

Tiger rescue highlights poaching threat in Malaysia

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A five-year-old male Tiger was freed from a poacher's snare on Sunday after it was found by WWF's Wildlife Protection Unit (WPU). © Wildlife and National Parks Department

(PhysOrg.com) -- A five-year-old male Tiger was freed from a poacher's snare on Sunday after it was found by WWF's Wildlife Protection Unit (WPU) just off a highway that cuts through the Belum-Temengor forest complex in the northern state of Perak.

WPU members, who were on a routine patrol on Saturday, detected two men on motorcycles near the site, who fled upon seeing them approach. When the WPU checked the area, they found the [Tiger](#) with its right foreleg caught in a wire snare.

The Tiger was freed from the snare early Sunday morning by the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (Perhilitan) officers who were called to the scene. The Tiger is being treated by Perhilitan at the Malacca Zoo and vets are hopeful that they might not need to amputate the animal's leg.

Perhilitan Perak Director Shabrina Mohd Shariff said investigations into the case were ongoing and that initial information showed the suspected poachers were from Kelantan.

The rescue should set alarm bells ringing for the remaining wild Tigers in the Belum-Temengor forests, one of the last strongholds for this species, said a WWF [Malaysia](#) and TRAFFIC joint press statement.

Research carried out in the area by both groups has indicated that the rescued Tiger is very likely just one of many that have been poached in the area. Illegal hunting in the Belum-Temengor area is rampant and the demand for tigers continues to drive criminals into the forest to kill the remaining ones.

The Belum-Temengor forest complex is one of three priority areas identified in Malaysia's National Tiger Action Plan. It is also part of an area of global priority for Tiger conservation. Yet it is highly vulnerable to encroachment and poaching for several reasons.

The area lies close to the porous Malaysia-Thai border and is easily accessible because of the 80 km long Gerik-Jeli highway that cuts across the landscape, providing hundreds of easy entry points for poachers.

Apart from the Perhilitan-WPU joint patrols, neither the vast and wildlife-rich area, nor the highway is systematically or thoroughly patrolled, making it an open target for poachers.

In August, a Thai national was caught by the police with pangolin scales and agarwood near the highway. He was one of 10 poachers arrested in the area over the last nine months. In that time also, Perhilitan, Police and the WPU removed 101 snares from the area.

“If the WPU rangers had not spotted the suspected poachers the story might have been very different for that Tiger. We were lucky this time. Who knows how many tigers we have already lost?” said Dato’ Dr Dionysius Sharma, CEO of WWF-Malaysia.

“This incident clearly demonstrates the need for a stronger enforcement presence in the Belum-Temengor area. If this isn’t enough of a clarion call for the government to afford more resources to form an anti-poaching Task Force, I don’t know what is,” he added.

TRAFFIC Southeast Asia’s Regional Acting Director, Chris R. Shepherd said that at the rate Tigers were being killed throughout their entire range, they did not stand a chance.

“But here in Malaysia, there is still hope of saving tigers. It will mean increasing enforcement efforts to protect crucial strongholds such as the Belum-Temengor complex and coming down hard on poachers,” he said.

“These poachers are criminals, and are robbing the world of one of the most amazing species to have ever walked the earth”.

The official estimate of the wild Tigers in Peninsular Malaysia is only 500, a sharp decline from 3000 estimated in the 1950s, explained wildlife biologist Dr Kae Kawanishi.

“Snares kill indiscriminately. This illegal act of cruelty should be condemned by the whole society. Despite the harsh penalty imposed by the law, it has been a major problem to wildlife throughout the country,”

said Kae, a member of the Malaysian Conservation Alliance for Tigers Secretariat.

“In order for the Malaysia to realize the goal of the National Tiger Action Plan, which is to double the number of wild tigers in the country by the year 2020, poaching cannot be tolerated.”

Provided by WWF

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