



Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund Half Year Report (due 31st October 2021)

Project reference	IWT081
Project title	Enabling and promoting communities to tackle IWT in Southern Myanmar
Country(ies)	Myanmar
Lead organisation	Fauna & Flora International
Partners(s)	Freeland, KFD
Project leader	Saw Soe Aung
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	2021_HYR2
Project website/blog/social media	www.fauna-flora.org

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

Due to a third wave of the COVID-19 virus outbreak in Myanmar (and associated mandatory restrictions) and the country's unstable political situation, many planned activities (particularly those involving meetings, travel and/or workshop/training sessions), were postponed during the reporting period. However, we were able to adjust some activities to occur online, or via mobile phones, during the reporting period.

Progress during the report period is as follows:

1. The tiger and prey camera-trap survey is on-going and, with the support of local communities, a total of 26 camera traps have been deployed, in 8-grid cells (each cell is 4km x 4km), focused on previously identified tiger core movement areas. In May 2021, FFI team worked with local communities from the Ywahilu area to inspect camera traps and collect any data. Normally, the traps are checked every month, but because of restrictions on movement, imposed by the Military Government, the team was only able to inspect 11 of the 26 trap points. Based on camera-trap results, 31 species (mammal, birds, and reptile), including target species (tiger, elephant and pangolin), were recorded. A total of six prey species of interest, (Gaur, Chinese serow, Muntjac species, Wild Pig, Malayan Tapir and Mouse deer species) were recorded. During the reporting period, we found no signs of pangolin trade or other illegal activities. Three hunters were recorded on camera-traps.
2. The HEC work also continues, with three target communities now actively involved in establishing a system of community protection using Community Elephant Guards. Volunteer focal points in each village are in regular contact with project staff and FFI's village facilitator, or the nearest Forest Department, via telephone, providing up-to-date information on elephant observations and/or human-elephant conflict events, in each village. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent restrictions on travel and movements, the project team was not able to provide HEC mitigation training to the Forest Department and Village Conservation Groups. The following table shows the case of human elephant conflicts during the reporting period.

No	HEC Village (Area)	Month (Cases of HEC)						Note
		April	May	June	July	August	Sep	
1	Yuzana	Raided oil palm plantation	Raided oil palm plantation	Raided oil palm plantation	Raided oil palm plantation	Raided oil palm plantation	Raided oil palm plantation	Group of elephant raid oil palm plantation every month in Yuzana oil palm plantation
2	War Chaung	X	X	X	X	X	Raided betel nut plantation	
3	Ban Khwan	X	X	X	X	X	X	No HEC incidents
4	Chaung Mon Ngar	raided betel nut plantation	raided betel nut plantation	raided betel nut plantation	raided betel nut plantation	raided betel nut plantation	raided betel nut plantation	Total 100 Acres (20 owners)
5	Bodar	X	X	One elephant dead	X	X	X	One elephant female was dead in the old canal
6	Pan Mone Chaung	X	raided betel nut plantation	X	X	X	X	
7	Yie Ngan Gyi Chaung	X	X	X	X	X	X	No HEC incidents
8	Sin Kaw Chaung	Raided betel nut plantation	X	X	X	X	X	
9	Kyauk Gyi	X	X	X	X	X	X	No HEC incidents

3. As mentioned in the annual report, three small livelihoods grants were previously provided to key targeted hunters from Mawtaung road, Mandai and 14-mile villages and the Ywahilu, all of which rely heavily on hunting for livelihood. Due to the political situation and COVID-19 restrictions, FFI project team was not able to join the monitoring trip. However, FFI village facilitators conducted monitoring and provided regular updates to the project team in Myeik. Based on this information, the result of yearly income from the main target villages is shown in the following table.

Sr	Village Name	Activity	Income (April-September)	Beneficiaries
1	Green Initiative (No 3, 5, 8)	Pig= 8 chicken= 144 Viss		6 hunters
2	Pyigyiman dai	chicken= 105 Viss Duck= 15 Viss		8 hunters
3	Ywahilu	Pig=20 chicken= 100 Viss	This information will be provided in the upcoming annual report.	15 members including hunter

4. Based on reports provided by KFD on the activities of the newly formed Lenya Wildlife Protection Unit (WPU) as part of their sub-grant, they undertook the following:

From April 15 to 27, 2021, WPU in Lenya carried out patrolling for 12 days. Four members of Wildlife Protections Unit joined patrols, recording direct and indirect sightings. In direct sightings, they observed eight signs and tracks of wildlife (such as gibbon calling, a group of monkeys, cutting wood, forest clearance and a group of 5 hunters). As for indirect sighting, the patrol team saw bear claw marks.

From May 17 to 28, Lenya WPU patrolled for 12 days. Only five WPU members patrolled. During the patrol period, they recorded three kinds of indirect observation of secondary sign (Elephant foot print, peacock sign, small scale logging with five logger) and two direct observations of calls (Gibbon song and calling of Dusky langur).

5. As part of a sub-grant, Freeland, reported undertaking the following activities in Southern Thailand in Prachuab Kiri Khan, Chumphon and Ranong provinces bordering Southern Myanmar during the reporting period:

(i) Identifying border crossings:

To learn more about transboundary crime, passage of local people and to deter criminality through warning signs and reactive monitoring. The team met with Department of National Parks staff, Royal Forest Department (RFD), Border army and Border Patrol Police, to learn about their understanding of illegal use of the crossings, recent trends in crime (wildlife, drug or human trafficking) and catalogue as much information as possible.

Output – Confidential report with a map of border crossings, their size and frequency of use, phone signal strength, and recommendations for placing signs and cameras. Anecdotal updates about crimes at each (if available). This activity is currently on-going and the information will be updated in November when the next site visit will occur.

(ii) Purchase and use of GSM Cameras

To monitor border crossings and poaching problem areas, Ten Spartan1 GSM cameras were purchased directly from the manufacturer and are now in hand, ready to donate to the three focal sites. The poaching situation at some sites is particularly intense and there is an appeal from the parks to get the cameras out in the forest as soon as possible. This is supported by the survey team which, in 2021 and along with Park rangers in Sadeth Naikrom-Krom Luang Chumprom (SDNK) North (Upper), intervened in 66 wildlife poaching cases.

These cameras are a particularly useful tool when integrated into park protection activities. However, successful interdictions of poachers require stand-by ranger teams ready to leave quickly, have the right equipment, skilled leadership and, most importantly, motivation. They will be coordinating the use of the cameras in conjunction with one ex-situ Department of National Parks (DNP) official who will evaluate the ranger's performance.

Recently, at another location rangers stopped two major poaching events and arrested four poachers armed with expensive high-powered rifles, complete with telescopic sights. Around SDNK the rangers informed them many poachers are quite affluent and owners of rubber and oil palm plantations who poach for sport and additional income, rather than subsistence. This is not the case for all though, as some recent interdictions demonstrate.

The team is now planning a short (cost share) enforcement ranger training course for SDNK North (Upper) during November. They will use Freeland time at the park to train officials how to use the cameras and set up the management and response processes, from their settings, placement (and camouflaging) for optimum results, to accessing images during that time. They would expect results to be obtained within a few days, with the newly trained rangers conducting rapid responses to incoming images of poachers.

(iii) Gap assessment to understand conservation connectivity of PAs in Thailand

During visits to SDNK wildlife sanctuaries the team have been working with officials to gather GIS data relating to the various protected areas along the Thai/Myanmar border. It appears the entire border area is integrated into various designations of protection. These include the lowest level, Protected Forest, equivalent to reserved forest (RF) which are under control of the RFD, and then three further IUCN Protected Area designations; Non-Hunting Area (NHA), Wildlife Sanctuary (WS) and National Park (NP). Some of these areas have been visited, but others still require ground-truthing to discover more about the state of their forests, levels of encroachment and ease of access, including passage to the border.

The formal protected areas have regular infrastructure expected, including headquarters and sub-stations. There are randomly placed government buildings in some areas, but it remains uncertain how the areas are managed or even if regular presence of officials is maintained. More research on this will be conducted over the next project period as this will identify the weaker points of protection that are being exploited by Thai poachers accessing Myanmar.

(iv) Designing and making warning banners for key access routes in Thailand

This section of the project has moved forward well. The design, layout and translations have proceeded on schedule and a draft version of the vinyl banner is now under a final review with FFI in Myanmar. They have previously produced similar banners in conjunction with various law enforcement agencies and it is hoped that they will give their approval for the use of logos on the banner; this adds weight to the message, demonstrates collaboration and fosters greater cooperation between the partners.

As all partner law enforcement agencies have the responsibility to conduct such awareness and outreach, the banners help fulfil their mandate and are generally popular. These awareness and warning banners are in three languages, Thai, Burmese and Karen (Sgaw), which will inform most residents in the area in their own language.

(v) Servicing wildlife survey cameras

To understand more about key wildlife species and their threats, Freeland has been collaborating with the three wildlife sanctuaries, and previously one national park, in this border area for over three years, developing a better understanding of the wildlife diversity, distribution and abundance. Given that there is no physical barrier between the two countries' landscapes, species regularly migrate between Thailand and Myanmar. There are even examples of individual tigers, recorded in Thailand, passing through Myanmar for more than 200kms, to another protected area further north of the Isthmus in Thailand. The network of protected areas both sides of the border provide an ecological corridor conducive to wildlife conservation.

The on-going wildlife monitoring has positively identified the presence of high-value species typically targeted by poachers, including endangered elephants and Indochinese tigers, and critically endangered Indochinese leopards and Sunda pangolins. Surveys have also helped map the distribution of carnivore prey species and the threats faced by wildlife in the area.

During the last quarter we conducted wildlife survey's to Sadej Naikrom South and Sadej Naikrom North (Upper); however surveys to Sadej Naikrom North (South) were not possible due to continual cases of covid in the communities around the park, which have affected the rangers as well as villagers.

At the time of writing the cameras have been left in place in SDNK N lower since June 2021 (the usual cycle is two months between checks), and it is highly likely the cameras will have been

damaged by moisture in this time. During each trip rangers are taught how to use the cameras, complete data sheets, and help review images post survey. Basic analysis includes counting independent captures from each survey and compiling simple presence check lists. Photographic evidence demonstrates tigers and leopards are both present and at least six prey species (Red muntjak, Fea's muntjak, Serow, Wild boar, sambar and gaur). To date, Banteng have not been recorded in any of the three sanctuaries.

2a. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months (for COVID-19 specific delays/problems, please use 2b). Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

In Myanmar, the number of people contracting the COVID-19 virus during the "third wave" exceeded the combined total of the first and second waves, according to Ministry of Health and Sports (MOHS). For this reason, all activities involving engagement with the Forest Department and communities have been impacted and delayed.

Similarly, due to the military coup and to covid-19 restrictions, much of the field work has been postponed, for the safety of staff, and until further announcements from the Ministry of Health and Sports and authorities indicate otherwise.

Fortunately, as COVID-19 has been steadily declining since August 2021, we are currently discussing with the Department of Forestry and communities (successfully registered VDCs) to develop a workplan in accordance with project log-frame. We are optimistic that the project activities will soon be able to fully resume.

2b. Please outline any specific issues which your project has encountered as a result of COVID-19. Where you have adapted your project activities in response to the pandemic, please briefly outline how you have done so here. Explain what residual impact there may be on your project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

As detailed above, to slow down the spread of the third wave of coronavirus in Myanmar, the authority strictly announced the lockdown from township to township. For this reason, it has been difficult to do all activities, especially those relying on community engagement, workshops, training, and public meetings.

Fortunately, we have overcome some activities during the reporting period by mobile network (Viber group, phone, and messenger).

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

Discussed with LTS: No

Formal change request submitted: No

Received confirmation of change acceptance No

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:

3b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully. Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a rebudget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a rebudget, so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.

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

The rainy season has been particularly heavy this year and some areas are still not accessible. One particular crossing requires fording a deep river 33 times between the access point and the border. This area has a permanent presence of the Thai Border Patrol Police. Another crossing sees soldiers from the Mon army crossing from Myanmar to Thailand to buy provisions. The situation concerning covid-19 has restricted access to some areas e.g. at the time of writing Sadej Naikrom North (lower) has infections among rangers and we have been advised not to travel there for about another month.

We are confident we can deliver a number of activities as the travel restrictions are being lifted now and we are in discussion with the Forest Department about travel permits and activities for the next few months.

If you were asked to provide a response to this year's annual report review with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

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 DO NOT send these in the same email.****

Please send your **completed report by email** to 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 e.g. Subject: IWT001 Half Year Report.**