



Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund Half Year Report



Project reference:	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)
Collaborators:	Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division, Forest Department, (NWCD) Wildlife Reserves Singapore (WRS)
Project leader:	Dr Alex Diment
Report date and number:	31 October 2017; HYR2
Project website /social media:	http://myanmar.wcs.org https://www.facebook.com/WCSMyanmar/

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable

Progress has been strong during the previous 6-month period, with partnerships, especially with the government's Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division (NWCD), continuing positively. Several components are maturing following detailed preparations during Year 1. Additional partnerships have developed and parallel funding has been secured to leverage IWT resources, and enhance the impact and sustainability the overall program. Key milestones or activities are outlined below.

Output 1. Relevant law enforcement agencies in both Myanmar and China have a detailed understanding of the trafficking networks operating along the trade route to the Muse-Ruili border.

Field visits have continued to collect data and intelligence. A visit to the border areas near Bhamo in southern Kachin state collected data from a range of different sources such as Forest Department, local business people and academic researchers. Investigations are also continuing on the China side, and the Myanmar team was able to make a visit to Yunnan province, and the Myanmar/China border, to collect a range of data, perform market surveys, identify informants, and build new partnerships.

Wildlife crime data from northern Shan State has been collected through the Forest Department, and added to the database. We are currently summarising and making data more accessible, including more public-facing reports. In addition, we have added an extensive database of trade information for species traded into China, which shows that Myanmar is the source of more species than any other country.

Output 2. Law enforcement agencies in the project areas have sufficient capacity to identify and prosecute wildlife crimes, and handle the confiscated animals.

We printed and disseminated 1000 revised handbooks for the Identification of Wildlife Species traded in South East Asia, translated into the Myanmar language. Following last year's training feedback, we revised the training materials, and developed several new training modules, with a range of guest trainers and lecturers from the Forest Department, Academia, and other NGO specialists.

A 3-day training course was delivered to 35 staff from 12 relevant government agencies, including Forest Department, Fisheries department, several parts of the Myanmar Police Force, Customs, border agencies, trade agencies, and the Ministry of Interior. As with last year, the training was held in parallel with the journalist's training course (see Activity 4.1) so that the 20 journalists had the chance to meet with and mix with front-line law enforcement personnel.

We have harnessed several platforms including Viber groups and closed Facebook pages to facilitate information exchange. This had a strong impact, bringing numerous requests for technical advice on species ID and wildlife trade issues from active front-line enforcement staff. In October, we will be delivering a Wildlife Trade program in Myanmar Forestry School for around 90 participants. We are also working with them to modernise their curriculum, as they transition from a 1-year to a 2-year program.

Output 3. Law enforcement officers working on the border have the appropriate mechanisms and ability to share actionable intelligence on wildlife trafficking and other transnational crime.

The government's Wildlife Law Enforcement Task Force continues to be the lead agency for our collaborative work; their 6-monthly meeting was held in July (facilitated by WCS). They discussed the strengthening of the Task Force, and will invite Department of Fisheries and the Justice Department to join. Outcomes/findings from the CITES Interagency Workshop (see below) were also presented.

The coordination meeting for the Border Liaison Office (BLO) with China was held only once in this year. We visited the BLO in Muse and met with the relevant officers, as we continue to try to engage with this mechanism. Our alternative approach, with the Checkpoint system, continues to be effective. The Checkpoint team is actively cooperating on wildlife crime cases, with inter-agency collaboration and coordination improved in those project areas we have accessed so far. We continue to request access to other regions, and have also successfully delivered training with partners in southern Shan State.

We have also focused on the utility of CITES as a mechanism for trans-boundary engagement. Our project team met with the Yunnan CITES office in July to plan the round-table between Myanmar and China on bilateral cooperation on wildlife trafficking. This meeting is scheduled for February 2018.

We have made progress with legal reform: working with the European Union's MyJustice governance project, we helped develop a TOR for a legal reform component, which brought two lawyers specialising in CITES to work on the draft Wildlife Law. We facilitated the National Interagency Technical Workshop on CITES and Wildlife Law Enforcement organized by this project, helping with dialogue, cooperation and awareness raising on issues of wildlife trafficking and CITES implementation.

Through this we were also able to help the lawyers engage directly with NWCD, engage a specialist translator, and provide direct input on revised the Wildlife Protection Law, which has now been submitted directly to the parliament, via the Union Attorney General's Office.

Output 4. Increased coverage in domestic media of wildlife trafficking issues and wildlife crime prevention successes and failures.

The most significant achievement is in the planned awareness campaign on Elephant Poaching – "Voices for MOMOS". We have been working with an alliance of 8 large conservation organisations, on this campaign, which aims to raise awareness of the Asian elephant poaching crisis, and support the governments response through the Myanmar Elephant Conservation Action Plan (MECAP). This campaign will be launched at a Press Conference in Yangon on 1 November 2017.

A 2 day training course for 20 journalists on reporting on the Illegal Wildlife Trade was organized in Mandalay, in parallel with the law enforcement training. Networking and information sharing between journalists and WCS' communications team is firmly established, and has led to over 14 media articles.

Other relevant progress and partnerships

We hosted a field visit by Senior Staff from the UK Embassy in May 2017, which was able to learn about many of Myanmar's wildlife trade issues first-hand. We have continued to provide advice to UK Embassy personnel on Wildlife issues whenever needed.

We attended a regional event (organised by APEC) in Vietnam on corruption, money laundering and wildlife crime, which was attended by numerous government and regional bodies, including INTERPOL, UNODC and key enforcement bodies. This was very useful in raising the profile of our work, and developing regional links, as well as building our knowledge of the links between wildlife crime and other serious transnational organised crimes.

We held a high-profile symposium at the International Congress for Conservation Biology, the major global meeting of conservation scientists, with over 1600 attendees, in Cartagena, Colombia. As well as enhancing collaboration and learning between Asia and with Latin America, we led a side event, which included criminologists, lawyers, social scientists and other researchers to develop a global working group on innovative and inter-disciplinary approaches to wildlife crime issues.

We have engaged closely with the planning of the MyPol project, a large EU-funded project to support the reform of the Myanmar Police Force. This includes advising them on government engagement, and training for enforcement personnel. This has significant potential to be a way to embed our training into the Myanmar Police Force's basic and ongoing training system.

We continue to be active on the NGO Working Group on Wildlife Trade, hosting one meeting and attending a second during this period. We have also used support from the IWT Challenge Fund to leverage additional funding from several sources:

Along with UK-based organisation, Stop Ivory, we applied for and secured additional funding from the UK Embassy in Burma. This project will support the government to improve the management of Ivory stockpiles and other confiscated wildlife parts, and is highly complementary to this IWT project.

We commenced our project funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, which will provide co-funding to the IWT project, primarily for the work on the China side of the border. We are in the final stages of contracting new funding support from the German government, which will also provide co-funding to this project, as well as our regional Counter Wildlife Trade work.

Management arrangements.

The review of our Year 1 report requested additional details on project management mechanisms:

Oversight and backstopping comes from our Regional Counter Wildlife Trade Coordinator, Dr. Scott Robertson, who is based in Vietnam. Senior project management, finance and leadership is given by our Senior Management, represented by our Country Director, U Than Myint, and our Finance Director and team, who are based in Yangon. Senior Management meetings are held monthly to track progress on projects, and troubleshoot as needed. Technical Advice and direct project management is provided by the Project Lead, Dr. Alex Diment. The project's key field office, in Lashio, is led by the Wildlife Trade Coordinator. An existing office in Mandalay (the usual home of our Dolphin team) is also occasionally used by the field teams.

The framework of cooperation with the government is managed through an MOU between WCS and the Forest Department. Coordination meetings are held with the government's Task-force every 6-months. Several other partnerships are managed through the NGO working group, which meets at least every 4 months. In addition, ad-hoc meetings are held regularly with existing or potential partners.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt 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.

Expenditure has been delayed, in part due to the slower than expected start-up phase of the project (outlined in HYR1), as well as the budget re-profiling from the beginning of the project. There have also been some delays due to the lengthy process for receiving government permissions for our work, which has been unexpectedly longer, due to the workload of NWCD, with many demands on their staff from international cooperation projects, as well as numerous staff currently studying overseas.

This is expected to lead to a significant under-spend during Year 2; we will be submitting a change request for a 1-year extension to enhance project impact and sustainability.

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: For previous changes but not yet for the new request

Formal change request submitted: Not yet

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

Yes No Estimated underspend:

We will submit a change request for a 1-year extension, along with a rebudget, in the coming weeks.

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

None.