

CASE STUDY

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COMMODITIES INVOLVED

Live reptiles and migrant smuggling

CONVERGENCE TYPOLOGY

Unconfirmed – possibly complete “career shift”

GEOGRAPHIC REGION

South Asia



From 2016 to 2018, the Wildlife Justice Commission investigated the illegal trade in live turtles and tortoises within Asia, focusing on criminal networks operating across India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Thailand. Several networks operating in India became key targets of the investigation and were involved in the supply of thousands of internationally protected turtles and tortoises (CITES Appendix I and II species) for the illegal live pet trade, including Indian star tortoises, black pond turtles, three-striped roofed turtles, red-crowned roofed turtles and tricarinate hill turtles. The investigation utilised covert investigation techniques and intelligence analysis in cooperation with law enforcement agencies in four

countries to gather evidence, effect arrests and seizures, and disrupt regional level criminality.

In June 2017, the Wildlife Justice Commission received intelligence relating to an Indian national in Chennai, India, who was actively involved in the supply of a range of wildlife products. Ongoing intelligence and covert investigations confirmed this suspect was illegally trading in Indian star tortoises, red sandalwood,²² and live tiger cubs.

Not only was there evidence of a convergence of wildlife and timber trafficking in this case, but two years later in March 2019, the Wildlife Justice Commission received further intelligence and was able to obtain evidence of this same suspect’s involvement in the smuggling of migrants from Sri Lanka, India, and Bangladesh to several European countries. It was not confirmed whether this suspect had made a full transition to migrant smuggling as his primary criminal business, or whether he continued to engage in wildlife trafficking as well.

The migrant smuggling methodology involved obtaining fraudulent documentation to clear airline and immigration checks at departure ports in South Asia so that passengers could arrive at targeted destination countries in Europe and claim asylum. Further investigation by the Wildlife Justice Commis-

²² Red sandalwood (*Pterocarpus santalinus*) is a tree species endemic to the southern parts of the Eastern Ghats mountain range in India. Its timber is highly valued for its deep red colour, particularly in China for use in carvings and furniture, and it also has several applications in traditional medicine. Exporting red sandalwood is prohibited in India except under some special circumstances and it is listed as a CITES Appendix II species. However, the illegal trade in red sandalwood is lucrative and shipments are regularly seized from smuggling attempts.

sion indicated that this network extended to several other countries outside of India. Information relating to the identity of the network and evidence of the use of fraudulent documentation was provided to the respective government authorities in Europe.

GOOD PRACTICE

- **Information exchange with relevant law enforcement agencies** when instances of crime convergence are identified.

INTERVENTION STRATEGY FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

- **Further and follow-up investigations** can be useful to help identify instances of crime convergence beyond an initial wildlife seizure event.

