

UPDATES FROM THE WILDLIFE TRADE PORTAL

INTRODUCTION

TRAFFIC's Wildlife Trade Portal—the world's most comprehensive open-access online portal of wildlife seizure data—was launched in April 2020 as a means of sharing data and cultivating collaboration with other organisations working in this field. Using information gathered from open sources such as press releases and publicly accessible datasets, the Portal was designed to be used by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), researchers and law enforcement agencies. It was developed with generous funding from Arcadia—a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin through support to the Reducing Trade Threats to Africa's wild species and ecosystems (ReTTA) project.

Following its launch, the Portal has attracted users from 68 countries around the world who have performed over 6,000 searches and downloaded over 500 datasets. Users of the Portal have access to more than 13,000 wildlife incident records—a number that is growing daily—including information relating to the commodities involved, the trade routes used, the methods

of concealment, and more.

The information contained in the Portal has been used for a variety of applications. For example, a study of pangolin scales seizures in three cities in Cameroon over the last decade demonstrated that although more seizures have been reported involving Yaoundé than Douala, the average weight of consignments associated with Yaoundé was 165 kg—one-sixth of the average 965 kg seen in Douala (Figure 1). One likely explanation is the existence of a seaport in Douala, a target for smugglers aiming to transport large quantities of scales, such as the 5 tonnes seized in 2017 from a Douala-based company run by Chinese nationals.¹

The same study examined trade routes for pangolin scales between Cameroon and Asian and/or other African countries. Datapoints from the Portal were uploaded into TradeMapper (www.trademapper.co.uk) to create maps such as the one displayed below (Figure 2). This map not only highlights Cameroon's role as a consolidation point for pangolin scales trafficked from other African countries prior to onward overseas transport, but also

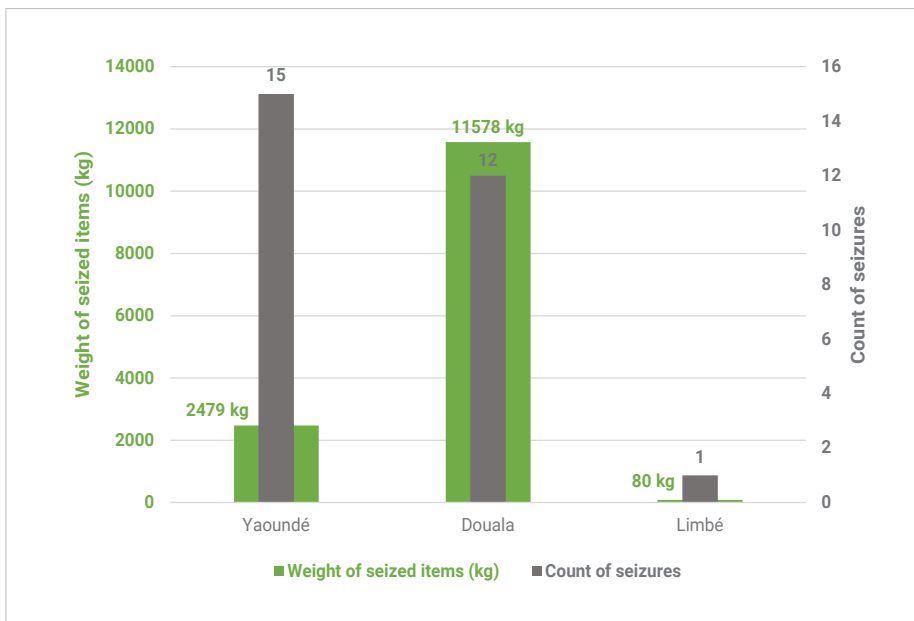


Fig. 1. Weight of items seized (and count of seizures) of pangolin scales involving Yaoundé, Douala and Limbé, 2010 to 2020.

Primary source: Wildlife Trade Portal (TRAFFIC, 2020), with a few additions from The Wildlife Trade Information System (TRAFFIC, 2020).

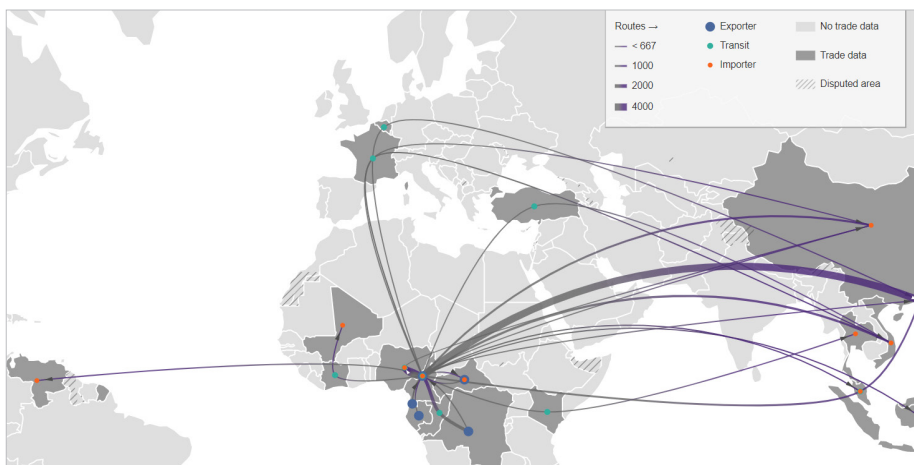


Fig. 2. Trade routes of pangolin scales smuggled between Cameroon and Asian and/or other African countries, 2010 to 2020.

Primary source: Wildlife Trade Portal (TRAFFIC, 2020), with a few additions from The Wildlife Trade Information System (TRAFFIC, 2020). Compiled using TradeMapper (TRAFFIC, 2018).

¹ <https://www.eagle-enforcement.org/news/5-tons-of-pangolin-scales-seized-2-chinese-arrested--A254/>

shows Europe’s role as a transit point, revealing the circuitous trade routes employed by traffickers to complicate or delay law enforcement efforts.

Another analysis of Portal data explored the various ivory products being moved along trade routes involving Thailand. Although many such routes involving Thailand are destined for China, the overall weight of ivory in these consignments is relatively small. By comparing the commodity types transported in these trade routes (Figure 3), it is evident that seizures in which the ivory was destined for Thailand appear to consist largely of raw ivory tusks and pieces, whereas seizures in which the ivory transited through Thailand and was destined China appear mainly to involve ivory carvings. This could be indicative of Thailand’s role in carving or processing raw ivory for onward export to China and elsewhere.

Recent additions to the Portal include a dataset of timber seizures. Using this, Portal users can analyse the methods of concealment and misdeclaration employed by traffickers attempting to disguise their smuggled goods or thwart law enforcement efforts. A recent analysis into this new dataset showed that over a quarter of all efforts to conceal illegal timber shipments included the use (or claimed use) of legal timber (Table 1). Traffickers also used food, often “wheat flour”, to conceal timber shipments. Other shipments were mislabelled as heavy industrial components or materials such as car parts or granite slabs, perhaps in an attempt to add a layer of authenticity to the weight of the shipping container.

The data underlying these various analyses can be downloaded from the Wildlife Trade Portal, available at www.wildlifetradeportal.org. TRAFFIC hopes that the increased understanding afforded by this open-access information will help to broaden global understanding of international wildlife trade and contribute to a solid body of evidence to guide conservation strategy.

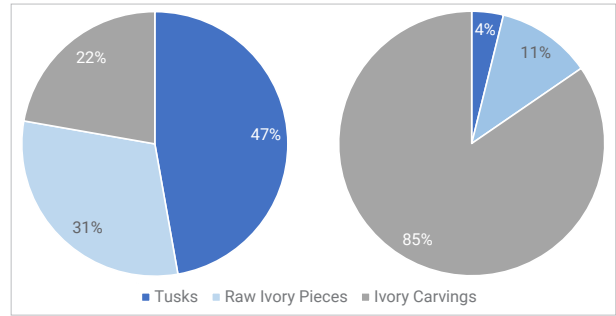


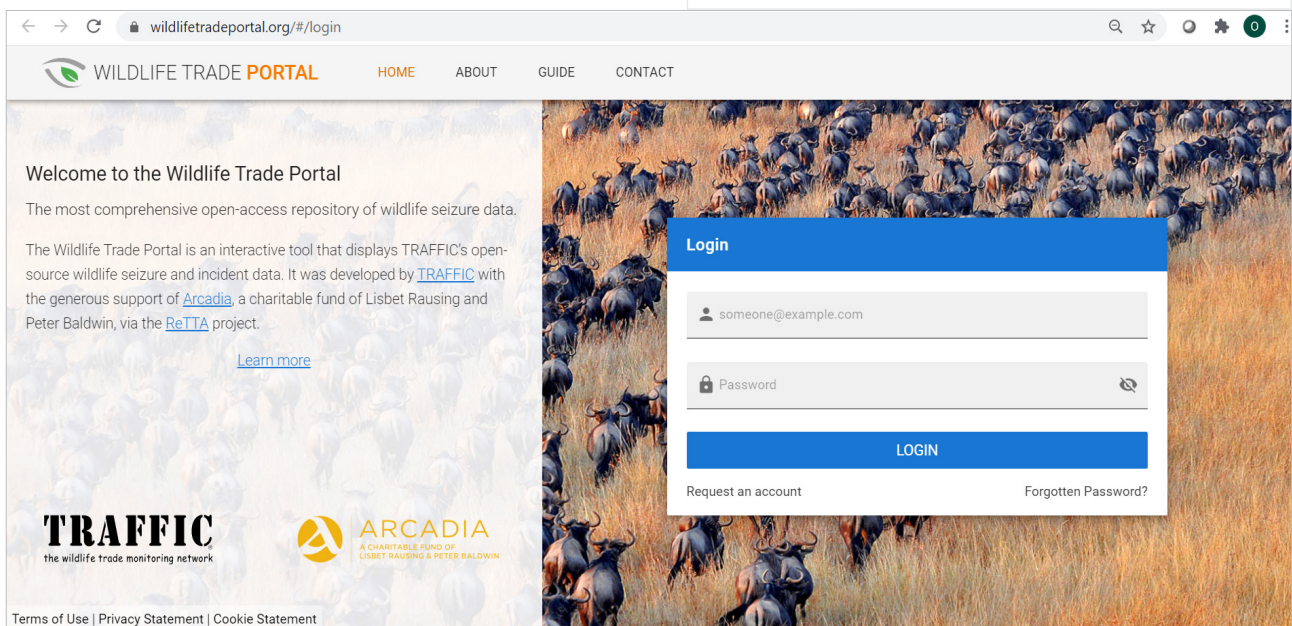
Fig. 3. Percentage frequency distribution of ivory products appearing in trade routes involving Thailand, with Thailand as the final known location (left) and with China as the final known location (right), 2010 to 2020.

Primary source: Wildlife Trade Portal (TRAFFIC, 2020).

Table 1: Methods of concealment or misdeclaration of timber shipments, 2010 to 2020.

Primary source: September 2020 dataset from Wildlife Trade Portal (TRAFFIC, 2020) with a few additions from The Wildlife Trade Information System (TRAFFIC, 2020). Specific methods have been grouped into categories.

Method of concealment or misdeclaration	Percentage frequency
Legal timber	28%
Foodstuffs	17%
Metallic objects/parts	11%
Stone	9%
Cloth/Clothing	7%
Furniture	6%
Building materials	4%
Glassware	4%
Powder	4%
Other	11%



A screen grab of the online portal interface where registered users can log in to access data on wildlife trade.