

WHY ARE BIG CATS KILLED FOR TRADE?

JAGUAR: Near threatened.

Pop. Decreasing.

At least 776 teeth seized from illegal trade since 2014

SKINS

FOR LUXURY HOME DÉCOR, TAXIDERMY, CLOTHING, ACCESSORIES

Big cat skins are used to make rugs, wall hangings and taxidermy specimens. Off-cuts may be used for clothing or accessories.

The market for big cat skins ranges from elite consumers, who may purchase tiger skins, cleanly prepared from captive sources, or cheaper skins from wild tigers. Skins of leopards, snow leopards and clouded leopards are cheaper alternatives, affordable to non-elite consumers.

Unchecked and growing demand for big cat parts and products, primarily from Chinese consumers but also Vietnamese, is threatening all the world's big cats. Most demand is not for traditional uses, but for luxury products and prestigious gifts. Different body parts are in demand for a variety of different uses.

While tigers are traditionally the most sought after, all big cats are falling prey to this demand – parts of other species are often sold to consumers in place of tiger.



LION: Vulnerable.
Pop. 23,000-39,000, decreasing.
3,321 skeletons exported to Laos and
Vietnam 2007-2016

Right, top: Tiger bone
wine for sale on WeChat

Right, bottom: Tiger bone
glue for sale on WeChat

BONES

FOR TONIC WINES, TRADITIONAL MEDICINES, CARVINGS

When most people think of trade in tiger parts, they think first of use of tiger bone in traditional Chinese medicine. Tiger bone is indeed ground up for production of traditional medicines in China, despite this being illegal.

However, the biggest market for big cat bone appears to be for production of tiger bone wine, consumed as a prestige luxury product as a tonic or to enhance male virility, often given as a gift or non-financial bribe. In China and other production centres, tiger bone wine is usually made by soaking bones in rice wine. In Vietnam, tiger bone is often boiled down to form tiger bone 'glue', which is then mixed with wine and consumed.

Leopard bone is used in the same consumer markets in production of wines and medicines, often sold to consumers as tiger. So-called 'leopard bone' might come from leopards, clouded leopards or snow leopards.

Lion and jaguar bone is also consumed in similar ways to tiger bone. There appears to be some demand for lion bone glue in Vietnam, but in many cases lion is sold to consumers as tiger.¹ Recent reports have revealed a market for jaguar bone glue among Chinese communities in South America.²

Big cat bones are also sold to Chinese consumers as jewellery or carved into trinkets.

TEETH AND CLAWS

FOR JEWELLERY AND AMULETS

Big cat teeth and claws are in high demand, particularly among men in China and Vietnam who wear them as status symbols. They are widely available in physical markets and online.

Teeth of other species – particularly lion and clouded leopard – may be sold to consumers as tiger. Trafficking in jaguar teeth from South America to markets in Asia has recently emerged as a serious threat.

Far left: Leopard skins
on sale in Linxia, China

Left: Stuffed tigers for sale
in Laos



PHYSICAL MARKETS

HOW ARE CONSUMERS ACCESSING BIG CAT PRODUCTS?

Chinese consumers purchase big cat products in persistent physical trade hubs in China and in towns near the border in Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. In some of these locations, such as cities across the Tibetan Plateau, few big cat products are now openly visible for sale following increased enforcement efforts, but trade continues 'under the counter'. In other locations, such as Mong La in Myanmar and markets in Laos, trade is conducted openly without fear of enforcement. Chinese buyers also buy parts from captive-bred tigers in Vietnam.³

ONLINE MARKETS

Sales of big cat products are rampant on many online platforms, particularly on social media such as Facebook and WeChat. Chinese buyers may purchase items from sellers based in Laos or Vietnam, who will then post the items across the border.

SNOW LEOPARD: Vulnerable.
Pop. 3,920-6,390, decreasing.
At least 292 seized from illegal trade since 2000


Consumers from China and Vietnam are the key consumers of big cat parts and products.

Big cats killed illegally in south Asia are smuggled across the Himalayas into China, including via mountain passes along China's borders with India and Nepal.

Parts and products of wild and captive-sourced tigers enter China along its southern border with Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. Many facilities with captive tigers in China have also been implicated in trade in tiger parts and products.

Tiger parts and products also enter China from Russia in the north-east of the country.

Parts from big cats sourced outside Asia – including jaguars in Latin America and lions and leopards in Africa – are transported by air or air mail to consumers in Asia.



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TACKLING BIG CAT TRADE - LEGISLATION AND ENFORCEMENT

Illegal big cat trade is serious transnational organised crime, impacting not just big cats and their ecosystems but exacerbating wider criminality, corruption and governance issues and affecting communities in range, transit and consumer states. Some of the individuals involved in illegal trade in big cats are involved in other serious crimes, such as drug and human trafficking.

To effectively tackle big cat trade, governments and enforcement agencies must treat it as a serious organised crime, and should focus on intelligence-led investigations, with inter-agency and international cooperation where appropriate. In many cases, the platforms for such cooperation already exist, such as regional wildlife enforcement networks and UN agreements on transnational organised crime and corruption – but political will is needed to put these into action.

Data on seizures of big cat parts and products from illegal trade raise some serious questions. For example, although we know teeth and claws are very prominent in illegal trade and highly desired by consumers, seizure figures do not reflect this, suggesting most are slipping through the net. More intelligence-led investigations, including on social media, are urgently needed.

Moreover, it is not enough to simply seize items from trade – seizures must be followed up by prosecutions and deterrent sentencing. If criminals face no consequences after items are seized, they may simply treat the loss as a business cost and harvest more of the wildlife product to compensate. In order to secure the most deterrent sentences, prosecutors and judiciary should make use of the full range of applicable legislation in wildlife cases, including anti-money laundering and anti-corruption laws, and should utilise seizure of assets and illegal income alongside fines and custodial sentences.

Top: Big cat parts openly for sale in Laos.

LEOPARD IN ASIA: Vulnerable.
Pop. 12,000-17,000, decreasing.
At least 5,042 seized from illegal trade since 2000

CLOUDED LEOPARD: Vulnerable.

Pop. decreasing.

At least 95 seized from illegal trade since 2000

POLICIES STIMULATING DEMAND: LEGAL TRADE


The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) currently permits export of lion parts from captive animals in South Africa. Recent studies have found that Laos and Vietnam are the biggest importers and that lion parts then enter illegal international trade to reach consumer markets, where lion parts are often marketed to consumers as tiger. This supply perpetuates the desirability of big cat products and complicates efforts to tackle illegal big cat trade.

Laws in China, Laos, Myanmar and South Africa currently allow domestic trade in big cat parts and products, including large-scale commercial trade of leopard bone products in China.⁴ Legal markets for big cat products serve to make them seem acceptable in the eye of the consumer and provide opportunities for 'laundering' of illegally sourced products.



Top: Tonic wine containing leopard bone, sold legally in China.

Bottom: Lions in a captive facility in China



TIGER: Endangered.
Pop. <4,000, decreasing.
At least 1,912 seized from illegal trade
since 2000

POLICIES STIMULATING DEMAND: COMMERCIAL KEEPING AND BREEDING

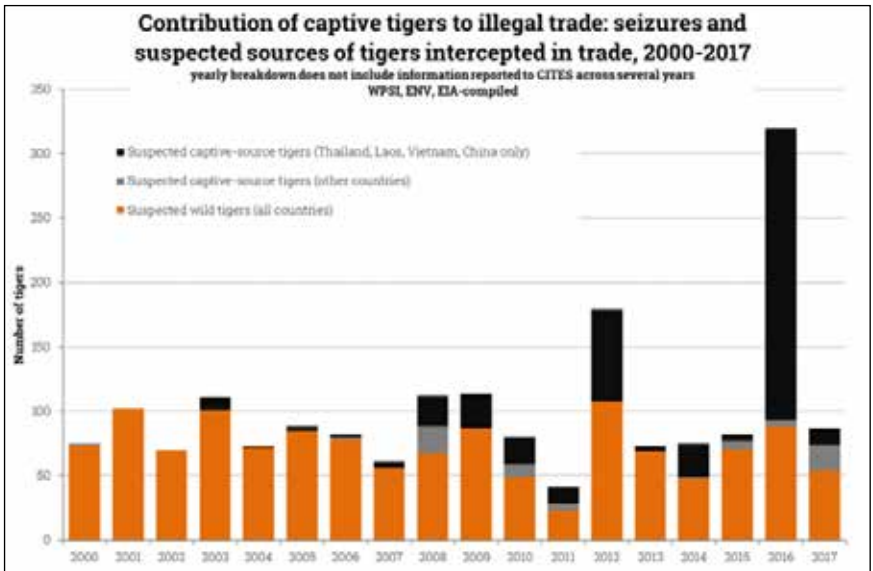
Demand for tiger parts and products is exacerbated by the widespread availability of parts of captive tigers; 7,000-8,000 tigers are held in captivity in facilities in China, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and South Africa.⁵ The vast majority of these facilities offer no conservation benefit to wild tigers and many have been implicated in trade in tiger parts and products. Trade in captive tiger parts exacerbates the perceived availability and acceptability of tiger products among consumers and undermines enforcement and demand-reduction efforts.

Captive facilities have become increasingly significant sources of tiger parts in illegal trade (see Chart 1 overleaf).

Captive tiger facilities in China, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and South Africa are of particular concern due to a combination of weak laws or enforcement regulating trade from captive facilities; incidents of trade in tiger parts and products from and through captive facilities; and links between organised crime networks and tiger facilities.

Facilities implicated in trade in tiger parts and products vary considerably in size and nature, from large-scale businesses with hundreds of tigers, even 1000+ tigers, in speed-breeding operations, to small "backyard" operations where tigers are raised for slaughter but not bred from.

Chart 1:



Below: Examples of the different scale of captive tiger operations engaged in trade in parts and derivatives:

Name of facility	Country	Number of tigers	Involvement in trade ⁶
Xiongsen Bear and Tiger Mountain Village	China	1,300	Has a brewery to produce tiger bone wine, which is sold online. Some sales of tiger bone appear to have been permitted by a Government scheme.
Vinasakhone Tiger Farm	Laos	69	Reported to sell tiger bone 'glue', and repeatedly implicated in tiger trafficking to and from Thailand and Vietnam. No satisfactory explanation for the disappearance of 300 tigers in two years, from 400 in 2016 to 69 in 2018.
Star Tiger Zoo	Thailand	6	Owner was arrested for trafficking tigers from Malaysia and Thailand to Vietnam via Laos.
Numerous informal facilities in Nghe An province	Vietnam	Kept individually or in small numbers.	'Backyard' operations where tigers are kept but not bred from. Raised for the purpose of slaughter for Chinese and Vietnamese buyers engaged in illegal trade.
Voi Game Lodge	South Africa	Around 20	Canned hunting of tigers has been reported and tiger bones are allegedly illegally exported as lion bones.

The threat posed to wild tigers by the keeping and breeding of tigers for trade in their parts and products has been recognised on multiple occasions by the international community, including in a Decision adopted by CITES in 2007 that tigers should not be bred for trade in their parts and products. Despite this, China, Thailand, Vietnam and South Africa have

yet to commit to phasing out commercial scale breeding of tigers or the keeping of tigers for trade in their parts and derivatives. While Laos has announced the intention to phase out its tiger farms, at present the proposal is to convert them to safari park-style operations. This would, in effect, reward the criminal enterprises associated with at least five of the facilities.



Captive tigers at the Golden Triangle SEZ, Laos

HOW EIA AND PARTNERS ARE RESPONDING TO THE CAPTIVE TIGER TRADE

UK Government Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund

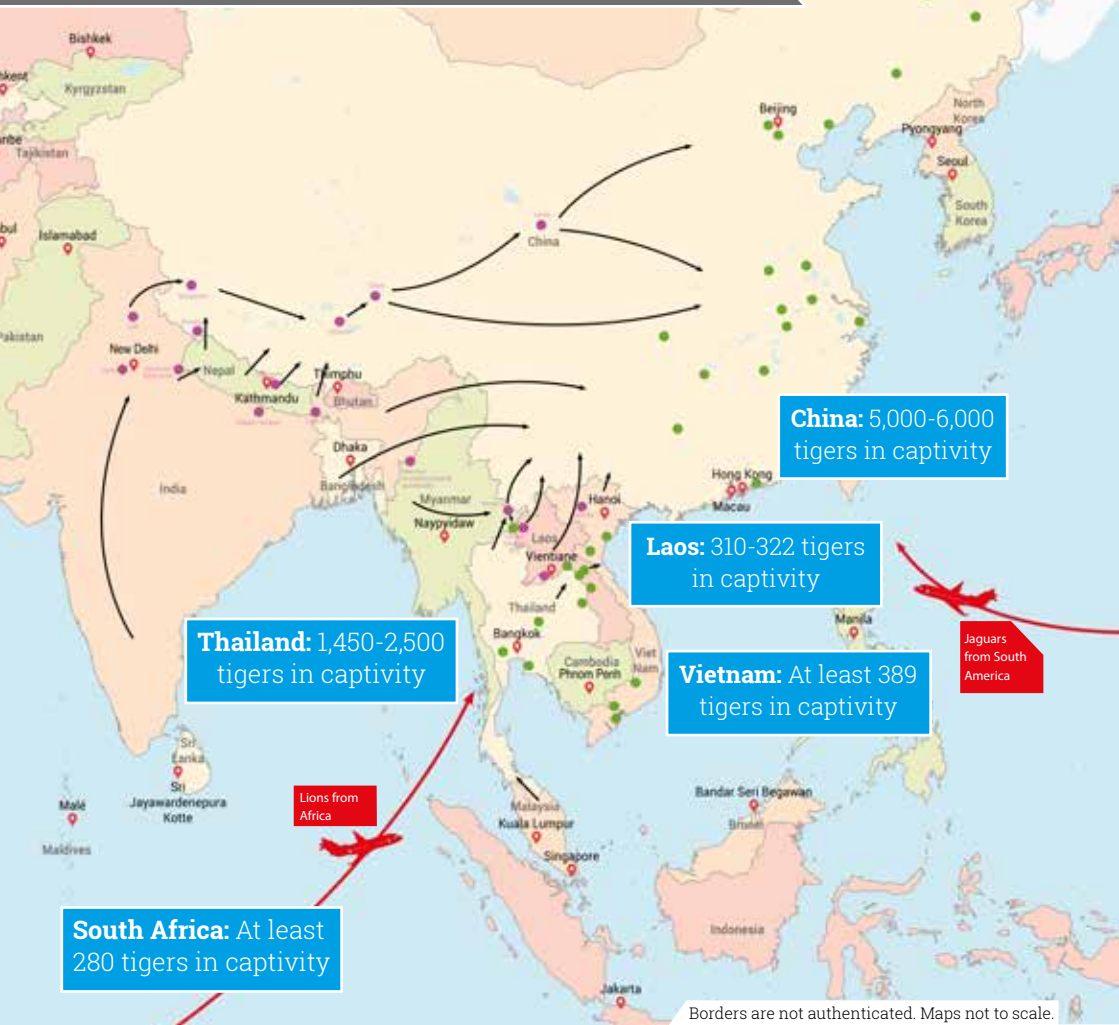
Under a project funded by the UK Government through the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, we and partners Education for Nature Vietnam and Wildlife Friends Foundation Thailand are investigating the shadowy figures behind tiger trade and farming between Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and China, some of whom are involved in global illegal wildlife trade.

The project includes mapping transnational criminal networks trafficking tiger parts across the region and putting together a picture of where tigers are held in captivity and how they end up in trade.

We have published an interactive map of facilities with tigers in China, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, highlighting those that have been implicated in trade. Explore the map at eia-international.org/where-are-the-tigers.

With this information, EIA, WFFT and ENV are advocating more effective responses to tiger farming and trade in the region, including sharing information with enforcement agencies to facilitate enforcement action. Together we have raised the profile of tiger farming across the region and will continue to advocate for the reform of laws and policies to phase out tiger farming and trade.

KEY TRADE ROUTES, TRADE HUBS AND CAPTIVE TIGER FACILITIES IMPLICATED IN TRADE IN BIG CAT PARTS AND PRODUCTS



Key

- Significant trade route for Asian big cat parts and derivatives
- Captive facility implicated in trade of tigers
- Trade hub

RECOMMENDATIONS

Markets for big cat parts and products, including from captive animals, must be eradicated to ensure the survival of big cats in the wild.

To achieve this, governments must:

- **Invest in intelligence-led investigations into networks trafficking big cats, involving inter-agency and international cooperation and resulting in prosecutions, deterrent sentencing and asset seizure**
- **Invest resources in investigation and prosecution of traffickers, traders and consumers engaged in trade in physical and online marketplaces and ensure these platforms cannot be used to trade big cat parts and products**
- **Use ICCWC enforcement indicators to identify gaps and challenges in law enforcement and criminal justice, and to target resources**
- **Ensure legislation prohibits the keeping and breeding of big cats for commercial trade in their parts and products, including domestic trade**
- **Support an end to international commercial trade in lion parts**
- **Send a clear message of zero tolerance of big cat trade by destroying publicly and privately held stockpiles of big cat parts and products**

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WHAT YOU CAN DO

Please **contact EIA** if you are working on demand reduction and are focusing on big cats.

eia-international.org

