

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Once abundant in the whole of Asia, wild Tiger *Panthera tigris* populations have dramatically declined during the last hundred years, from around 100 000 individuals to a current estimated population of 3200. The global population of Tigers is distributed in small, fragmented and often isolated landscapes in 13 range countries. In addition to habitat loss and degradation, human encroachment and excessive poaching of key prey species, the illegal trade in Tiger parts is greatly contributing to the rapid decline of Tigers in the wild.

As with most illicit activities, the international dynamics of Tiger trade are poorly understood. To aid in addressing this lack of knowledge, this report presents a compilation and analysis of available data on Tiger seizures from 11 of the 13 Tiger range countries over the past 10 years. It is hoped that this will inform debate on interventions to control the trade in Tiger parts and derivatives.

In order to understand the relationship between the number of seizures and the levels of trade or enforcement efforts, this report recognizes that it is necessary to measure the efficiency of wildlife law enforcement in those Tiger range countries whose seizure data have been analysed.

Methods

Information for this analysis was gathered from various sources, including: the Governments of India, Thailand, Bangladesh and Myanmar; WWF Nepal and WWF-US; TRAFFIC offices in India, China, the Russian Far East and South-east Asia; MYCAT Malaysia; WCS Indonesia Programme and open sources such as the Internet and other media. It included all seizure information available over the 10-year period January 2000–30 April 2010 from 11 of the 13 Tiger range countries: no data were recorded from Cambodia and Bhutan and these countries were therefore omitted from the analysis.

Results and discussion

A total of 481 seizures was analysed, suggesting a minimum of 1069 (annual average 104.2) and maximum of 1220 (annual average 118.9) Tigers killed for their parts and derivatives from January 2000 to April 2010. The vast majority of these seizures took place in India (276 seizures), followed by China (40 seizures), Nepal (39 seizures), Indonesia (36 seizures) and Viet Nam (28 seizures). Owing to the illicit nature of the trade, it must be assumed that the 1069–1220 Tigers implicated in this analysis are fewer than the actual number of Tigers and Tiger parts and derivatives being trafficked around the world.

Parts seized in range countries were most commonly in the form of skins (480), bones and skeletons (1253.53 kg), dead individuals (197) and claws (1313). Seizures of skins dominate in India and Nepal and are relatively frequent in China, Russia and Indonesia. Bones and skeletons are relatively often seen in seizures in China, Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Russia and Nepal. Claws are most often found in India and Malaysia. Seizures in Viet Nam and Thailand consist for a large part of whole dead Tigers, although China, Russia, Malaysia and Indonesia also show a relatively high amount of dead Tigers in trade.

It is crucial to note several caveats with respect to the results, above all that they represent a fraction

of actual trade and cannot be interpreted independently of enforcement contexts. That said, they inform discussion of key aspects of the trade in Tiger products, including the question of the origins of Tigers in trade, and reasons behind an apparent recent increase in seizures and the spatial distribution of seizures, as well as weaknesses in current law enforcement activities and the value of good data on the trade.

Conclusion

This study set out to compile and analyse data on Tiger seizures, 2000–2010, from 11 of the 13 Tiger range countries, to support conservation efforts to address the trade in Tiger parts and derivatives. It has succeeded in providing an unprecedented range of data on the trade in a single output, an important baseline to inform the understanding of this persistent yet illegal trade. While the caveats already noted must continually be borne in mind, conclusions and pointers emerge from the data set generated by this study.

First, and most obviously, the data show that illegal Tiger trade continues unabated despite considerable and repeated efforts to curtail it on the part of Tiger range and consumer countries, inter-governmental organizations and NGOs. Less concretely, but notably, the data point to other findings, namely the quantities of Tigers implicated by trade in the 11 Tiger range countries during this period; an apparent increase in seizures in recent years, with a greater part now being played by Indonesia, Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam and continuation of India's position as supplier of the largest quantities of Tiger products; steady demand for a variety of Tiger products; significant trade hubs and routes; the likelihood that the wild Tiger population may not be able to satisfy existing demand and that parts and derivatives from captive-bred Tigers entering illegal trade in response may well increase significantly; and the inadequacy of current law enforcement activities against illegal killing of and trade in Tigers, including the inability of penalties alone to deter would-be offenders, highlighting the importance of increasing the probability of detection, arrest, prosecution and conviction as a deterrent.

In sum, these conclusions point to a lack of political will among those responsible at national and international levels for protecting Tigers from illegal killing and trade. A paradigm shift in terms of commitment is needed and all stakeholders will have to join forces to create an intelligence-driven, well-co-ordinated, trans-boundary and sustained push against forces driving one of the most legendary species on Earth to extinction.

The following recommendations for fighting Tiger trade more effectively spring from the conclusions above and are centred around improving the understanding of the dynamics of Tiger trade and correspondingly enhanced enforcement. The recommendations do not include suggestions for reducing demand for Tiger products, as this was not researched as part of this study, though would obviously be part of any serious integrated conservation response to business as usual in the Tiger trade.