

TRAFFIC POST

the wildlife trade monitoring network

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TRAFFIC INDIA'S NEWSLETTER ON WILDLIFE TRADE IN INDIA



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© Forest Department, Kanha Tiger Reserve



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CITES UPDATE



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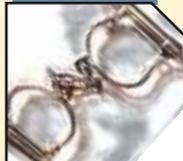
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South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN) established



During the Eleventh Meeting of the Governing Council of the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) held in Jaipur in May 2008, eight member countries pledged to work together to tackle illegal wildlife trade in the region.

In a Ministerial statement, known as the “Jaipur Declaration”, countries in the region supported the establishment of a South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN). The countries also endorsed a South Asia regional strategic plan on illegal wildlife trade that will focus on certain key areas of activity, including co-operation and co-ordination; effective legislation, policies and law enforcement; sharing knowledge and effective dissemination of information; intelligence networks and early warning systems; and capacity building.

Environment Ministers and senior delegates from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka present at this meeting issued a Joint Statement stressing the importance of mutual networking and technical support to address the needs of the region in combating illegal wildlife trade. “Regional co-operation can provide the best solution for regional problems,” the Ministers said.

Dr Arvind A. Boaz, Director-General of SACEP, an inter-government organisation established in 1982 for promoting regional co-operation in South Asia in the environment field, said “This is the first comprehensive wildlife trade initiative of its kind in South Asia and SACEP is confident it will lead to further commitment in the region, and even closer South-South co-operation to address illegal wildlife trade problems effectively”.

The Head of TRAFFIC India, Samir Sinha, who was also present at this meeting said that regional co-operation was absolutely essential in tackling the challenges of wildlife trade. “TRAFFIC warmly welcomes the initiative by all eight countries of South Asia in taking this important step of coming together and seeking to address poaching and illegal trade as a region. We look forward to helping make this initiative a conservation success”.



Distinguished delegates from various South Asian countries along with His Excellency Shri S.K. Singh, Governor of Rajasthan and Smt. Vasundhara Raje, Chief Minister of Rajasthan

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TRAFFIC India accelerates implementation of ISSC-MAP in India



TRAFFIC India is helping implement the International Standard for Sustainable Wild Collection of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (ISSC-MAP), which promotes appropriate management of wild plant populations to ensure those used in medicines and cosmetics are not over-exploited. ISSC-MAP is based on six principles: maintaining wild MAP resources, preventing negative environmental impacts, legal compliance, respecting customary rights, applying responsible management and business practices.

The ISSC-MAP wild collection standard was drawn up following extensive consultation with plant experts and the herbal products industry worldwide and was developed by WWF Germany, in co-operation with the IUCN/SSC Species Survival Commission Medicinal Plant Specialist Group (MPSG), TRAFFIC and the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN).

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TRAFFIC staff interacting with visitors at the international herbal Summit

In India, ISSC-MAP is being implemented by TRAFFIC India in co-operation with the Foundation for Revitalisation of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT). Dr G A Kinhal, Joint-Director FRLHT and Member of the Decision Group of the ISSC-MAP is guiding the launch and implementation of ISSC-MAP in India.

The National Medicinal Plants Board, Government of India is supporting the implementation. The project is funded by the German government's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

ISSC-MAP promoted at International Summit: TRAFFIC India, supported by WWF-India, helped promote ISSC-MAP at an International Summit on Medicinal and Aromatic Products and Spices organized by ASSOCHAM (The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India) in New Delhi, India, from 4-6 April 2008.

The Summit brought together cultivators, traders and manufacturers of medicinal and aromatic plants and spices to showcase continental, regional and local competencies in

this field; and to promote worldwide the upcoming business of herbals and spices. The principal guest at the summit was Smt. Panabaaka Lakshmi, Honorable Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, Government of India.

TRAFFIC India used the Summit as an opportunity to introduce the ISSC-MAP standard to a large national and international audience. Dr G A Kinhal of FRLHT spoke of the protocols that govern the export and import of medicinal and aromatic plants and the need for standardizing sustainable harvesting procedures. He then introduced ISSC-MAP and urged all stakeholders to implement it in their respective States. The presentation was very well received by the diverse cross-section of stakeholders of MAP trade.

ISSC-MAP launched in Karnataka: Following the successful launch of ISSC-MAP at Dehradun, Uttarakhand in February 2008, the standard was introduced to a workshop in Bangalore, jointly hosted by FRLHT, TRAFFIC and the Karnataka Forest Department on 30 May 2008. Mr A.K. Verma, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), Karnataka, inaugurated the workshop which was attended by over 40 participants, including key policy makers, Forest Department officials both serving and retired, officials from the Institute of Wood Science and Technology (IWST), Peace Institute, educational institutes, pharmaceutical companies, MAP cultivators and collectors, traders and others.

The Bangalore-based FRLHT, a recognized scientific and research organization, is leading the ISSC-MAP initiative in Karnataka. The Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India has designated FRLHT as a National Centre of Excellence for medicinal plants and traditional knowledge.

As an important source of valuable medicinal plants, Karnataka was identified as one of the first five target areas for the implementation of the project. The others are Uttarakhand in India, Nepal (Eastern Himalayan region), Cambodia (Greater Mekong region), Brazil (Amazon region) and Lesotho (Southern Africa).

Two sites have been selected in Karnataka and two species identified at each site for the implementation of ISSC-MAP. At Shirgungi village in Katgal Range, Honnavar Forest Division, the species selected are *Salacia chinensis* and *Embelia tsjeriam-cottam* and at Illemanne village in Tirthahalli Range, Shimoga Forest Division, the species selected are *Ailanthus triphyssa* and *Myristica malabarica*.



TRAFFIC India's banner on resource security

TRAFFIC India scales up its capacity building programme; workshops held to strengthen law enforcement



TRAFFIC has identified 'Capacity Building' as one of the significant components of its overall strategy in India. Under this programme, TRAFFIC provides training and inputs to a diverse group of officials working on wildlife enforcement related issues. The programme aims to improve understanding amongst the enforcement agencies about wildlife laws and their implementation. Recently, TRAFFIC India has conducted several capacity building workshops for key stakeholders. Some of these are as follows:

Workshops on wildlife conservation for the Judiciary: TRAFFIC India and WWF, in partnership with Karnataka Judicial Academy and Karnataka Forest Department, held a two day orientation programme on wildlife conservation for the Judiciary in Karnataka.

The workshop was held at the Karnataka Judicial Academy, Bangalore, from 7-8 June 2008 and was inaugurated by the Honorable Chief Justice of Karnataka Cyriac Joseph. Honorable Justice SR Bannurmah, Judge-High Court of Karnataka and President -Karnataka Judicial Academy presided over the inaugural function, which was graced by 18 other Senior Judges of the Karnataka High Court.

The workshop's principal aim was to sensitize the Judiciary to issues related to wildlife conservation. The Judiciary plays a significant role in championing the cause of forest and biodiversity conservation, and the workshop provided a timely update on the status of Forest and Wildlife legislations, International Conventions on related issues and enforcement of wildlife laws in India.

A total of 55 members of the Karnataka Judiciary and 10 Senior Officials of the Karnataka Forest Department participated from across the State.

Honorable Chief Justice of Karnataka Cyriac Joseph said, "Judges should be sensitised to various provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act and forest offences. This would help them to handle cases better". He further said, "The judiciary has always been supportive of wildlife and the environment".



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Participants in training at the Wildlife Institute of India

The workshop was successful in generating interest among the participants about curbing illegal wildlife trade and the implementation of wildlife laws. Immediately after this, a request was made to TRAFFIC India to conduct a similar workshop for the Honorable Judges of the Karnataka High Court.

Enforcement training workshop for officials from the Government of Nepal: TRAFFIC India and the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, organized an enforcement training workshop for officials from the Government of Nepal. The workshop was held at the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun, from 13-14 May 2008 and was followed by a field trip to Corbett Tiger Reserve.

The objective of the workshop was to strengthen cross-border co-operation and sharpen the skills required by the participants to curb illegal wildlife trade in their country.

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The training included modules on wildlife forensics, role of CITES, evaluating the scene of wildlife crime, setting up and handling information networks, conducting search and seizure investigations and developing documentation required for successful prosecution in a court of law. Eleven officials from various Protected Areas of Nepal and the CITES Management Authority, Government of Nepal participated in the training.

The faculty for the workshop included Mr P R Sinha and Dr S P Goyal from the Wildlife Institute of India, Mr M P Singh, retired DIG from the Central Bureau of Investigation, Mr Kumar Vishwajeet IPS, Uttarakhand Police, Mr SK Mukherjee (ex-Director WII), Mr Samir Sinha, Head of TRAFFIC India, Mr Khalid Pasha, Co-ordinator for TRAFFIC India and Mr James Compton, Asia/Pacific Programme Co-ordinator for TRAFFIC International.

The training was followed by a visit to Corbett Tiger Reserve where participants had the opportunity to share experiences on patrolling, fire protection, habitat management and visitor management. This exchange programme was made possible through the initiative and support of the WWF Nepal office.

Enforcement training workshop held at Pench Tiger Reserve: TRAFFIC India with support from WWF-India collaborated with the National Tiger Conservation Authority, Government of India and the Forest Department, Madhya Pradesh, to conduct a wildlife enforcement training workshop in Pench Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh, from 24–25 May 2008. The workshop was attended by 35 officials from the largest tiger-bearing forests of India, spread across 12 protected areas encompassing the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

Resource persons included Mr P R Sinha and Dr S P Goyal from the Wildlife Institute of India; Mr Mahendra Vyas, Advocate-Supreme Court and member of the Central Empowered Committee; Mr Keshav Kumar IGP-CID, Gujarat; Mr Sandeep Mittal, Zonal Director - Narcotics Control Bureau, New Delhi and Mr Samir Sinha, Head of TRAFFIC India.

During the workshop, knowledge and skills on wildlife forensic techniques, implementation of wildlife laws and policies were shared with field managers. The participants were also given a taster of the latest tools and technologies for curbing illegal trade. A hands-on training session on the use of deep-search metal detectors for locating metal traps inside forest areas was also conducted.



TRAFFIC 'Alert'

India has the caviar, covertly

Despite a red alert on caviar trade from the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), lack of co-ordination between India's Wildlife Crime Bureau and the Customs department has ensured that imports continue.

Most five-star hotels in Mumbai serve or use caviar in their kitchens. A 30 g serving of caviar, which two friends can polish off over a quick drink, costs around INR10 000 (USD230) at these hotels.

“We serve caviar as a dish and as a garnish, but you will not find it on the menu,” said a spokesperson for Leela Kempinski in Mumbai. The same was the case at the city's J.W. Marriott. The iconic Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai, however, has caviar on its menu and its Melba toasts.

The customs department, in a letter to the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, has admitted that it never tried to stop or check import of the contentious item because it did not have sufficient information about the red alert.

TRAFFIC India adds.....

Illegal caviar trade has had a devastating effect on the populations of sturgeon species in the wild. The main threats are over-fishing and poaching. In the last 15 years the Caspian Sea sturgeon population has been reduced by 40%.

Caviar, one of the most expensive foods in the world, is the processed, salted eggs of certain species of fish, especially the sturgeon, found in sub tropical and sub-Arctic waters of North America and Eurasia.

In 1998, all 27 sturgeon species were listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and since then, international trade in caviar and other sturgeon products can only take place with the relevant permits.

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TRAFFIC India steps up awareness campaign; launches film on illegal wildlife trade



TRAFFIC India launched a five minute film on illegal wildlife trade in India to a diverse audience during an event organized by WWF-India and Nokia in Mumbai to announce their partnership for a programme on the conservation of Tigers in India.

The event took place on 18 May 2008 and was attended by many eminent personalities including Priya Dutt, Honourable Member of the Parliament, Jamshed N Godrej, Trustee - WWF and well-known Bollywood & television stars such as Vivek Oberoi, John Abraham, Farouque Sheikh, Dr Anuj Saxena, Mini Mathur, Kabir Khan and Kumar Gaurav.

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TRAFFIC India's film has been produced with support from WWF-India and is an integral component of TRAFFIC's consumer awareness programme entitled Don't buy trouble. The film gives viewers a snapshot of the current trends in illegal wildlife trade and the detrimental effect it has on India's ecosystem. It also looks at domestic and international legislation that protects Indian wildlife.

Samir Sinha, Head of TRAFFIC India, and James Compton from TRAFFIC International helped distribute copies of the film and encouraged the audience to use them in spreading awareness about illegal wildlife trade.

Compton said, "It is truly rewarding to see the positive response of the audience towards the film."

The film was made by well-known filmmaker, Mr Himanshu Malhotra, and TRAFFIC India plans to release a Hindi version soon.

For a copy of the new film, please contact the TRAFFIC India office in New Delhi.

TRAFFIC 'Alert'



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However in January 2006, CITES imposed a worldwide ban on the trade in caviar and all products of the wild sturgeon, from which the caviar is obtained, after the nine major caviar producing countries failed to convince CITES that their populations of wild sturgeons were sustainable. This ban did not, however, affect caviar produced from farmed sturgeon which is usually prized much less.

This ban was lifted one year later after the Secretariat of CITES confirmed that the main producer states of caviar: Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan agreed to cut the combined catch quotas for sturgeon.

Currently, under CITES Resolution Conf. 12.7, all sturgeon caviar containers in domestic and international trade have to be sealed with non-reusable labels containing details about the source and country of origin of the caviar. This labelling system helps to ensure that all caviar entering the market is from legal sources.

In India, there is a need to raise awareness about the illegal aspects of the caviar trade amongst key enforcement agencies and buyers. With its high value, relatively low bulk, and ease of transportation, caviar offers ample scope for unscrupulous traders to cater to the market demand unmet by restricted legal supplies. Therefore there is a need to build awareness and create a mechanism that will help check the illegal caviar trade which has threatened sturgeon species in the wild.

Source:
<http://www.hindustantimes.com/storypage/storypage.aspx?id=5ae12ff4-999b-431d-ae8-436dc7264e94&&Headline=India+has+the+caviar%2c+covertly>
http://assets.panda.org/downloads/Sturgeon_factsheet.pdf
http://www.nhm.ac.uk/about-us/news/2006/jan/news_7416.html
http://www.panda.org/news_facts/newsroom/news/index.cfm?uNewsID=91220
<http://www.wwf.org.uk/filelibrary/pdf/organisedcrime.pdf>
http://assets.wwf.ch/downloads/2005_12_labeling_leaflet.pdf

Metal detectors help strengthen security at Kanha



© Forest Department, Kanha Tiger Reserve

Forest staff learning to use the metal detectors

TRAFFIC India has donated two deep search metal detectors to the Forest Department at Kanha Tiger Reserve to help them fight poaching activities. The detectors are used to locate metal traps used by poachers to trap wild animals and have been in use by the Forest Department in Kanha since December 2007.

Mr S Sen, Deputy Director of Kanha Tiger Reserve, said, "Two groups of the Forest Department have been trained to use this equipment, which is used for about four hours every day in all kinds of terrain. Though no traps have been located so far, the very presence of detectors acts as a deterrent to the use of metal traps by poachers."

TRAFFIC India will soon make available more such detectors to various Tiger Reserves across the country.

New member joins TRAFFIC India



Col. N. G Sithou joined TRAFFIC India on 15 May 2008 as Officer on Special Duty (on deputation).

Col. Sithou is a serving Indian Army officer and brings with him rich experience of over 29 years in the field. He is the recipient of the 'Chief of Army Staff Commendation Card' for distinguished service.

Col. Sithou can be contacted at nsithou@wwfindia.net

OUTPOST:

Indian Star Tortoises prominent in illegal freshwater turtle and tortoise trade in Bangkok market



© Chris R. Shepherd/TRAFFIC Southeast Asia

Indian Star Tortoise *Geochelone elegans*

Thailand is a major hub for the illegal international trade in freshwater turtles and tortoises and Indian Star Tortoise *Geochelone elegans* ranks high in this trade. This was highlighted in a new TRAFFIC report: *Pet freshwater turtle and tortoise trade in Chatuchak Market, Bangkok, Thailand* released in April by TRAFFIC Southeast Asia.

Surveys at Chatuchak Market (also known as the JJ or Weekend Market) by TRAFFIC investigators found that 25 out of 27 freshwater turtle and tortoise species for sale were non-native, the vast majority

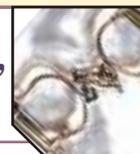
of them illegally imported into the country. The most commonly observed species at Chatuchak was the Radiated Tortoise *Astrochelys radiata*, a species endemic to Madagascar and listed in Appendix I of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), meaning that all commercial international trade in wild Radiated Tortoises is prohibited.

Indian Star Tortoise *Geochelone elegans* was the second most heavily imported CITES II-listed species recorded between 2000–2005, with all 1800 of those imported into Thailand reported to have originated in Lebanon and Kazakhstan and said to be captive bred (with the exception of 150 where no origin is reported, only that they were re-exported from Lebanon).

In 2004-2005 alone, 1700 Indian Star Tortoises were imported into Thailand, allegedly captive bred in Kazakhstan and re-exported via Lebanon, a country which is currently a non-Party to CITES. This is cause for concern and requires further investigation as no export of this species has ever been reported from any CITES affiliated countries to Lebanon or Kazakhstan since the inception of CITES in 1975. Furthermore, Indian Star Tortoise is totally protected in its three Range States, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and export is prohibited from these countries. Furthermore, while it is possible to breed this species in captivity, it is highly unlikely that it is bred in such quantities.

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TRAFFIC 'Alert'



RPSF seizes turtles from Bengal bound train

Over 190 tortoises were seized by Railway Protection Special Force (RPSF) personnel from the Farakka Express at Danapur, Patna in Bihar, on 5 June 2008. The tortoises were being smuggled from Uttar Pradesh to West Bengal. The person carrying the tortoises was arrested while the seized tortoises were sent to the local Sanjay Gandhi Biological Park.

Sources said that RPSF escort personnel were carrying out a routine search of the Farakka Express bogies when they stumbled upon some gunny bags in which the reptiles were kept. Although the person with the tortoises was arrested, the alleged kingpin of the gang managed to escape. The tortoises were to be delivered to a person in West Bengal for onward smuggling to Bangladesh where their flesh is used to make medicines to cure impotency.

This is not a one off case. Earlier, 45 tortoises were seized by the RPSF from the same train at Danapur on 20 May 2008. They were also en route to West Bengal.

TRAFFIC India adds.....

In India, there are 28 species of tortoises and freshwater turtles and 7 species of marine turtles. Almost all of these are protected under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972, under which their trade is totally prohibited.

Despite the legal protection, many species of turtles and tortoises are traded illegally across the border to neighbouring countries. They are either sold as pets or for meat, and traditional Chinese Medicines also use them as an integral ingredient. China is believed to be one of the largest markets for this trade as its native turtle species populations have been depleted dramatically, so they are sourced from countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal.

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“Dealers stated openly that many specimens were smuggled into and out of Thailand,” said Chris R. Shepherd, Senior Programme Officer for TRAFFIC Southeast Asia. “They even offered potential buyers advice on how to smuggle reptiles through customs and onto aeroplanes.”

Buyers from other parts of Asia, particularly Japan, Malaysia and Singapore, are known to purchase and smuggle large numbers of freshwater turtles and tortoises from the dealers in Chatuchak Market for retail in their respective countries.

Dealers were heard trying to sell the most endangered species on the basis of their rarity value.

“It is a sad day when people use a species's risk of extinction as a selling point,” said Dr Jane Smart, Head of IUCN's Species Programme. “We urge governments and law enforcement agencies to use the information contained in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species to stop this kind of behaviour before it is too late.”

The report recommends amending current national legislation to close loopholes relating to the possession of CITES-listed species. It also encourages enforcement authorities at international border crossings to be more vigilant in preventing the trade in prohibited species through Thailand, and recommends increased co-operation with concerned countries to crack down on the highly organized illegal pet freshwater turtle and tortoise trade.

OUTPOST:

Ninth meeting of the COP to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held in Germany



The ninth Conference of the Parties (COP 9) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was held from 19–30 May 2008, in Bonn, Germany. More than 4000 delegates representing parties and other governments, UN agencies, inter-governmental, non-governmental, indigenous and local community representatives, academia and industry participated.

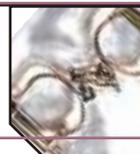
The CBD was negotiated under the auspices of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and adopted on 22 May 1992, although it became operational only on 29 December 1993. There are currently 191 parties to the Convention, which aims to promote the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. India became a signatory to the CBD in June 1992 and was one of the most pro-active countries in the formulation of the CBD.

During COP 9 to the CBD, India shared its valuable experiences regarding the major initiatives undertaken by it in a number of areas including: (i) joint forest management; (ii) eco-development committees in protected areas; (iii) access and benefit-sharing regime; (iv) plant breeders and farmer's rights, and (v) social recognition and awards.

According to India, the top priority for the CBD should be to design and implement incentive measures. For this, India suggested undertaking public awareness campaigns on social scarcity values of critical environmental goods; improving market access for non-timber forest resources and strengthening the link between their management and Joint Forestry Management; introducing market-based instruments such as taxes or subsidies when the goods and services are traded or tradable etc.

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TRAFFIC 'Alert'



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Most of the trade occurs through porous international borders and there is need to sensitize border Paramilitary Forces to the levels of the illicit trade and to strengthen their enforcement actions against it.

Source: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Cities/Patna/RPSF_seizes_turtles_from_Bengal-bound_train/articleshow/3101007.cms
Asian Turtles Are Threatened by Extinction, Pro Wildlife e.V., Germany

Rhino poachers want horn, and tails too

Following reports that fake rhino horns are being circulated in the illegal wildlife market, smugglers are asking poachers to authenticate the horn by providing additional rhino body parts. According to some non-governmental organisations, nails, ears and hoofs are sometimes removed to authenticate the horn.

Assam wildlife officials confirmed they had received similar reports, and knew of a case where a rhino's tail had been removed to confirm the horn was genuine. In April 2008, the Forest Department discovered two rhino carcasses lacking their horns, nails and tails.

TRAFFIC India adds.....

The Great Indian Rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis* is one of five rhino species found worldwide. It is poached for its horn which is used in traditional medicines in East Asia. In Yemen, the horn is also carved into ceremonial dagger handles known as jambiyas. The horns are usually traded as a single piece and can fetch 510 times the price of an African Rhino horn. The major trade centres in India are Siliguri in West Bengal, and Dimapur in Nagaland, from where the horns are smuggled out to Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar, respectively. The contraband finally finds its way to South-East Asian countries.

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Overall COP 9 to CBD adopted 37 decisions on a wide range of items such as agricultural biodiversity, including biofuels and biodiversity; the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation; invasive alien species; forest biodiversity; incentive measures; the ecosystem approach; progress in implementation of the Strategic Plan towards the target to reduce significantly the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010 and relevant Millennium Development Goals; financial resources and the financial mechanism.

For more details on the summary of decisions undertaken at COP 9, please visit <http://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/cop/cop-09/official/cop-09-12-en.pdf> or <http://www.iisd.org/2008/06/iisd-rs-summary.html>

CITES UPDATE



This section brings to you latest updates on CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) with a special focus on India-specific issues.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was established as a response to growing concerns that over-exploitation of wildlife through international trade was contributing to the rapid decline of many species of plants and animals around the world. The Convention was signed by representatives from 80 countries in Washington DC, USA, on 3 March 1973, and entered into force on 1 July 1975. There are currently 173 parties, with Oman joining as the 173rd party on 17 June 2008.

The 17th meeting of the Plants Committee and 23rd meeting of the Animals Committee of CITES were held in Geneva, Switzerland from 15–24 April 2008. In session, discussion was as follows:

- 1. *Pterocarpus santalinus*:** IUCN proposed categorizing this Indian species as ‘urgent concern’, noting that an NDF (non-detriment finding) has not been completed and that the species is Endangered. Malaysia noted their confiscation and disposal of three illegal shipments of the species originating in India. The Secretariat said that a major problem with this species is that trade is not being reported, but that this issue does not fall within the purview of NDFs.
- 2. *Rauvolfia serpentina*:** IUCN proposed categorizing the species from Thailand as “least concern”, and those from India and Myanmar as “possible concern.” Thailand noted that it is moving towards carrying out an NDF for the species.
- 3. *Taxus wallichiana*:** IUCN proposed to categorize the species from India as “possible concern”, noting that the export of wild specimens is prohibited, but that this does not appear to apply to cultivated specimens or finished products.

The Plants Committee finally recommended that *Pterocarpus santalinus* and *Rauvolfia serpentina* from India be categorized as “urgent concern”; and that within three months the Management Authority of India should clarify the legislative status of exports of these species and the level of artificial propagation, and that if exports of wild origin are to continue, within two years India should carry out a preliminary inventory of standing stock, establish a revised conservative export quota, and report to the Secretariat.

Additionally, it recommended that *Taxus wallichiana* from India should be categorized as “urgent concern”, and within three months India should confirm that it does not allow export of wild harvested species, and if exports are confirmed the Scientific and Management Authorities of India should confirm with the Secretariat that the existing policies provide an adequate basis for the formulation of NDFs.

Source: <http://www.iisd.ca/download/pdf/enb2162e.pdf> and www.cites.org

TRAFFIC ‘Alert’



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Reports indicate that six Rhinos were killed in Assam between January and June 2008, and the threat from poaching is rising.

In Africa, the last four Northern White Rhinoceros *Ceratotherium simum cottoni* remaining in the wild are feared to have been killed for their horns by poachers and the subspecies is now believed to be extinct in the wild. Only a few are left in captivity but they are difficult to breed and the number is so low that the subspecies is regarded as biologically unviable. This is a clear indication that the trade in rhino horn if left unchecked can have a disastrous affect.

Source:

<http://www.deccan.com/nation/nationalnews.asp#Rhino%20poachers%20want%20horn,%20tail>

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/environment/article4152951.ece>

Foreigners arrested in Darjeeling for smuggling insects

Two men from the Czech Republic were arrested on 22 June 2008 in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, after they were found in possession of hundreds of live beetles, butterflies and their larvae.

Forest officials picked up the duo after keeping track of their activities when they toured Srikhola and Rimbick, about 70 km from Darjeeling. The two have been handed over to the police.

More than 200 live beetles and an equal number of butterflies and larvae were found in their possession, along with tools used for trapping the insects. The foreigners will face charges under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

TRAFFIC India adds.....

Insects are an important component of biodiversity, but seizures like the above clearly indicate that even insects in the wild are not safe anymore.

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TRAFFIC 'Alert'



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Many of these insects are protected under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and some even enjoy the same legal status as the Tiger. Even though the species of butterflies and beetles seized in this case are not clear from the report, the fact that trained scientists are apparently engaging in "bio-piracy" is cause for serious concern.

This is not an isolated case: in July 2007, three French nationals were found with rare species of butterflies and moths in Gangtok, Sikkim. In 2001, two Russian entomologists were also arrested in Sikkim, for attempting to smuggle endangered butterflies, moths and beetles out of India. The total weight of insects seized from them was close to 21 kg.

Source:

http://www.telegraphindia.com/1080623/jsp/nation/story_9449984.jsp

<http://www.newkerala.com/nknews.php?action=fullnews&id=49364>

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1485855.stm

Endangered wild animal skins found in illicit wildlife haul

In April 2008, Indian authorities arrested two suspected smugglers who were trying to ship eight Tiger, eight Leopard, three Snow Leopard and three python skins to Nepal. Acting on a tip off, the police recovered the 22 skins from the baggage of a retired Indian army soldier and a civilian accomplice in Pratapgarh, a town southeast of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh.

Since one of the men involved was a retired army officer, the police are investigating the possibility that other army personnel in northern India may be involved in the smuggling ring.

TRAFFIC India adds.....

Tiger *Panthera tigris*, Leopard *Panthera pardus*, Snow Leopard *Uncia uncia* and all species of pythons found in India are listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. Under this, hunting or trade in these species is prohibited. Furthermore, international trade in these species is also banned or strictly regulated under CITES.

All the above are endangered in India and because there is little demand for the skins in India, the majority are intended for markets elsewhere.

Many similar seizures have taken place in Uttar Pradesh previously. In January 2000, police with support from TRAFFIC India, seized 4 Tiger skins, 70 Leopard skins, 221 Blackbuck skins, 18 000 Leopard claws, 150 kg of Leopard and Tiger bone, 132 Tiger claws, 2 Leopard teeth and a dried Leopard penis from properties in Khaga in the north Indian State of Uttar Pradesh. This seizure was one the largest hauls of illegal wildlife products ever recorded in India, indicating a scale and level of organization unprecedented within the illegal wildlife trade nexus.

Similarly, on 4 December 2007, the Special Task Force of the Uttar Pradesh Police seized three Tiger skins and three Tiger skeletons in Allahabad. Sixteen people were arrested including wildlife trader Shabeer Hassan Qureshi who is also the prime suspect in the above mentioned Khaga seizure. This could prove to be a major break thorough against wildlife crime in India.

In another seizure, around 20 kg of Tiger bones were recovered from a house in Gurgaon in Haryana on 8 July 2008. The accused in this case is believed to be part of the international network dealing in smuggling of prohibited animal body parts and is active in Uttar Pradesh. The investigating officers suspect that the bones were of a large Tiger from either the state of Uttarakhand or Uttar Pradesh . The seizure was led by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau.

Source:

<http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/04/16/tiger.smuggling.ap/>

<http://www.eia-international.org/cgi/reports/reports.cgi?t=template&a=11>

<http://bayturtle.com/wlx/>

<http://www.indianexpress.com/story/332755.html>

Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 8 July 2008

IN FOCUS:
Yarsa Gumba–The Keera Ghaas



Yarsa Gumba *Cordyceps sinensis*, commonly known as Keera Ghaas (insect-grass) in India is becoming a quiet victim of massive exploitation in the country. Originally known only from Nepal, Tibet and Sichuan, Qinghai, Xizang and Yunnan provinces of China, Yarsa Gumba was collected and exported through both regulated and unregulated channels. It is only during the last few years that it has been found in the higher reaches of Arunachal Pradesh and more recently in the Garhwal and Kumaon Himalayas in India.



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Collected specimens of Yarsa Gumba *Cordyceps sinensis*

Yarsa Gumba is an entomophilus fungus found primarily in subalpine regions, from 3200 m to 4000 m altitude. It is considered a miracle ingredient in many traditional medicines and practitioners believe it helps to enhance lung function, bolster the kidney's yang energy, relieves coughing, poor vitality, impotency, spermatorrhea,

asthma, aching joints, and reduces sputum and the general debility caused by long term illness.

The parasitic fungus grows on several species of caterpillars, deriving its nutrients from the caterpillar itself. In late autumn, fungal spores are released that infect the caterpillar. By early summer of the following year, the fungal infestation has killed the caterpillar and the fruiting body can be seen protruding from the caterpillar's head. Since it resembles a grass sprout, it is called Yarsa Gumba meaning "winter insect summer grass".

June is the peak month for the collection of the fungus, with collecting extending into the second half of July. On average, one person collects approximately 3500-3800 mummified caterpillars weighing about 1 kg per day. In the border town of Dharchula in Pithoragarh District, Yarsa Gumba fetches INR80 000-90 000/ kg, the product is transported through Nepal to markets in China. It is estimated that 400-500 kg of Yarsa Gumba is illegally trafficked into Nepal from Dharchula every year. Reports in the past indicate that many cross-border traders who sell Yarsa Gumba also trade in illegal wildlife products such as skins and body parts of Tiger, Leopard and other endangered wildlife.

Yarsa Gumba is not listed under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972, nor under the EXIM policy of India. Therefore, there is hardly any regulation of its collection or trade. Furthermore, this species is also not listed under CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora).

Samir Sinha, Head-TRAFFIC India commented, "Currently there is very little information regarding the trade of Yarsa Gumba from India. People go to various extremes to collect this fungus. This large scale collection of the species in such a short span can have devastating effect on this fragile alpine ecoregion. Furthermore, there are growing reports from various agencies suggesting that the money that comes from the fungus is also believed to sustain trafficking in protected species. There is an urgent need to understand the prevailing trends and build suitable mechanisms to regulate and check such wildlife trade."

Source:Habitat Ecology,Bio-chemical analysis and Pharmacognosy of Yar Tsa Gumba (*Cordyceps sinensis* Berk.) Unpublished paper. Chandra S. Negi, Department of Zoology, Government Postgraduate College, Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand
http://www.wildlifetrustofindia.org/html/news/2003/030618_yarsagumbu.htm
<http://www.wwfchina.org/wwfpress/publication/lhasa/05ABCWorkshop.pdf>

SIGNPOST:
Other significant news stories to read

Trade in mammoth ivory flourishes in Russia - An article, *Trade in mammoth ivory, helped by global thaw, flourishes in Russia*, by Andrew E. Kramer, in the International Herald Tribune, Europe, 25 March 2008, throws light on the on-going mammoth ivory trade across the region. The trade, bolstered recently by global warming, which has melted the tundra and exposed more frozen remains, is not only legal but actually endorsed by conservationists, says the article. To read more please visit <http://www.ihrt.com/articles/2008/03/25/europe/mammoth.php>

Nepal nails famed US explorer for illegal treasure trove - A famed American explorer and writer, whose books on Tibet opened the forbidden former Buddhist kingdom to Western eyes, has been named most wanted by Nepal Police for possessing an illegal treasure trove of wildlife parts and ancient archaeological artefacts. The police discovered a sizeable cache of ancient idols, Tibetan paintings, Tiger skins, bones of endangered animals and other illegal animal parts in two apartments rented by him in the capital. To read more please visit <http://www.zeenews.com/articles.asp?aid=444814&sid=SAS>

Police uncover huge wild animal smuggling case - In March 2008, police in Shantou, a coastal city in the east of Guangdong province, China, revealed details of a massive smuggling case involving more than 7000 animals destined for dinner plates across the province. Three suspects were detained, while the hunt goes on for several others who escaped. The police confiscated 5776 Monitor Lizards, 1170 cobras, 260 Malaysian Box Turtles and 370 Giant Asian Pond Turtles. To read more please visit http://www.china.org.cn/environment/news/2008-03/22/content_13290738.htm

Another rhino killed in Kaziranga - Another rhino in the Kaziranga National Park in Assam, India, was shot by poachers, taking the total number of rhinos killed in the forest since last year to 24. To read more, please visit <http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/holnus/002200806061655.htm>

Eighty eight threatened bird species in India - The much-anticipated IUCN Red List 2008, released on 19 May 2008, features India as among the 10 countries in the world having the largest number of threatened species of birds. Brazil tops the list with 141 while India is ranked seventh with 88 species. To read more, please visit <http://www.thehindu.com/2008/05/22/stories/2008052257322200.htm>

HEADLINES

Indian vultures may be gone in 10 yrs



Indian vultures, which were once common across the country, are now facing a dire future. A recent study indicates that their numbers have plummeted to critically low levels, and they may disappear within a decade. The birds are being affected by a combination of factors, including habitat loss and the use of veterinary drugs that are toxic to them.

Wild Indian birds face climate heat



Wild Indian birds are facing a significant threat from climate change. Rising temperatures and altered weather patterns are affecting their habitats and food sources. Conservationists are warning that many species could be pushed to the brink of extinction if the current trend continues.

WCCB to start security audit of wildlife reserves across India

Wildlife Conservation and Security Commission (WCCB) is set to launch a comprehensive security audit across all wildlife reserves in India. The initiative aims to identify vulnerabilities and strengthen the protection of these critical habitats.

Tiger, leopard skins seized, 3 held



Three individuals have been arrested and held in connection with the seizure of tiger and leopard skins. The skins were found hidden in a remote location. The case is being investigated as part of a larger effort to combat wildlife trafficking.

Turning star turtle



The star turtle, a critically endangered species, is facing a new challenge. Conservationists are working to protect its remaining populations and ensure its survival. The turtle's unique star-shaped shell is a key feature that makes it a sought-after target for poachers.

World Bank now on the tiger trail

The World Bank has announced a new initiative to support tiger conservation efforts across Asia. The program will provide financial assistance and technical expertise to help governments and local communities protect and restore tiger habitats.

Foreigners threaten Afghan snow leopards



The snow leopard population in Afghanistan is under increasing threat from poachers and habitat loss. Conservationists are calling for urgent action to protect this iconic species and its remaining habitat. The poaching of snow leopards is often driven by the demand for their skins and bones in traditional medicine.



7 rhino poachers held near Kaziranga



Seven rhino poachers have been arrested near the Kaziranga National Park. The poachers were caught in the act of killing rhinos for their horns. The incident has raised concerns about the safety of the park and the future of the rhino population.

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