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BULLETIN UPDATE

Bulletin | 11 February 2025

**Bringing United for Wildlife Members
and Partners the Latest Trends,
Typologies, and Modus Operandi on
the Illegal Wildlife Trade**



TASKFORCE ALERTS

United for Wildlife intelligence updates



Hong Kong: Illegal and unsustainable trade in tokay geckos

Much of the trade in [tokay geckos](#) (*Gekko gecko*) in Hong Kong is based on illegally and/or unsustainably sourced animals, according to [recent research](#). *On average 15,000 tokay geckos are offered for sale in Hong Kong on any given day, totaling approximately a quarter of a million specimens per year.* Across their range, tokay geckos are traded in the [millions](#) for use in traditional medicine and for pets. Rampant trade of the species has led to localized population declines in parts of Bangladesh, China, Indonesia and Thailand. In Bangladesh, gecko populations are estimated to have declined by 50% as a result of collection for the novel medicinal claims, the study said.

[Read More](#)



Large scale saiga antelope trafficking, abetted by a parallel legal trade, threatens the species

Nearly 1,000 saiga antelope (*Saiga tatarica*) horns were seized during a smuggling attempt into China in October 2024, one of several large-scale seizures documented since 2020. Saiga horn is most often sold in traditional medicine shops as shavings or as a “tea” containing the horn shavings, though in some cases whole horns can be purchased. Some traders likely pass off cow, goat or buffalo horn as saiga. Since 2020 the [TRAFFIC Wildlife Trade Portal](#) has documented 74 separate seizures of whole saiga antelope horns (*Saiga tatarica*) in Kazakhstan (31), China (24), Russia (16), and Kyrgyzstan (1), some involving thousands of horns. Nearly half (34) of the incidents documented involved more than 100 horns. In multiple cases seizures involved other illicit wildlife products including [rhino horn](#), tiger skins, and bear paws, and pangolin scales.

[Download the TRAFFICI Trade Portal data](#)

[Read More](#)



South Africa: Illegal succulent trade driving species to extinction, convergent with rhino horn, big cat bone trade

According to a [new report from TRAFFIC](#), "In South Africa, the illegal harvesting of succulent flora is rife in both private reserves and state-protected areas in the Succulent Karoo Biome, which spans the Northern, Western and Eastern Cape Provinces. Between 2019 and May 2024, more than 1.6 million succulent plants representing more than 650 species have been seized by law enforcement in South Africa. Many succulent species are in high demand for ornamental use by collectors in America, Europe, and Asia, and to meet this demand, the illegal harvesting and trade of indigenous succulent flora are rampant. This degrades ecosystems, deprives South Africa of unique natural resources, and criminalizes those drawn into illegal harvesting for financial gain."

Read United for Wildlife Alerts on succulent poaching and trafficking:

- [Namibia: Succulent Poaching Surge](#)
- [South Africa: Succulent poaching surges during and after Covid lockdowns](#)



CITES Secretariat allows monkey shipments to continue, despite serious wildlife trafficking risk, disease threats

The CITES Secretariat had [recommended](#) suspending the global trade of long-tailed macaques from Cambodia due in part to the widespread practice of illegally laundering wild caught specimens through breeding centers. The move would have banned the import of the monkeys to CITES signatories, but the recommendation was temporarily shelved after one party [requested more time](#) to examine the proposal. Significant corruption, wildlife trafficking, money laundering and other financial crimes have been documented in the trade [throughout the supply chain](#). Cambodian officials and US companies have been charged in relation to macaque trafficking, and scientists have warned about the disease risk associated with utilizing wild caught macaques in medical research.

Read United for Wildlife Alerts on the trade:

- [Illegally sourced wild macaques likely laundered through captive breeding facilities in Cambodia to supply US biomedical researchers](#)
- [Long tail macaque shipments to pose wildlife trafficking and disease risk](#)

- [Macaque transports expose airlines to wildlife trafficking, disease risks](#)
- Update: [Long-tailed Macaques imported to Canada increase wildlife trafficking, disease risks:](#)

[More United for Wildlife ALERTS](#)



ORGANIZED CRIME

[Vietnam grapples with 'alarming popularity' of online illegal wildlife trade](#), Mongabay
[Failed or 'Failed'? Post Mortem of an Ivory Prosecution – Part 1](#), SEEJ-Africa

CRIMES AGAINST CHARISMATIC SPECIES

[India: Major Wildlife Crime Bust in Assam: Elephant Tusks Seized, One Arrested in Sivasagar](#),
The Northeastern Chronicle
[Elite syndicate threatens Tanzania's Masai giraffe](#), Institute for Security Studies
[Greenwashing on an industrial scale with billionaire's private zoo in India](#)

FLORA CRIMES

[The Legal And Illegal Trade In Succulent Flora Stemming From South Africa](#), TRAFFIC

MARINE SPECIES

[‘These stories deserve to be told’: Shining a light on secretive fisheries managers](#), Mongabay

[One quarter of freshwater animals at risk of extinction](#), IUCN Red List, IUCN

[UK: Man stopped at Holyhead Port had more than 600 eels in cardboard boxes](#), North Wales Chronicle

MARINE SPECIES

[‘These stories deserve to be told’: Shining a light on secretive fisheries managers](#), Mongabay

[One quarter of freshwater animals at risk of extinction](#), IUCN Red List, IUCN

[UK: Man stopped at Holyhead Port had more than 600 eels in cardboard boxes](#), North Wales Chronicle

REPTILE TRAFFICKING

[Illegal trade is pushing Bangladesh’s freshwater turtles to the brink](#), Mongabay

[Why is this snake one of the most trafficked species in the world?](#) Wild Targets, Mongabay

[Customs intercepts four women smuggling eight snakes hidden in underwear at Shenzhen port](#), Global Times

[The trade of tokay geckos *Gekko gecko* in retail pharmaceutical outlets in Hong Kong](#), Springer Nature

LIVE ANIMAL TRAFFICKING

[USA: 5 Bay Area residents charged in illegal wildlife trafficking sting](#), KRON4

[Wildlife Smuggling racket busted by alert customs officials and arrested two women carrying birds and animals concealed in baggage from Malaysia](#), Country and Politics

[Increase in gibbon trafficking into India has conservationists worried](#), Mongabay

- see also: [UfW Alert 00219 Gibbons: Exotic pet trade fueling poaching, population decline](#)

[At Raipur railway station, 105 parrots rescued from illegal trade](#), The Times of India

DISEASE RISK

[Bird flu](#), National Health Service

[For Wild Animals, the Bird Flu Disaster Is Already Here](#), The New York Times

EXTINCTION RISK

[Study of more than 600 animal and plant species finds genetic diversity has declined globally](#),

The Guardian

[China's new pangolin quota for TCM sparks conservation concerns](#), Mongabay

[Sri Lanka: Drastic drop in wild elephant numbers at Uda Walawe National Park](#), The Sunday Times

[‘The risk of extinction is accelerating’: world’s botanic gardens raise alarm with space to protect endangered plants running out](#), The Guardian

[Shrinking trees and tuskless elephants: the strange ways species are adapting to humans](#), The Guardian

ONLINE ILLEGAL TRADE

[Vietnam grapples with ‘alarming popularity’ of online illegal wildlife trade](#), Mongabay

[Monitoring online illegal wildlife trade, With insights into ivory and plants](#), Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime

For more information on which species to watch for, check out the details in this bulletin as well as the [Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online prohibited content policy](#).

Want to join the Coalition? [Contact the team](#)

[Report Suspicious Wildlife Content Online HERE](#)

REPATRIATIONS

[Tanzania receives 116 tortoises as evidence in major trafficking probe](#), The Citizen

[DOWNLOAD: UfW Live Animal Seizures Resource Guide](#)

NEW: RESEARCH AND TOOLS TO COMBAT WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING

[IWT Case Studies](#), Biodiversity Magazine

[Expanded wildlife identification guide for law enforcement agencies across Southeast Asia](#),

TRAFFIC



TAKING ACTION

News, success stories, and best practice from and for Taskforce members

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United for Wildlife are pleased to support this first edition of **This Wild Earth**, a publication set out to tell the incredible stories of global conservation whilst raising awareness of efforts to tackle the illegal wildlife trade. In this edition, you can read about United for Wildlife's work, read a case study on IWT through Miami, learn about the Spix Macaw, newly discovered species of frog, African raptors, cheetah, and more.

[Download This Wild Earth](#)



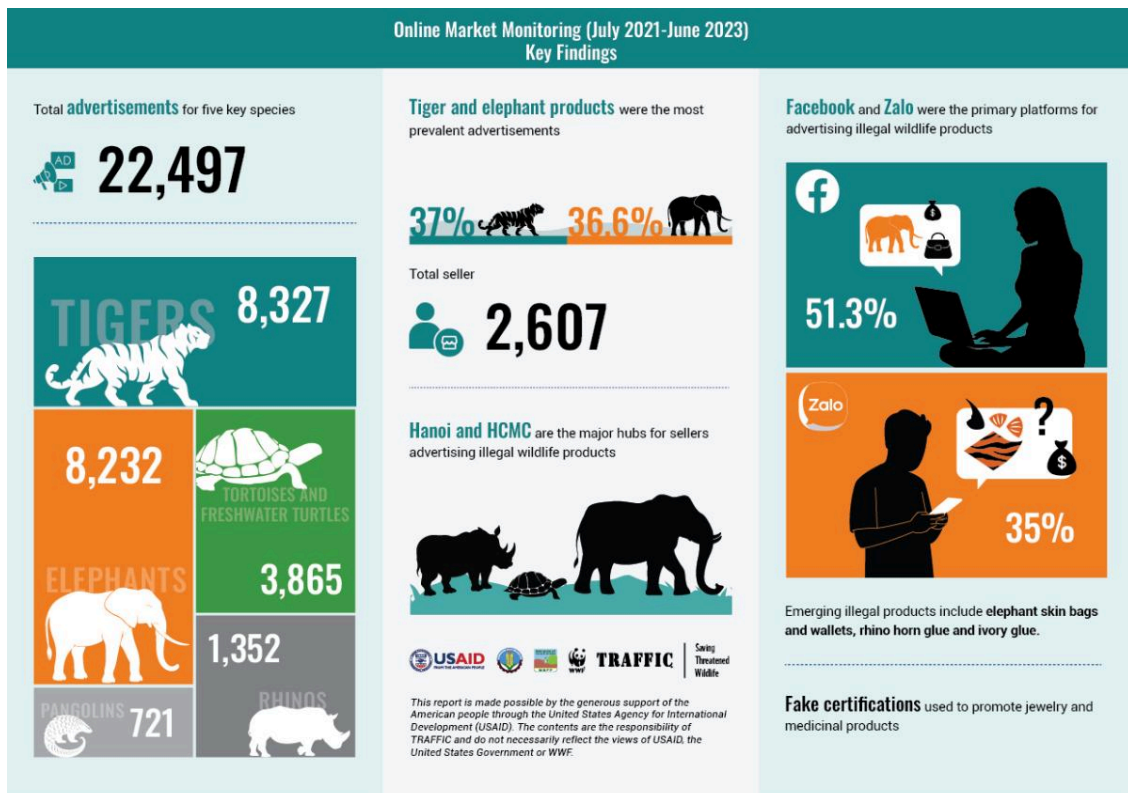
Operation Thunder 2024

United for Wildlife congratulates all of the Customs, Police, border control, forestry and wildlife officials who took part in the month long operation to disrupt wildlife trafficking networks.

Nearly 20,000 live animals, all endangered or protected species, were seized in the global operation jointly coordinated by the World Customs Organization (WCO) and INTERPOL. Participants hailed from 138 countries and regions.

Authorities arrested **365 suspects** and identified **six transnational criminal networks** suspected of trafficking animals and plants protected by CITES.

[Read More](#)



[TRAFFIC: New research shows alarming levels of online illegal wildlife trade in Vietnam](#)

TRAFFIC, with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Saving Threatened Wildlife project, has uncovered an alarming breadth of online adverts offering illegal wildlife products for sale in Vietnam. The research, conducted between June 2021 and July 2023, reveals the widespread availability of products from endangered species, including elephants, tigers, pangolins, rhinos, tortoises, and freshwater turtles, across major e-commerce and social media platforms.

[Download the Report](#)



[GI-TOC: Monitoring online illegal wildlife trade](#)

Drawing on data from the Eco-Solve Global Monitoring System (GMS)—with hubs in Brazil, South Africa, and Thailand—this new report from the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime highlights a 265% increase in IWT advertisements between August and October 2024 compared to the previous quarter, driven largely by the inclusion of Thailand in the monitoring network.

Some key findings from the report are:

- Thailand as a hotspot for illicit ivory trade

- Flora trafficking on the rise
- Digital platforms as enablers

[Download the Report](#)

Offender Data

Publicly Available Information



[DOWNLOAD Alleged Offender Data collated by the United for Wildlife Southeast Asia and Australasia Chapter](#)



The United for Wildlife Intelligence Sharing System updates the Resource Index each month, providing Members and Partners tools to increase understanding of corruption risks and IWT, the latest training for how to combat wildlife trafficking, red flag indicator compendiums, and more.

[DOWNLOAD: UfW Resource Index](#)

This Bulletin was produced by Focused Conservation on behalf of United for Wildlife and the Royal Foundation of the Prince and Princess of Wales.

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About

United for Wildlife Taskforce Intelligence Bulletins are joint monthly advisories for both Buckingham Palace and Mansion House Declaration Signatories on issues of high concern related to wildlife trafficking and the finance and transport sector, and are a core output of the Taskforce Information Sharing System.

Sharing

United for Wildlife Taskforce Bulletins are for limited distribution within the transport, finance, and law enforcement sectors only and should not be released publicly. We encourage you however to share these Bulletins with colleagues from within the finance and transport industries or law enforcement who may find them useful.

Disclaimer

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Contact

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