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USAID WILDLIFE ASIA

COUNTER WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING DIGEST: SOUTHEAST ASIA AND CHINA, 2020

Issue IV, May 2021

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Cover Photo: African Elephant © Saman Ranasingh

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACRF	ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASOF	ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Forestry
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CoP	Conference of the Parties
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CWT	Counter Wildlife Trafficking
DNP	Department of National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, Thailand
ECF	Elephant Crisis Fund
EIA	Environmental Investigation Agency
ENV	Education for Nature Vietnam
EU	European Union
FFI	Fauna & Flora International
FMT	Free Malaysia Today
HCMC	Ho Chi Minh City
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
KNP	Kruger National Park
MYR	Malaysian Ringgit
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SAR	Special Administrative Region
SBCC	Social and Behavior Change Communication
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WiTIS	Wildlife Trade Information System
WHO	World Health Organization
WFFT	Wildlife Friends Foundation Thailand
WJC	Wildlife Justice Commission
WRRT	Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature (World Wildlife Fund in Canada and the USA)

BACKGROUND

USAID Wildlife Asia is a five-year, $24.5 million, regional counter wildlife trafficking (CWT) initiative addressing the illegal trade in pangolins, tigers, elephants, and rhinos in Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), Thailand, and Vietnam) and China. The project aims to reduce consumer demand for wildlife parts and products, strengthen law enforcement, enhance legal and political commitment, and support regional collaboration to reduce wildlife crime.

This report is the fourth in a series of USAID Counter Wildlife Trafficking Digests (2017-2020). This issue covers the period from January 1 to December 31, 2020 and focuses on pangolins, tigers, elephants, and rhinos. It highlights major developments in conservation legislation, outlines some of the innovative social and behavior change communication (SBCC) research projects and campaigns, and explores enforcement efforts and seizures made in 2020. It is intended that this analysis will provide a helpful summary for individuals interested in recent developments in the illegal wildlife trade, and more importantly, catalyze further actions to counter the illegal and unsustainable wildlife trade.

USAID regularly collects and updates documentation on the current state of wildlife trafficking through a compilation of direct observations, published material and secondary data sources. This data is then evaluated and publicized in order to keep stakeholders and the general public informed. This information also provides an evidence base to support policy reformation, enforcement actions, consumer behavior changes, and conservation interventions.

The information used to create this issue of the Digest was compiled from documents, news articles, and reports that are readily available in the English language. The presented data are not exhaustive, and the reader must be aware that this Digest is not intended as a comprehensive analysis of all relevant seizures in this study's focal countries. The recommendations provided in this Digest are not only for USAID Wildlife Asia, but also for the broader counter wildlife trafficking community, and include a focus on social behavior change, improved law enforcement, increased government commitment, political will, and effective regional coordination. This Digest is intended to provide an overview of the current situation, to inform conservation actions, to support efforts to counter illegal wildlife trade, and ultimately to prevent the extinction of pangolins, tigers, elephants and rhinos.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Illegal and unsustainable wildlife trade poses serious threats to an increasingly long list of species around the globe. Pangolins, tigers, elephants and rhinos are among the most heavily affected animals, with poaching and trapping for trade continuing to drive them closer to the brink of extinction. The USAID Wildlife Asia initiative aims to counter the trade in these animals across the following Asian countries: Cambodia, China, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand and Vietnam. This Digest highlights the most important developments in elephant, pangolin, rhino and tiger counter wildlife trafficking (CWT) efforts in these countries in 2020 using data compiled from English language open-source media reports, as well as from TRAFFIC's Wildlife Trade Information System (WiTIS) and from several non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The emergence and spread of COVID-19 made 2020 a year unlike any other in recent history. The effects of the pandemic were felt around the world and were reflected in the gathered wildlife trade data as well. Far fewer wildlife seizures were reported in 2020 than 2019. National lockdowns, travel restrictions and trade suspensions all contributed to the fall in wildlife trade records, although decreased media attention and record keeping due to the pandemic must be factored in as well.

In February 2020, China announced a ban on food-related wildlife consumption in response to the reported transmission of the COVID-19 pathogen from animals to humans. Around the world, other countries, including Vietnam, announced similar bans. The impacts of this approach on wildlife consumption remains unclear, but high-level and industrial-scale wildlife trafficking is unlikely to have been affected.

2020 saw the continuation of an increasing focus on demand reduction in conservation efforts. Several social and behavior change communication (SBCC) approaches, which seek to reduce consumers' desire for specific wildlife products, were implemented. An SBCC campaign to discourage the practice of gifting with elephant, pangolin, rhino and tiger products in China was launched. Four multi-media SBCC campaigns were implemented to reduce demand for ivory and tiger products in Thailand between December 2019 and June 2020. The impact of these campaigns was measured during a rapid online survey among ivory and tiger product consumers, which found a significantly increased acknowledgement of the social unacceptability of using these products and a decreased desire to do so in the future.

2020 reports released by C4ADS and the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) highlight the importance of Central and West African countries as key export hubs in the international pangolin trade, catering predominantly to the Chinese market. The large volumes of trafficked scales suggest that the illegal trade in African pangolins is reaching critical proportions. South Asia and the Philippines also have seen an increase in pangolin poaching and trade.

A total of 48 reported pangolin seizures, accounting for close to 10,000 kg of scales, 54 live animals, 12 dead animals and one skin, were reported across the focal countries in 2020, much lower than recorded in 2019. A total of 104 suspects were arrested across 33 of the 48

recorded incidents, with only three cases leading to confirmed prosecutions, with the highest sentence being 10 years imprisonment.

A total of 17 tiger seizures were reported for the focal countries in 2020, most involving bones, representing a 50 percent decline in reported seizures compared to 2019, but a slight increase in comparison to 2018. A total of 25 suspects were arrested across 11 of the 17 recorded incidents, but no prosecutions could be confirmed.

China continues to be the largest ivory consumer country in the world, despite having installed a domestic ivory trade ban in 2018. Two 2020 reports by the EIA and the Wildlife Justice Commission (WJC) respectively, noted that after the ban, trade levels in neighboring Cambodia, Japan, Thailand, and Vietnam increased. Markets in these surrounding countries continue to cater to a predominantly Chinese clientele. The WJC found that, COVID-19 travel restrictions, compounded by increased enforcement efforts in China, have resulted in ivory stockpiling in Vietnam. Although Japan continues to play an important role in the international ivory trade, the country's domestic market may be shrinking. In July, TRAFFIC published a report on the availability of ivory on social media in Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam, showing that platforms such as Facebook and Instagram facilitate illegal ivory trade.

Like pangolin products, ivory is now predominantly trafficked from West and Central African countries. Transnational wildlife crime syndicates have reportedly shifted their focus on these countries due to lax enforcement and weak governance there. Findings by the Elephant Crisis Fund that poaching has decreased in East and Southern Africa correspond with this observed shift to West and Central African countries.

To protect remaining populations, the Cambodian Government, in collaboration with Fauna & Flora International (FFI), have launched a ten-year Asian Elephant Conservation Action Plan for Cambodia in 2020.

A total of 121 ivory seizures were reported in the focal countries in 2020, accounting for 506 kg and 234 pieces of ivory, representing a 68 percent decline from the number of seizures recorded in 2019. The large majority (93 percent) of the 2020 seizures took place in China. The country was also found to be the main destination of seized ivory shipments, with Japan being the most important exporting country. A total of 32 individuals were arrested across 15 of the 121 recorded incidents. Only one confirmation of prosecution was found, in a case involving two Vietnamese nationals who received fines of $29,000 and $18,530, respectively. A notable conviction occurred in Congo, where a notorious wildlife poacher was sentenced to 30 years of hard labor for elephant poaching and trafficking, the first ever wildlife trafficking conviction in the country's Criminal Court.

Poaching to supply predominantly East Asian demand for rhino horns, which are believed to have medicinal qualities, remains an immense threat. In South Africa, where most of the African rhinos survive today, poaching numbers decreased by 34 percent in 2020. Although a gradual decline in poaching has been observed for the past years, the steep decline recorded in 2020 can in large part be attributed to COVID-19-related travel bans and lockdowns. As

soon as COVID-19 restrictions were eased, poaching activity in Kruger's National Park increased.

A total of 14 reported rhino horn seizures were recorded for the focal countries in 2020, accounting for 222 kg and six pieces. This represents a 56 percent decline from the number of recorded seizures in 2019. China accounted for the highest number of seizures. A total of 41 suspects were arrested across 12 of the 14 recorded incidents. Four convictions were confirmed, with the most severe being a 12.5-year prison sentence for a Vietnamese national who was caught smuggling 30 kg of rhino horn into Vietnam from Mozambique.

Although the gathered seizure records show a clear decline in incident numbers across this Digest's focal species, this can largely be explained by worldwide COVID-19 measures. Demand for pangolins, tigers, elephants and rhinos remains high and poaching continues to pose a severe threat. The Digest provides a list of recommendations to support further research and counter wildlife trafficking efforts.

1 INTRODUCTION

The illegal and unsustainable trade in wildlife is a leading cause of population declines and increased extinction risk in commercially valuable species around the world (Broad et al. 2003, Eaton et al. 2015, Symes et al. 2018). Trade is driven by the demand for trophies, ornaments, pets, food, entertainment and traditional medicines (Nijman 2010, Scheffers et al. 2019). However, due to the clandestine nature of illegal trade and the lack of overarching studies of legal trade, our understanding of international trade networks is often incomplete (Symes et al. 2018). In addition to directly impacting species, wildlife trade contributes to overall loss of biodiversity, habitat degradation, introduction and spread of non-native species, and genetic pollution of wild populations (Scheffers et al. 2019). It is also an impediment to effective economic development including the prosperity of local communities and their essential health needs, an international security risk that undermines the rule of law, and, in the wake of the current pandemic, as a critical public health issue as it poses a high risk of disease outbreaks for humans (Wingard et al. 2020). The list of species classified as "threatened" on the IUCN Red List is growing rapidly. Threatened species are listed in any of the three categories: Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable, with illegal and unsustainable trade being a major driver. As of 2020, globally, there are 35,765 species assessed as threatened.

This Digest focuses on the trade in pangolins, tigers, elephants and rhinos in the following countries: Cambodia, China, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand and Vietnam. The number of threatened species in these countries is rapidly increasing. This Digest's focus on pangolins, tigers, elephants and rhinos is not only intended to aid efforts to counter illegal trade in these species and their parts and derivatives but is also meant to provide a representative picture of the broader issue of wildlife trafficking that is resulting in the decline and extinction of thousands of species across the world.

In addition to what was collected from open-source platforms, data was also contributed to this report from several NGOs. TRAFFIC's Wildlife Trade Information System (WiTIS) was extremely useful in the compilation for seizure data, as was information from Robin De Bois newsletters and Monitor's own database. Other NGOs, most notably EIA, provided information directly, or had information on their websites. Wildlife seizures, when combined in large numbers, can provide insight into illegal wildlife trade networks and provide useful information regarding trade trends and emerging risks (UNODC 2016). Seizure data are often listed in terms of weight, and all amounts in "tonnes" throughout this Digest is equal to 1,000 kilograms.

Seizure data require careful interpretation because they are a mixed indicator, demonstrating both the presence of a problem and the initiative of the relevant authorities in addressing it. For example, a high number of seizures in a particular location may reflect a greater law enforcement capacity or data collection effort by an NGO, rather than a greater volume of illicit trade.

Many important counter wildlife trafficking (CWT) developments took place in 2020, including efforts to strengthen wildlife legislation, reduce demand for illegally and unsustainably sourced animals, and to gain a better understanding of illegal trade flows and related dynamics and enforcement actions. Research efforts also included assessments of the impact of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) on poaching and wildlife trade around the globe. The WJC has published information that clearly illustrates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on wildlife trafficking networks in the focal countries of this Digest and this is referenced throughout this Digest for context.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), COVID-19 has played a significant role in reducing illegal wildlife trade activity and consumption – at least temporarily – in border regions and trade hubs in Myanmar, southern China, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam in 2020. This is primarily due to international border closures, restrictions on travel, tourism and movement of people, increased surveillance and security at international borders and the severe economic effects of national lockdowns and reduced consumer confidence.

Findings also indicate an increase in the extraction of wildlife and natural resources from protected areas for subsistence hunting and local trade due to the economic downturn the pandemic has created. As unemployment increases and local economic opportunities collapse, many local communities in rural and marginalized areas have turned to wildlife and forest resources for subsistence and small-scale trade opportunities at local markets to create income. This increase was reported in Thailand but may also be experienced more broadly in the region.

1.1 COVID-19

The outbreak of the recent respiratory disease COVID-19 began in November 2019 and has since emerged as an ongoing global pandemic that has infected and claimed millions of lives worldwide. While the origins of the virus are still unclear, it is generally considered to have begun by human contact with wildlife such as bats. The emergence and spread of COVID-19, as with zoonotic diseases in general, is most often a direct result of humanity's exploitation of and improper contact with wildlife – including through the global wildlife trade (Broad 2020, WJC 2020a). In the TRAFFIC report "Wildlife Trade, COVID-19, and Zoonotic Disease Risks," Steven Broad, the Executive Director of TRAFFIC, states that wild animal trade presents particular risks in this context, because it involves movement of individuals away from their natural range, where historical human exposure might have led to some build-up of immunity (Broad 2020). Such trade, by definition, brings live animals and animal products into close proximity with people engaged in commerce and consumption/use, whether as food, pets, medicinal ingredients, luxury goods or for other purposes. It also characteristically leads to species of different origin, captive-bred or wild-caught, being in close proximity along transport routes and in markets. Transmission from animal to animal, species to species and wildlife to human is therefore greatly facilitated by such trade (Broad 2020). According to Broad (2020), the World Health Organization (WHO) website lists over 30 major zoonotic

diseases (and disease groups) of concern and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has reported that three out of every four new or emerging infectious diseases in people come from wild and/or domesticated animals that act as sources, reservoirs and/or vectors of transmission. The current COVID-19 pandemic is thought to have been transmitted to humans in a wet market in Wuhan, China, and it has been linked to bats as potential reservoirs, perhaps with other species involved in the transmission. Other sources suggest the virus may have been transmitted through pangolins and there is emerging information suggesting strains of the virus have been transmitted to humans from commercial mink (fur) farms. Regardless, COVID-19 is not the first pandemic affecting humanity—the Spanish flu (1918 H1N1 influenza), the deadliest pandemic of the 20th century, infected an estimated 500 million people and killed 50 million, and several epidemics and pandemics have followed in recent times including HIV/AIDS (35 million killed since 1981); H1N1 swine flu (1.4 billion infected and 151,000 to 575,000 killed); West Africa Ebola virus of 2014-16 (286,000 thousand cases and 113,000 thousand deaths); and Zika virus, SARS and MERS emerging in between (Wingard et al. 2020).

1.2 LEGAL AND POLITICAL SUCCESSES

In response to COVID-19, China adopted a decision in February 2020 to ban the breeding and trading of terrestrial wildlife for food (WJC 2020a). While this was generally seen as a positive step towards curbing the spread of zoonotic diseases and the conservation of wildlife, the ban has some weaknesses. Most importantly, it disregards the issue of harvesting of wildlife for non-food purposes such as traditional medicine, pets, furs and skins, ornamental purposes, or entertainment (White 2020, Yang 2021). In fact, China has been promoting the use of bear bile from farmed bears as a traditional remedy for COVID-19. Other countries have also announced plans for additional regulation of wildlife consumption, including trade bans between Vietnam and China as well as Lao PDR and China (WJC 2020a). In July 2020, Vietnam announced a suspension on the import of wildlife products and their goal to eliminate markets and sites that illegally trade in wildlife (BBC 2020).

In February 2020, China also announced revision plans for its Wildlife Protection Law, which included the addition of over 500 new species to the protection list as well as upgraded protection levels for 65 species, including pangolins, which involves harsher penalties and stricter regulation with regards to their utilization (Baiyu 2020, You 2021). However, loopholes present themselves in the form of a permitting system for breeding and specialized utilization of species even if they are afforded Class I protection (Yang 2021). For example, pangolins are now afforded higher protection under China's revised wildlife laws and yet patented medicines containing pangolin scales are still approved for commercial use by pharmaceutical companies (C4ADS 2020, EIA 2020a). According to Yang (2021), once permission is granted for farming of wildlife, species are re-categorized as "livestock" and approved for commercial use, provided it is not for the purpose of food. Further, according to EIA, in April 2020, China published a document directed at provincial-level departments to support facilities breeding wildlife for food in converting their permits to other legal non-food uses like scientific research, medicinal use or exhibition. There are concerns this will

undermine efforts to reduce the risk of zoonotic diseases (White 2020). In the same month, the Chinese Government also issued a draft guide on the use of wildlife in patented traditional medicines which specifically stated that patents should not be issued for products containing tiger bone and rhino horn (White 2020).

In light of COVID-19, ASEAN Member States have recognized the need to strengthen cooperation and collaboration in tackling the illegal wildlife trade. On October 7, 2020, the 23rd ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Forestry (ASOF) approved the *Plan of Action on ASEAN Cooperation on CITES and Wildlife Enforcement 2021-2025*. As part of the implementation of the Plan of Action, the development of an updated *ASEAN Handbook on Legal Cooperation to Combat Illegal Wildlife Trade* will be a key deliverable for endorsement by ASOF in 2021. In November 2020, the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF) was adopted at the 37th ASEAN Summit, which is one of the region's main initiatives to overcome the pandemic (ASEAN 2020). Under the broad strategy of "advancing towards a more sustainable and resilient future", they include a goal to implement the *ASEAN Guidelines for Detecting and Preventing Wildlife Trafficking*, which encompasses promoting awareness and formulating recommendations/policy briefs on and to reduce the risks of zoonotic diseases being spread through the illegal wildlife trade (ASEAN 2020).

Some notable outputs supporting enhanced enforcement in the region included a *Pocket Guide* for frontline border officers in Myanmar, Laos and Thailand (February 2020) by TRAFFIC, and a talk on illegal wildlife trade for key staff from AirAsia in India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, also carried out by TRAFFIC. A report, *Making Traffickers Finance Counter-Trafficking: The Case for Conservation Restitution Funds from Asset Forfeitures and Seizures* available in English, Vietnamese, Thai, Lao, and Khmer was also produced by the Analytical Centre of Excellence on Trafficking. The year saw the release of USAID Wildlife Asia's *Counter Transnational Organized Crime* training package in English, Khmer, Lao, Thai, and Vietnamese, and the launch of the revised *Rapid Reference Guide on Applicable Offences to Trafficking of Critically Endangered Species in Thailand*, which is a tool to help investigators and prosecutors more effectively prosecute cases against wildlife criminals.

1.3 SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE RESEARCH AND TRENDS

In response to illegal wildlife trade, conservationists have largely pushed for supply-side interventions, such as anti-poaching patrols and strengthened enforcement efforts. However, such interventions on their own will not always stem the tide of wildlife trafficking. As legislation and law enforcement have been insufficient to protect many wildlife species in many countries, especially in countries where capacity in these areas is weak and corruption rife, conservationists are increasingly focusing on campaigns to help reduce the demand for wildlife products. There is now increasing interest in developing and implementing behavior change demand-side interventions, notably using the social and behavior change communication (SBCC) approach, which seeks to lower poaching pressure on sought-after species, including

pangolins, tigers, elephants and rhinos, by reducing consumer's desire for, and purchase of, specific wildlife products.

Developments in 2020 included a study on ivory demand among Chinese tourists traveling to other Asian countries and a groundbreaking survey that demonstrated the positive impact of SBCC campaigns in changing attitudes, social norms and behavior.

In October 2020, WWF and GlobeScan disseminated data on the purchase of ivory among Chinese travelling abroad from the Mainland to Cambodia, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), Japan, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam after China implemented its domestic ivory ban implemented in 2018. This updates information from similar studies done by WWF and GlobeScan in 2018 and 2019. Results from the 2020 survey showed that among 3,011 travelers surveyed, 24 percent visited ivory shops and 6.8 percent actually made an ivory purchase. Countries where incidence of ivory purchases was highest included Thailand (13.5 percent), Japan (12.0 percent) and Hong Kong SAR (11.3 percent).

In addition, one of the greatest successes achieved in 2020 was USAID Wildlife Asia's SBCC demand reduction campaigns in Thailand implemented from December 2019 to June 2020 to counter the two main drivers of Thai wildlife consumption (revealed by the project's above-cited 2018 consumer research study): (1) spiritual beliefs in the power of ivory and tiger products to bring good luck and protect from harm, and (2) the perceived beauty of ivory, mainly jewelry and accessories. To evaluate the impact of these campaigns, USAID Wildlife Asia conducted a rapid online survey among randomly selected ivory and tiger product owners and intenders in Bangkok (N=421) in July 2020. This groundbreaking survey was the first of its kind in the CWT sector to gather research data on the impact of demand reduction campaigns on individual attitudes, behaviors and social norms among target audiences. Findings from this 2020 survey revealed that exposure to these SBCC campaigns during their media dissemination period significantly improved desired attitudes about using ivory and tiger products. When compared to the sub-sample of ivory and tiger product owners and intenders (N=550) from the USAID Wildlife Asia 2018 consumer study, target audiences in 2020 reported an increased social unacceptability of the use of these products, as well as a decreased intention to use them in the future. Another milestone was the production and dissemination by USAID Wildlife Asia of the *Social and Behavior Change Communication Demand Reduction Guidebook* in November 2020 to serve as a reference for governments and partners implementing demand reduction activities (USAID Wildlife Asia 2020a).

1.3.1 SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE CAMPAIGNS

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, there were a number of other behavior change and awareness raising actions carried out or initiated in 2020 in the focal countries to reduce demand for parts and derivatives of elephant, pangolin, rhino and tiger parts. Numerous government agencies, NGOs, and private sector partners implemented over 30 campaigns and communications in focal countries (see list in Annex). These initiatives have ranged from targeted single-day events to national campaigns garnering hundreds of millions of views. Many of the campaigns listed were implemented in partnership, illustrating the growing recognition

that more can be achieved by working together to reduce demand for illegal wildlife products. Demand is built on strong traditions, beliefs, and preferences, and research is demonstrating that SBCC campaigns in particular are showing encouraging results in tackling the issue. As the COVID-19 pandemic continued throughout 2020, campaigns also began to address the links between wildlife consumption and use, and the dangers to human health due to zoonotic diseases. This message has captured the public's attention, and there is now significant opportunity for governments, NGOs, and other partners to reinforce this with consumers to further reduce demand.

2 PANGOLINS

Temminck's Pangolin © Chris R. Shepherd

2.1 SITUATION UPDATE

The planet is home to eight species of pangolin found exclusively in Africa (four species) and Asia (four species). The four African pangolin species are the black-bellied pangolin *Phataginus tetradactyla*, Temminck's pangolin *S. temminckii*, white-bellied pangolin *P. tricuspis* and giant pangolin *Smutsia gigantea*, the former two of which are listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List while the latter two were updated to Endangered status based on reassessments done in 2019 (Ingram et al. 2019, Nixon et al. 2019, Pietersen et al. 2019a,b). The four Asian species are the Indian pangolin *Manis crassicaudata*, Philippine pangolin *M. culionensis*, Chinese pangolin *M. pentadactyla* and Sunda pangolin *M. javanica*. In the recent IUCN Red list reassessments published in 2019, the threat status of three remained the same (the Indian pangolin as Endangered, the Chinese and Sunda pangolins as Critically Endangered), while the status of the Philippine pangolin was updated from Endangered to Critically Endangered due to overexploitation from hunting and poaching for illicit international and domestic trade (Challender et al. 2019a, Challender et al. 2019b, Mahmood et al. 2019, Schoppe et al. 2019).

Popular for their purported medicinal qualities, they are a much sought-after commodity. Pangolin products include scales, meat, skins/leather, trophies and charms. Demand for these products find pangolins among the most heavily illegally traded mammals in the world with all

eight species currently facing the threat of extinction. Pangolins have been listed in CITES Appendix II since 1995 to regulate international trade in the species. Concerning trade levels in the four Asian pangolin species resulted in the establishment of a zero annual export quota for commercial trade for these species in 2000 effectively prohibiting any trade. In spite of this, at the 17th CITES Conference of the Parties (CoP) in 2016, in response to the continued decline in pangolin populations, all Asian and African pangolin species were transferred from CITES Appendix II to I, prohibiting international commercial trade in all pangolin species, unless permitted in exceptional circumstances. However, black market demand for pangolins persists and now large-scale poaching for illegal international trade involving organized criminal networks is the key threat to remaining populations (EIA 2020a, UNODC 2020).

In September 2020, C4ADS released a report quantifying the growth and scale of the trade over the past five years. They highlight Central and West Africa as key trade hotspots and export hubs (linked to 72 percent of African seizures from 2015-2019) in the illicit trafficking of pangolin scales to China. They report traffickers in these regions use the bushmeat trade to collect scales in bulk and so-called pangolin breeding programs to traffic illegally obtained scales to China (C4ADS 2020). In December 2020, the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) report similar findings in their *Out of Africa - How West and Central Africa Have Become the Epicenter of Ivory And Pangolin Scale Trafficking to Asia*, which documents the shifting operations of wildlife smuggling syndicates in Africa to Nigeria, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo due to weak governance, widespread corruption and poor institutional frameworks (EIA 2020b). These pangolin trafficking networks operate across China, Vietnam, Nigeria, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire and Democratic Republic of Congo sourcing and transporting a high volume of scales. For example, in June 2019 and August 2020, traffickers were reportedly in possession of 116 tonnes of scales, which was comparable to the amount of pangolin scales seized globally in 2019 (C4ADS 2020, EIA 2020b). The volume of scales being trafficked clearly indicates that the illegal trade in the African species is growing. Further, both C4ADS and EIA highlight the concerning and continued use of pangolin scales in traditional Chinese medicine as this drives demand and undermines law enforcement and conservation efforts to shut down the trade in all pangolin species. C4ADS even connects pangolin breeding programs in Africa to pharmaceutical companies in China (C4ADS 2020) while EIA documents the use of pangolin scales by 56 pharmaceutical companies to produce at least 64 commercially available medicines (EIA 2020a).

Similarly, there has been a surge in the poaching of pangolins in South Asia reportedly destined to China (Choudhary et al. 2018, The Sentinel 2021). A search of open-source media revealed at least 44 incidents where pangolins were confiscated from trafficking busts conducted over the course of the year (2020) in India, the majority of which constituted live pangolins (64 percent) amounting to 29 animals followed by scales (36 percent) amounting to about 63 kg (Monitor, unpublished data). Of further significance, in June 2020, the Myanmar government approved a permitting process allowing private zoos to breed 90 species, including pangolins and tigers (Free Malaysia Today (FMT) 2020). This is concerning as Myanmar is a known transit route in the trafficking of wildlife into China, and the laundering of wildlife under the guise of captive-breeding is widespread throughout the region.

Trade of the Philippine pangolin has risen over the decades with a nine-fold increase of seizures recorded in just 2018–2019, compared to the previous 18 years. Between 2001 and 2017, there were 39 seizure incidents reported in the Philippines with a total trafficked volume estimated at 3,537 pangolins (Gomez and Sy 2018). In August 2020, TRAFFIC reported a total of 10 seizures that occurred from 2018 to 2019, which was estimated to amount to over 6,800 pangolins (Sy and Krishnasamy 2020). The Philippines is home to one species of pangolin, the Philippine or Palawan pangolin so named due to its restricted range on Palawan and adjacent islands. Considering its threatened status, the Philippine pangolin may be facing considerable pressure if such trafficking trends continue.

Tons Vs Tonnes

A recent study carried by the Oxford Brookes University and Monitor found that due to a widespread misunderstanding of the difference in weight between a ton and a tonne, estimates of seized pangolins (and likely other wildlife products) have been vastly underestimated (Nijman and Shepherd, 2021). In the United States of America, a ton equals 2,000 US pounds or 907.2 kg. In the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth countries using the Imperial system, a ton equals 1016.0 kg or 160 stone. In most of the rest of the world that uses the metric system a ton is written as a tonne, which equals 1,000 kg. A ton or a tonne is not related to American and British spelling. The study found that miscalculations resulting from not comprehending the actual weight difference between a ton and a tonne, came to an underestimate of 25,000 pangolins trafficked over a two-and-a-half-year period. All amounts in "tonnes" throughout this Digest is equal to 1,000 kilograms.

Sacks of confiscated pangolin scales © National Parks Boards, Singapore

2.2 SIGNIFICANT ACTIONS IN THE USAID WILDLIFE ASIA FOCAL COUNTRIES

CAMBODIA

Only one seizure record of pangolin scales amounting to over one kg was obtained in 2020. The incident was a result of the investigation into Cambodia's illegal ivory trade. Along with pangolin scales, the incident also involved the confiscation of ivory (6.58 kg), tiger parts (one tooth, 5.5 kg bones) and seahorse (103 dead). The seizure was made after the Wildlife Justice Commission (WJC) informed Wildlife Alliance of a carving factory suspected of dealing in illegal wildlife trade at which point a raid of the factory was undertaken in March, the wildlife products seized and a Chinese national was arrested. The case is still under investigation.

CHINA

China remains one of the most significant end destinations in the illegal international trade of pangolins. In 2020, there were 15 pangolin seizures in China mostly involving scales amounting to 3,598 kg. Mainland China was also the most reported destination of seized shipments (in 9 of 11 seizures that had data on international trafficking routes); while Hong Kong SAR was the reported transit route in the smuggling of 1,000 kg of scales from Indonesia to mainland China.

In June 2020, China announced plans to revise its list of protected species under the Wildlife Protection Law (which has yet to be released). This includes upgrading the national protection status of its native pangolin species to Class I, the highest form of protection under national legislation which essentially means harsher penalties for illegal traders, poachers, etc. (C4ADS 2020, TRAFFIC 2020a). In conjunction with this, the National Forestry and Grassland Administration committed to improved monitoring and tougher enforcement to curtail illegal trade, smuggling and consumption of pangolins as well as restore pangolin habitats. Pursuant to this, pangolin scales were removed as a raw material from the official Chinese Pharmacopoeia 2020 (a compendium of approved traditional and Western medicines) in an effort to lower consumption and demand for drugs that continue to threaten pangolin populations (C4ADS 2020, EIA 2020a). However, patented medicines containing pangolin scale as an ingredient, of which there are eight listed in the Pharmacopoeia, is still allowed, thereby permitting pharmaceutical companies and hospitals to commercially produce and sell traditional medicinal products containing pangolin scales. There are concerns this will continue to present a loophole that can be exploited to launder illegally obtained pangolin scales and undermine conservation efforts to eradicate the illicit trade in pangolin products in China.

As recently as January 2021, two pangolin smugglers were sentenced to 14 and 13 years in prison and fined $618,000 for trafficking in African pangolins to Asia (Xie 2021). Fifteen others have also been sentenced to between 15 months and 12 years in connection with the case. The gang was apprehended in 2019 for importing 23 tonnes of pangolin scales worth approximately $17.6 million from Nigeria in 2018 and 2019 (Xie 2021).

LAO PDR

There was one seizure of two live pangolins in the Lao Province of Xieng Khouang in August 2020. Additionally, Lao PDR was also implicated as a source country in two other seizures that took place in China (involving 66.3 grams of scales) and Vietnam (involving five live Sunda pangolins) respectively.

THAILAND

Thailand made four pangolin seizures in 2020 of two dead pangolins, one live pangolin, 258 pieces of scales and one skin. At least three Thai nationals were arrested in conjunction with these incidents.

VIETNAM

The highest number of seizures in 2020 was reported in Vietnam with 22 incidents. This mostly encompassed the confiscation of live animals with 18 incidents amounting to 51 pangolins. Eighteen locals have been arrested in connection with these incidents and at least two have been prosecuted to date with one receiving a one-year prison sentence and fine of $13,600 for possession of one live pangolin and one receiving a 10-year prison sentence for transporting nine dead pangolins in Vinh City.

Vietnam was also implicated as a source country of 14.58 kg of scales that were seized in mainland China and as destination country in the trafficking of 6,160 kg of scales from Nigeria that was seized in Malaysia. While there were few seizures of scales, the Wildlife Justice Commission reports being offered more than 22 tonnes of pangolin scales in Vietnam between January and March 2020 and infer that large quantities of pangolin scales are available as well as being stockpiled within the country (WJC 2020).

2.3 SEIZURES AND PROSECUTION

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in border closures and travel restrictions globally in 2020, there were 48 reported pangolin seizures in, or linked to, USAID Wildlife Asia's focal countries. The commodities seized included a total of 9,765 kg and 267 pieces of pangolin scales, 55 live animals, 12 dead animals and one skin. The largest shipments of scales were concealed or mis-declared as cashew nuts (one incident) and frozen fish (one incident). The species of pangolin seized was only identified in 10 seizures with the Sunda pangolin reported in 10 incidents and the Chinese pangolin in two incidents. Information on the top 15 seizures by volume can be found in **Table 1**.

China and Vietnam were the most significant players in the pangolin trade having reported the greatest number of seizures (14 and 22 respectively; 75 percent of all seizures) and were implicated as the main destinations of seized shipments. There were an equal number of seizures involving live animals and pangolin scales with 22 seizures each, the former predominantly involving Vietnam and the latter China. However, in terms of quantity, the largest seizure recorded in 2020 took place in Malaysia involving over 6,160 kg of scales which was reported to have originated in Nigeria and was en route to Vietnam.

Of the 48 seizure incidents, 33 incidents included arrests made amounting to 104 individuals. Only three cases have led to prosecution to date, the most significant being a 10-year prison sentence handed down to a Vietnamese national who was caught for transporting nine dead Sunda pangolins in Vinh City, Vietnam.

Table 1. Top 15 pangolin seizures and prosecutions in 2020, ranked by weight of seizure

No.	Date	Location	Summary	Seized items
1	March 31	Malaysia	Customs authorities in Malaysia seized a shipment of African pangolin scales, recovering over six tons of the contraband in a container at Port Klang. The scales were concealed among sacks of cashew nuts. The shipment originated out of Nigeria and was headed to Vietnam.	Scales – 6,160 kg
2	May 14	Mainland China	Authorities arrested 16 individuals for possession of pangolin scales estimated to be worth $56 million in the province of Guangdong.	Scales – 1,300 kg
3	September 24	Hong Kong SAR	Hong Kong Customs seized a tonne of pangolin scales along with 13 kg of dried snake gall bladders in a shipping container arriving from Indonesia and believed to be bound for mainland China. The shipment was declared as frozen fish.	Scales – 1,000 kg
4	March 9	Mainland China	Chinese Customs arrested nine alleged pangolin smugglers in South China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and East China's Anhui Province. A suspect in the case reported ordering a batch of pangolin scales from overseas (specific location not reported) to supply medicine markets in the provinces of Anhui and Henan.	Scales – 820 kg
5	April 11	Mainland China	Chinese Customs busted a smuggling syndicate trafficking pangolin scales and arrested 12 suspects. One of the suspects reported purchasing the scales from overseas (specific location	Scales – 441 kg

No.	Date	Location	Summary	Seized items
			not reported) and entrusted the scales to a smuggling ring to transport them into Guangxi.	
6	December 23	Mainland China	20 kg of pangolin scales were seized by a border patrol team in Guangxi. The scales were stored in the trunk of a vehicle. Three individuals were arrested.	Scales – 20 kg
7	January 10	Vietnam	Traffic Police found live pangolins, weighing 71 kg, after they stopped a four-seater car on National Highway 1A in the north central province of Thanh Hoa for violating traffic rules. The pangolins were *en* route to be sold in Hanoi.	Live – 16 individuals
8	May 8	Vietnam	A man was caught transporting nine dead Sunda pangolins weighing a total of 30.2 kg in Vinh City, Nghe An on October 12, 2020. He was sentenced to ten years in prison.	Dead – 9 individuals
9	December 6	Vietnam	Ninh Binh Province authorities discovered a passenger bus with six live pangolins and styrofoam boxes containing meat on its way from Dak Lak to Hanoi.	Live – 6 individuals
10	August 31	Vietnam	Acting on a tip-off, the Environmental Police and Nam Dan District Police in Nghe An Province arrested a man transporting six pangolins. The pangolins, weighing 23.8 kg, were hidden in three white foam boxes in the trunk of the car. The suspect arrested reported buying the pangolins in Huong Son District, Ha Tinh Province for $1,300.	Live – 6 individuals
11	January 12	Vietnam	Huong Hoa District Police in Quang Tri Province seized pangolins smuggled from Lao PDR from a passenger bus heading to Hue City with Lao registration tags. Five Sunda pangolins weighing 19 kg were confiscated and later	Live – 5 individuals

No.	Date	Location	Summary	Seized items
			transferred to a rescue center at Cuc Phuong National Park.	
12	November25	Vietnam	18 kg of ivory, 3 kg of pangolin scales and other wildlife was seized from a shop in Binh Duong. The owner was arrested.	Scales – 3 kg
13	January 21	Nepal	Three arrested at a bus station for trying to smuggle scales and other wildlife products into China via Tibet.	Scales – 2.9 kg
14	March 1	Cambodia	Wildlife Alliance's Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team (WRRT) raided a carving factory in Phnom Penh after receiving a tip-off. A Chinese national was arrested and found with 6.58 kg of ivory, 5.5 kg of tiger bones, one tiger tooth, 1.03 kg of pangolin scales, and 103 dead seahorses. A Chinese national was arrested and has been put on pre-trial detention.	Scales – 1.03 kg
15	June 25	Vietnam	Vinh Environment-Economic Police stopped a motorbike with a fake registration number and seized a Chinese pangolin and two Sunda pangolins weighing a total of 17 kg. The pangolins were transferred to Pu Mat National Park. Two subjects were arrested.	Live – 3 (2 Sunda pangolins and 1 Chinese pangolin)

USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

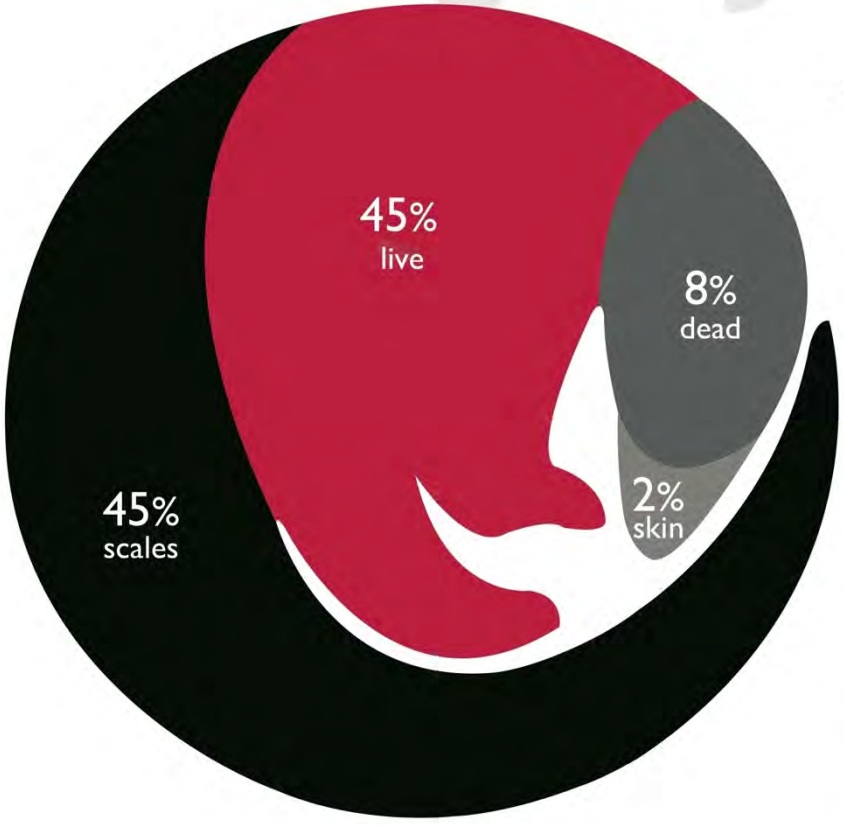
SUMMARY 2020
PANGOLIN SEIZURES

MAIN SEIZURE LOCATIONS

46% Vietnam Live

29% China Scales

MAIN COMMODITY
% OF INCIDENTS



MOST FREQUENT COUNTRY OF DESTINATION

9
incidents in China

2
incidents in Vietnam

TOTAL SEIZURES

48
Total number
incidents linked to focal countries

104
Suspects arrested

LARGEST SEIZURE

6,160 kg
Malaysia 6,160 kg scales

Source: Counter Wildlife Trafficking Digest, Issue 1V, 2020

2.3.1 TRADE ROUTES/HOTSPOTS

Information on trafficking routes was obtained from 11 of the 48 seizures incidents reported. This involved at least 11 countries and territories in Asia and Africa with the key destinations reportedly being mainland China (reported in 9 incidents) and Vietnam (reported in 2 incidents) (**Figure 1**).

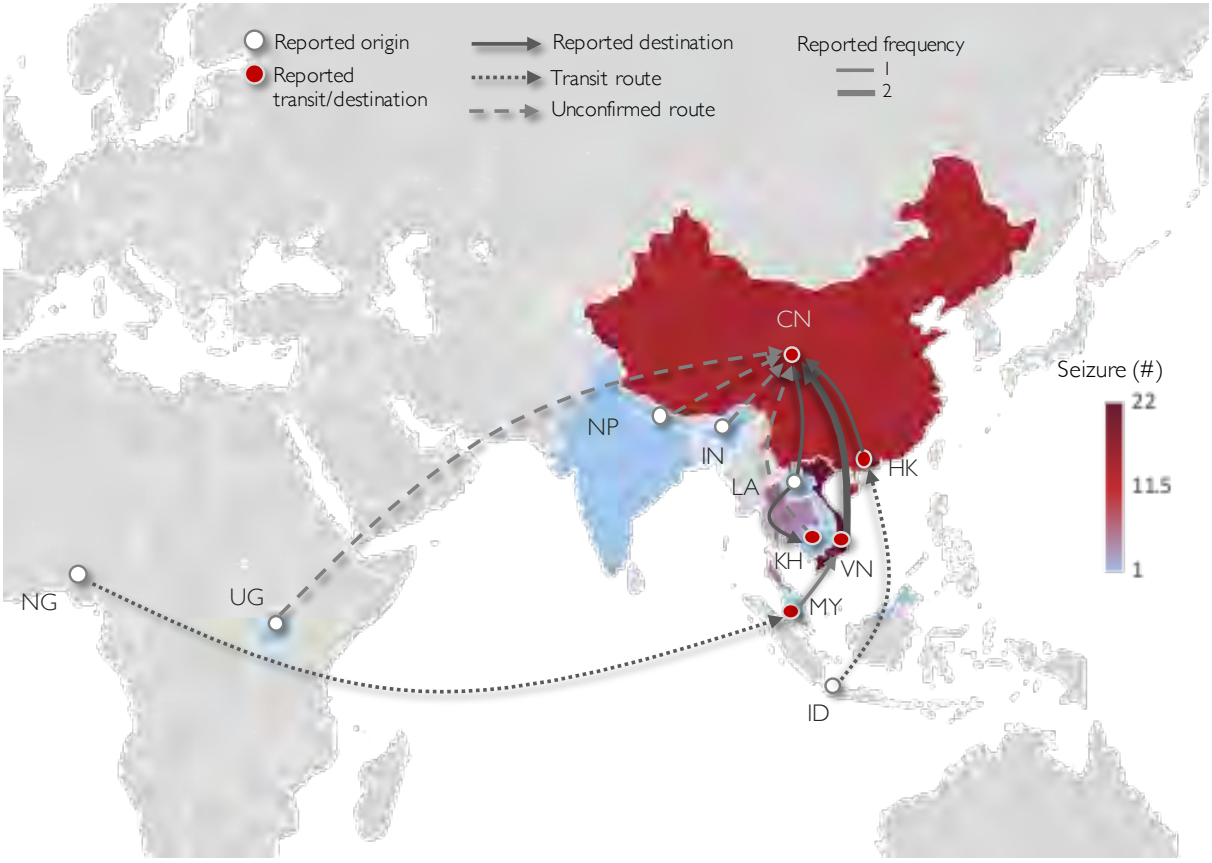


Figure 1. Seizure locations and trade routes involving pangolins in 2020. Country codes: CN=mainland China, HK=Hong Kong SAR, ID=Indonesia, IN=India, KH=Cambodia, LA=Lao PDR, MY=Malaysia, NG=Nigeria, NP=Nepal, UG=Uganda, VN=Vietnam.

Although there were few seizures with trafficking routes, these incidents reveal the ongoing and persistent threat to pangolins from illicit international trade in 2020 as with previous reports (USAID 2017, 2018, and 2019). Nigeria continues to be a key port of export of pangolin scale shipments out of Africa corresponding with reports by EIA (2020b) and Gomez et al. (2015). There was one seizure in Uganda of 0.5 kg of pangolin scales, six tortoises and 10 pieces of dried elephant penis which was confiscated from 14 Chinese nationals, and it is assumed these products would be trafficked to China though this remains unconfirmed. In Asia, Hong Kong SAR, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia and Nepal continue to play a role as important source or transit countries/territories in the illegal supply of pangolin products, while Vietnam continues to be a transit and destination country.

2.4 SUMMARY

Based on the previous USAID Digest reports, there were fewer seizures of pangolins linked to the focal countries in 2020 (48 incidents) in comparison to 2019 (82 incidents), including a significant drop in the volume of products seized i.e. 155,795 kg of pangolin products seized in 2019 (USAID 2020b) which in 2020, dropped to 9,765 kg plus 267 pieces of pangolin scales, 55 live animals, 12 dead animals and one skin. In 2018, there were fewer seizures (n=25) but greater volume of products seized i.e. 26,000 kg of scales, 13,000 kg of descaled/disemboweled pangolins and 378 live pangolins (USAID 2019). China and Vietnam remain the major end consumers of pangolin products which are being smuggled from Africa and through Asia; and the African region remains the largest source, in terms of volume of pangolin scales, to these markets. The reduced number of seizures in 2020 could be due to many reasons, not the least of which is the global COVID-19 pandemic that has interrupted supply chains and trafficking routes (WJC 2020). Nevertheless, investigations by organizations such as EIA and WJC reveal much larger quantities of pangolin products in trade than are being seized, the stockpiling of scales in Vietnam, and the change in modus operandi of traders from face to face to online transactions in adaptation to travel restrictions and border lockdowns. While no new trade trends or dynamics have been observed, the data indicates that both African and Asian pangolin species are still very much under threat from trade and more needs to be done to secure their future.

Pangolin scales seized in Singapore © National Parks Board, Singapore

CASE STUDY
Nigeria – Vietnam Connection

On March 31, 2020, Malaysian Customs authorities seized the largest shipment of pangolin scales in the country at one of its busiest ports, Port Klang. Over 6,100 kg of scales were found in a shipping container that was declared as cashew nuts. The scales were packed in 140 bags weighing 44 kg each and hidden amongst sacks of cashew nuts. The reported use of "cashew nuts" aroused suspicion as it has been previously used on numerous occasions to conceal the smuggling of pangolin scales. The Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia confirmed that the shipment originated out of Nigeria and was destined for Vietnam and estimated to be worth close to $19.5 million. However, no other details of the case were available such as suspects arrested or any other aspects of the investigation. Nigeria has emerged as the key export country in the trafficking of African pangolins to Asia – implicated in more than 167 tonnes of scales seized globally in the past five years (EIA 2020b). Similarly, Malaysia is a known transit route in the smuggling of wildlife products in the Southeast Asian region. In particular, its role in the trafficking of pangolin scales from Africa surfaced when several large seizures were made of over 17,000 kg of pangolin scales within the space of seven months in 2017. In 2019, about 29.8 tonnes of frozen pangolins were confiscated from two pangolin processing facilities in Sabah. According to investigations by EIA, shipping agents in Nigeria prefer sending shipments containing illicit wildlife products directly to Malaysia for transshipment or repacking before heading to destinations such as Hong Kong SAR, Singapore and Vietnam with shipments of ivory and/or pangolin scales often concealed with timber, cashew nuts and ginger (EIA 2020b). As recently as January 21, 2021, 8,800 kg pangolin scales were seized in Apapa, Nigeria that was being exported to Hai Phong, Vietnam in a container declared as furniture, which held timber, as well as ivory, horns, lion bones and other wildlife contraband. In 2018 and 2019, shipments of pangolin scales originating from Nigeria were seized in Hong Kong SAR (22 tonnes), Vietnam (22 tonnes) and Singapore (25.6 tonnes).

3 TIGERS

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3.1 SITUATION UPDATE

The world is losing its tigers. Today there are only about 3,900 wild tigers left, down from 100,000 individuals a century ago (Goodrich et al. 2015), though some experts estimate this number to be even lower. Of nine subspecies, four are already extinct, with the surviving subspecies under threat of vast habitat loss and degradation, poaching and illegal trade. Tigers once ranged widely across Asia, from Turkey in the west to the eastern coast of Russia (Nowell and Jackson 1996). Over the past 100 years tigers have disappeared from Southwest and Central Asia, from two Indonesian islands (Java and Bali, each once home to endemic subspecies of tigers) and from large areas of Southeast and Eastern Asia. Tigers now inhabit less than six percent of their historic range, with a 42 percent decline since 2006 (Walston et al. 2010, Goodrich et al. 2015). Tigers are classified as Endangered on the IUCN Red List, but two subspecies Malayan *P. t. jacksoni* and Sumatran *P. t. sumatrae* are classified as Critically Endangered (Goodrich et al. 2015). Recent tiger survey numbers indicate a small increase within some tiger range countries such as India, Russia, Nepal, Thailand and Bhutan, but tiger

numbers overall in Southeast Asia are at a critical level and continue to decline (Dinerstein et al. 2007, Goodrich et al. 2015, Bangkok Post 2020).

While there are numerous threats to the continued survival of tigers, including habitat loss, loss of prey species due to illegal and unsustainable hunting, the greatest immediate threat is poaching to supply the illegal trade (Wong 2020). The most serious threat to tigers is poaching for their skin and bones due to their high commercial value and status symbol, particularly in Asia. Tiger parts and derivatives are used in Asian medicines, trophies and consumed as exotic meat (Mills and Jackson 1994, Dinerstein et al. 2007). Tiger bone, in particular, has been used as a treatment for rheumatism and related ailments for thousands of years in traditional Asian medicine (Nowell 2000). In the early 1990s, it became evident that medicinal trade in tiger bone threatened to drive the already endangered tiger to extinction in the wild (Nowell 2000). In 1993-1994, shutting down medicinal markets for tiger bone shot to the top of the global environmental agenda (Nowell 2000). That said, virtually all parts of tigers are in demand. Regardless of their high profile, and of the legal protection afforded tigers in all range states, and their listing in Appendix I of CITES (all tiger subspecies have been listed in Appendix I of CITES since 1975, except for *P. t. altaica*, which was added to Appendix I in 1987), poaching for trade continues, as does their decline in the wild.

Further exacerbating the threats to tigers is captive breeding of these animals for commercial trade as it stimulates demand for and illicit trade in a highly threatened species and undermines conservation efforts to ensure their survival (EIA 2019). Tiger farms or parks are frequently exposed for fraudulent trade of tiger parts from captive-bred specimens and also from laundered wild animals (EIA 2020c, Four Paws 2020, Musings 2020, TRAFFIC 2020b). The need to regulate the captive breeding of big cats, including tigers has been raised at multiple CITES meetings. At CITES CoP15 in 2010, Parties adopted a decision (Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP15) that breeding tigers for parts or derivatives should not be permitted. However, at CITES CoP18 in 2019, countries with Asian big cat breeding facilities were instructed to review their national management practices, and those with commercial tiger breeding facilities were to restrict captive tiger populations to levels which support wild populations (Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP18) (USAID 2020b). Recent reporting in 2020 continues to reveal the deficiency of CITES Parties to curb the illegal trade in captive-bred tigers in Asia and globally (see Case Study below).

3.2 SIGNIFICANT ACTIONS IN THE USAID WILDLIFE ASIA FOCAL COUNTRIES

CAMBODIA

Only one case involving the seizure of tiger parts was found for 2020 involving Cambodia. In a raid carried out in a carving factory in Phnom Penh by Wildlife Alliance's WRRT, acting on a tip-off from the WJC investigating the ivory trade in Cambodia, seized 5.5 kg of tiger bones, one tiger tooth, 6.58 kg of elephant ivory, 1.03 kg of pangolin scales, and 103 dead seahorses. A Chinese national was arrested and put on pre-trial detention, the outcome of which is not yet known.

CHINA

In 2020, more seizures were reported as taking place in China than any other of the USAID Wildlife Asia focal countries, with 10 seizures involving teeth (n=3), bones (n=211 + 5.5kg), claws (n=2), skins (n=2), other parts (unknown), skeletons, (n=3), and skulls (n=2). A total of 29 people were arrested in conjunction with these seizures, though no resulting prosecutions were yet reported. One of the largest in China in 2020 involved 207 tiger bones, further illustrating the persistent demand for these bones for use in traditional medicines.

China is a key consumer of tiger parts and derivatives. There are an estimated 6,000 captive tigers in China. In December 2020, news broke of the killing of tigers at the Qinhuangdao Wildlife Rescue Centre in the province of Hebei renewing discussion around the use of captive-bred tigers for commercial trade considering it stimulates demand for and illicit trade in a highly threatened species and undermines conservation efforts to ensure their survival. According to EIA, this same facility and the adjacent Qinhuangdao Wild Animal Park were found making tiger skin rugs and selling tiger bone wine since at least 2012 with government approval, revealing China's disregard for a 2007 CITES Decision to phase out the use of captive-bred tigers for commercial trade (EIA 2020c).

LAO PDR

No seizures of tigers, their parts and derivatives, were reported to have taken place in Lao PDR in 2020. However, in January 2020, three Vietnamese nationals were arrested in Nghe An Province, Vietnam, transporting a tiger skeleton on a passenger bus that had purportedly originated from Lao PDR.

THAILAND

There were two tiger seizures in Thailand in 2020. The first took place early December at the notorious Mukda Tiger Park and Farm where a severed tiger head (n=1), carcass (n=1), body parts (quantity not reported) and live tiger cubs (n=5) were confiscated by the Department of National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP). DNA testing on the cubs revealed that at least three of the cubs had been smuggled into the zoo from elsewhere. The second incident occurred on December 23 when local authorities raided a hotel in Bangkok and found two tiger skins on display as well as shells from marine turtles.

VIETNAM

At least four tiger seizures were reported in Vietnam for 2020 consisting of wine (n=2), taxidermy head (n=1), skeleton (n=1) and in one incident teeth, skins and claws were seized but quantities were not reported. Of these seizures, one involved the smuggling of tiger skeletons from Lao PDR on a passenger bus. Vietnam was also implicated as the point of origin/transit in at least three seizures that occurred in mainland China.

3.3 SEIZURES AND PROSECUTION

A total of 17 tiger seizures in USAID Wildlife Asia's focal countries were reported in 2020 including China (10 incidents), Vietnam (four incidents), Thailand (two incidents) and Cambodia (one incident). There were no reported seizures in Lao PDR.

Tiger bones were the most frequent commodity seized in at least eight incidents amounting to 213 pieces and 5.5 kg followed by skins (four seizures, four whole skins) and teeth (four seizures, 22 teeth). Other body parts were also seized including carcass (n=1), head (n=1), skeletons (n=3), skulls (n=2), wine (n=2 bottles, two whole carcasses soaked in wine), and claws (though quantities were not specified). There was one seizure of five live cubs in Thailand that was part of a larger seizure of tiger body parts, carcass, severed head, etc. All tiger seizures are listed in **Table 2**.

Of the 17 seizures, 11 incidents included arrests made of 25 individuals though the outcome of these arrests are not as yet known.

Table 2. Tiger seizures reported in Cambodia, China, Thailand and Vietnam in 2020

No.	Date	Location	Summary	Seized items
1	January 9	Vietnam	A Vietnamese passenger on a bus from Lao PDR was found with illegal wildlife products including a tiger skeleton, macaque bones, two dead Asian golden cats and four bear paws. Three were arrested including the bus driver.	Skeleton – 1
2	March 1	Cambodia	Wildlife Alliance's WRRT raided a carving factory in Phnom Penh after receiving a tip-off from the WJC. A Chinese national was found with 6.58 kg of ivory, 5.5 kg of tiger bones, one tiger tooth, 1.03 kg of pangolin scales, and 103 dead seahorses. He was arrested and put on pre-trial detention.	Bones – 5.5 kg, Tooth – 1
3	March 17	Mainland China	Chinese Customs seized around 4 kg of wildlife products including suspected rhino horn, tiger bone, saiga horn, dried seahorses and bear bile entering the country, though point of origin was not mentioned. One person was arrested.	Bones – quantity unknown
4	March 23	Mainland China	Zhanjiang Customs and City Police arrested one person suspected of	Skeleton - 1

No.	Date	Location	Summary	Seized items
			smuggling rhino horn and other illegal wildlife products. A total of 33.13 kg of wildlife products were seized including saiga horn, bear bile and tiger bones. The suspect reportedly smuggled the products via informal crossing on the China-Vietnam border, and then sent them to Leizhou via domestic express mail.	
5	May 26	Mainland China	Suifenhe Border Management Brigade and the Suifenhe Customs Anti-Smuggling Bureau arrested one person in the smuggling of 200 suspected saiga horns and 207 suspected tiger bones (including two complete skulls) into the country though point of origin was not reported.	Bones – 207 Skulls – 2
6	June 3	Mainland China	The Pingxiang Office of the Nanning Customs Anti-Smuggling Bureau seized ivory bangles (334g) and two suspected tiger bones at a store in Puzhai which were believed to have been smuggled into the country.	Bones – 2
7	June 24	Mainland China	Chinese authorities confiscated tiger products hidden in the boot of a car in Zhenjiang. Two suspects were arrested.	Skeleton – 1 Skin – 1
8	July 7	Mainland China	Chinese authorities seized 25 boxes of bird's nests, two suspected tiger bones, and two suspected bear gallbladders from the boot of a vehicle in Guangxi. Two suspects were arrested.	Bones – 2
9	August 1	Mainland China	Chinese authorities seized hundreds of wildlife products after stopping and searching a van at the border checkpoint with Vietnam. Wildlife products seized included six bags of pangolin scales (14.58 kg), two pieces of tiger bones, 19 tiger teeth, seven gall bladders, six	Bones – 2 Teeth – 19 Wine – 2 bottles

No.	Date	Location	Summary	Seized items
			rhino products, 171 ivory products, two bottles of tiger penis wine and 20 bezoars. Three suspects were arrested.	
10	August 26	Mainland China	Chinese authorities seized dried tiger bone, tendon and tiger bone pieces at a farmer's market in Zhongshan village in Yunnan (on the Myanmar border).	Bones, body parts – quantity unknown
11	September 1	China	Chinese authorities seized one tiger skin and 6.15 kg leopard bones in Lhasa, Tibet.	Skin – 1
12	September 22	Vietnam	Police in HCMC arrested a Vietnamese man for buying an Indochinese tiger carcass soaked in wine and was later linked to a wildlife trafficking network. A search of his house revealed a tiger carcass, along with a stuffed tiger head and a stuffed bear head.	Head (taxidermy) – 1 Carcass in wine – 1
13	October 27	Mainland China	Chinese authorities seized 1.6 kg of animal products including suspected tiger claws and tiger bones which was reportedly bought in Vietnam. One Chinese national was arrested.	Teeth – 2 Bones, claws – unknown quantity
14	November 25	Vietnam	Vietnamese authorities seized 20 kg of ivory, 3 kg of pangolin scales and other wildlife from a shop in Binh Duong Province. The owner was arrested along with two other suspects.	Teeth, skin, claws – unknown quantity

No.	Date	Location	Summary	Seized items
15	December 1	Thailand	DNP raided the Mukda Tiger Park and Farm and found several body parts and live cubs. The cubs were suspected of being illegally smuggled into the zoo - DNA tests showed that three of them - one female and two males - were not related to any tigers in the park. Authorities removed the two other cubs for further forensics testing and are conducting DNA tests on a further 20 tigers at the park.	Live – 5 Carcass – 1 Head – 1 Body parts – unknown quantity
16	December 7	Vietnam	Vietnamese authorities busted a gambling syndicated and seized a tiger soaked in wine.	Carcass in wine – 1
17	December 23	Thailand	Thai authorities raided a hotel in Bangkok and found two tiger skins on display as well as shells from marine turtles.	Skins – 2

** Entries for this table are shown chronologically because data for seizure weights was not available.*

Seized tiger parts © Photo: Bussara Tirakalyanapan

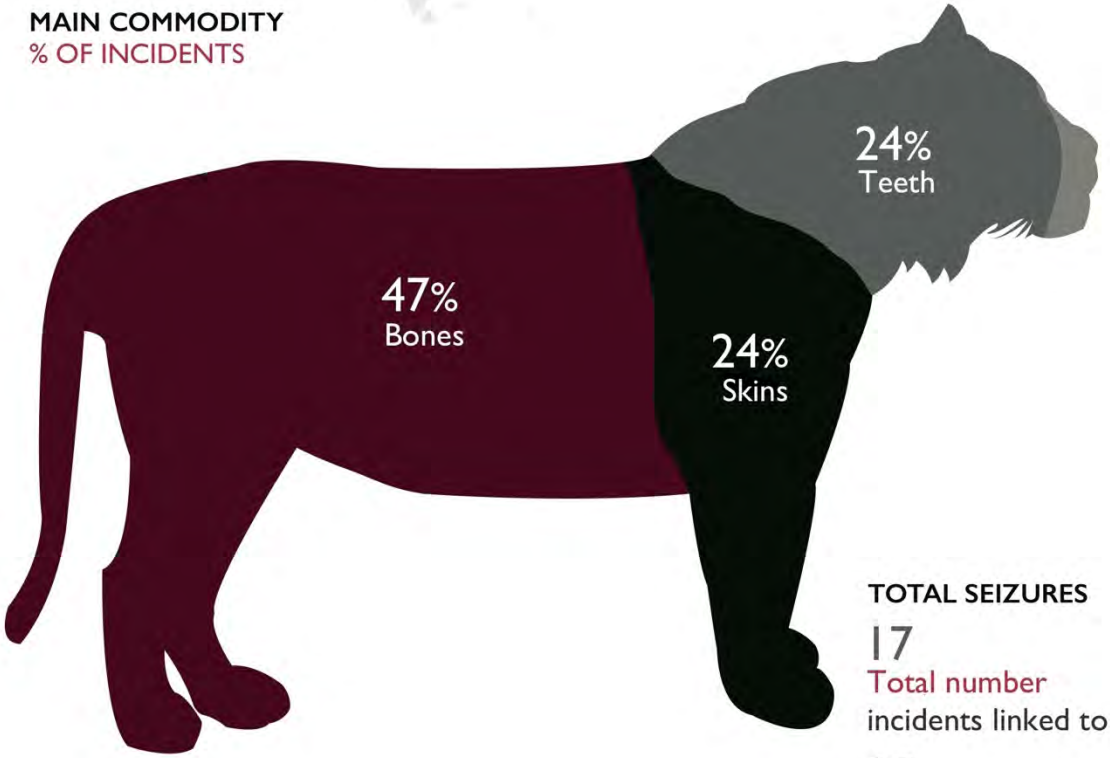
SUMMARY 2020
TIGER SEIZURES

MAIN SEIZURE LOCATIONS

24% Vietnam

59% China

MAIN COMMODITY
% OF INCIDENTS



TOTAL SEIZURES

17
Total number
incidents linked to focal countries

25
Suspects arrested

LARGEST SEIZURE

China	207 bones
Thailand	5 live, 2 dead (body parts, carcass)

Source: Counter Wildlife Trafficking Digest, Issue 1V, 2020

3.3.1 TRADE ROUTES/HOTSPOTS

Information on trafficking routes was extracted from only five of the 17 seizures reported for tigers involving four of the focal countries (**Figure 2**). Of these five incidents, mainland China was reported as the end destination in four, three of which were from Vietnam while Cambodia was potentially implicated in one (while the seizure occurred in Cambodia and a Chinese national was arrested, it is unconfirmed whether the products would be trafficked to China). Vietnam was also linked to the trafficking of tigers from Lao PDR in one incident.

Figure 2. Seizure locations and trade routes involving tigers in 2020. Information on trade routes were extracted from 5 of the 17 seizure incidents obtained. Country codes: CN=mainland China, KH=Cambodia, LA=Lao PDR, VN=Vietnam.

3.4 SUMMARY

There were fewer tiger seizures and reduced quantity of commodities seized in 2020 in comparison to 2019 (34 seizures involving 552 kg of products and 98 bottles of tiger wine) but higher than in 2018 (nine seizures involving 11 skins and five dead cubs). In any event, this data shows that the killing and trade of tigers persists even with global lockdowns and travel restrictions in place. China and Vietnam continue to be key consumers of tiger parts and derivatives. Vietnam remains an important trafficking route for tiger parts to China. In addition, further exacerbating the threat to wild tigers is the commercial trade in captive tigers

(see case study below), despite a 2007 CITES Decision to phase out the use of tiger farms for this purpose.

CASE STUDY
Exploitation of captive tigers for commercial use

There are thousands of tigers in captivity worldwide in commercial farms, privately run zoos, sanctuaries and other similar facilities (Coals et al. 2020, Four Paws 2020, Musings 2020) and its uncertain to what extent these institutions are used to breed tigers for commercial gain or launder wild tigers for illicit trade. There were several incidents in 2020 of captive tigers killed for trade renewing discussion around the use of captive-bred tigers for commercial trade considering it stimulates demand for and illicit trade in a highly threatened species and undermines conservation efforts to ensure their survival. The most prominent case was the seizure of five live tiger cubs and body parts including a severed head at the Mukda Tiger Zoo and Farm in Thailand that occurred in December 2020. This farm is located in the Thai province of Mukhdahan which borders the Savannakhet Province in Lao PDR and has been under government watch due to previous transgressions relating to illegal sourcing, trade and laundering of wildlife (TRAFFIC 2020b). According to Wildlife Friends Foundation Thailand (WFFT), the zoo was being used as a holding facility for wildlife being smuggled into Lao PDR and Vietnam (WFFT 2020). At least three of the five tiger cubs seized were DNA tested found to have been smuggled into the zoo.

Recently, Lao PDR and Thailand were once more flagged for their role in the farming of tigers for trade in their parts which are being trafficked to Vietnam (Smallman 2020, Anh and Chien 2021). As previously mentioned, in December 2020, EIA also revealed the ongoing and clandestine trade of tigers in China out of the Qinhuangdao Wildlife Rescue Centre in the Hebei Province with government approval (EIA 2020c). Four Paws released a report documenting similar dubious trade in EU's captive tigers – showcasing the fact that the majority of European countries fail to keep adequate records of tigers in captivity which is enabling illicit traders to operate without constraint (Four Paws 2020). TRAFFIC's analysis of CITES Trade Data highlighted much the same in their *Falling Through the System: The role of the European Union Captive Tiger Population in the Trade in Tigers* published in March 2020. The report revealed that live tigers were the largest quantities imported into and (re-)exported out of the EU, with Thailand and Vietnam the main importers (Musing 2020). It is important to mention here that in June 2020, the Myanmar government approved a permitting process allowing private zoos to breed 90 species, including tigers (FMT 2020). This is concerning as the laundering of wildlife under the guise of captive-breeding is widespread throughout the region and it is highly plausible that, much like Lao PDR and Thailand, these private zoos will facilitate and fuel further trafficking of wild tigers.

4 ELEPHANTS

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4.1 SITUATION UPDATE

Elephants are one of the most poached mammals on the planet, primarily for their tusks, but also for their skin, meat and hair resulting in large population declines in many Asian and African range states. For centuries people have regarded various forms of ivory, especially elephant ivory, as a luxury commodity, often associated with status and wealth. This is prominent in many Asian cultures and as such, Asia continues to be the main market destination for elephant ivory. African elephants *Loxodanta africana* (except for populations in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe), and all Asian elephants *Elephas maximus* are listed in Appendix I of CITES, which prohibits all international trade in these species. While trade in wildlife in 2020 may have decreased since the previous years due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, it is clear that the trade in elephant products persists.

China is considered to be the greatest center of demand for ivory in the world. China banned its domestic ivory trade in 2018 which has since displaced ivory markets into neighboring

countries such as Cambodia, Japan, Thailand and Vietnam (EIA 2020b, WJC 2020). While China's efforts to shut down its domestic ivory trade seems to be bearing fruit, outside of its borders, growing ivory markets are primarily being driven by Chinese traders and consumers. In 2020, the WJC released several reports on the evolving trade dynamics regarding ivory. In their "Rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on wildlife trafficking", they find that the COVID-19 restrictions, i.e., border closures, increased border security, and travel restrictions along with increased law enforcement efforts in China, has resulted in increased stockpiling of raw ivory in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam (WJC 2020a). They also released a report "Operation Jeopardy: The Growing Relevance of Cambodia in the Global Ivory Trade" further highlighting the shift in the trade and production, from countries with stronger law enforcement and policy developments, e.g., China, to countries that lack the capacity to effectively tackle transnational organized crime (WJC 2020b). Cambodia, in particular, was found to have a substantial open illegal ivory market driven by Chinese clientele.

Similar findings were noted in EIA's latest report (released in December 2020) *Out of Africa: How West and Central Africa Have Become the Epicenter of Ivory and Pangolin Scale Trafficking to Asia*, where multinational criminal groups in Africa have shifted operations to Nigeria, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo due to weak governance, widespread corruption and poor institutional frameworks; and have hijacked transportation networks to traffic high-volume shipments of ivory and pangolin scales to Asia, end destinations predominantly being China and Vietnam (EIA 2020b). West and Central Africa have become the export hubs for wildlife poached from across the region's tropical rainforests and savannas presenting a significant threat to the region's last strongholds of African elephants.

Japan still features heavily in the trafficking of ivory to China. That said, with regards to its domestic market, TRAFFIC launched a report, *Teetering on the Brink: Japan's Online Ivory Trade* in December 2020, which found that trade in ivory dropped by as much as 100 percent in 2020 on Japan's largest online ivory trading platform, Yahoo Japan (Nishino and Kitade 2020). The significant reduction in the nation's ivory market is highly welcome. Although online trade in ivory and illegal exports have reduced, they are still ongoing, including into China despite its domestic ivory ban introduced at the start of 2018.

In July 2020, TRAFFIC released a report on *Trading Faces: A Snapshot of the Online Ivory Trade in Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam* in 2016 with an update in 2019, which found thousands of ivory products for sale in all three countries with the highest number of traders found in Indonesia and the greatest quantity of products in Vietnam (Indraswari et al. 2020). It highlights the integral need to monitor online platforms in all countries with potential domestic ivory markets.

Malaysia has seen a steady rise in elephant deaths recently particularly in Borneo which have been attributed to the ivory trade and human conflict (Sabah Wildlife Department 2020). The most recent incident occurred in January 2021 when a pygmy elephant was found with seven bullet wounds in its skull, dismembered and its trunk missing along with half its body's skin. The motive for the killing remains uncertain as to whether it is due to retaliatory killing or whether those involved were targeting its skin for illegal trade considering only half was

removed and the tusks were not taken. In response to the increased killings of elephants, the Sabah government, in 2020, approved an updated version of its state action plan for elephant conservation (2020-2029) which includes stepping up protection and stopping the killing of elephants; enhancing habitat connectivity and permeability; ensuring best practices in the management and *ex situ* conservation of elephants; and researching, monitoring and predicting elephant population trends. A budget of approximately $4.9 million has been allocated to achieving this ten-year plan including the establishment of a special enforcement unit under the Sabah Wildlife Department to focus on protection of wildlife and forest reserves.

The number of wild elephants in Cambodia has decreased dramatically, and there are now estimated to be only 400-600 remaining, found in small, fragmented remnant populations (Maltby and Bourchier 2011, Gray et al. 2014). In an effort to protect remaining populations, the Asian Elephant Conservation Action Plan for Cambodia (2020-2029) was launched in 2020 by the General Directorate of Administration for Nature Conservation and Protection, Ministry of Environment (Sinovas et al. 2020). The action plan details seven strategic objectives including reducing habitat loss, conserving and improving habitat connectivity, improving law enforcement, preventing wild capture, mitigating human-elephant conflict, improving awareness, and undertaking research.

On 12 August 2020, the National Parks Board, Singapore (NParks) crushed nine tonnes of ivory, worth $13,559,900, to commemorate World Elephant Day. This ivory crushing event, the largest globally in recent years, demonstrated Singapore's strong determination and commitment to combat the illegal trade in wildlife. The destruction of the ivory seized from various shipments in past years will prevent it from re-entering the market and will disrupt the global supply chain of illegally traded ivory.

The Elephant Crisis Fund (ECF) Report (2020) finds that the poaching of elephants has reduced in much of East and Southern Africa and that local and international travel restrictions has reduced the international trafficking of ivory in 2020 evident by the lack of large-scale ivory shipments. In August 2020, a notorious wildlife poacher in Congo, responsible for the deaths of hundreds of elephants was arrested and sentenced to 30 years of hard labor for attempted murder, ivory trafficking and possession of military weapons. This landmark case was the first ever wildlife trafficking conviction in the Criminal Court in the Republic of Congo.

Ivory was crushed to commemorate World Elephant Day © National Parks Board, Singapore

African elephants

Based on the IUCN Red List, two species of African elephants, are recognized, the savanna elephant *Loxodonta africana* and the forest elephant *L. cyclotis* and are currently assessed as Vulnerable as a whole, though regional assessments lists populations in Central Africa as Endangered (Blanc 2008). One of the main threats to African elephants is high levels of poaching for the ivory trade (Zhou et al. 2018, Schenning 2019, EIA 2020b, WJC 2020). According to recent reports by EIA (2020b), populations in West and Central Africa have

been significantly affected by ivory poaching. At least two populations are recorded as lost in Democratic Republic of Congo and Chad, while elephant populations in Cameroon, the Republic of Congo, and Gabon are especially at risk having been found to be major sources of ivory destined to Asian markets. In one of the last strongholds in Gabon for forest elephants, recent estimates conclude populations to be 40-80 percent smaller than previously suggested, i.e. ranging from 754 to 1,502 individuals, or 0.47 to 0.8 elephants per km^2 (Brand et al. 2020).

Asian elephants

Asian elephants are threatened by habitat loss and fragmentation, human–elephant conflict, and poaching and illegal trade of live elephants and their parts, including ivory and as such are assessed as Endangered in the IUCN Red List (Williams et al. 2020). Populations in the focal countries of this Digest are all in serious decline and in some on the brink of extirpation. In Sumatra, Indonesia, and Sabah, Malaysia, elephant populations are estimated to be less than 1,500 individuals (Mongabay Indonesia 2020, Sabah Wildlife Department 2020). However, it has been argued that current knowledge of the populations of Asian elephants are in many cases based on crude guesses (Blake and Hedges 2004) and in reality, there is still much work to be done to determine where elephants persist, what true populations are and if some populations remain extant at all (Williams et al. 2020).

Elephant population estimates in focal countries (Williams et al. 2020):

Cambodia	400-600
China	300
Lao PDR	500-600
Thailand	3,126-3,341
Vietnam	104-132

4.2 SIGNIFICANT ACTIONS IN THE USAID WILDLIFE ASIA FOCAL COUNTRIES

CAMBODIA

There were two ivory seizures in Phnom Penh, Cambodia in 2020 where 0.76 kg and 6.58 kg of ivory products were confiscated from a sculpture shop and carving factory, respectively. The latter incident involved the arrest of a Chinese national. The raid was conducted by Wildlife Alliance's WRRT after receiving a tip-off from the WJC. Based on WJC intel, the factory was found to be processing raw ivory on a commercial scale and was involved in supplying local retail outlets selling worked ivory products. During the raid, they also found 5.5 kg of tiger bones, one tiger tooth, 1.03 kg of pangolin scales and 103 dead seahorses.

While there were only two ivory seizures in 2020, the WJC's investigation into the ivory trade in Cambodia reveals the availability of raw ivory tusks for sale in 2020 and how the country is fast becoming the new illegal ivory trade hub. In their latest investigations, they

document the shifting illicit trade in ivory from China, Vietnam and Lao PDR due to stronger law enforcement and policy developments, to Cambodia, a country perceived as lacking the capacity to effectively tackle transnational organized crime (WJC 2020). They also note that the open trade of ivory in Cambodia is driven predominantly by Chinese traders and consumers.

CHINA

Despite the domestic ivory trade ban in China that came into effect in 2018, local demand still plays a significant role in the poaching and illicit trafficking of ivory and is seen to be driving the expansion of ivory markets in neighboring countries in the region (EIA 2020b, GlobeScan 2020). A recent survey (2020) of ivory consumption by Chinese tourists, showed that 1 in 10 Chinese travelers to Asian destinations (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Japan, Hong Kong SAR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam) planned to purchase ivory as a gift for a family member, friend or business relation (GlobeScan 2020).

The majority of elephant seizures obtained in 2020 occurred in China (n=113, 93.4 percent). This predominantly involved ivory totaling 252.66 kg and 228 pieces. Aside from this, there was one incident that resulted in the confiscation of skins (four pieces) and one incident of leather weighing 196 grams. The seizures occurred in mainland China with the province of Guangdong the most frequent seizure location (n=27 incidents, 24 percent) followed by Zhejiang (n=12 incidents) and Shandong (n=11 incidents).

In December 2020, a court in Guangzhou sentenced 17 people, apprehended for smuggling over 20 tons of ivory, to long prison sentences ranging from two to 15 years and life imprisonment for two of the ring leaders. It is the toughest sentence ever handed down to criminals involved in illegal wildlife trade in China. Described as the biggest ivory smuggling racket ever busted, the group were moving huge quantities of ivory valued in the millions of dollars from Nigeria and other unnamed African countries into mainland China through Singapore and South Korea (ABS-CBN News 2021).

LAO PDR

There were no reported elephant ivory seizures for Lao PDR in 2020. The WJC reports that the ivory trade in Lao PDR has become more discreet and that traders have shifted away from Vientiane, its capital (WJC 2020). Further, due to COVID-19 measures, there has been a noticeable downturn in business and absence of Chinese clientele in Lao PDR.

THAILAND

There was only one seizure of six ivory pieces reported in Thailand in 2020, which occurred at an ashram and included various other products from multiple protected species such as pangolins, leopards, bears, serow, otters, deer, and freshwater turtles. This aside, Thailand was also implicated as a point of export of ivory products into China in six incidents involving Chinese passengers entering China.

A report on the online ivory trade in Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam, recently published by TRAFFIC, revealed that Thailand had the greatest number of advertisements offering over

2,500 ivory products for sale which predominantly consisted of religious items in 2016 (Indraswari et al. 2020). In 2019, this increased by 273 percent for the quantity of items offered and by 178 percent for posts warranting further scrutiny of the domestic ivory market.

VIETNAM

There were three ivory seizures that occurred in Vietnam in 2020 which amounted to 246.3 kg of ivory. The largest of these involved 225.5 kg (63 pieces of ivory hidden in 10 jute bags) that was confiscated from a truck in the province of Nghe An. Four suspects were arrested in these incidents and to date two have been prosecuted for illegally selling ivory jewelry amounting to 2.8 kg (151 bangles, 20 pendants, two bracelets, and four crafted fangs) though they only received fines of approximately $29,000 and $18,530 respectively. Vietnam was also implicated as a point of export in two cases of seized ivory in mainland China.

The WJC reports of at least 10 tonnes of ivory being stockpiled in Hanoi since 2019 due to increased law enforcement efforts in China (WJC 2020). Additionally, in their most recent report, TRAFFIC found close to 5,000 ivory products for sale online in Vietnam in 2016, which decreased by 81.5 percent in the number of items for sale and by 81.8 percent in the number of posts in 2019 as 50 percent of the online platforms previously surveyed in 2016 had shutdown (Indraswari et al. 2020).

According to ECF (2020), in July 2020, Nguyen Van Nam, Vietnam's most notorious wildlife trafficker, and two of his associates were sentenced to a total of 32 years in prison for trafficking ivory. This was achieved through three years of uncover investigations by the WJC that was supported by the ECF.

4.3 SEIZURES AND PROSECUTIONS

In 2020, there were a total of 121 reported ivory seizures in, or linked to, USAID Wildlife Asia's focal countries with the exception of Lao PDR which had no reported seizures, nor was it implicated in the trafficking of ivory with the other focal countries. China was the most significant consumer country in the ivory trade with the greatest number of seizures reported (93.4 percent) as well as implicated as the main destination of seized shipments (n=64 incidents).

The main commodity seized was ivory (both raw and worked), encompassing 97.5 percent of incidents which amounted to a total of 506.5 kg and 234 pieces. The largest shipment of seized ivory by weight occurred in Vietnam involving 225.5 kg of ivory; while by individual pieces, China confiscated 183 at a border checkpoint between Vietnam and China along with pangolin scales, tiger bones, teeth and wine, bear gall bladders, rhino horns and bezoars (unknown species). Information on the top 15 seizures by volume can be found in **Table 3**.

Of the 121 seizures reported, at least 15 incidents included arrests amounting to 32 individuals. One case has led to prosecution to date, involving two Vietnamese nationals who were fined approximately $29,000 and $18,530 respectively for selling jewelry made from ivory.

Table 3. Top 15 ivory seizures and prosecutions in 2020, ranked by weight of seizure

No.	Date	Location	Summary	Seized items
1	March 20	Vietnam	Dien Chau Traffic Police stopped a truck and discovered 63 pieces of elephant ivory weighing over 200 kg hidden in 10 jute bags. One subject was arrested.	Ivory - 225.5 kg
2	Early August	China	Chinese authorities seized hundreds of wildlife products after stopping and searching a van at a border checkpoint with Vietnam. Wildlife products seized included six bags of pangolin scales (14.58 kg), two pieces of tiger bones, 19 tiger teeth, seven bear bile, six rhino products, two bottles of tiger penis wine and 20 bezoars. Three suspects were arrested.	Ivory - 183 pieces
3	April 23	China	Jiangmen Customs busted a syndicate trafficking ivory and rhino horn from South Africa into China by sea. One suspect was arrested.	Ivory – 173.92 kg
4	April 17	China	Jiangmen Customs busted a syndicate trafficking ivory and rhino horn from South Africa into China by sea. Nine suspects were arrested.	Ivory – 38.7 kg
5	February 12	China	Forest Police in southwest China's Yunnan Province arrested an individual for trading in rare and endangered wildlife including 31 ivory products, two pangolin scales and helmeted hornbill.	Ivory – 31 pieces
6	November 25	Vietnam	Vietnamese authorities arrested the owner of a shop selling illegal wildlife products including ivory and pangolin scales in Binh Duong.	Ivory – 18 kg
7	February 27	China	Beijing Airport Customs seized over 8 kg of worked ivory from a passenger. Suspects were detained for further investigation, but no other details were reported.	Ivory – 8.08 kg
8	March 1	Cambodia	Wildlife Alliance's Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team (WRRT) raided a carving factory in Phnom Penh after	Ivory – 6.58 kg

No.	Date	Location	Summary	Seized items
			receiving a tip-off from the WJC. A Chinese national was arrested and found with 6.58 kg of ivory, 5.5 kg of tiger bones, one tiger tooth, 1.03 kg of pangolin scales, and 103 dead seahorses. He was arrested and has been put on pre-trial detention.	
9	July 16	China	Pingxiang Customs seized three ivory bangles in a parcel that contained banana chips and other snacks at the Puzhai courier office, acting on a tip-off regarding ivory smuggled across the border and then distributed within the country using the courier service. One suspect was arrested, and more ivory products (bangle, bracelet and necklace) were found in his home.	Ivory – 6 pieces
10	April 16	Thailand	Thai authorities arrested one person and after searching his house and ashram and found 27 illegal wildlife products from multiple protected species including elephant, pangolins, leopards, bears, serow, otters, deer, and freshwater turtles.	Ivory – 6 pieces
11	February 27	China	Beijing Airport Customs seized over 5 kg of worked ivory from a passenger. Suspects have been detained. Further investigation is ongoing.	Ivory – 5.42 kg
12	April 9	China	Hailar Customs seized ivory mailed from Japan. No further details provided.	Ivory – 5 pieces
13	May 25	Vietnam	Kien Giang Environmental Police confiscated 151 ivory-suspected bangles, 20 pendants, two bracelets, four crafted fangs from two jewelry shops. Two suspects were arrested.	Ivory – 2.8 kg
14	January 7	China	Nanning Customs, intercepted a Vietnamese passenger found with a total of 70 pieces of ivory products attached to his waist, abdomen and legs.	Ivory –1.83 kg
15	January 19	China	Chengdu Airport Customs seized 110 ivory items including beads, pendants,	Ivory – 1.3 kg

No.	Date	Location	Summary	Seized items
			carved tiles, and bracelets hidden in different parts of a checked-in luggage of a male Chinese national arriving from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.	

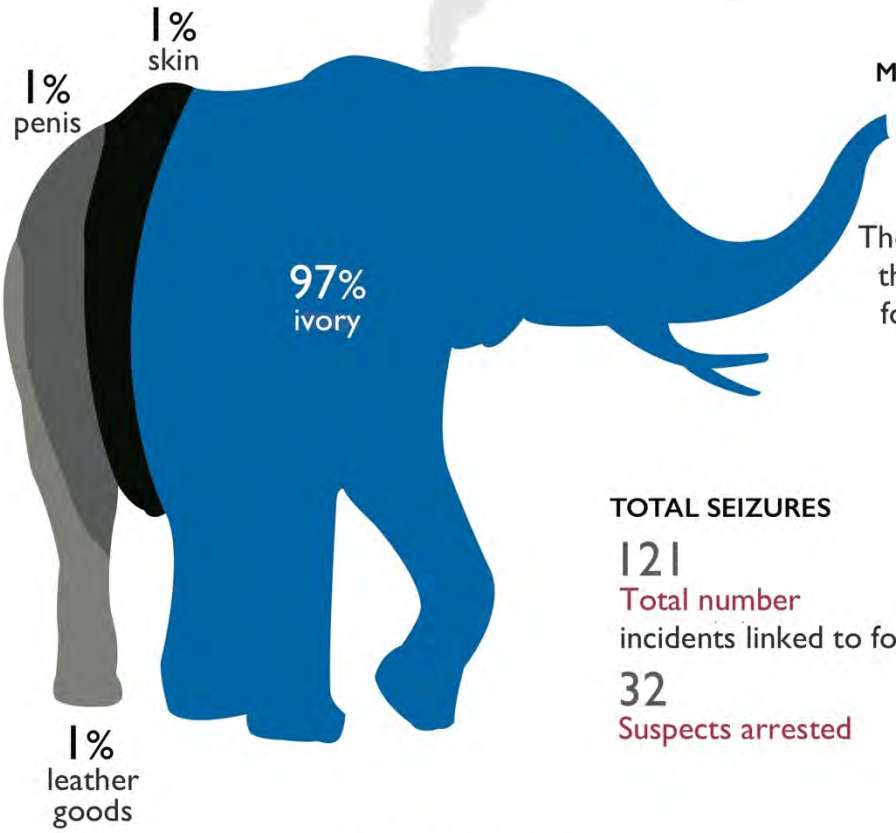
USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

SUMMARY 2020
ELEPHANT SEIZURES

MAIN SEIZURE LOCATIONS

93%
China
Ivory

MAIN COMMODITY
% OF INCIDENTS



MOST FREQUENT COUNTRY OF DESTINATION

64
incidents in China.
The province of Guangdong was the main port of entry (24%), followed by Zhejiang (10.6%) and Shandong (9.7%).

TOTAL SEIZURES

121
Total number
incidents linked to focal countries

32
Suspects arrested

LARGEST SEIZURE

225.5 kg

Vietnam	225.5 kg ivory
China	183 pieces ivory

Source: Counter Wildlife Trafficking Digest, Issue 1V, 2020

4.3.1 TRADE ROUTES / HOTSPOTS

Information on trafficking routes were obtained from 65 of the 121 seizures incidents reported. This involved at least 19 countries/territories with the key destination being mainland China, implicated in 64 incidents (**Figure 3**). The remaining one incident involved a Chinese national travelling from China to South Korea with an ivory bangle. Of the 65 incidents, African countries, as a point of origin/export, accounted for the largest quantity of seized ivory with approximately 218.6 kg followed by Europe (3.38 kg), Southeast Asia (3.17 kg), East Asia (2.5 kg) and the U.S. (0.56 kg).

Japan was the most frequent route of ivory products into China (21.5 percent of incidents) predominantly by post and remains consistent with previous reporting of Japan's role as a source of ivory into China (Nishino and Kitade 2020, USAID 2020).

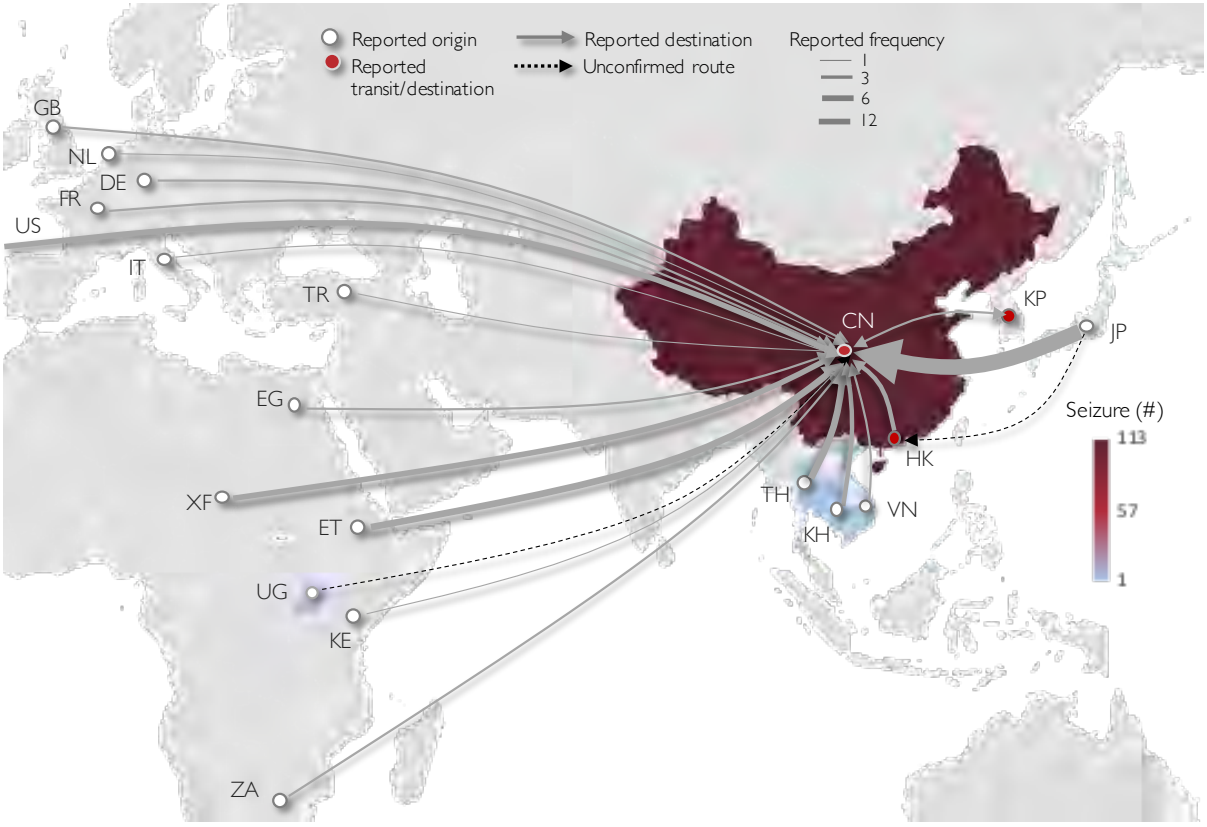


Figure 3. Seizure locations and trade routes involving ivory in 2020. Lines are weighted by frequency of trade route implicated in seizures. Country codes: CN=mainland China, DE=Germany, EG=Egypt, ET=Ethiopia, FR=France, GB=United Kingdom, HK=Hong Kong SAR, IT=Italy, JP=Japan, KE=Kenya, KH=Cambodia, KP=South Korea, NL= Netherlands, TH=Thailand, TR=Turkey, UG=Uganda, US=United States, VN=Vietnam, ZA=South Africa and XF=Africa (specific location not reported). An additional incident not featured in the map is of one seizure in mainland China, where the point of export was just reported as Southeast Asia.

Of the African countries, Ethiopia was the most frequent point of export reported (six incidents), with shipments seized at the Guangzhou-Baiyun International Airport in Guangdong Province and the Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport in Sichuan Province.

The ivory products were found in the luggage of passengers. An investigative report by EIA in 2020 revealed that West and Central Africa have become the key source and export points for ivory and pangolin scales to Asia, with Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo the top two countries associated with large scale seizures out of Africa (EIA 2020b).

European countries continue to play a transit or re-exporter region in the trade of ivory products to mainland China.

The most frequent mode of transport, obtained from 104 incidents, was by air (51 incidents) followed by post (43 incidents). There were only seven seized shipments reported by sea in 2020.

4.4 SUMMARY

Fewer records of seizures of elephant products were found for 2020 than were recorded in 2019 Digest (USAID 2020b). In 2019 there were 380 reported seizures of elephant products in, or linked to, the focal countries. These seizures involved a total of 48,217 kg of elephant products, demonstrating significant levels of trade linked to Asian market destinations. In contrast, 2020 saw a dramatic reduction in the number of reported seizures with only 121 amounting to 506.5 kg and 234 pieces of ivory. In 2018 there were far fewer seizures (n=24) but the total amount of ivory seized was 11,000 kg, equivalent to 230 elephants killed (USAID 2019).

Despite fewer seizures and the absence of large-scale seizures, the data still shows that the illegal trade in ivory persists in spite of restrictions in place disrupting movement of shipments. China remains a key consumer and driver in the illicit trafficking of ivory. Further, it appears that Chinese travelers are also sustaining ivory markets in neighboring countries such as Japan, Thailand and Cambodia. Aside from seizures, investigations by EIA and WJC also confirm the continued trafficking of ivory products at a reduced level though this is thought to be temporary due to border closures, warranting continued vigilance and monitoring to keep abreast of changing trade dynamics.

CASE STUDY
China's growing footprint in Africa: Chinese nationals arrested for possession of illegal wildlife products and illegal presence in Uganda

With growing investment from China in Africa, this case highlights the concerns over increased trafficking of Uganda's wildlife to China, and the efforts within Uganda to disrupt these wildlife trafficking networks operating within and through its borders. On March 18, 2020 seven Chinese nationals were found in possession of 10 pieces of dried elephant penises, at the Kireka Kamuli Lubowa Zone in Kira municipality, Uganda. They were also in possession of six tortoises and half a kilogram of pangolin scales. This was part of a larger investigation into the expiration of entry passes of 37 Chinese nationals in the country working without

valid permits. They were embedded in private business including food processing and scrap dealing firms, and in possession of hundreds of illegal SIM cards. Uganda has been a country of concern in the illicit trafficking of ivory out of Africa since the mid-2000s. This is due to the increasing presence of Chinese traders in Uganda under the pretense of legitimate business but who are exporting ivory to China (Titeca 2018). Improved law enforcement efforts within the country has since displaced ivory and pangolin trafficking networks to West and Central Africa (EIA 2020b). Given this expanded trade, there is mounting concern over increasing volumes of wildlife trafficked from African nations to China, and a growing number of incidents of Chinese nationals involved in poaching and trafficking within Africa. This case also highlights the need for sustained monitoring of rapidly changing ivory trade dynamics between Africa and Asia.

5 RHINOS

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5.1 SITUATION UPDATE

There are five species of rhino, with two occurring in Africa and three in Asia. Rhino poaching goes back centuries but has been particularly intense over the past 60 years, resulting in dramatic population declines. Three of the five rhino species are now listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List (Ellis and Talukdar 2020a,b, Emslie 2020b), meaning they face "an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild" (IUCN 2012). Rhinos are poached for their highly valuable horns, which are used in traditional medicine, predominantly in China and Vietnam (Milliken and Shaw 2012, Milliken 2014, Olmedo et al. 2018). Rhino horns are also used as art and antique products (Gao et al. 2016) and, as rhinos have become scarcer and more valuable, rhino horns have increasingly become symbols of wealth and social status (Hübschle 2016, International Rhino Foundation 2021a). In 1975, the three Asian rhino species, as well the northern white rhino *Ceratotherium simum cottoni*, a subspecies of Africa's white rhino *C. simum*, were listed in Appendix I of CITES following a strong surge in poaching and trade in the 1960s (Milliken 2014) to meet Asian and Middle Eastern demand. Their listing

in CITES Appendix I rendered any commercial international trade in these (sub-)species illegal. Two years later, the black rhino *Diceros bicornis* (which initially had been listed in Appendix II) and white rhino (which had not been listed at all) were also included in Appendix I. Despite these listings, illegal international trade continued largely unchecked until the early 1990s due to lax enforcement (Milliken 2014). By 1992, black rhino populations had decreased by as much as 96 percent, to approximately 2,400 individuals (International Rhino Foundation 2021b). As a result of international pressure for better regulation and enforcement in both source and consumer countries, rhino poaching significantly dropped in the early 1990s and stayed low until the late 2000s. During this period, African rhino populations were able to slowly recover. However, in 2008, rhino poaching once again intensified, catering to a rapidly developing Vietnamese market (Milliken 2014) and culminating in an annual peak of 1,349 killed African rhinos in 2015. Since then, poaching has declined. However, strong regulatory, institutional and military measures (Hübschle 2016) notwithstanding, poaching, in combination with habitat loss in many rhino range states, continues to pose a threat to the planet's remaining rhinos.

African rhinos

Africa accounts for approximately 86 percent of the world's remaining rhinos. It is home to two species: black rhino and white rhino. Black rhinos are currently assessed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List. Of the four subspecies, the western black rhino *Diceros bicornis longipes* was declared extinct in 2011 (International Rhino Foundation 2021b). Despite this, black rhino populations were found to have increased slightly in the past year, from 5,500 in 2019 to 5,630 in 2020 (International Rhino Foundation 2021b). White rhinos have the largest remaining populations of all five rhino species. With an approximate 18,000 white rhinos left, populations are nevertheless decreasing, leading the species to be listed as "near threatened" on the IUCN Red List (Emslie 2020a). The northern subspecies is all but extinct, with only two female individuals currently surviving in the wild (International Rhino Foundation 2021c).

The large majority of the remaining African rhinos occur in South Africa (International Rhino Foundation 2021d). Spilling over from Zimbabwe, where political and socio-economic turmoil facilitated the rise of rhino poaching in 2008, poaching in South Africa saw an enormous upsurge between 2009 and 2014. In 2014, no less than 1,215 of the country's rhinos were killed for their horns. Since then, poaching levels have steadily declined. 2020 was the sixth consecutive year in which South African poaching numbers were found to have dropped (International Rhino Foundation 2021d). More specifically, the South African Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF) reported a 34 percent decrease in the number of poached rhinos, which is a significantly larger drop than those observed in previous years (25 percent in 2018 and 23 percent in 2019). In total, 394 South African rhinos were killed in 2020, while this number stood at 594 in 2019. The steeper fall in poaching numbers in 2020 can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. Local lockdowns, as well as international travel restrictions and closed borders have hindered poachers in their movements. South Africa recorded a total of 1,573 poacher activities in Kruger National Park (KNP) (the country's largest national reserve, home to most South African rhinos) in 2020, representing a 22 percent decrease compared to 2019 (n=2,014) (DEFF 2021). In Kenya, even more impressive

numbers were recorded, with zero rhinos poached in 2020, which was the first time since 1999 (Corbley 2021).

However, poaching numbers in South Africa's KNP reportedly spiked as soon as lockdown measures eased in the final months of 2020. DEFF also reports a significant number of rhino poacher arrests in 2020, with 66 poachers arrested in KNP and another 90 outside the national park. Out of 45 verdict cases, 44 led to convictions, involving a total of 69 convicted persons. Notable convictions included prison sentences of 24 and 25 years for two rhino poachers (DEFF 2021). Although 2020 has seen a decrease in poaching and a slight increase in black rhino populations, the poaching spike in December suggests that poachers, and the organized crime syndicates behind them, are eager to continue supplying the strong demand in Asian consumer countries.

Asian rhinos

There are three Asian rhino species: the greater one-horned rhino *Rhinoceros unicornis*, Javan rhino *Rhinoceros sondaicus* and Sumatran rhino *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*. The latter two were once found in the focal countries of this Digest; the Javan rhino's range included Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam, and the Sumatran rhino was found in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam (Ellis and Talukdar 2020a,b). While it is not clear when rhinos went extinct in the focal countries of this Digest, the last known record was of a Javan rhino killed in Vietnam in 2010 (Ellis and Talukdar 2020a,b).

Both species are now classified as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List and only survive in Indonesia. The Javan rhino is found exclusively in the Ujung Kulon National Park in West Java, where its population has seen a small increase from 72 in 2019 to 74 in 2020. Although its population is considered to be stable, and births have occurred each year since 2012 (Ellis and Talukdar 2020a), the extremely low number of surviving individuals continues to put the species at high risk of extinction. Its small population increases the risks of inbreeding (International Rhino Foundation 2021) and leaves the species highly vulnerable to habitat destruction, natural disaster, disease, and any future poaching if the intensity of current patrolling efforts were to be reduced. The Sumatran rhino, which occurs in Sumatra and Indonesian Borneo, is faring far worse. Its population, which consists of less than 80 animals and, by some estimations, even as little as 30 individuals (Ellis and Talukdar 2020b), is scattered across fragmented pockets of forest, decreasing the probability of breeding-age animals encountering one another (Talukdar 2020b). The remaining animals are threatened by habitat loss due to oil palm cultivation and coal mining, as well as poaching. In 2017, the Indonesian Government initiated an Emergency Action Plan for Rhinos, which includes habitat protection, population surveys and captive-breeding efforts (Ellis and Talukdar 2020a). Several planned activities under the program, including the development of a new sanctuary (Hanafiah 2020), the capture of a wild female rhino in East Kalimantan (Yovanda 2020), the creation of an overview of the current state of the Sumatran rhino, and a global training seminar planned for June 2020, had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the three Asian rhino species, the greater one-horned rhino is the most abundant today. Now surviving in India and Nepal, the species has come back from near extinction in the early 20th century and is currently classified as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List. In August 2018, the species'

population size was estimated at 3,588 individuals, with 82 percent of them living in India (Ellis and Talukdar 2019). A country-wide rhino census, scheduled to take place this year in Nepal, was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Mandal 2020). This was the third postponement of the census, after failure to secure funds in 2018 and 2019 forced the count to be pushed to 2020. In India, rhino populations are on the rise. The India Rhino Vision 2020 (IRV 2020) program was supposed to be concluded this year but saw round-up meetings pushed back because of COVID-19 (International Rhino Foundation 2021f). This program was launched in 2005 by the Assam Forest Department in collaboration with WWF-India, the International Rhino Foundation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services to increase the number and range of rhinos in Assam state (WWF India 2016). Wild-to-wild translocations, predominantly out of Kaziranga National Park, were an important part of the project. In 2020, several translocations had to be postponed. Although not all the initial goals of the program have been met, the project can be considered an overall success, with rhino populations on the increase and poaching numbers going down (International Rhino Foundation 2021e).

5.2 SIGNIFICANT ACTIONS IN THE USAID WILDLIFE ASIA FOCAL COUNTRIES

CAMBODIA

No rhino reported seizures were found for Cambodia.

CHINA

Together with Vietnam, China is the country where rhino horn demand remains the strongest and this is reflected in the data. Most of the recorded seizures (n=8) took place in China and the country was named as a destination in one additional seizure record. The incidents in which China was implicated accounted for a total of 67.7 kg and six pieces of rhino horn. One of the reported seizure incidents resulted in a conviction of the suspect. On 13 October, A Chinese citizen was sentenced to nine months in prison and a fine of $775 for possession of a rhino horn cup and other wildlife products at his residence in Beijing.

LAO PDR

No reported rhino seizures were found for Lao PDR.

THAILAND

No reported rhino seizures were found for Thailand.

VIETNAM

Together with China, Vietnam continues to be the most important consumer of rhino horn, despite the strict illegality of the trade. Booming demand in the country, largely as a result of increased wealth, has been the main catalyzer of the current levels of poaching in Africa, which started in 2008. Despite the many awareness campaigns targeting this species in Vietnam, the demand for rhino horn continues (Olmedo et al. 2018). This is an indication of the need for continued work to implement evidence-based targeted campaigns to address these strongly held, traditional beliefs. Preliminary results from USAID Wildlife Asia's

research shows that people exposed to an SBCC campaign to reduce rhino horn consumption in Vietnam are less likely to purchase rhino horn in the future, less likely to recommend purchasing or using rhino products, and less likely to find buying and using rhino products acceptable (USAID Wildlife Asia 2021).

Four rhino horn seizures were recorded to have taken place in Vietnam, and the country was implicated in an additional five recorded seizures, be it as the indicated destination (n=2) or transit country (n=3). In total, the seizures relating to Vietnam accounted for 195.2 kg and six pieces of rhino horn. These numbers and volumes confirm Vietnam's status as one of the most important rhino horn consumer countries, as well as its function as an important transit hub to China. South Africa and Mozambique were found to be the most important provenances of shipments to and through Vietnam (see trade route section). Two of the Vietnamese seizures led to strong prosecutions, with sentences of 12.5 years and six years imprisonment, respectively. These high sentences reflect an increasing acknowledgement of the severity of wildlife crime by Vietnamese courts. Vietnam's tougher stance on wildlife crime has resulted in – and been further facilitated by – the country's revised Penal law, which came into effect in 2018. Along with increased penalties, it also closes some previous loopholes, for example by rendering the possession of protected species such as tigers and rhinos a criminal offence. A 2020 Education for Nature Vietnam (ENV) report, found that the number of wildlife trafficking cases resulting in prosecution had risen from 86.7 percent between 2015 and 2019, to 97.2 percent in the first six months of 2020. The number of arrests resulting in prison sentences also increased, from 48 percent in 2018 and 2019 to 68 percent in 2020, as well as the length of these sentences (ENV 2020).

5.3 SEIZURES AND PROSECUTIONS

Reduced poaching activities, as well as restricted international travel due to COVID-19, appear to be reflected in the seizure data for 2020. A total of 14 reported rhino horn seizures involving at least one of the focal countries were found, accounting for a total of 222 kg of the product, and six pieces of unknown weight (**Table 4**). Based on the average weight of African rhino horns (Vigne and Martin 2016), confiscated volumes represent between 44 and 74 poached rhinos. These seizure numbers are significantly lower (by 56 percent) than those from 2019, when 34 seizures, totaling 519 kg of rhino horn, were reported. The largest reported seizure of 2020 involved the confiscation of 93 kg of rhino horn from a Vietnamese warehouse near Ho Chi Minh City's Tan Son Nhat International Airport. The shipment had reportedly entered Vietnam from the Philippines and was intended to be shipped onward to other countries. Most 2020 seizures took place in China (n=8), followed by Vietnam (n=4). "Africa" and Mozambique were most often quoted as the provenance of seized shipments (n=3 for both).

The recorded seizures accounted for a total of 41 arrested suspects and four confirmed convictions. This low number of convictions may be due to underreporting and not representative of actual conviction rates. The highest recorded sentence was cast in Vietnam

and constituted 12.5 years imprisonment for a Vietnamese citizen who was found guilty of smuggling close to 30 kg of rhino horn from Mozambique (see case study below).

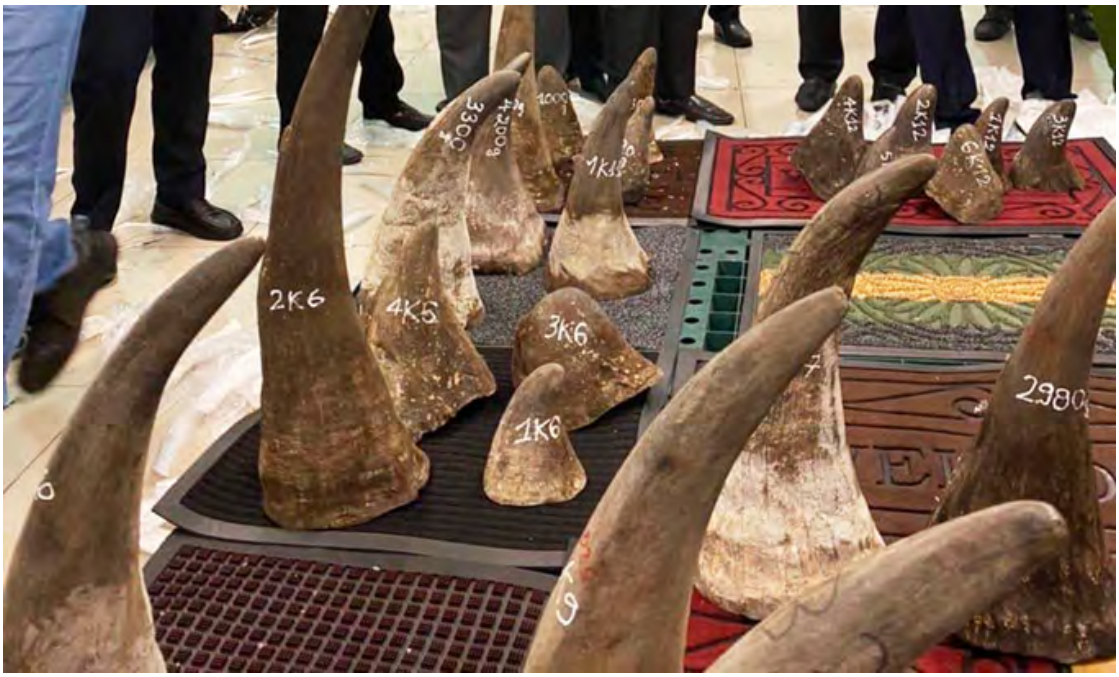
Table 4. Reported rhino seizures and prosecutions in relation to focal countries in 2020, ranked by weight of seizure.

No.	Date	Location	Summary	Seized items
1	December 22	Vietnam	Vietnamese Police seized 12 packages of rhino horn, totaling 93 kg, from a warehouse just outside HCMC's Tan Son Nhat International Airport. The horns had reportedly entered Vietnam from the Philippines and were supposed to be sent on to other unspecified locations.	Horns – 93 kg
2	March 15	China	Chinese Customs seized 16 rhino horns, totaling 36.6 kg from 2 cars in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province. The horns were reportedly smuggled in via Vietnam and were in transit to Fujian Province, China.	Horns – 36.6 kg
3*	March 2	Vietnam	Eleven rhino horns, totaling 28.7 kg were seized from a Vietnamese traveler at Can Tho Airport. The man had travelled from Mozambique, through South Korea, and was later (September 2020) sentenced to 12.5 years prison.	Horns – 28.7 kg
4	April 17	China	Jiangmen Customs, in collaboration with Guangdong and Jiangmen Police, arrested nine people and confiscated 25 kg of rhino horns alongside 39 kg of ivory. The contraband had reportedly been smuggled from South Africa to China by sea freight.	Horns – 25 kg
5	January 5	Singapore	A 45-year-old South African man was arrested at Changi International Airport for attempting to smuggle 11 pieces of rhino horn, totaling 22.1 kg, from South Africa to Vietnam, via	Horns – 22.1 kg

No.	Date	Location	Summary	Seized items
			Singapore. The man was later sentenced to one year and five months in prison.	
6	March 6	Vietnam	A 49-year-old Vietnamese man was arrested at HCMC's Tan Son Nhat International Airport for attempting to smuggle six rhino horns, totaling 6.2 kg, from Mozambique to Vietnam. The man was later sentenced to 6 years in prison.	Horns – 6.2 kg
7	August 1	China	Chinese Customs seized hundreds of wildlife products from a van at a border checkpoint with Vietnam in Chongzou. Among the contraband were pangolin scales, ivory, bear bile, tiger products, and six pieces of rhino horn.	Horns – 6 kg
8	November 10	Mozambique	A 30-year-old Vietnamese woman was arrested at Maputo International Airport with 4.3 kg of rhino horn and lion products. She was about to board a plane to Vietnam.	Horns – 4.3 kg
9	March 23	Vietnam	Dan Tien Wharf Customs, in collaboration with Mong Cai City Police, seized 3.1 kg of African rhino from a Vietnamese man in Mong Cai. The man was traveling to Mong Cai by bus, reportedly to meet with a Chinese buyer to whom he would sell the contraband for $87.	Horns – 3.1 kg
10	April 27	China	Nanchang Customs arrested a Chinese man at an industrial park in Ji'an, Jiangxi Province. The man was about to sign for a parcel containing dozens of small pieces of rhino horn, totaling 1.75 kg.	Horns – 1.75 kg
11	March 23	China	Zhanjiang Customs, in collaboration with Zhanjiang City Police, arrested 15 people in Leizhou City, Guangdong Province, and confiscated 1.2 kg of	Horns – 1.2 kg

No.	Date	Location	Summary	Seized items
			rhino horn, as well as other wildlife products. The products were reportedly smuggled in from Vietnam and then sent to Leizhou via express mail.	
12	May 26	China	In Beijing, a rhino horn cup was seized from a man's house, following the suspect's attempt to sell the cup to a second suspect, for $2,786. The man was sentenced to 9 months in prison and a fine of $774.	Horns – 0.04 kg
13	April 1	China	Between March 27 and April 1, Shijiazhuang Customs reported two wildlife seizures, involving ivory, saiga horn, dried seahorses and dried sea dragons and hawksbill turtle. At least one of the seizures included an unspecified number of rhino horn cups. The goods had been smuggled into China over land, via routes without border controls.	Horns - unspecified
14	March 17	China	Shijiazhuang Customs seized 4 kg of wildlife products, including rhino horn, tiger bone, saiga horn, dried seahorses and bear bile. One suspect was arrested.	Horns - unspecified

*See Case Study



93 kg of rhino horn confiscated near Tan Son Nhat International Airport © Ho Chi Minh City Police

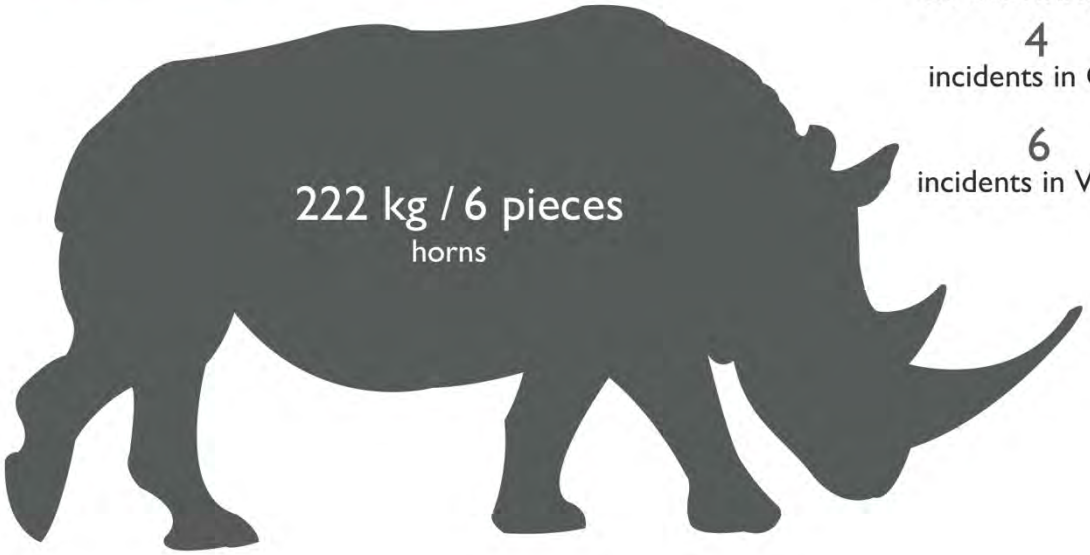
SUMMARY 2020
RHINO SEIZURES

MAIN SEIZURE LOCATIONS

29% Vietnam 131 kg

57% China 65 kg + 6 pieces

MAIN COMMODITY
% OF INCIDENTS



MOST FREQUENT COUNTRY OF DESTINATION

4
incidents in China

6
incidents in Vietnam

LARGEST SEIZURE

93 kg
Vietnam 93 kg horns

TOTAL SEIZURES

14
Total number
incidents linked to focal countries

41
Suspects arrested

Source: Counter Wildlife Trafficking Digest, Issue 1V, 2020

5.3.1 TRADE ROUTES

Trade route information was included in, or could be derived from, 10 of the 14 seizure records (**Figure 4**). Three records mentioned "Africa" as the provenance of the seized rhino horns, without specifying the country. Among those records that did specify the country of origin, Mozambique (n=3) and South Africa (n=2) were the most frequently mentioned. Even though Mozambique is an important exporting country in the international rhino trade chain, most of the horns shipped from there are likely to have been sourced from South Africa, seeing how Mozambique's rhino populations have largely been poached out (Emslie 2020a,b). China (n=9) and Vietnam (n=4) were the only two recorded destination countries. It is possible that some of the rhino horns that were seized in Vietnam were destined for China, but when this was not explicitly mentioned, Vietnam was taken as the destination country. In four Chinese cases, shipments were reported to have been brought in from Vietnam, signifying that trade routes from Africa, through Vietnam to China remain highly common. Routes from Africa to Vietnam included transits in Qatar (n=2), the Philippines (n=1), Singapore (n=1) and South Korea (n=1).

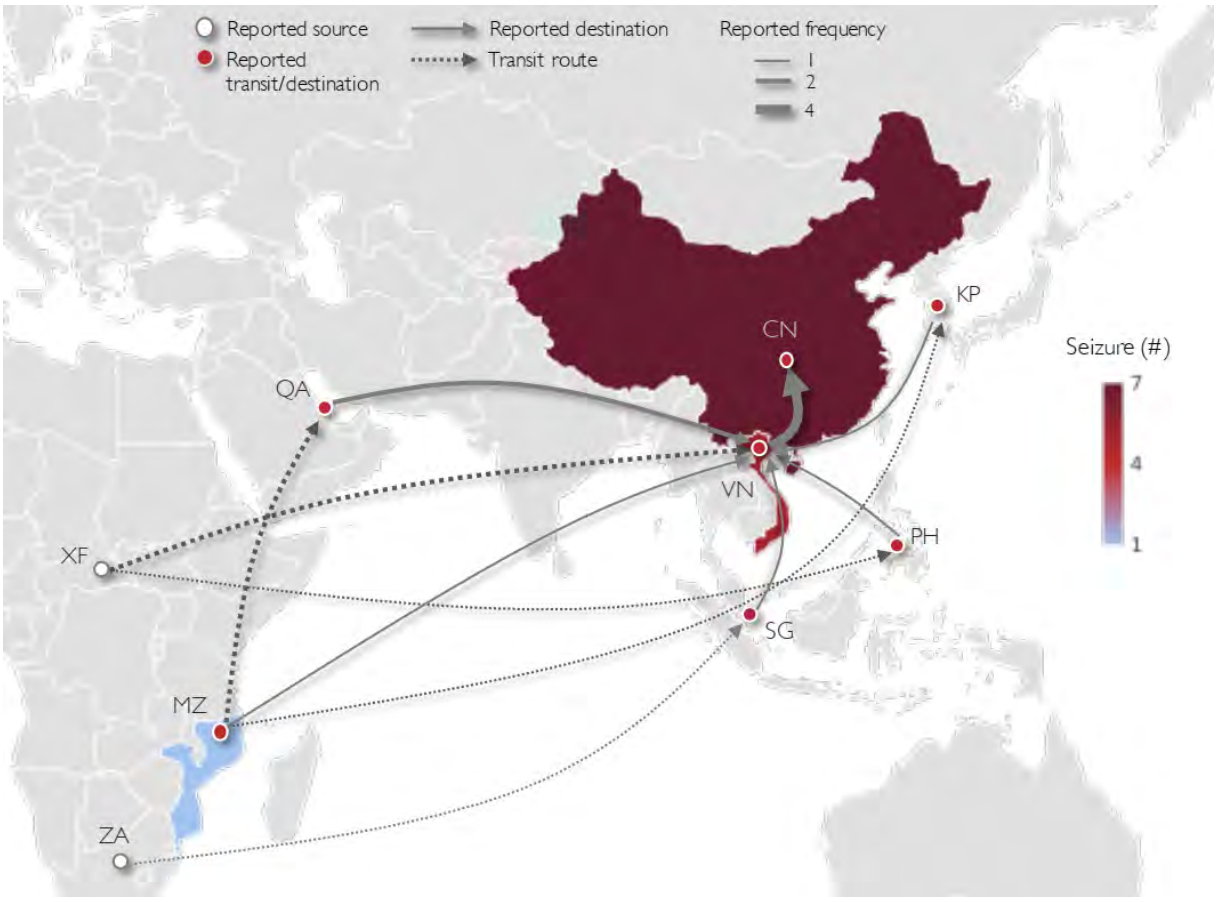


Figure 4. Seizure locations and trade routes involving rhinos in 2020. Country codes: CN=mainland China, KP=South Korea, MZ=Mozambique, PH=Philippines, QA=Qatar, SG=Singapore, VN=Vietnam, XF='Africa' (unspecified), ZA=South Africa.

5.4 SUMMARY

Rhino horn seizures were found to have decreased by 56 percent in 2020. Although it is difficult to determine trade trends based on potentially imperfect and non-exhaustive seizure data, it is likely that the decrease in seizures indeed represents lower trade levels in 2020. COVID-19 measures and travel restrictions have disrupted poaching efforts and international trade chains. In South Africa, the international rhino trade's most important source country, poaching levels reportedly fell throughout most of the year. Although diminished poaching and trade in 2020 have been positive developments, they were brought about by extraordinary circumstances. As COVID-19 measures relaxed towards the end of the year, South Africa saw its poaching levels increase again. There are few indications that demand for rhino horn in China and Vietnam is decreasing, and therefore rhino populations, even those that are currently stable or increasing, remain under threat of current and future poaching activity. However, sustained efforts from governments and other partners to address the personal motivations for buying or using rhino horn is showing potential in helping to reduce demand.

CASE STUDY

Record conviction of Vietnamese rhino horn smuggler

On December 29, 2020, a 38-year-old Vietnamese man was sentenced to a record 12.5 years in prison for his attempt to smuggle 28.7 kg of White rhino horn into Vietnam on March 2. He was found guilty of "violating regulations on the management and protection of endangered, precious and rare animals" (Nguyen 2020). The convicted had traveled from Mozambique, where he reportedly worked as a driver. According to his statement, he had accepted a proposal from his employer to transport rhino horns to Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). When his flight schedule, which included a transit in South Korea, was changed due to COVID-19 measures, he ended up landing in Can Tho, where his contraband was detected. The man's story resembled a case that happened just a few days after his smuggling attempt: on March 6, 2020, a 49-year-old Vietnamese man traveling from Mozambique was arrested at HCMC's Tan Son Nhat International Airport with 6.2 kg of rhino horn in his suitcase. The man had reportedly been asked by an "acquaintance" to transport "rare goods" to Vietnam, without knowing what those goods were (Hoang 2020). The suspect was sentenced to six years in prison on November 20, 2020. Not only do these cases illustrate the trade link between Mozambique and Vietnam, but they are also exemplary of the modus operandi of international crime syndicates. In both cases, the men, who resided in Mozambique, were contacted by someone in their social surroundings to transport contraband back to their home country. The compensations both men received for their illegal activities were low ($1,000 plus travel expenses and $345 respectively). Through the engagement of men such as the convicted, organized crime groups are able to conduct highly profitable business while minimizing costs and risks. The high sentences that were carried out are indicative of a recognition of the severity of rhino smuggling by the Vietnamese courts.

6 DISCUSSION

Far fewer seizures of wildlife parts and products were reported in 2020 than 2019. There are numerous reasons that may have contributed to the decline in reported seizures, with the obvious being the global COVID-19 pandemic that swept the globe in 2020 resulting in border lockdowns, travel restrictions, and trade suspensions. These disruptions may have caused a decrease in illegal trade, or a decline in enforcement responses to counter illegal trade during the pandemic, or a combination of the two. It may also be that the media is reporting on fewer instances of wildlife trade related enforcement action due to pandemic-related media priorities, and/or a reduction of effort or delayed effort made by organizations that collect, compile and analyze seizure and prosecution data. While there are already some pieces of data supporting some of these possibilities, such as a reported 33 percent drop in rhino poaching in Kruger National Park in South Africa due to the pandemic-related lockdowns (Smith 2020) and the reported significant drop in both elephant and rhino poaching in Namibia in 2020 (Ndjavera 2020), there are reports of increased poaching in Asian countries (Godbole 2020, Ghosal and Casey 2020). For example, between April and May 2020, India, Nepal and Pakistan reported a sharp rise in poaching incidents driven by economic loss imposed by lockdowns and focused enforcements efforts on imposing lockdown restrictions (Godbole 2020). Clearly, much more research is needed to fully understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global wildlife trade, and the reasons for far fewer seizures and prosecutions being reported in the media in 2020.

That said, in spite of the pandemic, seizures were recorded for all focus species in 2020, indicating that illicit international trade in these species persists and continues to present a significant threat to wild populations. In addition, ongoing investigations by organizations such as EIA and WJC show greater quantities in trade than are recorded as being seized, including the stock piling of wildlife products such as pangolin scales and elephant ivory in countries like Cambodia and Vietnam; and the change in modus operandi of traders from face-to-face interactions to online transactions in adaptation to travel restrictions and border shutdowns.

The captive-breeding of tigers for commercial and illegal trade was exposed in several reports that came out in 2020 reinforcing the lack of conservation value of such practices as they stimulate demand for an illicit trade in highly threatened species and undermine conservation efforts to ensure their survival.

The continuing demand for, and trade in, pangolins, tigers, elephants and rhinos show that wildlife trade is not driven by subsistence needs but the economic value of wildlife commodities. COVID-19 in turn has drawn attention to the incredible threat such trade poses to human health, the global economy, and biodiversity and reveals the inadequacies of wildlife legislation, policies and enforcement on a global scale in regulating and controlling both the legal and illegal trade of wildlife. For example, China's planned revisions of its wildlife laws and regulations to prevent future pandemics still has significant loopholes that permit the exploitation of threatened species for "traditional medicine", a billion-dollar industry considered a key driver of species declines.

The exploitation of wildlife as commercial commodities is pushing species to extinction, as evident by the focus species in this Digest, and such exploitation is linked to emerging zoonotic diseases. It is therefore necessary that concerted efforts and resources be spent on ending unsustainable and illegal global wildlife trade, and to ensure public safety, and to reduce over-exploitation of wildlife, immediate proactive changes on multiple levels should be considered.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

DEMAND REDUCTION

1. Continue to work with partners to develop and implement evidence-based targeted behavior change campaigns to reduce demand for pangolins, tigers, elephants and rhinos.
   - Although efforts have been made to reduce demand for these animals in consumer countries, governments and NGOs must continue to explore ways to highlight, replicate and build upon approaches that address the personal motivations that drive the desire for these products.

2. Explore opportunities to integrate COVID-19 messaging into behavior change campaigns to reinforce impact and outcomes.
   - The effects of the pandemic were felt around the world and there is a strong case for looking into how the integration of COVID-19 messaging can effectively resonate with governments, the general public and target consumer groups to precipitate demand reduction.

3. Continue producing and refining tools such as the *Social Behavior Change Communication Demand Reduction Guidebook* released in November 2020 as key references for governments and partners implementing demand reduction activities.

4. Allocate more resources to more effectively evaluate the effectiveness of SBCC campaigns to reduce demand and use these findings to refine and deliver more impactful campaigns.

5. Expand efforts to leverage the private sector such as the tourism industry, to actively support demand reduction campaigns in order to enhance the reach and impact of these campaigns.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

1. Work with law enforcement agencies to improve anti-trafficking efforts in Asian source and transit countries. Enforcement efforts in Asian source and transit countries should be strengthened to stem the illegal trade in Endangered species including, but not limited to, pangolins, tigers, elephants and rhinos.
   - Recent years have seen an upsurge in pangolin trade from India and the Philippines to East Asia. Meanwhile, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Nepal and Vietnam

continue to function as important source and transit hubs in the international pangolin trade. There have been increasing reports of shifts to source and transit countries with more lax policies and enforcement, such as Cambodia.

2. Support relevant governments in the region develop strategies and approaches to implement the 2007 CITES Decision to phase out commercial tiger breeding.
   - Despite this Decision, commercial tiger breeding continues, and urgent actions need to be taken to better regulate or close these facilities as commercial captive breeding of tigers stimulates demand, facilitates laundering practices, and impedes demand reduction.

3. Help develop platforms and/or organize fora that support capacity building and facilitate stronger counter wildlife trafficking collaboration efforts between law enforcement agencies in source/transit countries in Africa and transit/consumer countries in Asia.
   - While evidence suggests that coordinated enforcement efforts between Africa and Asia are beginning, it needs to be strengthened and sustained in order to effectively disrupt transnational organized crime groups.

4. Work with partners to assist law enforcement agencies to increase emphasis on moving from seizures and arrests to prosecutions and convictions by promoting the importance of specialized responses and disciplines, such as financial intelligence, anti-corruption, criminal intelligence, cybercrime, and forensics, coupled with sound investigative work, evidence gathering and robust case preparation and prosecution.

LAW AND POLICIES

1. Support ongoing efforts to prohibit the use of medicines containing pangolin scales in China.
   - Although China has announced plans to update the protection status of pangolins to Class I, some patented medicines containing pangolin scales can still legally be traded. In order to halt the illegal international pangolin trade and prevent the laundering of wild caught animals, China should prohibit the use of all pangolin products and medicines that contain them.

2. Assist countries in the region to realize stronger legislation and more effective prosecution and sentencing.
   - In order to deter trade actors on both the supply and the demand side of the pangolin, tiger, elephant and rhino trade chains, strong legislation, high penalties, and effective prosecution and sentencing is needed. In order to stem the illegal trade in these endangered animals, stronger legal measures must be taken in countries across the international trade network. There should be more focus on building institutional capacity at judicial level, including development of environmental rules of procedure, sentencing guidelines and integrated training program.

3. Help mobilize technical and financial support, where appropriate, to support the implementation of the Plan of Action on ASEAN Cooperation on CITES and Wildlife

Enforcement 2021-2025.

- This ambitious Plan was endorsed on October 7, 2020, at the 23rd ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Forestry (ASOF) and will require substantial support to realize the counter wildlife trafficking elements of this important regional document.

4. Coordinate research into the current levels of protection and enforcement efficiency across ASEAN to support relevant Member States develop national plans of action, make recommendations for policy interventions and guide future conservation actions.

5. Continue advocating for and working with countries to update legislation to include all CITES-listed species in national protection lists and ensure penalties are commensurate with the crime and act as a deterrent, and where needed provide training and support for the courts to help facilitate appropriate sentencing.

REGIONAL COORDINATION

1. Increase and improve cooperation between China and surrounding countries in the fight against illegal wildlife trade.
   - China's trade bans on products such as ivory, have driven trade to surrounding countries, where markets now increasingly cater to Chinese tourists. In order to combat this trade shift and disrupt international trade flows, China and surrounding countries such as Cambodia, Japan, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, as well as the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, must collaborate through intelligence sharing, joint regulations and aligned enforcement and prosecution efforts.
   - While there have been strong efforts in Southeast Asian destination countries such as Thailand and Vietnam to reduce demand for ivory products among Chinese travelers, these efforts need to be coordinated with similar activities undertaken in China (source country) to enhance effectiveness,

2. Coordinate further research into the trade of pangolins, tigers, elephants and rhinos and document outcomes in follow-up Digest or related reports.
   - Although trade levels were found to have decreased in 2020, continuing demand, as well as reports of stockpiling of wildlife products, suggest that trade will continue unabated in the post-COVID-19 era. Furthermore, traders' modus operandi is changing, as shown by an increasing online trade, and need to be understood.
   - In order to monitor trade trends, understand ever-evolving online and physical markets, and determine effective conservation strategies, further in-depth research into the domestic and international trade of pangolins, tigers, elephants and rhinos by government agencies, research institutes and NGOs is of crucial importance.

3. Work with partners to undertake more detailed research to better understand the potential reasons behind the declines in reported seizures in 2020.
   - While it is extremely likely that COVID-19 is the general cause, understanding the exact reasons and the true scale of the declines, as well as the nature of changing trade flows and the immediate and long-term responses of traffickers, is essential.

ANNEX CAMPAIGNS AND COMMUNICATIONS IMPLEMENTED DURING 2020

Country	Campaigns/communications	Organizations
Cambodia	*#STOPEATINGWILDLIFE* (Aug 2020)	Wildlife Alliance
	#StandByWildlife	Wildlife Alliance
	PROTECT THE CARDAMOMS	Wildlife Alliance
China	Comic billboard campaign	WildAid, China Wildlife Conservation Association and the Pangolin Crisis Fund
	#EndTheTrade Conservation Journey to Stop the Wildlife Trade (Nov 2020)	Wild Aid
	Wildlife Free Ecommerce Campaign against online trade (Mar 2020)	China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation
	Wildlife Protection Law Campaign	IFAW and USAID Wildlife Asia
	Wildlife-Free Gifting Campaign Phases 1 and 2	IFAW and USAID Wildlife Asia
	Digital Deterrence component of *Wildlife-Free Gifting Campaign*	IFAW and USAID Wildlife Asia
	Beijing, China, July 30, 2020—nine industry associations, agreed to establish an alliance to counter illegal wildlife trade.	China Wildlife Conservation Association (CWCA), China Wild Plant Conservation Association (CWPCA), and the Association of China's Traditional Chinese Medicine (ACTCM)
Thailand	Tiger Talk for Global Tiger Day (July 29, 2020)	Department of National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP) and NGOs
	EndPandemics.Earth (March 2020 campaign video)	Freeland
	Digital Deterrence Campaign Phase 2	USAID Wildlife Asia and DNP
	A Good Life is Free of Killing Campaign	USAID Wildlife Asia, WildAid and DNP
	No Ivory, No Tiger Amulets Campaign	USAID Wildlife Asia and DNP

Country	Campaigns/communications	Organizations
	Mobilizing spiritual leaders to reduce demand for wildlife products	USAID Wildlife Asia, International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), DNP
	Beautiful Without Ivory Campaign	USAID Wildlife Asia and DNP
	No to Ivory Souvenirs and Gifts Campaign	USAID Wildlife Asia, DNP and Minor Group of Hotels
	Social and Behavior Change Communication Demand Reduction Guidebook	USAID Wildlife Asia, DNP, UNDP GEF TRAFFIC
Vietnam	*Chi III Initiative* – Rhino Horn (Aug 2020)	TRAFFIC and USAID
	Chi III Initiative – Illegal wildlife consumption in Da Nang (Aug 2020)	TRAFFIC and USAID
	Never Again Public Service Announcement on life in during the COVID-19 shutdown	ENV
	Superstitious Public Service Announcement to commemorate International Tiger Day	ENV
	Stop Bushmeat, Prevent Risk / The Host (Sept 2020)	WildAid, CHANGE and Pangolin Crisis Fund
	10 Years Lost – Javan Rhino (Oct 2020)	WildAid and CHANGE
	Rhino Week celebrity social media campaign (Sep 2020)	CHANGE and WildAid
	Commitment for Wild online pledge (May 2020)	CHANGE and WildAid
	The Call Of The Wild video (May 2020)	WildAid and CHANGE
	"Completing the law to manage and protect wildlife against the complicated evolution of the epidemic COVID 19" seminar (March 2020)	CHANGE, WildAid, Agriculture Vietnam Newspaper and the Vietnam Administration of Forestry
	Project PEEK youth training	CHANGE and The Biodiversity Group, The American Ambassador and Con Dao National Park
	Three-year social marketing programme to reduce demand for tiger products in Vietnam (Dec 2020)	TRAFFIC
	TRAFFIC signed a memorandum of understanding with the Hanoi UNESCO Travel Club (HUTC), setting a partnership to reduce wildlife crime in the country's tourism sector. The UHTC has agreed to work together with	TRAFFIC

Country	Campaigns/communications	Organizations
	TRAFFIC to encourage its membership of more than 300 local tourist agencies to adopt wildlife-focused corporate responsibility (CSR) to combat the trade of illegal wildlife products, which are often marketed to tourists in Vietnam.	
	When I Grow Up Campaign –for rhino horn (January 2021)	Humane Society International

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