



Poaching of and illegal trade in tigers

1. This document has been prepared by the CITES Secretariat and INTERPOL General Secretariat.

Background

2. The tiger, *Panthera tigris*, is one of the world's best-known 'flagship' species. However, it may also be the one that is closest to extinction. In the early 1900s, tigers ranged across much of Asia and are thought to have numbered about 100,000. By 2010, numbers of tigers in the wild were estimated to have fallen to 3,200. Tigers now occupy only 7 % of their historical range.
3. This startling decline resulted from a number of impacts (in no order of priority): reduction in, and fragmentation of, suitable habitat; falling numbers of prey species; encroachment by humans into tiger habitats; legal hunting (during part of this period); deliberate eradication through government policies in some areas (for part of this period); conflict between tigers and humans and livestock; and poaching and illegal trade.
4. It was in the early 1970s that the conservation community began to appreciate the rapid loss of these animals but, despite efforts by tiger range States and the international community, their continuing decline has been almost unstoppable. Indeed, although range States established protected areas and tiger reserves, numbers have continued to fall. It has gradually become clear that the most significant current threat to the survival of tigers is poaching and the subsequent illegal trade of tiger skins and other body parts.
5. Almost every part of a tiger has a value in the 'black markets' of illegal trade in wildlife. Its skin is prized for decorative purposes and is incorporated into the traditional clothing of some ethnic minorities. Its bones have historically been used as ingredients in a wide range of traditional medicines. Its whiskers have been used to treat toothache. Its collar bones are regarded as good luck charms by gamblers. Its feet, mounted on the outside of a house, are believed to ward off evil spirits. Its claws and teeth are regarded as talismans. Its penis, dissolved in alcohol, is claimed to be an effective aphrodisiac. Its tail can be processed in the belief that it can be used as a treatment for skin cancer. Illegal trade in tiger meat for human consumption also appears to have increased in recent years. There seems almost no end to the variety of ways in which those who trade in this animal can profit. Trade in live tigers, although very limited, also occasionally occurs, primarily for private collections of exotic species or as a status symbol (sometimes used by senior figures in organized crime groups).
6. *Panthera tigris*, apart from one subspecies, has been listed in Appendix I of CITES since the treaty entered into force on 1 July 1975. The remaining subspecies (the Amur or Siberian tiger) was included in Appendix I on 22 October 1987. Consequently, international commercial trade in tigers is prohibited. Since the late 1990s, domestic trade in specimens of tiger has been banned in each country that historically engaged in such trade.

Introduction

7. Despite the recognition of the significance of poaching of and illegal trade in tigers, there has been limited effort to obtain an overview of these crimes from an international perspective. In some tiger range States, government agencies and non-governmental organizations have been quite successful in collecting data relating to poaching incidents and seizures of skins, bones and other body parts. Elsewhere, such data-gathering has been either patchy or non-existent.
8. It has, therefore, been almost impossible for the law enforcement community to employ modern crime analysis techniques in relation to the illegal killing and trading of tigers, at local, regional or international levels. Consequently, there has been little opportunity to develop strategies to combat such crimes. There

has been similarly little exchange between countries, or with international agencies, of intelligence regarding tiger-related crimes and those responsible for them. This too has hampered opportunities to conduct cross-border operations directed against wildlife criminals or to facilitate targeted enforcement responses.

9. This is particularly frustrating if one acknowledges that illegal trade in tigers is not especially widespread. Much of it appears to be conducted by a relatively limited number of individuals or groups and is destined for specialized markets or consumers. Although some of these markets are clandestine in nature, they are nonetheless open to infiltration and targeting, and several of their geographical locations are known.
10. The CITES Tiger Enforcement Task Force, meeting in India in 2005, called for an analysis of data on poaching and illegal trade. However, the CITES Secretariat was unable to acquire sufficient data to facilitate any meaningful analysis.
11. The CITES Secretariat and INTERPOL General Secretariat, in late 2009, during a law enforcement intelligence training course for officials of tiger range States, attempted to gather relevant data but, again, with limited success.
12. At its 15th meeting (Doha, 2010), the Conference of the Parties to CITES adopted the following Decisions:

Directed to Parties, especially tiger range States

15.46 *All Parties, but particularly tiger range States, should submit, by 30 June 2010, information relating to incidents of poaching of and illegal trade in tigers that have occurred within their territory since the beginning of 2007. Information should be submitted using the Ecomessage format distributed in Notification to the Parties No. 2009/028 of 22 July 2009. Ecomessage forms for each incident should be submitted to the CITES Secretariat or to the General Secretariat of ICPO-INTERPOL via INTERPOL National Central Bureaus.*

Directed to the Secretariat

15.47 *The Secretariat shall collaborate with ICPO-INTERPOL to undertake an analysis of the information received from Parties. Two reports, one for public consumption and the other solely for the law enforcement community, should be prepared. The public document will be posted on the CITES website, whilst the other will be circulated in a restricted fashion to relevant enforcement agencies. The Secretariat shall report on this matter at the 61st meeting of the Standing Committee and make any relevant recommendations as a result of the analysis.*

13. The CITES Secretariat subsequently issued Notification to the Parties No. 2010/011, of 26 May 2010, encouraging Parties to submit data using the Ecomessage format.

(See <http://www.cites.org/eng/notif/2010/E011.pdf>)

14. The Secretariat passed all information it received to the INTERPOL General Secretariat, which also received information through its own communication channels. Officers from INTERPOL's Environmental Crime Programme conducted an analysis of the submissions. This report is the outcome of that analysis.

Reporting countries

15. By 30 September 2010, information had been received from the following 13 countries: Australia, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, the Netherlands, Singapore, Thailand, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam
16. No information was received from the following tiger range States: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and the Russian Federation.
17. Since it seems unlikely that any tiger range State is free from either poaching or illegal trade, it must be presumed that data relating to such crimes are not being collected in those countries or simply that they did not report them.

18. For the purposes of this analysis, all information submitted in relation to tiger body parts or products has been treated on the basis that these were genuinely from a tiger or contained genuine tiger ingredients. CITES and INTERPOL note, however, that there is widespread fraud in relation to tiger parts and derivatives that are traded and offered for sale. This is especially true in the case of medicinal products labelled as containing tiger bone. Historically, tests conducted by forensic science laboratories have been unable to detect the presence of tiger ingredients in the majority of such products.
19. However, because the Conference of the Parties to CITES has recommended that any item labelled as containing a specimen of a CITES-listed species should be treated as if it did, and because trade in such specimens (whether genuine or not) indicates a demand for the genuine article, the analysis has not sought to distinguish between genuine and fake specimens (unless specifically relevant).

Reporting format

20. The majority of countries that reported did so using the Ecomessage system, which has been advocated by both the CITES Secretariat and INTERPOL as the preferred method of communicating information and intelligence on environmental crime. The message form is designed to provide guidance for reporting officers and ensure a uniform way of reporting cases. Additionally, the format facilitates efficient import of data into INTERPOL's International Criminal Intelligence System (ICIS) and assists in analysis of the information. Other methods of reporting included tables and spreadsheets.
21. The content and quality of information varied somewhat with some countries providing great detail including smuggling routes, condition and preparation of commodities seized, value of commodities and penalties. Some countries also provided nominal information, which is essential in helping to identify the key criminals behind the trade in tigers.
22. It should be noted that the majority of countries reported very low incidence of tiger-related cases over the period 2007-2010. It is difficult to say whether this is due to a lack of interception and seizures, to low incidence of illegal trade, or to incomplete reporting at the time of the offence.

Summary of findings

23. Countries reported seizures of tigers and their parts in various forms. In India, which has the largest population of wild tigers, most incidents related to the poaching and unlawful killing of tigers identified through the discovery of whole tiger carcasses. Whole carcasses, sometimes found frozen at the time of seizure, were also seized in Thailand and Viet Nam. The freezing of tigers prior to transportation suggests the involvement of more urban-based sources, possibly from captive-breeding facilities although this is a difficult conclusion to make.
24. Other countries in Asia seized tiger claws, teeth and bones. Teeth and claws were sometimes incorporated into items of jewellery.
25. In countries outside Asia, including Australia, the United States and European countries, the most frequently-seized items were for traditional or complementary medicinal use. Plasters and pills were the most common preparations of the items seized. Of these medicinal preparations, the majority was described as being for personal use and was carried in the personal luggage of travellers.
26. Some of the reports submitted contained information on the countries of origin and transit and, to a lesser extent, destination. The data are not of sufficient quantity to draw conclusions regarding trade routes. However, Australia and the United States reported that the majority of attempted importations of traditional medicines originated or last transited through China, with Viet Nam also mentioned. It should be noted that all Indonesia's seizures were reported to be Sumatran tiger (*P. tigris sumatrae*) (skin, bone and whole carcasses), indicating that Indonesia is not apparently affected by illegal imports of specimens from other range States.

Conclusion

27. The CITES Secretariat and INTERPOL wish to record their appreciation to those countries that submitted data. The analysis has not been able to throw any particularly fresh light on patterns or trends in relation to the poaching of tigers and the subsequent illegal trade in specimens.

28. Unless they receive detailed data in relation to crimes directed at tigers, from all relevant sources, it is next to impossible for crime analysts to provide any meaningful overview of such activities or supply intelligence that would assist enforcement agencies in responding.
29. The CITES Secretariat and INTERPOL have no recommendations to make to the CITES Standing Committee at this time. However, they wish to note that INTERPOL is currently working with a small number of tiger range States on operations directed against illegal trade in tiger parts and derivatives and hopes to expand such activities across a larger number of range States in due course.