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INTERPOL Progress Report on Asian Big Cat Trade

September 2016 - July 2018

INTERPOL's Global Wildlife Project is working closely with big cat range countries across Asia to enhance law enforcement responses to trafficking in big cats. This report provides an overview of the initiative undertaken by the Project since 2016.

Investigative and Analytical Support

Through several Regional Investigative and Analytical Case Meetings held in Bhutan (November 2016), Myanmar (March 2017), Malaysia (March 2018) and India (April 2018), INTERPOL facilitated information exchange and joint analysis of information to support the investigation of criminals and organized networks trafficking Asian big cats.

In March 2016, INTERPOL worked with India and Nepal to collate and analyse information on criminals and groups trafficking tigers in the region. The network was mapped out and analysed to identify the key persons who should be targeted in order to dismantle the network. Following this initiative, strong law enforcement action by India and Nepal from 2016-2018 have resulted in the arrest of several of the key individuals identified. INTERPOL red notices have been issued to locate some criminals and others have been placed under surveillance or joint investigation.

In 2016, INTERPOL had developed two reports on tiger smugglers operating between India and Bangladesh in the Sunderban area. From 2016-2018, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) of the Bangladesh Police has been actively working towards surrender and rehabilitation of pirate groups, including some named in the INTERPOL report. This has led to overall reduction in crime in the Sundarban region, including tiger poaching and trafficking.

INTERPOL is also working with Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore on data extraction and analysis of phones seized in major wildlife cases and investigations, providing critical information needed for follow up investigation.

Fugitive Investigation

Fugitive Investigation is a core function for INTERPOL. Countries are encouraged to issue INTERPOL notices and diffusions on criminals trafficking Asian big cats. In February 2018, close collaboration between Indian and Nepalese police through INTERPOL channels led to the arrest of Lodu Dime, a tiger trafficker and INTERPOL Red Notice subject, wanted since 2013. Lodu Dime was the key suspect in the seizure of 5 tiger skins and 7 sacks containing 114kg of tiger bones in Nepal in January 2013, during INTERPOL Operation Prey IV. The arrest occurred within 6 weeks of issue of the INTERPOL red notice. (For more information - <https://www.interpol.int/News-and-media/News/2018/N2018-012>)

Operational support

INTERPOL organizes an annual global operation to target wildlife crime. 49 countries participated in Operation Thunderbird in 2017 and 92 countries participated in Operation Thunderstorm in 2018. In addition to other wildlife, tiger, leopard and lion parts and derivatives were seized by participating countries during these operations. More information on the operations can be found at:

<https://www.interpol.int/News-and-media/News/2018/N2018-058>

<https://www.interpol.int/News-and-media/News/2017/N2017-022>

The results from these operations have played a key role in helping INTERPOL identify wildlife trafficking routes in Asia, modus operandi, hotspots and markets, as well as gaps in information and enforcement capabilities. Convergences were seen between wildlife crime and other crimes including drug distribution, and smuggling in firearms and stolen motor vehicles.

Capacity development

INTERPOL has particularly focused on developing analytical capacity within the member countries to ensure better information collection, management and analysis. From 2016-2018, 8 trainings have been delivered on analysis techniques, use of analytical software, online investigations, social media monitoring and phone data analysis. Over 60 officers have been trained from 11 countries in Asia.

INTERPOL has also been working closely with the Snow Leopard Trust in Kyrgyzstan to develop law enforcement capacity to investigate snow leopard poaching and smuggling.