

THAILAND'S TIGER ECONOMY



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Below: There are probably fewer than 5000 wild tigers surviving worldwide



Introduction

In the last ten years there have been thousands of column inches dedicated to the news that the tiger is on the brink of extinction. With a global population that has crashed by 95% over the last 100 years, millions of dollars have been spent on new and innovative approaches for tackling habitat destruction, the decline in prey population, and the continuing international illegal trade in tiger parts and derivatives.

But the tiger can be saved, if people really want it to happen. Across its range, there are several isolated examples of tiger populations bouncing back in the face of what were once thought to be insurmountable odds.

Sadly, one country where this hasn't happened is Thailand, once the primary range of the Indo-Chinese tiger. Years of rampant illegal logging, widespread poaching of endangered species, poorly implemented conservation strategy and government indifference have decimated the tiger population and the forests that it depends on.

Thailand has shown itself to be woefully inadequate in implementing domestic legislation to stamp out the tiger trade and in enforcing international agreements to which it is a signatory. EIA has learned through its investigations that Thailand has also become

a conduit for illegal trade as well as a manufacturer and supplier of tiger products.

A blossoming institutional belief that tigers can be saved by the breeding of captive tigers outside a scientific international studbook programme is threatening to undermine *in situ* conservation efforts. Instead of securing a long-term future for tigers, these activities shield a more sinister threat: the commercial trading of tigers into extinction.

EIA investigations have revealed a persistent lack of interest and effort on the part of the Thai authorities to control a growing domestic and international trade that threatens not only the remaining wild tigers in Thailand, but also wild tigers across their range. Despite the widely available tiger products which publish their factory address details on the packaging, the authorities appear to have taken no action and displayed no interest in curbing this trade.

The tiger, once a symbol of strength and progress, has been reduced to a symbol of apathy and disregard for a once rich biodiversity. But EIA believes that it is not too late for the new Prime Minister to take immediate and decisive action to reverse the recent trend and to reinstate the wild tiger as a symbol of a new Thailand.

Debbie Banks,
EIA Senior Campaigner
June 2001

The tiger, once a symbol of strength and progress, has been reduced to a symbol of apathy and disregard for a once rich biodiversity.





Thailand and Tigers

Thailand signed the UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in March 1973¹ and ratified the Convention in April 1983, but it was not until Thailand faced wildlife trade sanctions under CITES in 1991² that domestic legislation was adopted to implement CITES. The Wild Animals Preservation and Protection Act, B.E. 2535 (1992), bans the hunting of wild tigers and trade in parts and products of tiger whether it is wild or captive bred.

The import and export of live tigers (for zoos, captive breeding programmes and circuses) can only take place with the relevant certificates and permits from the Thai Royal Forest Department (RFD) and CITES Management Authority. A number of individuals are still permitted to keep tigers in captivity but are banned from trading in the animals or their parts.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives is charged with enforcing the Act and violations can carry a fine of up to US\$888 and imprisonment of up to four years. It does not however, specifically prevent the manufacture, use, sale, import and export of products *labelled* as containing tiger.^{3,4}

Historically, Thailand was widely considered to be the primary range of the Indo-Chinese sub-species of tiger and until 1998 there were an estimated 250-501 wild tigers⁵. Recent independent scientific research has verified that

there are far fewer tigers in Thailand than previously thought, perhaps only 150.⁶

Despite legislation banning the hunting, import, export, and trade in tigers, Thailand is a prominent consumer of tiger parts and derivatives. Trading in tigers from neighbouring tiger range states as well as its own populations, Thailand has not only become a conduit for trade, but has a flourishing domestic market greatly enlarged by tourism, and an established manufacturing industry churning out tiger products for home and abroad.

The Thai-Burma and Thai-Cambodian borders are renowned hot-spots for illegal wildlife trade and there are numerous reports of Thai buyers bringing illegal tiger and other cat products into Thailand from Burma^{7,8} and smuggling live tigers from Thailand to Cambodia.⁹

Earlier well-publicised surveys in Thailand's capital, Bangkok, have documented the widespread availability of tiger-based products in Chinatown shops and pharmacies.¹⁰ There is abundant evidence of a wider international illegal trade in tiger parts and derivatives beyond national and regional borders.

Official CITES and United States records implicate Thailand as a continuing conduit for trade. CITES data reveals that between 1977 and 1997, 58 shipments of trophies, skins, bones, teeth, claws and tiger derivatives were intercepted while being exported from Thailand to Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the

... about 100 captive-bred tiger cubs are traded illegally each year.

Right:
Tiger and other wildlife parts for sale on the Thai-Burma border



© Damien Lewis



The Thai Government's Failure

Philippines. The seizures included 16 skins, 48 claws, 20 teeth, 2 skulls and at least 743 tiger bone products¹¹.

Additional information from the US Fish and Wildlife Service shows that exports of tiger bone derivatives continued in 1998 and 1999 with further seizures of 195 tiger based derivatives¹². Both sets of data indicate that in some circumstances the derivatives originated from China and in fact, between 1990 and 1994 Thailand imported 1650 cartons of tiger based derivatives from China. Recent data is unavailable since Thailand has failed to submit annual reports on trade in fauna for 1998 and 1999¹³.

In a recent interview a well-informed source revealed that about 100 captive-bred tiger cubs are traded illegally each year. He described them being placed in cages, concealed in fruit crates and illegally smuggled by boat from Thailand to China. A middleman is used to locate the tiger cubs for sale and once an agreement is made, the tiger cubs are sent from Mai-Sai on to a boat which then travels to China along the Mekong River.

In July 1999, EIA met with the former head of the Wildlife Conservation Division and CITES Management Authority, Dr. Schwann Tunhikorn, to discuss the illegal sale of tiger parts in Bangkok. Dr. Tunhikorn told EIA that there had been recent enforcement activity when the Chairman of the IUCN Cat Specialist group had visited and found significant quantities of products available for sale in Chinatown¹⁴.

Dr. Tunhikorn showed EIA some of the products seized earlier and stated that they were fakes but could not offer any evidence to prove this. In recent investigations, EIA has found that some of the very same products are still available in Bangkok and real or fake, their availability perpetuates a demand that stimulates the poaching and trade in wild tigers.

In October 2000, Cambodian wildlife authorities seized two tiger cubs and a lion that were reported to have been bought from the Thai army¹⁵.

Details of past investigations have been widely publicised through the media and in the newsletters of specialist organisations of which senior figures in the Royal Forest Department are members. Yet the Thai authorities have failed to take action against an ongoing illegal trade.

Despite having been embarrassed before the international community over their failure to implement CITES in 1991, the Thai authorities have continued to ignore their obligations to CITES. This is not only reflected by the ongoing trade, but also by their failure to provide recent annual trade reports to CITES.

... the Thai authorities have continued to ignore their obligations to CITES.



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Above left: Raw tiger bone, on sale in a Bangkok pharmacy.

Left: Products labelled as containing tiger are easily available in Bangkok's Chinatown.

EIA Investigations

Recent EIA investigations reveal that the problem is much worse than simply selling Chinese-manufactured patent medicines. Factories in Thailand are illegally manufacturing tiger-based products for

a domestic and international market. In December 2000 and May 2001, EIA surveyed pharmacies in Bangkok's Chinatown and discovered that some of the products were being manufactured in Thailand. EIA identified three Thai factories: Zung Seng Heng¹⁶, Ouay Un and Heng Tien Huat.

Factories in Thailand are illegally manufacturing tiger based products

EIA Survey of pharmacies in Bangkok's Chinatown, December 2000 and May 2001

(all prices are in US\$ @ \$1 = THB 45)

Tung Kiong Seng Huat

Shop No. 300

- Tiger-based compound, locally known as "yao gao" to mix with liquor at \$5.40.
- Tiger bone pills at \$5.20 and \$2.04.
- Tiger penis pills at \$6.40.

The above three products were manufactured by Zung Seng Heng factory (Thailand), the store owner claimed the raw ingredients came from China.

Tiger bone pills at \$1.10, Chong Seng Medical Factory (China)

Tiger bone pills titled "*Pilulae Cortiees Ecommiae et Ossis Tigers*", Guiyang Chinese Medicine Factory (China).

Shop Two

No tiger products available

Chin Lee Chiang Pharmacy

Charoen Krung Rd, 15/16

- Tiger bone pills, \$6.10 for 20, according to the store owner these came from Beijing via Hong Kong.
- Tiger bone whisky \$23.70, made in China by Tong Reng Tang but distributed in Thailand by Li Fai Co Ltd.

Shop Four

Tiger yao gao, \$0.44 for three pieces.

Shop Five

- Tiger bone pills at \$1.10, made in Thailand by the Ouay Un factory.
- Raw tiger bone at \$6.60 per gram, makes tea or alcohol mix, according to the store owner the bone originates from China.

Shop Six

- Tiger bone pills, \$0.66, \$0.88, \$1.11.
- Tiger yao gao, \$10.00.

The store owner claimed that these products originated in China.

Shop Seven

No tiger bone products available

Soi Chareon Krung,

Chinatown

- Tiger yao gao at \$10.00, made by the Heng Tien Huat Factory (Thailand). The store-owner claimed that people from China visit Thailand to buy these products and bring them back.
- Another brand of tiger yao gao, called Yong Seaw Tung was also available at US\$10. The store-owner claimed that this product is not fake, is secretly made in Thailand and exported to China.

Tong Thai Dispensary

484 Yowaraj Road, Chinatown

- Three products for sale. Tiger yao gao by Heng Tien Huat Factory, and two different products of yao gao by Zung Seng Heng. The products were selling at \$8.00, \$9.00, and \$18.00 respectively.

Ching-Seng Cheang

522-524 Yowaraj Road, Chinatown.

- Two products for sale - yao gao manufactured by Zung Seng Heng for \$10.00 and tiger bone pills manufactured by Ouay Un for \$1.10.

Eng Chin Joo Chean Ltd

117 Rama 4 Road, Bangkok

- One product for sale of tiger pills called Hu-Gu PandanWan manufactured by Sian Drug Works in China, and selling for \$1.75.

Thong Thai Dispensary

Yaowaraj Road, Chinatown.

- One product for sale, yao gao manufactured by Zung Seng Heng and selling for \$8.00

Thailand's Tiger Factories

EIA has uncovered businesses in Thailand distributing and manufacturing tiger-based derivatives for a domestic and international market.

Ouay Un, 152/12 Pakasem Rd, Bangkok, www.ouayun.com

EIA investigators found Ouay Un's tiger bone pills for sale at the Sri Racha Health Traditional Medical Clinic at the world famous Sri Racha Tiger Zoo and at some of the pharmacies visited in Bangkok's Chinatown.

When EIA investigators visited the factory and enquired about the products available, they were informed that a range of products are made in Thailand and exported to Norway and the Netherlands.

With specific reference to the tiger bone pills, the factory manager claimed that the bone for the pills was from Thailand and cost over \$1000. The product was very diluted and one bottle of pills costs \$1.10.¹⁷

Zung Seng Heng, 3/286 – 289 Suwintawong Road, Moo 9, Lampakshi, Nong Chock, Bangkok, 10530.

One company of particular concern is Zung Seng Heng based in Phrakanong and Nong Chok in Bangkok. When an EIA Investigator met with the Manager and Director Mr. Songpol Bumrungrattakul he said his company buys in the tiger bone from China and processes it for a Thai market. He also implied that they export their products to China and the products are packaged for both the Thai and Chinese markets¹⁸.

Heng Tien Huat, 2/59 Soi Chan Set 1, Rama 11 Road, Bangkok

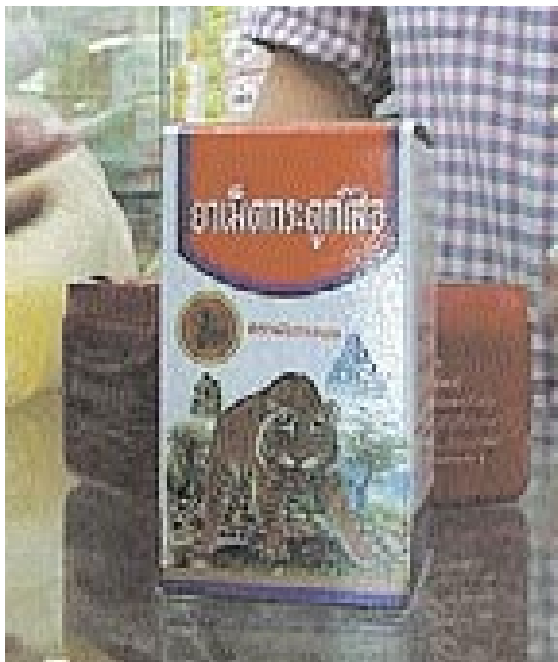
According to the packaging of tiger *yao gao* found in Bangkok's Chinatown, this product is manufactured in Thailand by Heng Tien Huat and according to the store owner, exported to China. Similar tiger bone products manufactured by Heng Tien Huat were seized by Canadian authorities in the late 1990s¹⁹.

Above right:

The Zung Seng Heng company buy in tiger bone from China to make a tiger-based compound, "yao gao", for a domestic and Chinese market.

Right:

Heng Tien Huat of Thailand manufacture tiger products for domestic and overseas market.



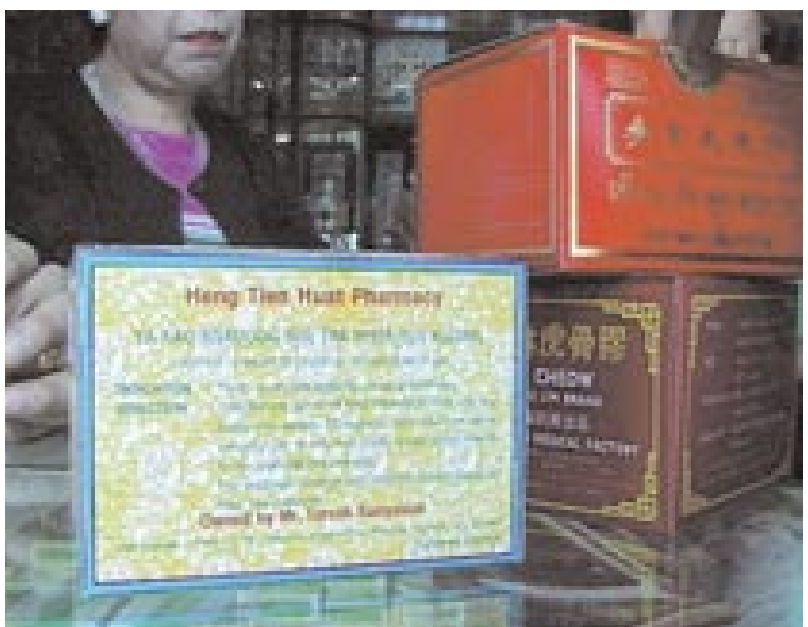
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Left:

Tiger bone pills made in Thailand by Ouay Un were found for sale in Bangkok's Chinatown and on the premises of the Sri Racha Tiger Zoo at the Sri Racha Health Traditional Medical Clinic. The Ouay Un factory manager stated that the bone comes from Thailand.



© Faith Doherty/EIA



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Right: At Sri Racha Tiger Zoo cubs are taken from their mother prematurely and weaned on sows.



© Faith Doherty/EIA

Right: Tiger cubs at the Nong Ngu Hua Snake Farm.



© Faith Doherty/EIA



Left: Sri Racha Tiger Zoo circus

© Faith Doherty/EIA

Thailand's Tiger Farms

According to official records there are approximately 300 tigers in captivity in Thailand²⁰, but unofficial estimates put the population of captive tigers in Thailand at around 1000²¹. EIA has asked the RFD about the status of tigers in captivity in Thailand and of the registration system, but has not received a response.

When the Indochinese Tiger Masterplan for Thailand was written in 1995 by a group of international scientists, there were only 43

Indochinese tigers in captivity across Indochina and in the US²². Most of the tigers currently held in captivity in Thailand are unsuitable for scientific captive breeding programmes, because many of them are Bengal²³ or hybrid through poor husbandry practices.

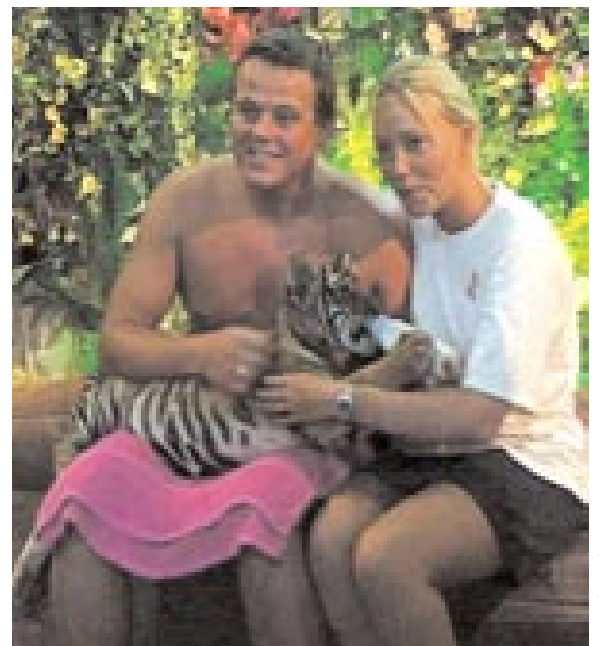
These tigers have little conservation value beyond their potential for education. To date, there have been no successful reintroductions of captive tigers in to the wild. The efforts at education are very poor with Sri Racha Tiger Zoo providing the worst kind of inaccurate ideas and misinformation.

Below left: Nong Ngu Hua Snake Farm tiger show

Below right: Tourists pose for photos with a tiger cub at Sri Racha Tiger Zoo



© Faith Doherty/EIA

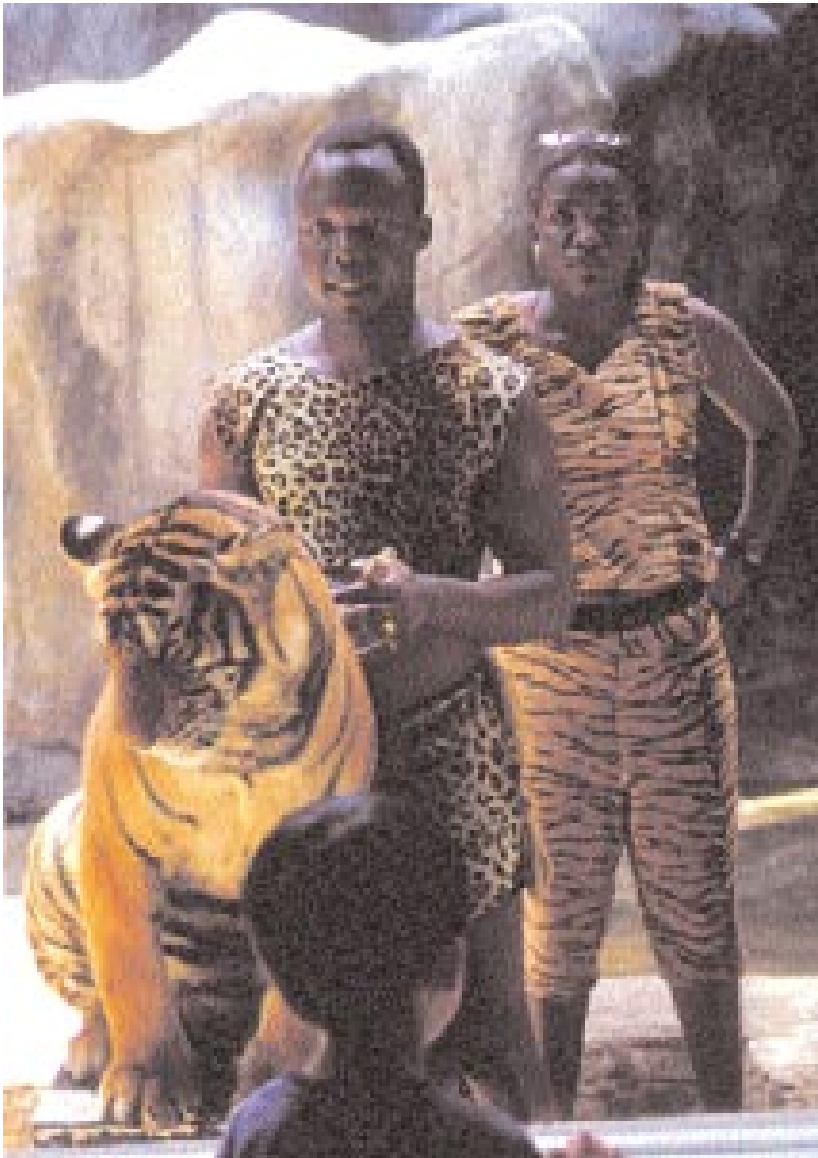


© Faith Doherty/EIA



© Faith Doherty/EIA

Above: At Sri Racha Tiger Zoo staff claim 300 tigers are born each year, yet there are only around 200 tigers there. Where have all the tigers gone?



© Peter Richardson/EIA

Above: Misleading exhibit at Sri Racha Tiger Zoo

One exhibit provides a photographic opportunity for tourists with tigers and “Kenya Boy”²⁴. A man and two women of African origin dressed in *faux* animal print outfits share an enclosure with tigers. For money, the man and women will pose with a tiger. Besides the obvious degradation of both human and tiger, the exhibit reinforces a common mistake that tigers are native to the African continent.

There has been widespread suspicion regarding the purpose and activities of tiger breeding facilities in Thailand. In 1995, Sri Racha Tiger Zoo was reported to be hoping for a change in the law to allow the sale of tigers for commercial purposes²⁵. At that time, there were 35 tigers at Sri Racha.

Today, in addition to the 50,000 crocodiles that are raised each year for commercial purposes²⁶, there are between 180²⁷ and 400²⁸ tigers held at the public zoo and a second facility that is closed to the public. Staff at the zoo claim that six females give birth every month and that around 300 cubs are born each year.²⁹ If the latter is true, the numbers do not add up. Where have all Sri Racha's tigers gone?

In response to international concerns regarding the purposes of Thailand's captive breeding operations for tigers, the Thai government issued a statement in 1995 refuting the charges of tiger farming for trade and reiterating that “it is the policy of the Wildlife Preservation and Rescue Committee to suppress the trade in tiger parts and to investigate any claim of tiger parts being used or sold in Thailand for any reason.”³⁰

Yet in December 2000 EIA investigators found tiger bone pills manufactured by the Ouay Un factory for sale in the Sri Racha Health Traditional Medical Clinic, on the premises of Sri Racha Tiger Zoo. Furthermore, in a study by TRAFFIC in 2000, a Chinatown store owner in Bangkok told investigators that he buys tiger penis from the Sri Racha Tiger Zoo.³¹

According to the Thai government statement of 1995, the owner of Sri Racha, Mr Maitree Tempsiriphong, has special status under a clause in the 1960 Thai Wildlife Law “to keep a large number of tigers without operating as a breeding center he is however, forbidden from trading or selling his animals or any tiger by-product”.

International Trade

In all tiger range states the tiger is threatened by habitat destruction, prey decline and poaching for illegal trade. While the solutions to these issues are many and varied and relate to the needs of local communities, one aspect is clear. So long as there is a demand, or perceived demand for tigers on the international market, there will always be an incentive for poachers and traders to deal.

Today this market is no longer confined to traditional Chinese medicine, but also a diffuse and widespread market for skins that is not only depleting tigers but impacting leopards and other endangered wild cats too.

Under CITES, tigers were listed in Appendix 1 in 1975 (except for the Siberian sub-species which was listed in 1987), thereby banning all international commercial trade. Since then there have been a series of resolutions adopted by the Conference of the Parties regarding conservation of, and trade in, tigers. Each resolution has recognised the significant efforts that have been made by Parties over the years to strengthen legislation and enforcement. They have also identified loopholes and made specific recommendations to Parties to address these.

By prohibiting products that claim to contain tiger, much of the pressure on enforcement authorities has been lifted in some tiger consuming states. The enforcement authorities of countries that voluntarily adopted such legislation can now seize such products without first having to conduct prohibitively expensive forensic tests.

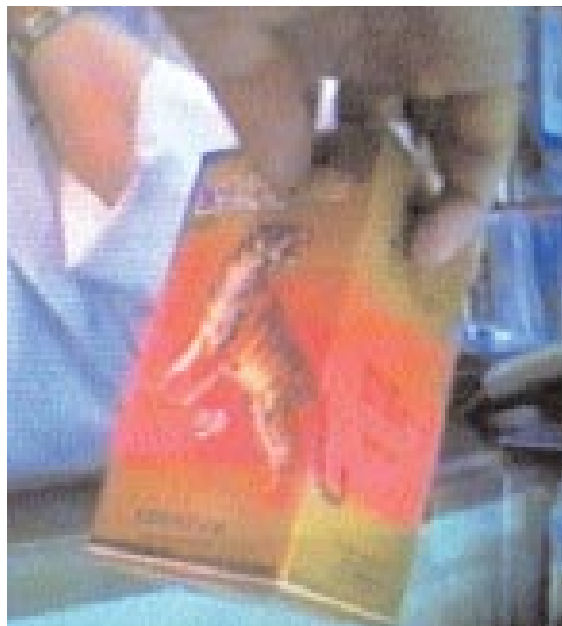
In 1999 CITES launched a series of technical and political missions to tiger range and consumer states, led by enforcement and implementation experts, to review legislation and enforcement activities in relation to CITES. They did not visit Thailand.

At the 11th Conference of the Parties to CITES in April 2000 the Parties approved the creation of a CITES Tiger Enforcement Task Force. This is an attempt to bring together enforcement personnel from tiger range and consumer states to gather, exchange and utilise intelligence more effectively. In a demonstration of its apathy towards tiger conservation, Thailand failed to send a representative to the first meeting that was held in New Delhi, 2nd – 6th April 2001.



© EIA

Above: Tiger bones for sale in Vietnam



Left: Tiger bone pills for sale in a Tokyo pharmacy.

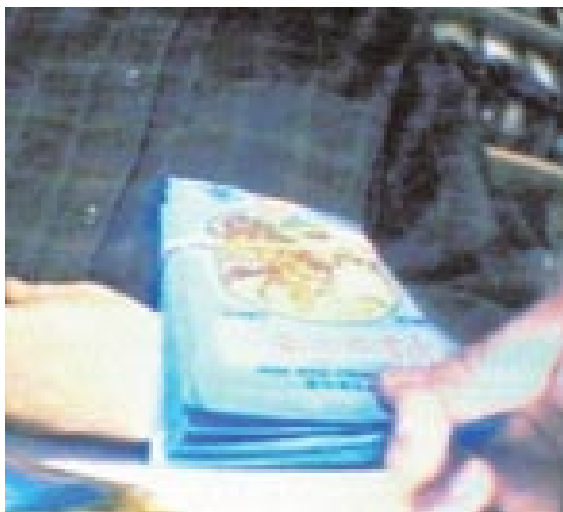
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Above: Tiger bones for sale in South Korea

Right: Tiger bone plaster for sale in New York's Chinatown



© EIA



Right: Tiger bone in alcohol for sale in Thailand

Far right: Tiger bone plaster for sale in Amsterdam

© EIA

In 1997, CITES Conference Resolution 9.13 (Revised) urged Parties to take the following actions to eliminate trade:

- 1. All Parties and non-Parties, especially tiger range and consumer States to adopt comprehensive legislation and enforcement controls as a matter of urgency, with the aim of eliminating trade in tiger parts and derivatives, in order to demonstrably reduce the illegal trade in tiger parts and derivatives by the 11th Conference of the Parties.*
- 2. All Parties seeking to improve their legislation controlling the trade in tiger parts and derivatives, or to adopt such legislation, including penalties adequate to deter illegal trade and to consider introducing national measures to facilitate implementation of CITES, such as voluntarily prohibiting internal trade in tigers and tiger parts and derivatives and products labeled as containing parts and derivatives of tiger* and other Appendix 1 felidae species.*
- 3. Those Parties and non-Parties in whose countries stocks of tiger parts and derivatives exist to consolidate and ensure adequate control of such stocks.*

*bolded text added by author



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Tiger Farming – An Urban Myth

The concept of tiger farms as a means to alleviate the pressure on wild tigers is not a new one, but it is one that has consistently been deconstructed and rejected by the international community on the grounds of economics, enforcement, ethics and politics.

In 1990 and 1992 China made initial attempts to seek international approval for trading in products from the Breeding Centre of Felid of Hengdaohezi in Heilongjiang, but withdrew any formal proposals before CITES when they realised there was no international support for such a move³². Instead, in 1993 China banned the use, sale, manufacture, import and export of any products containing tiger and any products labelled as containing tiger, withdrew tiger from the official pharmacopeia and initiated research to identify culturally acceptable alternatives³³.

The premise behind the promotion of captive breeding of tigers for commercial purposes is that the parts and products of captive bred tigers can cater for demand from an ever growing consumer base worldwide. Governments, tiger conservation experts, enforcement experts and NGOs continue to reject this notion for a number of reasons:

- Any legalisation of trade in tiger parts would only serve to perpetuate a market demand. It would also undermine the serious efforts on the part of many tiger range and consumer states over the last 10 years to secure a future for the wild tiger.
- Worldwide demand for tiger parts in traditional Chinese medicine and a booming demand for skins is simply too vast to be catered for by farming. Any moves in this direction will be overwhelmingly detrimental to the species in the wild.
- Economically, it will always be cheaper to kill tigers in the wild than raise them on farms. The average cost of raising one tiger to maturity, in non-professional husbandry conditions is over \$2,000, while a bullet costs less than one dollar – poison even less.
- Hundreds of forest guards in India and other tiger range states have lost their lives in the frontline battles to protect their natural heritage. The situation for them would worsen if trade in captive bred tiger parts were legalised.

- Current levels of illegal trade indicate widespread deficiencies in legislation and enforcement. The system would be unable to prevent the laundering of wild tiger parts into a legitimised trade.
- Legalising trade in captive bred tigers will fail to address the wider tiger conservation issues and threats that affect not only tigers, but other endangered cat species, prey species and forests.



Above: Sri Racha Tiger Zoo

© Faith Doherty/EIA

Below: The economy of tiger farming means that it will never relieve the pressure on wild tigers in other range states like India.



© Fatehpur Forest Dept.



Conclusions

Thai authorities are failing to enforce domestic and CITES-implementing legislation and as a result, tiger parts and derivatives are widely available in Bangkok and cross the borders with Cambodia, Burma and China.

There is cause for concern regarding the operation of businesses claiming to import and export raw tiger parts and derivatives. In particular Zung Seng Heng, Heng Tien Huat and Ouay Un, which are distributing tiger derivatives in Thailand.

Inadequate implementation of the registration system of captive bred tigers in Thailand is allegedly leading to the illegal export of live tigers from breeders in Thailand to Cambodia and China.



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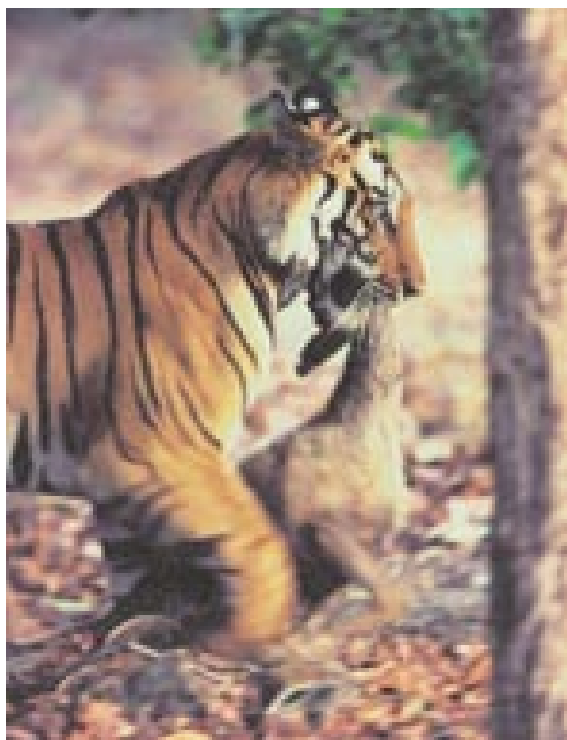
Recommendations

EIA calls upon the Government of Thailand and the Prime Minister to urgently carry out the following:

- Thailand must enforce its domestic legislation.
- As urged by CITES, Thailand must immediately amend existing legislation to include the prohibition of the sale of products *labelled* as containing tiger in order to avoid the need for prohibitively expensive forensic tests and to ease enforcement. Tougher penalties must be imposed to ensure the law is an effective deterrent.
- Thailand must create a National Wildlife Crime Unit dedicated to investigating and combating illegal trade in tigers, tiger parts and derivatives, including the investigation of factories responsible for manufacturing and distributing tiger derivatives. The results of the enforcement and prosecutions resulting from this unit must be made public.
- Thailand must nominate a representative of the enforcement authorities to the CITES Tiger Enforcement Task Force and to the Interpol Environmental Crime Sub-Group.
- Thailand must create an independent monitoring body to register and record the details of all captive bred tigers, ensuring transparency and accountability regarding the activities of captive breeding operations.
- Thai authorities and the international community must improve education and outreach to ensure that the limitations of captive bred tigers and their false claims of species conservation are better understood.

EIA calls upon the CITES Standing Committee to:

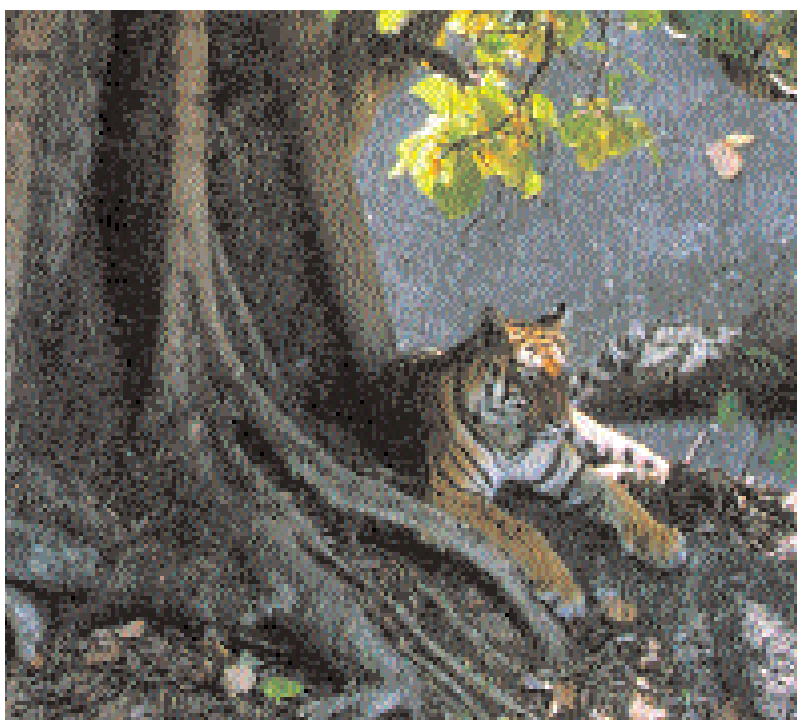
- Immediately dispatch a technical and political mission to Thailand to review legislation and enforcement activities as per the previous series of missions from which Thailand was omitted.



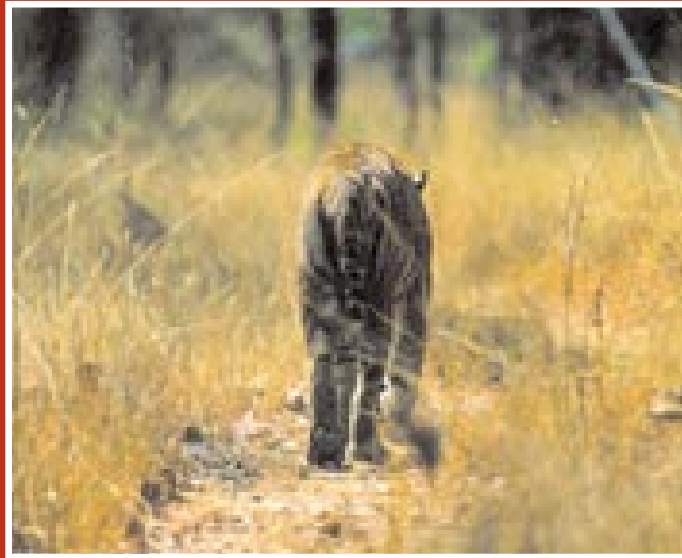
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