



## **Kuching Declaration Protecting Wildlife Against Illegal Trade And Trafficking in Asia**

### **BACKGROUND**

Significant progress is being made in Asia towards reaching Aichi targets for setting aside areas on land and sea for biodiversity conservation. Protected areas and other forest areas are, however, losing this biodiversity at alarming rates due to poaching and illegal and unsustainable harvest fueled by commercial market demand for wildlife, which includes animals and plants.

Asia is a source, transit, and consumer region for this illegal wildlife trade, which is facilitated by a myriad of factors, including increasingly well-developed transportation networks that extend across country borders on land and sea.

The 900 participants from more than 65 countries who attended the meeting of the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (herein ATBC) held in Kuching Malaysia from 1-5 July, 2018, organized under the main theme of 'Linking Natural History with the Conservation of Tomorrow's Tropical Ecosystems', collectively call for greater protection of wild animals and plants against illegal trade and trafficking in Asia.

### **THE PROBLEM**

Wildlife trade is driven by organised criminality involved in acquiring rare and threatened animal and plant species to supply the market, undermining national and international governance systems. Species such as tigers, bears, helmeted hornbills, rosewoods, birds, orchids, tortoises and freshwater turtles, langurs/leaf-monkeys, and pangolins are heavily harvested for trade, both for consumption within the region and to supply global demand.

While comprehensive trade data gaps exist for some groups, others such as songbirds, parrots, turtles and reptiles are known to be subjected to illegal and unsustainable hunting and trade levels that threaten wild populations. As such, there are wide and

alarming reports of negative impacts, including local extinctions, for many species across Asia.

Current and future plans for the expansion of road networks, including those financed by new regional development initiatives, will open up more remote areas to access by humans and will result in increased levels of illegal harvest and trafficking.

This includes increased pressure on wildlife inside and outside of protected areas, compounding pressures on an already struggling conservation system. Indeed, less than a-quarter of the world's protected areas have effective management due to inadequate planning, staffing and budgets, and so most are failing to maintain their biodiversity values and other natural capital.

Three-quarters of countries have at least half their protected land under intense human pressure from mining, infrastructure, settlements, logging or agriculture. The problem is most acute in western Europe and southern Asia.

We, the participants of the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation in Kuching:

**RECOGNISE THAT:**

Illegal wildlife trade is heterogeneous, including a wide range of species, diverse types of products with distinct uses and consumer bases, and involving multiple countries and regions. It also includes trade across a range of platforms, from open markets to online trade. It further includes a diverse type of illegal activities, including, but not limited to, organised criminal activities. Conservation responses need to account for diversity along each of these axes.

Regulation of illegal wildlife trade is supported by strong legislation in some countries, but is hindered by a range of significant gaps and challenges including loopholes that fail to provide adequate coverage for non-native species and facilitate the laundering of illegal wildlife.

Poor and inconsistent law enforcement, poor systems that regulate captive breeding operations to prevent fraudulent practices, corruption, insufficient penalties to deter crimes, and, in some cases, lack of awareness in judicial systems about how to prosecute wildlife and trafficking crimes.

Enforcement agencies are understaffed, sometimes poorly trained regarding the scope of the problem, and under-resourced compared with the scale and intensity of the problem.

New tools and technologies are available for fighting illegal wildlife trade, including, but not limited to, stable isotopes and genetic analysis, webscrapers for online trade, and sniffer dogs. However, many of these forensic techniques are currently unavailable to the frontline enforcement staff who need them the most.

Wildlife trade is facilitated by the expansion and improvement of roads, especially those that provide alternative routes for trade that avoid going through major checkpoints or formal border crossings. In addition, logging and logging and access roads open up new areas for wildlife traffickers to harvest populations of target species that used to be protected by their remoteness and inaccessibility.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Encourage periodic monitoring of the extent of wildlife trade, *i.e.* species and numbers illegally traded.
- Targeted research be performed on target species' population viability, ecological and ecosystem service impacts of illegal harvest and international trafficking of flora and fauna. This should include lesser known species, such as amphibians, plants and timber.
- Investigations be conducted on the actors and routes involved in illegal trade of wildlife, including along informal transportation networks (e.g., minivan networks), as well as through formal transportation hubs (e.g., airports, seaports, customs checkpoints).
- More attention be paid by law enforcement and investigation agencies to monitoring online sources of wildlife trade information, including social media.
- Governments consider wildlife crime as serious offences that warrant severe penalties under relevant laws and regulations.
- Strategic patrolling and protection measures for heavily hunted species (e.g., helmeted hornbills, rosewoods, pangolins) and for lesser-known traded taxa (e.g., songbirds, tortoises) must be implemented so as to avert imminent loss of populations and extinction of species.
- Increased efforts to identify, and eliminate, loopholes in wildlife regulations are also crucial to prevent the fraudulent sale of illegal wildlife as legal products. This includes increased minimum penalties for offenses.
- Increased access be provided for law enforcement staff to tools and technologies that facilitate forensic analysis and detection of the laundering of restricted species.
- The effectiveness of law enforcement be improved by engaging local communities in collecting evidence, acting as expert witnesses, and bringing forward cases to prosecution.

- Use of ranger based data for patrol planning, monitoring effectiveness of law enforcement efforts, and risk mapping of high poaching threat areas in and around protected areas and other critical wildlife habitats.
- More training and collaborations between local researchers and government agencies and research institutions is also needed.
- Creation and upgrade of roads be planned and mapped in accordance with existing protected areas and areas harbouring species threatened by wildlife trade.
- Logging roads be closed to unrelated vehicles both during and after logging operations, and permanently closed after cessation of logging harvest cycles.