

1,000 Tiger Parts Seized in Decade

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Khan, a 9-month-old male rare Bengali white tiger, growling inside his cage at the Krasnoyarsk zoo on Sunday. **Ilya Naymushin**

BANGKOK, Thailand — More than 1,000 parts of tigers slain by poachers across Asia have been seized over the past decade, raising fears that the big cats are headed for extinction, says a new study by a key wildlife trade monitoring group.

The report says most of the tiger parts — including skins, bones, skulls and penises — were seized in India, China and Nepal and were destined for use in traditional medicines, decorations and even good luck charms.

The report comes before a Nov. 21-24 "tiger summit" in St. Petersburg that is to finalize a plan to double the number of tigers in the wild by 2022. There are believed to be as few as 3,200 wild tigers remaining, down from about 100,000 a century ago.

The conference, hosted by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, is expected to include representatives from all 13 tiger range countries.

A major trafficking route, uncovered in recent years, begins in India, home of half the world's

tigers, and ends in China where tiger parts are highly prized as purported cures for a range of ailments and as aphrodisiacs. Experts say China's economic boom has helped fuel the illegal trade, with more Chinese able to afford the expensive tiger products.

The report by TRAFFIC said between 1,069 and 1,220 tiger parts were seized in 11 of the 13 tiger range countries in the decade ending April 2010.

"A paradigm shift in terms of commitment is needed against forces driving one of the most legendary species on Earth to extinction," said the report, seen Wednesday.

It did not estimate the total number of tigers poached every year but said, "With parts of potentially more than 100 wild tigers actually seized each year, one can only speculate what the true numbers of animals are being plundered."

The report noted that an increasing number of seizures are being made in Indonesia, Nepal, Thailand and Vietnam. It said illicit trade hot spots include Nepal as a transit country and the borders of India-Myanmar, Malaysia-Thailand, Myanmar-China and Russia-China.

Many seizures take place within 50 kilometers of protected tiger areas like the Western Ghats in India, the Sundarbans of Bangladesh and Nepal's Terai region.

"Clearly enforcement efforts to date are either ineffective or an insufficient deterrent," the report quoted Mike Baltzer, a tiger expert with The World Wide Fund for Nature, as saying. But the report stressed that enforcement alone would not curb the trafficking and that concerted effort was needed to curb demand for tiger parts.

China has come in for particular criticism for lackluster attempts to wean its citizens from tiger products and those from other wild animals. Tiger farms have sprung up to meet some of the demand, but critics say this has not slowed trafficking because of a widespread belief that medicines from wild tigers are more potent than those from farmed animals.

TRAFFIC is a joint program of the WWF and IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

A suspected Primorye region poacher faces up to six months in prison and a fine of 575,000 rubles (\$18,000) on charges of killing one of the eight Siberian tigers still living in the area in June, Interfax reported Wednesday.

Prosecutors of the local city of Ussuriisk have forwarded the case against Sergei Burtsev to court, although a date for the hearing has not been set, the report said.

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