

Illegal Wildlife Trade as a theme for planning

CONVENORS: Chris Shepherd and Caroline Lees

AIM: The aim of the working group is to explore the question: When planning action for species impacted by illegal wildlife trade, how can we get more benefits to more species?

BACKGROUND: CPSG traditionally supports groups – government agencies, NGOs, other SSC Specialist Groups – to plan the conservation of single species. It is now scaling up its operations and developing new tools to support more planning, for more species. A strand of this new work involves grouping species that can be expected to respond in a similar way, to similar sets of planned conservation actions. One of the ways in which we can group species is by threat, and one of the most challenging threats to wildlife in Southeast Asia (as well as in other regions) is illegal wildlife trade. The workshop will consider two broad themes:

1) Increasing the efficiency of existing work

There are examples of where action taken for high profile species could have made a difference to many other, similarly affected taxa, but where this opportunity was missed. Taxon-focused groups often work in isolation, leading to duplication of effort, wasted resources and missed opportunities. There must be ways to do this better.

Single-species workshops have been held recently for several species affected by illegal trade in Southeast Asia (e.g. Helmeted Hornbills, Sunda and Formosan Pangolins, Sun Bears). Within these workshops, small working groups on illegal trade issues were formed which gave rise to actions which are broadly similar across plans and which provide opportunities for inter-species consolidation and collaboration on actions. Further, there may be other, less well-known species that could “piggy-back” on action taken for those higher-profile taxa and there may be simple, achievable ways of maximizing those opportunities.

2) A threat-focused workshop process

Asian song-birds provide an example of a multi-species planning initiative for illegal trade affected species, which is now moving forward successfully to implementation. There is scope to develop a CPSG workshop process that targets multiple species simultaneously but which looks solely at the threat of illegal trade (rather than attempting to tackle all relevant threats concurrently). This new workshop process could differ from CPSG’s standard format in: the types and sources of information gathered and collated in advance of the workshop; the types of stakeholders invited to participate; the boundaries of the system that we aim to influence through planning; the working group topics; the planning outputs; the framework set up to drive plan implementation.

PROCESS: The workshop will begin with 2-3 short, scene-setting presentations (20-30 minutes including questions):

1) Introduction to the issues and what we are trying to achieve

2) Learning from mistakes: case-studies of opportunities missed

Following this the group will:

- Develop a trade-focused “threats map” for a flagship species for which illegal wildlife trade is the major threat. The map will work from poacher through trafficking routes to consumer, including both direct and indirect threats
- Add to this, at pertinent points on the map, broad threat mitigation strategies
- Use this to look at the range of areas in which multiple species could be gathered under the umbrella of a plan for a single-species
- Discuss how this could be made operational in the context of a CPSG planning process.

OUTCOMES: A first step towards a CPSG multi-species planning process centered around a primary threat of illegal wildlife trade.