

## Illegal Trade of Wildlife in South Asia



South Asia region covers an area of approximately 42,916,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Comprising of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. It encompasses 16 of the 238 globally important eco-regions), notably the Terai-Duar Savannah and Grassland eco-region across Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal, the Sundarbans Mangroves of Bangladesh and India, Indus River Delta of India and Pakistan, the Andaman Sea and the Maldives and Lakshadweep Atolls. These eco-regions support exceptionally rich biodiversity and a huge array of unique, threatened and endangered species (e.g. the Asiatic lion, tiger, snow leopard, Asian elephant, one-horned rhinoceros, and eight of the world's 15 crane species). Within South Asia, India and Nepal together contribute nearly 10% of the global biodiversity while occupying merely 2.5% of the global land area.

Because of this richness in biodiversity, South Asia has been one of the prime targets of international organized wildlife crime networks taking advantage of poverty-related conflicts and instigating people to commit wildlife crimes for the ultimate benefit of rich international consumers. During the past two decades, there has been a sudden increase in the demand for wild animal and plants from South Asia. Seizures in many countries of the region, of parts and derivatives from wildlife - including tiger, leopard, elephant, ornamental fish, birds, and rare medicinal plants - are a pointer to the fact that rare and endangered fauna and flora of the region are in great demand locally as well as globally leading to unsustainable harvest and trade. The trade is diverse, ranging from live animals and plants to a vast array of wildlife products derived from them, including food, medicines, trophies, skin and hide, exotic leather goods, wooden musical instruments, timber and tourist curios.

While legal trade can be monitored and managed, illegal trade in wild animals and plants poses a major challenge to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in South Asia. Investigations have also revealed that illegal hunting and trade is accomplished through a deep-rooted and well-established clandestine chain of operators who have developed strong nexus with international wildlife crime network.

However, as most of the countries in South Asia are parties to international conventions concerned with the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity to combat the threat, leaders in the international community – especially from supply and demand countries – need to collectively expand and deepen their levels of cooperation. Better and shared information will position governments to counter this transnational crime more effectively.

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