

Investigating Patterns of International Wildlife Trade in ASAP Species

Participants

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Aim

The aim was to investigate patterns of commercial wildlife trade in ASAP species to identify case studies of species that are being illegally laundered into the international market by being falsely declared as captive-bred and, consequently, to raise awareness of the potential misuse of CITES source codes. The group identified several case studies and brainstormed on a wide range of factors to consider when identifying cases of potential laundering. The group further brainstormed on lots of options on how to engage stakeholders to prevent illegal laundering. These ideas will provide the basis for a publication and can assist with the implementation and effective regulation of CITES.

Background

The Asian Species Action Partnership (ASAP) is an initiative of the International Union for Conservation of Nature Species Survival Commission (IUCN SSC), which brings together organizations interested in developing, implementing and funding conservation initiatives for Critically Endangered species in South-East Asia (<https://www.speciesonthebrink.org>). Many ASAP species are threatened by illegal and unsustainable wildlife trade and over one-third are listed in one of the Appendices of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Under CITES, trade in specimens listed in the Appendices requires documentation of the source of the specimen when exported or imported. Captive breeding is sometimes considered a conservation solution, potentially reducing the pressure on wild populations. However, there is increasing evidence that wild-caught specimens are being laundered into the international market, falsely declared as being captive-bred. The increasingly high number in transactions of specimens claimed to be captive-bred has raised concerns about the potential misuse of CITES source codes. In the workshop we investigated patterns of international wildlife trade in ASAP species based on data from the UNEP-WCMC CITES Trade database to identify potential cases of misuse of CITES source codes in order to assist with the implementation and effective regulation of CITES. We identified several case studies and developed a checklist of steps that could be undertaken to more successfully identify and prevent illegal laundering.

Process

1) Presentation on international wildlife trade (Background)

By Chris Shepherd

Commercial captive breeding is not to be confused with conservation breeding. It is often believed that legal trade in captive-bred wildlife products will drive illegal products off the market and that implementation of captive breeding operations should be preferred over intensification of legislation and

enforcement. This supply-side approach to conservation can only be successful when key prerequisites are met. These prerequisites include:

- proper management and systems (most importing countries do not have systems in place to prevent laundering)
- research into commercial- and scientific feasibility and monitoring
- effective and properly enforced legislation
- public awareness and social vigilance concerning the use of wildlife products.

Some species are bred in large quantities, but these operations rarely benefit the conservation of wild populations. Some examples include Tigers, Asian Arowana, Siamese crocodile, and Javan Pied Myna. Bogus captive breeding is becoming increasingly common and facilitates the illegal trade of rare species and/or huge volumes of wildlife from Southeast Asia. Reasons include that captive breeding can circumvent trade restrictions, is less scrutinized, is reportedly possible on a large scale, and creates a false sense of sustainability. However, captive breeding is expensive (operating costs of the facility including food, enclosures, vets etc.), whereas for wild-caught individuals the only investment is the cost of catching.

Example case study 1: Birds traded from the Solomon Islands 2000-2009

From 2000-2009 approx. 68,000 birds were traded from the Solomon Islands, 76% of which were not native to the Solomon Islands, yet there were no records of previous exports to the Solomon Islands. Of those, 58,000 were declared as captive-bred, however, there are no breeding farms. They were falsely declared as captive-bred and laundered via Singapore onwards into the global market (see Shepherd, Stengel & Nijman, 2012).

Example case study 2: Tokay Geckos

Tokay Geckos are not on Indonesia's list of protected species, and trade in wild-caught specimens is subject to an annual harvest and export quota system. Commercial breeding of Tokay Geckos is also permitted in Indonesia and in March 2014 the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry announced that they had given permission to six companies to export a total of over three million live captive-bred Tokay Geckos for the pet trade. In order to produce one million adult-sized geckos a facility would require 140,000 breeding females, 14,000 breeding males, 30,000 incubation containers in continuous use year-round, and some 112,000 rearing cages. Basic care of these Tokay Geckos would require hundreds of staff to be employed and a constant supply of food, all of which would have significant additional costs (see Nijman & Shepherd, 2015).

By Johanna Stärk:

CITES includes three Appendices, I, II, and III:

- Appendix I: Included species threatened with extinction. Trade is allowed only in exceptional circumstances and not for commercial purposes unless from registered breeding facilities. Import/Export permit is required.
- Appendix II: Includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction but where trade needs regulation to avoid utilization detrimental to survival. Export permit is required.
- Appendix III: Not discussed here

Table 1: CITES source codes:

Source code abbr.	Source code	Description
C	Captive-bred	True captive-breeding (produces F2, F3...generations in a controlled environment)
F	Captive-born (F1)	Born in captivity, at least one parent from wild (F1)
R	Ranched	Reared in a controlled environment, taken as eggs or juveniles from wild
D	Captive-bred (App.I)	App. I animals bred in captivity for commercial purposes in operations included in the Secretariat's register
W	Wild-caught	Specimens taken from the wild

Exports, Imports and Re-exports for each CITES Party can be downloaded in aggregated form for each year since 1975 from the UNEP-WCMC CITES Trade Database (<https://trade.cites.org>).

As of October 2018, there were 175 ASAP species, of which 39% are listed in CITES Appendices. Of those, 10% are commercially traded in the last 10 years (as live individuals). We collected and aggregated data from CITES Trade Database for 12 ASAP species and 2 non-ASAP species (for comparison).

2) Working Groups

The working group was divided into three groups. Each group selected 1-2 species. Based on the data from the WCMC CITES Trade database (see for example Fig 1), and data from the Species360/ZIMS database (population reports). The goal was to:

- Investigate, through published literature and online sources, whether the trade volumes and patterns over the years seemed legal and probable.
- Prepare a short summary of findings and present results in approx. 2 min per species explaining why you think the trade pattern is plausible or suspicious.
- Brainstorm a checklist of actions that can help prevent illegal laundering
- Check for example:
 - Breeding biology (annual reproductive output in captivity)
 - Shifts and fluctuations between different source codes
 - Inconsistent breeding over time
 - Implausible high numbers or significant increase in numbers
 - Incorrect application of source code for CITES App. I species
 - Species exported from countries of poor law enforcement
 - Market prices and cost of captive breeding
 - Reports of illegal laundering for that species

Cuora amboinensis

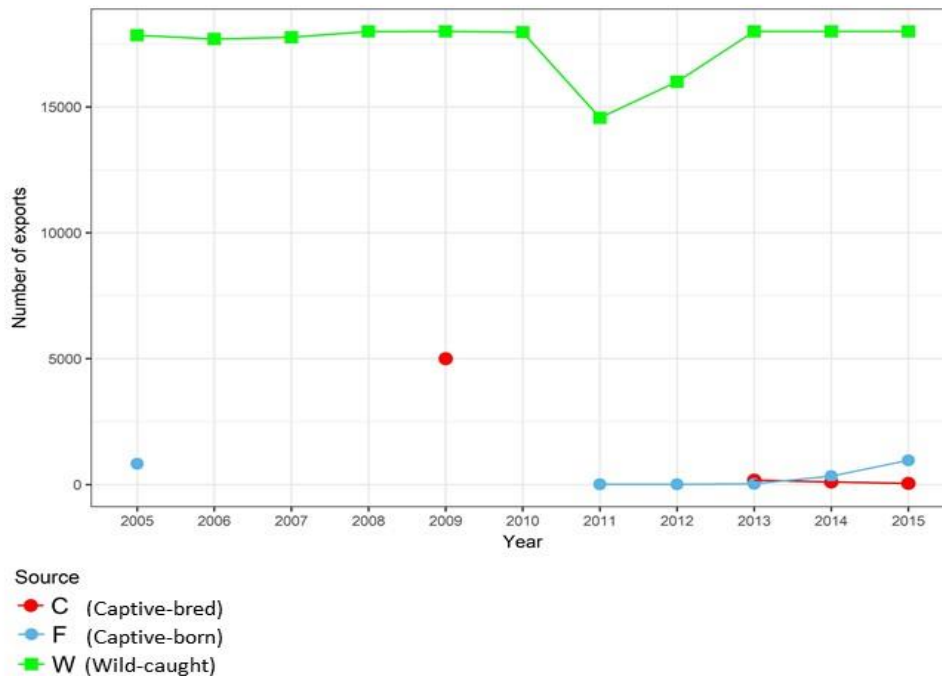
Southeast Asian Box Turtle

N exports: 199319

App. II (2000)



Individuals



Main exporter(s)	C	F	W
Indonesia	-	2102	191828
Laos	5000	-	-
Vietnam	325	-	-
US	-	64	-

Main importer(s)	C	F	W
Hong Kong	-	892	94239
US	-	-	42087
China	-	1274	37383
Vietnam	5000	-	-
Japan	140	-	-
Spain	105	-	-

Figure 1: Number of individuals exported in the commercial trade for *Cuora amboinensis*

Results Group 1:

Southeast Asian box turtle - *Cuora amboinensis* (CITES App II, non-ASAP species)

- Has a quota of about 200 thousand specimens/year.
- A TRAFFIC report showed that more than double of the quota is exported from Indonesia. That is just 10% of the number that is actually traded.
- Specimens exported as “Farmed” are probably being illegally traded as they all seem to be exported to the same country and then re-exported
- Some of the reported trade seems to be possible due to the low number of individuals.

Conclusion: Majority of trade is probably illegal

Yellow-crested cockatoo – *Cacatua sulphurea* (CITES App. I)

- Between 1 000 and 25 000 individuals left in the wild – it is highly likely that they are not being taken from the wild.
- Trade in captive-bred specimens is illegal since Appendix I species can only be traded under source code “D”, i.e. registered captive-breeding facilities. This indicated a misuse of source codes and bad reporting.
- Spike of 350 specimens in 2008 seems suspicious and should be further investigated. The group checked the CITES trade database. The trade in 2008 might be suspicious due to the country of origin.
- This species breeds easily, so trade may be possible.
- This species occurs in the illegal trade (sold in plastic bottles online)

Conclusion: Species is easy to breed, so trade may be possible. However, further investigation into the CITES trade database governmental regulations is needed. Aggregated data alone does not represent the full picture but it is a great start for looking for laws and how to enforce the laws already in place.

Results Group 2:

Group 2 focused mainly on point 3) and brainstormed actions to engage stakeholders and options on how to prevent illegal laundering:

- How can the fundamental issues be adequately addressed? How to get the stakeholders and enforcement agencies check the data? How to get the data easily accessible? (hard to download the data and make graphs).
- Customs officials or pet traders should have access to data (with minimal effort) and be able to understand/analyze it
- Encourage the different stakeholders to understand where the specimens come from.
- Look into the exporter, demographics, and import countries.
- Ideally, one should be able to use the Species360 and CITES information as a global database on all species.
- Get expertise opinion on whether the trade seems suspicious e.g. hotline for advice and more expert analysis
- Certification schemes for, e.g. pet shops, certified by a third party to ensure animals are from legitimate sources.
- Checklist to point into the right direction for zoos or pet traders, and also for food. This way people could easily check if the species are legally traded and/or easy to breed in captivity.
- Pilot these mechanisms with ASAP species.

- How we can make stakeholders and industries care about the issue: risk management, compile with CITES to avoid sanctions and maybe it is a good prioritization for governments.

Conclusion: Some work needs to be done in order to improve the way we develop assessments of illegal trade. This process should be made as easy and straightforward as possible, for example, the creation of a database that comprises all the needed information in just one place.

Results Group 3:

Burmese star tortoise - *Geochelone platynota* (CITES App. I)

This group checked information in peer-reviewed journals and Species360 summaries provided at the beginning of the workshop and found:

- 5 breeding facilities in Myanmar in 2009 that had at least 300 juveniles. One is a commercial facility and the others are from the government from Japan.
- The international demand for animals seems to be lower than the number of exports reported in CITES Trade Database – Also, reported imports do not match the reported exports – stressed the importance of making sure that the import numbers match the export numbers.
- Species seem to be almost gone from the wild –main reason seems to be the international trade; specimens have been taken from the wild by poachers over the years.
- Looked into the demographic and the protection status of the countries in which this species is exported from and if they are within the species range. For example, Japan is the main importer but they have been importing individuals of this species from Kazakhstan and Lebanon (which does not seem to be in the range state of this species) – look into this to see if it is a loophole in the law.
- Conclusion: Trade in captive-bred individuals of this species seems unreasonable. This group concluded that they would need to look in more detail to the countries involved in trade to understand if the trade is indeed legal.

Discussion:

After discussing the outcomes of the work undertaken by each one of the three groups, we brainstormed a checklist of actions that can help prevent illegal laundering:

- When analyzing species-specific trade we should consider breeding ecology and protection status and check if it matches with the number of exports;
- It is important to compare data of similarly traded species (i.e. species that are in the same range and CITES appendices to understand patterns and consistency; Compare import and export numbers and check for discrepancies).
- Third-party verification of trade records in order to verify and monitor wildlife trade;
- Check the exporter companies and look for suspicious patterns;
- Check the origin country;
- Special focus on species that look alike (e.g. cockatoos);
- CITES Appendices I species are more difficult to analyze (start with App.II species);
- Check other resources (e.g. national legislation);
- Be alert to non-range states that are exporting as range states;
- Hotline to check for information on species being traded;
- Example of the **United to wildlife** – create more awareness;

- Engage airlines to better check shipments (but: when shipment gets to the airport it already has permits from health and quarantine, CITES, and country authority – in total 4 official permits. Customs cannot delay a flight; airlines do not have the authority to challenge a permit).

Actions:

- Integrate the results of this workshop in the ASAP database (Johanna with help of ASAP team)
- Development of a database including data from CITES, Species360, IUCN Red List, and demographic data in order to easily inform and more successfully identify cases of bogus wildlife trade (Species360 CSA)
- Decision chart that would classify and identify species and patterns of concern that identify suspicious trade (potential future project)
- Include results obtained here into a publication and look further into some of the key resources identified (national legislation etc.) (Ioanna with help of TRAFFIC SEA, Monitor)

References:

Shepherd, C.R., Stengel, C.J., and Nijman, V. (2012). The Export and Re- export of CITES-listed Birds from the Solomon Islands. TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.

Nijman, V and Shepherd, C.R (2015) Adding up the numbers: an investigation into commercial breeding of Tokay Geckos in Indonesia. TRAFFIC. Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.

APPENDIX – Handout



Appendix I

"Species **threatened with extinction**. Trade in specimens of these species is permitted only in **exceptional circumstances**."

Appendix II

"Species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which **trade must be controlled** in order to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival."

Commercial purpose

"... if its purpose is to obtain economic benefit (whether in cash or otherwise), and is directed toward resale, exchange, provision of a service or any other form of economic use or benefit."

Trade Sources



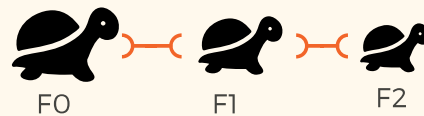
Captive-bred

"Animals bred in captivity (F2 and F3 generations in a controlled environment), as well as parts and derivatives."



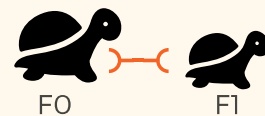
Captive-bred (App.I)

"Appendix-I animals bred in captivity for commercial purposes in operations included in the Secretariat's Register."



Captive born

"Animals born in captivity (F1 or subsequent generations) that do not fulfil the definition of 'bred in captivity' as well as parts and derivatives."



Ranched

"Specimens of animals reared in a controlled environment, taken as eggs or juveniles from the wild, where they would otherwise have had a very low probability of surviving to adulthood."



Wild

"Specimens taken from the wild."



SOURCES:

<https://www.cites.org/eng/disc/how.php>

<https://www.cites.org/eng/res/05/05-10R15.php>

UNEP- WCMC, A Guide to Using the CITES Trade Database, Version 8, October 2013