

## CASE STUDY

2

### COMMODITIES INVOLVED

Tiger parts and human trafficking

### CONVERGENCE TYPOLOGY

Opportunistic convergence

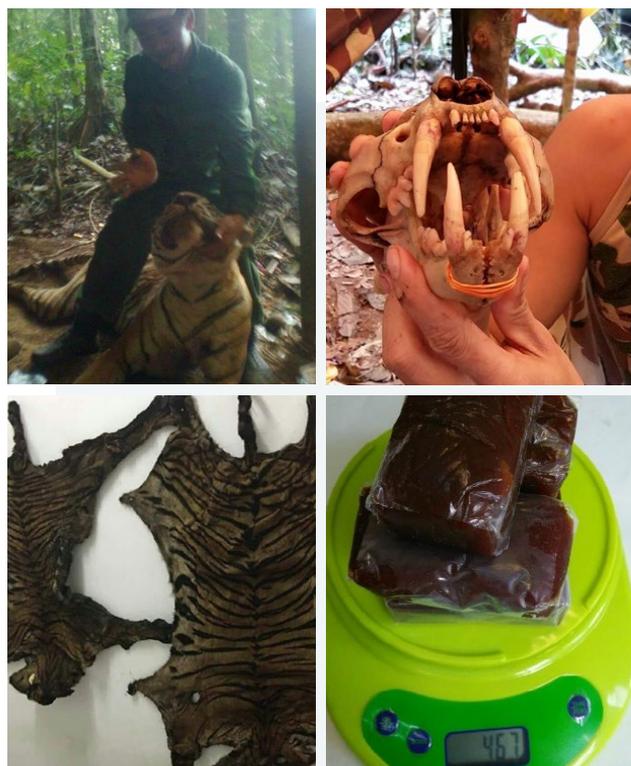
### GEOGRAPHIC REGION

Southeast Asia



**During an investigation** into the illegal trade in tiger parts within Southeast Asia, in August 2016 Wildlife Justice Commission operatives received intelligence of a Vietnamese national named Son who was residing in Kuala Lumpur and had access to tiger products in Malaysia. The operatives obtained multiple images of Vietnamese men in a jungle setting with a dead tiger, as well as tiger canines, claws, and tiger bone paste (images 3-6).

**This led the Wildlife Justice Commission** to launch a joint operation with the Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia (PERHILITAN) to investigate Son's network. An undercover operative met with two network members and was taken to an apartment complex in an outer suburb of Kuala Lumpur. In an apartment that was occupied by eight Vietnamese men, two tiger skins were shown to the operative.



*Images 3-6 (clockwise from top left): Photo of dead tiger in jungle setting that triggered the investigation; big cat skull; tiger bone paste that the group was selling; two tiger skins shown to Wildlife Justice Commission operatives.*

**Acting on information received** from the Wildlife Justice Commission, PERHILITAN officers raided the premises and arrested the eight men, seizing two tiger skins, one tiger canine, 20 bear claws and two

pieces of ivory jewellery. Son was not present at the apartment at this time, although PERHILITAN officers located and arrested him later that same day in possession of one tiger canine, one piece of ivory jewellery and one bear claw. Expert investigators established that the skins had come from wild Malaysian tigers, which increased the impact of the offences given that fewer than 200 tigers are estimated to remain in the wild in Malaysia.

**Following the arrests** of the nine men, only Son was found to be legally living in Malaysia – the other eight men had expired visas and their passports had been taken from them. PERHILITAN's interviews with these men indicated that they were working for a syndicate run by a Cambodian boss, illegally collecting agarwood in the Malaysian forests.<sup>21</sup> The men were allegedly brought from Vietnam to Malaysia and their passports withheld until they had collected enough agarwood to cover their expenses. While in the forests, the group was opportunistically poaching tigers and collecting other wildlife products to sell on the side to earn money.

**Information later obtained** by the PERHILITAN officers indicated that this same syndicate was also facilitating the recruitment of Vietnamese women to travel to Malaysia to work in the sex industry. The arrangement was similar to the men working in the forest, in that the women were held in Kuala Lumpur and dispossessed of their passports until it

was determined they had covered the costs of their transportation and housing. Information relating to this Cambodian/Vietnamese human trafficking network was shared with other relevant law enforcement agencies in Malaysia.

**Son and one other Vietnamese man** pled guilty to offences relating to the illegal possession of wildlife products. Son received a fine of MYR 15,000 (equivalent to approximately USD 3,700) and the other man received 36 months imprisonment. The remaining seven men were deported back to Vietnam.

#### GOOD PRACTICE

- **Collaboration between law enforcement authorities and NGOs** in sharing intelligence and conducting joint investigations can be effective to identify and target criminal patterns of behaviour.

#### INTERVENTION STRATEGY FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

- **Wildlife crime can be an easier entry point to investigate other associated crimes**, and the use of wildlife legislation in some countries can provide law enforcement opportunities such as the ability to act even without a warrant and to inspect premises at any time.

<sup>21</sup> Agarwood is formed in the heartwood of certain tree species (particularly species of the *Aquilaria*, *Gonystylus*, and *Gyrinops* genus) when they become infected with a type of fungus. In response to the attack the tree produces a dark, aromatic resin, which is highly sought after for making perfumes, fragrances, and incense. All species of the *Aquilaria*, *Gonystylus*, and *Gyrinops* genus are listed as CITES Appendix II species.