

WWF and TRAFFIC's CYBER SPOTTER PROGRAM

NOVEMBER 2020 | SUMMARY



ABOUT

With advances in technology, easier access to online connectivity and a rise in demand for illegal wildlife products, illicit supply chains are booming globally. Products derived from prohibited species such as elephants, wild cats and pangolins, as well as live animals such as turtles and birds are readily available for purchase online. This illegal trade not only harms wildlife populations but trade in unregulated wild animals may pose human health risks, as seen in the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

Buyers do not need to be skilled at locating these illegal animal products online as they are easily found on widely used platforms in a few simple clicks. Therefore, tech companies must help in detecting and stopping these online wildlife criminals as the scale of online trafficking, especially anonymously, increases.

In response to this, international e-commerce, technology and social media companies, including founding partner Google, formed a coalition in 2018 to shut down these marketplaces for wildlife traffickers - a first step to combating the online trade.

The Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online unites 39 of the world's largest tech companies, along with leading wildlife conservation organisations WWF, TRAFFIC and IFAW to detect, remove and prevent illegal wildlife trafficking online. In the first 2 years of the collaboration, Coalition members blocked and/or removed over 3.3 million illicit listings from their platforms.

The Wildlife Cyber Spotter Programme is a key citizen scientist component of the Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online. It empowers people to be part of the solution by helping to detect and report illegal online listings. Since the program's inception, it has identified and prevented sale of 10,000+ wildlife listings across the web. Although a relatively small group at the moment, this program is rapidly expanding into other regions.

To expand the reach of the program, WWF looked to Coalition partners to pilot the Cyber Spotter program as an employee engagement initiative. After a successful first round with Coalition Member's employees based in the US in April 2020, WWF Singapore trained Coalition Member's employees in APAC to identify and flag illegal wildlife listings and products across the web.

TRAINING AND LOGISTICS

Twenty-four Coalition Member's employees attended 2 remote online training sessions on identifying elephant, big cat and pangolin products online. In addition to this, training to spot live animal listings was also provided. They received support through weekly check-ins and a

chat group, and the program was structured as a competition with a collective goal of 1000 listings. Cyber Spotters were encouraged to search for products across all online platforms, not just those which are part of the Coalition.

For two weeks, Cyber Spotters searched for wildlife listings using their training, while WWF and TRAFFIC staff reviewed flagged listings in real time to refine and verify the Cyber Spotters' accuracy. WWF and TRAFFIC then cleaned and analysed the results, and shared relevant findings with Coalition member companies and law enforcement agencies so they could take any necessary action on the flagged posts.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

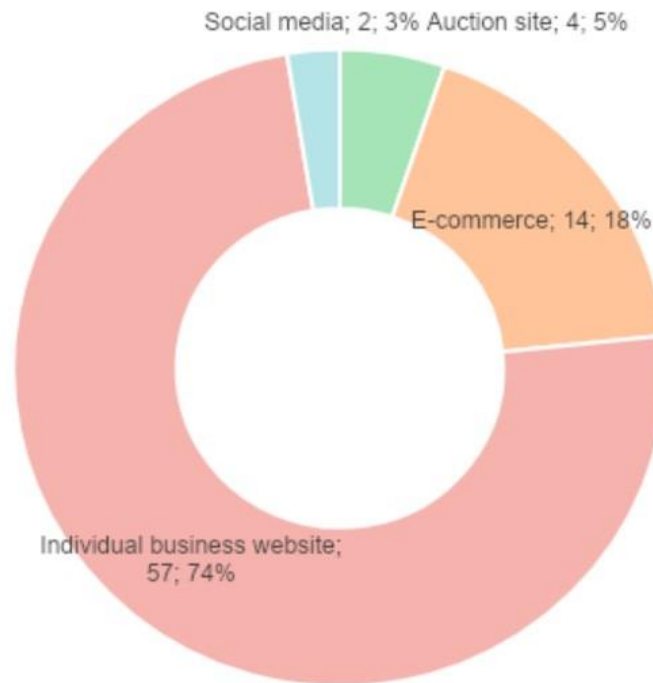
The Cyber Spotters flagged 583 suspicious wildlife listings during the 2 weeks of the program.

- A total of 583 listings were recorded, out of which **464** were flagged accurately which resulted in **80%** of accuracy in identifying wildlife products.
- 77 platforms or websites were recorded in total, with 8% of platforms being part of the Coalition and 92% which were from platforms that are yet to join.
- A total of 9 languages were utilised, with English being the most commonly recorded language accounted for in 52% of the listings.

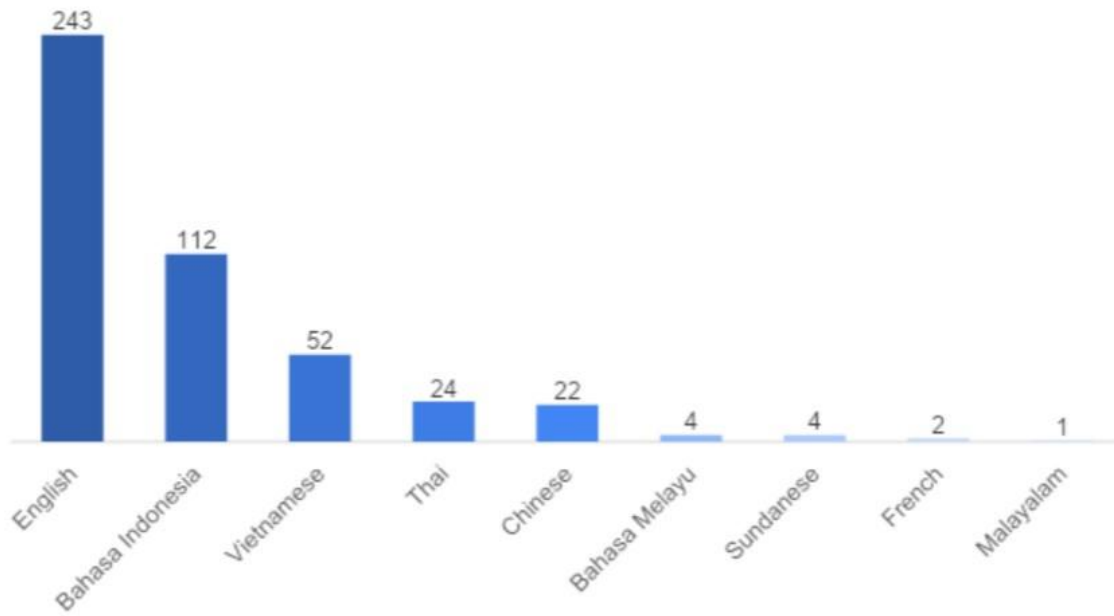
DETAILED FINDINGS

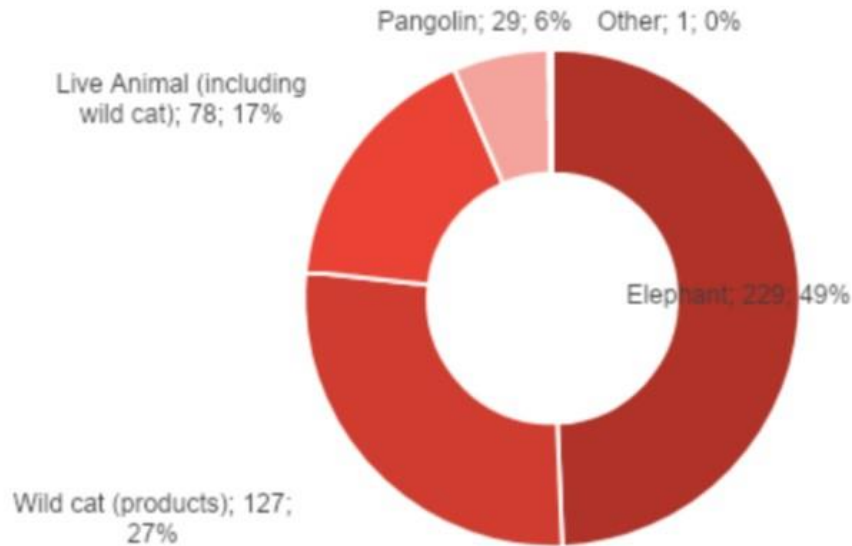
Of the total 77 platforms that were recorded, 8% of platforms were part of the Coalition, while 92% (n= 71) either have not joined or are websites of individual businesses that would not meet the criteria for engagement. It is worth noting that the majority of these 77 platforms or websites were individual business websites which accounted for 74% (n =57) of the total number of platforms recorded. Individual business websites as such may not participate in the Coalition.

Type of platform or website



Languages searched: A total of nine languages were utilized with English being the most prevalent language in 52% of the listings. The listings in English were mainly offering elephant parts and products which accounted for 63% of the 243 English listings, followed by wild cat products which accounted for 37%.





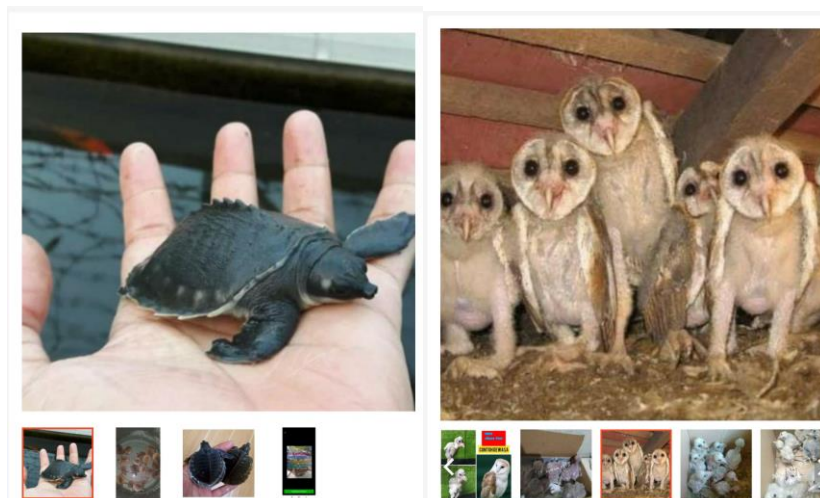
Elephant/mammoth products: Out of the 229 listings of elephant and mammoth parts and products offered for sale, most elephant products found were ivory that were carved as an ornament or idols. Other than the ivory products, non-ivory products were also found, such as elephant hair which was inserted into jewelry eg. rings or weaved bracelets, and elephant skin was made into leather wallets, boots and belts. As mammoth ivory, unlike elephant ivory, is legal for trade but may often be confused with one another and hence was reported.



Example of elephant ivory bangles (left) and elephant tail hair (right) offered for sale

Pangolin products: Majority of pangolin products being offered were pangolin skin in the form of leather boots, belts, wallets, purses and more. Only three listings of whole or crushed scales were documented. Pangolin scales are commonly offered for sale as Traditional Medicine to help with ailments such as lactation difficulties, however the pangolin scales are merely made of keratin which is the same material as human nails and the medicinal value of their scales is not proven.

Live animal sales: Other than the wildlife parts and products offered for sale, live animals were commonly offered for sale as pets. The taxa targeted in the Cyber Spotter program are listed on protected by national laws and governing bodies, and therefore selling or owning them (in some cases without permits and in other cases at all) is illegal. Birds of prey and wild cats were the most recorded groups of live animals.



Examples of juvenile Pig-nosed Turtle (left) and Barn Owls (right) offered for sale.

Next Steps:

1. Share listings with Law enforcement and Coalition Members to take action on the listings and accounts identified.
2. Share listings with Non-Coalition partners to help start a dialogue around the issue of illegal wildlife trade and working with the Coalition.
3. Continue exploring Cyber Spotter program as both a citizen volunteer-based initiative and employee engagement initiative with other companies and general public.

Acknowledgements:

Big thanks to the Coalition Members, TRAFFIC International - Southeast Asia, WWF Singapore and WWF USA. We are also extremely grateful to the Cyber Spotters for carrying out their dedicated work and helping us reduce illegal wildlife trade online.