



Leopards losing out at CITES as Parties let reporting slide - August 2011

EIA and WPSI urge the CITES Standing Committee to agree upon the minimum information required from Parties to be able to assess the implementation of Res. Conf 12.5 (Rev. CoP15) for *all* Asian big cats.

EIA and WPSI are concerned that, despite the perilous situation facing leopards and their Appendix-I listing, only Israel, Thailand and India have provided information on leopards under Res. Conf 12.5 (Rev CoP15) to SC61.

Of the 32 Appendix I Asian big cat range states these three are the only countries to have submitted any information on species other than tiger, in reference to the implementation of Res. Conf 12.5 (Rev. CoP15). No Parties have reported on snow leopard (*Uncia uncia*) or Asiatic lion (*Panthera leo ssp. persica*), even though they are subject to the same illegal trade and demand as tigers and leopards.

Several Asian leopard subspecies are listed on IUCN Red List as endangered or critically endangered. Leopard parts and derivatives continue to be seized regularly, China's skin registration scheme has reopened domestic trade in skins, and intentional killings of leopards as a result of conflict with humans occur with alarming regularity.



Framegrab of leopard skin shown by illegal trader, Western China, 2011 © EIA

Despite these significant threats, Parties appear either unwilling or disinterested in reporting on either the status of leopards within their national boundaries or trade in leopard parts and derivatives.

Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev CoP15) suggests a range of measures that enforcement agencies in range states could employ to combat the illegal trade in Asian big cat parts and derivatives.

These include the gathering and use of intelligence, directed investigation techniques, inter-agency cooperation and an emphasis on prosecution.

Yet reporting on these themes for leopards is scant. Overall reporting on Asian big cats is not in standardised format and there are variations in the utility and depth of information presented.¹

It would be informative if range states could report on the following enforcement actions regarding leopard trade, for example:

- Number of leopard-trade cases identified
- Number of leopard-trade cases prosecuted and convictions obtained
- Demonstrated increase in conviction rates against detected cases
- Number of directed and coordinated transboundary operations aimed at leopard trade
- Number of ECOMESSAGES shared regarding leopard trade

Questions over populations

Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev CoP15) also emphasises the importance of biological and distribution data to the implementation of the Convention. The IUCN Red List shows the most recent population information for four Asian leopard subspecies dates to 2007. The last all-India leopard population estimate was 2001 and numbered 9,884.²

The absence of reliable population data is alarming when compared with the continued, widespread reports of illegal trade. While seizures are important, the focus should be on prosecuting the actual criminals who perpetuate the trade. Otherwise, criminals can continue

undeterred and further contribute to the decline of the leopard.

Illegal trade rife and continuing

Since 2001, WPSI have reported 1,696 leopards killed due to poaching and trade alone in India.³ This is an average of 160 a year.

Elsewhere in Asia, since 2001, at least 891 leopard skins, many pieces of skin, 128kg* bone, three skeletons, and additional unweighted quantities of bones and carcasses, along with live leopards destined for the pet trade, have been seized. At least 69 snow leopard skins have been seized, along with other body parts including skeletons, skulls and carcasses of unreported quantities; seven clouded leopard skins were seized, four carcasses, one live, a skeleton and bones of unreported quantity. Then in 2007, the only remaining wild population of Asiatic lions was the target of poachers seeking bones to supply the international market as a replacement to tiger bone.⁴

Clearly, leopards are being hit hard. As with other Asian big cats, they are poached to feed the demand in skins, bones and other parts in the international illegal trade. The skins are traded for luxury home décor, taxidermy and bribery purposes in consuming countries, especially China. The bones are used in traditional Chinese medicine.

Over the course of consecutive annual investigations in western China from 2005 to 2009, EIA-WPSI investigators viewed at least 332 full leopard skins for sale at just a few locations. Over the period 2005-2006 alone, over 400 traditional costumes with leopard skins were viewed.

In just one location, Linxia, in Gansu Province of China, 305 full leopard skins were viewed. Three quarters of all the Asian big cat skins seen at that location were leopard skins. Investigations have not previously been specifically and solely directed to identify bone markets, yet leopard skulls, claws and teeth have nevertheless also been identified in Lhasa, and leopard bone, skulls and claws in Linxia.

The latest intelligence from the field shows that enforcement is still languishing whilst leopards continue to be poached for skin and bone and China has redoubled the threat with its skin registration scheme.

Latest intelligence from China

China states in SC61 Doc 41 Annex 2 that trade in Asian big cats has been effectively deterred, yet EIA's sources confirmed in 2011 that nine traders and their associated business premises, which EIA and WPSI have repeatedly documented over the

years as engaged in the illegal trade, are still selling wildlife products in western China with impunity. This includes continued open sales of Asian big cat skins and bones.

EIA's sources have also reported that TCM pharmacies visited in south-east China are selling leopard bone products including bone-strengthening wine, *Dahuo Luowan*. All the manufactured dates were identified as 2009-2011, and all the products were accompanied with SFA stickers.

China's reopening of trade

China's skin registration scheme (SFA Notification 206), under which owners of tiger and leopard skins from "legal" sources can apply for registration, has reopened the door for domestic trade. China has not been forthcoming in clarifying the purpose and nature of this scheme, including how "legality" is defined.

Threats to African range states

During interactions with EIA and WPSI's undercover investigators, traders in China more often than not claim that leopards are sourced from India, some leopard skins have been said to be from Africa. If true, this situation poses serious threats to the future of not only Asian leopards, but to their African counterparts which might be increasingly targeted as a substitute source. Sourcing substitutes of Asian species from Africa is already occurring with other mammal populations, such as lion and pangolin.

References

1. As discussed in TRAFFIC-WWF, *Deciding the Tiger's Future* (SC58 Inf.9) with reference to discussions at SC57.
2. <http://www.iucnredlist.org/apps/redlist/details/15954/0>. Notes Indian estimate is considered inaccurate. See also Dr. Ravi Chellam in Sanctuary Magazine, *India's Leopard Problem – Is Panthera Pardus Vanishing Faster Than Panthera Tigris?*
3. WPSI <http://www.wpsi-india.org/statistics/leopard.php>. To date retrieved, 5th August 2011.
4. EIA records, and from TRAFFIC, *TRAFFIC Bulletin Seizures and Prosecutions March 1997-December 2010*.

*Includes one seizure in which source states mixed tiger and leopard bone but individual species quantities not given.