

Asian Wildlife Trade Bulletin

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Traditional Chinese medicine experts speak against captive breeding of tigers

Over 40 Traditional Chinese medicine experts from China's top universities, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and traditional medicine associations spoke out against the captive breeding of tigers as a means of conservation at a recent gathering in Shanghai.

Supported by TRAFFIC, the meeting discussed the conservation and sustainable use of medicinal wildlife resources, with particular focus on the possible re-opening of the domestic tiger trade in China. The meeting, entitled "Medicinal animal resource conservation and sustainable use," took place at East China Normal University on Oct 28, 2006. The meeting marks the seventh gathering of the Traditional Medicines Advisory group (TMAG), a forum formed by TRAFFIC, China's CITES Scientific Authority, and experts throughout China's traditional medicine community to discuss key issues with regard to conservation and sustainability.

'Captive breeding centers such as the Hengdao River Breeding Center*, established in 1986, were set up for commercial purposes," said Dr. Yang Qisen of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. "However, when the Chinese government banned trade of tigers in 1993, the center claimed their aim was to conserve wild tigers. I believe conserving wild animals by captive breeding is not possible. Many areas of China no longer have suitable habitat for tigers, such as for the South China tiger.'

Dr. Ma Qiang of the Chinese Academy of Forestry stated that if China reopened its trade in tiger products, 'it would not be possible to distinguish whether tiger products were from captive sources or from the wild. This could stimulate more poaching of wild tigers, and result in devastating consequences for world's remaining wild tiger population.'

(to be continued on page 2)



Medicines containing tiger parts may become available if China re-opens the domestic tiger trade. At a recent TRAFFIC forum, traditional Chinese medicine experts said that this could have devastating consequences for the world's remaining wild tiger population. © WWF-Canon / Wil LUIJF

Dear Partners,

Asia's trade in wildlife is one of the world's most pressing threats to biodiversity. To meet the complex and daunting challenges of achieving legal and sustainable wildlife trade in a continent of rapid development and great socio-economic diversity, TRAFFIC is unique in its ability to partner with others and to broker conservation solutions to address the challenges of wildlife trade.

Our work in Asia has resulted in better policy in the control of flagship species, strengthened law enforcement along key trade routes, improved management of legal trade via provision of science-based decision making, greater collaboration between government agencies in the region through bilateral and regional dialogues, and greater participation by consumers in keeping trade legal and sustainable.

But much work still needs to be done as Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Central Asian Republics, Mongolia and Russia increasingly provide wildlife resources to supply the demands of East Asia's increasingly affluent consumers.

Through this quarterly newsletter, we hope you enjoy learning about how TRAFFIC is working to transform Asia from a threat to nature to a protector of nature. With the continued trust and support from donors, members, local partners, governments, scientists, media and consumers, together we can find a way forward.

Steven Broad
Executive Director
TRAFFIC International

TRAFFIC
the wildlife trade monitoring network

Prof. Zhou Caiquan of West China Normal University believes that the use of tiger bone is not necessary, 'TCM practitioners have found that bones from sailong, a kind of mole found in the Tibetan Plateau, is more effective than tiger bones. This effective substitute could make the TCM tiger trade obsolete.'

Prof. Su Hualong from the Chinese Academy of Forestry Science, however, believed that tigers could become extinct without captive breeding programs. "To save wild tigers, in addition to the tiger trade ban, integrated measures to save wild resources must be implemented, including habitat restoration and enlargement, the removal of snares, ensuring tiger prey are sufficient, and raising public awareness," he concluded.

Since the 1993 ban, the stated objective of tiger breeding centers is to breed tigers for eventual reintroduction to the wild, which has not yet been successfully carried out anywhere. Captive populations of tigers in China have now exceeded 4,000 animals. The Chinese government is considering limited trade of tiger bone for use in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM).

'An open dialogue and active participation of Chinese medicine practitioners in conservation helps dispel the myth that TCM is contradictory to conservation,' said Prof. Xu Hongfa, Director of TRAFFIC's China program, "With this kind of leadership, TCM can play a role in promoting a healthy ecosystem, and not contribute to species extinction and illegal wildlife trade.'

* The Hengdao River breeding center, located in Heilongjiang province in northeast China, is one of China's two largest tiger captive breeding centers. Its captive population is estimated at over 1,000.

For more information, contact Caroline Liou at caroline@wwfchina.org

Promoting government action to protect the region

Taiwan government renews commitment to keep tiger bone out of traditional Chinese medicine

A TRAFFIC project aimed at stopping the resurgence of the tiger trade in Taiwan from Southeast Asia has resulted in a renewed commitment not only by the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) community but by the Taiwan government to keep tiger bone out of traditional medicine.

The project, which sought to gain support from Taiwan's TCM trade associations for conservation efforts by increasing understanding of the trade impact on wild tiger populations, organized a dialogue meeting with stakeholders on June 20, 2006, in Taipei. Thirty representatives from TCM trade associations around the island and six government officers attended the meeting.



Government authorities in Taiwan are reproducing and distributing a TRAFFIC poster on tiger conservation to Taiwan's 16,000 TCM retailers. © TRAFFIC East Asia - Taipei

awareness activities,' said Joyce Wu of TRAFFIC - Taipei.

As a result of the dialogue, the Taiwan government issued an official notice to re-inforce the ban on tiger bone trade and use, as well as called for the assistance of TCM traders to stop the use of tiger medicines.

Government authorities also agreed to both produce more copies of a poster on banning the tiger trade developed by TRAFFIC and distribute them to Taiwan's 16,000 TCM retailers. TRAFFIC originally produced 2000 copies of the posters, which gives TCM retailers a clear explanation on why tiger bone is not for sale. The posters have also been translated into Bahasa Indonesia to raise awareness of the acute problems facing the Sumatran tiger in Indonesia.

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Asia's regional trade networks

Promoting conservation of Amur River sturgeon in Russia

Recent TRAFFIC research on the status of Kaluga sturgeon (*Huso dauricus*) and Amur Sturgeon (*Acipenser schrenckii*) has revealed that the amount of sturgeon harvested annually in the Russian part of the Amur River exceeds the amount legally allowed by the Russian government by several times. The illegal fishing and trade of Amur sturgeon and Kaluga caviar and meat is responsible for the over-fishing, which has led to the continuing demise of wild populations.

The Amur River, one of the world's longest rivers with a

Participants discussed the conservation impact of the tiger trade, include a briefing on a major tiger bone seizure in 2005. This was crucial for TCM traders to understand the connection between the seizure and the TCM trade, and its impact on wild tiger populations. 'Instead of blaming TCM traders for tiger bone smuggling, we wanted to engage in an open dialogue and seek their help in providing ideas and opportunities for

length of 4,400km, is shared by Russia, China, and Mongolia. The river once supported over 120 fish species, including the Kaluga and Amur sturgeon. The two species are endemic to the Amur Basin and have been commercially fished for more than 100 years. They are harvested chiefly for caviar - the unfertilised eggs, or roe, of the females and one of the most valuable of wildlife commodities.



A recent TRAFFIC survey revealed that sturgeon harvested annually in the Russian part of the Amur River is several times the amount legally allowed by the Russian government. © TRAFFIC Europe - Russia

However, a lack of adequate fisheries management and law enforcement, together with increased levels of illegal fishing and trade have led to a dramatic reduction of the river's sturgeon resources in recent decades. In the early twentieth century, the catch decreased by over 30 times, and between 1987 and 2002, the annual sturgeon catch in the Amur River fell from 530 tons to 37 tons, mainly due to over-fishing and water pollution.

TRAFFIC surveys included interviews with fishermen, government fish inspectors, poachers, traders, and enforcement agency staff, including from the Customs and Prosecution Offices. A market survey was also conducted.

A study of sturgeon catches discovered an absence of second-time spawners in the catch of Kaluga, revealing that almost all Kaluga sturgeon entering the river to spawn are caught. While juvenile fish from two fish hatcheries have been released into the river, the numbers are small and have not impacted Amur sturgeon populations.

Widespread poaching is the main reason for over-fishing of Amur River sturgeons. The quantity of sturgeon harvested annually by poachers in the Russian part of the Amur River is many times more than the allowed catch. For example, in 2002, a maximum of an estimated 800 kg of Amur River sturgeon caviar could be harvested legally. However, the total quantity of caviar that received official veterinary certification by the Veterinary Services was 2173 kg.

TRAFFIC found that illegal poaching is highly organized and there are indications that local government administrations and/or law enforcement agencies are involved in the illegal trade and may co-operate with poachers.

Most illegal Amur River sturgeon products are consumed domestically. Both meat and caviar are sold openly in markets, shops, through advertisements and even on the Internet. Most of this trade takes place in the region, though Kaluga caviar can be purchased in Moscow through the Internet.

These illegal products are also smuggled abroad, often to China and Japan from where they may then be transported to other destinations such as the US or Europe. According to the Far-Eastern Customs Directorate, reports of attempts to illicitly export illegal sturgeon products are on the rise.

'TRAFFIC will provide the information it has gathered to the relevant regional and national government bodies and will offer concrete and measurable actions to address the diminishing Amur River sturgeon population and to stem the illegal harvest. TRAFFIC will also be putting forward suggestions for measures at the international level and to the CITES Secretariat,' said Alexey Vaisman of TRAFFIC Russia, 'The next step would then be to encourage an effective means of implementing these recommendations and help ensure that the sturgeons in the Amur River have a future'.

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Consumers as partners

Connecting wildlife to our lives: Reaching consumers in Viet Nam

The individual actions of consumers are important, and informed purchasing decisions requires the public to have accurate information. In countries such as Viet Nam, where a recent TRAFFIC survey revealed that nearly 50% of Ha Noi residents have used wildlife products, raising public awareness is key to achieving legal and sustainable wildlife trade.

Viet Nam, with a population of over 80 million people, is also home to many rare fauna and flora that dwell throughout its diverse landscapes, including over 75 endemic animal species. Several wildlife species that are endangered throughout Asia can be found in Viet Nam, including the Javan rhino and the Asian elephant. Nevertheless, a burgeoning wildlife trade, alongside habitat destruction, is threatening to destroy this rich biological heritage.

As the first step in a long-term WWF/ TRAFFIC communications campaign to reach consumers in Ha Noi, TRAFFIC conducted a survey in 2005 on the attitudes and behavior of Ha Noi residents toward consumption of wildlife. The outcomes of this survey have not only helped inform the campaign, but will also serve as a basis for other communications and awareness activities in Ha Noi.



Winners of a TRAFFIC campaign involving Ha Noi high school students who developed ideas for a television public service announcement on illegal consumption of wildlife. © TRAFFIC Southeast Asia – Greater Mekong

The ongoing campaign by WWF and TRAFFIC has already succeeded at reaching a variety of target audiences. A number of activities have been organized for high school and university students, journalists have been given specialized training sensitizing them to wildlife trade issues, and public service announcements produced by students revolving around the anti-wildlife consumption slogan “Don’t trade the natural world for human demands” are currently being aired on Vietnam Television through March 2007. A famous Vietnamese composer was hired to compose the background music for PSA’s, as well as the theme song for the campaign itself.

Other activities have included the preparation of a press release highlighting the impacts of illegal wildlife trade and unsustainable wildlife consumption, and outlining the ways in which the WWF/ TRAFFIC campaign aims to address these issues. This together with coverage of the campaign activities has resulted in over 60 media reports both in Ha Noi and throughout the country.

In addition, a range of communications materials have been produced and sent to local journalists, relevant government agencies, the Youth Union, National Union of Students, secondary schools involved in the project, as well as conservation organisations including FFI, IUCN, Birdlife, UNEP, and the Wildlife Trade Network in Vietnam.

Many other activities are planned aiming at reducing the unsustainable consumption of wildlife products in Ha Noi, and more recently funding was secured to extend the campaign until 2009.

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Promoting government action to protect the region

Strengthening law enforcement to combat illegal trade of Asian big cats in southwest China

A joint TRAFFIC and China CITES MA workshop aimed at addressing the illegal trade of Asian big cats through promoting the enforcement of CITES regulations in southwest China took place on November 28-29, 2006, in Dujiangyan, Sichuan province.

Over 30 participants attended the workshop, including front-line policemen, market monitoring officers, customs enforcers, and officers from local forestry bureaus.

‘Participants said they were unaware of the crisis facing many endangered species,’ said Yang Qin, Program Coordinator for the TRAFFIC China, ‘The workshop helped them understand how their work is key to stopping illegal wildlife trade.’

Mr. Meng Xianlin, Director of China National CITES MA, gave a general introduction of CITES and how China implements this international treaty. His presentation emphasized illegal trade in tiger and leopard skins, as well as ivory. TRAFFIC introduced the results of a recent survey on tiger and leopard bone products in China.



Policemen, market monitoring officers, customs enforcers, and local forestry bureau officers in southwest China learn how their work is key to stopping illegal wildlife trade at a recent TRAFFIC workshop. © TRAFFIC East Asia China Programme/ Yang Qin

‘Before the workshop, I had little knowledge on species identification and relevant national laws, as well as little support from other organizations to help us effectively implement monitoring methods,’ said one participant from the State Administration for Industry & Commerce, ‘The workshop provided some easy and practical training, and the chance for better cooperation with other stakeholders in the future.’

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Promoting government action to protect the region

Tackling illegal wildlife trade in Mongolia

A training seminar for staff of Mongolia's Customs and Inspections Agencies on illegal wildlife trade took place in Ulaanbaator on December 4-6, 2006. The training was sponsored by the US State Department, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and TRAFFIC.

The training included intercepting common smuggling techniques; conducting undercover investigations and surveillance; conducting vehicle and cargo inspections; evidence handling; and disposal and disposition of seized wildlife.

Many species of Mongolia's wildlife are now under imminent threat of national extinction due to the demand for wildlife products such as saiga antelope horns, red deer antlers, bear parts, skins and furs, and birds of prey. The illegal wildlife trade has caused significant decreases in wildlife species in Mongolia (many by 75-90% in just the last 15 years).

Through the training, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and TRAFFIC East Asia hope to improve the skills of Mongolian Customs and Inspection agents to undertake wildlife protection and enforcement and more effectively meet Mongolia's obligations in preventing illegal wildlife trade under CITES.

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Demand for wildlife products such as saiga antelope horn has caused significant decreases in wildlife species in Mongolia. © WWF-Canon / John E. NEWBY

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