

Notorious Indian Tiger Poachers Jailed in Landmark Conviction

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Undercover work funded by UK charity leads to 'one in a thousand' breakthrough

Six notorious tiger poachers have been jailed in Southern India in what is being described as a landmark conviction. The five men and one woman were sentenced to three years each by Karnataka High Court – a sentence made more remarkable by the fact that the conviction rate for tiger poaching in the country is 0.1%.

The gang travelled the country poaching tigers and other wildlife for sale into the international market – tigers would be carved into fur, bones and organs for use as decoration, tonics and medicine.

They were caught red-handed with lethal 'jaw' traps in the Bandupur Tiger Reserve, and brought to justice by the Karnataka Forest Department with specialist legal assistance from the Care for the Wild-funded Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) Wildlife Crime Enforcement Team.

Care for the Wild CEO Philip Mansbridge said: "This conviction is a landmark for tiger conservation and sends a powerful message of deterrence to wildlife criminals who aim to poach India's tigers.

"Our partnership with the WTI is instrumental in a huge number of cases per year alongside de-snaring and undercover enforcement activities. The team also work with government forest staff to ensure more arrests lead to convictions, just like this one, in the future."

Jose Louies, WTI, said the poachers were caught after two of the gang turned informer: "The gang moved across the country in various disguises, mostly adorning the facade of street vendors, setting up camps near tiger reserves. Once the camp is set up, the men break off into small groups and infiltrate tiger habitats. These poachers are renowned for their extraordinary tracking skills, and the ease with which they locate tiger tracks and place the deadly jaw traps exactly in the path of the tigers. The operation may take them any amount of time, and as these hunters are determined, they wait inside the forest, till they get what they came for – a tiger.

"Once they manage to trap their prized possession, they spear it in the mouth, swiftly kill it and remove the skin. The body is usually buried within the forest and they come back in a few weeks to recover the bones, which are also in high demand in various illegal markets."

Care for the Wild is a charity based in Sussex dedicated to the protection of wildlife in the UK and abroad. For more information or if you would like to support our work, see <http://www.careforthewild.com>

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