

CASE STUDY

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COMMODITIES INVOLVED

Live reptiles and fraud

CONVERGENCE TYPOLOGY

Unconfirmed – possibly complete
“career shift”

GEOGRAPHIC REGION

South Asia



During its previous multi-year investigation into the illegal trade in live turtles and tortoises within Asia, the Wildlife Justice Commission had identified a Bangladeshi national who was part of a reptile smuggling network operating between India, Bangladesh, and Thailand.

In May 2019, Wildlife Justice Commission operatives received new intelligence indicating that this individual was now involved in setting up and operating “scam call centres” that were illegally obtaining personal information of customers from various companies located in the United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, and Australia.

Workers from the call centres would contact the customers and use a variety of false pretences to attempt to extract money from them. Victims were requested to send money to a local bank account, where it was remitted to Thailand. The money was then sent either to Bangladesh or India via hawala transactions.²³

It is believed the scam call centre business is currently more profitable than previous turtle and tortoise trafficking activities, although it requires a considerably larger network of operations and initial cost outlay. While the method by which money is transferred back to the principles is similar to the method used to transfer money between countries for transactions involving illegal wildlife, it is unlikely to account for the convergence in this case.

Information on the identity of members of this network and evidence in relation to the illegally obtained company data was provided to the respective government authorities.

Every year millions of people worldwide collectively lose billions of dollars to scam callers offering wide-ranging fraudulent “services” and schemes to gain money. These are particularly difficult crimes to investigate and prosecute due to the victims being located in another country to

²³ Hawala is an informal ‘underground’ method of transferring money without any physical money movement taking place. Transactions are arranged through a network of hawala dealers, based on trust and balancing books.

the scam operations, and evidence from the victims is needed to bring charges. Jim Browning is the Internet alias of a software engineer who focuses on scambaiting and uncovering scam call centres. One of his most prominent exposés involved hacking into the computer system and CCTV camera network of a call centre in India to collect extensive evidence of their scam operation which was charging thousands of British victims hundreds of pounds to fix non-existent computer problems.²⁴ Browning's work triggered a BBC investigation and a raid on the centre by the Indian police, which resulted in the arrest of the call centre owner in March 2020.²⁵

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.

²⁴ Jim Browning (2020), Spying on the Scammers series, accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=le71yVPh4uk&feature=youtu.be>

²⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-51740214>

