guide to identify smuggled ivory published by CITES, TRAFFIC and WWF

Accurate identification is critical to preventing illegal ivory products from being smuggled or illegally traded and to curb the poaching crisis decimating elephant populations. On 11th August 2020, ahead of World Elephant Day, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Secretariat, TRAFFIC and WWF published the Identification Guide for Ivory and Ivory Substitutes, a comprehensive and accessible resource for identifying the most commonly found ivories and artificial substitutes in trade that should prove to be a vital tool to assist law enforcement in identifying trafficked ivory.

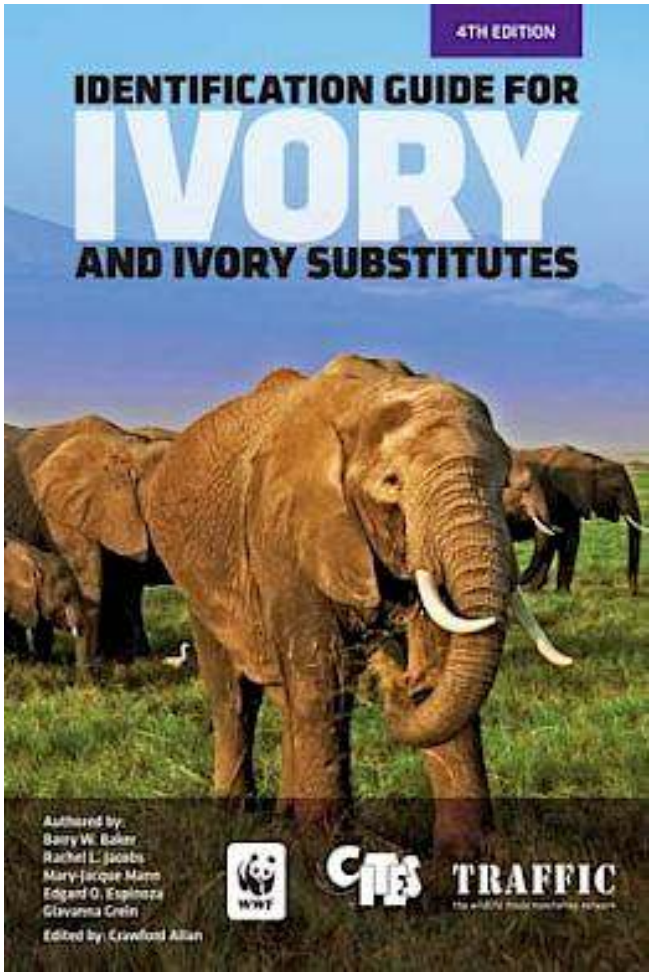
CITES Secretary-General Ivonne Higuero said, "The much-awaited 4th edition of the Guide will be a key tool in the regulation of the international trade of several CITES-listed species. Through it, we reaffirm our commitment to support CITES Parties to achieve the objectives of the Convention and combat wildlife crime."

Ivory products can sometimes be falsely labelled in trade to avoid regulations, particularly to circumvent the international commercial trade ban in elephant ivory. The range of ivories and substitutes can be difficult to recognise without specific equipment, expertise and time-consuming examinations.

The Guide includes updated descriptions of ivories from different species and their products found in trade and reliable methods used to determine ivory types depending on the form of product, such as tusk/tooth, carving, or other items.

The Guide provides enforcement officers, forensic scientists, online technology company enforcement staff and wildlife trade management authorities with detailed procedures, visual aids and instructions for recognising ivory products, particularly those that have undergone heavy alterations such as carving and painting.

The new Guide includes details on the most relevant species—elephants, mammoths, whales, narwhals and hippos—as well as more extensive visual materials to aid



enforcement officers in identifying elephant ivories from ivory substitutes, such as plastics and vegetable ivory. The Guide also addresses the sale of ivory products online, where an increasing share of illegal elephant ivory trade is now taking place and where identification of static digital images can be challenging.

Last reviewed in 1999, more than two decades of advancements have been incorporated into the Guide to help law enforcement agencies distinguish between types of ivories and their substitutes, including detailed graphics and forensic applications for ivory identification.

Read more at https://www.traffic.org/news/cites-traffic-and-wwf-release-new-guide-to-identify-smuggled-ivory/

TRAFFIC Alert

1. Six arrested for poaching 23 Spiny-tailed Lizards in Rajasthan

2. Fourteen Tokay Geckos seized while being smuggled from Bangladesh

TRAFFIC ALERT

1 Six arrested for poaching 23 Spiny-tailed Lizards in Rajasthan

In August 2020, Rajasthan Forest Department arrested six people for poaching 23 Spiny-tailed Lizards from Desert National Park (DNP). The lizard locally known as "*Sanda*", is in high demand for its oil in India and abroad. The lizards were seized inside the sanctuary in the Jaisalmer range. The accused were arrested red-handed along with hunting equipment, weapons and live lizards.

TRAFFIC adds.....

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The Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard *Saara hardwickii,* locally known as the "Sandha" or "Sandho" is India's only herbivorous lizard species and has been a target for wildlife poachers and smugglers for some years. Found across northwestern India, mainly in and around the Thar Desert of Rajasthan, the lizard is listed in Schedule II of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, prohibiting its capture and trade. Its international trade is regulated under CITES where it is listed in Appendix II.

The Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard is targeted for its oil and meat, the latter regarded as a delicacy amongst locals while the oil is believed to possess medicinal properties and is used to treat impotency, as an aphrodisiac and to cure joint pains. The species is also reported to be commercially exploited for the illegal pet trade. Loss of habitat owing to development projects and expansion of agriculture and irrigation are causes of concern for the species in the wild.

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TRAFFIC ALERT

2 Fourteen Tokay Geckos seized while being smuggled from Bangladesh

Fourteen Tokay Gecko lizards were rescued by India's Border Security Forces (BSF) while being smuggled through the India-Bangladesh border in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district. The lizards are highly prized in international markets and were seized from a man at the Pargumti border outpost en route to India. The accused managed to escape leaving behind a plastic packet containing the lizards which was handed over to the Wildlife Department.

TRAFFIC adds.....

The Tokay Gecko *Gekko gecko* is arboreal, nocturnal and one of the largest gecko species found in India. It is found across northeast India including Assam, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Tripura, and also in Bihar, West Bengal, and the Andaman archipelago.

© TRAFFIC

Tokay Geckos are in high demand in illegal wildlife trade for use in traditional Asian medicines as unproven treatments for various serious diseases such as asthma, cancer, diabetes etc. In 2009, a new global trade emerged in Tokay Geckos that led to a spike in its poaching. The tongue and other internal organs of the species were in high demand for their use as a supposed treatment for Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). Tokay Geckos are also sought after as pets and are popular in the European Union and North America.

Owing to continued over-exploitation of the species, the Tokay Gecko was listed in Schedule II of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, in 2014, prohibiting trapping, trade or use of Tokay Geckos in India. The species is also listed in Appendix II of CITES. However, this has not deterred the poaching and smuggling of Tokay Geckos in India. Although there is very little information available on Tokay Gecko numbers, current high rates of exploitation may be putting considerable pressure on wild populations.

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WEIRD & WILD

(A glimpse into strange and unknown wildlife products and derivatives found in illegal wildlife trade)

“Floating Gold” lures wildlife smugglers and traders

Mayuri Chopra; TRAFFIC, India Office

1

"Floating Gold" lures wildlife smugglers and traders

Floating Gold, "Treasure of the Sea" or "*Ambergris*," is a wax-like substance formed in the intestines of Sperm Whale *Physeter macrocephalus*, and Pygmy Sperm Whale *Kogia breviceps*.

Sperm whales are hunted in some parts of the world for their meat, spermaceti oil, and also ambergris.

The Sperm Whale and Pygmy Sperm Whale are both protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. The Sperm Whale is listed in Appendix I of CITES and the Pygmy Sperm Whale in Appendix II. It is illegal to sell, transfer or possess ambergris in India and possession is punishable by a fine or imprisonment up to seven years.

Ambergris is highly valued and is found in about one in every 100 sperm whales, although this figures varies significantly with geographical location[1] and the species have a wide distribution. The ambergris may be directly extracted from the animal ("body ambergris"), found floating in the ocean (as flotsam) or washed up on the shore (as jetsam).

1

© Peter Kaminski, CC BY 2.0

The name Ambergris derives from the Middle French word *ambregris*, or "grey amber." There is a common misconception that yellow amber has the same origin although it is actually petrified resin[2].

How Ambergris is excreted from whales is open to debate: some researchers consider it is a type of faecal coprolith released from the rectum, others suggest it is ejected from the mouth. Evidently, Ambergris is produced by sperm whales with rich cephalopod diets, consisting of indigestible parts such as horny beaks, squid pens and eye lenses. The undigested material is usually vomited out in a healthy whale approximately every 6–10 days. In about 1% of cases, this material passes into the intestine leading to a series of events that forms *Ambergris*.

Chemically, Ambergris comprises ambreine (a tricyclic triterpene alcohol) and other volatile compounds. After release into the sea, the material loses most of its water content and the faecal odour of fresh Ambergris and becomes a colourless, waxy substance with a musky sweet smell.

Ambergris is used in luxury perfumes because of its excellent fixative and stabilising properties preventing fragrance from evaporating. Synthetic alternatives to Ambergris are available and marketed under the names *Grisambrol, Ambrofix* and *Ambropur*. Nonetheless, natural ambergris is still traded worldwide as revealed by seizures around the world and in India.

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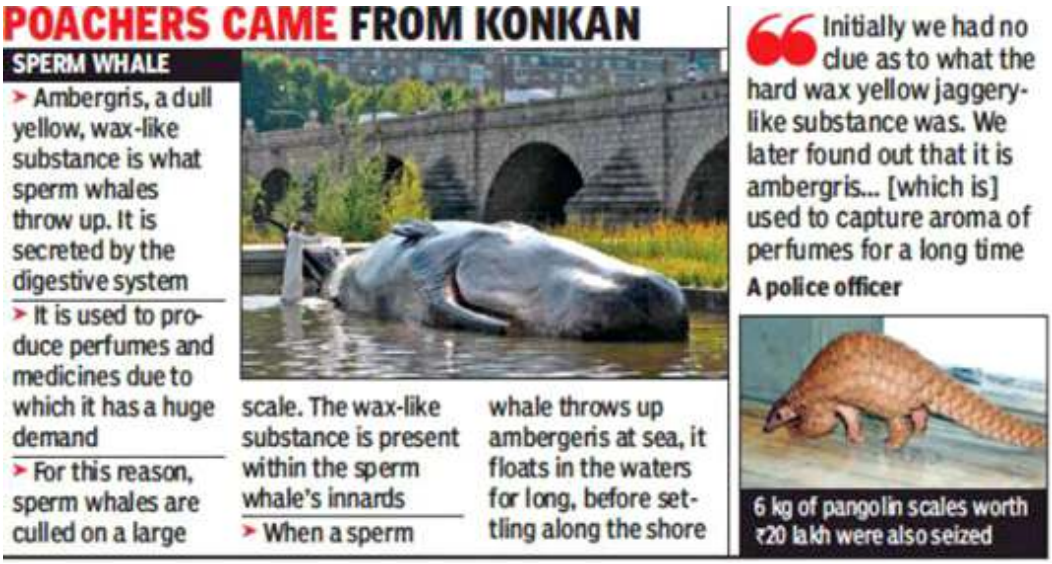

POACHERS CAME FROM KONKAN

SPERM WHALE

- Ambergris, a dull yellow, wax-like substance is what sperm whales throw up. It is secreted by the digestive system
- It is used to produce perfumes and medicines due to which it has a huge demand
- For this reason, sperm whales are culled on a large scale. The wax-like substance is present within the sperm whale's innards
- When a sperm whale throws up ambergeris at sea, it floats in the waters for long, before settling along the shore

"Initially we had no clue as to what the hard wax yellow jaggery-like substance was. We later found out that it is ambergris... [which is] used to capture aroma of perfumes for a long time

A police officer

6 kg of pangolin scales worth ₹20 lakh were also seized

2 October 2018; Mumbai Police Crime Branch intercepted 10 kg of Ambergris in a multi-species seizure along with 6 kg of pangolin scales.

Signpost

Other significant news stories

Leopard poaching highest in Uttarakhand, Maharashtra

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

A recent study by TRAFFIC India on the seizure and mortality of 'common leopards' (*Panthera pardus fusca*) revealed that of the total of 747 leopard deaths between 2015-2019 in India, 596 were linked to illegal wildlife trade and activities related to poaching.

TRAFFIC is a leading wildlife trade monitoring network across the world and the paper has been authored by Saket Badola, head of the TRAFFIC India office, and Astha Gautam.

"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," said the report published in the latest edition of TRAFFIC India's newsletter.

The paper titled "SPOTTED' in Illegal Wildlife Trade: A Peek into Ongoing Poaching and Illegal Trade of Leopards in India' also said that the highest numbers of poaching incidents were reported from the States of Uttarakhand and Maharashtra.

During the period 2015 to 2019, there were more than 140 cases of seizures of leopard body parts in Uttarakhand, and about 19 incidents where the deaths of these cats could be directly linked to poaching. More than 40 cases of seizure of leopard body parts and 16 cases of poaching were recorded from Maharashtra between 2015 to 2019.

"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," the report states.

Another concern raised in the paper is the incidence of live animal trade involving leopard cubs in seizures in Chennai and in Maharashtra.

At risk: Despite curbs on illegal wildlife trade, leopards continue to be poached for their skin and claws. • FILE PHOTO

The Hindu, Chennai; 08/08/2020

18-tonne red sandalwood cargo seized

India intercepted shipment bound for UAE during month-long global operation

DEVESH K. PANDEY
NEW DELHI

The India Customs intercepted an 18-tonne shipment of red sandalwood destined for the United Arab Emirates, during a month-long "Operation Thunder 2020", coordinated by the Interpol and the World Customs Organisation, which involved law enforcement agencies in 103 countries.

The operation against environmental crime was held from September 14 to October 11. It resulted in large seizures of protected wildlife and forestry specimens and products, triggering arrests and investigations worldwide, said the Interpol.

"Focusing on pre-identified routes and hotspots, 'Operation Thunder 2020' resulted in more than 2,000 seizures of wildlife and forestry products. In total, 699 offenders were apprehended and at least one Interpol Red Notice has already been requested based on information gained during the operation. Further arrests and prosecutions are anticipated as ongoing global investigations progress," it said.

Tusks recovered

The participating countries focused mainly on the species protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Mexican law enforcement rescued an adult female white tiger, a jaguar and a four-month old lion cub in Sinaloa.

"In Cameroon, customs officers seized 187 raw elephant tusks from a truck crossing the border from Gabon. In total, 56,200 kg of marine products were seized during Operation Thunder 2020," said the Interpol, adding that the Peruvian police seized a shipment of 11 tonnes of mutilated sharks.

Besides, 1,160 birds and 15,878 kg of plants were seized during the operation. The police in Zimbabwe thwarted the transfer of 32 live chimpanzees from Congo. The seized contraband included more than 1.3 tonnes of ivory, over 1 tonne of pangolin scales, 87 truckloads of timber, 1,400 turtles and tortoises, 6,000 turtle or tortoise eggs and 1,800 reptiles.

"Wildlife and forestry crime is the world's fourth largest illegal trade – a lucrative illegal business with far-reaching and devastating consequences not just for the environment but also for society, public health and global economics," said Interpol Secretary General, Jürgen Stock, in a statement.

Prized logs: A file photo of red sandwalwood seized in India.

The Hindu, Mumbai; 12/11/2020

India is a top source for raw material for 'tiger cake': UN

'Trade In Tiger Parts Also For Luxury Items'

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Dehradun: Tiger wine goes for $1,000 a pop. Tiger cake, sold like chocolate bars, fetches the same. The illegal trade in tiger parts has moved on from just medicinal pitches to luxury items. And India is one of the two biggest suppliers.

Between 2007 and 2018, the latest United Nations World Wildlife Crime Report said, two-thirds of all wildlife seizures globally were of tiger bones. "Thailand and India are the main source countries for these seizures," the report said, adding that the ones in Thailand came from farmed animals — illegal tiger farms breed them in captivity — while those in India were from the wild.

Of the 153 cases in which the nationality of tiger traffickers could be determined, the report added, 38% were Indian, only behind Chinese (39%).

Tiger bones are sought after in underground markets for the medicinal and aphrodisiac qualities attributed to them in some forms of Asian traditional medicine. It is infused in wine to make tiger wine, boiled down to make cake or ground into a powder to make pills. "The first tiger bone case I came across in India was in 1986, a seizure near the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve. By the early 1990s, the illegal trade in tiger bones from India to China was widespread," Belinda Wright, executive director of the Wildlife Protection Society of India, told TOI.

The report identifies two trafficking routes — the trans-Himalayan (India-Nepal-Tibet) and the Mekong Delta (southeast Asian countries). "Some border areas in South Asia have been identified as hotspots for tiger trafficking based on high seizure rates recorded there. From South Asia, parts move across the borders of India and Nepal into China via the northeast India route to Myanmar," it said.

The markets are in China, Vietnam and Thailand. But the consumer base has changed. "Consumer demand profiles for tiger products have started to change, and new forms of demand are emerging ... The switch is from tiger meat and tiger wine being consumed only as health products to now also being consumed as exotic luxury products that demonstrate affluence," the report said.

How the trade functions is also changing. "A large part of the trade ... has shifted to online sales through social media and messaging apps," the report said. Qamar Qureishi, senior scientist at the Wildlife Institute of India, had a word of caution: "Almost 70% of human diseases are zoonotic ... People should stay away from wildlife products as much as possible to eliminate the possibility of contracting diseases like Covid-19."

Tiger bones are sought after in underground markets for the medicinal and aphrodisiac qualities attributed to them in some forms of Asian traditional medicine. It is infused in wine to make tiger wine, boiled down to make cake or ground into a powder to make pills

The Times of India, Chandigarh; 24/07/2020

RED KANGAROO, HYACINTH MACAWS AMONG THE RESCUED

Forest dept busts smuggling racket in Assam

TORA AGARWALA
GUWAHATI, JULY 29

A RED kangaroo, the largest of all kangaroos in Australia and three pairs of hyacinth macaws, native to South America, are among the exotic animals rescued after forest department officials busted a smuggling racket at the Assam-Mizoram border on Tuesday.

The rescued animals, which also included three rare Aldabra tortoises and two capuchin monkeys, were found in plastic boxes and cartons in a vehicle that was stopped at a check post in Assam's Cachar district, authorities said.

"We are investigating the matter," said DFO, Cachar Forest Division, Sunnydeo Choudhary. "The smugglers were trying to take the animals from Mizoram to Guwahati, following which the animals would be taken elsewhere, maybe Kolkata or another big city."

Two people, Narsimha Reddy and Navnath Tukaram Daigude, have been detained in this connection. The animals, now at the Cachar Forest Department office, will be transferred to Assam State Zoo in Guwahati.

"These are extremely rare and exotic animals. In fact, the Aldabra tortoise, native to the UNESCO World Heritage site of Aldabra Atoll in the Seychelles, is one of the largest tortoises in the world," said Choudhary, adding that the tortoise and the macaw species were classified as 'vulnerable' in the International Union for Conservation of Nature list.

Choudhary said the animals are "healthy and safe". "They have been checked by the doctors here and we have put them on a special diet," he said.

He added that the truck was intercepted at Lailapur Forest check gate, a common trade transit route.

"At least 200 trucks pass through every night, carrying different items. When this one passed, our team detected a strange smell from the vehicle," said Choudhary, "The driver tried to pass it off as rotten fruit, but our personnel searched the vehicle and found the animals."

The official said this was part of a larger racket and they suspect the animals were smuggled out of Myanmar. "This is no small trade but a huge racket running at an international level. While we have never intercepted a vehicle on this particular route, my understanding is that they could be testing new routes to carry out the trade," he said.

In March 2018, officials had seized Gaboon vipers, marmosets and giant scorpions among other exotic animals in Jorabat. The investigation later revealed that the animals were sourced from Thailand.

Meanwhile, the Assam State Zoo is preparing for the arrival of the rescued animals. "We have readied the enclosures, and are going to keep them quarantined for a few days," said Tejas Mariswamy, DFO, Assam State Zoo.

The rescued animals were found in plastic boxes and cartons in a vehicle stopped at a check post in Cachar district.

The Indian Express, Delhi; 30/07/2020

YouTube video unveils elephant trade

Forest Department takes custody of 15 elephants from a self-styled trader in Kollam

K.S. SUDHI
KOCHI

Boasting about trading 200 elephants in a YouTube video has landed a self-styled elephant trader of Kollam in trouble with the Forest Department booking cases against him for illegal transport and sale of elephants and taking his 15 elephants into custody.

Five cases have been booked against V. Shaji of Kaveri Puthenkulam, Kollam; K.S. Rashmi, Kollam; Shinu of Mavelikara; Manish Nath, Kollam; and a few others for illegally trading 15 captive elephants. The accused have been booked for illegally transporting the elephants from other States, keeping the animals without valid documents and trading them. The relevant sections of the Wildlife Protection Act and the Captive Elephant Management Rules have been invoked against them, the officials said.

The department swung into action last month after the video, Puthenkulam Kaveri Park, in which Shaji stated that he had brought nearly 200 elephants from Assam, Bihar and Andaman and traded them in Kerala, went viral. He claimed to have purchased the elephants, Modi, Lakshmi, Anandhanarubhan and Rao among others, and brought them to the park. The preliminary verification of documents indicated that the elephants, which were in the names of others, were in the custody of Shaji, said officials.

Special team formed

A special team with over 100 persons was formed and searches were carried out in Kollam, Pathanamthitta and Mavelikara. The key accused could not be arrested as he went into hiding. Even though the team had plans to take the possession of the animals, the idea was later dropped and the elephants were left with its keepers after recording its custody.

In another incident, two cases were booked against A.V. Prasanth of Manikandeswaram, Perumbadu, for the illegal trade of elephants. He was arraigned as the first accused in both the First Information Reports filed by the Forest Department at the Judicial First Class Magistrate Court-I, Nedumangad.

In the first case, Prasanth has been made the accused for illegally bringing an elephant from Uttar Pradesh in violation of the provisions of the Act and Rule and forging documents.

In the second case, besides Prasanth, Bency Shaji, Praveen and Sreejith have been arraigned as the accused. The case is that Shaji sold the elephant to Praveen. The animal was then sold to Sreejith from whom Prasanth bought it.

One of the 15 elephants taken into custody.

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