

Illegal trade in wildlife on despite strong law

Smugglers Exploit Ignorance Of Officials To Escape Detection, Punishment

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Coimbatore: Some months ago, a woman was caught with a tiger cub in her bag at the Bangkok Airport. She had put the sedated cub in her bag along with a few stuffed toy tigers. However, airport staff spotted the cub when the bag went under the scanner and booked her. Many like this woman are willing to risk imprisonment to smuggle wildlife because of the demand in the market. Experts in wildlife crime say the scale of trade in wildlife and products is next only to narcotics.

A 'convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora' at the Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding (IFGTB) here on Wednesday highlighted the rampant trade in wildlife. S Narayanan, regional deputy of the southern region of the National Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, said "Many times, officials right from the enforcement and investigative officials to the judiciary are not aware of the detail of the Wildlife Protection Act. Therefore, conviction rates are less and even when there is conviction, the chances are that the convict gets a reprieve when his appeal goes to a higher



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court," he said. An understanding regarding banned items to its detection is necessary to address the situation, he said.

The low detection and conviction rates have made smuggling in wildlife products an attractive option, Narayanan said. The demand for wildlife products are more especially in other countries. Body parts of tigers to elephants and star tortoises to sea shells and sea horse and skins of snakes, rhinoceros and others are in high demand.

Depending on which schedule these animals fall under the Wildlife Protection Act (1972) their export and

trade requires certificates sanctioning its transfer. Smugglers show forged certificates which many times goes undetected. Apart from this there are several cases where ornamental items made using animal products are not detected, Narayanan said.

In some parts of the country the trade is so rampant that the trade of animals and their by-products are conducted openly. "Star tortoises are transported in hand bags. Some even take them away openly. There was an incident where a person was caught with five marmoset monkeys in his coat pocket in Kolkata," he said. Educating those involved in the illegal trade in many instances has motivated many among them to withdraw from such activities. But the emphasis is to educate the officials and what they should do if they are in doubt. Agencies including the Botanical Survey of India (BSI), Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), Central Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding (IFGTB) have the capabilities to detect the veracity of wildlife products. Depending on the products, they should be sent to the appropriate agencies and the reports taken, Narayanan said.

Tiger Thriving in South Due To Absence of Organised Poachers

Coimbatore: Tigers are thriving in the forests of southern India, thanks to the absence of organised poaching gangs here. Recent studies have confirmed that tiger reserves in the south have a better record of conservation than the northern reserves. Officials indicate that the tiger population in the south is on the rise because poaching is low key and less organised.

It's not that tiger killings aren't reported at all. Officials contend that most of these are 'incidental crimes' committed by those who get a tiger while trying to kill a deer. They also get caught while trying to sell the tiger skins.

However, poaching is a serious problem in many parts of the country. Traps to capture the animals are readily available in the open in Orissa and Assam. Demand for tiger products too is high in countries like China where tiger bones are used to prepare native medicines. There are tiger farms in China, but the wild tigers are in more demand than those at the farms.

In states like Madhya Pradesh and Haryana, there are certain tribes like the Bawarias, Behelias, and the Katnis, who are gypsies who reportedly poach as well as trade in tigers. The poachers use methods which are simple but painful. They lay traps which are kept on paths to spots frequented by the animals like a pond. Tigers get trapped in them and poachers who lie in waiting nearby kill them and remove their skin and other parts. They know the mechanisms of poaching and the routes which makes detection impossible without precise intelligence.

According to the census data of the tigers released in 2011 by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, there are around 1,706 tigers in the country out of which 534 tigers are in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Karnataka with 300 tigers has the highest number of tigers among Indian states.