

Pelestarian Harimau Sumatera Kerinci-Seblat

Kerinci Seblat Sumatran Tiger Protection & Conservation

**Report on activities conducted with the
support of 21st Century Tiger and
Dreamworld Conservation
January-June 2013**

by

Fauna & Flora International



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Summary

The period January-June 2013, saw an unprecedented increase in recorded - as opposed to suspected - threat to Sumatran tiger in and adjoining Kerinci Seblat National Park.

Tiger Protection & Conservation Units recorded and destroyed a total of 51 active tiger snares in the course of 68 patrols and other field actions in seven districts and three of the four provinces of the national park during this six months interim reporting period.

This total compares with nine active tiger snares detected and destroyed in the previous six months (June-December 2012) and so confirms warnings first made by this programme in mid-2011, that threat to tigers in Sumatra was likely to rise significantly due to major changes in the nature of wildlife crime syndicates operating out of certain large cities in eastern Sumatra.

A new TPCU, launched with support of another program donor, became active and operational in January 2013 so that, for this interim reporting period, six Tiger Protection & Conservation Units were operational from base camps in Jambi and Bengkulu provinces to the east and west of the national park.

Units walked a total distance of just under 1100Km (683 miles) on routine and out-of-routine field actions and made a total of 64 tiger presence records. Thus, frequency of encounter with tiger was stable or improved in areas with a sustained TPCU patrol focus in spite of a dramatic increase in confirmed threat from highly organised and focused tiger poaching.

No serious human-tiger conflicts involving human casualties or repeat livestock predation were recorded but the escalation in poaching threat meant that even very minor 'stray' tiger conflicts received a full TPCU presence to prevent poachers from exploiting the situation.

This impacted on routine forest patrol activities, in particular for members of the Jambi TPCUs in February and March 2013.

No pre-planned tiger law enforcement actions were conducted during this reporting period although teams were placed on pre-law enforcement stand-by on two occasions.

However a total of 14 arrests were made by TPCUs in July as a result of investigations conducted during this reporting period. Since late 2010, PHS investigators have encountered increasing difficulty in securing evidence of tiger crime for a law enforcement response due to the now highly-organised and 'closed' nature of the poaching and trade syndicates.

Therefore the team maintained and strengthened emphasis to securing information on suspected active threat to tiger and tiger prey species for a patrol response while also continuing investigations to identify the key 'players' in organised wildlife crime syndicates and identify strategies for effective subsequent law enforcement.

Through FFI Indonesia, a training workshop was organised with Interpol Indonesia to introduce some key provincial and district police officers to the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network and we hope to build on this initiative over the next months (see *capacity building*).

Activities and Results

- Investigations and information collection
- More than 40 investigations into tiger poaching and trade, some of long duration and continuing at date of this report, were conducted during this six months project report period in nine park-edge districts of three provinces.

Additionally information was collected for 'log' purposes regarding the activities of suspected poachers and traders, prices allegedly paid by dealers for tiger body parts and, most crucially at this time of heightened threat, on areas where tiger poaching was suspected active for a patrol response.

More than 70% of active tiger snares destroyed and almost 80 per cent of deer snares were found by TPCU patrols launched on the basis of information secured, either covertly in the course of investigations or openly, from community informants.

Investigations also advised that a relatively small number of groups of hunters were responsible for the overwhelming majority of snare placements found and destroyed and also recorded a strong correlation between the current surge in threat to tiger and collection of gaharu or *Aquilaria sp.*

This present strong linkage between the current surge in threat to wild tigers (and other rare species) and *gaharu* has been reported also in Malaysia (*pers com MyCat*) and, in northern Sumatra in the Gunung Leuser ecosystem area (*pers com Rudi Hape*).

Although the program's primary focus is to Sumatran tiger, information was collected, as possible, on threat to other species and in January 2013, it was learned that poachers supplying specialist ivory markets in East Asia were now targetting the iconic helmeted hornbill *Buceros vigil*.

Information was collected on this threat, not least since at least one dealer buying these rare forest hornbills is also known to be a major trader in Sumatran tiger operating out of a city in eastern Sumatra, and the team liaised with FFI teams in Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo) who have been monitoring and responding, where possible, to this trade which first became a serious threat to this species in West Kalimantan in 2010-11.

Investigations were also conducted, throughout the reporting period, to secure information on the identities of the 'lead' traders or wholesalers buying tiger body parts from traders in park-edge district capitals.

Routine covert surveillance of two suspected illegal wildlife traders operating in one park-edge district was trialled by the team in the first quarter of 2013 but was found to be extremely time-consuming and provided information primarily on the highly sophisticated methods being used to transport illegal wildlife at least risk to the dealer.

Forest Patrols .

A total of 68 routine or intelligence-driven forest patrols and other field actions were conducted by six Tiger Protection & Conservation Units in seven districts and three provinces of the national park.

Patrols covered a total walking distance of just under 1070Km by GPS way point and made a total of 63 tiger presence records during the period with 60% of patrols recording one or more tigers present, compared with 54% in the same period of 2012.

Frequency of encounter on patrol also increased to just under 1 tiger per 17 patrol Km walked with the highest FoE in the south-west of the national park in the Mukomuko area of Bengkulu.

The higher percentage of patrols reporting tigers present and improved frequency of encounter were a consequence of TPCUs tightening field patrol strategies to focus to key tiger populations in the face of a major increase in recorded poaching threat.

The program has been predicting a possible increase in active threat to tiger – not least due to very high prices touted by illegal trade syndicates - early-mid 2011 and patrol results confirmed warnings that were previously primarily based investigation results.

During this six months reporting period TPCU rangers detected and destroyed a total of 51 active tiger snares in and adjoining national park forests compared with nine active snares in the preceding six months and a total of 20 active snares for the year 2012 as a whole.

In addition rangers found a total of 41 under construction or recently (<2 weeks or fewer) deactivated tiger snares in the course of patrols – with 19 under-construction snare sites in just one - and reported clear evidence of the deaths of not fewer than four tigers, including a mother and her juvenile cub.



Picture: TPCU rangers with tiger snares (8) found and disarmed on an intelligence-led patrol in the national park on the Kerinci-Merangin district borders

Just under 75% of the active tiger snares destroyed by TPCU rangers were found on intelligence-driven patrols while a significant percentage of the 'under construction' or recently (<2 weeks) deactivated snares were also found on patrols launched on the basis of 'information received.'

Snare sites selected also showed clear attempts by hunters to avoid detection including use of 'marginal' locations where, while less likely to kill a tiger, poachers might also hope their snares would not be detected by a TPCU patrol.

Over this six months period, 18% of TPCU field patrols reported evidence of active tiger poaching compared with 8% for the first six months of 2012 and 4% in the first six months of 2011.

Although threat to tiger rose very dramatically during this reporting period, patrol results and accompanying investigation data clearly shows that a relatively small number of groups were responsible.

A significant percentage of these men were previously known to this program and have links to a park-edge ethnic group in West Sumatra province, members of which have a long history of negative interactions with tiger and, in the past, with Sumatran rhinoceros.

TPCU patrols also responded to threat to tiger prey species with a total of 246 active deer snares destroyed by patrols, more than half of which were found in the final month of this reporting period which marked the run-up to the holy month of Ramadan when snare poaching for deer traditionally climbs.



Picture: Burning a poachers' camp found deep within the national park

Threat to tiger habitat, within the national park but in particular in adjoining protected state forests, was recorded on just over 30% of all patrols conducted with illegal activities recorded including illegal logging, gold mining as well as small-holder conversion of state forest bordering the park.

However due to increased threat to tiger recorded during this period, patrol units' priority was to combat snare poaching of tiger and habitat protection received a lower focus than in previous years except where a response could be made at the end of a forest patrol.

Human-tiger conflict mitigation:-

PHS personnel responded directly to a total of eight human-tiger conflict incidents or tiger emergencies during the project period with the key principal of protecting both tiger and forest edge communities.

Responses to incidents included counseling and advice to villagers and use of noise-makers to drive 'straying' tigers back into forest as necessary.

Escalating threat from organised poaching gangs meant that a full TPCU presence was required in a number of these cases to ensure hunters did not move in to exploit the situation even where the local community was supportive.

The Bengkulu units also provided back-up to colleagues from KSDA in Bengkulu in a long-running low-grade human-tiger conflict in farmland adjoining the national park and a second incident where two tigers were moving in and out of villages and farmland and predated goats in an area formally assigned as production forest but which has been severely impacted by small-holder conversion.

The time required to monitor and mitigate conflicts varied widely with the most time

consuming involving tigers moving in farmland and fragment forest far from national park edge or in areas adjoining the park where the program concluded there was a substantial risk of a poacher intervention.

From mid January and through much of February 2013, Jambi-based TPCUs spent the majority of their field time monitoring a low-grade (victimless) human-tiger conflict incident in an area where there are three small settlements in a narrow farmland corridor between the eastern and western blocks of Kerinci Seblat National Park.

Tigers frequently cross the Merangin river and inter-district highway in this area to move between forest blocks and villagers are supportive of tiger conservation and accustomed to tiger presence but will request support if a tiger begins to show signs of becoming too resident in park-edge farmland or if external threat (hunters) is observed.

In this particular case villagers from two of three settlements in the corridor reported the presence of a group of men suspected to have snared and killed a tiger in this area in early September 2012.

An assessment patrol was conducted and confirmed not only that two of the resident tigers were indeed moving in forest edge farmland but also found a group of suspected armed poachers were roaming the area at night.

An intensive patrol presence was maintained in this area for almost six weeks during which time three different groups of men – all including individuals known to this team as suspected tiger hunters – were reported and these men were kept under close surveillance until they withdrew from the area.

In March patrol activities were also significantly disrupted by a complex human-tiger conflict mitigation exercise involving three individual tigers moving in farmland and forest fragments in the south of the Kerinci valley.

One of these tigers is frequently present in forest close to an old, traditional village and tolerated by the villagers in this area (which is also home to two TPCU community team rangers) however considerable problems developed when a second tiger appeared on the scene and the two animals moved as a pair, in farmland between two villages.

Once villagers appreciated that the two tigers were a mating couple (they had been complaining about the noise) the situation eased and then resolved naturally.

A third tiger, meanwhile, moved out of national park forests to the north-east of this area – possibly following a territorial dispute or attracted by the resident female and moved from the park, through rice fields and into mixed farmland and community forest close to the same area where two tigers were already causing some disruption.

In this instance box traps were placed in key sites since normal methods of driving this tiger back into its normal habitat were liable to cause more problems than they solved and there was only one 'safe' route available to this tiger through contiguous degraded secondary and tertiary forest back to the national park.

This incident was also safely resolved in late March when this animal finally made the correct selection of ridge trail and made its way north-east and back into the national park.

Due to extensive buffer forests and palm oil plantations, conflict poses a lesser problem in the west of the national park in the program's priority focus areas in Mukomuko and North Bengkulu districts.

However routine field activities were significantly disrupted in January 2013 when the Bengkulu Unit for Conservation of Natural Resources (KSDA) requested back-up from the PHS team in Bengkulu to manage a human-tiger conflict in former logging forests in North Bengkulu district which have been impacted by smallholder encroachment

One or more TPCU teams and the Bengkulu teams' coordinator, Nurhamidi, were on site in the area for just under two weeks during which time intermittent predation of not fewer than five goats occurred.

Tiger presence was confirmed not only by pugmarks and faeces but also through repeated first-hand encounters, (see below)



While initially both TPCU and KSDA Conservation Response Unit (CRU) personnel assumed only one tiger was present – although pugmarks suggested the possibility of two, predation of a goat at village edge at the same time as a minor, opportunist attack on a passing motor cyclist, convinced the team that not fewer than two tigers were present at the site.

Survey patrols in forest-edge farmland – made somewhat interesting due to tiger presence - also secured clear evidence that a juvenile tiger had been snared

and died in a wild pig snare some days before the conflict escalated. The cub is believed to have been skinned, very amateurishly, on site and then sold to a dealer in Bengkulu City and this information was passed to local police authorities for further investigation, although to date there has been no result.

After almost two weeks on site, both tigers present commenced to move north-east towards disturbed but still intact watershed protection forest adjoining the national park and both KSDA and PHS rangers removed from the location and returned to normal duties. No further problems were reported while investigation monitoring advises that no subsequent poaching threat occurred.

Two wildlife emergencies, both relating to tigers caught accidentally, in wild boar snares set by forest-edge farmers to protect crops, were recorded during the project period, both in farmland to the southwest of the park in Bengkulu province.

In the first case, in February 2013, the Bengkulu teams' coordinator was advised that a tiger had been caught, by the neck, in a wire cable pig snare in farmland bordering lowland state production forests .

Our partners from the KSDA Bengkulu Conservation Response Unit (CRU) which is led by a highly regarded young wildlife vet, went on full stand-by alert while two TPCUs led by the Bengkulu team coordinator went to the site to conduct a distance and situation assessment to advise the subsequent response.

The teams confirmed the accuracy of the report – made by the farmer himself - and were drafting subsequent response plans when they observed the anchor of the wild boar

snare give way and then release.

The tiger was now free-ranging but still with a cable snare on his neck and after moving down to a stream to drink, began to move back to forest edge over a period of minutes while TPCUs watched by.

The following day a search of the area adjoining this farm was conducted and the team confirmed the cable had released naturally while tracking confirmed the tiger was free-moving, apparently not seriously injured and had moved into the forest.

Information was subsequently secured that five unknown individuals were seeking information regarding the presence of this tiger and had entered forest in this area and a law enforcement monitoring patrol was conducted. No snares were found.

The second incident relating to reports of a tiger caught in wild board snare occurred in Lebong district in the south of the national park in March 2013 and occurred when a tiger in hot pursuit of a farmland guard dog was caught in a pig snare.

The Bengkulu team coordinator and base camp support personnel and administrator (TPCU personnel were all in the field on patrol) commenced an eight hours drive to the site, however upon arrival learned the tiger had already released itself and retreated into the forest but that nobody had thought to advise the TPCU of this fact.

Finally, TPCU personnel responded to an urgent request for support by the headman of Tiangko village in Merangin district on the eastern borders of the national park after a juvenile tiger was found dead in rice fields at village edge.

KSDA Bengkulu CRU Team Leader and wildlife vet, DrH Yanti reached Kerinci the following day from her base camp and conducted a post mortem on the young male with inconclusive results and samples were dispatched to the Bukittinggi, West Sumatra animal pathology lab for further tests.

These tests were also inconclusive but suggest this young tiger had been sick for some time but that a poison bait using a commonly available rat poison may have hastened its end.

Pugmarks of an adult tiger, suspected to be a female and so the dead cub's mother, were present in the adjoining area for at least three days after this incident and her movements and that of suspect individuals in the area monitored but no further problems occurred.

Law enforcement to address wildlife and other forest crime

No successful tiger law enforcement actions were conducted during this six months period, primarily due to intense difficulty in securing evidence of crime which is the key precursor to launching law enforcement action.

TPCUs prepared for law enforcement action on two occasions before being 'stood down' , for technical reasons.

Three illegal loggers arrested by a TPCU patrol team in the western fringes of the national park in Mukomuko district of Bengkulu in October 2012 were subsequently sentenced to eight months custodial sentences and substantial fines while a second illegal logging case, also from Mukomuko, is proceeding through the legal system.

Five chainsaws were confiscated by TPCU patrol teams but cases did not proceed through the courts system and were dealt with through formal legal warnings.

Court hearings continue in the case of eight men arrested, in October 2012 during a joint law enforcement operation with the national park to combat organised encroachment into the park in Kerinci district. The very slow progress of this legal case may possibly be due to local political factors.

Other breaches of forest and species law were dealt with by TPCUs through counseling on permissible activities within the national park or through formal legal warnings and instructions to perpetrators to immediately withdraw

Capacity raising

No formal training activities were conducted during the project period by the program during this reporting period although senior TPCU rangers ran a training workshop for local NGOs to introduce the basic principals of human-tiger conflict mitigation and reporting.

Meanwhile senior criminal investigation detectives from four park-edge district police authorities attended a training and awareness workshop in Aceh led by Interpol Indonesia and facilitated through FFI Indonesia.

The workshop introduced the principals of the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network and briefed police attendees on the activities and impacts of international, organised wildlife crime syndicates.

Three long-serving community ranger members of the Jambi-based TPCU teams took turns to act as Leaders of two Jambi-based TPCU which are presently without a National Park Authority seconded Unit leader due to gross under-staffing of the national park's ranger group and so have begun to develop valuable command skills.

At date of this report we are advised that nine long-serving members of the PHS team will (finally) sit the Forestry Service test in September 2013 (almost two years after they were approved as candidates) and, dependent upon results, be inducted into the national park authority ranger team from December 2013 so fully restoring the team's ability to respond immediately to breaches of forest and species law.

Finally we were hugely happy to host a visit from 21st Century Tiger's Esther Conway who joined a TPCU patrol for two days and demonstrated that while she is new to 'The Field' that she is willing and able and more than welcome to join TPCU patrols again in the future.

Coordination and liaison with other agencies and organisations

Since 2011 the team has been deeply concerned by changes in the structure of the black market for tiger and huge increases in prices touted by dealers (see *past reports*) which preceded the current surge in poaching threat recorded on patrol.

Discussion with other programs in Sumatra and certain other sites in Asia appears to show interesting correlations in both the changes in threat levels and when these began to be recorded.

The program has therefore commenced informal discussions with other field teams in Sumatra and overseas with the purpose of establishing where there is any correlation between sites in changes recorded and to establish whether any common factors may be identified.

Unfortunately this activity remains something of a work in progress since very few teams appear to have both investigation and field patrol data sets available to them with which to track changes in pressure on tiger at both field (patrol and survey) and investigation level.

The program maintained a cordial working relationship with other tiger conservation teams in Sumatra, not least through the Harimaukita Sumatran Tiger Conservation Forum and with key local NGO partners working around the national park while PHS personnel maintained routine coordination with key local police divisions.

Since 2011, threat to Sumatran tiger in and around this national park has become predominantly *trader* rather than *poacher* driven and inter-provincial trade syndicates now directly influence local incidents.

However effective investigations, in particular post law enforcement into illegal wildlife trade networks, may be hampered by jurisdictional issues not only within the forestry department but also the Indonesian national police service who are valued partners to this program.

The program team leader discussed this issue in detail with the national park authority director and supportive local police officers it was agreed that the FFI team in Kerinci will seek to facilitate a trans-institutional technical working agreement between the NPA and key provincial police authorities to provide a framework through which the serious issue of trans-boundary (at provincial level) wildlife crime may be more effectively tackled.

DJM

Sungaipenuh Kerinci

July 2013