National Workshop on Capacity Building for Combating Wildlife Crime in India
R. Marimuthu¹ and Shubhobroto Ghosh²

Capacity building is needed for enforcement agencies for scientific and professional investigation of wildlife related crimes. In line with this a “National Workshop on Capacity Building for Combating Wildlife Crime in India” was held in Tamil Nadu Forest Academy, Coimbatore from 4-6 February 2016. This is the first of its kind in India. This workshop was organised by TRAFFIC, a global wildlife trade-monitoring network, in partnership with Wildlife Crime Control Bureau and Tamil Nadu Forest Department. About 100 participants represented by 20 states including forest, police and intelligence departments, directorate of revenue intelligence, Indo-Tibetan Border Forces, Border Security Forces, Customs, Railway Protection Force, Sastra Surakha Bal and others took part in the training. The first author had a privilege to attend this workshop.

The workshop started with the inaugural welcome address by Dr. Shekhar Kumar Niraj, IFS, Head, TRAFFIC-India. Followed by Ms. Tilotama Verma, IPS, Additional Director, WCCB and Dr. Rajeev Srivastava, IFS, APCCF, Director, Tamil Nadu Forest Academy welcomed the participants. Later Dr. V.K. Melkani, IFS, PCCF (WL) & CWLW talked on the importance of addressing wildlife crime. Dr. N. Krishnakumar, PCCF (HoD) spoke on combating wildlife crime.

Then TRAFFIC’s film on the sniffer dog-training programme in India “Super Sniffers” launched. Mr. Himanshu Malhotra, a renowned wildlife filmmaker, directs it. The film showcases TRAFFIC’s initiative of training and deploying sniffer dog squads in India to combat wildlife crime. It highlights how dogs are trained at the dog-training centre and further used in the field for patrolling, nabbing poachers and in arrests of wildlife criminals. Sniffer dogs were brought and demonstrations held. It is really amazing to watch sniffer dog’s ability.

The three-day’s agenda was a combination of technical sessions, panel discussions, plenary sessions, field exercise and field demonstration handled by experts. The technical session includes talks on: overview on the nature of illegal wildlife trade in India and South Asia (Dr. Shekhar Kumar Niraj); identification of specimens in trade and strategies in combating wildlife crime related to these species (Mr. Kamal Dutta, WCCB); application of forensics and DNA techniques in wildlife crime investigations-Standardising forensic based protocols for investigating wildlife crimes (Dr. S.P. Goyal); DNA mapping and wildlife forensics (Dr. Sunil K. Verma, CCMB); Training Manual on Wildlife Enforcement was...

¹Senior Education Officer, Zoo Outreach Organization.
Email: marimuthu@zooreach.org
²Senior Programme Officer, TRAFFIC-India. Email: sgpowerofwords@gmail.com

Inauguration of the workshop

Field demonstration on detecting and dismantling hunting equipments
launched after that; India’s role in South Asia’s fight against wildlife crime through SAWEN (Ms. Tilotama Verma, WCCB); Lessons learned and best practices- ARREST programme (Ms. Onkuri Majumdar, Freeland); Intelligence collection and collation methodologies of cyber tracking (Mr. Manish Shankar Sharma, SAF); Techniques of investigation and prosecution to combat illegal wildlife trade (Mr. Vivek Kishore, WCCB); Bail and cancellation of bail in the context of wildlife offences and its impact on trails (Mr. Kartik Shukul, Advocate, Mumbai); Improving investigation in wildlife cases-case studies (Mr. Sanjay Upadhyay, Advocate, Supreme Court); Patrolling methods in the field for better surveillance (Mr. Rohit Singh-WWF Malaysia); Remote surveillance of PA’s using infrared sensors (Mr. Vedanayagam, ADVANTECH); Trade of reptiles & Trade of marine and coastal species (Dr. Chandan Jani, Scientist, Odisha); Trade of Birds (Dr. Abrar Ahmed, BNHS).

Panel discussion includes the topics such as: Identification of problems in interagency cooperation; Role of NGOs and scientific institutions in combating wildlife crime; Role of common man in combating wildlife crime. The first author is one of the panelists of this group. The second panel discussion was “Role of media and communications in wildlife crime control”. Mostly media personnel were attended this. Next panel discussion was strategic initiative in South Asia to combat wildlife crime through the South Asian Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN). There were other panel discussion too and topics were; identifying current problems in investigation of wildlife crimes; Identifying core strengths and weaknesses of wildlife crime prosecution in India and Trade in non-flagship species.

Field exercises were held on day three. The exercise was intelligence collection prosecution and investigation. The participants were divided into four groups. The scenes were market investigation and surveillance; intelligence collection and surveillance methods and poaching in the forest-search and seizures, sample collection, drafting and investigation of poaching cases. Lawyers and forensic experts guided the groups. At the end each group’s representative gave presentation on the feedback on the field exercise. This activity was really lively and learned a lot about wildlife crime investigation. Usage of metal detectors in wildlife crime was also demonstrated. Later the Special Task Force (STF) personnel Mr. Suresh demonstrated identifying traps and eliminating them in the field. This also was very useful to know variety of traps laid by the poachers in the wild and how to dismantling them.

Last day in last session the group discussed about development of national level strategic vision of protocols for wildlife crime. The participants contributed a very good input to this. Hope India will get one soon. The three-day very fruitful workshop ended with a valedictory. I hope the workshop is an eye opener for the participants loaded with current knowledge on combating wildlife crime and also useful literatures for the reference supplied by TRAFFIC. They are: Criminal Manual; Lesser known species fact sheet; Training manual on wildlife enforcement; Sharks in the soup-An overview of shark trade in India; TRAFFIC Post Newsletter; important aspects of investigation in wildlife offences; The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and Red Sander-An ecological boon or Enforcement Bane?

First author thank Dr. Shekhar Kumar Niraj, Director and Mr. Shubhroboto Ghosh, Senior Programme Officer- TRAFFIC-India for extending invitation to attend the workshop.