

Asian Wildlife Trade Bulletin

News from TRAFFIC's Wildlife Trade Initiative
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Viet Nam's Government commits to protecting wildlife from illegal trade

Over 100 participants from the Communist Party of Viet Nam (CPV), government agencies and other organizations attended a workshop in August to discuss the illegal wildlife trade threatening Viet Nam's natural resources.

The event, entitled *The Protection of Wildlife and Its Impact on the Conservation and Sustainability of Natural Resources in Viet Nam*, marked an important milestone in Viet Nam's fight against wildlife trafficking as the first meeting sponsored by the ruling Communist Party, bringing high-level officials to the table to discuss the illegal and unsustainable trade.

The two day workshop was co-organized by the Central Committee for Communications and Education (CCCE), an advising body to the Communist Party, with support from TRAFFIC's Greater Mekong Programme. Participants included representatives of the CCCE, different Central Committees of the CPV, offices of the Government, the National Assembly, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, local government officials, a representative of the US Embassy, and members of TRAFFIC, WWF and IUCN.

In an effort to educate the media to raise awareness of wildlife trafficking, the workshop also included journalists from 17 major Vietnamese newspaper, television and radio organizations.

Attendees heard presentations on the current status of biodiversity in Viet Nam and the impact of wildlife trade on natural resources. Participants also discussed how to use existing legislation and the media to change consumer behaviour and end illegal wildlife consumption.

An official statement from the CCCE following the workshop stressed the need for Party and Government officials to address illegal wildlife trade and contribute to the preservation of natural resources in Viet Nam.

"To protect wildlife species is not only the responsibility of the Forest Protection Department, the Police, Customs Department and Market Control. Depending only on these law enforcement agencies is not sufficient to ensure the existence and sustainability of wildlife species. There must be participation of communities, co-operation, information sharing, co-ordination among various organizations and the guidance of the Party's committees and government authorities at different levels," concluded the report.

The CPV also recommended stricter implementation of national laws related to wildlife protection; use of the mass media to raise public awareness; expedited implementation of Viet Nam's Biodiversity Law; increased funding for conservation and sustainable use of resources; improved living standards for people living in and around protected natural areas; and the establishment of an environmental court to prosecute crimes related to wildlife.

The workshop was held as part of the TRAFFIC and WWF-led Wildlife Trade Campaign, which aims to change consumer attitudes in Viet Nam to end illegal wildlife trade. This workshop specifically targeted government officials, one of two major consumer groups of wildlife products in Hanoi, according to research conducted by TRAFFIC. The second major consumer group is businessmen.

The response and range of attendees is promising for the future of wildlife conservation in Viet Nam. Co-organizers TRAFFIC and CCCE have committed to collaboration on two additional workshops in the coming months. The first will help educate the CCCE's Communications Officials from Viet Nam's Northern provinces so that they can inform their respective ministries, organizations, and districts about wildlife trade. The second will be held in conjunction with the Viet Nam Chamber of Commerce to raise awareness of the wildlife trade in the business community.

For more information, contact Sarah Morgan at smorgan@traffic.netnam.vn

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TRAFFIC
the wildlife trade monitoring network

New wildlife identification handbook released in Viet Nam



Front cover of the new wildlife ID guides © Sarah Morgan/TRAFFIC

In late May, TRAFFIC's Greater Mekong Programme and the Vietnamese Forest Protection Department released *A Pictorial Guide for Quick Identification of Some Wild Animals Protected by Vietnamese Laws and CITES*.

The guide, published in Vietnamese, includes coloured photographs and descriptions of nearly 150 species protected under national legislation and CITES, focusing on key characteristics that allow for easy identification.

The handbook is meant to be a field tool for enforcement officials to identify quickly some of the protected species bought and sold in the wildlife trade. It is a much-needed resource as illegal wildlife trafficking continues to threaten the country's unique biodiversity.

The production of this handbook was a collaborative effort between TRAFFIC, the Forest Protection Department (FPD) and the CITES Scientific Authority. The Royal Danish Embassy is the donor behind the books.

TRAFFIC distributed 1,000 first-edition copies to officials throughout the country from the FPD, Market Control, Customs, the Environmental Police and the National Park to assist them in enforcing wildlife trade legislation. The co-operative efforts between TRAFFIC and Vietnamese authorities are vital to increasing the effectiveness of wildlife trade law enforcement.

New hunting law passed in Russia

In an historic move, the Russian parliament has passed new legislation on wildlife hunting and conservation of hunting resources.

Russia's only previous hunting law was signed by Emperor Alexander III in 1892, but repealed in 1917 following the Russian

Revolution. Since then, hunting in Russia has been governed by a series of decrees and court orders.

The new law includes several clauses relating to sustainable use of animals and will provide a stronger legal basis for implementing hunting regulations and introducing subsidiary legislation.

"TRAFFIC warmly welcomes this new legislation, which marks a big step forward for wildlife management and conservation in the Russian Federation," commented TRAFFIC's Alexey Vaisman, who was a member of the Federal Parliament's working group that helped draft the law.

He added that although there were still some gaps in the legislation, they would be addressed during the autumn session of Parliament.

The legislation was approved following a vote in parliament after its third reading, and will enter into force on 1 April 2010.

For more information, contact Natalia Pervushina at npervushina@amur.wwf.ru

Information displayed on illegal wildlife trade on Russian-Chinese border

Sixteen information boards about illegal wildlife products have been put on display at Far Eastern Customs Directorate checkpoints along the Russian-Chinese border. The informative displays are already set up in eight Customs houses, as well as in Vladivostok International Airport.

The bilingual boards—in Russian and Chinese—provide travellers



Information board in Russian and Chinese

with information about the legislation governing the transportation of wildlife products, and were designed with the input of experts from the Vladivostok branch of the Russian Customs Academy, the Russian and Chinese CITES Management Authorities, plus TRAFFIC and WWF staff.

The information boards also feature images of convicted Russian and Chinese wildlife smugglers. It is the first time such public awareness notifications, specific to the implementation of Russian and Chinese legislations on wildlife transportation, have appeared at these regional Customs checkpoints.

"The input of several government and non-government Russian and Chinese authorities is an indication of the collaborative effort needed to solve cross-border problems associated with wildlife illegal trafficking," commented Natalia Pervushina, co-ordinator of TRAFFIC's work in the Russian Far East (RFE).

Illegal harvesting and trade in rare animals and plants remains a major threat to the biodiversity of the RFE, a region which

faces many challenges. On the one hand, it is a region rich in biodiversity, but at the same time it is one of the most problematic regions in Russia for illegal trade in wild animals and plants. High demand from neighbouring Asian countries, especially China, drives the trade in wildlife products, including wild ginseng roots, skins and bones of Tiger and Leopard, bear paws and gall bladders, Musk Deer pods, furs, dried sea cucumber, products of Amur Sturgeon and amphibians.

Russia's Far Eastern Operative Customs reported that in 2008 there were 45 wildlife seizures by RFE Customs, among which 35 administrative cases and 10 criminal cases were instituted. According to experts' estimates, 160 species of RFE wildlife are affected by illegal and unsustainable trade, which has resulted in the RFE Customs prioritizing the fight against wildlife trafficking.

"Special attention should be paid to combating illegal wildlife trafficking during the current economic crisis when people may be tempted to generate extra income through illicit means," warned Natalia Pervushina.

For more information, contact Natalia Pervushina at npervushina@amur.wwf.ru

Training for frontline staff pays off

Staff from the International Airport and Low Cost Carrier Terminal in Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur underwent a course in August to learn how to identify species in trade and to intercept wildlife traffickers.

The Wildlife Trade Regulation Workshop was organized by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations-Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN).

During this workshop, security, airline and cargo personnel, as well as law enforcement officers based at the airports, learnt how smugglers conceal wildlife in baggage, air freight and on their person. The workshop also provided an introduction to the laws and regulations that govern international trade in wild plants and animals.



Participants listen as the Chairman of the Conference makes his opening speech during the government workshop on illegal wildlife trade © Nguyen Dao Ngoc Van/TRAFFIC

Participants from airlines, airport management, and freight forwarding companies, Royal Malaysian Customs and the National

Parks and Wildlife Department also heard from TRAFFIC about the most commonly traded species and were given illustrative guides to help identify these.

A special session on tortoises—one of the species groups most commonly smuggled in carry-on luggage—was also held for participants.

The participants were also encouraged to play a bigger role in halting the illegal wildlife trade by the Senior Officer of the ASEAN-WEN Program Coordination Unit; Dr Chumphon Sukksaem. He outlined the growing role that airports in the region were playing as conduits for the illegal wildlife trade.

Participants were told that as frontline personnel, their work was vital if Malaysia and its fellow ASEAN member countries were to win the fight against illegal wildlife traders.

The day following the training, Air Asia staff at the Low Cost Carrier Terminal who attended the course, seized five Zebra Doves from a Bali-bound passenger and one week later, found and seized a Leopard Gecko from a Hong Kong-bound passenger.

Over the past two years, several tonnes of ivory have been seized by authorities at regional airports in Taipei, Guangzhou, and Bangkok; rare tortoises and turtles are regularly found hidden in other air cargo consignments; while most recently, Australian Customs arrested a man attempting to smuggle 39 parrot eggs into Australia through Perth International Airport,

ASEAN-WEN is an initiative that brings ASEAN governments together to combat wildlife crime and the course is one of several supporting components aimed to help government agencies thwart illegal wildlife trade in the region.

The Wildlife Trade Regulation Workshop was held with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Malaysia Airports, and is designed to target the considerable quantity of illegal wildlife that is carried in personal baggage or shipped as airfreight.

The course aims to create a critical mass of informed employees and enforcement officers at airports to shut out wildlife trafficking effectively. TRAFFIC and partner organization FREELAND Foundation, provide technical assistance for the implementation of programmes under the ASEAN-WEN banner.

For more information, contact Elizabeth John at jlizzjohn@yahoo.com

China's fisheries must adapt to meet new EU regulations

China appears to have made considerable progress in improving the traceability of its fish processing industry, but will need to adapt further if it is to meet the requirements of forthcoming European Union regulations.

From January 2010, all fish materials imported into the European Union (EU) will have to be accompanied by catch certificates, which have to be validated by the flag State of the vessel that caught the fish. The new laws aim to combat Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing.

Poaching crisis as rhino horn demand booms in Asia

Rhino poaching worldwide is poised to hit a 15-year-high driven by Asian demand for horns. Poachers in Africa and Asia are killing an ever increasing number of rhinos—an estimated two to three a week in some areas—to meet a growing demand for horns believed in some countries to have medicinal value, according to a briefing by TRAFFIC, WWF and IUCN.

An estimated three rhinos were illegally killed each month in all of Africa from 2000–2005, out of a population of around 18,000. 12 rhinoceroses now are being poached each month in South Africa and Zimbabwe alone, the three groups said in August.

“Illegal rhino horn trade to destinations in Asia is driving the killing, with growing evidence of involvement of Vietnamese, Chinese and Thai nationals in the illegal procurement and transport of rhino horn out of Africa,” the briefing states.

Since 2006 the majority (96 percent) of the poaching in Africa has occurred in Zimbabwe and South Africa, according to a further report by TRAFFIC and IUCN, released in December 2009 (see <http://www.cites.org/common/cop/15/doc/E15-45-01A.pdf>).

“These two nations collectively form the epicentre of an unrelenting poaching crisis in southern Africa,” said Tom Milliken of TRAFFIC.

Both reports document a decline in law enforcement effectiveness and an increase in poaching intensity in Africa. They have been submitted to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES); Parties to the Convention will meet in March to discuss rhino poaching and other wildlife trade issues.

Meanwhile, rhino poaching is also problematic in Asia. About 10 rhinos have been poached in India and at least seven in Nepal since January alone—out of a combined population of only 2,400 endangered rhinos.

The second report also raises concerns regarding the low and declining numbers as well as the uncertain status of some of the Sumatran and Javan Rhino populations in Malaysia, Indonesia and Viet Nam.

“Increased demand for rhino horn, alongside a lack of law enforcement, a low level of prosecutions for poachers who are actually arrested and increasingly daring attempts by poachers and thieves to obtain the horn is proving to be too much for rhinos and some populations are seriously declining,” said Steven Broad, Executive Director of TRAFFIC.

“Concerted action at the highest level is needed to stop this global crisis of rampant rhino poaching,” said Amanda Nickson, Director of the Species Programme at WWF International. “We call on the countries of concern to come to COP 15 in March with specific actions they have undertaken to show their commitment to stopping this poaching and protecting rhinos in the wild.”

For more information, contact Richard Thomas at richard.thomas@traffic.org



Fish processing factory in Shangdong Province © C.Morrison

To meet the new requirements, China will have to issue certificates for all catches by China-flagged vessels, and obtain certificates from other countries when fish is imported into China for processing.

The TRAFFIC study, *Understanding China's fish trade and traceability*, characterizes China's fish reprocessing industry and examines to what extent its existing traceability systems will be able to cope with the requirements of the forthcoming EU legislation. The study was funded by the UK Government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

“The welcome initiative by the EU to tackle IUU fishing, along with measures being introduced in the US, mean that the days are rapidly disappearing for those who trade in seafood products without adequate documentation to prove the legitimacy of their operations,” said Glenn Sant, TRAFFIC's Global Marine Programme Leader.

The study compiled information on the structure of the current fish processing trade for marine species caught or reprocessed by mainland China, and examined the fish documentation schemes in place to look for weaknesses where infiltration of illegally sourced fish might occur.

Species examined in the report include pollock, cod, salmon, redfish, haddock, whiting, coalfish, hake, toothfish and tuna. Determining the quantities of species of fish being re-processed is far from straightforward: Customs systems both in China and in some importing countries lack sufficient detail in commodity codes and usually do not check whether fish imports are classified under the appropriate code.

Recommendations in the report include streamlining of the monitoring systems currently used by Chinese authorities into a single, integrated and effective traceability system; the development of formal requirements for catch certification and documentation in China.

Understanding China's fish trade and traceability (PDF, 2.5 MB) by Shelley Clarke was published by TRAFFIC East Asia and is available on www.traffic.org

For more information, contact Priscilla Jiao at bjiao@wwfchina.org

Elephant-size loopholes sustain Thai ivory trade

Legal loopholes and insufficient law enforcement mean that Thailand continues to harbour the largest illegal ivory market in Asia.

Concerns were raised that legal provisions governing trade in domesticated elephants are providing cover for illegal trade in wild-caught, highly-endangered Asian Elephants from both Thailand and neighbouring Myanmar, according to a TRAFFIC report.

TRAFFIC's survey documented over 26,000 worked ivory products for sale in local markets, with many more retail outlets dealing in ivory products than market surveys conducted in 2001.



Thai ivory buddhas © Daniel Stiles/TRAFFIC

Market surveys in 2008 found 50 more retail outlets offering ivory items in Chiang Mai and Bangkok, the main hub for illegal ivory activities, accounting for over 70 percent of the retail outlets in Thailand offering ivory items for sale. However, overall there was less worked ivory openly on sale than in 2001.

“Since 2004, the Thai Government has only reported two ivory seizure cases totaling 1.2 tonnes of raw ivory. Thailand needs to reassess its policy for controlling its local ivory markets as currently it is not implementing international requirements to the ongoing detriment of both African and Asian Elephant populations,” said Tom Milliken, director of TRAFFIC East/Southern Africa.

The report includes new information on ivory workshops—eight in Uthai Thani, one each in Chai Nat and Payuha Kiri, and three in Bangkok—between them employing dozens of carvers in the production of ivory jewelry, belt buckles and knife-handles. Much of the ivory being worked is illegally imported from Africa. Some workshop owners boasted close ties with European knife makers, while others reported sending ivory, steel and silver items to the US for sale in gun shops.

“The Thai Government needs to crack down on this serious illegal activity and stop allowing people to abuse the law,” said Dr Colman O’Criodain, WWF International’s analyst on wildlife trade issues. “A good first step would be to put in place a comprehensive registration system for all ivory in trade and for live elephants”.

Hundreds of live elephants are known to have been illegally imported from Myanmar in recent years, to be sold to elephant trekking companies catering to adventure tourism in Thailand. The capture of wild elephants has been banned in Thailand since the 1970s, but such trade usually goes undetected because domesticated elephants do not have to be registered legally until they are eight years of age.

“There must be greater scrutiny of the live elephant trade if enforcement efforts are to have any impact at all,” said Chris R. Shepherd, TRAFFIC Southeast Asia’s Acting Director. “Thailand and Myanmar should work together, and with urgency, to address cross-border trade problems,” he added.

A recent high-profile ivory seizure, a review of national legislation, and the initiation of training courses for both government staff and ivory traders are indications of the commitment being shown by the Thai Government to tackle the illegal ivory trade. 316 pieces of raw ivory weighing 812.5 kg illegally imported from Qatar were confiscated by the Royal Thai Customs Department in August at the Suvarnabhumi International Airport. The Government is beginning a review of the Wildlife Animal Reservation and Protection Act (WARPA 1992), which contains a loophole that allows illegal trade to flourish in the country.

For more information, contact Elizabeth John at jlizzjohn@yahoo.com

Customs staff gear up with identification skills in Shanghai

In light of China’s receipt of 101.4 tonnes of legal ivory from four southern African countries, law enforcement and Customs staff have been prioritized to receive additional training to identify ivory products.

A specific course on regulation and management of ivory and its products was organized by the Shanghai Municipal Afforestation Administration and co-organized by TRAFFIC in May 2009. Participants were drawn from the protection sections and management stations of Shanghai Municipal Afforestation Administration, Shanghai office of CITES management authority of China, wildlife conservation departments in 12 districts, as well as government-authorized ivory processing and retail companies.

Shanghai, one of China’s wealthiest cities, has become a hotspot in illegal ivory trade in recent years. This year’s survey has indicated that illegal trade persists and some legitimate shops are covertly running illegal operations.

The training workshop was intended to intensify the crackdown on illegal trade, regulate legal ivory trade in Shanghai as well as identify illegal trade disguised as legal trade.

Professor Xu Hongfa, head of the TRAFFIC’s China Programme, briefed the participants about the CITES one-off auction in ivory in 2008, and analysed the impact of China and Japan’s one-off ivory import on international ivory trade. “Smugglers might try to disguise illegally imported ivory as from legitimate sources, imposing a huge challenge on our regulatory management of ivory trade,” Professor Xu said.

The Elephant Information Trade System (ETIS), managed by TRAFFIC on behalf of the Parties to CITES, can be utilized to

gain a better understanding of illegal ivory trade and provide useful information in ivory trade management and combating smuggling.

TRAFFIC's China Programme Officer Xu Ling gave a detailed report on results from a survey of ivory trade in major Chinese cities of Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai. The report recommended law enforcement authorities co-operate with ivory processing and selling authorities focus on strict implementation of labeling and certification of ivory so that illegally-sourced ivory cannot be misrepresented as legal.

A former senior craftsman with Shanghai Friendship Store joined the training team to demonstrate how to identify ivory products definitively, something which will be very helpful in future law enforcement in Shanghai.

The regulatory authorities requested wildlife conservation officers in every district to intensify crackdowns on ivory smuggling and illegal trade, urge designated ivory processing and selling companies to operate in strict accordance with the relevant regulations as well as implement ivory labeling and certification management.

For more information, contact Priscilla Jiao at bjiao@wwfchina.org

Enforcement officers put in the picture



Frontline enforcement officers in Asia now have simple species identification sheets to help them identify the wildlife they see in trade

Can you tell an Indian Star from a Ploughshare Tortoise or an Eld's Deer antlers from those of a Sambar? Probably not, and no doubt you'd seek expert assistance if required to do so, but that's the sort of challenge facing wildlife enforcement officers who need to be able to recognize which of the wide variety of wild animal and plant species in the ASEAN region is being traded.

To assist them, the ASEAN-Wildlife Enforcement Network (WEN) has developed a set of simple identification sheets to help Customs and other enforcement officers as they inspect shipments of wildlife goods to see if they comply with relevant legislation.

The sheets were compiled by Claire Beastall of TRAFFIC Southeast Asia as part of the US Agency for International

Development (USAID) funded ASEAN-WEN Support Program. Technical assistance for the implementation of activities under this program is provided by TRAFFIC and FREELAND Foundation.

"It's obviously impossible for officers to be experts in the identification of every wildlife product they come across, which is why ASEAN-WEN has produced these simple guides to help them" commented Dr Chumphon Sukkaseam, Senior Officer of the ASEAN-WEN Programme Coordination Unit (PCU).

The identification sheets aim to assist busy frontline enforcement officers with a user-friendly tool designed to help them decide whether a species is being transported legally, and if not how to seek specialist help.

Unscrupulous traders sometimes label shipments of rare and threatened animals as common species that can be legally traded, in the hope that officers inspecting the shipment won't know the difference.

"The need for such guides has long been recognized," commented Chris R. Shepherd, Acting Director of TRAFFIC Southeast Asia. "I am confident these guides will help plug a gaping hole in wildlife enforcement efforts in the region."

The English version of the identification sheets will be made available for download on the ASEAN-WEN website, and translated versions will be delivered to countries throughout the ASEAN region. To date, they have been translated into Bahasa Malay, Bahasa Indonesia, Khmer, Lao, Filipino, Thai and Vietnamese languages.

ASEAN-WEN is the world's largest wildlife law enforcement network, comprised of Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The United States and China are also co-operating with ASEAN.

For more information, contact Elizabeth John at jlizzjohn@yahoo.com

Local harvesters learn sustainable harvesting of medicinal plants

Medicinal plant harvesters undertook a training session on sustainable harvesting of the southern Schisandra fruit in China's southwest Sichuan province in August.

The training took place in Daping village, Shuijing Town, as an activity of the EU-China Biodiversity Programme. Participants included more than 30 villagers, mainly harvesters, staff from Wanglang Nature Reserve as well as staff from TRAFFIC and WWF China.

The training materials were developed by experts from the Sichuan Academy of Chinese Medicine Sciences and Southwest University based on the international standards for sustainable harvesting of wild medicinal and aromatic plants (ISSC-MAP).

Participants learnt the concepts of organic products and sustainable harvesting, methods of identifying, harvesting, processing, packaging and transportation. Trainer Dr Yang Wenyu of Xihua



More than 30 harvesters learning sustainable harvesting skills © Liu Xueyan/TRAFFIC

University delivered the simplified training contents by using picture diagrams, enabling villagers to interact actively with the trainer, and offering their own ideas on sustainable harvesting.

Daping Village has a long tradition of harvesting the Southern Schisandra *Schisandra sphenanthera*. However, some methods are inappropriate: cutting off the whole plant damages the resource and the environment; harvesting in the wrong season and applying incorrect processing methods leads to low content; hygiene standards don't meet international market requirements. The training targeted these issues, to help correct bad harvesting practice and educating villagers on the correct methods to use. Through the workshop, villagers were expected to accept and adopt reasonable methods to improve the quality of products.

For more information, contact Priscilla Jiao at bjiao@wwfchina.org

Spotlight

TRAFFIC India's latest poster entitled "Munias of India in the illegal bird-trade" has been produced to help enforcement agencies identify the various species of munias in India's illegal bird-trade.

India is home to eight species of munia, all of which are protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Munias are popular aviculture subjects worldwide. Being small in size and adored for their beautiful coloration, melodious calls, low-cost diet and easy captive-care, they are commercially exploited throughout their range. Although parakeets are the most popular pet birds in terms of preference and popularity, munias rank number one in terms of their sheer volume in bird trade



TRAFFIC East Asia - Regional Office

Room 2001, Double Building,
22 Stanley Street
Central, Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 2 530 0587
Fax: (852) 2 530 0864
Email: trafficea@biznetvigator.com
Timothy Lam, Senior Programme Officer

TRAFFIC East Asia - China

c/o WWF China Programme Office
Room 1609, Wen Hua Gong,
(Laodong Renmin Wenhua Gong Dongmen)
Beijing Working People's Culture Palace
Beijing 100006, People's Republic of China
Tel: (86) 10 6511 6211(6213)
Fax: (86) 10 6511 6261
Email: teachina@wwfchina.org
Xu Hongfa, Wildlife Trade Programme Co-ordinator

TRAFFIC East Asia - Japan

6th Fl. Nihonseimei Akabanebashi Bldg.
3-1-14, Shiba, Minato-ku
105-0014 Tokyo, Japan
Tel: (81) 3 3769 1716
Fax: (81) 3 3769 1304
Email: traffic@trafficj.org
Akiko Ishihara, Senior Representative

TRAFFIC East Asia - Taipei

PO Box 7-476,
Taipei 106, Taiwan
Tel: (886) 2 2362 9787
Fax: (886) 2 2362 9799
Email: treatai@msl.hinet.net
Joyce Wu, Programme Officer

TRAFFIC Europe - Russia

c/o Vladivostok, WWF Russia Amur branch, 18a,
Verkhneportovaya st,
690003, Russia
Tel: (7) 423 241 48 68
Fax: (7) 423 241 48 63
Email: npervushina@amur.wwf.ru
Natalia Pervushina, Programme Officer

TRAFFIC Southeast Asia - Regional Office

Unit 3-2 1st floor
Jalan SS 23/11
Taman SEA, 47400 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia
Tel: (603) 7880 3940
Fax: (603) 7882 0171
Email: tsea@po.jaring.my
Chris Shepherd, Acting Regional Director

TRAFFIC Southeast Asia - Greater Mekong

c/o WWF Vietnam and Greater Mekong
39 Xuan Dieu Street
Ho Tay District, Ha Noi
Viet Nam
Tel: (84) 4 3719 3115
Fax: (84) 4 3719 3093
Email: traffic-indochina@traffic.netnam.vn
Nguyen Dao Ngoc Van, Senior Projects Officer

TRAFFIC India

WWF India Secretariat
172-B, Lodi Estate, N. Delhi 110003, India
Tel: (91) 11-41504786
Fax: (91) 11-43516200
Email: ssinha@wwfindia.net
Samir Sinha, Head

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