

Media-Reported
Wildlife Poaching and
Illegal Trade in India

2020



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Wildlife Conservation Society-India (WCS-India)

Vision

WCS-India envisions a world where wildlife thrives in healthy lands and seas, valued by societies that embrace and benefit from the diversity and integrity of life on earth.

Mission

WCS-India's mission is to conserve wildlife and wild places through science, conservation action, education, and inspiring people to value nature.

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Counter Wildlife Trafficking Programme, WCS-India

Wildlife Conservation Society-India's Counter Wildlife Trafficking (CWT) programme aims to support government agencies by building and improving their access to information, skills, technology, and expert support to tackle wildlife crime in India. Illegal wildlife trade is recognised as a serious transnational crime with an overall turnover of billions of dollars every year, requiring a coordinated effort by various enforcement agencies to tackle it effectively.

What We Do

We work with government agencies to reduce wildlife crime and dismantle wildlife trafficking networks in India by:

- Conducting capacity building workshops for officers on effective detection, investigation, and prosecution of wildlife crime.
- Providing technical support to law enforcement officers in multiple aspects of wildlife crime.
- Carrying out and disseminating research on wildlife crime to refine knowledge in this field.



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The publication is an assessment of publicly available online open-source newspaper articles. Analysis within this report is to be interpreted with consideration to the variability in availability and reporting of newspaper articles. An increase in media reporting of illegal wildlife trade incidents may be an indication of effective enforcement capacity. The authors would like to emphasise that the COVID-19 pandemic may have also influenced the results of this report.

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Glossary of terms

BSF	Border Security Force
CID-WB	Criminal Investigation Department – West Bengal
CISF	Central Industrial Security Force
CITES	Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
DRI	Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, Government of India
GDELT	Global Database of Events, Language and Tone
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IWT	Illegal Wildlife Trade
MoEFCC	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
PFA	People for Animals, Non-Governmental Organisation
SSB	Sashastra Seema Bal
TRAFFIC	Trade Record Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce
WCCB	Wildlife Crime Control Bureau
WCS-CWT	Wildlife Conservation Society-India's Counter Wildlife Trafficking Programme
WLPA	Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972

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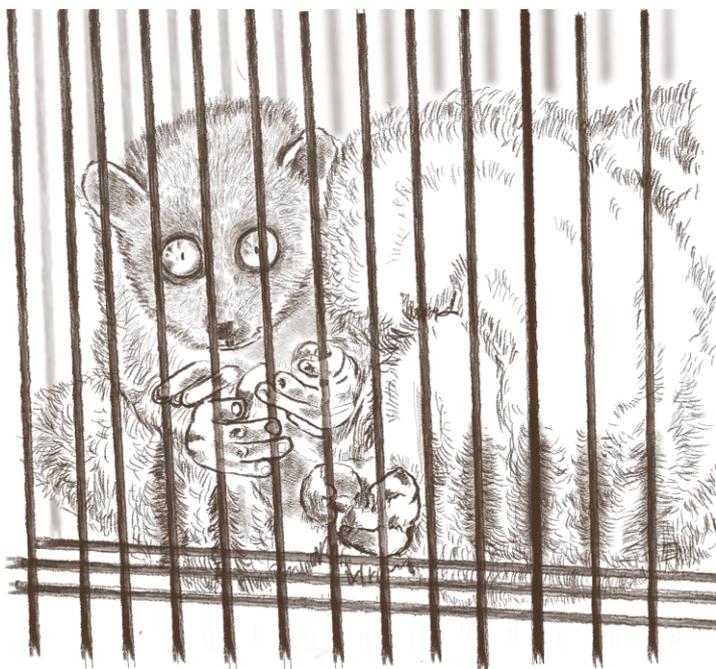
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INTRODUCTION

Illegal hunting of wild animals and illegal wildlife trade (IWT) continue to pose a major threat to many species across the world. Documenting this illegal trade, however, has proven to be difficult given its scale and nature. However, in the past, compilations of media reports on wildlife-related offence events, including seizures, arrests, poaching events, have been used by researchers and practitioners to understand and document IWT at varying scales. Such information can give key insights into the nature of the trade, e.g. the species involved, trends, volumes, frequency, trading hubs, routes, etc., enabling better-informed counter-trafficking measures and policies.

Most of India has a relatively efficient enforcement system that results in a high number of seizures and arrests across the country. It also has an active media community that regularly reports on these wildlife crime events and the subsequent enforcement action. These factors have enabled us to use media reports on wildlife offence events to piece together a clearer understanding of IWT across India. We present here the results of online media report searches for the year 2020 on wildlife offence events in this report.

The methodology used for collecting data for the report involved daily, as well as a one-time comprehensive search for media reports using keywords like 'wildlife hunting', 'wildlife poaching', 'wildlife seizure' in combination with species names like 'tiger', 'pangolin', 'rhino', etc. Given the volume of illegal trade in Red Sandalwood (*Pterocarpus santalinus*) timber, we chose to include this one timber species in our searches. In cases where the searches led us to reports in regional languages, these were translated in-house or with the use of online tools

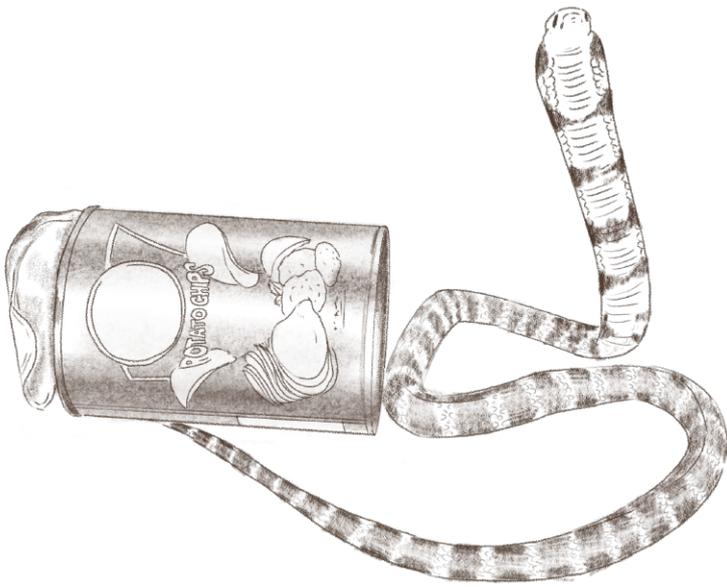


such as Google Translate. Where possible, attempts were made to triangulate data using multiple reports. Species-level information was recorded from these reports when possible, and information was characterised into broader categories – i.e. big cats (including tiger, *Panthera tigris*; and leopard, *Panthera pardus*), pangolin (including Indian pangolin, *Manis crassicaudata*; and Chinese pangolin, *Manis pentadactyla*), etc.

It is important to note that although seizure reports provide an opportunity to record many aspects of IWT, it is by no means an exhaustive dataset of IWT. Only part of the trade is intercepted, and not all seizures are reported in open-access



media reports. Additionally, some species are more likely to get detected by enforcement agencies than others, and this is especially true for derivatives that can be very hard for enforcement agencies to detect (e.g. bear bile, turtle calipee, pangolin scales, etc.). Biases might also come in at the time of reporting – crime events involving charismatic species might be reported more persistently than those involving lesser-known species. Moreover, even for charismatic species, we know that online reports can only capture a limited percentage of the incidents. We know from comparing our big cat numbers in this report (82 incidents in 2020) with those presented by the Wildlife Protection Society of India (201 incidents in 2020) that information gathered through multiple sources, including field-level networks, can capture more than double

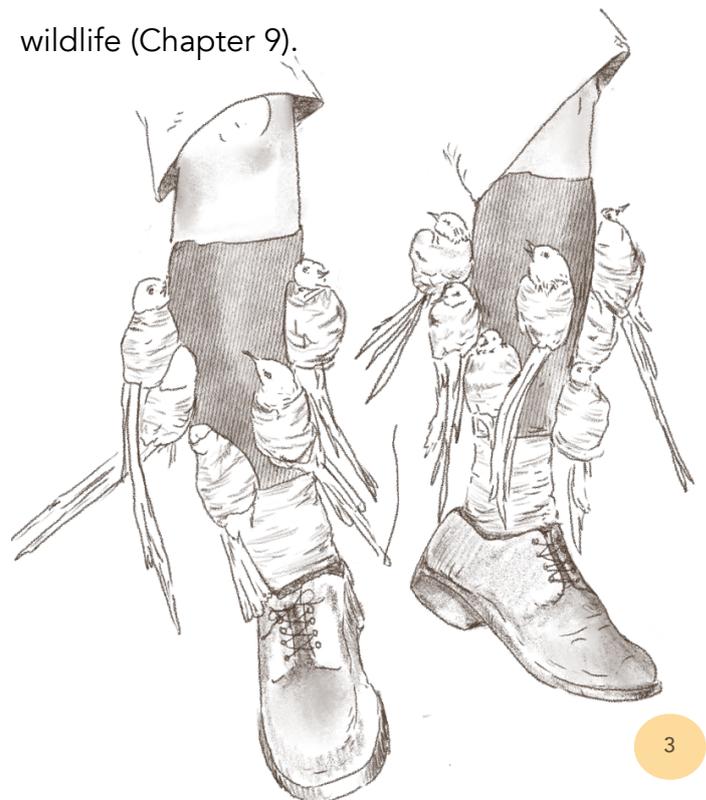


the number of incidents. It is also worth noting that some regions are likely to see higher numbers of seizures because of effective enforcement and not necessarily higher instances of wildlife crime. We would like the readers to be cognizant of these limitations of the dataset.

We urge the readers to also consider the fact that the year 2020 was an exceptional year in many ways due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore this report might be capturing an anomaly. Other reports and studies have suggested that bushmeat hunting increased during the lockdowns, while trade involving long distances was expected to have decreased due to travel restrictions. Considering this, we have included in our analysis a month-wise representation of wildlife offence reports and tried to understand the trend

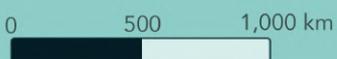
we see in these graphs with respect to lockdowns. When possible, we have tried to include any additional information and anecdotal information that can help explain the patterns.

In addition to an overview of the species that were recorded across media reports (Chapter 1), we have included in this report detailed chapters on big cats (Chapter 2), elephant (Chapter 3), pangolin (Chapter 4), rhino (Chapter 5), tortoises and freshwater turtles (Chapter 6), and trade in marine species (Chapter 7). We have also included a brief description of trade in other species of interest (Chapter 8; ungulates, other mammals, other reptiles, birds, non-native wildlife, red sandalwood, uncategorized), and overall online trade with prohibited wildlife (Chapter 9).





OVERVIEW



Map.1. State-wise spatial distribution of wildlife poaching and illegal trade incidents recorded during 2020.

We documented 522 unique media reports of wildlife poaching and trade in 2020 from India. Of these, 468 media reports recorded hunting or illegal trade related events for a single species/species group, while 54 incidents had more than one taxonomic group recorded in the same event.

We came across the maximum number of events involving ungulates (89 incidents), followed by big cats (82 incidents), pangolins (72 incidents), tortoises and freshwater turtles (61 incidents), elephants (57 incidents), red sandalwood (52 incidents), other reptiles (49 incidents), birds (37 incidents), marine wildlife (35 incidents), other mammals (34 incidents), uncategorized (17 incidents), non-native wildlife (13 incidents), and rhinos (9 incidents).

The number of documented incidents from media reports suggests that despite the pandemic and the related lockdowns illegal hunting and trade in wildlife continued across India. We recorded fewer reports of wildlife poaching and illegal trade incidents in open source media in the period March-May (average

of ~35 incidents per month) compared to other months of the year (average of ~44 incidents per month). This could be due to lower levels of reporting, or due to decrease in opportunities to trade wildlife products, as a result of lockdown restrictions. A nationwide lockdown was ordered in India from March 24th until April 14th (Phase I). Subsequent phases of the lockdown were imposed until May 31st, 2020 (Phase II, III, and IV). Ease of lockdown restrictions in India began from June 1st onwards. Consistent with other reports we find that records of hunting of ungulate species, which are preferred bushmeat species, increased^{1,2}. April observed a peak in reporting of ungulate incidents (16 incidents) in comparison to other months (Refer to Fig.1.2). It is however important to note that both the long-term and short-term effects of the pandemic and the lockdowns on wildlife hunting and trade are expected to be very complex and the data presented here is insufficient to give any meaningful insights into these complexities.

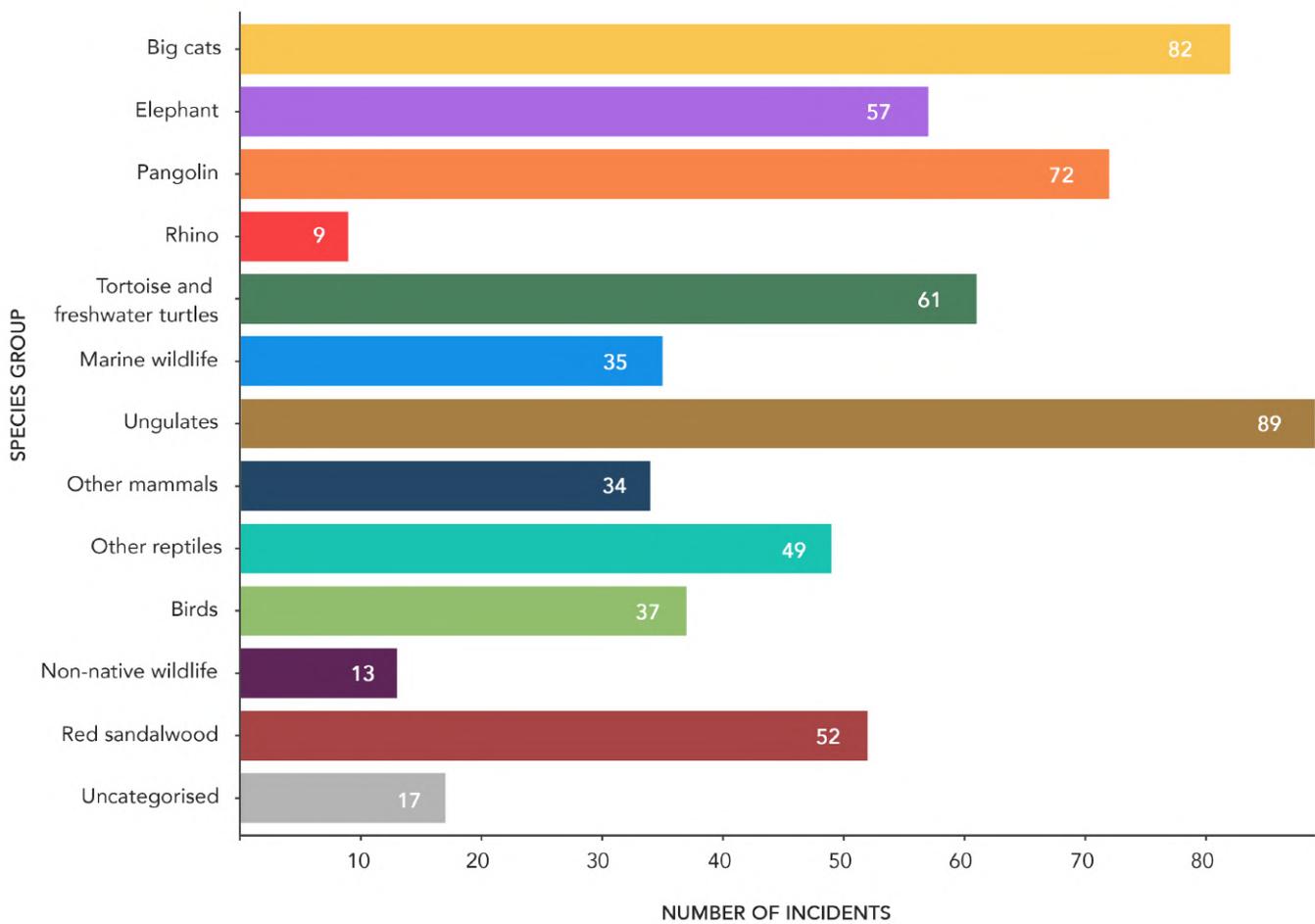


Fig.1.1. Species groups-wise frequency of wildlife poaching and illegal trade incidents recorded during 2020.

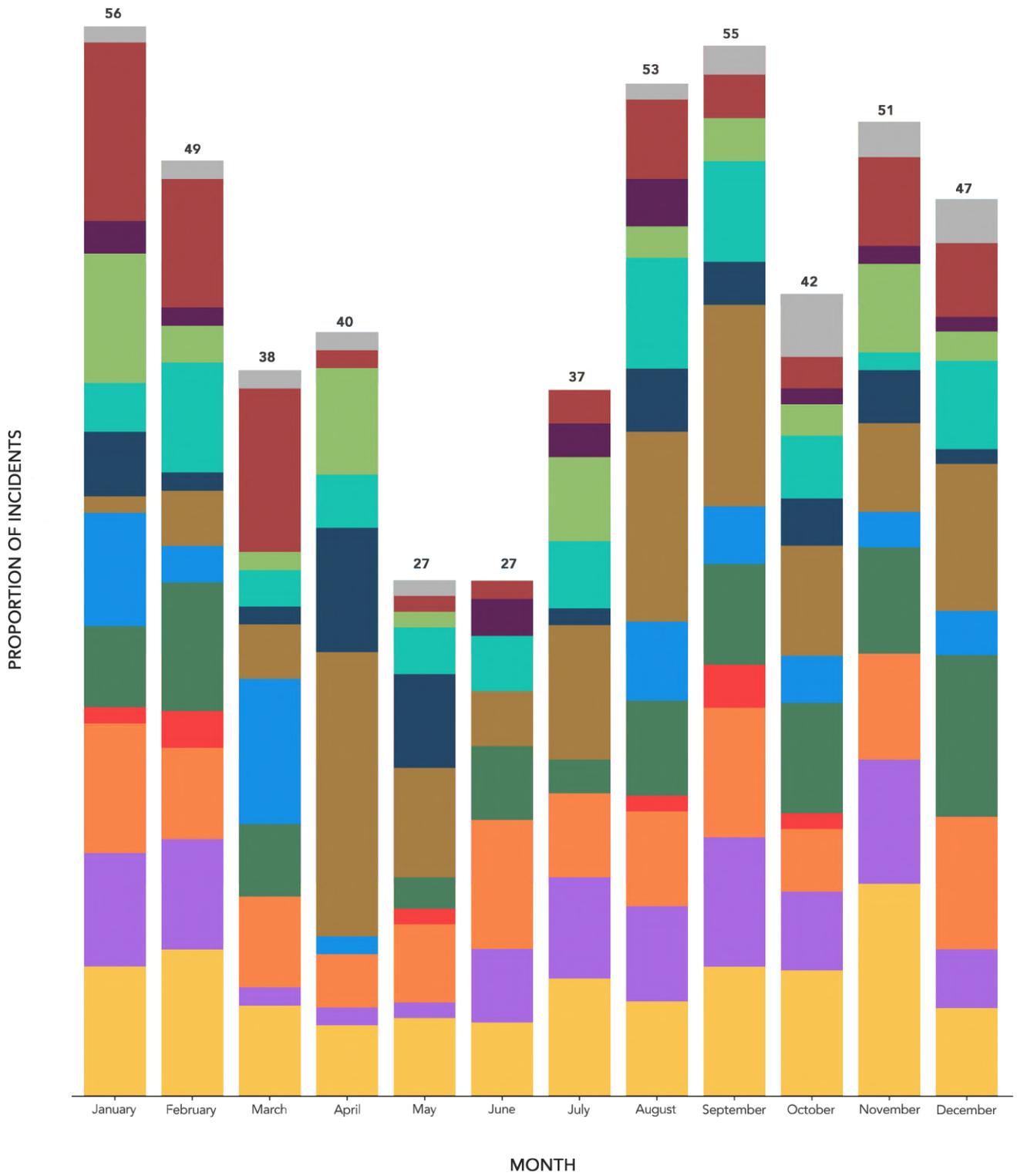
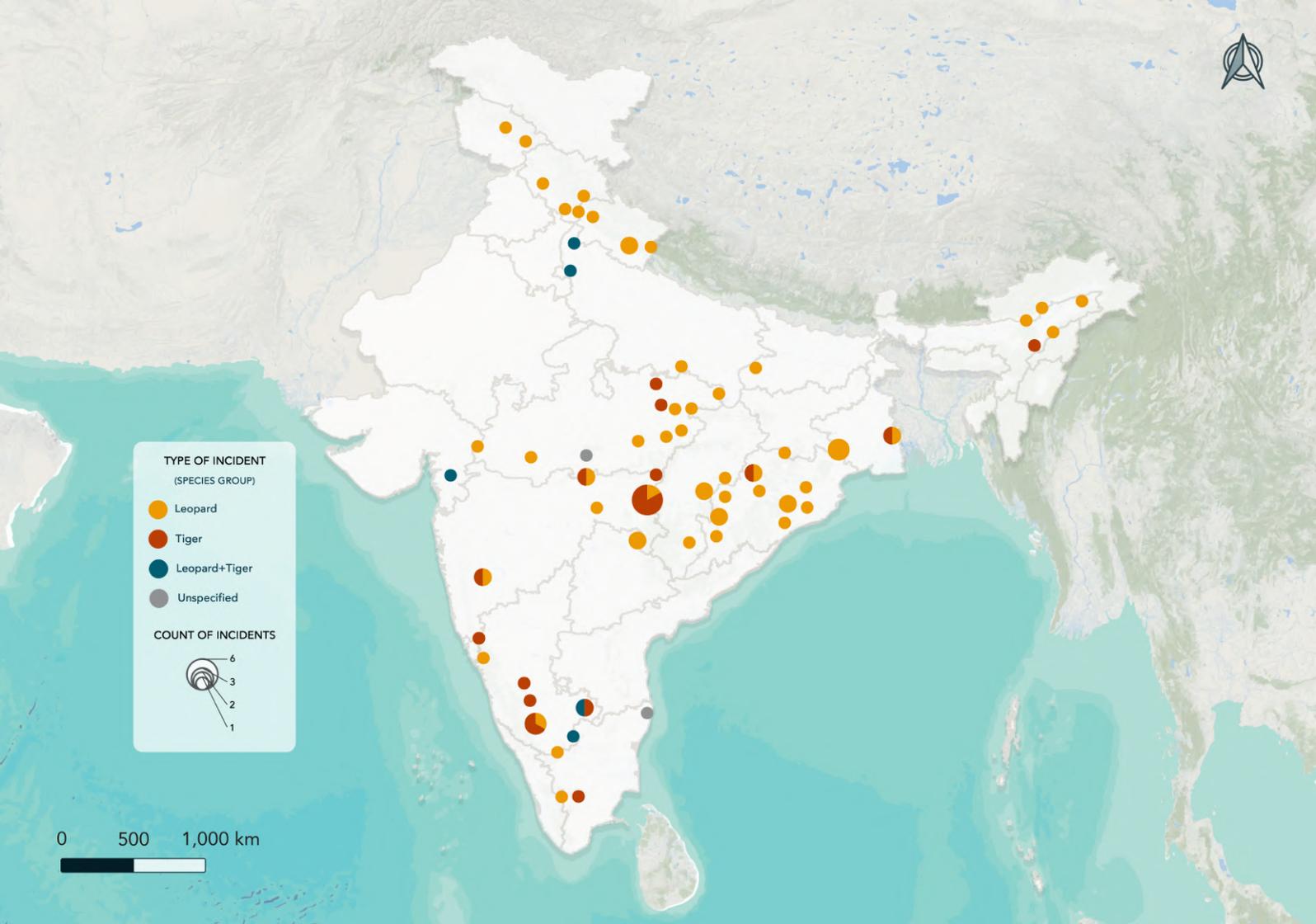


Fig.1.2. Month-wise proportions of wildlife poaching and illegal trade incidents among species groups recorded during 2020.

Chapter 2

BIG CATS





Map.2. District-wise spatial distribution of big cat poaching and illegal trade incidents recorded during 2020.

The term 'big cat' collectively refers to the extant members of the genus *Panthera*, namely the tiger, the lion, the leopard, and the snow leopard (in addition to the jaguar that is not found in India). The IUCN Red List categorizes the bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris*) and the asiatic lion (*Panthera leo persica*) are listed as 'Endangered' while the snow leopard and Indian leopard (*Panthera pardus fusca*) are listed as 'Vulnerable'. The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 has accorded the highest

protection to these species. Illegal hunting for trade in their body parts, retaliatory killing in response to human-wildlife conflict, and accidental killing in snares have emerged as major threats. Reports suggest that in India, leopards are poached at a rate of four individuals per week³. According to the Wildlife Protection Society of India, in 2020 alone, the deaths of 31 tigers and 170 leopards were attributed to illegal poaching and trade^{4,5}. For the purpose of this

assessment we are only including leopards and tigers that are found across the country and are common in trade.

In this assessment, we collected online media records of illegal trade in big cats in India in 2020. For leopards, we used a combination of keywords, 'leopard', 'leopard seized', 'leopard poached' and 'तेंदुए तस्करी' (Hindi), in Google Search Engine and GDELT. We conducted a similar exercise for tigers, using keywords, 'tiger', 'tiger seized', 'tiger death', 'tiger smuggle', 'tiger poach', and 'tiger arrest', but restricted search efforts to Google Search Engine. Although big cat species documented in India include lions and snow leopards, for this assessment, we restricted our search effort to frequently documented species in illegal trade in India, that is, leopards and tigers. Furthermore, to maximise data collection, we used additional keywords and online resources, such as websites and Facebook groups of enforcement agencies (WCCB). We have also included online media records documenting illegal trade in leopards and tigers from the WCS-CWT database, which is maintained through the daily collection of wildlife crime records.

We recorded 82 big cat poaching and trade incidents. Leopards were documented in 60 incidents of overall records assessed, and tigers in 25 involving tigers. In two incidents of overall records assessed, big cat species were not identified in the media report. Among the documented records, one in every four incidents involved seizures of big cats along with products of other groups (such as elephant, pangolin, ungulates, and reptiles, including but not limited to clouded leopard, hornbill spp., corals, Indian softshell turtle, monitor lizard, and red sand boa). In five incidents, leopard and tiger body parts were seized together.

Seizures of big cat incidents did not vary much across the year, although the number of reports declined in the months of March-June, which coincided with the lockdowns, and increased in the winter months. Like discussed in the previous 'Overview' the reason for lower number of reports during the lockdowns may reflect a decrease in poaching, decrease in reporting, or both.

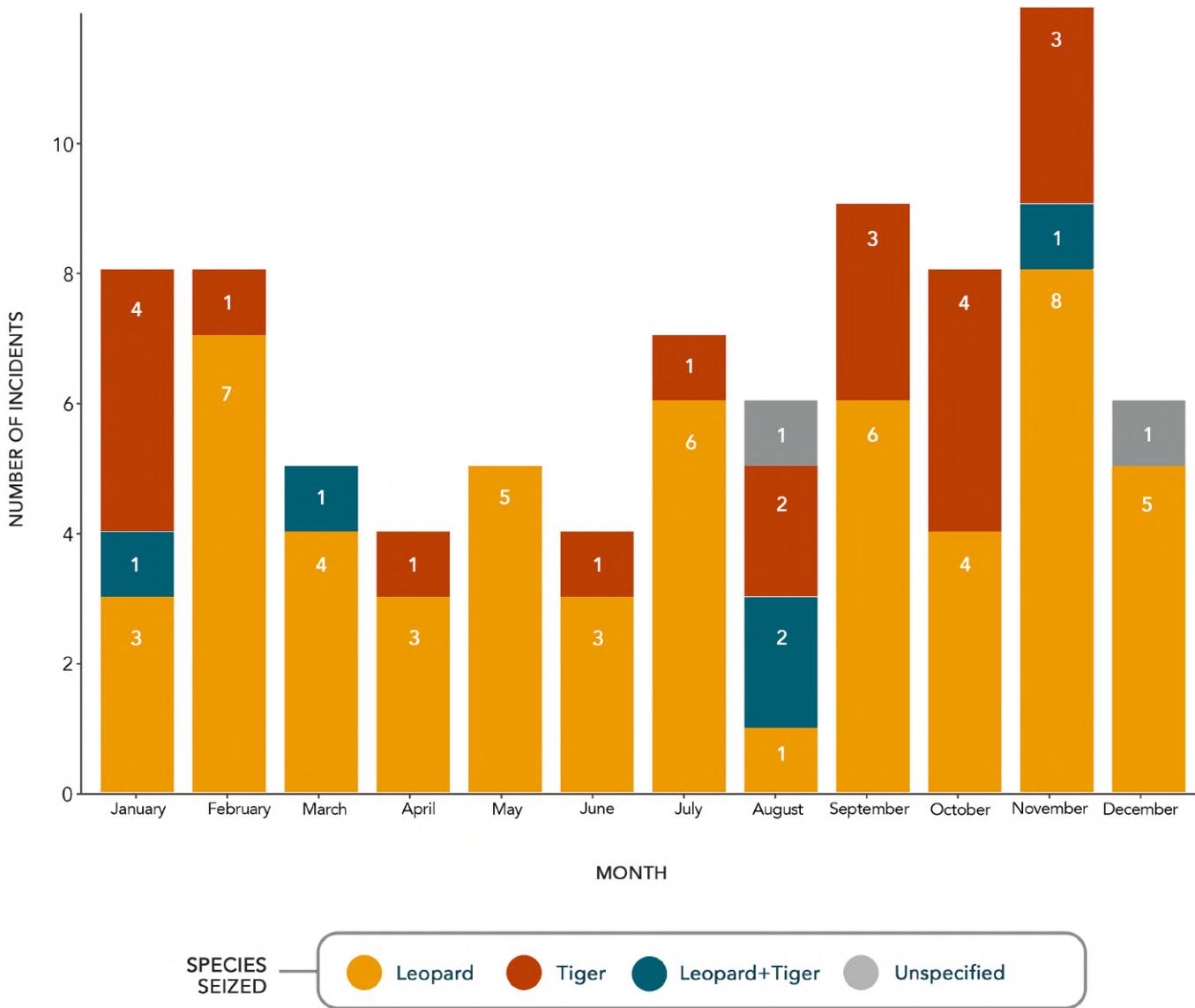


Fig.2. Month-wise frequency of big cat poaching and illegal trade incidents recorded during 2020.

Big cat incidents were documented in 63 districts across 19 states and 1 Union Territory in India. The highest number were from Odisha (15 incidents), followed by Maharashtra (13 incidents), Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka (9 incidents each), and lastly, Chhattisgarh (6 incidents).

Forty-five instances of the reported poaching and seizure incidents pertained to skin/pelt-based trade, followed by 27

instances involving claws, and 13 instances involving canines. Often, pelts, claws, and canines were seized together, possibly indicating a demand for these parts in particular. Other parts seized included vertebrae, bones, whiskers, paws, genitalia, flesh/meat, legs, and tails.

During the course of this assessment we came across many incidents where the primary motive for poaching was

retaliation, but body parts were removed opportunistically. In one such incident, reported from Satara (Maharashtra), a group of individuals used insecticide to kill a leopard that had ventured into their village and attacked a cow. After which, they buried the leopard carcass and extracted its claws. In another incident, villagers from a district in Jammu and Kashmir lynched a leopard that had ventured into their village and injured at least seven villagers. Again, following which, the leopard's claws were removed. In January at Dibrugarh (Assam), a leopard was lynched by a group of villagers after it had ventured into the village and injured five villagers. The villagers proceeded to mutilate the carcass and consumed its meat.

We also came across many instances where the big cats were found in traps (especially in wire nooses) that might have been laid for ungulates (for bushmeat or for crop protection). This non-targeted killing of big cats has been reported consistently for many years – in 2019 it was estimated that at least 36 big cats had died due to unintentional trapping⁶. Images of tigers and leopards with wire

nooses have emerged from various parts of the country indicating that this problem might be prevented and needs to be highlighted.

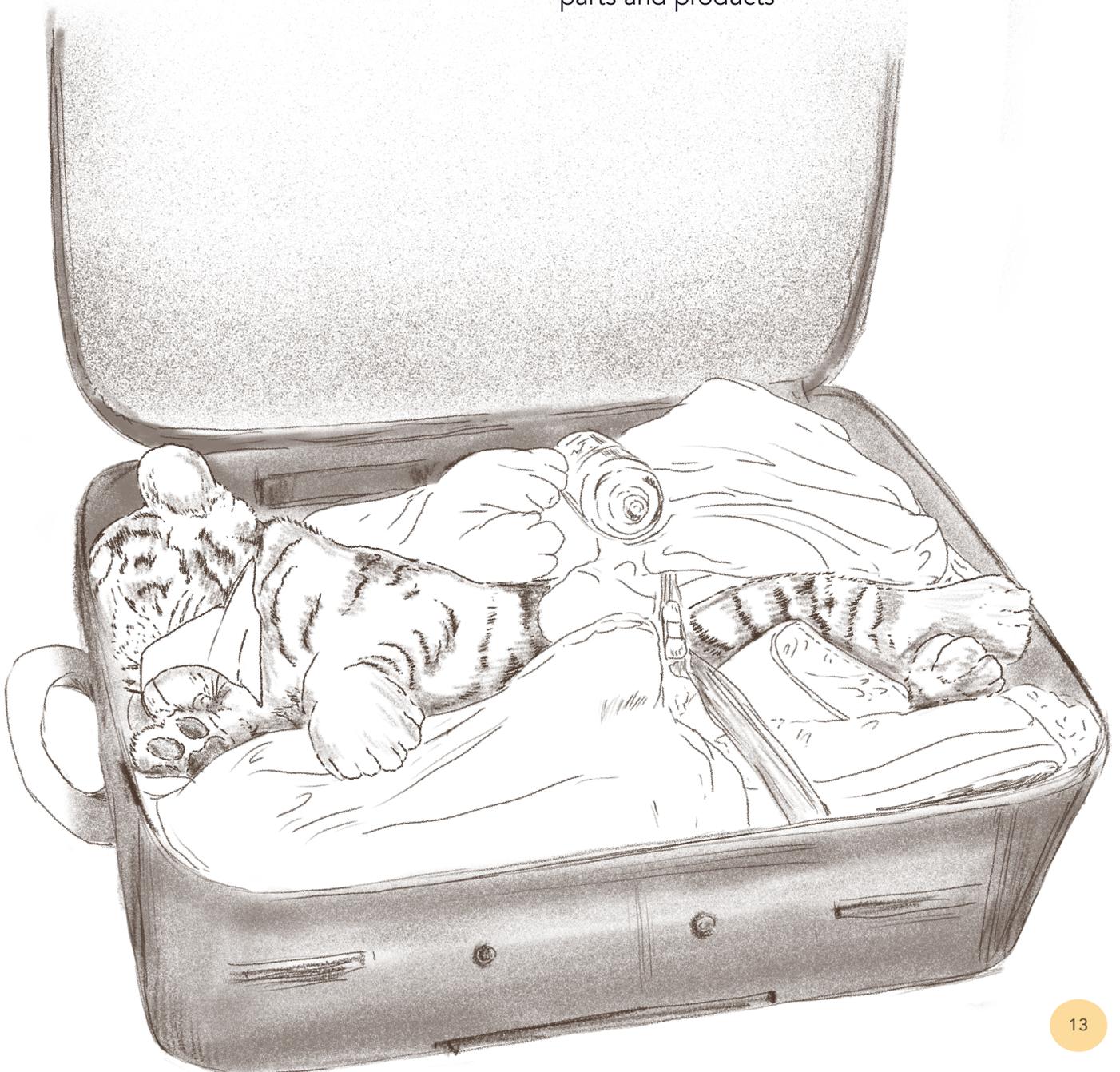
The instances of domestic demand for big cat parts in our study included a case in Uttar Pradesh that unearthed a market for wildlife contraband, including big cat parts, as a 'panacea' for 'sexual disorders' being sold at a proclaimed Ayurvedic clinic. Another seizure incident from Bengaluru (Karnataka) in November revealed a huge network catering to the demands for big cat parts in the jewellery industry – four hundred leopard nails and six tiger nails seized indicate an elaborate supply chain tracing the network from poachers to smugglers, to jewellery vendors, and regular customers, who demand big cat parts embossments in gold pendants/lockets and other jewellery. In another unusual incident, an unspecified big cat canine was discovered from a flight arriving from Dubai⁷. The canines were concealed inside the hollow pipe of one of the aircraft seats.

We documented two incidents of poaching involving big cat cubs. In a

poaching incident from Maharashtra, a tigress and her two cubs were killed by poisoning. In another incident from Narasimharajapura Pura forest range (Karnataka), a poached tiger cub's skin and nails were removed. The contraband was smuggled to Mandya (Karnataka), where the suspects were trying to find prospective buyers for the skin. We also encountered media reports documenting illegal possession of big cat parts/

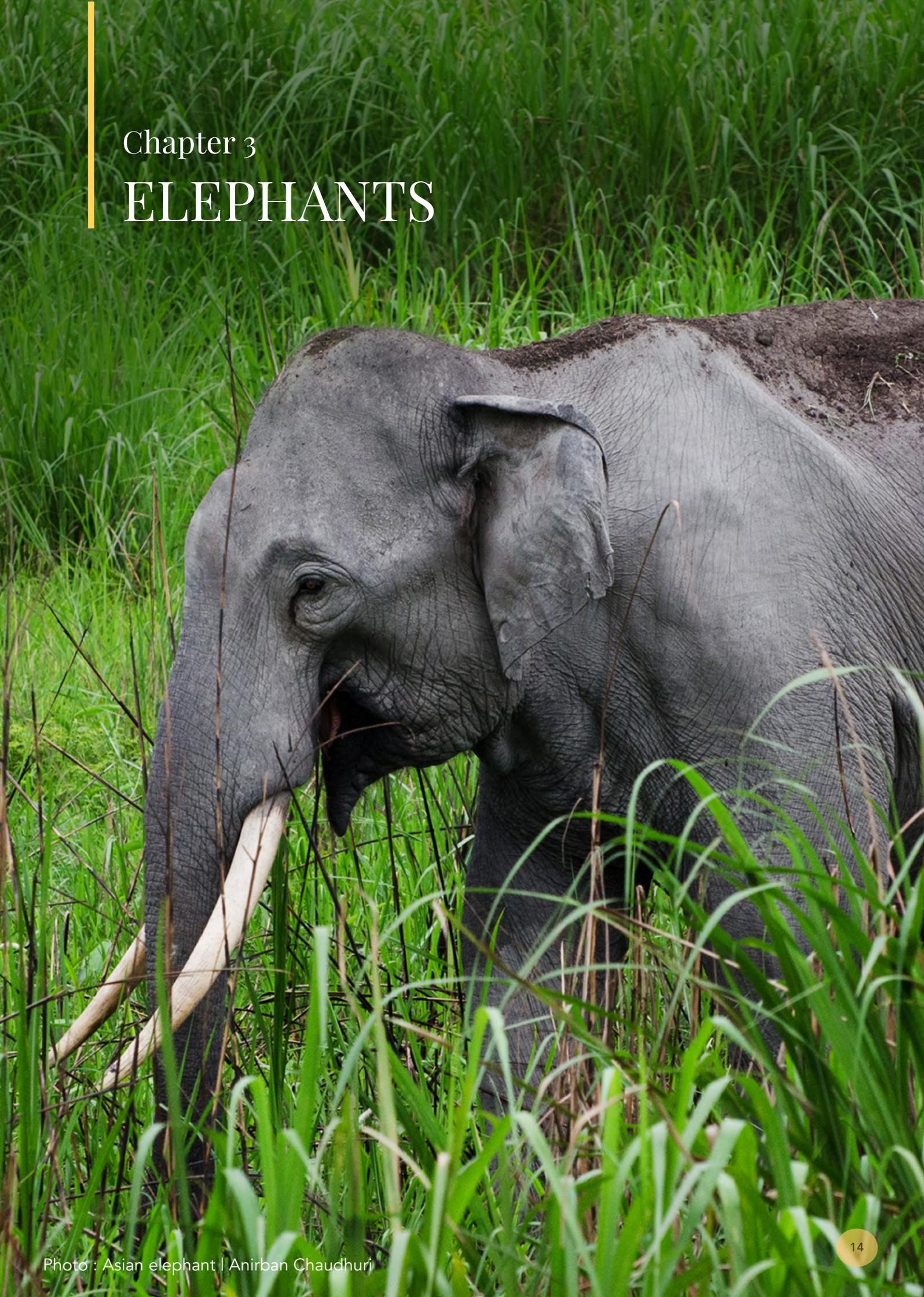
products derived from individuals killed years ago. In Odisha, the skin of a leopard killed two years ago in Simlipal National Park was seized, indicating stockpiling of parts.

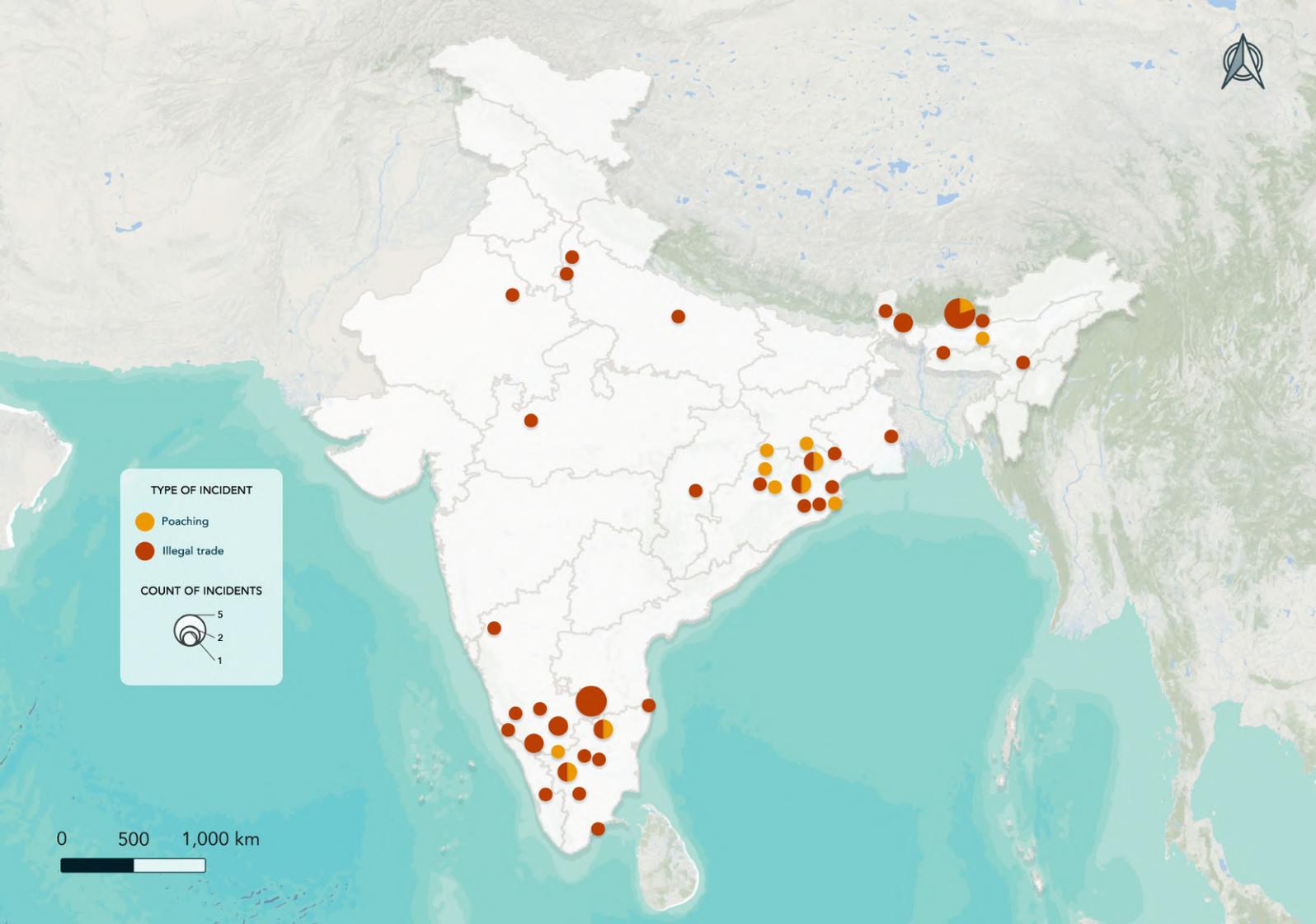
The monetary values quoted for big cat contraband varied across media reports, ranging from thousands to lakhs of rupees, indicating the arbitrary nature of estimating the economic value of big cat parts and products Annex .



Chapter 3

ELEPHANTS



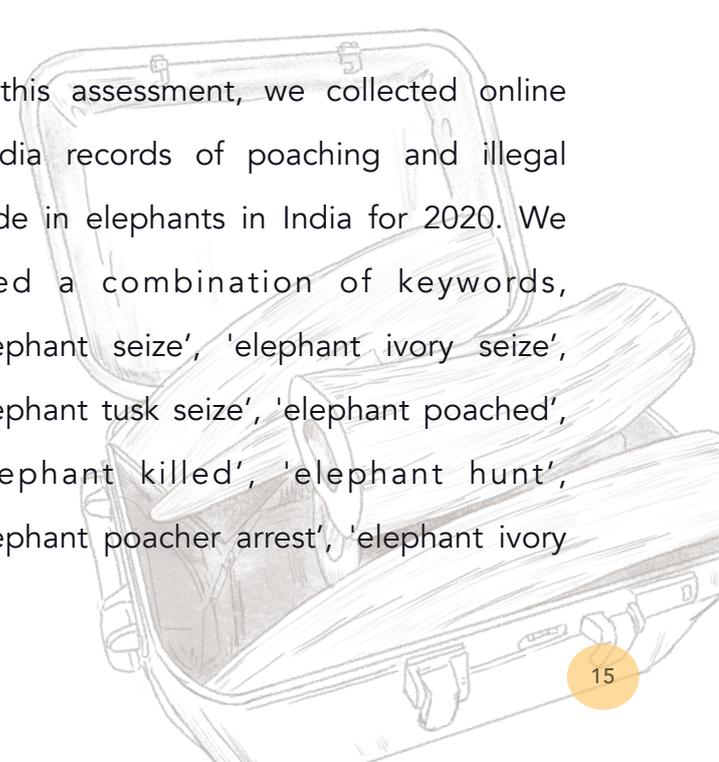


Map.3. District-wise spatial distribution of elephant poaching and illegal trade incidents recorded during 2020.

Illegal trade of elephant ivory has persisted due to its high demand in the local and international markets⁸. Male Asian elephants are killed for their tusks, which are then carved into ornate statues, artwork, or sold in raw form. These products are either sold in domestic markets or smuggled out of the country. Besides ivory, Asian elephants are also poached for their meat, bones, teeth, hair and skin, which are also smuggled abroad

to be used in cosmetics, medicines and accessories, including handbags^{9,10,11}.

In this assessment, we collected online media records of poaching and illegal trade in elephants in India for 2020. We used a combination of keywords, 'elephant seize', 'elephant ivory seize', 'elephant tusk seize', 'elephant poached', 'elephant killed', 'elephant hunt', 'elephant poacher arrest', 'elephant ivory



artefact seize', 'elephant ivory smuggler arrest', in Google Search Engine and GDELT. Furthermore, to maximise data collection, we used additional keywords and online resources, such as NGO portals like 'Robin Des Bois' and 'South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network' (SAWEN). We have also included online media records documenting illegal trade in elephants from the WCS-CWT database, which is maintained through daily collection of wildlife crime records. Each reported incident was categorised into 'poaching' or 'illegal trade' in our final dataset based on whether the crime was intercepted at the location of the illegal killing of the animal or during stages that involved the transport and sale of ivory.

We recorded 57 elephant poaching and illegal trade incidents from 12 states and one union territory of India all of which had clear signs of illegal trade, such as tusks missing from elephant carcasses or processed/unprocessed ivory confiscated. Of these, 45 incidents involved illegal trade or smuggling of ivory, and 12 incidents involved killing of elephants. Tusks were recorded from 35 incidents, whereas ivory carvings and ivory pieces

accounted for the remaining 10 incidents. The seized ivory carvings included sculptures, ivory bracelets and bangles, idols, statuettes, and carved tusks. The arrest of ivory artisans, along with carving knives and other equipment, indicate the presence of functional ivory carving and manufacturing units in India.

A month-wise analysis highlighted the absence of reported poaching events between March and May (Fig.3.1). This period also corresponded with the lowest number of illegal trade events (one each of these months). Restrictions due to the lockdown during this time may have restricted smuggling operations or resulted in low reporting of crime events. However, we noticed an increase in poaching immediately after restrictions were eased and public movement was allowed.

Highest number of illegal trade incidents took place in Karnataka (10 incidents), followed by Odisha (7 incidents), Tamil Nadu (7 incidents) and Assam (6 incidents) (Map 3). The notable seizure incidents recorded from these states include seizure of 25 kg of ivory in Mysuru (Karnataka), 21

kg in Wayanad (Kerala), and 19 kg in Keonjhar (Odisha). Additionally, seizure incidents were also recorded from Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

Majority of the illegal trade seizures took place in transit on roads (13 incidents) (Fig.3.2.). In seven incidents, elephant products in raw ivory form and carved ivory were seized from residential areas. Seizure incidents were also recorded from

the border region between India and Bhutan (5 incidents). One such incident involved the seizure of four tusks weighing around 16 kg from Chirang district of Assam bordering India and Bhutan. Railways were also used as a mode of transport to smuggle ivory. One high volume incident involved the seizure of 13 kg of elephant tusks from a Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh-bound train, coming from Guwahati, Assam. The consignment was intercepted at New Jalpaiguri railway

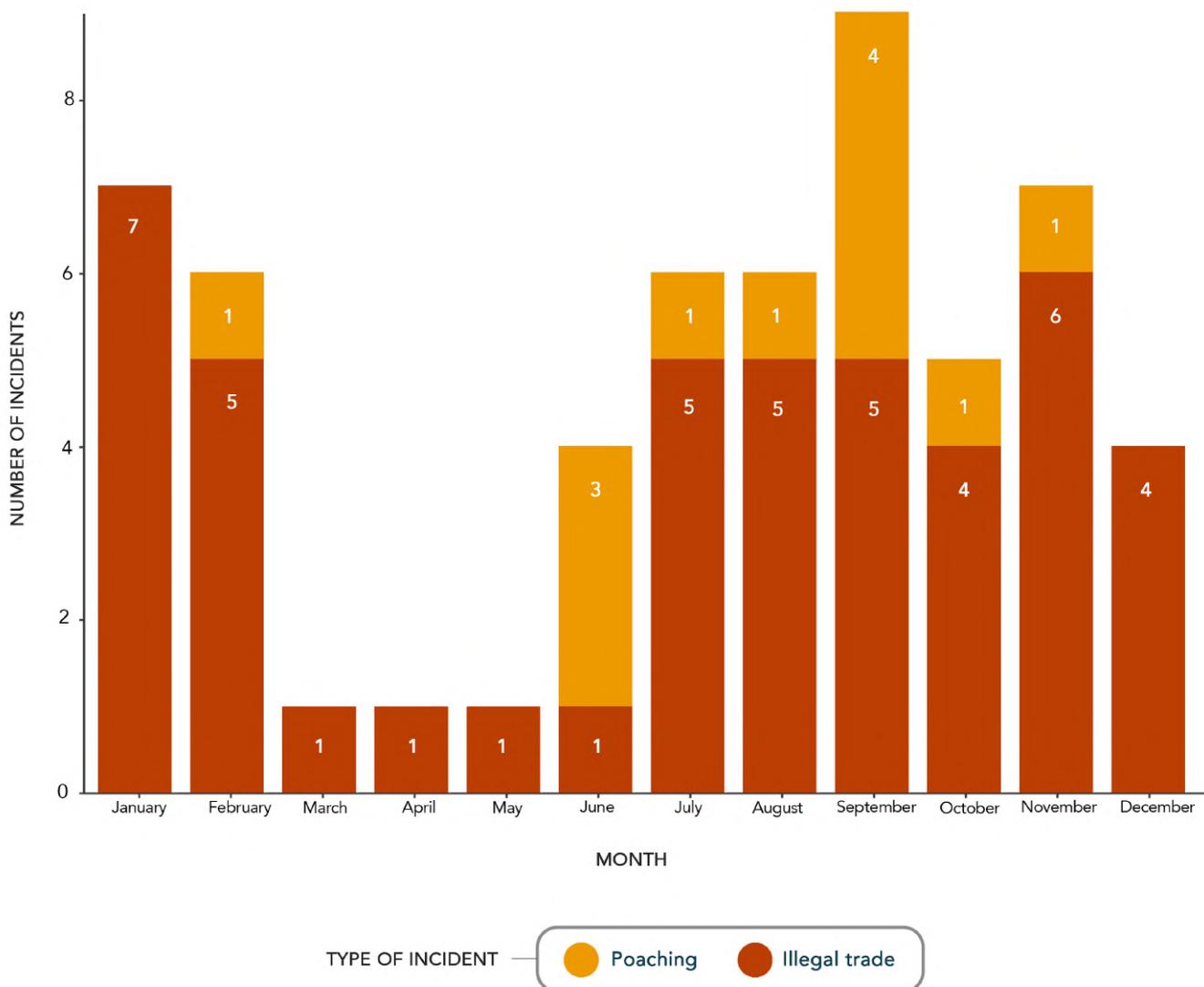


Fig.3.1. Month-wise frequency of elephant poaching and illegal trade incidents recorded during 2020.

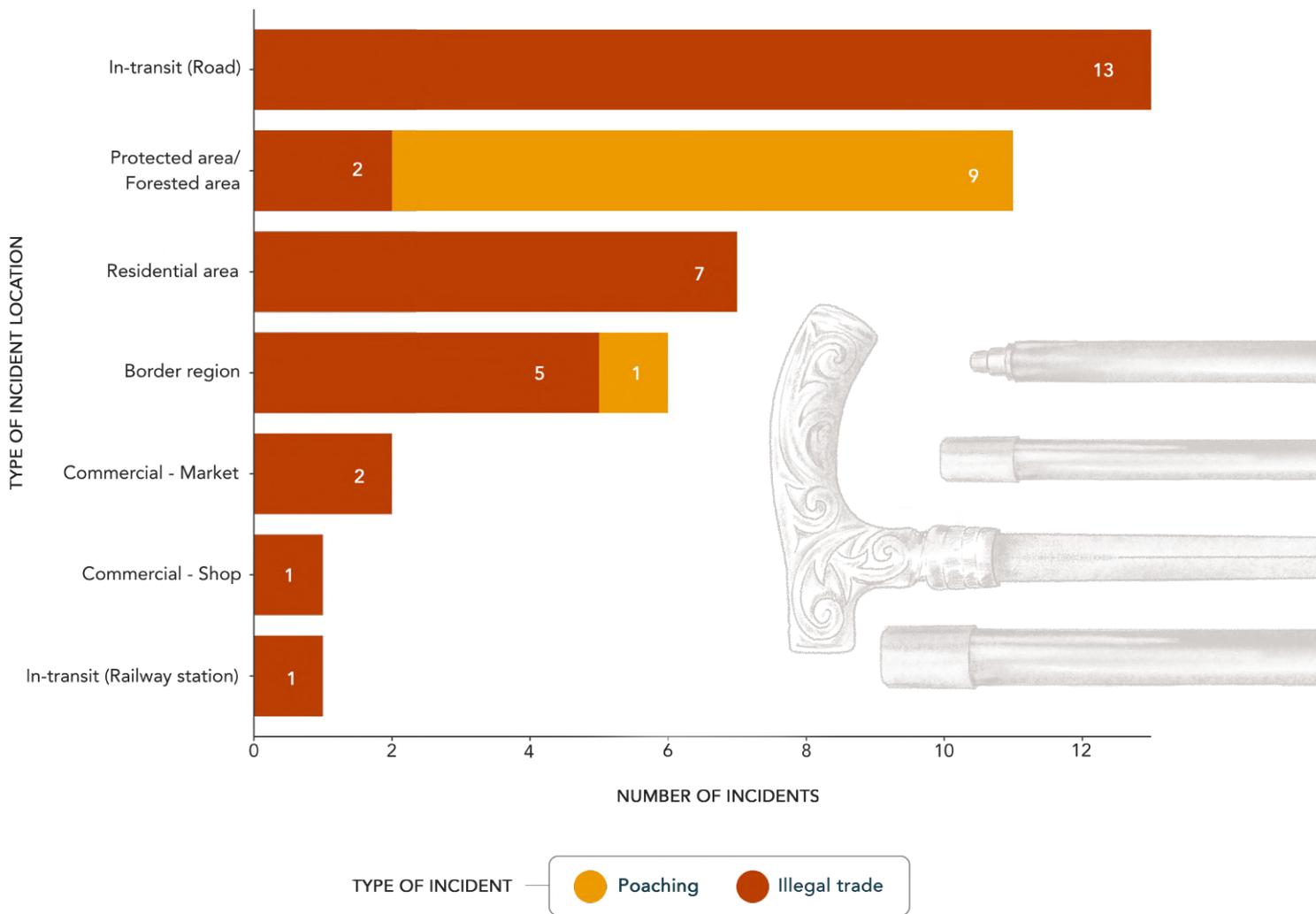


Fig.3.2. Location-wise frequency of elephant poaching and illegal trade incidents recorded during 2020 (16 out of the documented 57 elephant poaching and illegal trade incidents did not mention any information on type of location; these incidents were excluded from the graph).

station in West Bengal. Use of commercial places like markets (two incidents) and shops (one incident) were also recorded. In one such incident, elephant tusks were confiscated from a pet store in Tamil Nadu, where the accused conducted negotiations over WhatsApp. The most common form of concealment was plastic or gunny bags, while the most prevalent modes of transportation were motorcycles, vans, and other four wheelers.

We recorded 12 incidents of elephant poaching throughout the year. Majority of the incidents took place in protected areas/forested areas (9 incidents). Additionally, we recorded one poaching incident from Chirang district, in the border region between India and Bhutan. The elephants were found dead either with bullet marks or with extracted tusks, indicating a possibility of poaching. Besides bullets, illegal electric fences, poisoned darts/arrows and chemicals were

also documented as methods of killing. Three unusual elephant poaching incidents were also recorded, where other parts (trunks and jaws), besides the tusks, were removed or extracted. These parts were probably meant for trade or local consumption. Incidents of elephant meat consumption have previously been recorded from the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland^{12,13,14}.

We recorded 10 incidents of illegal elephant trade along with other species. These incidents included deer (antlers, hide and skull); tiger (claws and teeth); bear (teeth and nails); rhino (ivory); leopard (hide); peacock (feathers); monitor lizard (hemipenis – '*hatha jodi*'); sea corals and turtles. During our assessment, we also encountered several human-elephant conflict incidents, including elephant death due to electrocution, poison or

chemicals, explosives, and accidents on road or rail. One such incident that drew widespread attention was the death of a pregnant elephant in Palakkad district of Kerala. The elephant died after consuming a pineapple stuffed with firecrackers that exploded in her mouth. Human-elephant conflict incidents are not included in this assessment.



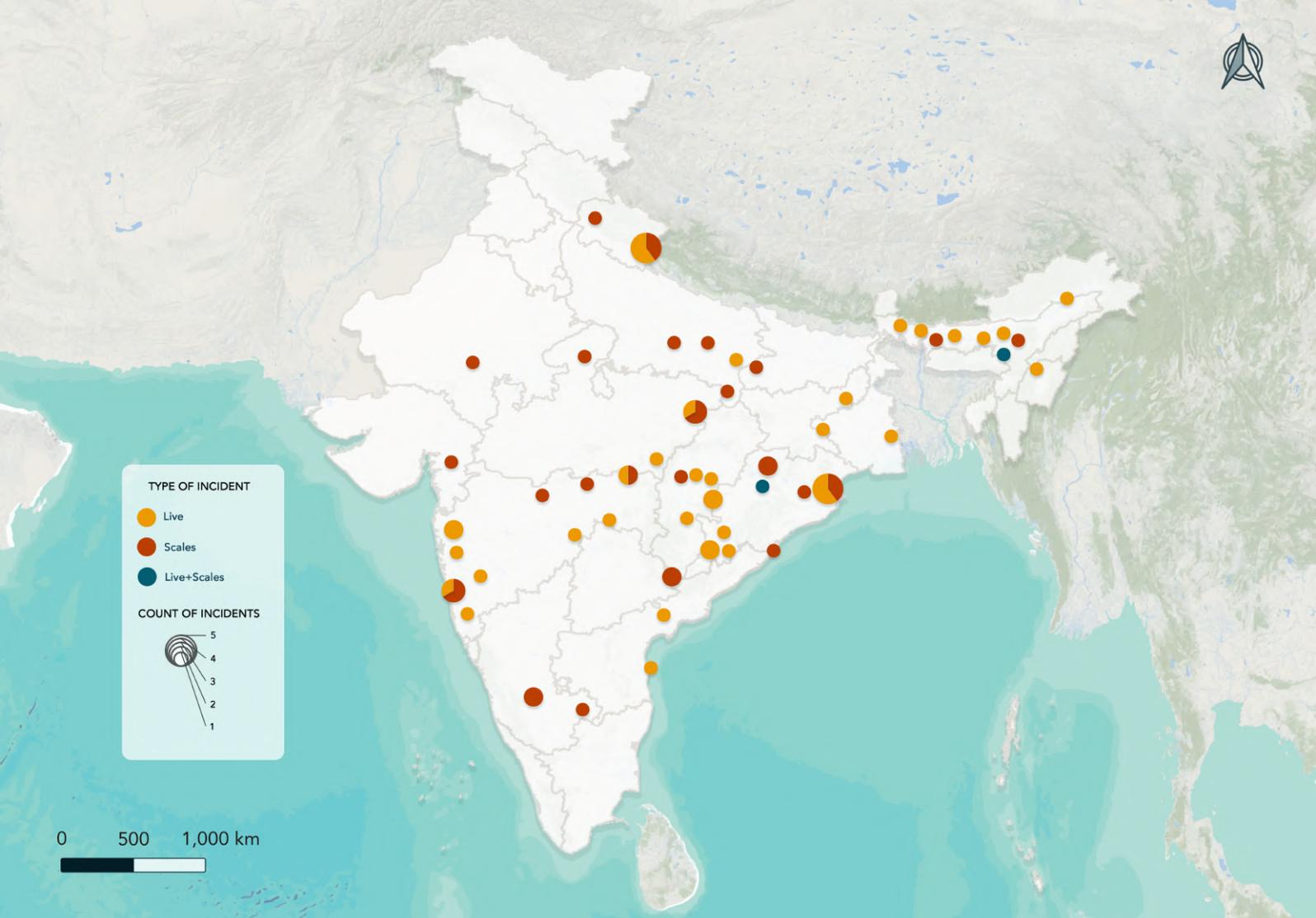
Illegal Ivory Trade in Indo-Bhutan Region

Several kilograms of elephant tusks were confiscated from the India-Bhutan border area in Chirang district of Assam. Multiple enforcement agencies carried out these seizures, including WCCB, Assam Police, Assam Forest Department and SSB. Multiple seizures and arrests were carried out from August until the end of the year based on intelligence that 60 kg of elephant tusks were stashed in the border region, which was to be smuggled out after the lockdown. It is suspected that the members arrested belonged to an organised smuggling network.

Chapter 4

PANGOLINS





Map 4. District-wise spatial distribution of illegal pangolin trade incidents recorded during 2020.

Globally considered one of the most threatened and widely trafficked mammals, pangolins are rampantly hunted for their meat, skin and scales. One of the key drivers for this illegal trade is the usage of their parts and products in Traditional Asian Medicine. The COVID-19 pandemic, along with unconfirmed speculations of pangolins acting as intermediary hosts in transmitting coronavirus, brought further global attention to these species.

Among the eight species of pangolins present, four are distributed across the African continent, while the remaining four are found in Asia. Two species of pangolins are found in India – India pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) and the Chinese pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*). All eight species of pangolins are listed under Appendix I of the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), thereby restricting the international commercial trade of pangolins. Additionally, pangolins

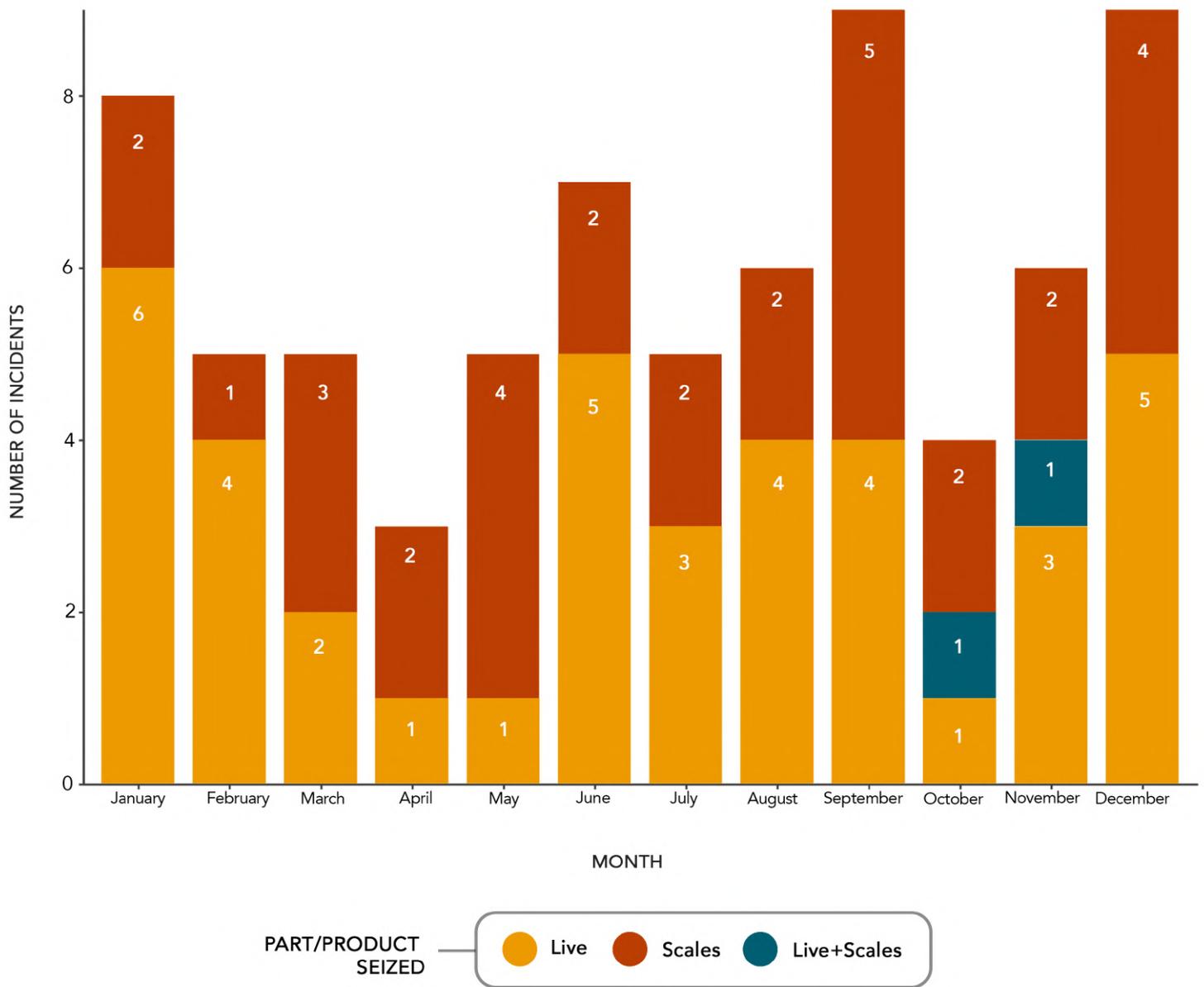
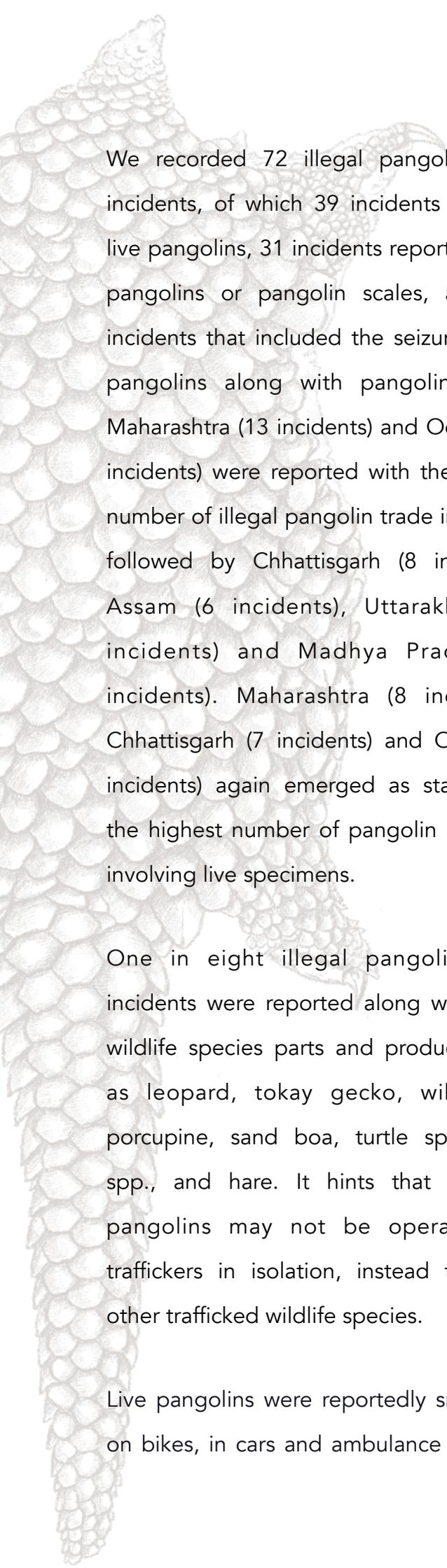


Fig.4. Month-wise frequency of illegal pangolin trade incidents recorded during 2020.

in India receive the highest level of protection, placed under Schedule I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. Despite the stringent laws in place to protect these species, online records of pangolin seizure incidents from 2020 indicated that their illegal trade persisted.

In this assessment, we collected online media records of illegal trade in pangolins in India for 2020. We used a combination

of keywords, 'pangolin poach', 'pangolin seize', 'pangolin seizure', 'pangolin arrest', and 'pangolin smuggle', in Google Search Engine and GDELT. Furthermore, to maximise data collection, we used additional keywords and online resources. We have also included online media records documenting illegal trade in pangolins from the WCS-CWT database, which is maintained through daily collection of wildlife crime records.



We recorded 72 illegal pangolin trade incidents, of which 39 incidents involved live pangolins, 31 incidents reported dead pangolins or pangolin scales, and two incidents that included the seizure of live pangolins along with pangolin scales. Maharashtra (13 incidents) and Odisha (12 incidents) were reported with the highest number of illegal pangolin trade incidents, followed by Chhattisgarh (8 incidents), Assam (6 incidents), Uttarakhand (6 incidents) and Madhya Pradesh (6 incidents). Maharashtra (8 incidents), Chhattisgarh (7 incidents) and Odisha (6 incidents) again emerged as states with the highest number of pangolin incidents involving live specimens.

One in eight illegal pangolin trade incidents were reported along with other wildlife species parts and products, such as leopard, tokay gecko, wild boar, porcupine, sand boa, turtle spp., deer spp., and hare. It hints that trade in pangolins may not be operating by traffickers in isolation, instead targeting other trafficked wildlife species.

Live pangolins were reportedly smuggled on bikes, in cars and ambulance vehicles,

concealed inside gunny bags and sacks. With live seizure incidents equating to as many or more than pangolin scales-based seizure incidents, it may become important to document and track the status of rehabilitated pangolins back to the wild. A recent documentation from Central Zoo Authority created a field guide for the rehabilitation of pangolins in India¹⁵. The current scenario of pangolin trade in India may warrant providing assistance to law enforcement agency members towards rehabilitating trafficked pangolins.

Multiple incidents of pangolins being advertised or sold over the Internet were documented in 2020, especially on YouTube. Another theme observed in pangolin seizure incidents was of enforcement capturing pangolin smugglers using decoy deals (undercover enforcement agency members engaging with smugglers towards striking a deal to buy pangolins in exchange for money, to capture culprits red-handed). We observed that some of the smugglers were members of political parties, army or village level constitutional bodies, among others. One notable incident documented

mentions smugglers using fake government ID cards (from August 2020) to avoid detection from enforcement agencies. Suspects with alleged connections to smugglers from Nepal, Myanmar, and China have also been documented in some media reported incidents, indicating the eventual demand and destination countries.

We documented incidents where there were instances of pangolin traders incentivising villagers to indulge in pangolin trafficking by offering to buy scales or live animals. Likewise, we also documented incidents of first-time offenders who were attempting to sell pangolins opportunistically. Some of these locations include Odisha (Cuttack, Redhakhol, Korput, Balugaon, Kalahandi and Deogarh), Telangana (Bhadrachalam, Kothagudem), Karnataka (Bhadra Forests, Muthodi Forest Area, Belur Range, and Kalasapura), Maharashtra (Pune), Assam (Karbi Anglong), as well as undisclosed locations in Uttarakhand and Meghalaya. There were also multiple instances in which pangolins were seized along with other wildlife species with the aim of indulging in local black magic practices.

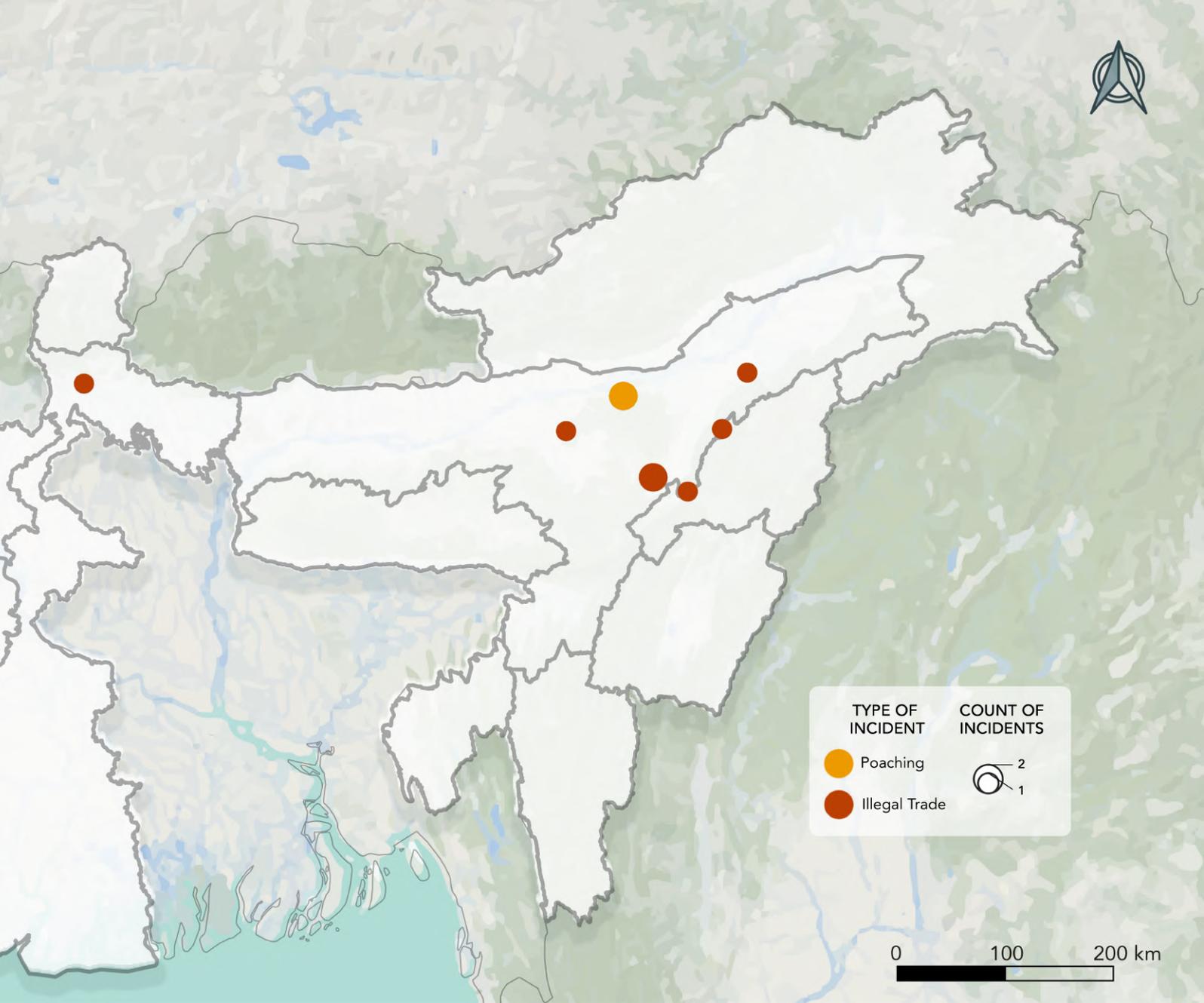
A month-wise overview of illegal pangolin trade incidents indicated that they remained consistent throughout the months, with the highest numbers documented in September and December (9 incidents each). The least recorded month appeared to be April 2020 (3 incidents), attributing to India's initial phase of lockdown restrictions. This may have resulted from either lesser pangolins being smuggled or less detection or reporting of pangolin trafficking instances due to COVID-19. In addition, we assessed how pangolin incidents were reported in the COVID-19 lockdown months between March and August of 2020 compared to the same periods in 2018 and 2019. The results of this assessment were published in the *Biological Conservation* journal, wherein we documented a significant increase in pangolin seizure incidents in 2020 compared to previous years¹⁶.



Chapter 5

RHINOCEROS





Map.5. District-wise spatial distribution of rhino poaching and illegal trade incidents recorded during 2020.

The greater one-horned rhinoceros, Asian rhinoceros or the Indian rhinoceros, is a rhino species native to the Indian subcontinent. With the global population estimated to be at 3,588 individuals as of August 2018, IUCN lists it as Vulnerable on its Red List of Threatened Species¹⁷. It has been included in CITES Appendix I since 1975, therefore restricting its trade

globally. By the start of the 20th century, the population was determined to be almost extinct, with Kaziranga in India left with perhaps as few as a dozen rhinoceroses in 1910^{18,19}. However, due to strict protection and management of their natural habitats in India and Nepal, the population recovered and is now found across 12 sites. More than 70% of the

Asian rhino population is found in Kaziranga National Park in Assam¹⁷.

Poaching for illegal trade in rhino horns continues to be the primary threat to the Indian rhino. The horn, made up of a protein called keratin, is used in traditional Asian medicines. Despite no biomedical evidence, it is considered to possess medicinal properties that can treat a myriad of ailments like cancer, fever, rheumatism, and gout^{20,21}. This demand for the rhino horn transcends international borders, and the horns smuggled illegally from India have been known to go through the northeastern borders of India into Southeast Asia.

In this assessment, we collected online media records of illegal trade in rhinos in India for 2020. We used a combination of keywords, 'seize', 'seizure', 'poach', 'poaching', 'arrest', 'rhino', 'rhino horn', 'kaziranga' (English); 'গঁড়', 'শিঙৰ', 'চোৰাং', 'ব্যৱসায়', 'গঁড়', 'চিকাৰী', 'শ্ৰেষ্ঠাৰ', 'ব্যৱসায়' (Assamese), in Google Search Engine and GDELT. Furthermore, to maximise data collection, we also used additional keywords and online resources such as NGO portals like Robin Des Bois.

We have also included online media records documenting illegal trade in rhinos from the WCS-CWT database, which is maintained through daily collection of wildlife crime records. Each reported incident was categorised into 'poaching', 'illegal trade' or 'arrest' in our final dataset.

We recorded 25 Rhino IWT incidents, including two poaching and seven illegal trade incidents. These include records of arrests, seizure of arms, seizure of rhino horns, and poaching. One recorded incident was a conflict in the Daldali Reserve Forest in Assam between the patrolling team and a group of poachers, in which one poacher was shot dead. Additionally, the number of recorded arrests also included arrests of poachers during their attempts to poach rhinos, thereby preventing said poaching.

Rhino IWT incidents were recorded from four states: Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, and West Bengal. Assam topped the list with 22 incidents recorded from its various districts, and the rest were recorded from the other three states.

The poaching in Kaziranga National Park in May 2020 was the first rhino poaching recorded in the park premises after a gap of 13 months. The last recorded poaching in the park before that occurred in April 2019.

arrests in each category (except one incident). The arrests in the 'Investigative arrest' category were all a result of investigation by the law enforcement agencies and might be connected to incidents that occurred before 2020.

A monthly assessment of the recorded incidents in the data collected revealed the breakdown, as shown in Fig.5. The incidents in the 'Illegal arms' and 'Illegal trade' categories were all accompanied by

A total of two poaching incidents, seven arms and ammunition seizure incidents, and six rhino horn seizure incidents were recorded. One recorded illegal trade

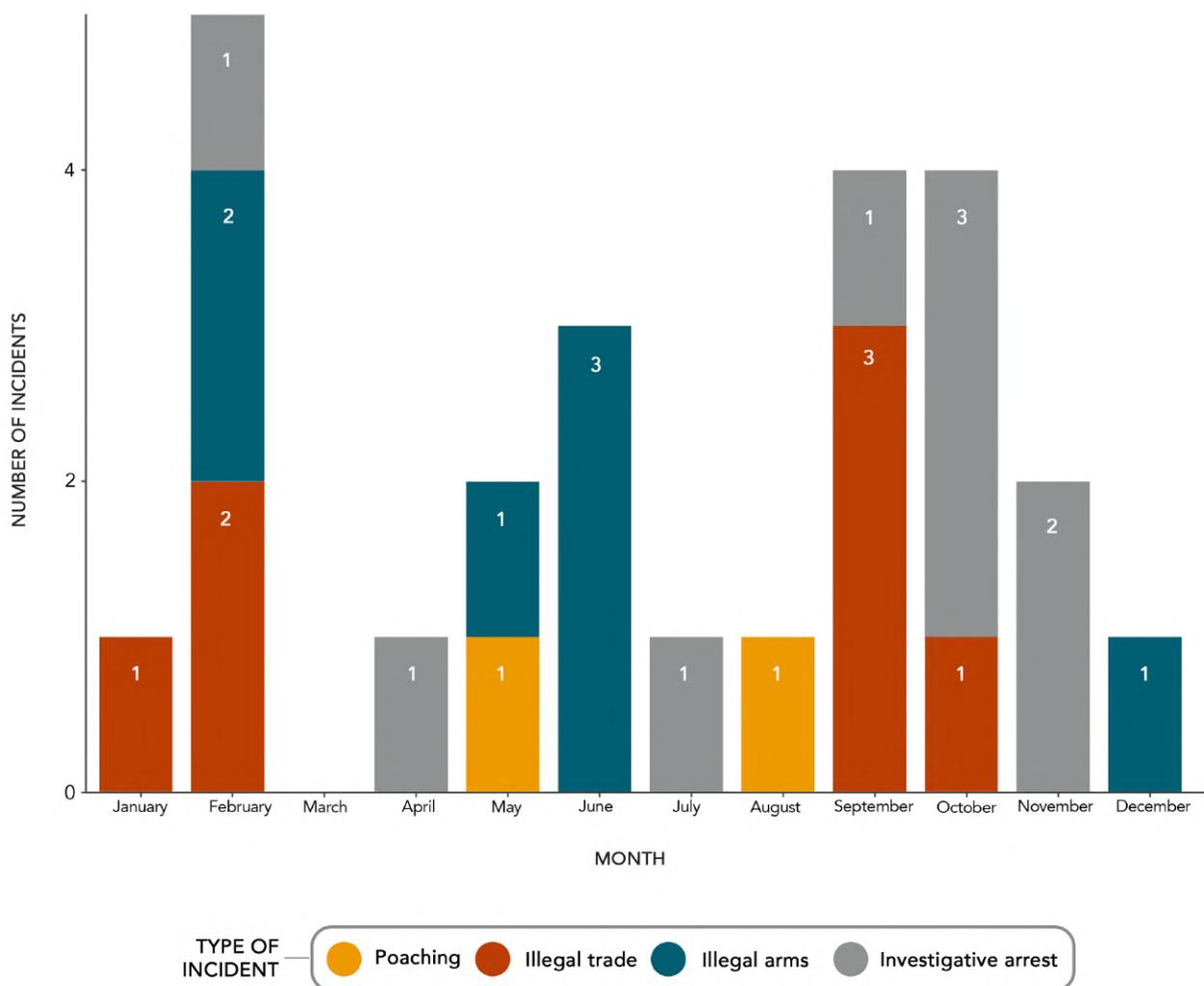


Fig.5. Month-wise frequency of rhino poaching and illegal trade incidents recorded during 2020.

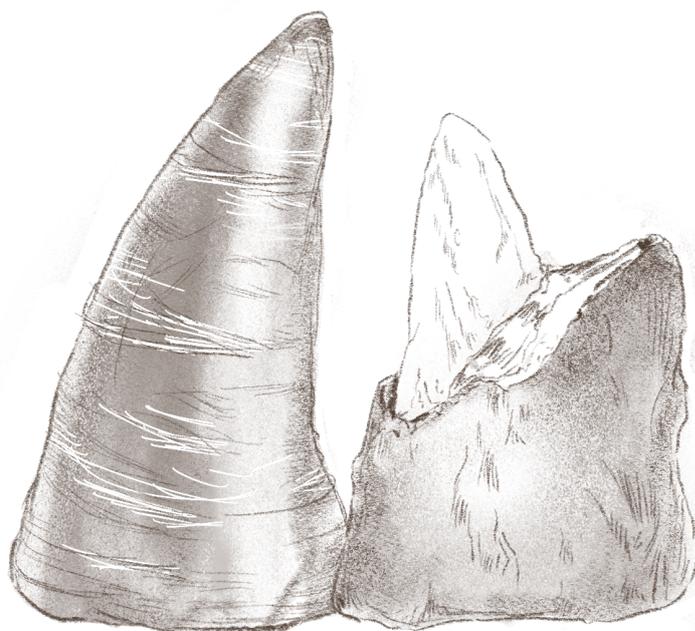
incident involved the seizure of rhino skin and nails.

Rhino poaching occurred twice in 2020, once in May and once in August, both at Kaziranga National Park in Assam. Contrastingly, six rhino horns were seized during the year, indicating that more rhino horns were in circulation than the number of known rhino poaching cases in 2020.

In the slew of arrests during September and October, three Forest Department staffers were arrested in two separate incidents for being involved in the illegal rhino horn trade^{22,23}. These staffers, who worked as forest guards at the Kaziranga National Park, were arrested for having traded a rhino horn that they found inside the park premises to other poachers for the horn to be sold in Nagaland. Nagaland has also previously been in the spotlight for serving as a location of interest for illegal rhino horn trade in its largest city, Dimapur, and other areas within the state. In addition to the forest staffers, in two incidents in October, a total of five *mahouts*, elephant keepers employed at the Kaziranga National Park,

were also arrested for their involvement in the illegal rhino horn trade.

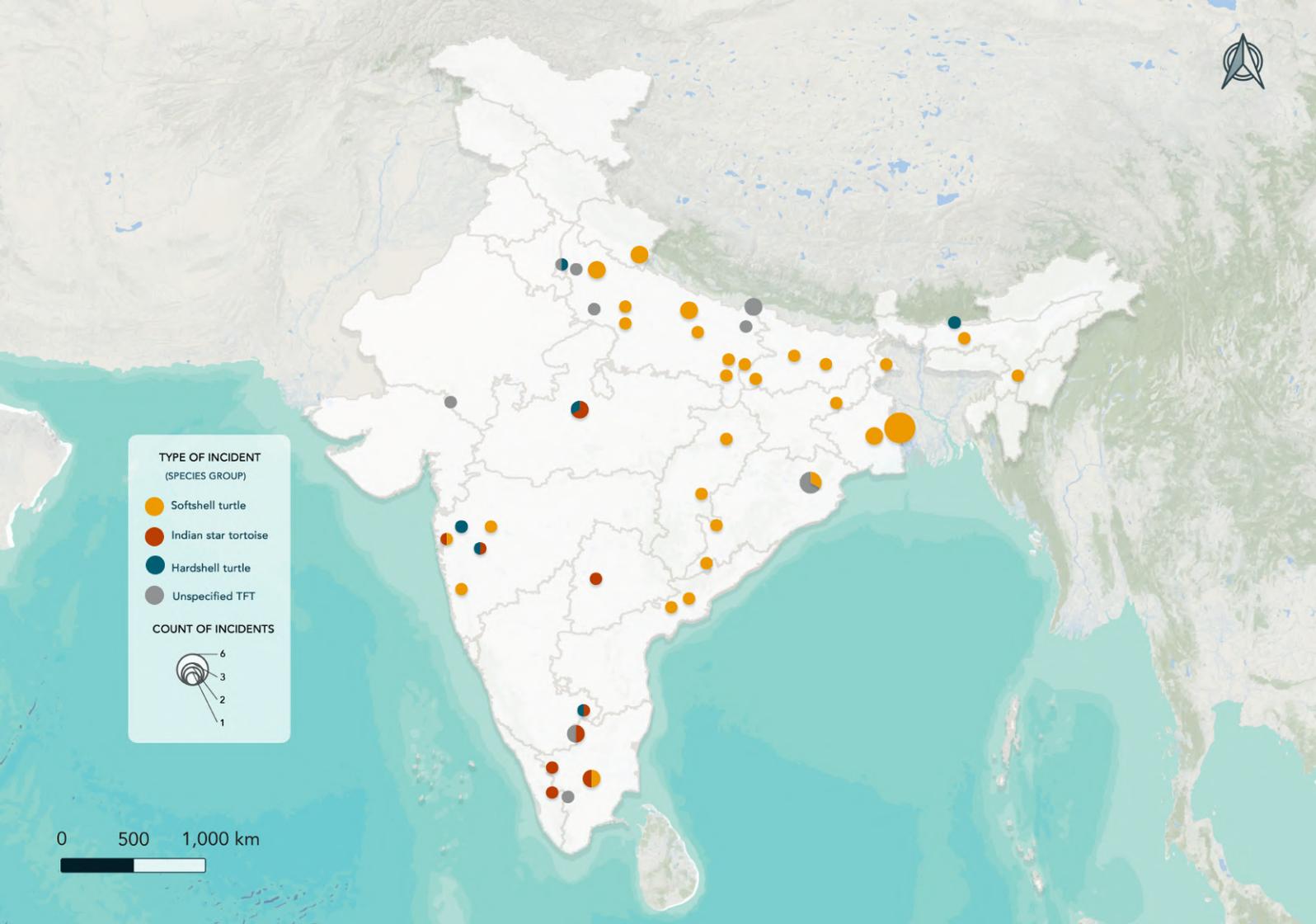
Furthermore, in four separate incidents in 2020 – in February, April, June and December respectively – action by the Kaziranga Forest Department and Assam Police resulted in them jointly apprehending poachers inside the Kaziranga National Park, before any poaching could take place. Illegal arms were seized from the arrested poachers in three of the four incidents, and the arrested poachers allegedly admitted to having entered the forests to poach rhinos.



Chapter 6

TORTOISES AND FRESHWATER TURTLES





Map.6. District-wise spatial distribution of illegal TFT trade incidents recorded during 2020 (of the recorded 61 incidents, one incident was not mapped since it did not contain specific location details).

The threat of extinction faced by tortoises and freshwater turtles (TFT) from over-exploitation is well-documented. TFTs are over-harvested for food consumption (meat and eggs) and international pet trade. Additionally, turtle parts such as shells, bones and calipee (a gelatinous substance present over the lower shell of turtles) are in demand for their use in traditional medicines and specific cuisines. India is home to 29 species of TFTs, of

which at least 15 species are known to be traded illegally²⁴.

While native tortoises and hard-shell turtle species are predominantly smuggled to pet markets in Southeast Asia and China, the live softshell turtle species have a large domestic demand for consumption. They are particularly in demand in the border region adjoining West Bengal and Bangladesh. Calipee, the gelatinous

substance found in the lower shell of a turtle, is considered a high-value product Annex. It is extracted from softshell turtles, dried, and then smuggled to countries such as China, where it is used as an ingredient in soups²⁵.

In this assessment, we collected online media records of illegal trade in TFTs in India for 2020. We used a combination of keywords, such as 'turtle seizure', 'tortoise seizure' and 'कछुआ तस्करी' (Hindi) in the Google Search Engine and the keywords: 'turtle' and 'tortoise' in GDELT. Furthermore, to maximise data collection, we used additional keywords and online resources, such as websites and Facebook groups of enforcement agencies (WCCB, MOEFCC, CISF, SSB, BSF, CID-WB, Border Guards Bangladesh, DRI) and that of NGOs (TRAFFIC-India). We have also included online media records documenting illegal trade in TFTs from the WCS-CWT database which is maintained through daily collection of wildlife crime records.

We recorded 61 illegal TFT trade incidents involving at least nine Indian species of tortoises and freshwater turtles, all but one

species protected under WLPAs and CITES. Softshell turtles and their derivatives were seized in 38 incidents. Indian star tortoises were seized in 10 incidents and represented the only native tortoise species recorded from illegal trade in our assessment. Hard-shell turtles and TFTs whose identification were not specified in the media reports were seized in six and 12 incidents respectively. While the majority of the incidents involved only one of the distinct TFT groups, few seizures involved a mix. For example, some incidents involved Indian star tortoises with hard-shell turtles and softshell turtles, respectively (Fig.6.1).

Approximately eight in ten seizure incidents comprised only live individuals of TFTs. Illegal trade in TFT products such as calipee, meat, shells and bones was also documented in our assessment.

A month-wise analysis highlights the absence of reported illegal TFT trade incidents in April, with the lowest reported incidents in May and July (Fig.6.1). The absence of reported TFT incidents in April may be accounted for by the strict lockdown imposed in India between

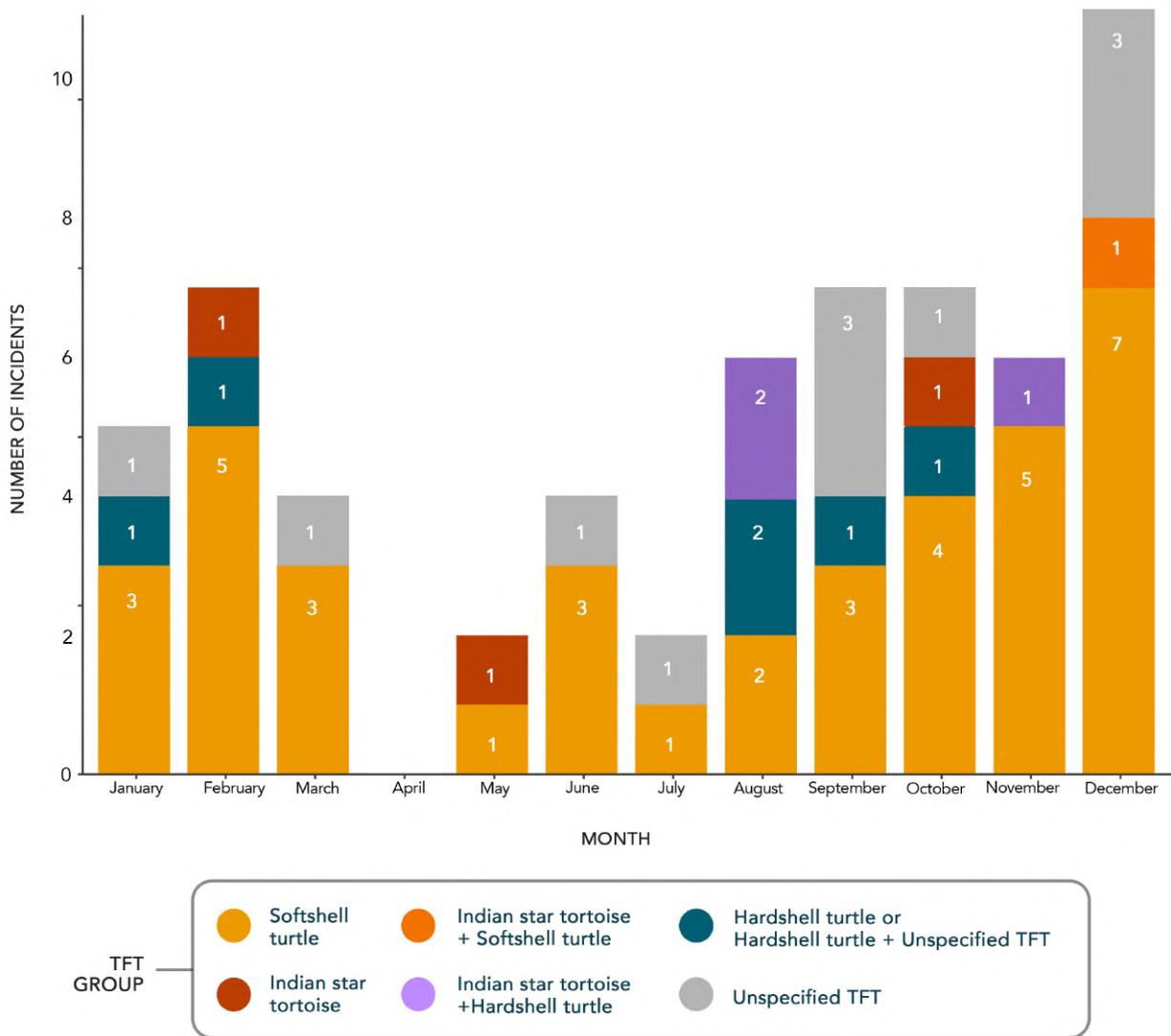


Fig.6.1. Month-wise frequency of illegal TFT trade incidents recorded during 2020.

March 24th, 2020, and May 31st, 2020, due to COVID-19, which may have severely restricted the trafficking of TFTs. Alternatively, restricted enforcement efforts and low reporting during this period, may have contributed to this trend. Post-June, India went into several phases of 'unlock', during which travel restrictions were eased. Correspondingly, we found an increase in TFT incidents from July onwards until the end of the year. This trend was prominent for the

softshell turtles, for which a peak in incidents was observed in December. Ground information available to us and other studies have documented similar spikes in softshell turtle trade in India during the winter months²⁵. This has been attributed to the low activity of the turtles and associated ease of capturing at the supply end, and the increased demand for their meat during winter months in West Bengal and adjoining areas. For Indian star tortoises, we observed the most

number of incidents in August. However, all of these incidents contained 1-8 individuals. Previous studies have demonstrated that the collection of star tortoises peak post local monsoon, i.e., during March-April and September-November²⁶. Correspondingly, the only high volume seizure incident of star tortoises involving 426 individuals was recorded in October.

We recorded illegal TFT trade incidents from 16 states and one union territory.

Most incidents involving softshell turtles were recorded from Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, the former being a source state and the latter a demand state (Map.6). We also recorded several incidents of live softshell turtles being trafficked from Andhra Pradesh to Odisha and West Bengal (Map.6). Within West Bengal, softshell turtles were either bound for the southern districts of Howrah and North 24 Parganas or the northern districts of Malda, Dakshin Dinajpur and Siliguri.

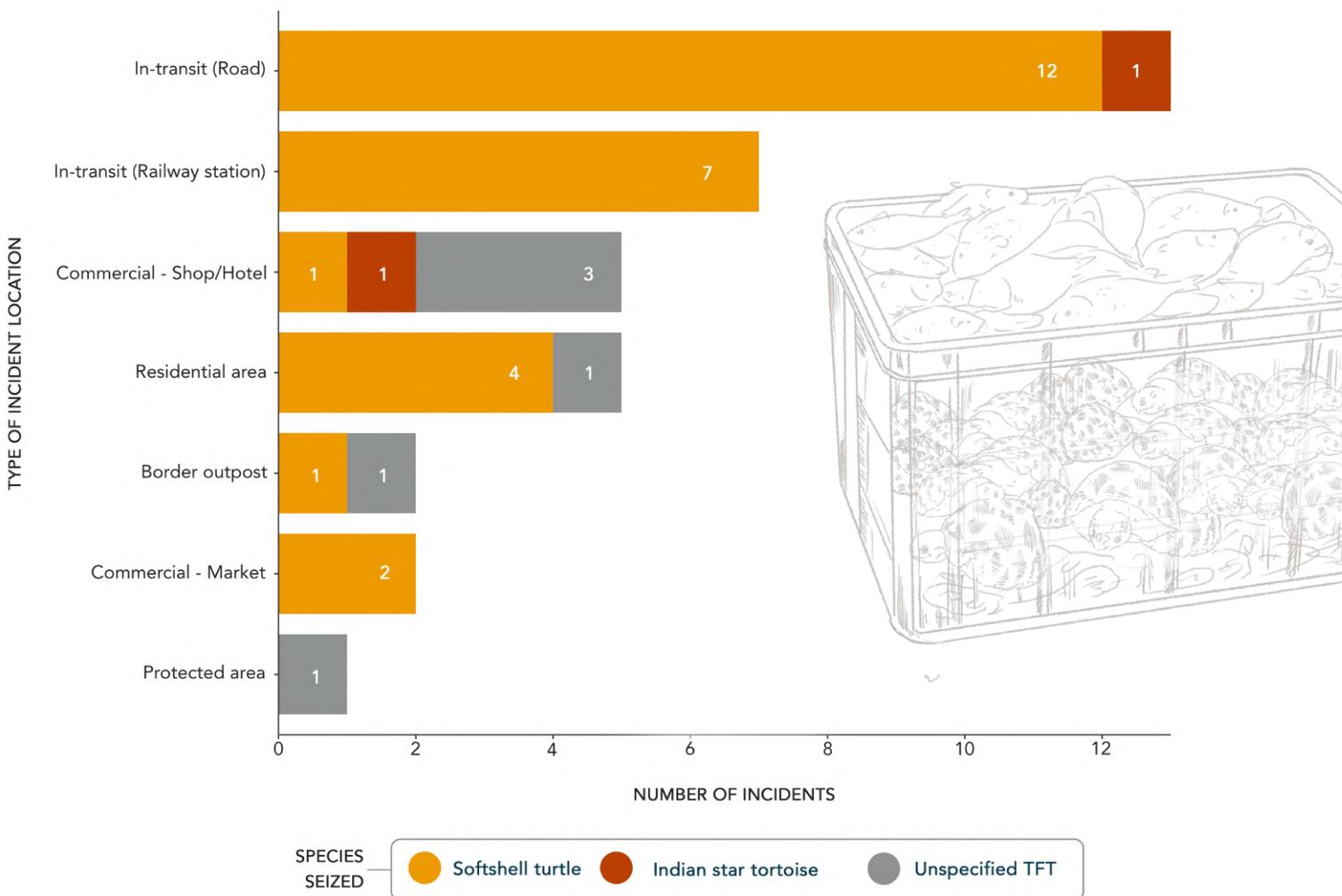


Fig.6.2. Location-wise frequency of illegal TFT trade incidents recorded during 2020 (Twenty six out of the documented 61 incidents involving TFTs did not mention any information on type of location; these incidents were excluded from the graph).

Majority of the illegal TFT trade incidents involving softshell turtles occurred in transit, either on-road or rail (Fig.6.2). In four incidents, softshell turtles were also seized from residential areas (Fig.6.2). One such incident involved the seizure of 637 softshell turtles from a fish trader's house in Naihati, West Bengal. The softshell turtles were allegedly destined for the border markets of North 24 Parganas district.

Softshell turtles were typically stored and transported in jute sacks, sometimes hidden under vegetables and other

consumables. In some incidents, the accused travelled with children and family members to avoid detection by enforcement agencies. One such incident in 2020 involved the arrest of 22 accused, mostly family members, with 654 softshell turtles in Naihati, West Bengal. Members of the group allegedly concealed the turtles in school bags and divided themselves among different train coaches.

The illegal TFT trade incidents involving Indian star tortoises were restricted to Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh

While softshell turtles were mostly trafficked as live individuals, products such as calipee, meat and shells were also seized in 2020:

1. **Calipee:** In September, a consignment of 10 kg of calipee was seized close to the Indo-Bangladesh border in Malda district, West Bengal. The accused were smuggling the consignment from Uttar Pradesh to Bangladesh via Malda. This is a known route of calipee trafficking from India to countries such as China. Likewise, in November, a high volume consignment comprising 2,583 live softshell turtles and 30 kg of softshell turtle calipee was seized in transit on the road in Etawah district, Uttar Pradesh. It was potentially being smuggled to West Bengal.
2. **Meat:** In July 2020, a unique seizure incident involving 120 kg of softshell turtle meat was documented from Barabanki district, Uttar Pradesh. The consignment was being smuggled on the road from Uttar Pradesh to be supplied to the Bengali settlements in the Uttar Pradesh-Uttarakhand border areas. The turtle meat was concealed under fish in thermocol/polystyrene boxes packed with ice.
3. **Shells:** Three seizure incidents of softshell turtle shells were recorded from Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra during 2020. These incidents potentially represent cases of subsistence use of the shell, post-consumption, rather than commercial trade.

(Map.6.). All but one of these seizure incidents contained 1-20 Indian star tortoises. The exception was an incident involving 426 Indian star tortoises seized in October in the Sangareddy district of Telangana. The tortoises were allegedly stocked for over 3-4 months due to lockdown and were then being smuggled on an inter-state public bus to Mumbai. Mumbai is a known exporting location of Indian star tortoises from India to countries in Southeast Asia²⁶. Another notable incident involved online trade in eight Indian star tortoises and one Indian tent turtle. This incident was recorded from Bhopal district of Madhya Pradesh.

Half of the incidents in which hardshell turtles were recorded, happened along with the seizure of Indian star tortoises. Multiple species of native hardshell turtles are frequently seized along with Indian star tortoises due to their common demand for the domestic and international pet trade.

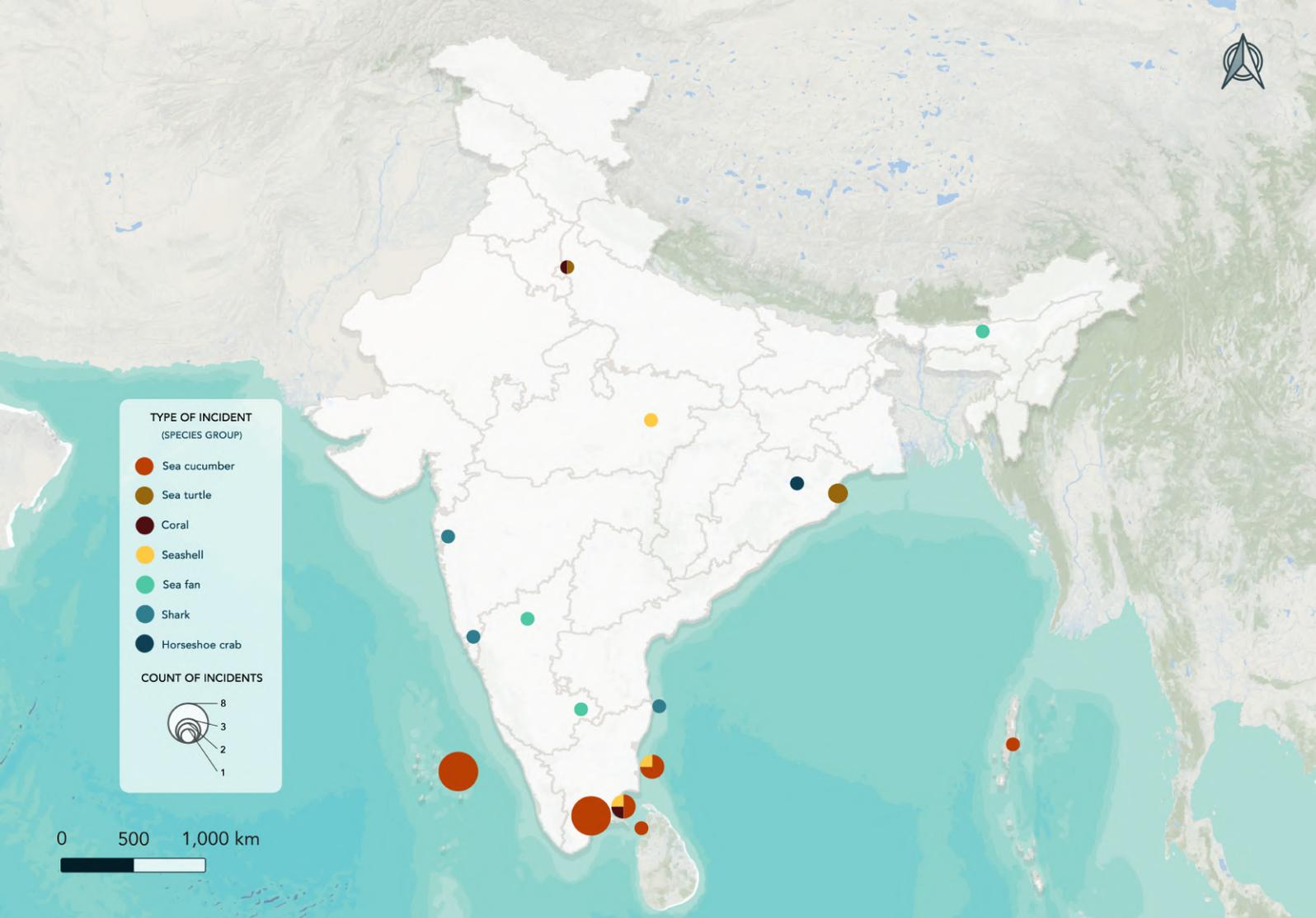
While we recorded four native softshell turtle species, four native hardshell species and one native tortoise species, we also recorded 12 incidents involving unidentified species. Therefore, the number of species recorded in this assessment can only be treated as an underestimate.

Category of TFT	Common Name	Scientific Name	WLPA	CITES	IUCN Status
Softshell turtle	Indian flapshell turtle	<i>Lissemys punctata</i>	Sch I (Pt II)	II	VU
	Indian peacock softshell turtle	<i>Nilssonina hurum</i>	Sch I (Pt II)	I	EN
	Indian narrow-headed softshell turtle	<i>Chitra indica</i>	Sch IV	II	EN
	Indian softshell turtle	<i>Nilssonina gangetica</i>	Sch I (Pt II)	I	EN
Hardshell turtle	Indian tent turtle	<i>Pangshura tentoria</i>	Sch I (Pt II)	II	LC
	Tricarinate hill turtle	<i>Melanochelys tricarinata</i>	Sch I (Pt II)	I	EN
	Spotted pond turtle	<i>Geoclemys hamiltonii</i>	Sch I (Pt II)	I	EN
	Indian black turtle	<i>Melanochelys trijuga</i>	NA	II	LC
Tortoise	Indian star tortoise	<i>Geochelone elegans</i>	Sch IV	I	VU

Chapter 7

MARINE WILDLIFE





Map.7.1. District-wise spatial distribution of illegal marine wildlife trade incidents recorded during 2020.

The biodiversity-rich waters of India harbour several commercially important species with high values in the international trade market. The literature on Illegal, Unregulated, and Unreported fishing (IUU) suggests that marine wildlife from India is illegally transported across borders to neighbouring countries where its harvest and trade is legal^{27,28}. In response to an increasing international demand, many commercially valuable species like sea cucumbers, trochus shells, sea horses, sea fans and ten species of

elasmobranchs amongst several other marine species have been included in the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 over the years^{Annex}.

The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (WLPA) enlists a number of marine species across four schedules (I, II, III and IV) with varying levels of protection. These species include the **giant grouper** (*Epinephelus lanceolatus*); the **dugong** (*Dugong dugon*); all species of **seahorses, pipefishes** and **sea cucumbers**; all **scleractinian corals** including organ pipe corals, sea fans, sea sponges; 10 species of **sharks and rays** (elasmobranchs); and 24 species of **molluscs**. A number of **cetaceans, marine turtles, crocodiles** and **sea snakes** are also enlisted under the WLPA.

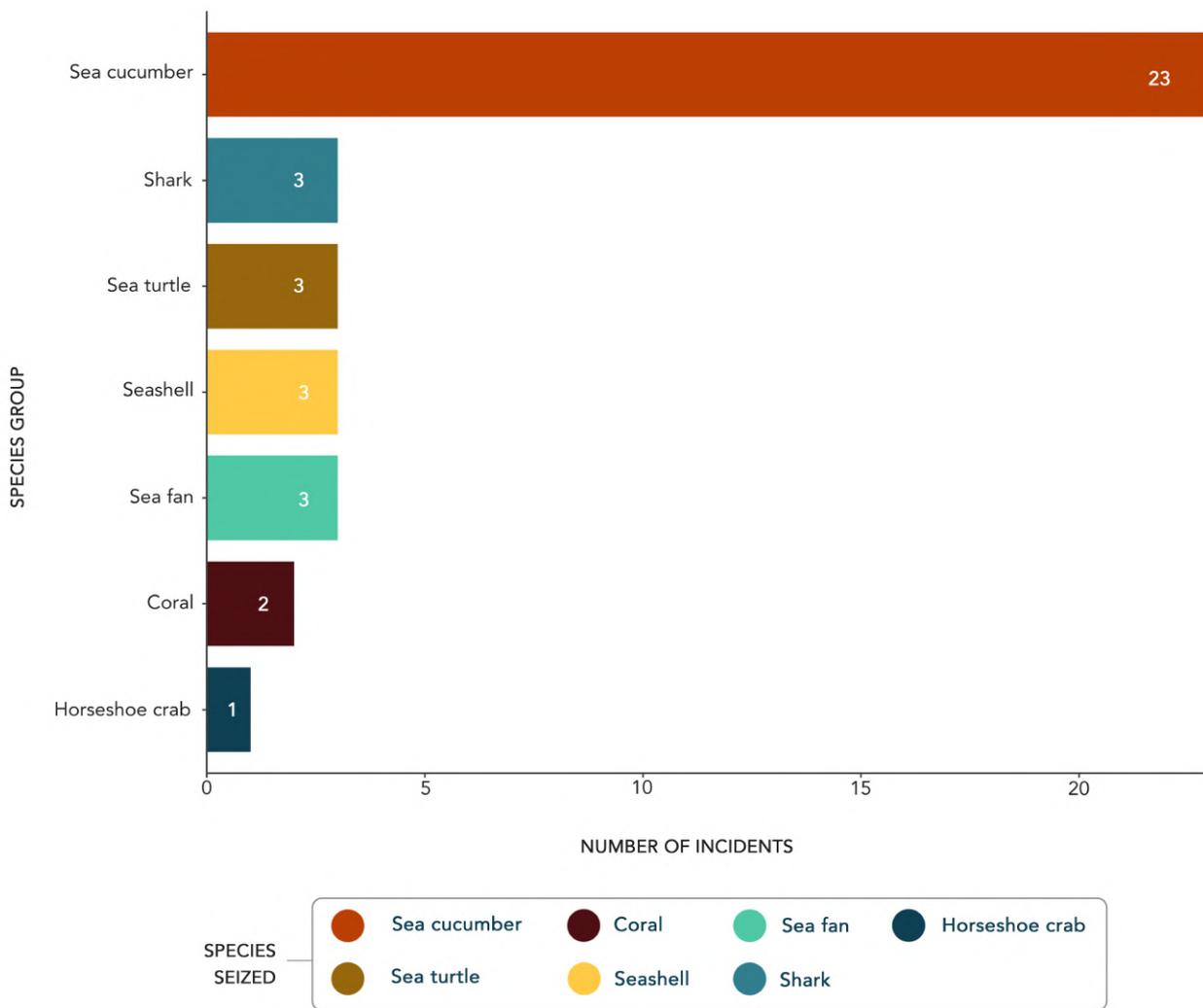
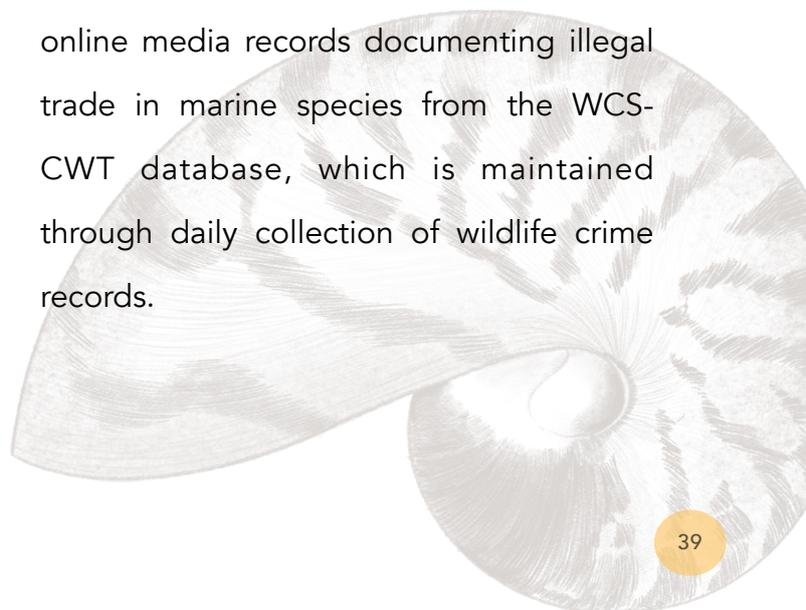


Fig.7.1. Species-wise frequency of illegal marine wildlife trade incidents recorded during 2020.

In this assessment, we collected online media records of illegal trade in marine species in India for 2020. We used a combination of keywords, 'sea cucumber' 'sea cucumber seize' 'sea cucumber smuggle' 'sea cucumber poach', 'sea cucumber arrest', 'seahorse trade', 'seahorse seizure', 'seahorse for sale', 'seahorse seize', 'shark fin', 'shark fin seize', 'manta ray', 'mobula ray gills', 'mobula ray', 'manta ray gills', 'seafan smuggle', 'sea turtle arrest', 'sea turtle seize' in Google Search Engine.

Furthermore, to maximise data collection, we also used additional keywords and online resources, such as websites and Twitter profiles of enforcement agencies (WCCB), and the environmental magazine, 'Down to Earth'. We have also included online media records documenting illegal trade in marine species from the WCS-CWT database, which is maintained through daily collection of wildlife crime records.



We recorded 35 illegal marine trade incidents involving protected species such as sea cucumbers, sea fans, corals, sea turtles, elasmobranchs, horseshoe crabs and other commercially important molluscs (Fig.7.1). While a majority of the seizure incidents took place in coastal areas of states like Tamil Nadu, Goa, Odisha, Maharashtra, Union territories of

Lakshadweep Islands, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands; a few isolated events reported marine wildlife seizure incidents from states like Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi and interiors of Karnataka. 24 of the 35 reported contraband were meant to be exported out of the country based on media reports and historical evidence describing the nature of trade.

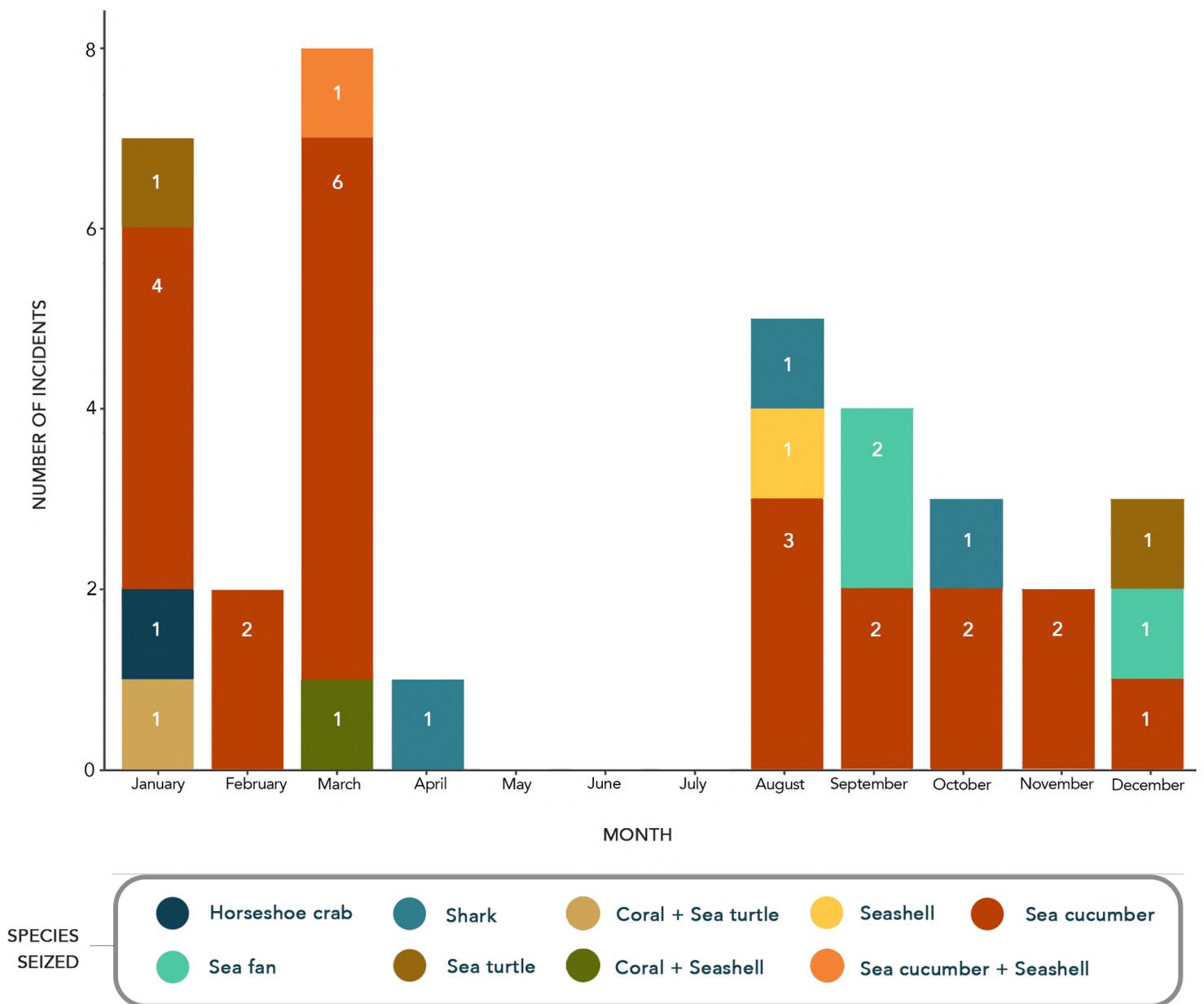


Fig.7.2 Month-wise frequency of illegal marine wildlife trade incidents recorded during 2020.

Illegal trade in sea cucumbers accounted for 23 incidents out of the total seizures of protected marine species in India. The highest number of incidents (Fig.7.1) was recorded in March (8 incidents), followed by January (7 incidents) and August (5 incidents). Only one incident was reported in April, and no incidents were reported between May and July (Fig.7.2). The four-month period corresponds with a nationwide lockdown to curb the COVID-19 outbreak. While the impact of this lockdown on poaching and illegal trade is unknown, the absence of incidents reported during this period could be related to limited enforcement capacity (due to safety measures), constrained supply chains, or lack of reporting. The April incident reported a whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*) stranded at Baga Beach, Goa, missing its fins. A week later, video footage of the event surfaced in which unidentified men were seen cutting off the fins (possibly while the animal was still alive).

According to the media articles, 19 seizure incidents seem to be acted upon through intelligence tip-offs suspecting criminal activities. Other seizure incidents were

carried out during joint operations (9 incidents), routine inspection (3 incidents), apprehending trespassers within protected areas (2 incidents) and intercepting abandoned contraband (1 incident). Forest Departments undertook 24 seizure incidents reported in 2020, a large number of these incidents involved a special unit or a subsidiary unit of the Forest Department (e.g. Sea Cucumber Protection Task Force, Forest mobile flying squads and Anti-Poaching Guards/Watchers) that was responsible for carrying out the investigation and prosecution. The Marine Police and the Coastal Security Group (CSG) - special divisions of the Tamil Nadu Police Department - investigated 10 of the 16 seizure incidents in their state. Central agencies such as the WCCB (3 incidents), Coast Guard (2 incidents), and the Customs (2 incidents) have routinely assisted in apprehending poachers and offenders under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

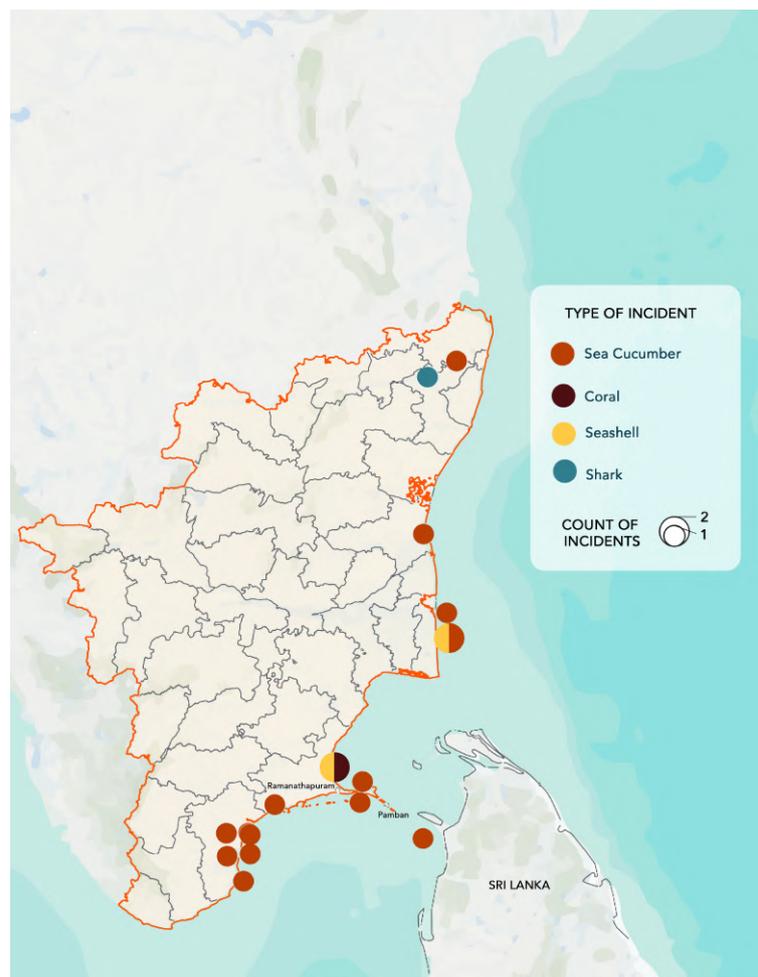
Wildlife seizures in charismatic species like sea turtles and whale sharks tend to be rare in India, however, two incidents involving sea turtles were reported in January and December off the coast of

Odisha on the eastern coast of India. The coastal waters off the state witness sea turtle aggregations in the months of December and January, leading to a mass nesting event, popularly known as 'Arribada', on the beaches of Rishikulya, Odisha. In both incidents, the perpetrators were trespassing near Gahirmatha Wildlife Sanctuary and were arrested by enforcement agencies on account of the olive ridley turtles (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) caught in their nets. In another incident from August, a whale shark that was meant to be sold, was seized by the police at Sassoon Dockyard in Mumbai. The fishermen and traders managed to escape, while the buyer was arrested.

Two in every three recorded illegal marine wildlife trade incidents in India originated from the Union Territory of Lakshadweep Islands (8 incidents) and the state of Tamil Nadu (16 incidents) in 2020 (Map.7.2) suggesting both a high volume of trade and an active enforcement regime. Coastal areas of Tamil Nadu seem to serve as connecting regions, facilitating mobility between all supply chain entrepôts. Out of the 16 incidents reported from Tamil Nadu, 14 involved sea cucumbers, one

involved multiple species of shells and another involved processed shark fins. In the latter incident, a Customs Intelligence Unit intercepted two passengers at Chennai airport in possession of 23.5 kg of processed shark fins. The two individuals attempted to transport the contraband by air to Dubai. Additional information revealed that the intelligence unit was familiar with the smuggling of wildlife products, stating that the last shark fin contraband incident was seized in December 2019.

Map.7.2. Location-wise spatial distribution of illegal marine wildlife trade incidents recorded from Tamil Nadu during 2020.



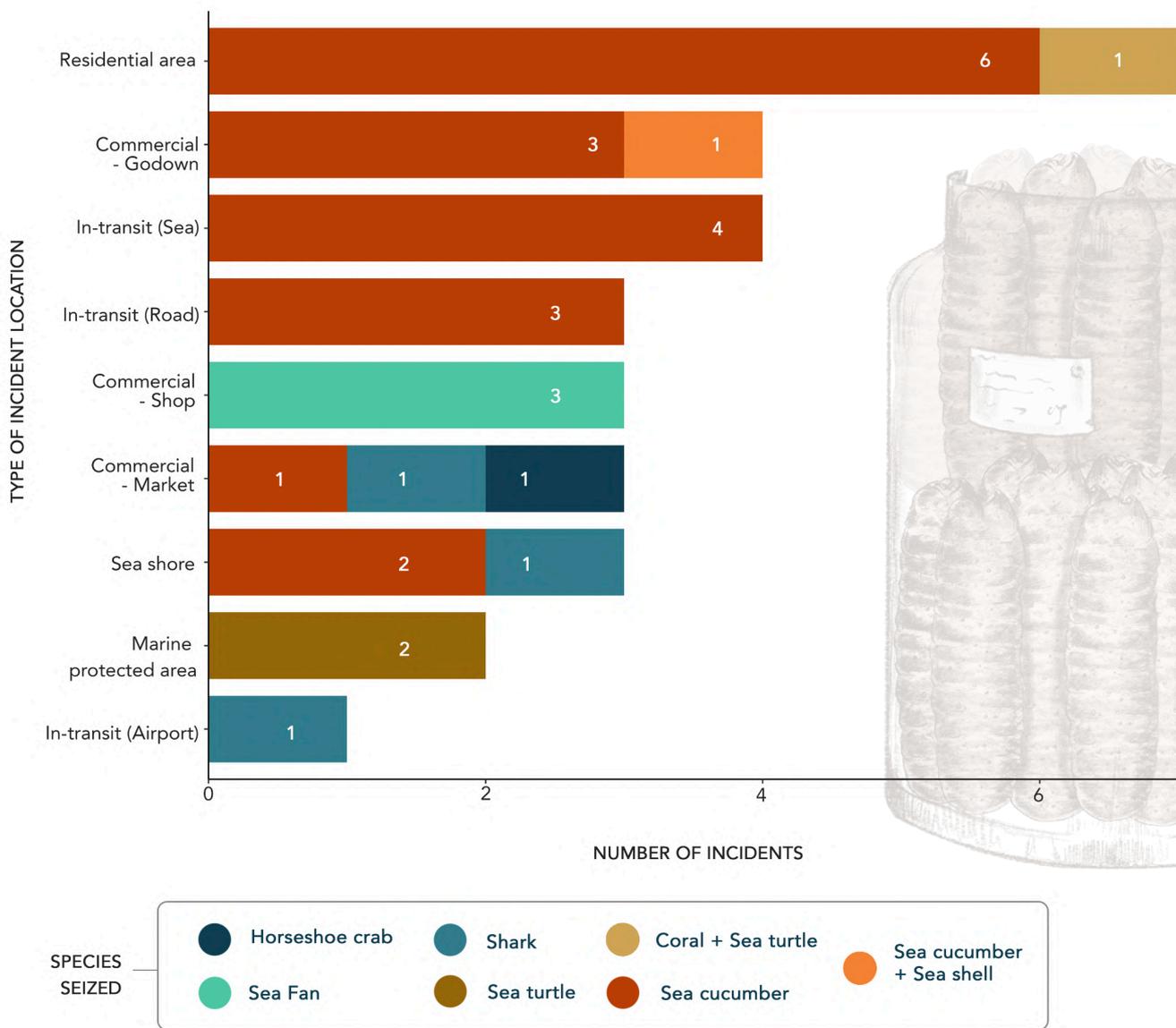


Fig.7.3: Location-wise frequency of illegal marine wildlife trade incidents recorded during 2020 (five out of the documented 35 incidents involving marine wildlife did not mention any information on type of location; these incidents were excluded from the graph).

We further analysed the role of each seizure location to find multiple entrepôts in the illicit trade of sea cucumbers. (Fig.7.3). Analysis of the 2020 sea cucumber incidents revealed the organized nature of sea cucumber smuggling from India into neighbouring countries. Contraband seized from residential addresses (6 incidents) (Fig.7.3)

revealed stockpiling of processed and freshly acquired sea cucumbers. In one such incident, the arrested individual revealed that middlemen stockpiled processed sea cucumbers until they received communication to transport the consignment through sea or air routes. Four other sea cucumber incidents from commercial addresses revealed that consignments were stored in godowns

(warehouses), concealed in cement bags or gunny bags, and transported via road.

The use of vehicles to transport sea cucumbers by road, either from the runner to the processing agent, or the middleman to the transporter, were reported from two incidents. The arrested individual confessed that his associates had purchased the contraband from Thoothukudi (Tamil Nadu) and intended on selling it in Vembar (Tamil Nadu), shedding light on the possibility of multiple traders within each supply chain.

Poachers who attempted to transport sea cucumber consignments through unregistered vessels via sea routes to Sri Lanka were apprehended by the Coast Guard and Tamil Nadu coastal police authorities in the Gulf of Mannar in one instance. The Indian Coast Guard apprehended one Myanmar boat near Rutland Island in South Andaman. Another boat intercepted near Agatti Island was headed beyond the territorial waters.

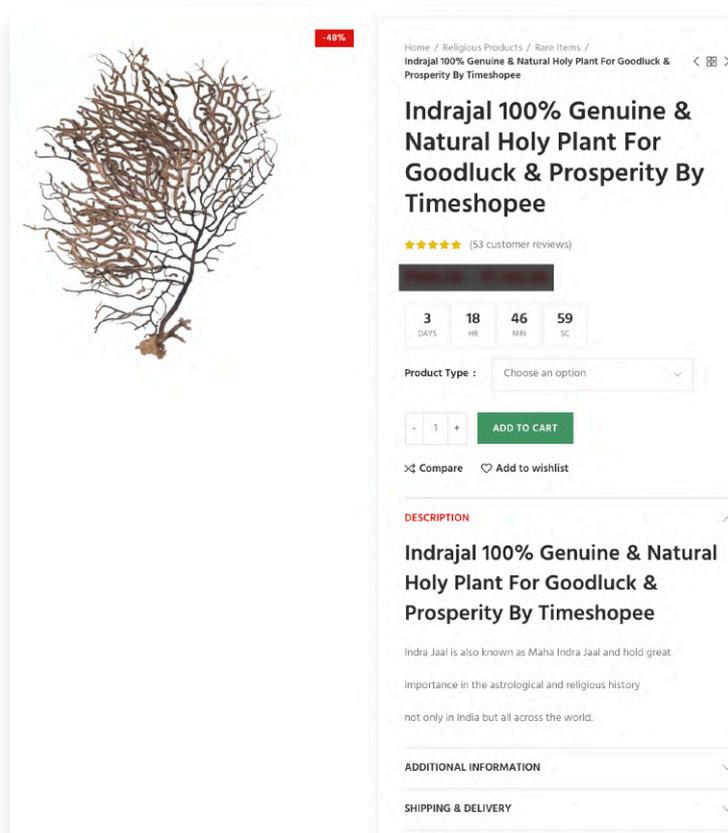
Sea fans are found in coral reef-associated habitats present along the coastal waters of Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, the Gulf of Kutch, and India's island territories.

Delhi: January 19, 2020:

Corals and endangered hawksbill turtle carapace (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) seized from farmhouse in South Delhi.

Delhi Police, along with the People for Animals (PFA), conducted a joint operation that raided a farmhouse in South Delhi's Kapashera area. The Police seized skulls, skin and the bodies of several endangered species from the farmhouse. Two corals and the carapace of a hawksbill turtle (*E.imbricata*) were found along with multiple terrestrial species.

Online sale of sea fan (Sold as 'Indrajal')²⁹.



Odisha: January 2nd, 2020:

A resident from West Bengal was caught while selling six live horseshoe crabs at the weekly market. Each individual weighed around 300 to 350 gms. He was selling marine arthropods along with items like herbal oil and medicinal herbs. The accused had purchased the horseshoe crabs from fishermen.

Horseshoe crabs are not commonly reported in trade in India. This incident, however, indicates the possibility of having a domestic market for this species.

They are one the commonly traded species in India, having a domestic market associated with ornamentation and superstitious beliefs. They are popularly sold as 'Indrajala' or 'Mahajal', believed to bring prosperity to those who possess them²⁹. In 2020, three incidents alone accounted for 1,142 individual sea fans. Information gathered from the two incidents reveals a network of wholesalers, retailers and middlemen that supply sea fans to vendors, such as priests, who sell them as religious items. However, there is little to no information on the source of these sea fans.

In addition to these, 40 trochus shells and 10 spider conch shells were seized from an individual in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh. Trochus shells are only found in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. In contrast, spider conch shells can be found in Lakshadweep, Tamil Nadu, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and reef slopes off the western coast of India.



Chapter 8

OTHER SPECIES OF INTEREST

approach to focus on terrestrial ungulates, which are frequently documented for their involvement in poaching and trade for wild meat, and other derived wildlife products such as pelts, horns/antlers, and other organs.

Ungulates

Ungulates are a broad and diverse group of hoofed mammals. This term is loosely used to comprise deer, pig, cattle, elephant, rhino, and whale. For this assessment, we analysed online media records of illegal trade in species of deer, antelope, boar, and wild sheep (excluding records of elephants, rhinos, whales and dolphins). We took this

We recorded 89 ungulate poaching and trade incidents, documenting species of wild pig, spotted deer (Chital), sambar, blackbuck (Indian Antelope), Indian gazelle (Chinkara), Indian muntjac (barking deer), serow, blue sheep, nilgai, gaur, wild buffalo, mouse deer, hog deer, and musk deer, in this assessment. One in three records of ungulate incidents was reported along with other wildlife species parts and



products, such as leopard, tiger, elephant, rhino, pangolin, and various species of mammals, birds and reptiles. Odisha (15 incidents) and Karnataka (14 incidents) were reported with the highest number of ungulate poaching and trade incidents, followed by Tamil Nadu (10 incidents) and Maharashtra (10 incidents). Other states (and union territories) documented with ungulates poaching and trade incidents were Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

Collectively, this species group observed the highest number of documented poaching and illegal trade incidents in media articles for 2020. Month-wise, April (16 incidents) observed the highest records of ungulate incidents, coinciding with nationwide COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. This finding is consistent with other research (Mendiratta et al. 2021) that report an increase in wild meat hunting during the lockdowns in the face of increased food insecurity.

Other Mammals

We collectively grouped other mammalian species (besides big cats, elephants, pangolins, rhinos, and ungulates) documented during the assessment within this category. We recorded 34 poaching and trade incidents involving other mammals documenting clouded leopard, Asiatic black bear, Himalayan black bear, sloth bear, porcupine spp., civet spp., jungle cat, wild hare spp., squirrel spp. (Malabar giant squirrel, flying squirrel spp., others), Indian jackal, Ganges river dolphin, monkey spp., and hedgehog spp. Two in three records of 'other mammal' incidents were reported along with parts and products of species like leopard, tiger, elephant, pangolin, and various species of ungulates, birds and reptiles. States documented with other mammal poaching and trade incidents were Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Assam, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh.

Bear species were documented in eight separate incidents; five involving sloth

bears (products seized nails and claws) and three involving Asiatic or Himalayan black bears (products seized pelts and bile ducts). Hare was similarly documented in eight incidents, seven of which involved poaching incidents, whereas one incident involved capturing a live hare (seized

along with pangolin scales and a turtle shell). Porcupine spp, squirrel spp, and Indian jackal were documented in five incidents each. Three incidents reported involved the arrest of perpetrators after they posted photos and videos of hunting on social media.



Other Reptiles (Excluding Tortoises, Freshwater and Marine Turtles)

We collectively grouped reptile species, excluding tortoises, freshwater and marine turtles, documented during the assessment within this category. We recorded 49 poaching and trade incidents involving reptiles documenting sand boa, monitor lizard, spiny-tailed lizard, Indian chameleon, tokay gecko, mugger, and multiple species of snakes. A fourth of the reptile incidents were seized along with other wildlife species parts and products, such as leopard, tiger, elephant, rhino, pangolin, ungulates, and various species of mammals and birds. One

in 10 records assessed in this report involved documentation of reptile poaching and trade incidents. Monitor lizard (17 incidents of which 3 involved *hatha jodi* or monitor lizard hemipenis), sand boa (15 incidents) and snake spp. (10 incidents; including cases of snake venom) were the major documented reptile species groups. Maharashtra, in comparison, observed the highest recorded reptile incidents (eight incidents), of which seven involved sand boa alone. Media reports of sand boa incidents (13 out of 15 incidents) reported unverified price tags (ranging from lakhs to crores of rupees), raising concerns about increased poaching Annex. Other states that documented reptile poaching and trade incidents were Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.



Birds

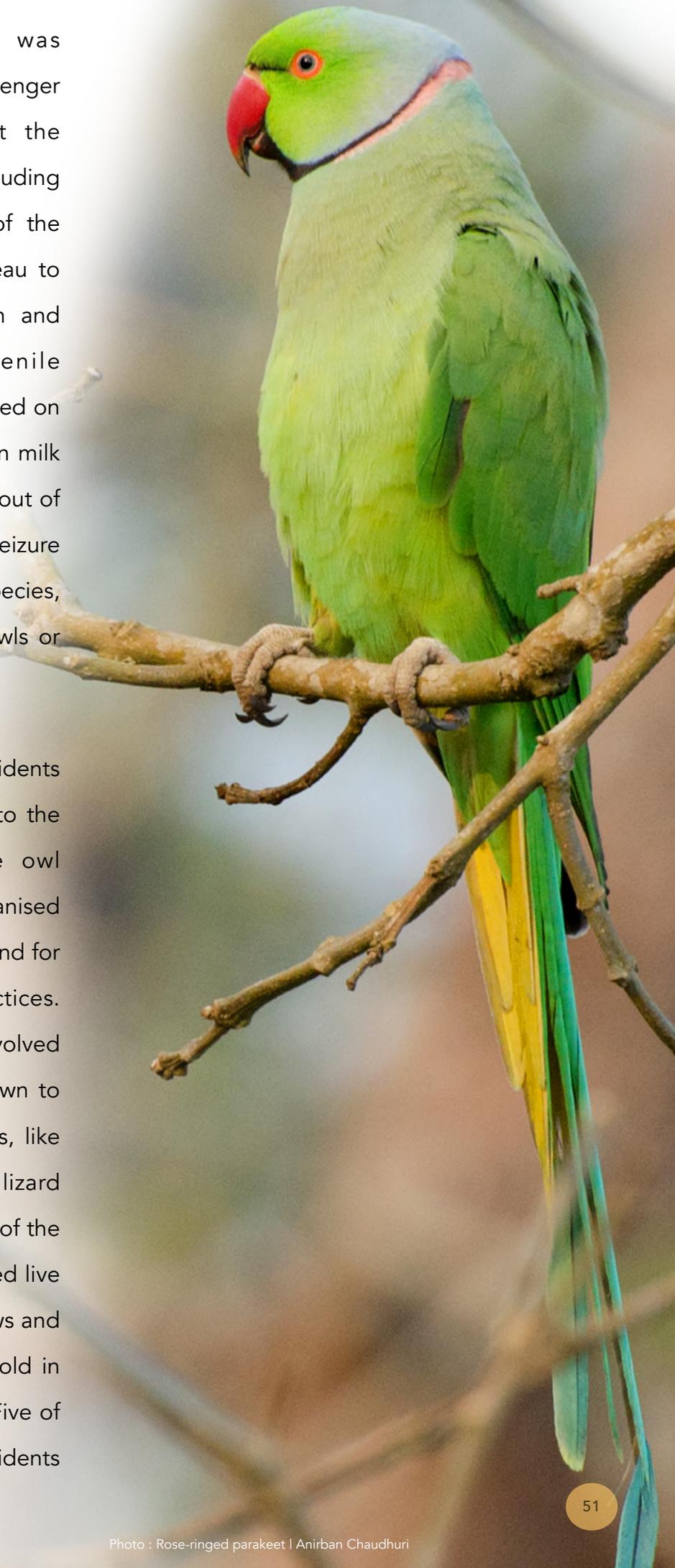
We recorded 37 seizure incidents of bird species during 2020, of which 23 incidents involved single species and 14 incidents involved multiple species. Species hunted and traded include parrots, owls, peafowl, hornbills, munias, vultures, francolins, quail, and pheasants. Tamil Nadu reported the highest poaching and trade incidents in birds (6 incidents), followed by Karnataka (4 incidents) and Gujarat (4 incidents). The maximum number of incidents were recorded in January (8 incidents), followed by April (6 incidents), and July (5 incidents) and November (5 incidents). The six incidents in April were all reported to be hunting, seemingly for consumption. This may be attributed to the nationwide lockdown due to COVID-19 that severely restricted economic activity, transportation, and access to food. During the month of April, in Rajasthan, five individuals in a quarantine centre killed and cooked a grey francolin since they were tired of eating only vegetarian food. In the same month, seven individuals in Tamil Nadu were apprehended for killing and cooking quail, along with hare and squirrels, and

posting images and videos to their WhatsApp and Facebook accounts. Several hunting incidents of bird species occurred outside of protected areas, with individuals citing the movement of birds outside the forest as the primary reason for hunting them.

Ten of the recorded seizure incidents were of parrot species. The targeted species were predominantly rose-ringed and plum-headed parakeets, with few instances of red-breasted parakeets and alexandrine parakeets. Parakeets were traded or kept in captivity only for their use as pets. Seizure incidents occurred either during transport, at the time of sale by individual sellers, or from residential homes and pet shops. Parakeets were largely traded live, though individuals died during transport due to stressful conditions. Two high volume incidents were recorded, where 500 and 750 parakeets were seized during transport at train stations. Two incidents of juvenile parakeets being traded were also observed. Parakeets were primarily smuggled via trains, both passenger and goods trains. In January, an organised interstate trafficking racket between pet shop owners and suppliers in Karnataka,

Telangana and Maharashtra was detected by enforcement. Passenger trains were used to transport the protected species of birds, including parakeets, captured in jungles of the Western Ghats and Deccan Plateau to different destinations in Western and North India. In March, juvenile parakeets that were being smuggled on an express train were concealed in milk cartons to avoid detection. Three out of ten recorded parrot/parakeet seizure incidents took place with other species, primarily birds like munias and owls or turtles and tortoises.

Six of the recorded seizure incidents involved owl species. According to the media reports almost all the owl trafficking incidents were by organised smuggling gangs, driven by demand for their use in superstitious practices. These seizure incidents also involved other species and their parts known to be traded for superstitious beliefs, like live red sand boas, monitor lizard hemipenis, and jackal bones. Five of the six owl trafficking incidents involved live owls, with one incident of owl claws and other wildlife contraband being sold in a grocery store in Uttar Pradesh. Five of the six recorded owl seizure incidents



their parts. In one incident a live eagle owl being sold in November was recorded from Karnataka. Spotted owlet, barn owl, and Indian eagle-owl are some of the traded species of owls in India. Owls are used in occult practices, especially during Diwali, increasing their demand in November³⁰.

Nine waterfowl poaching incidents (including migratory birds) were also

observed. Egrets and duck species, like the northern shoveler, northern pintail, and lesser whistling duck, were targeted. In one instance 180 live egrets were caught using nets by three individuals in Tamil Nadu in January. The trio were planning to sell meat from the birds in local markets. Most of the poaching incidents that targeted waterfowl were reported in winter months. Odisha and Gujarat reported the highest instances of poaching of migratory species (two incidents each) followed by Tamil Nadu (one incident). In Odisha, all poaching incidents were reported from Chilika Lake. In Gujarat, poaching incidents of coots and demoiselle cranes were observed in the Nal Sarovar Sanctuary and Kutch area.

There was one instance where peacock feathers were seized, along with other wildlife contraband of ivory and tiger claws, and three instances where peafowl were hunted for meat. There were two hornbill cases, one involving feathers being seized in a market raid in Arunachal Pradesh and another incident of male hornbills being hunted in Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam.



Photo : Barn owl | Dean Eades_Wikimedia Commons

Non-Native Wildlife

We collectively grouped species of foreign/exotic origin that were being illegally traded within this category. We recorded 13 exotic wildlife incidents, documenting toucan spp., parrot spp., monkey spp., macaw spp., curassow spp., kangaroo spp., iguana spp., tarantula spp., and meerkat, among others. Six records documented exotic species incidents that occurred near the Indo-Bangladesh border region (five records from West Bengal and one record from Assam). Three incidents were reported from Airports (two from Chennai and one from Kolkata), while one incident was reported from Chennai Central Railway Station. Three separate seizure incidents involving African elephant tusks and hippopotamus teeth/tusks.

List of CITES Appendix I & II species documented in seizure incidents from 2020:

Species	Cites Appendix
Hyacinth macaw (<i>Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus</i>)	I
Hippopotamus (<i>Hippopotamus amphibious</i>)	II
African elephant (<i>Loxodonta africana</i>)	II
Keel-billed toucan (<i>Ramphastos sulfuratus</i>)	II
Aldabra giant tortoise (<i>Aldabrachelys gigantea</i>)	II
Red-handed tamarin (<i>Saguinus midas</i>)	II
Brown-headed parrot (<i>Poicephalus cryptoxanthus</i>)	II
Green iguana (<i>Iguana iguana</i>)	II

(Other mentions of non-native wildlife in seizure incidents did not specify species; include squirrel monkeys, macaws, capuchin monkeys, marmosets and aracari toucans)



Red Sandalwood

Pterocarpus santalinus, commonly known as red sandalwood or red sanders, is a tree species distributed in the forests of Andhra Pradesh and pockets of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Red sanders are considered one of the most lucrative products for timber smugglers ^{Annex}. In our assessment, we found 52 seizure incidents of red sandalwood in 2020. Most of these (30 incidents) occurred in the Chittoor and Kadapa districts of Andhra Pradesh, close to source locations such as in Seshachalam Hills. Besides, red sander logs were also seized in transit on national highways connecting Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Smugglers used luxury cars and SUVs to smuggle smaller quantities of red sanders and stored them in the godowns, warehouses and depots. The use of seaports (Chennai Port, Tamil Nadu; Nhava Sheva Port, Maharashtra; Mundra Port, Gujarat; New Mangalore Port, Karnataka) and airports (Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi and Rajiv Gandhi International Airport, Telangana) for smuggling of red sanders were also documented. These consignments were concealed in bags and

shipment containers, heading to Dubai, Hong Kong, Thailand and China. The arrest of international suspects from China and Sudan was recorded in 2020, wherein the consignment was smuggled by air. During our assessment, we found fewer seizure incidents recorded between March and May, which might be attributed to travel limitations due to lockdown.

Uncategorised

Additionally, we documented 17 incidents linked to wildlife crime, which did not fall under the predefined categories mentioned above. Of which, six records involve seizure incidents of timber-based products, and four incidents involving Indian sandalwood. Other records involved incidents of illegal fishing, fake wildlife products, frogs, teeth of unspecified wildlife origin, and Indian costus herb (*Dolomiaea costus*) (Appendix I of CITES; Schedule VI of WLPA). The mentioned incidents within this category were coincidental but may warrant in-depth documentation to better understand its severity.

Chapter 9

ONLINE WILDLIFE TRADE

The illegal wildlife trade, already rampant on-ground, seems to have moved online in recent times. It is found across the internet ranging from popular social media platforms like Facebook, Youtube, pet forums, e-commerce marketplaces to more privacy-oriented platforms such as WeChat, WhatsApp and Telegram. Some of the key reasons behind its popularity are easy accessibility, private networking and the anonymous nature of the trade. Social media makes it possible for even local inexperienced sellers with no established connections or networks to now have a global reach. Restrictions on travel and shipping caused by the pandemic have also catalysed the increase in cyber assisted wildlife trade.

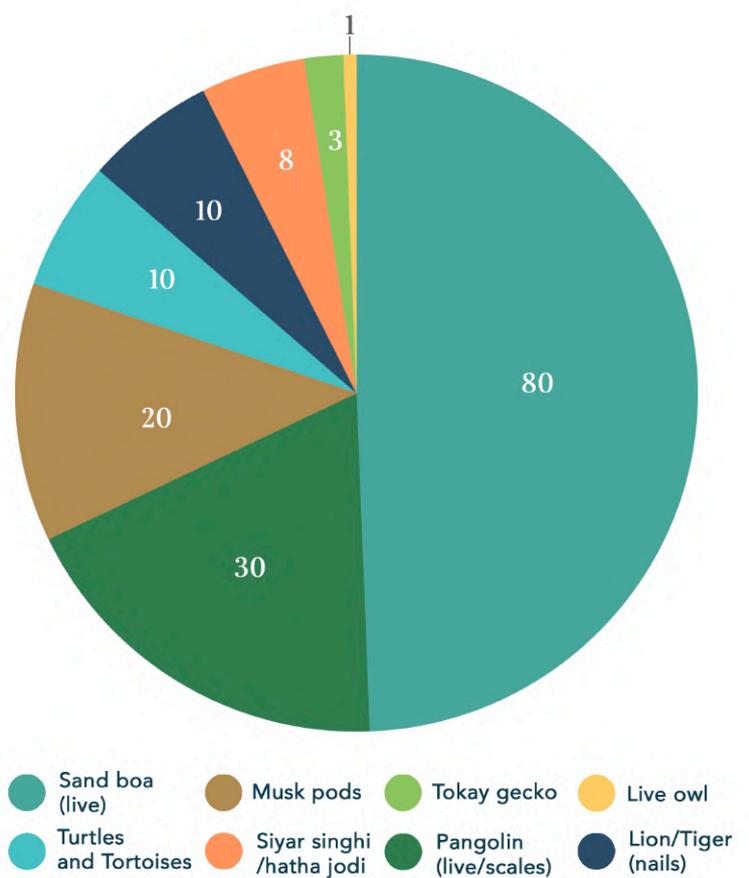
In India, online trade is primarily driven by the demand for meat, parts for traditional medicines, pet trade, and occult practices like black magic and other myths. In many Youtube videos, pangolins are shown to

have a magical power that makes them capable of generating electric current inside their body; sellers label this as a 'pangolin power test'. Such posts and videos have a common thread of superstition where it is believed that they possess some supernatural power. Recent surge videos and posts of the sale of sand boas also called double engine snake ('*do muh wala saap*') has been recorded. Similarly, superstitious beliefs seem to be driving the demand of many other species and products like monitor lizard genitalia (*hatha jodi*), deer musk pods, tokay gecko, owls, sea fans that are found widely across the internet. Posts are often published using code words and regional words such as: 'double engine snake' for (red sand boa), sikka (pangolin scales), kasturi test (musk pods), bajar kit (pangolin), natchathira aamai (turtle), etc.

Several native and exotic species of birds and turtles/tortoises; such as star tortoises, red-crowned roof turtle, rose-ringed parakeet, alexandrine parakeet, red munia, and other exotic species such as African grey parrot, blue-throated macaw and yellow-crested cockatoo, protected under CITES, commonly feature online as

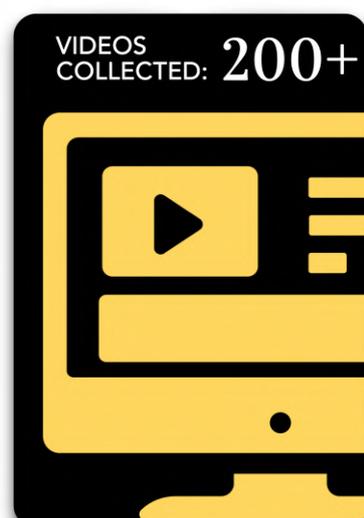
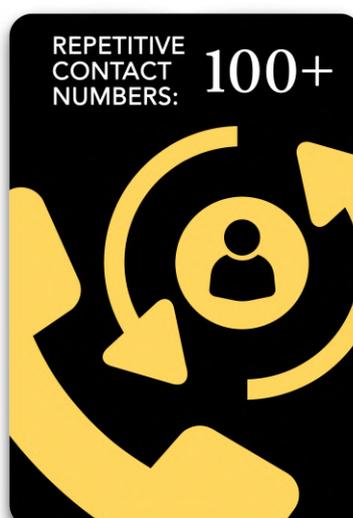
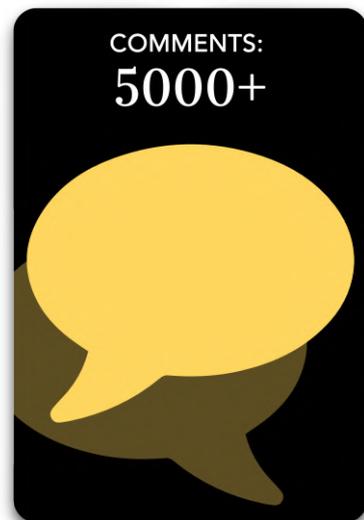
pets. Videos and posts for their sale are frequently found in private Facebook India groups and various forums.

YouTube was found to be very popular among local sellers to advertise live animals and derived products for sale. Following tip-offs from YouTube has led to successful seizures of pangolin scales, tiger skins, rare seashells, red sanders, sandalwood, amongst others, by WCCB and Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network the past year.



Pilot Monitoring of YouTube

Through short-term monitoring, we came across more than 200 videos on illegal selling of live species or their derived products. The authenticity of the listings has not been verified.



Annexure: Wildlife Crime Control Bureau – Advisory from 2012 on assigning monetary value to seized wildlife articles.



GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

भारत सरकार

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS

पर्यावरण एवं वन मंत्रालय

2nd Floor, Trikot-I.

२ तल. त्रिकूट-१

Wild Life Crime Control Bureau Bhikaji Cama Place, New Delhi -110 066.

वन्यजीव अपराध नियंत्रण ब्यूरो

भिकाजी कामा प्लेस, नई दिल्ली-११० ०६६.

No. 10-27/WCCB/2012/3874

Dated: 9th August, 2012

ADVISORY – 01 of 2012

1. It has been observed that whenever wildlife or wildlife articles are seized, the enforcement agencies tend to assign monetary value to such articles. Trade in wildlife articles is prohibited and there is no basis for such monetary valuation.
2. Indian wildlife is under stress from illegal trade. Illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife articles is demand driven and primarily for profits. Some of the habitual wildlife criminals during their interrogations revealed that they switched over to illegal wildlife trade from other criminalities such as narcotics, due to lower risk and perceived profits. Some first time wildlife criminals had resorted to such offences after reading about high values of wildlife articles in the newspapers.
3. Quotation of international market prices for wildlife articles, in no way adds value to the enforcement efforts. On the contrary, the practice may actually promote poaching and illegal wildlife trade.
4. The matter may therefore be brought to the notice of the field formations and appropriate instructions may be issued to stop this practice. If there is a system of rewards, citations etc., based on value of seized contraband, the same may be amended for wildlife articles. Conspicuous contribution towards prevention/ apprehension/ investigation / prosecution work related to wildlife crime; and busting of organized wildlife criminal networks could be the basis for such rewards. Press briefings on wildlife crime may highlight endangered status of the species involved, its role in ecology and adverse impact of its loss on environment.

(Shyam Bhagat Negi)
Additional Director/IGP
Ph: 26182484.

Copy forwarded for information and necessary action to:

1. Directors General of Police of all States
2. Chief Wildlife Wardens of all States
3. Director General, Assam Rifles/BSF/CISF/ITBP/SSB, Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi.
4. Director General, Railway Protection Force, Ministry of Railways, Government of India, New Delhi.
5. Chairman, Central Board of Customs & Excise, Ministry of Finance, New Delhi.
6. DG, Department of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), Ministry of Finance, New Delhi.
7. RDDs WCCB – NR, WR, CR, SR and ER

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Reported Date	Title (As mentioned in link)
Jan 1, 2020	तेंदुआ खाल,कछुआ और हिरण सींग को बेचने के फिराक में थे तस्कर,पुलिस के हत्थे चढ़े 3 आरोपी
Jan 2, 2020	Rescued baby parakeets being fed on formula, love
Jan 3, 2020	Six horseshoe crabs seized in Odisha, man arrested
Jan 4, 2020	Snake venom worth Rs 1.5 crore seized, three arrested in Bengal
Jan 4, 2020	Snake venom worth Rs 1.5 crore seized, three arrested in West Bengal Kolkata News
Jan 4, 2020	Chhattisgarh: 2 cops, 5 others arrested while trying to smuggle leopard skin
Jan 4, 2020	7 arrested with four leopard skins in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada
Jan 5, 2020	11 tonnes of red sanders seized in Perungalathur Chennai News
Jan 5, 2020	Snake venom worth Rs1.5cr seized, 3 arrested in Bengal
Jan 5, 2020	One held, 16 red sanders log seized
Jan 7, 2020	Wildlife body parts seized
Jan 7, 2020	3 Chinese Arrested With 180 Kg Red Sandalwood At Delhi Airport
Jan 8, 2020	खवल्या मांजराची तस्करी करणाऱ्यांवर पोलिसांनी कारवाई - Marathi News Pangolin smuggler arrested by police Latest crime News at Lokmat.com
Jan 8, 2020	Hunting of prey animals continues unabated in Umblebailu
Jan 8, 2020	Two arrested for smuggling animal parts Bareilly News
Jan 9, 2020	Wildlife carcasses seized, case registered
Jan 9, 2020	Three Assamese held for transporting tusks in Karnataka
Jan 9, 2020	One more arrested from Bengaluru for smuggling wildlife
Jan 10, 2020	Maha: 7 men try to smuggle pangolin in ambulance; arresteds
Jan 10, 2020	Police seize 4,000 kg red sanders in Mangaluru; 5 held
Jan 10, 2020	Khed resident held with Indian Pangolin
Jan 11, 2020	Villagers kill leopard: बिबट्याला ठार मारून त्याच्या मांसाचं गावजेवण घातलं - villagers kill leopard, feast on its meat in assam dibrugarh district
Jan 12, 2020	Bengaluru: Koramangala police seize elephant tusks and tiger teeth Bengaluru News
Jan 12, 2020	Operation Turtshield: Thousand endangered turtles seized from Bengal market
Jan 12, 2020	Fatehpur : Case filed against 4 youths for hunting pangolin-m.khaskhabar.com
Jan 12, 2020	900 kg of sea cucumber seized
Jan 12, 2020	Seven arrested for smuggling Pangolin
Jan 13, 2020	৯৮৫টি বিরল প্রজাতির কচ্ছপ উদ্ধার বনগাঁ থেকে, গ্রেফতার ২
Jan 13, 2020	तस्करी कर लाए जा रहे कछुए बरामद, दो तस्कर भी पकड़े
Jan 14, 2020	Illegal ivory trade in Kochi: 5 arrested illegal ivory trade five men arrested for illegal trade of ivory
Jan 14, 2020	Three arrested for poaching peafowls

- Jan 14, 2020 [DRI News Updates: January 2020](#)
- Jan 14, 2020 [Five held for attempting to sell ivory in Kochi](#)
- Jan 15, 2020 [Six suspects in tiger poaching held | National](#)
- Jan 15, 2020 [219 sea cucumbers worth Rs1.17 crore seized in largest seizure in Lakshadweep](#)
- Jan 16, 2020 [Trawler with live Olive Ridleys seized by forest guards in Gahiramatha](#)
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- Dec 30, 2020 [600 softshell turtles rescued in Naihati](#)
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- Jan 31, 2021 [Customs officials seize 13 wildlife species at Chennai Airport](#)

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SNAKE VENOM

PANGOLIN PILLS

TIGER BONE
MEDICINE

Man...
M... M...