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Frozen tiger cub captured during WJC investigation in Viet Nam
Introduction

The Wildlife Justice Commission (WJC) is a non-governmental organisation based in The Hague, The Netherlands. It was established in March 2015 with the goal of exposing and disrupting transnational organised wildlife crime. The WJC is staffed with former law enforcement officers, analysts and lawyers from the United States, Great Britain, Australia, the European Union and several Asian countries.

In 2014 the CITES secretariat reported that seizures of tiger specimens had increased in Southeast Asia in recent years, and that, of 61 live tigers seized in the period 2010–2012, 74% were confiscated in three South-East Asian countries: Laos, Thailand and Viet Nam. A seizures analysis commissioned by the secretariat highlighted concerns about the source of tigers in illegal trade, in light of the presence of tiger breeding facilities in these countries and the small numbers of wild tigers (SC65 Doc. 38).

Operation AMBUSH began in July 2016 and aims to examine the drivers and organised criminality behind the illegal tiger trade across Asia with a particular focus on the role of tiger farms in the Greater Mekong region. This brief presents preliminary results, based on our undercover investigations in Viet Nam, Laos and Malaysia, open source research and intelligence obtained from governmental and non-governmental sources.

Here we present a snapshot of our findings on a relatively small scale, however, the findings are representative of the wider issue that tigers bred in farms are being supplied into illegal trade.
Summary

This briefing provides some insight into the methods being used, the journey tigers take to market, and how this is facilitated by organised criminality. The growth in unregulated and private breeding may be enabling illegal trade, at the same time wild tigers are being targeted to service demand in Viet Nam and China.

Due to the volume of parts observed for sale (in particular reference to whole skins) and the paucity of wild tigers in the region, it is likely that tigers have originated from farms (p.9–10).

It is also suggested that a proportion of tigers in trade products may also be fake.

Viet Nam
We found an astounding amount of tiger parts offered for sale by a criminal network based in Viet Nam and subsequently identified a strong demand for tiger claws and canines as a fashion / status symbol (p. 7-8). This sub-culture consists mainly of young Vietnamese men and the WJC captured numerous images highlighting this trend. We further identified Vietnamese and Chinese buyers with a great desire for tiger bone paste and wine and broth. We found at least eight instances of tiger cubs contained in liquid vases, described as tonic wine. This may indicate a new commodity on the market. This product was being marketed primarily to Chinese customers. Conversely, we observed very little appetite for tiger skins.

Thailand
Our investigators met with illegal wildlife traders, one of whom showed his stash of tiger skins and boasted how he could obtain large quantities of tiger skins sourced from Thailand and Viet Nam.

Laos
Through our investigations we were able to collect compelling footage from a facility that evidences tigers from the farm are being supplied to criminals engaging in illegal trade (p.11–12).

Malaysia
Our covert investigations led to the arrest of eight Vietnamese nationals who were part of a trafficking network. The team were apprehended after poaching Malayan tigers and attempting to sell their parts in Kuala Lumpur (p.15–16).

Czech Republic
Reliable intelligence reports that tiger breeding is occurring and there are concerns regarding the high mortality rate of cubs born at the facility. The suspicion being that the cubs are removed to be grown and slaughtered elsewhere (p.14).

South Africa
Research finds South Africa now has an increasingly relevant role in both the legal and illegal trade of tigers (p.13).
The map highlights the known flows of tigers across Asia.

While many of the routes are persistent trade flows, such as India – Nepal – China, the WJC have identified a new route of wild tigers from India. During our most recent investigation we found tiger parts for sale in Malaysia have originated from India. This is consistent with a major seizure of tiger parts in Malaysia in 2015 comprising amongst other items, 470 tiger claws, equating to a minimum of 26 tigers. The parts were suspected to have come from India.

Moreover, our intelligence reports Vietnamese poachers are in operation in Malaysian forests to feed national demand for tiger parts as status symbols.

Thailand’s role includes a transit point for tigers originating from Indonesia and Malaysia. It is also a source for captive bred tigers to stock farms in Laos and to supply demand in China and Viet Nam. Reliable WJC intelligence reports that tiger parts for sale in Viet Nam comprise both wild tigers from Malaysia, and captive bred tigers from Thailand and those being privately bred in Viet Nam.
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WJCs first investigation in Viet Nam between 2015-2016 found parts and products of a minimum of 158 to a maximum of 225 tigers in trade. The total value of these tiger commodities in trade is conservatively estimated to equate to USD 3.1 million (VND 71,000,000). A range of commodity types were observed in trade; it is clear there is greater demand for tiger bone paste but canines and claws as jewellery are also very popular.

The images presented here were collected during our investigation and highlight the demand for claws and canines as fashion items for young Vietnamese men.

The WJC is currently investigating up to 100-150 new subjects specialising in illegal tiger trade and trafficking even larger volumes. Furthermore, we also detected the sale of eight tiger cubs and one leopard cub in jars.

**Chart 1** outlines the most commonly observed products found in trade during the investigation and highlights the relatively low occurrence of skins or skin products being offered for sale.
During our extensive investigation which centered on the village of Nhi Khe in Viet Nam, we identified one particularly prolific wildlife trader.

During a covert WeChat conversation with the WJC between April – May 2016, the trader offered tiger parts for sale equating to an estimated USD 9,000.

The images shown here were captured directly from the trader’s WeChat account.

The WJC was able to evidence at least 130 violations of Article 190 of the Vietnamese Penal Code: Trafficking in Tiger in an organised manner.

Evidence against this and 50 other subjects was submitted to the Government of Viet Nam in a Map of Facts (Jan 2016) followed by an Update of the Map of Facts (July 2016).

**Profile of a prolific Tiger Trader**

**PERSON OF INTEREST**

- **Nationality**: Vietnamese
- **Method of Trading**: WeChat & Facebook

**CHART 2: RANGE & VOLUME OF TIGER PARTS OFFERED BY ONE VIETNAMESE TRADER BETWEEN 1 JULY 2015 – 31 MAY 2016.**

- **Whole tiger**: 1 Piece
- **Tiger cub in wine**: 3 Jars
- **Bone products**: 386 Kgs
- **Skin**: 25 Pieces
- **Claw**: 97 Pieces
- **Bone glue**: 12 Kgs
- **Skull**: 2 Pieces
- **Bone wine**: 71 Bottles
- **Genitals**: 28 Pieces
- **Canine**: 323 Teeth
- **Skeleton**: 22 Pieces

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This map presents the locations of all the known facilities where tigers are held in Viet Nam (17) and Laos (2) and the number of tigers at each facility based on a WJC survey and research. In Laos, the two known establishments are both close to the Thai border, with the Golden Triangle being within the Special Economic Zone, and therefore also bordering Myanmar. In Viet Nam, most facilities are located in or near to the cities of Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh.

In July 2016, the WJC conducted surveys at ten of the known establishments in Viet Nam and one in Laos to directly observe the current number of tigers at each. In total, we found an estimated 175 tigers in Viet Nam and 335 in Laos, equating to 510 in total.
In addition to these known establishments it is suspected that illegal tiger farms are on the rise in Viet Nam. An identified increase in private breeding was further corroborated in May 2016 when ENV (who have inspected these establishments bi-annually since 2007) reported that the number of captive tigers in Vietnam has increased from 81 in 2010 to 180 by 2016. Furthermore, ENV suspects that most of these facilities are engaged in illegal activities, either by selling cubs or laundering tigers through their farms and into trade.

TABLE 1: KNOWN FACILITIES IN VIET NAM AND LAOS WITH CURRENT NUMBER OF TIGERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Location Name</th>
<th>No. of tigers</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Surveyed by WJC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tay Thanh</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dai Nam Lac Canh Van Hien</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Suoi Tien Theme Park</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dray Sap: Gia Long Waterfalls</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Thai Binh Duong/ Pacific Beer Company</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Vuon Xoai Resort</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Thanh Canh</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sai Gon Zoo</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>My Quynh Safari</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Vinpearl Safari Phu Quoc</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Private farm of Nguyen Khac Thuong</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Bao Son Paradise</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Private farm of Nguyen Mau Chien</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Trai Bo Ecotourism</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Hon Nhan Ecotourism</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Ha Noi Zoo</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Soc Son Wildlife Rescue Center</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Golden Triangle, Special Economic Zone</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Muang Thong Tiger Farm</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Tiger Farms as a Supplier

Case Study:
Muang Thong Tiger Farm

The EIA published ‘Sin City’ in 2015 which examined illegal wildlife trade within the Special Economic Zone in Laos. The investigation found the number of live tigers housed there increased from six to 35 individuals between 2014-2015, and further reported that the source of tigers was from another farm in Laos. The Muang Thong Tiger Farm in Laos currently has an estimated 300 individuals and therefore holds more tigers than all those known facilities in Laos and Viet Nam put together.

Our undercover investigation revealed this large tiger breeding facility offers their tigers for sale to traders in Viet Nam and China.

Muang Thong Tiger Farm is fundamentally different to the well-known Laos based King’s Roman Casino in the Special Economic Zone (an entertainment venue open to the public), as very little is known about its purpose or legal status.

The current owner is the godson of the former Laotian prime minister: Thongsing Thammavong, who was in power between 23 December 2010 - 20 April 2016. The farm owner has a picture of the former prime minister in his house, observed first hand by our investigators.

WJC investigators visited the farm covertly in July 2016. The farm was found to house approximately 300 live tigers, ranging from 100-200kg in weight. The tigers are kept in cramped, concrete conditions. Each large enclosure contains two rows of smaller enclosures (approx. 4m x 4m x 30metres deep). In addition, our investigators observed ten tiger cubs kept in a separate enclosure.

Tiger Farms as a Supplier

Evidence of Supply to Tiger Trade

Our investigation reveals that buyers usually bring their own professional butcher who then carves the tigers on site. This is to ensure the tiger skins are removed cleanly. Alternatively, buyers hire the farm manager and his team to undertake the killing and butchering.

Tigers are not purchased alive; they are all killed and butchered on site. The tigers are killed by use of lethal injection.

Prices quoted to our undercover investigators are shown in Table 2, where whole tigers are sold by the kilo. Buyers buy the whole tiger, not just the skins or bones. After killing and carving the tiger, it is then up to the buyer which parts they wish to keep or dispose of.

Unlike King’s Roman Casino, which caters mostly to a Chinese clientele, the majority of buyers at Muang Thong are of Vietnamese origin.

WJC’s investigation in Nhi Khe, Viet Nam identified at least 13 traders who were able to supply tiger products in great volume. During an undercover meeting, a significant wholesale trader displayed four tiger skins to WJC operatives at his premises. The trader informed our operatives that he would give a discount on price if a quantity exceeding 10 tiger skins were ordered, indicating his ability to obtain large quantities of tiger skins. A Vietnamese Chinese-language interpreter present during the meeting stated that if investigators wanted many skins the trader would collect them from other people.

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TABLE 2: PRICES QUOTED IN USD FOR WHOLE AND PART TIGERS (JULY, 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tiger Parts</th>
<th>Whole Tiger</th>
<th>Canines</th>
<th>Whiskers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Kilo</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. Tiger</td>
<td>57,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tiger in captivity at Muang Thong Tiger Farm, July 2016
South Africa is becoming increasingly relevant in the illegal tiger trade debate, due to the emergence of a legal and illegal trade in tiger parts out of South Africa, particularly in reference to live specimens.

According to the CITES trade database, between 2010-2015 South Africa featured as the exporter on 103 permits for parts and whole specimens of *Panthera tigris*. Sixty-two permits referred to the export of a minimum of 163 live tigers with the greatest amount imported by the UAE (19), Egypt (19) and Thailand (18). In addition, there are an estimated 280 tigers in at least 44 facilities in South Africa, very little is known about these facilities.

On the illegal front confidential intelligence reports tigers are bred in South Africa for the Asian market. Very few seizures have been reported in Asia of tiger parts originating from Africa, with the exception of the two incidents detailed here. Only one of these refers to South Africa and therefore represents an important intelligence gap.

1. In October a Vietnamese national was arrested after being found in possession of elephant and tiger parts at Siem Reap Airport. 4

2. In April 2015, Kunming Customs confiscated a large contraband of illegal wildlife products including an Indo-Chinese tiger fur and 7.7 kg of tiger bone from two Chinese national's checked luggage. 5

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There are strong indications that tigers are being bred in the Czech Republic for illegal trade purposes. According to the CITES Trade database Czech Republic exported 28 live tigers between 2010-2015, with the majority destined for Viet Nam (18). Ten were for zoos and eight were for commercial purposes in Viet Nam.

Moreover, in July 2016, four Indochinese tigers were moved from the Czech Republic to Hanoi Zoo in Viet Nam. The transfer was publicised in the media as a conservation measure, even though the tigers will remain in Hanoi Zoo for the duration of their lives. The source of the tigers in Czech Republic is not currently known and remains an important intelligence gap. Hanoi Zoo is a government registered establishment which has been implicated in illegal tiger trade on two occasions; in 2002 and 2008. In the 2008 case the zoo admitted to selling two live tigers to Vietnamese wildlife traffickers, the investigation led police to a house where frozen pieces of four tiger bodies were found along with stoves used for cooking glue from animal bones.

Illegal trade between the Czech Republic and Viet Nam has also been documented on at least two occasions in 2013:
- Two tiger skeletons were seized en route from Czech Republic to Viet Nam
- 10kg tiger bones were found in a vehicle in the Czech Republic driven by a Vietnamese national

Reliable intelligence reports that tigers are being bred in private facilities in the Czech Republic: tiger cubs are being bred in high volumes but many do not appear to make it to adulthood. A high mortality for cubs is reported, but it is suspected that cubs are moved to other facilities in the Czech Republic, either to grow to a more desirable size for slaughter or to be killed for the purpose of producing tiger bone wine.

There is also concern regarding an extensive trade in tiger bone wine or ‘broth’ brewed and bottled in Czech Republic, purportedly for illegal export to Viet Nam. WJC covert investigations have found that this product, traditionally associated with demand in China, is also highly sought after in Viet Nam. The longer the product is fermented, the more potent and delicate it becomes. Tiger wine can be sealed in jars for many years, opened for a special occasion and poured into plastic bottles for sharing with people (similar to the picture).

This dynamic presents a new challenge for law enforcement due to the limited expertise to extract DNA from tiger bone wine to identify its source. There is also the extended issue that bones used to brew wine may contain lion bone.

Packaged tiger wine bottles
Activating justice against Vietnamese tiger traffickers

Intelligence collected through Operation Ambush has already garnered success.

In August 2016, the WJC identified and successfully infiltrated a Vietnamese organised crime group at work in Malaysia. This network consisted of Vietnamese nationals who were operating in Peninsular Malaysia’s Belum Temengor Forest Complex specifically targeting agarwood but also to poach wildlife, opportunistically.

WJC operatives acting as potential buyers, engaged one major trafficker, who assumed the role of the seller as part of the network. The subject offered the tiger products obtained by the Vietnamese poachers for sale. Images supplied to the WJC from the trafficker are shown to the right.

The Malayan tiger is now assessed to be Critically Endangered with less than 250 individuals left in the wild. Therefore the network’s criminality is expected to have had a devastating impact upon Malaysia’s wild tiger population.

A collection of images sent by the network in what is believed to be Malaysia’s Belum Temengor Forest Complex showing off a freshly killed Malayan tiger *Panthera tigris jacksoni* as well as tiger canines, claws and the paste produced through boiling bones.
A WJC investigations team was deployed to Malaysia with the aim of identifying these subjects and bringing them to justice.

On 30 August 2016, WJC investigators partnered with the Malaysian Wildlife Crime Unit (Perhilitan) in setting up a sting operation after learning that members of the network were in Kuala Lumpur selling their tiger products. Having secured enough proof of the traffickers’ criminality, Perhilitan staff conducted a raid at a premises in Kuala Lumpur’s southern suburbs where they arrested seven Vietnamese nationals aged between 23-33. The raid led to the discovery of two tiger skins and an array of products including paste, canines and claws derived from tigers. In addition to the tiger parts, 21 bear claws and 14 bear gallbladders were seized.

Through the persistent efforts of the Perhilitan investigators; the team located and arrested the alleged ring leader, a 24-year old Vietnamese national, later that same day.

All subjects are now before the court facing charges relating to Malaysia’s Wildlife Conservation Act 2010. Perhilitan’s tiger expert is currently examining the seized products to determine their geographical origin.

More details of the story can be found here at the Borneo Post online.
Thank You