

An Assessment of Wildlife Trade at Mong La Market on the Myanmar-China Border

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INTRODUCTION

MYANMAR is the largest country in mainland South-east Asia. Bordering five nations, including India, Thailand and the People's Republic of China, it is strategically located as a land bridge between South and East Asia. The country is endowed with rich natural resources and is home to some of Asia's prime conservation flagship species, such as the Tiger *Panthera tigris*, the Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus*, and the Gaur *Bos gaurus*. Besides habitat loss, wildlife in Myanmar is threatened by illegal and unregulated hunting for domestic and international trade (Martin and Redford, 2000; Shepherd, 2001; Rao *et al.*, 2005), and these practices continue to flourish largely because of lack of commitment to protect wildlife (Martin, 1997). Insufficient capacity among enforcement agencies is a major impediment to conservation.

Although little is known about the extent of wildlife trade within and from Myanmar, it is well known that China is a major consumer of wildlife from neighbouring countries (Yiming and Dianmo, 1998; Yiming and Wilcove, 2005), including Myanmar (Yiming *et al.*, 2000). With that in mind, the Mong La market on the border with China was visited to assess the trade so as to further TRAFFIC's understanding of Myanmar's wildlife trade dynamics, especially pertaining to international trade.

With a poverty incidence of 27%, Myanmar is among the poorest countries in South-east Asia (ADB, 2006), especially in remote and border areas. As part of an overall plan to reduce poverty, raise the standard of living, and narrow the gap between urban and rural areas, 24 Special Development Zones in designated States and divisions were established in 2001. Several of these are situated near international borders, in order to promote international trade.

Mong La is situated in one of the Special Development Zones, immediately adjacent to the border with China's Yunnan Province. The town was largely developed with money from a Chinese opium war lord, after reaching a peace agreement with the Myanmar junta, and until 2005 operated largely independently from Myanmar law. Nightclubs, brothels, hotels, and 24-hour casinos attracted large numbers of Chinese to indulge in activities largely banned inside China (Oswell and Davies, 2002; Davies, 2005). In the past, the region was off limits to non-Chinese foreign visitors, but more recently, foreigners from further abroad have begun to visit the area intermittently, regardless of the seven-hour land journey from the Thai/Myanmar border. Along with Burmese and other local languages, Chinese is commonly used. All signs in Mong La, for example, are

written in Chinese characters, and the Chinese Yuan, and not the Myanmar Kyat, is the currency of daily use. At the time of the authors' visit, many of the casinos were closed down, hotels were empty, and prostitutes appeared to be less in evidence.

WILDLIFE LEGISLATION

Myanmar has committed to protecting its wildlife through the *Protection of Wildlife and Wild Plants and Conservation of Natural Areas Law* of 1994, and to managing its international trade under CITES, to which Myanmar became a Party in 1997. Chapter XI of the aforementioned 1994 law states that anyone "killing, hunting or wounding a normally protected wild life or seasonally protected wild life without permission or possessing, selling, transporting or transferring such wild life or any part thereof without permission" shall, on conviction, be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years, or fined up to Kyats 10 000 (USD1490), or both. Penalties relating to violations involving fully protected species may extend to imprisonment for seven years or a fine of up to Kyats 50 000 (USD7451), or both.

METHODS

The Mong La market was surveyed on 7 February 2006 and all species and their parts observed were recorded. All specimens were openly displayed, and there was no need to resort to undercover techniques to obtain the relevant data. An obligatory guide from Mong La provided the necessary translations. The surveyors did not purchase any wildlife parts or derivatives. Species that could not be readily identified were photographed for further reference. Any species that could not be identified at least to genus level is not included in this report. Such specimens included the carapace of a turtle, scutes from a tortoise and canines and claws from small cats.

The official exchange rate during this period was USD1=6.71110 Myanmar Kyat.

OBSERVATIONS

A total of 14 vendors were selling wildlife products in Mong La market on the day of the survey. A combination of freshly killed animals and dried or durable parts (horns, antlers, etc.) were observed. In all, a minimum of 179 animals, representing 32 species were offered for sale, i.e. four species of birds, 21 species of mammals and seven reptile species. At an adjacent hotel a Tiger skin was openly displayed for sale in the lobby. The most numerous species on the market were the Tokay Gecko *Gekko gecko*, Red Muntjak *Muntiacus muntjak* and Asiatic Black Bear *Ursus thibetanus*, with a minimum number of 72, 23 and 13 individuals observed respectively (see Table 1). Ten species (32%) observed in the Mong La market are included in the list of

Species	CITES	National protection status	Live	Carcass	Whole skins	Skulls/ heads	Horns/ antlers**	Feet/ paws	Misc. parts	Min. no. of individuals
MAMMALS										
Slow Loris <i>Nycticebus coucang</i>	II	P	2	-	5	-	-	4	2 skeletons	7
Macaque <i>Macaca</i> sp.	II	P	-	-	-	1	-	-	1 tail	1
Pangolin <i>Manis</i>	II	TP	3	-	1	1	-	-	c. 260 scales	4
Flying Squirrel <i>Petaurista cf. petaurista</i>	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
East Asian Porcupine <i>Hystrix brachyura</i>	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	c. 600 quills	2
Asiatic Black Bear <i>Ursus thibetanus</i>	I	P	-	1	-	12	-	9	19 claws	13
Siberian Weasel <i>Mustela sibirica</i>	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	1 skeleton	2
Otter <i>Lutra</i> , <i>Lutrogale</i> or <i>Aonyx</i> sp.	I/II	TP	-	-	2	-	-	-	1 tail	2
Small Indian Civet <i>Viverricula indica</i>	III	P	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Spotted Linsang <i>Prionodon pardicolor</i>	I	TP	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Jungle Cat <i>Felis chaus</i>	II	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Fishing Cat <i>Prionailurus viverrinus</i>	II	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Leopard Cat <i>Prionailurus bengalensis</i>	II	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	4
Clouded Leopard <i>Neofelis nebulosa</i>	I	TP	-	-	1	-	-	-	1 skeleton	1
Tiger <i>Panthera tigris</i> **	I	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Asian Elephant <i>Elephas maximus</i>	I	TP	-	-	4 pieces	-	-	-	-	1
Eurasian Wild Pig <i>Sus scrofa</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 tooth	1
Red Muntjak <i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>	-	SP	-	13	3 pieces	-	8, 1 set	-	10 tails	23
Sambar Deer <i>Cervus unicolor</i>	-	P	-	-	-	-	12, 2 sets	-	-	8
Gaur <i>Bos gaurus</i>	I	TP	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	1
Mainland Serow <i>Naemorhedus sumatraensis</i>	I	TP	-	-	-	-	8, 1 set	-	1 tail	5
Goral <i>Naemorhedus</i> sp.	I	TP	-	-	-	-	1 set	-	-	1
BIRDS										
Pheasant <i>Lophura</i> sp.	I/III	TP	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	3
Owl <i>Bubo</i> sp.	II	TP	-	-	-	-	-	2	1 wing	1
Black-collared Starling <i>Sturnus nigricollis</i>	-	P	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Hwamei <i>Garrulax canorus</i>	II	P	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
REPTILES										
Burmese Python <i>Python molurus</i>	I/II	P	-	-	1	-	-	-	5 pieces	1
Cobra <i>Naja</i> sp.	II	-	6	-	1	-	-	-	-	7
Tokay Gecko <i>Gekko gekko</i>	-	-	-	72	-	-	-	-	-	72
Water Monitor <i>Varanus salvator</i>	II	P	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	1
Big-headed Turtle <i>Platysternon megacephalum</i>	II	TP	1	-	-	-	-	-	5 carapaces	6
Red-eared Slider <i>Trachemys scripta elegans</i>	-	*	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Chinese Softshell Turtle <i>Pelodiscus sinensis</i>	-	*	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
TOTAL	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	180

Table 1. Wildlife observed in Mong La market, Myanmar, 7 February 2006.

TP = Totally Protected, P = Protected, SP = Seasonally Protected, * = Exotic species ** = for sale at a nearby hotel

Seasonally Protected or Protected species, possession or trade in which requires a permit under Myanmar law. However, it is highly unlikely that any of the dealers in this market had the required permits, as they were aware that their activities were illegal and were very wary when questioned or when photos were taken.

Eleven species (34%) observed are included in Myanmar's list of Totally Protected species and therefore should not be traded. The remaining 11 (34%) species are not included in the Totally Protected, Protected or Seasonally Protected lists of Myanmar, including two exotic species: the Red-eared Slider *Trachemys scripta elegans* and the Chinese Softshell Turtle *Pelodiscus sinensis*. Seven species observed were listed in CITES Appendix I, 10 in Appendix II and one in Appendix III. A further three species were listed in CITES, but could only be identified to genus level. Only 10 of the 32 species observed were not listed in the CITES Appendices. Legal trade of CITES-listed animals from Myanmar to China in the period 1997 to 2005 involved an average of 64 individuals per year and was largely restricted to live snakes and crocodiles (300 and 210 individuals of each species group respectively), Rhesus Macaques *Macaca mulatta* (50 individuals) and Asian Elephants (15 individuals) over a nine-year period (UNEP-WCMC, 2006).

It is clear that the trade is carried out on a daily basis, at least in the case of the trade in animal carcasses: many of the specimens being offered for sale had been recently killed as they were still bleeding and in the process of being gutted, and gall bladders were being removed, for example. There were no refrigeration units.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although carried out over only one day, this is the first complete inventory of wildlife trade in Mong La.

Oswell and Davies (2002) recorded more than 17 animal species at the Mong La market and a nearby shop in January to February 2002, but did not conduct a full inventory. Only three of the species they recorded (unknown species of eagle(s), Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris* and Marbled Cat *Pardofelis marmorata*) were not recorded during the survey under discussion. Felbab-Brown (2006) noted turtles, monkeys, rodents, and birds being offered for sale at the Mong La markets, as were bear claws, dried genitals from civets, and deer antlers. However, no specific details were provided with these observations. In the 1980s and 1990s Martin and Redford (2000; Martin, 1997) surveyed nine towns in Myanmar's interior or at the border with Thailand. In all they observed some 26 species offered for sale, nine of which were not observed in Mong La. The greater number of species (>18) were recorded at Tachilek market, at the border with Thailand; at the other eight markets considerably fewer species were found to be present. Whether or not the high number of species (33) offered for sale in Mong La represents a difference between Mong La and the other markets, or whether or not the number of species offered for sale at markets has increased in time is not clear at present. On the other side of the border in Yunnan, Yiming *et al.* (2000) reported on 26 species that were confiscated by Chinese forestry officials in the Sino-Myanmar border area that originated or could have originated from Myanmar. Eight of these (six of which were birds) were not recorded in Mong La. Combined, these data show that Mong La, despite its relatively small size, is an important trade hub for the export of wildlife from Myanmar to China.

Hunting has always played an important role in local livelihoods in rural north-eastern Myanmar (Rao *et al.*, 2005), but with the opening up of the country, it is highly likely that an increasing percentage of the trade is for



PHOTOGRAPHS: C. R. SHEPHERD

FISHING CAT SKIN (LEFT) AND SPOTTED LINSANG SKIN (RIGHT) SURROUNDED BY ANIMAL PARTS INCLUDING ELEPHANT SKIN, BONES, SIBERIAN WEASEL SKINS, GALL BLADDERS (SPECIES NOT KNOWN) AND A VARIETY OF UNIDENTIFIED ANIMAL PARTS AND FAKE TEETH.



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A DEAD ADULT AND JUVENILE RED MUNTJAC *MUNTIACUS MUNTIACUS* AWAITING SALE AT MONG LA MARKET.

buyers from outside the immediate area. With increasing globalization and improving transport infrastructure, even some of the most remote areas in one of Asia's most reclusive countries are being exploited for short-term gains. Without effective monitoring and regulation, and increased efficiency of law enforcement, Myanmar's wildlife will continue to be depleted. The authors' observations and those of Oswell and Davies (2002) indicate that the primary purpose of much of this trade is to supply the demand from China, and indeed that wildlife is being imported into China. This suggests clear violations of international commitments under CITES.

The quantity of CITES-listed species being offered for sale on one day at Mong La equals the official annual trade in wildlife exported from Myanmar to China. If these observations are a true reflection of the magnitude of trade from Myanmar to China, this suggests that the illegal trade between these countries is of a much higher magnitude, and consists of more species, than the reported levels of CITES-permitted trade indicate.

The fact that all specimens observed in the Mong La market were openly displayed demonstrates the blatant disregard for national legislation—or at least a lack of awareness of a law that is inadequately enforced.

Additional monitoring and research on the trade in animals and plants from Myanmar is needed, in combination with increased law enforcement co-ordination between Myanmar authorities and their counterparts in China. Information should be provided to the national authorities and/or the international conservation community whenever possible. The Myanmar Government recognizes that increased co-operation and communication with China, and with all neighbouring countries, is essential in controlling the cross-border trade and in effectively implementing CITES (Compton, 2003). In December 2005, the 10 member countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN),

which includes Myanmar, formed the ASEAN-Wildlife Enforcement Network, the world's most extensive wildlife law enforcement network. The network is designed to protect Asia's wildlife by facilitating the exchange of intelligence among enforcement authorities in the region. Co-operation and vigilance on the part of the border authorities in both Myanmar and China should be increased and Myanmar's existing domestic regulations and controls need to be enforced more stringently by the responsible authorities in order to end these illegal activities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank James Compton and John Parr for comments on earlier drafts of this paper, and Wim Bergmans for help with species identification. Their local guide in Mong La, who remains anonymous, should also be thanked.

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