

Endangered species traders using Internet: Ministry

Endangered species traders in Jakarta are using the Internet to develop a global market in animal parts that some say rivals the rackets run by international drug dealers, ministry officials say.

Civil servant investigators (PPNS) from the Forestry Ministry and the National Police accompanied by Wildlife Advocacy Institute (LASA) activists raided a gallery in Jakarta on Wednesday and seized 30 animal parts from endangered species valued at almost Rp 100 million (US\$ 11,200).

After the raid, the ministry's forest protection and nature conservation chief Darori said that endangered species traders have been using the Internet to reach global market.

"It is difficult to trace them since payment transactions are also made via the Internet," Darori told reporters on Thursday.

At a press conference, the ministry presented animal parts seized in the raid, including tiger skins, tiger bones and ivory.

The owner of the IGF gallery in West Jakarta, identified by his initials, AKM, was placed under arrest after the raid and was currently in detention, according to officials.

The police are still looking for another 9 people allegedly linked to the illegal trade in endangered species.

Darori said that the demand for animal parts from endangered species from Indonesia was still high, particularly in China.

"If the countries in ASEAN had not prohibited the trade of endangered species, it would be difficult to stop the trade as countries in ASEAN have been used as a transit point for sending [animal parts] to China and other nations," he said.

Indonesia would use its influence as ASEAN's rotating chair to discuss how to stop the illegal trade of endangered species, he said.

The threat of online trading on wildlife has recently been a subject of heated discussion among the international community, as evinced by the meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in 2010.

According to the convention, the Internet has been facilitating the international illegal trade in endangered species.

Wildlife Advocacy Institute activist Irma Hermawati said that endangered species traders had taken to the Internet to develop networks as complicated as those run by international narcotics syndicates.

"Their links have been well organized making it difficult to trace the main actors behind the illegal trade of endangered species," Irma said.

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The ministry pledged to send letters to the courier companies demanding them to tighten checks to minimize their shipments of endangered species.

There were no current statistics on the endangered species trade, according to ministry, though officials have foiled several attempts to smuggle endangered species out of the country.

The ministry said it foiled attempts to smuggle 737 turtles in January, for example, in addition to conducting raids in Papua that seized 467 turtles in Merauke and another 10,980 turtles in Mimika in December.

Indonesia has been categorized as a “mega-diverse” nation due to its immense biodiversity.

Thousands of species across the globe are at risk of extinction due to human encroachment, a high rate of forest loss and global warming.

In Indonesia, 140 species of birds and 63 species of mammals are currently on the list of threatened species.

The nation has lost over 1 million hectares of forest in recent years due to the massive expansion of plantation agriculture and illegal mining, something which has threatened the habitats of many endangered and protected species.

Indonesia’s tiger population, for example, has plummeted in recent decades after human encroachment led to the destruction of nine-tenths of the species’ natural habitat.

The nation once boasted Javanese and Balinese tiger subspecies, but now they are extinct, leaving the Sumatran tiger as the nation’s lone endemic big cat.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature recently declared that the Sumatran tiger was critically endangered, while the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora placed it on a list of prohibited species for trade.