

Captive-bred... or wild-taken?

Examples of possible illegal trade in wild animals through fraudulent claims of captive-breeding



Sources of information and photos

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Analysis of CITES trade data (CITES Trade Database, UNEP-WCMC) undertaken by TRAFFIC concerning *Testudo horsfieldii* for the period 1995-2008 (unpublished).
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Nijman, V., Shepherd C.S. and Stengel C.J. (2012). *The export and re-export of CITES-listed birds from the Solomon Islands*. TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, Malaysia.
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Nijman, V. and Shepherd, C.R. (2010). The role of Asia in the global trade in CITES II-listed poison arrow frogs: hopping from Kazakhstan to Lebanon to Thailand and beyond. *Biodiversity Conservation* 19 (7).
Todd, M. (2011). *Trade in Madagascar's reptiles and amphibians in Thailand*. TRAFFIC Southeast Asia. Malaysia.
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Nijman, V. and Shepherd, C.R. (2009). *Wildlife trade from ASEAN to the EU: issues with the trade in captive-bred reptiles from Indonesia*. TRAFFIC Europe for the European Commission, Brussels, Belgium.
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Burmese python ©Laura (Tiger girl), Flickr.com Creative commons

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Lyons, J.A. and Natusch, D.J.D. (2011). Wildlife laundering through breeding farms: Illegal harvest, population declines and a means of regulating the trade of green pythons (*Morelia viridis*) from Indonesia. *Biological Conservation*, 114 (12).
Green tree python ©Angus McNab, Flickr.com
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Bird of paradise ©Bob|P-&-S, Flickr.com Creative Commons

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Suspicious surrounding captive-breeding

Most people would never imagine their pet might have been sourced illegally, that they have inadvertently supported wildlife crime, or that their purchase could have contributed to the threatened status of species in the wild...



**CAPTIVE-
BRED ...
OR WILD-
TAKEN?**



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

***CITES: Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora**

Unsustainable and illegal trade for pets, food and traditional medicine is a principal threat to many species. However, in recent years, a new global phenomenon of serious conservation concern has emerged: the laundering of species collected from the wild, but declared as “bred in captivity” to evade international regulatory controls, including trade under CITES*.

This phenomenon is believed to be affecting many types of animals including tortoises, turtles, birds, frogs, lizards, snakes and mammals, some of which are already listed as threatened on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. The Horsfield's Tortoise *Testudo horsfieldii* (Vulnerable) and the Spiny Turtle *Heosemys spinosa* (Endangered) are just two examples.*

A number of cases involving suspected fraudulent claims of captive-breeding are illustrated in this short publication, with the aim of highlighting and raising awareness of the broad scale of this problem. We conclude by summarising what TRAFFIC is doing, and what you as a consumer can do, to help to address this serious threat to many species across the globe.

Indicators of possible problems include:

- ↑ Sudden increase of trade in reportedly captive-bred, farmed or ranched specimens
- ⚡ Erratic trade patterns
- ⚖ Discrepancies in reported imports and exports
- ➡ Countries of re-export never having imported parental breeding stock from range States
- Transiting through non-CITES* Parties
- ☹ Species known to be difficult to breed in captivity
- Not enough parental stock
- 📄 Recently established facilities, which claim to have bred species that are slow to mature; facilities identified as the source of specimens are non-existent; facilities with no experience of breeding; or inadequate facilities
- ★ Traders/breeders openly admitting laundering

Case n° 1

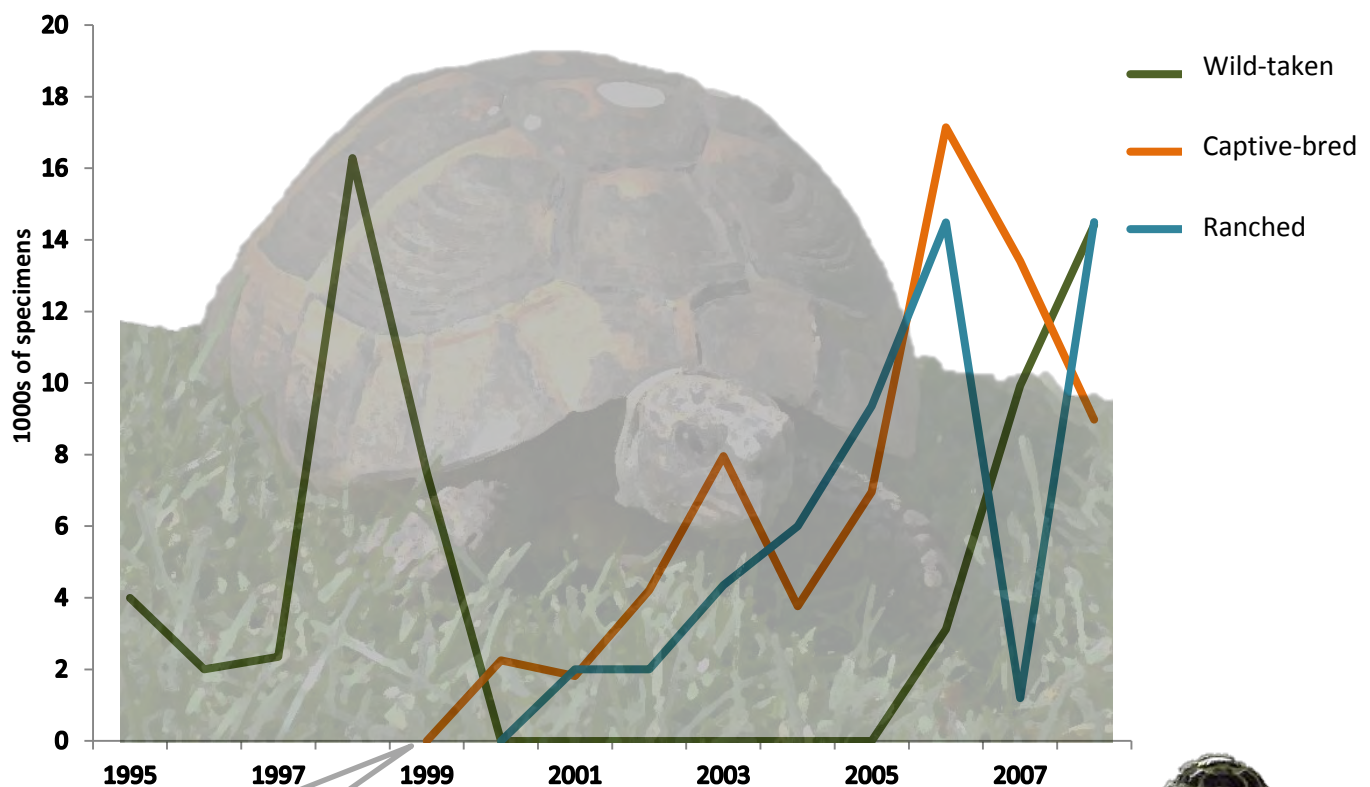
The Horsfield's Tortoise *Testudo horsfieldii*



- ✓ Listed in CITES Appendix II*
- ✓ Native to Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, China, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan
- ✓ Commonly traded for pets

Sudden increase in trade of captive-bred specimens

- following a trade ban for
wild-taken specimens



1999 - 2006

**EU suspended imports in
wild-taken (W)
specimens from most
range States**

A total of 82 293 non-wild specimens were imported into the EU between 2000 and 2006.

>90% of captive-bred specimens were imported from a single country with no previous known history of captive-breeding this species (Ukraine).

Prior to the trade ban, there were no EU imports of specimens of Horsfield's Tortoise declared as captive-bred or ranched.

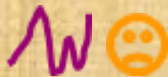


Erratic trade patterns, discrepancies in reported imports

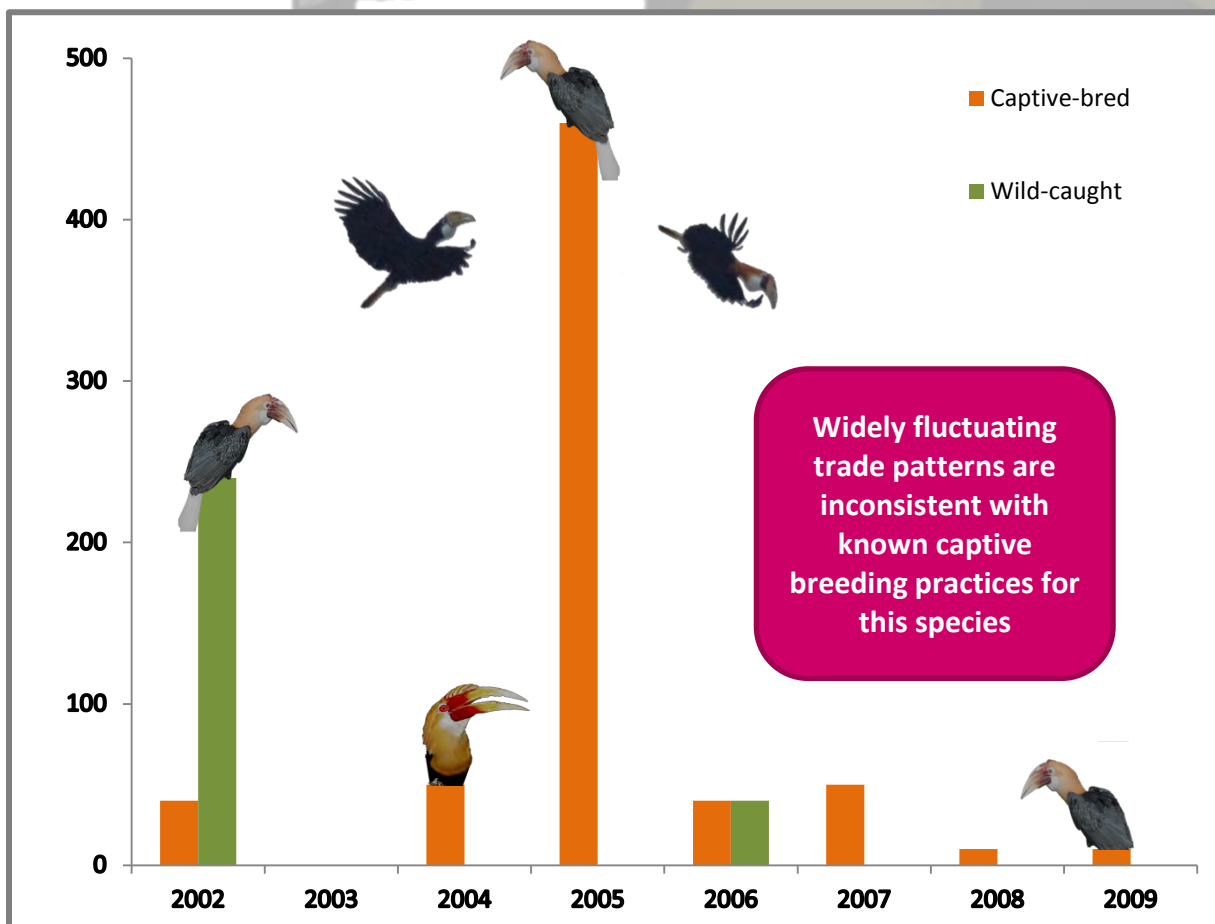
Case n° 2

The Papuan Hornbill *Rhyticeros plicatus*

- ✓ Listed in CITES Appendix II
- ✓ Native to the Solomon Islands, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea
- ✓ Hornbills reproduce slowly, produce only a small number of eggs each time and take a long time to reach maturity



CITES trade data show large fluctuations between years in amounts of captive-bred and wild-caught specimens traded.



Widely fluctuating trade patterns are inconsistent with known captive breeding practices for this species



Case n°3

Poison Arrow Frogs (*Dendrobatidae spp.*)



- ✓ Listed in CITES Appendix II
- ✓ Native to Central and South America
- ✓ Captive breeding in many species is uncertain
- ✓ Commercially traded for pets

Between 2004 and 2008, Thailand reported importing 2665 specimens of 16 species of poison arrow frogs from Lebanon, all declared as being captive-bred in Kazakhstan.

Questionable trade

1. Specimens declared as captive-bred are exported to a CITES-Party (Kazakhstan)

2. ... to a non-CITES Party (Lebanon), after which they are then re-exported to another CITES Party (Thailand)

Kazakhstan, Party to CITES since 2000, has not reported importing (stock for breeding) or exporting (captive-bred stock) any poison arrow frogs, or in fact any other amphibian.

Furthermore, no CITES Party has reported exporting any of these frogs to Kazakhstan.



Only 32 *Calumna* spp. chameleons have been reported. Such few individuals would be insufficient to support a "captive-bred" animals imported to Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan has not reported a single specimen of *Calumna* to CITES and no CITES Party has reported exporting any to Kazakhstan.

Trade routes - including trade through non-CITES Parties



Captive-breeding operations...

Case no. 5

Indonesian reptiles



- ✓ Frill-necked Lizard *Chlamydosaurus kingii*
- ✓ Emerald Monitor *Varanus prasinus* (CITES App. II)
- ✓ Timor Tree Monitor *Varanus timorensis* (CITES App. II)
- ✓ Spiny Turtle *Heosemys spinosa* (CITES App. II)
- ✓ Burmese Python *Python molurus bivittatus* (CITES App. II)

Surveys, site visits, interviews and data analysis demonstrated that for the majority of species, most Indonesian facilities visited in 2006 were not capable of producing reptiles in commercial quantities.

Evidence included:

- *Insufficient staff capacity and knowledge*
- *Inadequate equipment*
- *No specimens of certain species present in facilities*



Species	Frill-necked Lizard	Emerald Monitor	Timor Monitor	Spiny Turtle	Burmese Python
Total number of specimens observed in facilities in 2006	0	97	39	0	27
Approximate maximum biological production per female per year	30	5	7	5	20
Maximum possible production in facilities per year	0	315	175	0	340
Total number in most recent monthly breeding reports	1418	552	518	533	93
Reported captive-bred exports by Indonesia in 2006	No data	661	580	192	257

For all case study taxa apart from the Burmese Python, numbers of specimens observed in facilities and potential production were substantially less than numbers in breeding reports and/or national export records suggesting that captive breeding to reported levels is unlikely to be occurring in these facilities.



... laundering specimens taken from the wild?

Case no. 6

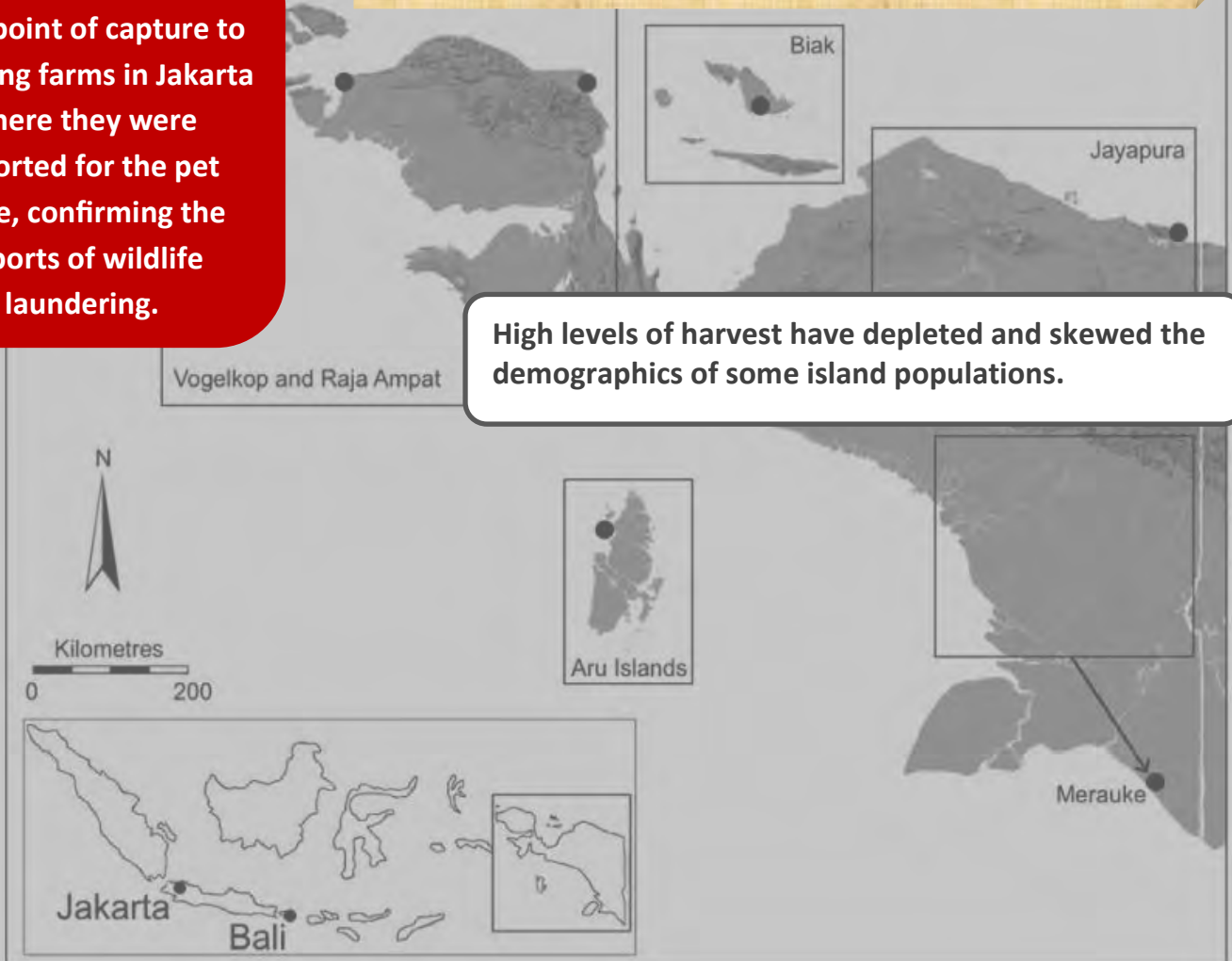
Green Tree Pythons (*Morelia viridis*)



- ✓ Listed in CITES Appendix II
- ✓ Native to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Australia
- ✓ The Green Tree Python is the species most commonly exported by Indonesia as captive-bred

Snakes were traced from their point of capture to breeding farms in Jakarta where they were exported for the pet trade, confirming the reports of wildlife laundering.

High levels of harvest have depleted and skewed the demographics of some island populations.



Surveys of wildlife traders in the Indonesian provinces of Maluku, West Papua and Papua, conducted between August 2009 and April 2011, demonstrate that in total, at least 4227 green tree pythons were collected from the wild and laundered through breeding facilities prior to export.

What is TRAFFIC doing to address this problem?

- Carrying out research and investigations into trade patterns and production from facilities in order to identify the true scale of the problem
- Sharing this information and raising the profile of the issue with CITES Parties and decision makers
- Developing capacity in source countries, for example by providing authorities with the information necessary to carry out effective inspections of breeding facilities
- Identifying potential tools and techniques to differentiate wild and captive-bred specimens in trade, for use by CITES authorities and enforcement officers



What can you do? How can you help?

- 1) Are you thinking of **buying a pet**, but are concerned it may have been taken from the wild and is not actually captive-bred, as is claimed? If so, please contact your **National CITES Management Authority** for further guidance, details for which can be found here: <http://www.cites.org/cms/index.php/lang-en/component/cp/>
- 2) Have you seen animals for sale and **suspect the seller/breeder** may not be declaring their true origin? If so, please contact TRAFFIC at teur@traffic.org or your **local TRAFFIC office**, details can be found here: <http://www.traffic.org/contact/>
- 3) Would you like to **find out more about TRAFFIC** and how to **support our work**? If so, please go to www.traffic.org or Facebook: trafficnetwork Twitter: TRAFFIC_WLTrade YouTube: trafficnetwork

TRAFFIC is an organisation specialising in monitoring all aspects of wildlife trade, and operates as a strategic alliance between WWF and IUCN.

TRAFFIC's goal is to ensure that trade in wild plants and animals is not a threat to the conservation of nature.