

Pelestarian Harimau Sumatera Kerinci-Seblat

Kerinci Seblat Sumatran Tiger Protection & Conservation

**Report on activities conducted with the
support of 21st Century Tiger and Dreamworld
Wildlife Foundation**

January-June 2016

by

Fauna & Flora International



Summary of activities and results to date

The project purpose is to secure the effective protection and conservation of Sumatran tiger through actions to reduce direct and indirect threat to tiger in a national park that forms the core (1.38 million hectares) of a globally important Tiger Conservation Landscape.

A total of 61 SMART forest patrols were conducted by Tiger Protection & Conservation Units in national park and park-edge forests with not fewer than 53 tiger records made in the course of patrols across a total walking distance of just over 686 miles.

While threat to tigers from organised poaching-and-trade syndicates remained high when compared to the long-term project average, active threat to tigers measured through snares detected and destroyed and number of patrols recording active threat, reduced.

TPCU patrols destroyed a total of 35 active tiger snares – three of which had been placed by a poacher already under arrest - compared with 46 active snares in the first six months of 2015 while the percentage of patrols recording active threat reduced to 14.75% compared with 23.8% of patrols in 2015 and 27.5% of patrols in 2014.

For the first time ever, all active tiger snares detected were recorded on patrols launched on the basis of information secured from community information networks or through investigations although information secured was very rarely specific in terms of exact location.

Additionally, camera trapping and monitoring transects were conducted by the project's partner team, Monitoring Harimau Sumatera (MHS) in an inner or 'Core area' of the national park, this activity is ongoing and results have not yet been analysed but also advise of a substantial reduction in direct threat to tigers .

Only one major tiger law enforcement action was conducted during this six months period and resulted in the arrest, in early January, of the kingpin of a tiger poaching syndicate operating from a village to the south-west of the national park and a second man who was the poacher in this case.

One of these two individuals was subsequently sentenced to four years in prison, the highest sentence ever recorded under current Indonesian wildlife crime legislation while the second man received a three years gaol term, both men were also ordered to pay substantial fines.

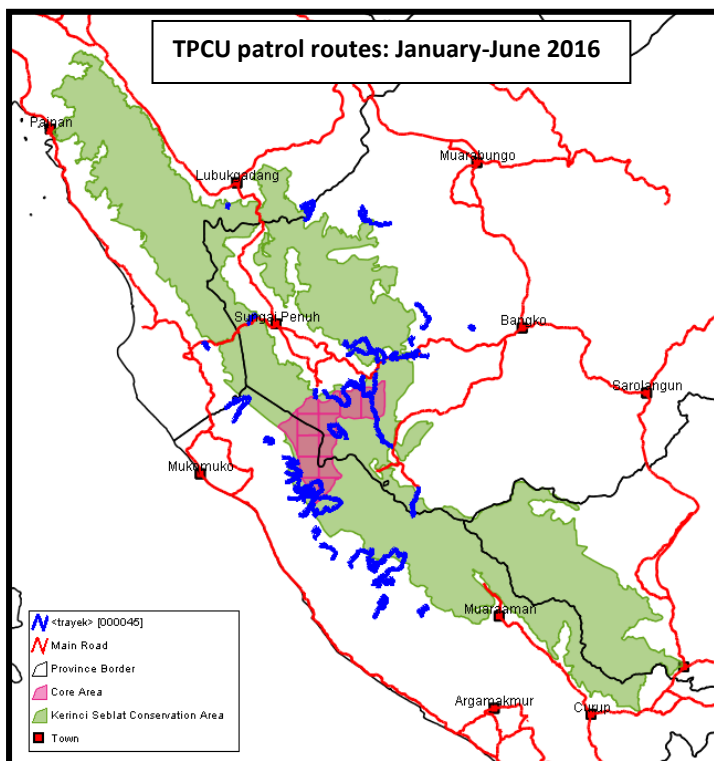
Additionally TPCUs responded to four human tiger conflicts during this reporting period, one serious, with monitoring advising that mitigation efforts, conducted collaboratively with the affected community, were successful.

Wildlife crime Investigations were conducted by TPCU personnel in three of the four provinces adjoining the national park with more than 80 investigation reports logged, the primary focus was to poaching and trade in Sumatran tiger but investigators also secured important data regarding related trade in Malay pangolin and Helmeted hornbill, both of which are now categorised as Critically Endangered as a direct consequence of illegal wildlife trade demand.

The team had hoped to be able to recruit and train up two additional rangers from early 2016 with the purpose of maintaining patrol capacity while strengthening illegal wildlife trade investigations. Unfortunately funds pledged for this purpose were not made available to the program during this reporting period.

Forest patrols by Tiger Protection & Conservation Units (TPCU)

The programme's six Tiger Protection & Conservation Units conducted a total of 61 SMART- forest



patrols across a walking distance of more than 1106Km (686 miles) by GPS Waypoint during the reporting period .

Patrols were conducted in national park and park-edge forests (See *SMART map, left*) of three of the four provinces of central-western Sumatra which overlay the protected area with a total of 321 Unit field days devoted to forest patrols.

Just over 62% of TPCU patrols recorded tigers present on patrol routes (See map, *below*) with a total of 53 tiger records made in the course of 38 patrols and with a frequency of encounter at 1 tiger per 20.85 patrol kilometres walked.

A further 14 monitoring transects were conducted by the TPCU's partner

team Kerinci Seblat Tiger Monitoring or MHS deep within a Core area of the national park with TPCU's focusing field actions to vulnerable populations in outer edges of the Core area due to MHS presence deeper within the Core area.

All monitoring transects reported one or more tigers present with a total of 31 tiger records made and with frequency of encounter at 1-18.75Km by GPS waypoint.

A slightly reduced frequency of encounter with tigers by TPCUs is likely, in part, to be a consequence of a continuing strong focus to intelligence-driven patrols to combat suspected active threat while six-month results can be biased by the results of a relatively small number of patrols.

However patrol records do suggest tiger densities in the outer edges of the national park and in buffer-zone forests in the south west of the protected area in Mukomuko and North Bengkulu districts have been impacted as a result of serious poaching threat recorded between 2013-2015 with at least four tigers known or strongly suspected to have been killed in 2015 by the poaching syndicate whose leader was arrested in January 2016 and this is likely to be borne out by analysis of camera trap monitoring results later this year .

Law enforcement conducted in early January (*see Investigations; Law Enforcement*) resulted in the arrest of a poaching syndicate 'kingpin' identified as the primary local driver of poaching threat in the south west of the core or focus area of the national park and park-edge forests.

Through interdicting the source of direct threat to tigers and maintaining a field presence and other activities to ensure there is no resurgence of pressure, providing threat to habitat is contained, tiger densities in this area are likely to begin to demonstrate recovery from 2017.

Units remained highly focused to detecting and addressing active threat to tigers and tiger prey and patrols were frequently driven by information secured from community information networks and through investigations.

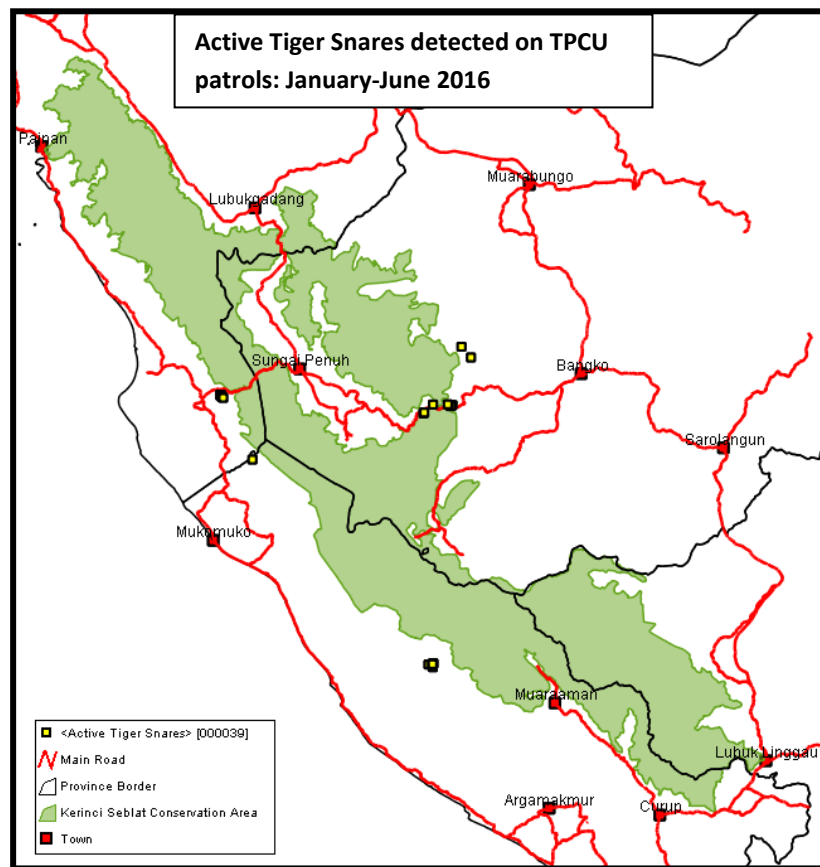
All active tiger snares (*see SMART map, above*) and the overwhelming majority of deer snares detected and destroyed by TPCUs during this six months period were recorded on patrols launched on the basis of information secured, the first such time this has occurred in project history.

A total of 35 active tiger snares were recorded and destroyed in the course of nine intelligence-driven TPCU patrols with active threat to tigers recorded on 14.75% of all patrols compared with 23% of patrols in the same period of 2015 and 27% in 2014 when, analysis of patrol results now suggests that poaching threat to tigers in areas where TPCUs have a patrol presence, peaked.

This reduced threat was most apparent in the first five months of 2016 with 18 active tiger snares – including three set by a poacher already arrested and in police custody – were recorded compared with 31 in the same five months of 2015.

Over the six months as a whole, patrol effort (Unit field days) to record active threat to tigers increased to 1 tiger snare per 9.2 patrol days compared with 1- 7.7 patrol days in 2015 and 1-6.5 patrol days in the first six months of 2014.

Meanwhile, in forests within and adjoining the south-west of the core area in Mukomuko district of Bengkulu, no active tigers snares were recorded by either TPCUs or on monitoring team transects following the arrest of a tiger poaching syndicate leader and one of his cohorts in early January. More significantly, for the first time in two years, no patrols reported suspected tiger mortality from snare poaching during this six months period.



However while active threat to tiger from organised poaching and trade syndicates detected by patrols reduced, threat remains above the historic project average which, for the period 2005-2011 was 1 tiger snare per 30.5 patrol days and this is unlikely to reduce to the historic norm or lower until illegal wildlife trade demand is addressed, both at a sub-national and as, if not more importantly, at an international level.

A total of 172 active snares set for deer (*rusa sambar* and *muntjak*) were recorded during this six months period with 148 of these recorded on an information-driven patrol in the north-east of the national park in Merangin district of Jambi during the fasting month of Ramadan.

Over the period as a whole, fewer than 7% of TPCU patrols reported active threat to deer with all but three active deer snares recorded on patrols found during the Ramadan period when poachers may be driven by local market demand.

However while threat to both tiger and to deer reduced during this six months period, TPCU patrols and investigations advised of continuing threat to the now Critically Endangered Helmeted hornbill from organised poaching syndicates funded and facilitated by traders, some of whom are also known to be involved in the trade in Sumatran tiger.

Illegal clearance of national park forests continued to be recorded, in particular in Merangin district of Jambi in the north-east of the national park where forest clearances are highly organised and backed by a rogue 'farmers rights organisation which is reported to receive direct financial benefit from the clearances.

The program team has recommended the national park authority lodge a formal report and request for investigative back-up to the Indonesia Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and to national police given a lack of national political will to address organised encroachment into protected forests and serious impacts on the park's capacity to respond to threat to habitat caused by a reorganisation of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry and substantial cuts in government funding to this and other protected areas.

Investigations

More than 80 wildlife crime investigation and 'for information' reports were logged by TPCU personnel during this six months period excluding information from community informants advising of possible active poaching threat for a patrol response.

Investigations were conducted in nine local government districts (*kabupaten*) and municipalities in three of the four provinces.

A primary focus was to securing valid information on suspected poaching or trade threat to Sumatran tiger for an appropriate response but extensive information was also collected, in the course of investigations, on threat to other species, in particular the now Critically Endangered Helmeted hornbill *Rhinoplax vigil*. Investigations also monitored illegal wildlife trade and changes in demand for species and body parts and worked to identify suspected illegal wildlife trade routes.

Investigations also advised that trade in the bezoar or gall bladder stones of Malay porcupine *Hystrix brachyura* (CITES II) is very much more extensive and serious than previously supposed and driven by illegal trade demand from two adjoining ASEAN countries. This trade may be deserving of a greater focus by national and international agencies and species conservation focused NGOs not least due to apparently strong connections to trade in other protected wildlife and apparent volume of trade suspected.

Almost half of all reports logged related to ongoing investigations, some of long-standing, which supplied up-dated or expanded information on the activities and associates of suspected wildlife criminals, black market prices allegedly offered by traders or secured, IWT trade routes and possible changes in IWT demand.

Investigations suggest that wildlife trade-driven demand for Sumatran tiger may have slowed since early-mid 2015 with major traders becoming more selective and setting higher minimum 'standards' for tiger body parts acceptable in the higher tiers of the illegal wildlife trade. Reported Trade demand in areas around the national park was highest for tiger bone and for tiger canines with investigations advising traders are now cautious regarding purchases of tiger skins, specifically citing the danger of detection and law enforcement.

One long-running investigation into serious levels of poaching threat to Sumatran tiger in the south-west of the national park in Mukomuko district of Bengkulu province, resulted in successful law enforcement action in early January 2016 and the arrest of the organiser of a tran-provincial tiger poaching syndicate and one of his cohorts.

Three major new investigations commenced, one into an individual believed to be directing the activities of two or more gangs of tiger poachers operating in and adjoining the national park in the south and south-west of the protected area and with links to the gang leader arrested in January.

A second investigation was launched into the activities of an individual named, in the course of covert interviews as a major buyer of helmeted hornbill casques and, more opportunistically, Sumatran tiger and believed to be deploying and funding the activities of four or more gangs of hunters operating across at least three provinces of Sumatra from his base in a park-edge district.

A third investigation resulted in two undercover TPCU investigators identifying a trader believed to be sourcing tigers and hornbill casques not only from his home province but from areas in northern Sumatra island.

Due to the linkages to poaching of tigers and hornbill north Sumatra, far from this project's area of operations, the project team briefed the WCS Indonesia Wildlife Crime Unit(WCU) and this investigation continues, in collaboration with WCU personnel.

Unfortunately, funds pledged for 2016 which would have allowed the team to recruit two additional community rangers so that patrol intensity could be maintained while investigation focus heightened were not disbursed.

Species and forest law enforcement actions to uphold Indonesia conservation law:

One major tiger law enforcement action was conducted during this six months period and resulted in the arrest and successful prosecution of two men with the heaviest sentence ever awarded under current Indonesian national conservation law against one suspect and a project-record sentence against the second.

Law enforcement was led by the program team in partnership with Mukomuko division police with the skin and complete skeletal assembly of an adult female Sumatran tiger poached in park-edge forest seized as evidence.

The prime suspect in this case had been under intermittent surveillance by TPCU investigators since late 2013 when he was initially identified as an opportunist broker of wildlife for local hunters and investigation focus stepped up following a tiger poaching incident in mid 2014.

Subsequent investigations advised that the suspect was the 'kingpin' or coordinator of an organised tiger poaching syndicate composing two or more gangs posing serious direct threat to tigers in national park forests in districts of three provinces with links to illegal wildlife traders in Riau and South Sumatra provinces in eastern Sumatra island.

This man was subsequently charged on two counts of tiger poaching and trade, one relating to the incident in 2014 and the second to the attempted sale of a tiger poached in forests to the south-west of the protected area in December 2015.

A second man was charged with one Count of tiger poaching while a third man was released under formal Caution on the grounds that he was only the courier in this case and acting under the orders of one of the suspects.

A warrant for the arrest of a fourth man identified in the course of investigations was issued by the district chief of police but the suspect absconded before the warrant could be executed and TPCU investigators and local police detectives continue to seek his whereabouts so that he may be arrested and face trial on tiger poaching charges.

This man is believed to be in hiding in a neighbouring district of Bengkulu province under the protection of a tiger poaching syndicate leader and nine active tiger snares destroyed on an information-driven TPCU patrol in June 2016 showed strong similarities in construction method with snares recorded in 2014 and 2015 in national park forests to the north in Mukomuko district of Bengkulu.

Sentencing for wildlife crime offences, in Indonesia or elsewhere, may not always reflect the serious nature of the crime on occasion because its wider context has not been clarified to the members of the judiciary preparing or hearing the case.

Therefore, post law enforcement, the project team briefed and then facilitated Expert Witnesses to fully advise police Case preparation officers and subsequently Court Prosecutors regarding the case and its connections both to organised crime and the international illegal trade in Sumatran tigers. Subsequently in late May, the bench of judges at Bengkulu Utara district court handed down the highest sentences recorded to date under current Indonesian wildlife crime legislation.

Habitual poacher Anzuar Anas was sentenced to four years in prison and a Rp60 million fine or US\$4,620 (current maximum sentence five years and Rp100 million) while Sudirman, who sought to organise and profit from the sale of a protected species as syndicate 'organiser' and who linked hunters with traders received a lesser custodial sentence of three years and a fine of Rp30 million,

itself the highest sentence and heaviest fine imposed in the project's history for a purely tiger poaching or trade-related offence.

A second planned tiger law enforcement action relating to an ongoing investigation launched in March 2016 into a trans-provincial tiger and helmeted hornbill trade syndicate operating from a district of West Sumatra province was aborted after the suspect's partner, the leader of the syndicate, intercepted the suspect and evidence before law enforcement could be conducted in a neighbouring province. This investigation continues.

Finally, in early June, security auxiliaries at a very supportive and helpful palm oil plantation (PT Tegal Kerinci Agung) adjoining the national park in Dharmasraya district of West Sumatra province contacted the team to advise of the citizens' arrest of three men, following a stakeout of a suspicious vehicle parked in the plantation, and seizure of an illegal firearm and ammunition.

Plantation security auxiliaries handed the men into local police custody and a subsequent search of the suspects' vehicle revealed numerous heavy-duty wire cable snares, already prepared for placement, in addition to nylon rope snares of a type favoured for deer poaching.

The wire cable snares exhibited an unusual 'signature' found in tiger snares previously detected and destroyed in national park forests on TPCU patrols in this area while two of the suspects were individuals from a district of a neighbouring province previously identified as suspected tiger poachers by TPCU investigators.

The project provided support in this Case to ensure prosecution proceeded, albeit only under laws pertaining to possession of unlicensed firearms – there presently being no grounds to prosecute under current Indonesian wildlife legislation for 'going equipped' or being in possession of tiger snares'.

Support included briefings to sub-district and district detectives including TPCU patrol documentation of tiger snares previously destroyed in this area which showed the very close similarity in construction with the snares seized from the three suspects.

A warrant for the arrest of a man from a third park-edge district – also 'known' to the project as a suspected tiger and pangolin trader - who allegedly provided the ammunition seized and who facilitated or funded the suspects' activities was subsequently issued but this man had absconded by the time police arrived at his house.

The case is now proceeding through the pre-court preparation process and the project will supply expert witness support, as required for the subsequent legal process although the individuals are charged only with possession of illegal weapons and ammunition as, under current Indonesian wildlife law, possession of snares is not a criminal offence.

Offences recorded on patrols were responded to as appropriate, most frequently through formal legal warnings to offenders, these included two elderly village hunters apprehended on an information-driven patrol during Ramadan which resulted in the destruction of 148 sambar and muntjak snares and 137 snares set for forest pheasant and partridges.

In this case, although smoked deer meat was found in their possession, the TPCU leader concluded that the fact these hunters had been detected and tracked down deep within the forest and issued with formal legal warnings would serve as a strong deterrent both to these men and others in their remote, traditional village in the future while also being seen as fair by villagers given the hunters' ages.

Human-Tiger Conflict Mitigation and wildlife emergencies -

Four human-tiger conflicts were recorded and responded to by TPCUs during this period, the most serious incident involving a farmer bitten on the thigh by a tiger cub while clearing undergrowth in a mature cinammon plantation close to the edge of the national park in the south of Kerinci district.

It is likely that the cub – whose mother's pugmarks were subsequently found close to where the incident happened – was startled by the farmer and responded by biting him. The farmer responded to the attack by hitting the cub over the head with a machete before making his escape and having the bite treated and stitched at a local first aid post but did not require hospital treatment.

TPCU personnel subsequently provided counselling and advice to local farmers and community leaders while monitoring the area to ensure this incident was not exploited by poachers and learned that a group of armed hunters from an adjoining district had sought to enter the area but withdrawn on learning of a TPCU presence.

All other human-tiger conflicts reported and responded to related to tigers moving through forest-edge farmland – in one case almost certainly as a consequence of encroachment by smallholder farmers – but with no predation of livestock or direct threat to people recorded however incidents were monitored to ensure poachers did not seek to exploit the incident.

Community/Government/Stakeholder Engagement:

The program team maintained informal contact with colleagues in other tiger conservation programs in Sumatra, in particular sharing information on changes in detected threat to tigers and other protected wildlife.

Close links were also maintained with local NGO partners in particular after two provincial governors made requests to the Minister of Forestry for permission to construct roads through the national park.

Meanwhile the team liaised with the Aspinall Foundation Indonesia team who are proposing to develop a wildlife rehabilitation centre with the TKA palm oil plantation company which is also planned to include a temporary holding facility for rescued tigers and other large felids.

Given the importance of national park forests in this area and existing pressure on the TPCUs, discussions included outline planning for establishment of a team to conduct routine patrols at park edge with personnel drawn from TKA security auxiliaries and a local NGO member of the AKAR Network.

DJM
Sungaipenuh, Kerinci
July 2016