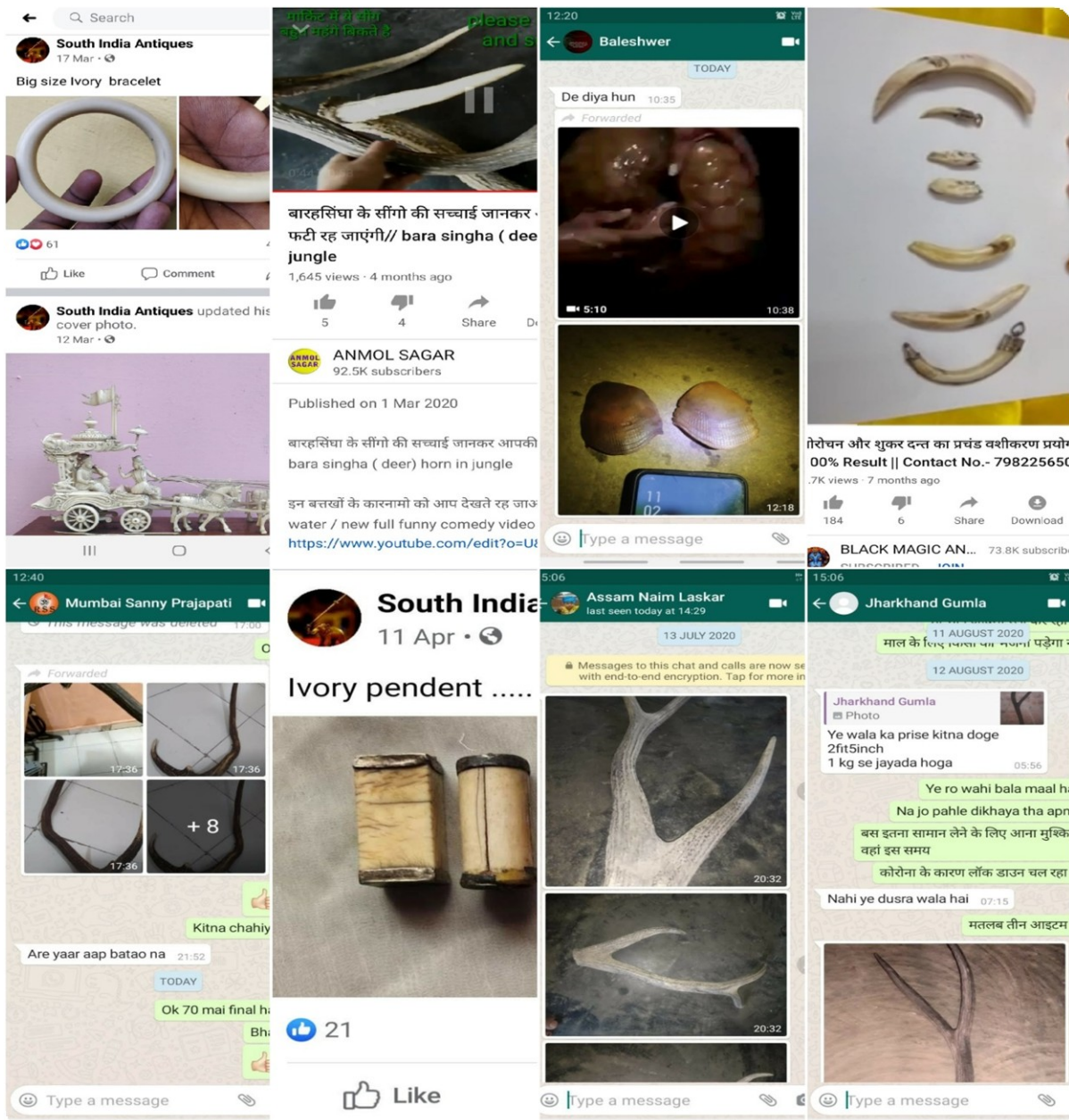




OPERATION WILDNET-III REPORT

WCCB's Countrywide Wildlife Enforcement Operation



WILDLIFE CRIME CONTROL BUREAU

IIND FLOOR, TRIKOOT-I, BHIKAJICAMA PLACE, NEW DELHI-110066

Report on Wildlife Crime Control Bureau's "OPERATION WILDNET-III"

From 1st July to 30th September 2020

INTRODUCTION

The internet is the biggest marketplace, open all hours for buyers and sellers to exchange goods. With such huge volumes of transaction taking place daily, relatively low trading costs and the possibility for traders to hide their identities, the internet provides a vast platform for the sale of both legal and illegal items, including wildlife and their products. The rapid expansion of the internet and its transformation of communication and commerce has coincided with increasing pressures on the world's wildlife, including pressure from wildlife trade. Online trade platforms have been and continue to be the dominant mechanism for trading wildlife and their products on the internet. Apart from online trade platforms, wildlife trade on social media platforms is growing.

The Internet has revolutionized interpersonal communications, the distribution and accessibility of information as well as legitimate economical activities. However, criminal activities have also benefited from it, adapting and moving towards a new form of illegal activities. The rapid growth of the Internet has led to important changes in criminal activities, offering new opportunities and facilitating certain types of crime such as online illegal trade of wildlife articles. The use of the internet increases the efficiency of these traditional crimes, providing more opportunities for illegal activities. Considering offenders have now a global reach, they have access of an international potential of sellers and buyers for illicit goods and services. More so, there are many software tools, applications and apps, offenders can use to cover their tracks online, making it hard to trace them down. They provide anonymity and facilitate the commission of crimes and thus restrict potential detection by authorities.

Considering the increasing threat of online wildlife trade, Wildlife Crime Control Bureau envisaged a multispecies enforcement operation, code named as "Operation WILDNET" in May, 2017 and Operation "WILDNET-II" in September 2019 to drag the attention of the enforcement agencies towards growing online wildlife crime, resulting in registration of criminal cases against accused involved in online wildlife illegal trade. A huge number of e-commerce sites, online trade portals and social media platforms were identified, which were being used for online wildlife trade. Based on analysis of outcome of above operations, two meetings with representatives of online trade portals i.e. Olx, Quikr, Amazon, Snapdeal, Indiamart, Flipkart was conducted to discuss issues related to online illegal wildlife trade and to reach a consensus on sharing of information of merchandise offering wildlife articles/products on their trade portals to facilitate legal action against offenders.

Another meeting to address the concern of rapidly increasing online illegal wildlife trade was conducted by WCCB and TRAFFIC-India on 12th September, 2019 in the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change which was attended by the officials of MoEF&CC, National Tiger Conservation Authority, Central Zoo Authority, State Forest Departments, Paramilitary Forces, Delhi Police, Global Tiger Fund, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Wildlife Trust of India, WWF-India, TRAFFIC-India and representatives of Google India, Quikr, Flipkart, Indiamart, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). A consensus was had among participants to develop a mechanism for cooperation and collaboration among internet companies (Internet Service Provider/Application Service Provider) as well as online trade portals and enforcement agencies to tackle the menace of online illegal wildlife trade. On appeal of WCCB, OLX and INDIAMART also ran awareness campaign with coordination of WCCB in which advertisement consisting of pictorial & one line representation with appeal to protect wildlife were placed on their webpages.

Due to spread of COVID-19 pandemic, economy is impacted in unprecedented ways. Therefore the pandemic may have significantly impacted ease of transport and the illegal trade in wildlife, transnational organised crime groups and other criminal networks involved in wildlife trafficking were likely to prioritise online methods to support their activities related to illegal wildlife trade while taking advantage of opportunities brought about by the pandemic and the widespread shift into online working and communication.

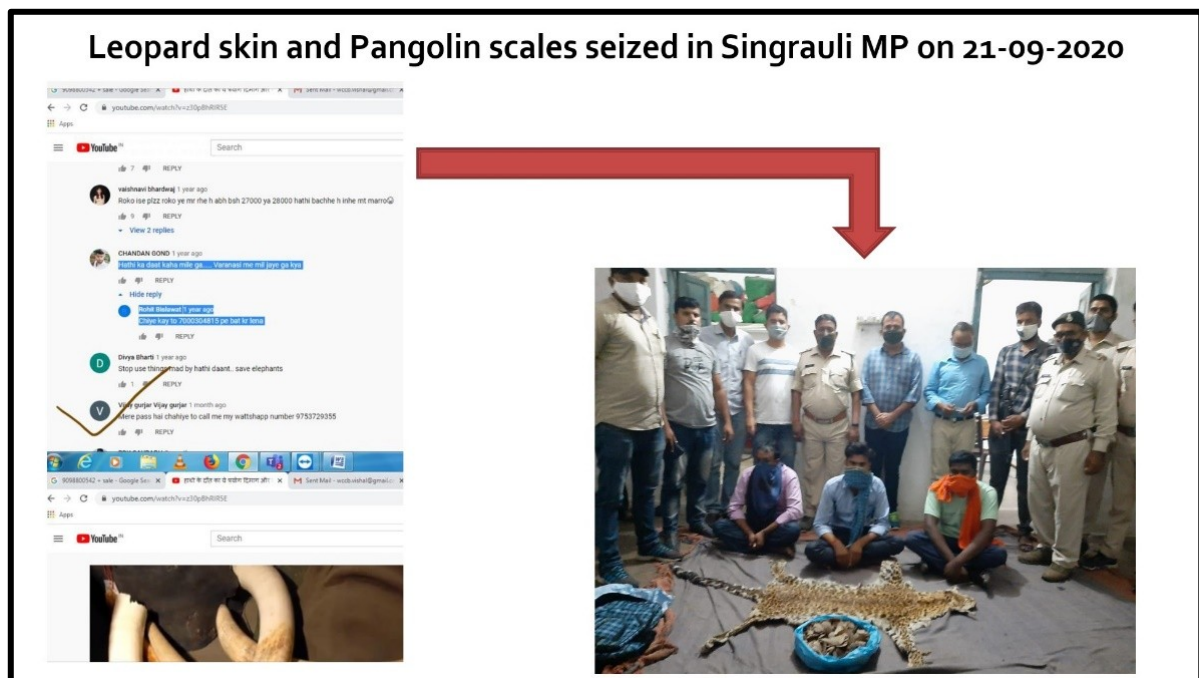
With the above backdrop to counter acts of online wildlife criminals with similar and effective force to dissuade them to indulge in wildlife crime and to carry forward the legacy of operation WILDNET, three month long, Third Operation in the series, "Operation WILDNET-III", was envisaged by Wildlife Crime Control Bureau.

ABOUT OPERATION "WILDNET-III"

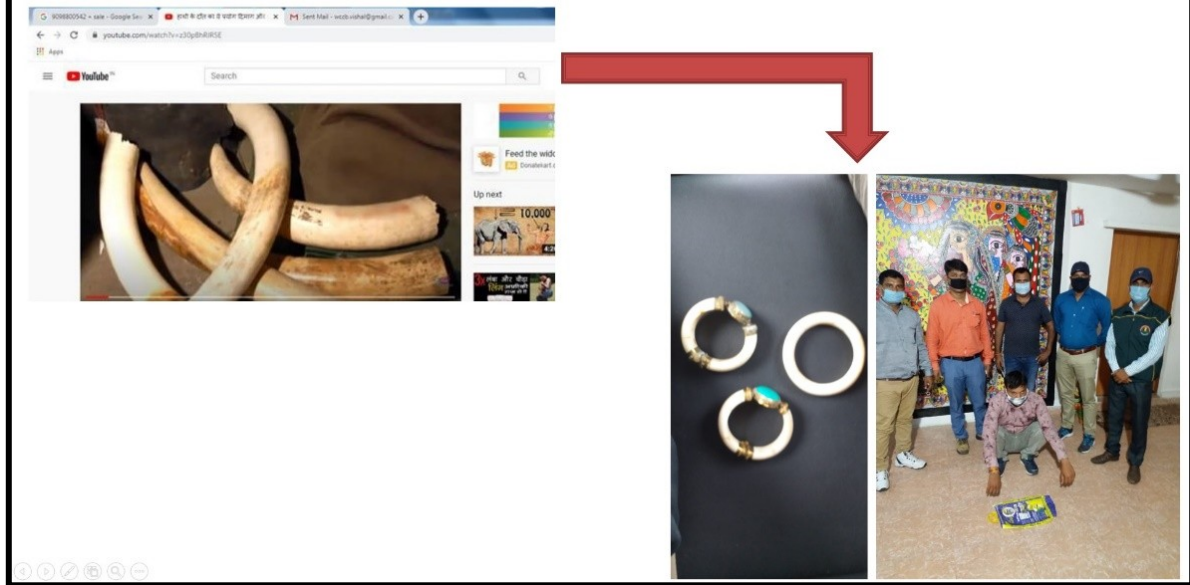
The operation started on 1st of July, 2020 and terminated on 30th September, 2020. The Enforcement agencies were requested to focus their attention on the ever increasing illegal wildlife trade over internet using Social Media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, twitter, Youtube etc. apart from various online classified sites and online trade portals, websites and Blogspots. The Enforcement Agencies were requested to bring in the information about various platforms used by wildlife traders to market their illegal products and to apprehend them by conducting joint operation in coordination with WCCB. It was also requested to generate awareness among the general mass towards the menace of online wildlife crime and urge the support of the people towards demand reduction.

OUTCOME OF THE OPERATION

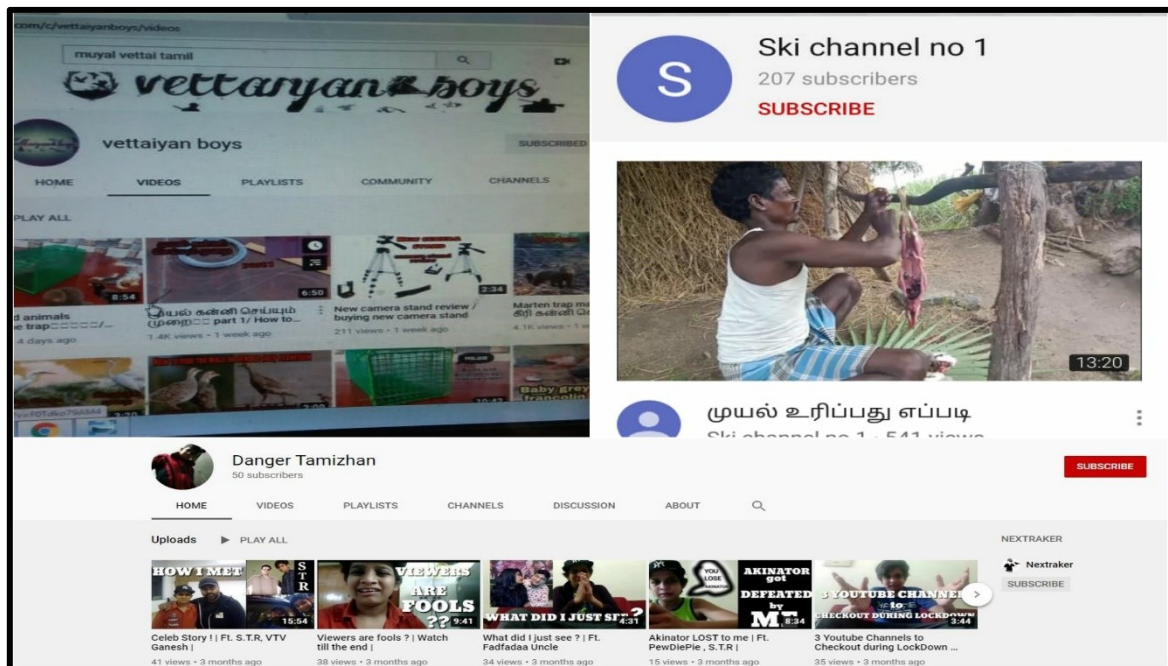
During operation, cyber patrolling with focus to detect offers of wildlife articles/products was made extensively by WCCB. From the offers posted for online trading of wildlife articles, details were extracted through available information and actionable inputs were prepared and shared with State Enforcement Agencies to take action against the offenders. Online posts for trading of wildlife articles were detected from Facebook, WhatsApp, Youtube, Amazon, Flipkart, Ricepuller.com, and Ecraft.com. Wide range of live animals like Pangolin, Turtle/Tortoise, Crocodile, Parakeet, Civet Cat, Red Sand Boa, Owl as well as articles extracted from wild protected species like Leopard Skin, Samber Deer, Deer Antler, Ivory, Gangetic Dolphin meat, Trochus, Monitor Lizard Hemipenises, Pangolin Scales, Musk Pod, Sandalwoods were found being traded online. Based on the actionable inputs extracted from open intelligence sources and information available from offers made through online posts with respect to wildlife trade, 26 criminal cases registered resulting in the arrest of 45 offenders and seizure of leopard Skin, 4.3 Kgs Pangolin Scales, 01 Live Pangolin, 01 Crocodile, 75 Parakeets, 01 Civet Cat, 01 Deer Antler, 40 Trochus niloticus, 40 Moti Sankhs, 09 Monitor Lizard Hemipenis, 09 Star Tortoise, 01 Indian Tent Turtle, 10 Kgs of Gangetic Dolphin meat.



Elephant Tusk Bangles seized from Ujjan, MP on 10-08-2020



The Bureau paid specific attention towards Youtube videos depicting killing and trapping of scheduled wild animals. As such videos are instrumental in proliferating wildlife criminal activities. During the operation period, four such channels were detected where videos of poaching, killing and cooking of wild animals were uploaded and details were extracted and information was shared with State Enforcement Agencies to take legal action against account holders of YouTube channels. 05 Account holder of YouTube channels depicting videos of illegal activities with respect to wild animals namely 'Ski Channel No.1', 'Vettaian Boys', 'Danger Tamizhan' and 'Arun Atrocities' were arrested after booking them under provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.





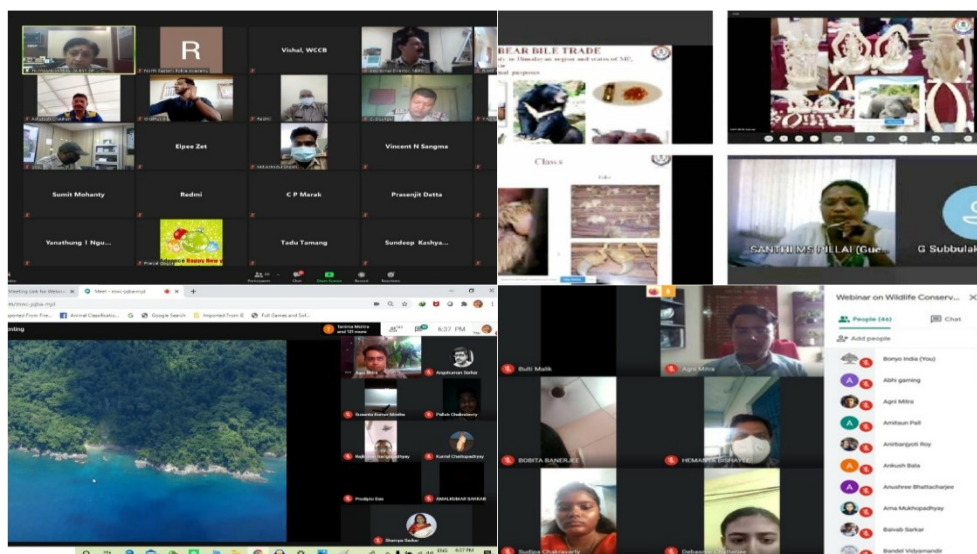
Online cases detected during “Operation WILDNET-III”

Cases Detected	Case Registered	Total States	Website detected	Types of Species detected	Accused arrested
78	26	19	9	27	46

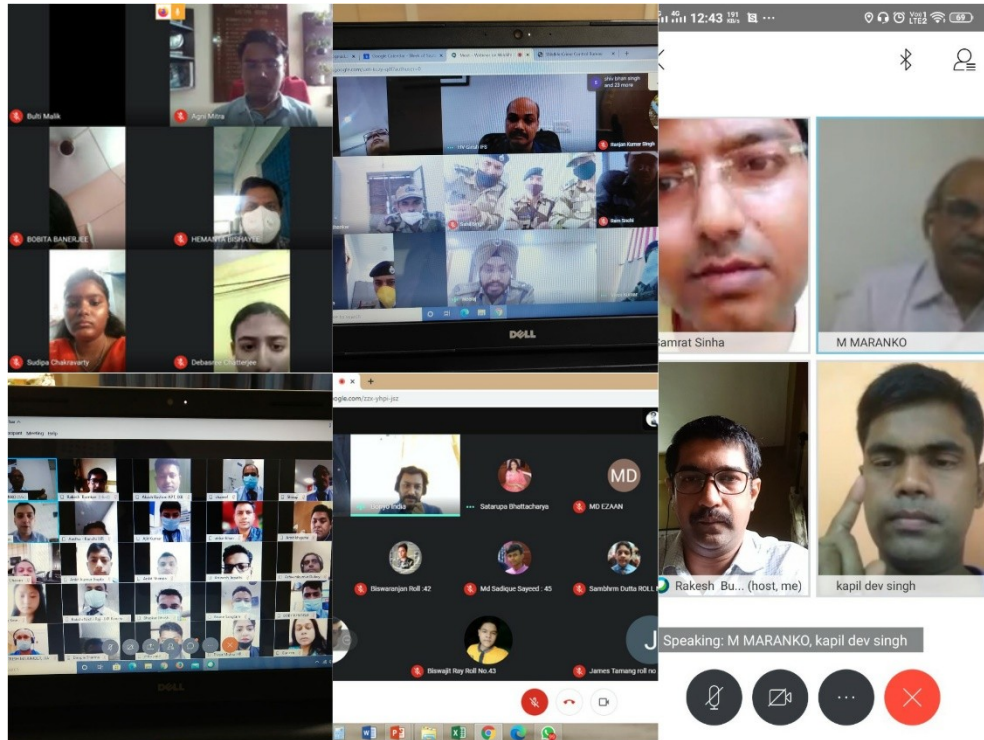
Sensitization/Awareness program conducted during the Operation

During period of operation, 01 day long online training programme on cyber patrolling, Intelligence collection, specie identification, investigation, handling, documentation and prosecution of wildlife cases was conducted by WCCB for Forest officials of Punjab Forest Department.

WCCB also conducted 33 online webinars on issues related to wildlife crime including online illegal wildlife trade and other issues in wildlife conservation, identification, concealment methods for CISF, Custom, Airline Security Staff, Police, Forest, Railway, students and faculty members of education institutes. During these online sensitization programmes, 2142 stakeholders were sensitized on issues related to illegal online wildlife activities and methods to detect activities related to online wildlife trade.



01 online awareness programs was conducted for representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions and members of local communities living around Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, on issues related to wildlife conservation, increasing online wildlife trade and its ill effects on biodiversity and how to fight against it. 100 PRI members and public stakeholders participated in the awareness program.



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1.68 kg Ganja seized from peddler

■ Staff Reporter

GWARIGHAT police arrested a drug peddler and seized 1.68 kilogram Ganja and a mobile handset from him near Khandari nullah late night on Monday. The accused has been identified as Akash Choudhary (24), a resident of Akash Ganga Hotel in Gwarighat.

According to Gwarighat police, during a special campaign against illegal trade and transportation of narcotic substances, they received information about a man sighted near Khandari nullah. Acting promptly, police started a search near Khandari Nullah area. Witnessing the police team, the miscreant started running but alert cops managed to catch him. The suspect Akash Choudhary had a bag and a

Operation Wildnet-3 yields more success, smuggler held

■ Under the direction of Abhijit Roy Choudhary, Deputy Director, Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, Central Region Jabalpur and In-charge Officer of State Level Tiger Strike Force, Bhopal a special campaign, Wildnet-3 has been started to put-up vigilant check on a racket of illegal online wildlife trade

■ Staff Reporter

CONTINUING Operation Wildnet-3, Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, Central Region, Jabalpur, in association with TSF Bhopal and Indore, nabbed an accused and seized three ornaments made of elephant tusk

Endangered eight-star tortoises, turtle rescued in another raid

■ Staff Reporter

COMBINED team of Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), Central Region Jabalpur and Forest Division Bhopal nabbed a man and seized endangered species of eight-star tortoises and an Indian tent turtle from him in Bhopal.

WCCB, Central Region Jabalpur, Inspector Devendra Singh Rathore informed that they received a tip-off that a man was engaged in online trade of wildlife and detected in Bhopal. Taking prompt action on the information, a combined team of WCCB Jabalpur and Forest Department Bhopal was constituted under the direction of Abhijit Roy Choudhary, Deputy Director, WCCB Central Region Jabalpur and HS Mishra,



Elephant tusk ornaments seized from the accused.



Combined wildlife teams from Jabalpur and Bhopal yield success



Seized tortoises of endangered species seized by the WCCB Central Region Jabalpur.

MP STF shuts down YouTube videos used by wildlife smugglers

TNN | Oct 31, 2020, 12:10 IST

✉️ 🖨️ A- A+



Representative image

BHOPAL: The Madhya Pradesh STF (wildlife) has busted a gang involved in trade in pangolin scales and other wildlife articles through YouTube and got the videos removed under Operation Wildnet-III.

Three people have been arrested following searches in Indore, Ujjain, Sagar and Shivpuri, and 2.7 kg of

pangolin scales recovered.

Investigating officers asked YouTube to remove the videos through which the racketeers were allegedly attracting buyers of prohibited articles. "Now, all the links we shared with YouTube are either blocked or have been removed," said an officer.

Operation Wildnet was first envisaged by Wildlife Crime Control Bureau in May 2017, to tackle the increasing threat of online wildlife trade and turn enforcement agencies' attention towards internet deals of scheduled species.

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Bhupesh Baghel
Chief Minister, Chhattisgarh

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