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TRAFFIC[®] POST

NEWSLETTER ON WILDLIFE TRADE IN INDIA

▶ Special Edition :

EXOTIC WILDLIFE TRADE

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

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 free of cost 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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EDITORIAL ADVISOR:

Dr Dipankar Ghose dghose@wwfindia.net

MANAGING EDITOR:

Dilpreet B. Chhabra dilpreet.chhabra@traffic.org

EDITORIAL TEAM:

Merwyn Fernandes merwyn.fernandes@traffic.org
Astha Gautam astha.gautam@traffic.org

DESIGN:

Dilpreet B. Chhabra dilpreet.chhabra@traffic.org

PHOTO CREDIT:

Rob Webster / WWF (Front cover)



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EDITORS' DESK



Dipankar Ghose, Ph.D.
Interim Head, TRAFFIC's India office
& Director - Wildlife & Habitats
Programme, WWF-India

Dear Readers,

People love pets. Some decades back, one would keep dogs, cats, or birds at home. However, when India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 prohibited keeping wild birds of Indian origin as pets, people shifted to keeping exotic species. Budgerigars were an easy choice, and then came love birds, zebra finches, cockatiels, etc. Expensive ones included macaws and cockatoos.

Recently, reports have indicated an upwards trend in keeping exotic wildlife pets ranging from snakes, scorpions, parrots and monkeys. Much of this trade is illegal, as evident from the seizures reported in India. The demand driver of this illegal exotic wildlife trade remains unclear, but in many cases, it is presumed to meet the demand as a pet.

The present Issue of TRAFFIC Post presents an updated scenario on the trafficking of exotic wildlife species in India. The article - *In unfamiliar lands: Trafficking of exotic wildlife species in India*- under the INFOCUS section of the newsletter is a well-researched write-up that will help sensitise wildlife law enforcement officers, NGOs and individuals assisting the government to curb illegal wildlife trade. It will also be interesting for the general public since much of the exotic wildlife trade is on social media and online portals. The article also highlights the conservation and legal impact of the growing exotic wildlife trade in the country.

Recently, TRAFFIC's India office and WWF-India conducted a study on illegal trade in sea cucumbers in India. The final report has been published, and a summary is included in this edition of TRAFFIC Post. A second study on pangolins with startling figures of 1200+ pangolins poached in the five years from 2018 to 2022, primarily due to demands from East and Southeast Asian countries, has

also been highlighted in this Issue. TRAFFIC's India office published a factsheet on the illegal trade in pangolins and their body parts on World Pangolin Day 2023.

This Issue of TRAFFIC Post also summarises the illegal trade of various medicinal plants in India. Besides important insights into illicit wildlife trade trends in India, TRAFFIC Post also highlights TRAFFIC's work in India. Exciting updates on Super Sniffers –TRAFFIC and WWF-India 's wildlife sniffer dogs helping law enforcement agencies across India curb wildlife crime are also in this Issue.

We hope readers of TRAFFIC Post will find this Issue informative and useful.

A | IN FOCUS



A1. IN UNFAMILIAR LANDS: TRAFFICKING OF EXOTIC WILDLIFE SPECIES IN INDIA

Astha Gautam & Dr Merwyn Fernandes, TRAFFIC's India Office



Representative image

© Rob Webster / WWF

India's appetite for exotic wildlife pets may be increasing. In 2018, a Giant Aldabra Tortoise *Aldabrachelys gigantea* was seized in Assam, at the inter-state border with Meghalaya, along with Gaboon Viper *Bitis gabonica*, African pythons *Python* spp., Meerkat *Suricata suricatta*, scorpion, Sugar Glider *Petaurus breviceps*, and over a dozen snakes. To put it into perspective, the Aldabra Tortoise weighs about seven times more than the largest tortoise native to India, the Asian Giant Tortoise *Manouria emys* (Kundu, *et al.*, 2013; Stanford, *et al.*, 2015).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC), the Government of India, issued an advisory on importing exotic live wildlife species in India and for declaration of stock. The advisory pertained to only those species listed in Appendix I, II, and III of CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) but not listed under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and aimed to streamline the country's compliance with CITES. An essential part of the advisory was a "Voluntary Disclosure Scheme" for pet owners to declare their

exotic pets for registration without requiring to produce any documentation. There was a declaration by 32,645 individuals from 25 states and five Union Territories who claimed to possess exotic animals, including various species of mammals, reptiles and birds, some of which are hardly conceivable as pets, such as kangaroos *Macropus* spp. and lemurs.

Similarly, in 2020, again in Assam, three Giant Aldabra Tortoises were seized along with a Red Kangaroo *Osphranter rufus*, capuchin monkeys *Cebus* spp. and Hyacinth Macaw *Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*. While in 2022 alone, six kangaroos were seized in multiple incidents in the Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar districts of West Bengal. Such cases are not limited to these species or a particular location. Enforcement officials of India, stationed at different transit areas and at ports (sea and air), have also frequently encountered bags filled with exotic species like live primates, parrots, snakes, and turtles while scanning passenger baggage or checking vehicles.



Spotted cuscus © Brent Stirton / Getty Images

EXOTIC SPECIES

'Exotic species' is a term used to refer to a species not found in a concerned habitat or geographical area, hence, non-native. Humans have owned wild animals for as far back as records go. In the past, exotic plants and animals were often transported and introduced into new areas. The purpose included plantations, arboretums, and landscaping in the case of plants, while on the other hand, animals were sought after as trophies, collectables, pets, and livestock.

This tendency continues to date and now involves a range of diverse species across all taxa (Fukushima, *et al.*, 2020), such as reptiles and birds from Africa are in

demand in the markets of East and Southeast Asia (Outhwaite & Brown, 2018). Similarly, studies have reported groups of animals such as slow loris *Nycticebus* spp. (Musing, *et al.*, 2015), otters (Gomez & Bouhuys, 2018), birds (Bush, *et al.*, 2014), parrots (Berkunsky, *et al.*, 2017), raptors (Panter & White, 2020), songbirds (Lees & Yuda, 2022), reptiles (Auliya, *et al.*, 2016; Luiselli, *et al.*, 2016; Leupen 2018; Wakao, *et al.*, 2018; Janssen & de Silva, 2019; Altherr & Lameter, 2020), amphibians (Altherr & Lameter, 2020; Choquette, *et al.*, 2020; Kitade & Wakao, 2022) and freshwater fishes (Raghavan, *et al.*, 2013). Region-wide assessments such as those of Europe (Auliya, 2003), the Middle East, Southeast Asia, or South America (Moorhouse, *et al.*, 2017), Africa (Woolloff *et al.*, 2022) or countrywide assessments such as Malaysia (Krishnasamy & Stoner 2016), Singapore (Chiok & Chng, 2021), Philippines (Sy 2018; Sy *et al.*, 2022), the United Kingdom (Elwin, *et al.*, 2020) have reported exotic pet trade.

In many instances, the trafficking violates national legislation and international conventions, such as the CITES. In addition, it adversely affects the region/area from where the species has been extracted, resulting in a decline in species abundance (Morton, *et al.*, 2021). The trade has driven many species to such low levels of abundance, putting them at elevated risk of extinction, such as the Black-winged Myna *Acridotheres melanopterus* (BirdLife International, 2021), Ploughshare Tortoise *Astrochelys yniphora* (Leuteritz & Pedrono, 2008; Mandimbhasina, *et al.*, 2020), and the endemics bird species from the Sundiac islands (Eaton, *et al.*, 2015).

Loss of biodiversity (Bush, *et al.*, 2014), and impact on ecosystem services and public health have also been identified as effects of the unsustainable and unregulated trade. Many exotic species have been identified as carriers of zoonotic diseases (Bernard & Anderson, 2006), carrying a risk of exposure to both humans and wildlife (Chomel, *et al.*, 2007) and causing disease outbreaks in destination countries (Karesh, *et al.*, 2005). There have been reported incidents of Crested Hawk-eagles *Nisaetus cirrhatus* (H5N1 virus) (van Borm, *et al.*, 2005), Prairie Dog *Cynomys* spp. (Monkeypox) (Guarner, *et al.*, 2004), and turtles (Salmonella) (Back, *et al.*, 2016) carrying diseases, and thereby threatening the native species and humans.

ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN FUELLING THE DEMAND

Social media has emerged as a window to the world, allowing people to get insight into global trends. However, a darker aspect of this convenient connection to the world is the growing popularity of



Tufted Capuchin © R.Isotti, A.Cambone / Homo Ambiens / WWF

exotic pets on social media platforms. The prevalence of species such as otters (Harrington, *et al.*, 2019), slow loris (Musing, *et al.*, 2015), snakes (Jensen, *et al.*, 2019), turtles (Liu, *et al.*, 2021) and parrot (Martin, *et al.*, 2018) on social media has reportedly driven their demand as pets. Such trends have been observed all over the world, including social media and e-commerce platforms in Hong Kong (Sung & Fong, 2018), the Middle East (Spee, *et al.*, 2019), Thailand (Siriwat & Nijman, 2018; Siriwat, *et al.*, 2019), and China (Ye, *et al.*, 2020).

TRADE OF EXOTIC WILDLIFE SPECIES: AN OVERVIEW

The trade of exotic species occurs globally, with a growing market for the species (Lockwood *et al.*, 2019). Countries with rich biodiversity or unique wildlife species are often exploited to supply the species (Robinson, *et al.*, 2015); the demand for the unique species fuels the unregulated and illegal trade of wild species. While the trade negatively impacts habitat, the targeted species are often extracted from their natural habitats in the wild (Moorhouse, *et al.*, 2017) and introduced to unprecedented habitats, and/or used for captive breeding of the species. Reports indicate that exotic species have escaped into the wild or been deliberately released, thus becoming invasive (Lockwood, *et al.*, 2019) and gravely impacting native flora and fauna. Species in the pet trade, such as the Common Green Iguana *Iguana iguana* (van den Burg, *et al.*, 2020) and ornamental fish (Liang, *et al.*, 2006), have emerged as invasive species in destination countries.

The illegal trade also has an inhumane aspect to its execution. Trafficked in miserable conditions, cramped in boxes and improvised baggage, often tied or in an insentient state, many animals suffer gravely and do not make it to the end of their journey.

TRADE OF EXOTIC CITES-LISTED WILDLIFE SPECIES IN INDIA

According to the CITES Trade Database, India imported 20 parrot species from 2017 to 2021, including 16 species listed in Appendix II of the CITES and four species listed in Appendix I (Golden Parakeet *Guaruba guarouba*, Grey Parrot, Military Macaw *Ara militaris* and Scarlet Macaw *Ara macao*). During this period, India also imported nine exotic reptile species of these; one was listed in Appendix I of the CITES and eight in Appendix II. They were assessed as Near Threatened, Vulnerable and Endangered by the IUCN Red List. These species were imported for breeding in captivity or artificial propagation, commercial and personal purposes, and for zoos. Thereby alluring to the growing demand for exotic species as pets (Pragatheesh, *et al.*, 2021), scientific breeding and commercial purposes.

To highlight the exotic wildlife trade in India, TRAFFIC collated data from open media sources for 2022, on the trafficking and illegal trade of exotic wildlife, with an assumption that the reported incidences are correct. TRAFFIC takes no responsibility for the

INDIA'S ILLEGAL EXOTIC WILDLIFE TRADE IN 2022: AN INSIGHT



Chimpanzee © Kirsten Lies-Warfield

liability of these open-source reports of the incidences. These are assumed to be accurate. Species in the trade may also be hybrid species or those bred in captivity.

Reports of 56 seizure incidents of exotic wildlife in India were found in open media sources for 2022. These incidents were reported in 10 states: Assam, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, and West Bengal; and one in Union Territory, Delhi. Of these, six states, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura and West Bengal, share international borders, indicating the possibility of exploiting these borders for the trafficking of wildlife species. According to the information in the open-source reports, seizures were reported at airports, air cargo stations, railway stations, international post offices, and areas near international borders. Most seizure incidents were reported from West Bengal (14 incidences), followed by Tamil Nadu (12 incidences) and Mizoram (10 incidences).

About 4,000 (3951) exotic animals were recorded in the 56 seizure incidents. These included the broad groups of mammals, birds, reptiles, fish species, and insects.

• Mammals

More than 100 primate individuals were reported in 22 seizure incidents in 2022. In most cases, the species of seized primates were reported, and these included Moor Macaque *Macaca maura*, grey monkey *Semnopithecus* spp., Siamang *Symphalangus syndactylus*, pygmy marmoset *Cebuella* spp., marmoset, Spot-nosed Monkey *Cercopithecus petaurista*, potto *Perodicticus* spp., Myanmar Snub-nosed Monkey *Rhinopithecus strykeri*, Red-chested Mustached Tamarin *Saguinus labiatus*, spider monkey *Ateles* spp., Panamanian White-throated Capuchin

Nearly 4000 exotic wild animals were recorded in the 56 seizure incidents in India in 2022

Cebus imitator, Black-capped Capuchin *Sapajus apella*, orangutan *Pongo* spp., guereza *Colobus* spp., Golden-headed Lion Tamarin *Leontopithecus chrysomelas*, tamarin monkey *Saguinus* spp., Dusky Langur *Trachypithecus obscurus*, De Brazza's Monkey *Cercopithecus neglectus*, Chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes*, and Indri *Indri indri*. In two incidents, the number of seized species was not reported. The species were not mentioned in one reported incident involving seven seized primate individuals.

Other mammals reported included kangaroo, otter, beaver *Castor* spp., wallaby *Wallabia* spp, mongoose *Herpestes* spp., meerkat, Serval *Leptailurus serval*, porcupine, Sugar Glider *Petaurus breviceps*, sloth *Bradypus* spp., fox *Canis* spp., and capybara *Hydrochoerus* spp..

In seizures involving the Common Spotted Cuscus *Spilogale maculatus*, Common Dwarf Mongoose *Helogale parvula* and porcupine, seizures did not report the number of individuals seized.



Capybara © Jaime Rojo / WWF-US



Grey Parrot © Michel Gunther / WWF

• Birds

Parrots were the most seized species, with over 1000 individuals reported in seizure incidents. The seized parrots included parakeets (600+), Grey Parrot, budgerigars, lovebirds, cockatiels, macaws, white cockatoos, and black cockatoos. The other bird groups represented include starlings *Sturnus* spp., hornbills, pigeons, bower birds *Ptilonorhynchus* spp., and songbirds.

• Reptiles

Snakes were the most reported group in seizure incidents (15) among reptiles and included 157 animals. Over half of the snakes seized were python, including species such as Ball Python *Python regius*, and Burmese Python *Python bivittatus*. Other species seized were kingsnake



Ball Python © Mokele via Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0

Lampropeltis spp., cobra, Mangrove Cat Snake *Boiga dendrophila*, Egyptian or Kenyan Sand Boa *Eryx colubrinus* and Red Cornsnake *Pantherophis guttatus*. The seizure incidents also included species of turtles, tortoises, alligators, and crocodiles.

Lizards were most seized in terms of numbers among reptiles and included over 835 animals. The species was not mentioned for over 50% of the seized individuals (mentioned as lizards). Where reported, the species include tegu lizard, iguana species, monitor lizard *Varanus* spp., chameleons, and bearded dragon *Pogona* spp.

Other seized species include frogs and arthropods such as spiders (tarantulas) and beetles.

THE LAW

In India, the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 prohibits the trade in wild animals (and their articles) specified in its various Schedules. In its latest amendment in 2022, the Act enlisted CITES-listed species in Schedule IV. Similarly, the export and import policy of the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) regulates, restricts or prohibits the trade of wildlife (and their article) through its guidelines.

Under the authority of the Foreign Trade (Development & Regulations) Act, 1992, trade in wild animals as defined under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 is prohibited, while trade in CITES-listed species is subjected to the provisions of the Convention. Trade in species not listed in the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 is permitted only against a license on the recommendation of the Chief Wildlife Warden subject to the provision of CITES.

ADDRESSING CONCERNS

1. The advisory issued by the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC), the Government of India, on importing exotic live wildlife species in India and for declaration of stock can be crucial to regulating and monitoring the ownership of exotic wildlife species in India. Since it includes registering and declaring the progenies of the imported exotic live species, the advisory provided an opportunity to estimate the status of exotic pet species in India.

2. In December 2022, amendments were made to the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. The amended Act introduced regulation on CITES-listed species under the Schedule IV of the Act. Prior to this,

the EXIM policy regulated the trade of exotic species in India. However, this presented a gap in intervening in the possession and trade of CITES-listed species beyond the trade points. Now, the inclusion of the species in the national legislation can help take enforcement actions on violation of the provisions of CITES. The amendment will support the purpose of the CITES to ensure that the trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten the species' survival.

3. Many individuals interested in possessing wildlife as exotic pets need to be made aware of the conservation and legal status of the species, the risk of zoonotic diseases from exposure or the inhumane conditions the species endure before reaching them. Campaigns designed around disseminating this information to the public would significantly discourage people from purchasing threatened wildlife or violate national and international legislation.

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B

TRAFFIC UPDATES (INDIA)

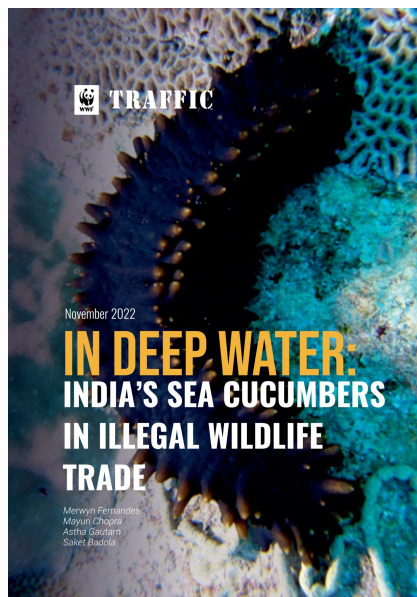


B1. SEA CUCUMBERS IN DEEP WATERS: TRAFFIC AND WWF-INDIA'S NEW STUDY REVEALS WORRYING ILLEGAL TRADE TRENDS IN INDIA

India is home to about 200 sea cucumber species crucial to the marine ecosystem as they consume decomposing organic matter and convert it into recyclable nutrients for other marine life.

All of India's sea cucumber species are protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, against collection, trade or any form of utilisation. Two species found in Indian waters - *Holothuria fuscogilva* and *H. nobilis* are also listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) since 2020, which regulates their international trade.

Despite the strict legal provisions, the Holothurian populations in India have been subjected to illegal harvest. Recent research by TRAFFIC and WWF-India for 2010-2021 highlights this threat, finding at least 101.40 tonnes and 6,976 sea cucumber individuals in illicit wildlife trade in India for 12 years. According to the seizure reports, Sri Lanka, China, and Southeast Asia were the top three destinations for sea cucumbers trafficked from India. In India, the maximum seizures (139) were reported from Tamil Nadu, followed by 15 seizures in Lakshadweep, four in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, two in Karnataka, and



one each in Manipur and Kerala, while one seizure occurred mid-sea.

The findings were encapsulated in a report – *In Deep Waters: India's sea cucumbers in illegal wildlife trade* – released ahead of World Fisheries Day 2022.

The study also looked into the reasons behind the unsustainable sea cucumber trade and found that demand for sea cucumbers in East and Southeast Asian markets, along with the ease of harvest and low processing costs (drying), are proving detrimental to the species and their survival in India. It also lists action points to help curb the

illegal sea cucumber trade in India, including recommendation on future research priorities, enhancing capacity for interdiction by law enforcement agencies, devising policies and promoting community engagement and awareness.

Download the report - *In Deep Waters: India's sea cucumbers in illegal wildlife trade* – at https://www.wfindia.org/about_wwf/enablers/traffic/media/?21242/sea-cucumber-in-deep-waters-new-study-reveals-worrying-illegal-trade-in-india

B2. OVER 1200 PANGOLINS TRAFFICKED IN INDIA FROM 2018-2022, FINDS TRAFFIC AND WWF-INDIA'S LATEST STUDY



Pangolins are reported to be among the most trafficked wild mammals globally, and they are also targeted for illegal wildlife trade in India. To flag this, TRAFFIC and WWF-India released a factsheet that reported an equivalent of 1203 pangolins poached and trafficked for illicit wildlife trade in 342 seizure incidents during 2018-2022.

TRAFFIC and WWF-India's Factsheet titled "*India's pangolin buried in illegal wildlife trade*" was released ahead of World Pangolin Day on 18 February 2023.

India is home to two pangolin species – Indian Pangolin *Manis crassicaudata* and Chinese Pangolin *Manis pentadactyla*- protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Despite this, India reports a significant number of pangolin trafficking incidents reflected by seizures across the country. Pangolins are poached mainly for demand arising from China and Southeast Asia. Scales are used as an ingredient in traditional medicines and believed to cure various ailments, while meat is considered a delicacy and consumed for its alleged medicinal properties.

Twenty-three Indian states and one Union Territory, reported seizures of pangolins and their derivatives from 2018-2022 in India. Odisha reported the highest number of seizure incidences involving the maximum number of pangolins in the illegal wildlife trade (154 pangolins in 74

seizures). It was followed by Maharashtra (47 seizure incidents and 135 pangolins).

Seizure incidences included live pangolins and their derivatives, such as scales, carcasses, skins, claws, meat, bones and other body parts. About 50% of the seizure incidences included live pangolins, while more than 40% included pangolin scales.

The number of pangolin seizure incidents is a cause of concern for the survival of this elusive species, for which there is limited information on population status and distribution. It is imperative to focus on pangolins and strengthen their protection and conservation for their future survival.

The Factsheet - "*India's pangolin buried in illegal wildlife trade*" - stresses the need to address the demand for pangolins in consumer countries and strengthen enforcement actions to deter trade. These steps would play an essential role in safeguarding the future of the species in the wild and preserving the significant ecological role they play in their habitat.

Download at https://www.wwf.org/about_wwf/enablers/traffic/media/?21462/indias-pangolin-buried-in-illegal-wildlife-trade

B3. WILDLIFE LAW ENFORCEMENT WORKSHOP ORGANISED FOR THE FOREST OFFICIALS OF MELGHAT TIGER RESERVE

Melghat Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra is rich in biodiversity, including many endangered and protected mammals, reptiles, butterflies and insects. The reserve is also rich in avifauna with many species of birds, including the recently rediscovered Forest Spotted Owllet *Athene blewitti*. Many cases of wildlife poaching have been reported from Melghat in the past, including tigers, pangolins, and monitor lizards, among other endangered species.

Keeping this in mind, TRAFFIC and WWF-India, with support from Maharashtra Forest Department, conducted a wildlife law enforcement workshop for the forest officials of Melghat Tiger Reserve from 20-21 January 2023. The purpose was to give an insight into the new and emerging illegal wildlife trade trends and tools and techniques available to curb this.

The two-day training was attended by 38 forest officials, many of whom had recently joined the force. It was organised at the Interpretation Centre, Shahnur, Amravati, Melghat Tiger Reserve. The training was carefully designed to incorporate the latest trends and policies to freshen the existing knowledge and skills of the officials.

The TRAFFIC's India team conducted the training with support from legal experts (Advocate Ganshayam Dhole, Additional Public Prosecutor and Advocate Uday Deshmukh, ex-District Government Pleader); and wildlife experts (Mr Chandra Prakash Sharma, Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and Mr M. Maranko, an Independent Consultant).

The training focussed on providing insight into the commonly traded wildlife derivatives and their identification techniques, evidence collection through forensics, internet use in illegal wildlife trade and other related subjects. A special session on the latest amendment to the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 was also included in the training to help the officials understand and implement the amended sections of the Act, including forest officers' powers, offences under the Act, and procedures.

Mr Arjuna K.R., Deputy Conservator of Forest, Akot Wildlife Division of Melghat Tiger Reserve, appreciated the initiative by TRAFFIC and WWF-India for undertaking this training that will help to update the knowledge and skills of the forest officials.

B4. SIX MORE WILDLIFE SNIFFER DOGS COMPLETE TRAINING AND JOIN INDIA'S FORCE FIGHTING WILDLIFE CRIME

India's wildlife sniffer dog force has new recruits as six wildlife sniffer dog squads as the 10th batch finished their training under TRAFFIC and WWF-India's wildlife sniffer dog training programme on 1 April 2023.

Six German Shepherds dogs, ranging between six and nine months old, and their 12 handlers had enrolled for the seven-month-long training at Basic Training Centre, Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force (BTC-ITBP) camp in Panchkula, Haryana in September 2023. On completion of their training in April 2023, they joined the forest departments of Karnataka (4), Bihar (1), and Madhya

Pradesh (1), taking the total number of wildlife sniffer dogs trained under TRAFFIC and WWF-India's programme in India to 94.

BTC-ITBP had organised a passing out ceremony to felicitate the dogs and their handlers in their successful completion of the training course.

Mr Ravi Singh, Secretary General & CEO WWF-India, said, "Dogs are not just man's best friend. Once trained as wildlife sniffer dogs, they play a crucial role in protecting our wildlife from crime and illegal trade.



© TRAFFIC

This is also true for the 94 wildlife sniffer dogs trained by WWF-India and TRAFFIC over the years. We wish our programme's new and 10th batch good luck and hope they can strengthen and support wildlife protection initiatives."

Dr Merwyn Fernandes, Coordinator of TRAFFIC's India Office, said, "Illegal wildlife trade is a serious threat to the conservation of species in the wild. Wildlife law enforcement practices are critical in containing this threat, and the use of wildlife sniffer dogs for wildlife crime prevention and detection is crucial. In light of this, TRAFFIC and WWF-India launched the pioneering wildlife sniffer dog training programme in 2008. We hope at least four to five wildlife sniffer dogs are deployed in each state and at transborder areas, working with law enforcement agencies to protect our wildlife."

Dr Dipankar Ghose, Director & HoD, Wildlife & Habitats Division, WWF-India, and Interim In-Charge, TRAFFIC's India office adds, "Detecting smuggled wildlife is an ongoing challenge for law enforcement agencies. TRAFFIC and WWF-India support initiatives that bring in new tools and technology for wildlife crime detection and prevention. Training sniffer dogs for wildlife crime prevention was a step in this direction. So far, the dogs

have been deployed by the State Forest Departments and Railway Protection Force. We hope this programme will be institutionalised and adopted by other law enforcement agencies".

Mr Ishwar Singh Duhan, Inspector General, ITBP, Director, NTCD&A (National Training Centre for Dog & Animals), Panchkula, said, "The new batch of six dogs and their handlers have shown immense commitment over the past seven months. Besides learning detection skills, the dogs have undergone obedience training crucial to becoming wildlife sniffers. The dogs have been trained to detect tiger and leopard skins, bones and other body parts, bear bile, red sanders, and other illegal wildlife products. We are sure they will adapt their skill sets to include other wildlife contraband once deployed in the field. BTC-ITBP wishes them good luck".

The training of the tenth batch of six dogs at ITBP started on 5 September 2022 and ended on 1 April 2023.

B5. WILDLIFE SNIFFER DOGS' REMARKABLE CONTRIBUTION TO CURBING WILDLIFE CRIME IN MADHYA PRADESH



© Madhya Pradesh Forest Department

Heroes come in all shapes and sizes. It is true for the canine force of the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department, which has been leading the way to strengthen wildlife protection in the State.

Madhya Pradesh is home to the maximum number of wild tigers in India (Jhala *et al.*, 2020). With an area of more than 10,000 sq. km in tiger reserves, it plays an integral role in supporting India's tigers and other wildlife conservation. These vast forest areas are managed and protected through the efforts of the state forest department, where TRAFFIC and WWF-India's wildlife sniffer dogs have been deployed since 2010.

BACKGROUND

In 2008, TRAFFIC and WWF-India's launched a wildlife sniffer dog training programme to train and deploy wildlife sniffer dog squads to detect and deter wildlife crime in India. Since then, 94 wildlife sniffer dogs have been trained and deployed by the Forest Departments and Railway Protection Force in 21 states and union territories. Six dogs and their 12 handlers have recently undergone training at BTC-ITBP camp in Panchkula, Haryana as the 10th batch of wildlife sniffer dogs trained under TRAFFIC and WWF-India's wildlife sniffer dog training programme in India. These squads joined the Forest Departments of Karnataka, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh, taking the total number of wildlife sniffer dogs trained under TRAFFIC and WWF-India's programme to 94.

Over the years, these wildlife sniffer dog squads, popularly called Super Sniffers, have become an integral part of the anti-poaching team of forest departments, regularly engaging in patrolling and enforcement action. One such cherished association has been with the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department.

Since 2010, Madhya Pradesh Forest Department has deployed 10 wildlife sniffer dog squads trained under TRAFFIC and WWF-India's wildlife sniffer dog training programme in India. The first batch included two sniffer dogs, Jimmy and Jackie, deployed to Jabalpur and Hosangabad. Five years later, in 2015, three wildlife sniffer dogs, Myna, Shera and Cheetah, were deployed to the Indore, Kurai range and Sagar division, respectively, with two dogs joining the Tiger Strike Force of the State. In 2016, three more wildlife sniffer dogs, Horwel, Daily and Nirman, were deployed to Madhav National Park and Bhopal and Satna Division, respectively. In 2018, wildlife sniffer dog Tina was trained and deployed at the Satpura Tiger Reserve along with her handlers. In 2023, wildlife sniffer dog Ilu, has been deployed at Kuno National Park.

IN ACTION: SUPER SNIFFERS OF MADHYA PRADESH

The wildlife sniffer dogs Cheetah, Jimmy and Shera deployed with the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department have been part of the Tiger Strike Force,



© TRAFFIC

Jabalpur. Since 2011, these dogs have helped with about 55 wildlife seizures involving about 16 species, such as the Bengal Tiger *Panthera tigris tigris*, Leopard *Panthera pardus*, Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus*, Wild Boar *Sus scrofa*, Chital *Axis axis*, Sambar *Rusa unicolor*, Nilgai *Boselaphus tragocamelus*, Bear spp., monitor lizard *Varanus* spp., Indian Jackal *Canis aureus*, Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*, Sandalwood *Santalum album*, turtle, snakes and other wildlife. They have also helped recover hunting gear in a few cases.

Super Sniffer Jimmy has had the most prestigious record of helping solve maximum wildlife crime cases among these three. Deployed at Jabalpur in 2010, Jimmy has assisted in the most number of incidents (34) involving 13 species, including tiger, leopard, bear, and chital, among others. In 2018, Jimmy retired from active duty.

Another Super Sniffer Nirman, deployed at Tiger Strike Force, Satna Division, Madhya Pradesh since 2016, has contributed to many successful wildlife law enforcement actions along with his handlers Rajkishor Prajapati and Ashok Kumar Gupta. The seven-year-old German Shepherd trained in the 5th batch of TRAFFIC and WWF-India's wildlife sniffer dog training programme has assisted in solving over 80 wildlife crime-related cases. He has helped curb crimes targeting species such as tiger, leopard, bear, Four-horned Antelope *Tetracerus quadricornis*, chital, sambar, wild boar, and nilgai, and has also helped recover hunting tools such as snares and wires for electrocution.

Nirman was also the winner of 'Canines for Felines', a contest hosted by TRAFFIC and WWF-India on Global Tiger Day in 2019 to celebrate the contribution of wildlife sniffer dogs towards curbing tiger poaching.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE ROLE OF WILDLIFE SNIFFER DOG HANDLERS

The role of a wildlife sniffer dog is incomplete without its two handlers, who undergo training with the dog at the training centres for seven to nine months. These handlers are responsible for managing the wildlife sniffer dog on duty and also for taking care of the dog's welfare and upkeep. TRAFFIC and WWF-India acknowledge and appreciate their immense contribution to supporting the wildlife sniffer dog programme and curbing wildlife crime in the country.

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B6. PLANTS IN ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE IN INDIA: NEW FACTSHEETS HIGHLIGHT THE THREAT TO RED SANDERS, AGARWOOD AND CATERPILLAR FUNGUS

The wild plant species form the foundation of timber, wellness, fashion and healthcare practices. They are mainly used in traditional medicine, *Ayurveda*, *Siddha*, *Unani* and also Tibetan medicines besides, finding use in craftsmanship.

The scale of over-exploitation of wildlife resources is often either unknown or not fully considered by those dependent on the plant trade, the beneficiaries of the trade or the government policymakers responsible for ensuring adequate attention to conservation and economic issues. Rising demand may lead to a direct threat to species populations in the wild.

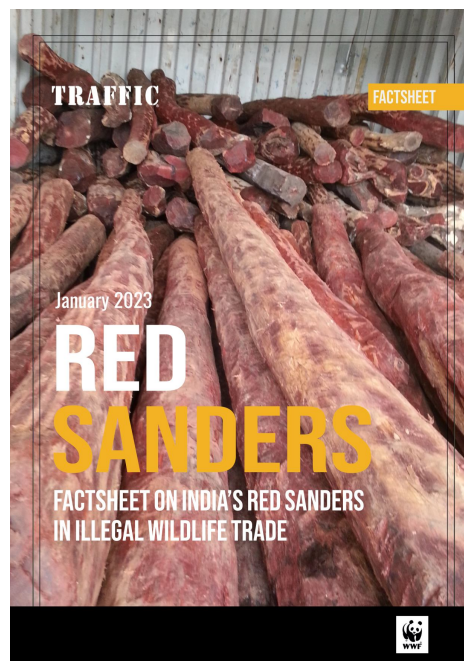
To highlight the threat to plants in illegal wildlife trade in India, TRAFFIC and WWF-India have released factsheets on three commonly traded plant species in India – Red Sanders *Pterocarpus santalinus*, Agarwood *Aquilaria* spp. and Caterpillar Fungus *Ophiocordyceps sinensis*.

The factsheets provide information about the species, interesting facts, legal status and threats from the illegal wildlife trade. These will be helpful for educators, policymakers, researchers, media personnel, and the general public who want to learn about the conservation of wild plants in India.

RED SANDERS

Red Sanders is reported to be one of India's most exploited tree species and is under severe pressure from illegal logging and harvesting. Its heartwood is in demand in both domestic and international markets and is used to make furniture and handicrafts, while the red dye obtained from the wood is used as a colouring agent in textiles and medicines. Rampant illegal logging has been reported across its range state.

As a native species to Andhra Pradesh, the State regulates Red Sanders (Red Sandalwood) use and trade. As per the amendment to the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 in December 2022, Red Sanders is now listed in Schedule IV. Under the foreign trade policy of India, the import of Red Sanders is prohibited, while export is restricted. Despite the regulation and legal protection, illegal logging and timber extraction remain a primary conservation concern for the species.



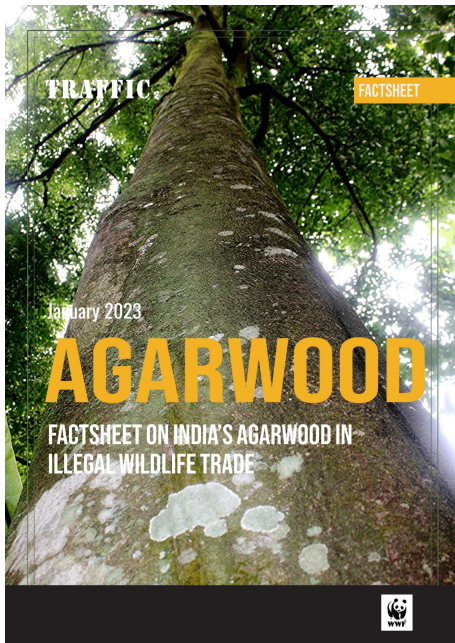
https://www.wwf.org/about_wwf/enablers/traffic/media/?21342/red-sanders-in-illegal-wildlife-trade

AGARWOOD

Agarwood is the common name for the resinous aromatic resin formed in the heartwood of the trees of genera *Aquilaria*. India is home to three species, of which *Aquilaria khasiana* and *Aquilaria malaccensis* are agarwood-producing species.

Agarwood is among the world's most commercially valuable plant species. The species is exploited for its valuable aromatic heartwood, a source of agar oil, also known as '*oudh/agaru*', the most preferred raw material in perfumery and traditional medicines. Agarwood has been overexploited throughout its range for its fragrant heartwood, threatening its population. It continues to be traded in significant quantities to and from India.

Due to its listing in Appendix II of CITES, India's Export-Import (EXIM) Policy restricts agarwood trade. Any violations of the EXIM policy make the goods liable for confiscation and the individual(s) liable to punishment under India's Customs Act, 1962. After the amendment to the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972



in December 2022, agarwood has been listed in Schedule IV. Despite the regulations, the species has suffered adversely due to unsustainable harvest and illegal trade.

https://www.wwfindia.org/about_wwf/enablers/traffic/media/?21422/agarwood-in-illegal-wildlife-trade

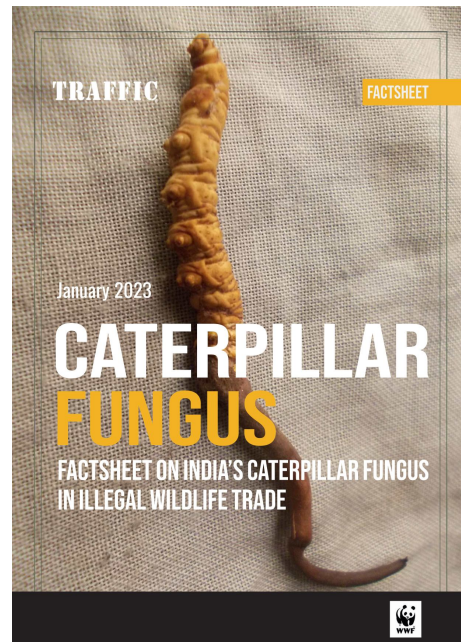
CATERPILLAR FUNGUS

Locally known as *Yarsa Gumba*, Himalayan Gold, or *Keera Ghaas*, Caterpillar Fungus is endemic to Bhutan, China, India, and Nepal and threatened due to overexploitation driven by increasing demand, especially in traditional medicine markets.

Extraction/harvesting and trade of Caterpillar Fungus are

regulated through permits, guidelines, and policies of the range states, such as Sikkim and Uttarakhand. However, the existing regulatory mechanisms for the trade of Caterpillar Fungus in the different range states of India are not consistent and applicable across India. Insufficient mechanism to monitor and regulate the trade in Caterpillar Fungus and the international demand for this species has been attributed as drivers for the trade.

https://www.wwfindia.org/about_wwf/enablers/traffic/media/?21442/caterpillar-fungus-in-illegal-wildlife-trade



B7. 'IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT ONE TIGER': TRAFFIC AND WWF-INDIA LAUNCH A NEW AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

Culminating the Year of the Tiger 2022, and to celebrate 50 years of tiger conservation in India with the launch of Project Tiger in 1973, TRAFFIC and WWF-India released a new poster campaign, **"It's not just about one Tiger"** on World Wildlife Day. The posters appeal to protect the tiger and end the illegal wildlife trade. They also highlight the linkages of protecting tigers to protecting ecosystems, culture and heritage, livelihoods and our future.

The key message *"It's not just about one Tiger"* reminds people that removing even a single tiger from the forest can negatively affect us. We must protect the tiger and mitigate the threats affecting this species to protect our

future. As illegal wildlife trade is one of the most significant threats to the tiger, the posters appeal to people to reject tiger products and support tiger protection initiatives.

The **first poster establishes the link between protecting the tiger and preserving our ecosystem**. As an apex species, a wild tiger plays an essential role in maintaining the harmony of the forest ecosystem. With every tiger poached for the illegal wildlife trade, this equilibrium is disturbed due to an imbalance between the prey animals and the forest vegetation. The **second poster establishes the link between**

protecting the tiger and protecting rivers, as tiger habitats are rich treasures of rivers and water bodies. Protecting tiger habitats will protect river catchments. With every tiger poached for the illegal wildlife trade, our water security and collective well-being is endangered.

The **third poster establishes the link between protecting the tiger and protecting our natural heritage**. The tiger has a strong cultural significance in India, and its presence in the wild is a matter of national pride. With every tiger poached for illegal wildlife trade, we lose a part of our natural heritage.

The **fourth poster establishes the link between protecting the tiger and protecting the livelihoods**. The tiger keeps the forest thriving, and the forest provides people with resources and livelihood. With every tiger poached for the illegal wildlife trade, we risk the livelihood of forest-dependent communities.

The **fifth poster establishes the link between protecting the tiger and protecting our future** since the tiger helps secure our forest, ecosystem, water resources, livelihoods

and natural heritage. With every tiger poached for the illegal wildlife trade, we risk losing our future.

Despite the highest protection status of tigers in India, they are often targeted for illegal wildlife trade, mainly destined for international markets. There is a demand for tiger derivatives such as skin and nails as curios, and bones for traditional medicines. The tiger's prey is also hunted for bush meat, impacting the species' survival. Besides illegal wildlife trade, tigers are also threatened by habitat loss and human-wildlife conflict.

The new campaign posters by TRAFFIC and WWF-India has been distributed among key stakeholders and displayed across India to sensitise on tiger conservation and protection issues.

Download the posters at
https://www.wwf.org/about_wwf/enablers/traffic/media/?21502/its-not-just-about-one-tiger



Tigers live in rich biodiverse areas along with other wildlife. As apex predators, tigers regulate herbivore populations, thus indirectly impacting vegetation that herbivores consume. With every tiger poached for the illegal wildlife trade, the trophic structure of ecosystems may be affected.

REJECT TIGER PRODUCTS! PROTECT TIGERS TO PROTECT THE ECOSYSTEM!

TRAFFIC India Office, c/o WWF Secretariat, 172-B, Lodi Estate, New Delhi-110003; Tel: 011-41504786; Email: trafficind@wwfindia.net; www.trafficindia.org; www.traffic.org; www.wwfindia.org

Image credits: Tiger (naturepl.com/Andy Rouse/WWF); Tiger teeth (DRI) Design: Nehal Vijay

TRAFFIC



IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT ONE TIGER
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TIGER WINE

Many rivers that provide water to hundreds of millions of people and irrigate millions of hectares of cropland originate or flow through tiger habitats. Protecting tiger habitats will protect river catchments. With every tiger poached for the illegal wildlife trade, our water security and collective well-being is endangered.

REJECT TIGER PRODUCTS! PROTECT TIGERS TO PROTECT THE RIVERS!

TRAFFIC India Office, c/o WWF Secretariat, 172-B, Lodi Estate, New Delhi-110003; Tel: 011-41504786; Email: traffcind@wwfindia.net; www.traffickingindia.org; www.traffic.org; www.wwfindia.org

Image credits: Tiger (Nitish Madan / WWF-International); Tiger wine (International Fund for Animal Welfare) Design: Nehal Vijay

B. TRAFFIC UPDATES

TRAFFIC



IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT ONE TIGER
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TIGER TRAFFICKING

In India, tigers have a strong cultural significance, and their presence in the wild is a matter of national pride. With every tiger poached for the illegal wildlife trade, we lose a part of our natural heritage.

REJECT TIGER PRODUCTS! PROTECT TIGERS TO PROTECT THE HERITAGE!

TRAFFIC India Office, c/o WWF Secretariat, 172-B, Lodi Estate, New Delhi-110003; Tel: 011-41504786; Email: traffcind@wwfindia.net; www.traffickingindia.org; www.traffic.org; www.wwfindia.org

Image credits: Tiger (Dr Saket Badola) ; Tiger Cub (James Morgan) Design: Nehal Vijay



TIGER SKIN

Forests and tiger habitats provide livelihood opportunities to millions of people through the sustainable collection of forest produce and ecotourism. With every tiger poached for the illegal wildlife trade, people may lose livelihood opportunities.

REJECT TIGER PRODUCTS! PROTECT TIGERS TO PROTECT LIVELIHOOD!

TRAFFIC India Office, c/o WWF Secretariat, 172-B, Lodi Estate, New Delhi-110003; Tel: 011-41504786; Email: trafficind@wwfindia.net; www.trafficindia.org; www.traffic.org; www.wwfindia.org

Image credits: Tiger (Suyash Keshari / WWF-International); Tiger skin (Dr Saket Badola) Design: Nehal Vijay



TIGER MEDICINES

Tiger habitats are strongholds of forests that help brace against climate change impacts. Forests store large quantities of carbon and mitigate the impacts of natural disasters such as floods, landslides and cyclones. With every tiger poached for the illegal wildlife trade, we risk our future.

REJECT TIGER PRODUCTS! PROTECT TIGERS TO PROTECT OUR FUTURE!

TRAFFIC India Office, c/o WWF Secretariat, 172-B, Lodi Estate, New Delhi-110003; Tel: 011-41504786; Email: trafficind@wwfindia.net; www.trafficindia.org; www.traffic.org; www.wwfindia.org

Image credits: Tiger (naturepl.com/Andy Rouse/WWF); Medicine (WWF-US /Keith Arnold) Design: Nehal Vijay

C

GLOBAL SCAN



C1. RECORD NUMBER OF WILDLIFE SPECIES REGULATED BY CITES AFTER COP19

Representatives of more than 160 governments, Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), reaffirmed their commitment to addressing the biodiversity crisis by adopting proposals to regulate international trade in more than 500 new species during the CITES CoP19 held on 14-25 November 2023 at Panama City.

The Conference of the Parties (CoP) reached a record number of 365 decisions as they worked to safeguard threatened wildlife species while at the same time allowing the international trade that underpins human well-being and contributes to conservation efforts. More than 2,500 people attended the meeting, which was held in Panama. The amendments adopted at CoP19 entered into force on 23 February 2023.

The CoP adopted a total of 46 Proposals of the 52 put forward. This has brought a record number of species under CITES regulations, including sharks, lizards, turtles, fish, birds, frogs and more than a hundred tree species. The CITES regulations are designed to ensure the sustainability of species in the wild while allowing their international trade and contributing to the conservation of ecosystems and global biodiversity.

In welcoming the decisions made by the Parties, the Secretary-General of CITES, Ivonne Higuero said "The Parties to CITES are fully aware of their responsibility to address the biodiversity loss crisis by taking action to ensure that the international trade in wildlife is sustainable, legal and traceable. Trade underpins human well-being, but we need to mend our relationship with nature. The decisions coming from this meeting will serve the interests of conservation and wildlife trade, that

doesn't threaten the existence of species of plants and animals in the wild, for future generations."

The contribution that CITES can make to reducing zoonotic diseases is also to be investigated. 70% of emerging diseases are estimated to be transferred from wild animals to humans. CITES is to look at the role it could play in reducing the likelihood of this transfer.

The new species listed on CITES and their international trade regulated, include nearly 100 species of sharks & rays, more than 150 tree species, 160 amphibian species, including tropical frogs, 50 turtle and tortoise species and species of songbirds. All these species have seen declines in their populations over recent years.

CITES regulates the world's trade in threatened species of animals and plants; 183 countries and the European Union are Parties to the Convention and every three years, they take part in a meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP). This is the 19th time they have met in the past 50 years since the Convention was adopted in 1973.

For more information, please visit <https://cites.org/eng/news/record-number-of-species-to-be-regulated-by-cites-after-cop19>

D

TRAFFIC ALERTS



D1. EXOTIC PET TRADE CONTINUES UNABATED IN CHENNAI AND OTHER CITIES IN TAMIL NADU

The trafficking of exotic pets continues unabated in Chennai and other cities like Tiruchi, Madurai and Coimbatore and its outskirts, even after the imported pets are seized at international airports in Tamil Nadu, as per the news reports.

From the beginning of the year till February, two consignments of exotic pets were seized at Chennai international airport and included species such as mangabeys, pythons and marmosets. Also, 171 star tortoises meant for export to far eastern countries were also intercepted at Chennai airport in these fifty days. In the first seizure of 2023, 45 ball pythons, three

marmosets, and eight corn snakes were caught by customs at Chennai airport.

Tiruchi, Madurai and Coimbatore, the cities where international flights land, are also thriving hot spots for the sale of exotic species.

SOURCES:

<https://www.daijiworld.com/news/newsDisplay?newsID=1049888>

D2. ENDANGERED ANIMALS RESCUED FROM A TRUCK ON INDIA'S ASSAM-WEST BENGAL BORDER

Exotic wild animals, including Australian bear cats and Gibon Monkeys, were seized on 8th April 2023, from a truck intercepted along the Assam-West Bengal border. The truck was reportedly *en route* to Maharashtra from Guwahati, and the animals were allegedly smuggled out of the State. Of the three arrested, one is from Kerala, while the other two hail from Maharashtra.

According to the news reports, smuggling exotic and endangered wild animals through Assam has recently been a significant problem. In November 2020, the police in Assam rescued seven endangered species of black

monkeys or apes hidden in boxes inside a truck coming from Mizoram en route to Meghalaya.

In a similar incident, forest officials in Cachar, Assam, rescued 13 exotic animals, caged in three boxes, in a tea garden on 19th October 2023.

SOURCES:

<https://www.indiatodayne.in/assam/story/endangere-d-animals-rescued-from-truck-on-assam-west-bengal-border-539735-2023-04-08>

TRAFFIC ADDS.....

The globalised market economy encourages people to indulge in expensive hobbies and consumerism, and the burgeoning exotic pet market is assumed to symbolise a new way of life and status. In India, many reports have pointed towards an increasing exotic pet trade.

Trade in exotic (non-native) wildlife is regulated by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to which India is a Signatory. Species listed under the CITES for trade can be brought into the country for pet trade with adequate clearances and documentation. Without such clearance or supporting documentation, the trade in these species is considered illegal. After the amendment to India's Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 in December 2022, CITES-listed species have also been brought into Schedule IV.

Illegal pet trade threatens species conservation and significantly affects many wild species. In many cases, especially birds, they are snatched from the wild, primarily juveniles, and are smuggled, stuffed in constricting spaces, with only a few reaching the eventual destination. Furthermore, indiscriminate hunting and capturing of species targeted because of their gender leads to a skewed gender ratio, further restricting the successful reproduction of these species.

Apart from the adverse impact to biodiversity, ecological function and national economy, wild captive animals also pose the risk of transmitting zoonotic diseases. Many traders also falsify claims that their animals have been sourced from captive



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breeding facilities when actually, the animals are sourced from the wild. This becomes a serious issue since wild animals often carry zoonotic diseases that could be transmitted to humans and other animals.

MAY 2023

WORKING TO ENSURE THE TRADE
IN WILD PLANTS AND ANIMALS IS
NOT A THREAT TO THE
CONSERVATION OF NATURE

TRAFFIC, India Office,
C/o WWF-India Secretariat,
172-B, Lodi Estate,
New Delhi-110003

Tel: +91-11-41504786,
Email: trafficind@wwfindia.net
For more information, please visit
www.trafficindia.org;
www.traffic.org



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