No let-up in tiger trafficking as 150 tigers are seized a year

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Authorities worldwide have seized tigers and parts equal to an average of 150 tigers a year over almost 23 years, with seizures in the first half of this year signalling the relentless pursuit of remaining wild tigers, a new TRAFFIC study revealed today.

Overall, whole tigers, dead and live, as well as a variety of tiger parts equal to a conservative estimate of 3,377 tigers were confiscated between January 2000 and June 2022 across 50 countries and territories, with data showing an increasing trend.

According to Skin and Bones: Tiger Trafficking Analysis from January 2000 – June 2022, the tigers and their parts were seized in 2,205 incidents, mostly in the 13 Tiger Range Countries.

India, home to more than half of the global wild tiger population, remains the top-ranked with the most incidents and number of tigers confiscated.

“The evidence clearly shows poaching and illegal trade are not temporary threats. Unless we want to watch wild tigers wiped out in our lifetime, immediate and time-bound actions must be a priority,” said Kanitha Krishnasamy, co-author of the report and Director for TRAFFIC in Southeast Asia.

Key findings:

- Between January 2000 and June 2022, 85% of tigers were seized in the 13 Tiger Range Countries in 1,688 incidents.
- More than 2,300 people were arrested for involvement in tiger trafficking, 95% within Tiger Range Countries from January 2000–June 2022.
- The top 3 countries by number of confiscations over the whole study period were India (759 incidents or 34% of total), China (212 - 10% of total) and Indonesia (207 - 9% of total).

Specific to the first half of 2022:

- Indonesia, Thailand, and Russia recorded significant increases in the number of seizure incidents in the first six months of 2022, the Year of the Tiger, compared to the January-to-June period of the previous two decades.
- Indonesia, home to the Critically Endangered Sumatran Tiger seized a greater number of equivalent tigers in the first half of 2022 (18 tigers) compared to its entire 2021 confiscations (16 tigers).

Southeast Asia highlights:

- TRCs in Southeast Asia especially are struggling to protect their remaining wild tiger populations while also grappling with other trade problems, including captive facilities that supply the illegal trade.
- Thailand and Viet Nam have featured most prominently, with 81% and 67% of the total seized tigers in the respective countries suspected or confirmed to involve captive-sourced tigers from 2000 to June 2022.
- Viet Nam saw a 185% jump in tigers confiscated in the 2018–2021 period compared to 2014 – 2017

Illegal online trade:

- There is a significant trade in tiger parts online in six Southeast Asian countries studied: 675 social media profiles trafficking in tigers were identified, 75% of which were Viet Nam-based accounts.
- There were close links between online traders offering tiger products and those touting ivory, bear and rhino horn products.

Commodities in trade:

- Tiger skins remained the most frequently seized item over the almost 23 years studied: Skins were confiscated in 902 incidents, whole tigers in 608 incidents and tiger bones in 411 incidents.
- The frequency of whole tigers in seizures surged in the first six months of 2022 compared to

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recent years, turning up in 39% of seizures.

The report, launched ahead of the CITES CoP 19, forms part of TRAFFIC's priorities, where the fate of tigers and other big cats will be a focus of discussions.

The authors of this report, aligned with TRAFFIC's stand, have urged CITES parties to fully implement CITES Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP18) on Asian big cats (ABCs) and the associated CoP Decisions, which recommend a slew of actions covering improved legislation, enforcement, record keeping and actions to prevent tiger parts and derivatives from captive breeding facilities from entering the illegal trade chain - END

Other quotes

Co-author and Senior Wildlife Crime Analyst, Ramacandra Wong on Indonesia's surging seizures in the first half of 2022: "It's an ominous development for the Critically Endangered Sumatran tiger and a cautionary tale for all tiger subspecies. There's never been a greater urgency to intensify the fight against wildlife crime in all range states."

Tiger Trade Leader at WWF's Tigers Alive Initiative, Heather Sohl on tiger parts seized: "The thousands of tiger parts seized are a testament to enforcement effort, but they also speak to the continued threats tigers face. Poaching, trade and demand for tigers and their parts persist, compounded by the tiger farms which add to the illicit trade. Strong action is needed by governments to combat the pressure this puts on wild tiger populations."

Company Contact:

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TRAFFIC

T. 07921309176
E. abbie.pearce@traffic.org

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