

Illegal Wildlife Trade: Half Year Report

(due 31 October)

Project Ref No	IWT-023
Project Title	Securing the gateway: Reducing wildlife trafficking from Myanmar to China
Countries	1: Myanmar 2: China
Lead Organisation	Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)
Collaborator(s)	Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division, Forest Department, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (NWCD) Wildlife Reserves Singapore (WRS)
Project Leader	Dr Alex Diment
Report date and number (eg HYR1)	31 October 2016
Project website	http://myanmar.wcs.org

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed baseline timetable for the project (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).

The project commenced with the recruiting of national staff, including a Wildlife Trafficking Coordinator, and a Wildlife Trade Officer. The Coordinator, U Aung Kyaw, had a successful career in the Myanmar Forest Department, in the Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division, being Warden of several high-profile Protected Areas, before his retirement last year. U Aung Kyaw brings a whole career of experience of wildlife protection and law enforcement, strong leadership and organisational skills, as well as retaining numerous contacts with the Forest Department and other key agencies, both nationally and in Shan State. The project Officer, Daw Mya Thida Aung brings in-depth regional and local knowledge of the focal trade-route, having worked in many of the towns in Shan State along the route for a decade, as well as highly relevant experience from the human trafficking and narcotics sectors. She is fluent in English (as well as Burmese and Shan languages) and ensures that high-level translation and interpretation skills are available within the project team.

Partnerships have been developed and strengthened during the project start-up phase, including numerous meetings and information sharing sessions with in-country stakeholders: the main ones being the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), as well as Yangon University researchers focussed on Wildlife Trafficking. WCS staff participated in a full-day technical meeting in Singapore about the regional Wildlife Trade (as part of the conference of the Society for Conservation Biology), and held several side-meetings with regional organisations, including with TRAFFIC and the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA). A visit was also made to meet with Wildlife Reserves Singapore, one of the project collaborators, who will be supporting the care facilities for confiscated live animals. WWF Myanmar is starting a counter wildlife trade program, and we have also held roundtable meetings and discussions with them, as well as discussions with other relevant local stakeholders and civil society groups.

The key partnership for the project is with the Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division (NWCD) of the Forestry Department. At the initial project inception meeting with the Director

and senior department staff, the commitment of the government to the issue of wildlife crime was clear, and this strong desire has laid a foundation for the rest of the project. During these early meetings, it was agreed for the government to re-establish a high-level Wildlife Law Enforcement Task Force, to coordinate all the work on wildlife trafficking in Myanmar. This body had previously been formed, on paper, in 2007 but had never actually met and was considered defunct. It was re-registered under the new government on 18 July 2016, following several consultations with WCS. The Task Force is expected to become the main government partner for the project, providing an ideal multi-agency mechanism for the project to work through.

On World Environment Day, on 5 June 2016, the new President of Myanmar, His Excellency U Htin Kyaw, affirmed Myanmar's commitment to "zero tolerance for the wildlife trade" and specifically mentioned collaboration with WCS as a mechanism for the prevention of the illegal wildlife trade. This message from the very top of the government further shows the commitment that the government is showing for the aims of the project, and has been a very useful political statement to encourage action with other agencies.

The Wildlife Law Enforcement Task Force consists of Forest Department, Police, Customs, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Border Affairs, and the Attorney-General's Department. The first meeting of this group was on 30 September 2016, with a very positive meeting including WCS as technical advisors. The Task Force has requested support from WCS in several ways, starting with the development of an Action Plan for the Task Force to implement over the next two years.

For project Output 1, to better understand the wildlife trade, preliminary field-surveys have been carried out to gather background information on wildlife trade, with field-work in August and September in Mandalay and Lashio, as well as the town of Pyin O Lwin. Discussions have been held with the Zoos in Mandalay and Yangon, since in the past, animal traders had links with these zoos to sell them live animals, and are suspected of also selling animals across the borders.

For Output 2, to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement, the preparatory work is complete, and partnerships and meetings have been held, including with the Forest Department of Northern Shan State, Police Department representatives, and key staff at some of the checkpoints. The team also met with the Highway Cargo Truckers Association, to collect information and ensure that proposed law enforcement measures would not unduly affect their business. A training program is now being prepared for the coming dry-season for the relevant enforcement agencies. To enhance buy-in and effectiveness of the training, the framework and scope of this training program is being coordinated through the Task Force.

On Output 3, related to international cooperation, there has been minor progress, with initial contacts made across the China border, and some side meetings during international conferences. For example, we ensured that the Myanmar delegates at the CITES meeting in Johannesburg were able to meet with their counterparts from China and Thailand. We expect that Myanmar delegates will attend the upcoming Wildlife Trade conference in Hanoi, and we will be providing technical and other support to them.

On Output 4, related to awareness and media, there has also been some good progress. Baselines have been collected on media-stories on Wildlife Trade, as well as other illegal trade issues, and a library of previous articles has been collated. Contacts with over 150 journalists and over 40 media outlets have been made, with at least 10 stories resulting from our interventions. Recent efforts have led to a positive contact for a Chinese media article, which is now in preparation.

In addition, a blog post was submitted to the UK Embassy in Myanmar for them to post on their website, to promote the IWT Challenge Fund, and the role of the UK Government.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

The commencement of the Project, and also recruiting staff, was delayed due to the security situation in the project area. Sadly, conflict between the ethnic armed groups the TLNA and the SSA, fighting each other as well as the Myanmar military, restarted in April 2016, and led to the region being sealed off and communities evacuated from their homes for more than one month. This also included the project Coordinator, whose family is resident in one of the affected villages. The active conflict has ended for now, and access to the area for Myanmar nationals is now possible. The situation is being carefully monitored; access to the area for international staff continues to be heavily restricted.

There were also some delays due to Myanmar's new democratically-elected government, which took power on 1st April 2016. Following this, it took some time to reform Ministries, with some major restructures, and the merger of several relevant ministries and departments.

There have also been delays related to the formation of the Wildlife Law Enforcement Task Force. However, the re-forming of this Task Force is an extremely positive sign of the government's commitment, and providing more ownership and support to this Task Force will, we expect, be a very strong positive element in the project in the longer term.

2b. Have any of these issues been discussed with LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with LTS: Yes

Formal change request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance: N/A

3a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (eg more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No Estimated underspend: £

4. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to IWT challenge Fund management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but **should also be raised with LTS International through a Change Request.**

Please send your **completed report by email** to Joanne Gordon at IWT-Fund@ltsi.co.uk. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number in the header of your email message eg Subject: 001 IWT Half Year Report**