



THE CRIMINAL NETWORKS BEHIND JAGUAR TRAFFICKING.

*Researching Crime Convergence to better
understand and combat jaguar trafficking*

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A SUMMARY REPORT

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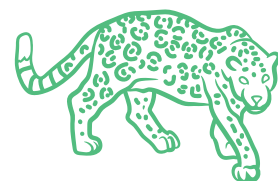
Introduction

The jaguar (*Panthera onca*) is listed on CITES Appendix I and is classified on the IUCN Red List as 'near threatened.' Scientists estimate that the size of the global jaguar population varies greatly. A study by De la Torre et al (2018) estimated the global population of jaguars to be 64,000 individuals, while Jędrzejewski et al (2018) estimate that there are 173,000 (138,000±208,000) jaguars left in the wild, mostly concentrated in the Amazon basin.

To tackle jaguar trafficking, more information on the trade's scale, nature and dynamics is needed. One of the objectives of 'Operation Jaguar' was exactly that. Operation Jaguar is a joint project between IUCN NL, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), and Earth League International (ELI) and is made possible by the Dutch Postcode Lottery. ELI has conducted undercover investigations on jaguar trafficking in Latin America as part of Operation Jaguar. Multiple missions have been undertaken to four Latin American countries: Bolivia, Suriname, Peru, and Ecuador. The focus of the intelligence-led operation was to unveil the central nodes, mechanisms, and structure of the entire criminal supply chain, with a bottom-up – top-down approach focusing on the illegal wildlife goods providers, the traders, the transporters, and the sellers in China.

Through Operation Jaguar we have identified and investigated the most important jaguar trafficking networks in these four South American countries. ELI has researched the illegal wildlife supply chain to unveil the dynamics underneath jaguar trafficking in the region and identify the main players, trafficking routes, and destinations. Over the years more than a dozen trafficking networks operating regionally and internationally have been unveiled. Confidential Intelligence Briefs (CIBs) [1] regarding these jaguar trafficking networks have been shared with several governmental and intergovernmental agencies.

[1] This report contains information from the CIBs, but sensitive information has been excluded from this report. This will be shared with relevant authorities and intergovernmental agencies.



The CIB is one of the most critical outputs of ELI's research activities, delivering finished, actionable, and cohesive intelligence. It contains the analysis of wildlife crime dynamics and trafficking flows, key wildlife trafficking hotspots, the modus operandi of the criminal networks involved including the names of key players, and a broader mapping of their associates and enablers. It is normally shared with relevant bodies, both national and international, and contains evidence of illegal activity collected during the operations in the form of extracts from the transcripts of conversations, photos, personal information, illegal goods in their possession, products of the social media analysis (SMA) and crime maps.

A first report [2] published by IUCN NL in 2020 showed that professional, international criminal networks are behind the illegal trade in jaguar parts from Bolivia. The following report provides an overview of ELI's key findings regarding jaguar trafficking in the countries of Bolivia, Suriname, Peru, and Ecuador, followed by a case study of a top transnational jaguar trafficking network(s) identified through investigative fieldwork. From here, ELI shares detailed evidence and first-hand information regarding jaguar trafficking and its convergence, or overlap, with other serious crimes, such as drug smuggling, human trafficking, gold trafficking, or money laundering.

ELI's Convergence Paradigm

ELI examines each network through its convergence paradigm, in which ELI has defined, instituted, and analyzed a 4 Type Convergence Research Classification based on first-hand empirical data from its field operations and analysis.

1. **Multiple Species Convergence** refers to the trafficking of multiple species at the same time (e.g. rhino horn, ivory, pangolin, jaguar, shark fin, seafood).
2. **Multiple Environmental Crime Convergence** involves the same traffickers or networks engaging in wildlife crime, plus the trafficking of other natural resources, such as illegal logging, illegal fishing, and illegal mining.
3. **Serious Crime Convergence** refers to the same traffickers or networks engaging in other serious crimes, such as money laundering, human smuggling, and drug trafficking.
4. **Transnational Networks Convergence** describes the overlap of transnational organized criminal networks and their activities. Network convergence is multileveled, as these criminal networks have intentionally created a variety of regional, interregional, and transnational points of connection to strengthen their criminal activities.

[2] <https://www.iucn.nl/en/publication/new-report-unveils-the-criminal-networks-behind-jaguar-trafficking-in-bolivia/>

Bolivia

ELI has identified dozens of Persons of Interest (Pols) [3] in Bolivia, all top-tier international traffickers or middlemen. In collaboration with Bolivian authorities, ELI focused on the most important traffickers at the head of one of the largest syndicates.

Key findings:

- **Products:** Jaguars are poached for their meat, teeth, bones, penis, testicles, and skin. Jaguar fangs and penises are very popular among Chinese businessmen in Bolivia, who use these jaguar products to bribe Bolivian officials and secure construction contracts.
- **Demand:** Open-source research and Bolivian media outlets suggest that the surge in jaguar trafficking is closely related to the recent influx of Chinese companies involved in large development projects with the Bolivian government. These projects have resulted in the opening of previously inaccessible wilderness territories, providing new sources of jaguars to meet continued demand in Asia.
- **Buyers:** Chinese individuals residing in [ES2] mainland China, often China's business elite, are the major buyers of jaguar products from Bolivia.
 - Two different categories of clients were identified depending on the jaguar product commercialized. Larger jaguar skins and bones are generally bought by Chinese managers and business owners. Jaguar fangs are typically bought by Chinese workers because they are easier to disguise inside checked pieces of luggage or skin belts. The workers then have these fangs gilded with gold in China.
- **Traders:** The majority of Chinese settled in Bolivia, an estimated 7,000 to 8,000 individuals, are originally from Fujian, a province on the southeastern coast of China. A so-called "Putian Gang", the South American branch of the Fujian mafia, oversees the illegal jaguar trade in Bolivia. This gang also owns numerous profitable illegal casinos and engages in a variety of illicit activities, including laundering millions of dollars and managing the cocaine business and market to the Bolivians. Members of the Putian gang in Bolivia have relatives in Argentina, who collaborate in these unlawful activities and/or run casinos as well.
 - ELI's investigations revealed that the Chinese nationals running Bolivia's jaguar trade live in remote regions. Santa Cruz, San Borja, and the Beni department were identified as major jaguar trafficking hotspots.
 - ELI discovered that the top traders in Bolivia typically supply jaguar products to individual sellers or wholesalers in China. Other traders supply to Chinese second-level sellers in South America.
 - Locals (Bolivian nationals) also act as middlemen, sourcing jaguar teeth and then selling them directly to Chinese buyers or other Asian middlemen.
- **Sourcing:** ELI's intelligence revealed that Chinese buyers source fangs from local community members in Bolivia. It was discovered that Chinese traffickers utilize local radio stations, advertisements, and social media to encourage the hunting of jaguars and recruit Brazilian individuals to source jaguar parts.

[3] A person who is believed to be possibly involved in a crime but has not been charged or arrested.

Pricing: The price of jaguar fangs in China is up to ten times higher than the price paid in South America. Jaguar fangs are typically disguised and sold as a replacement for tiger teeth, whose demand and price in China are even higher. Various sources refer to the jaguar as the “American tiger.” Teeth gilded in gold are sold at even higher prices. Many jaguar fangs are used to make pendants that Chinese nationals wear to symbolize social status.



Smuggling methods: One of the major challenges in fighting jaguar trafficking is the inadequate capacity of law enforcement and governmental authorities to control and protect land borders, waterways, and airports through which wildlife smuggling occurs.

- The preferred means of transport for these illegal jaguar products is by plane, with individuals carrying the jaguar parts in pieces of luggage or on their bodies whenever possible. Traffickers often bribe high-level police officers to get support in passing through the borders undetected.
- Illegal goods are most often smuggled via transit points to the destination in China to avoid direct routes or airports with stricter controls. Popular transit points are Brazil, Vietnam, and Hong Kong.
- In some instances, ELI found international shipping services were used. Payments are typically done in cash OR via WeChat if the person is in China.
- In 2022, it became more difficult to smuggle jaguars and other wildlife products outside of Bolivia, however, many traffickers have identified new smuggling routes across the land border of Bolivia with Brazil.
- ELI has uncovered evidence of multiple Chinese-owned restaurants in Santa Cruz that serve and sell jaguar meat. The price of jaguar meat is much lower than that of other jaguar products.

A Case Study of Criminal Network SA4:

Since 2018, ELI has been collecting intelligence on SA4 [3], a network that plays a critical role in the illegal wildlife trade in Bolivia, primarily in the trafficking of jaguar-related products, including fangs, jaguar bone wine, and skins. Furthermore, ELI gathered substantial evidence regarding SA4's involvement in a variety of converging criminal activities, including money laundering and illegal mining.

[4] ELI's investigators and criminal analysts have created a unique designation for each criminal network they identify (e.g. SA4, SA8, M1). This allows the team to investigate and analyze the networks efficiently and safely. SA in this case stands for 'South America'.

SA4 is led by one of ELI's most important targets in this region, Pol Sa18. He is based in a remote region of Bolivia, where he has a well-established record of engaging in wildlife trafficking and other illegal activities in Latin America and even Southeast Asia. Pol Sa18 has direct contact with local poachers, suppliers, other wildlife traders, and customers.

Environmental Crime Convergence in SA4

The activities of the criminal network SA4 are analyzed through ELI's convergence paradigm (see above). ELI utilizes four convergence types to provide empirical evidence and analysis regarding the extent to which wildlife crime aligns with other organized criminal activities. As found in our other operations, ELI's species-oriented focus (in this case the jaguar) led to the discovery of a variety of converging criminal activities within the established criminal networks.

TYPE 1 – SPECIES CONVERGENCE

Over the years, SA4 has been heavily involved in trafficking jaguar parts. However, more recently it has adapted its activities to satisfy the higher demand for crocodile-skin products.

TYPE 2 – ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME CONVERGENCE

SA4 engages in multiple forms of environmental crime, including illegal gold mining. SA4 conducts its illegal mining activities in the Amazonian regions of Bolivia. Informants within the network shared that the unauthorized mining is conducted with Chinese associates or often facilitated by corrupt Bolivian government officials who help Chinese companies secure contracts for managing mining sites and roads. SA4 also engages in illegal logging, serving as a key member in the timber trade in the Pando and Beni provinces.

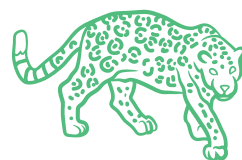
TYPE 3 – SERIOUS CRIME CONVERGENCE

For years, the criminal network SA4 has been committing other serious crimes alongside its involvement in environmental crime and wildlife trafficking. ELI's investigations revealed that this network engages in money laundering, drug trafficking, corruption, and the illegal casino business operating in Santa Cruz. The largest amount that SA4 has managed to launder was USD 3M in one month. Informants shared that the average profit is 8-9% of the total amount laundered.

ELI's investigators and analysts also worked in collaboration to discover an existing WeChat group with over 386 Chinese members. This chat is used by traders and collaborators quickly exchange information on a variety of topics, such as trafficking routes and police activity.

TYPE 4 – NETWORKS CONVERGENCE

According to various sources, SA4's network of collaborators and other criminal groups extends to China, including customs officials and Chinese-based traders. For example, some members of the network also worked with Customs in Xiamen (China). In the past, the Customs director was SA4's direct associate and was able to facilitate the products' shipments to China.



Transcripts from a conversation with a source close to SA4:

ELI: You were fine when you mailed over 100 teeth back last time? How come?

Source: I knew the customs in Xiamen where I sent it.

ELI: So, you sent it directly to the director's office?

Source: He was the one who picked it up. After he got it, my friend drove to Xiamen to pick it up.

ELI: So, you only send it to your friend. How about jaguar bones?

Source: You can bring it back too. You can grind it to little ones like grain. You can bring it back. Like this much, a small bag.



Suriname

Like other countries in the Amazon, Suriname is undergoing major infrastructure developments that are driven by trade and transportation, as well as the search for valuable extractive resources such as timber, gold, and oil. New roads into wilderness areas are both driving environmental degradation and fuelling wildlife poaching and trafficking. In addition, the rise in jaguar trafficking over the last decades has coincided with the increase of Chinese foreign direct investments and the inflow of Chinese immigrants in Suriname. ELI's intelligence revealed that jaguar products are purchased by Chinese buyers in South America and mainland China. Furthermore, jaguar products are exported from Suriname to Europe, including the Netherlands.

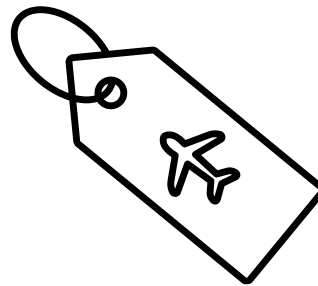
Key findings:

- **Products:** Jaguars are poached for their meat, teeth, bones, and skin. Jaguar bones wine is very popular among Chinese residing in Suriname and surrounding countries.
- **Buyers:** Chinese in South America and China are the major buyers of jaguar products in Suriname. Intelligence also revealed that jaguar products are exported to meet the demand of Chinese residing in Europe, the Netherlands being one of the main destinations.
- **Traders:** The Chinese involved in jaguar trafficking in Suriname are mainly from Fujian, a province on the southeastern coast of China. There are many more traders involved than ELI initially suspected.
- **Sourcing:** Chinese buyers source fangs from local community members. ELI's intelligence confirms that jaguar parts are sourced mostly from the south Suriname region, typically at the border with Brazil and near gold mines, such as the south of the Afobaka reserve. Some of ELI's sources also reported sourcing occurring in west Suriname.
 - Jaguar products are often transported to certain Chinese supermarkets where the animals are processed.
- **Pricing:** Jaguar fangs and meat prices increased during the past 4 years. In 2021-2022, the price at source (from locals) increased due to the recent government ban in 2018, in which killing, transporting, buying, selling, and even possessing a jaguar became against the law and punishable by fines and imprisonment. Thus, due to the increasing risks related to the illegal jaguar trade, the final sale price has increased for both small jaguar fangs and fangs gilded with gold.
- **Smuggling methods:** Smuggling from Suriname to China generally happens by air through the Netherlands, and, less often through the United States. Police controls at airports in Suriname have been getting tighter in the past 3-4 years. Chinese sellers have become increasingly careful, and most shops do not display jaguar products. However, some Chinese gold shops with good connections to the authorities are still openly selling jaguar fangs.
 - ELI discovered that prohibited jaguar products within Suriname are transported through distribution buses and occasionally wood logging trucks. Sometimes jaguar parts are hidden inside tree logs and shipped to China.
 - Jaguar products are also smuggled on large container boats managed by Chinese shipping companies. Traffickers also use smaller boats unchecked riverways to smoothly smuggle jaguar products across different parts of South America including Guyana, Suriname, and French Guyana. These transit routes are established through criminal networks' close relationships with the police and Surinamese Customs, whom they bribe to obtain help with the smuggling or to simply disregard their illicit activities.

Transcript from Pol identified by ELI:

Pol: Now is very hard to bring jaguar teeth out from the airport. Now these gold shops here have some trouble in selling the teeth out because of the ban. . . Actually, Amsterdam airport is not strict inspecting our luggage when we transfer from there to China. We brought a lot of fish maws, and we had no problem in Amsterdam, but Shanghai and Hangzhou airports check our luggage very carefully. Xiamen and Guangzhou are very easy to get the stuff out.

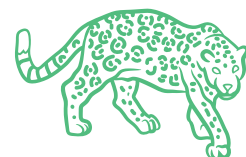
The Amsterdam airport is not like USA as all checked luggage for transfer passengers will go from one plane to the next directly in the airport without going through X-ray machines like USA. So Amsterdam is totally lax as we can hide the illegal stuff like teeth in the checked luggage and they will surely pass as well in Amsterdam on our way to China. Some Chinese from Wenzhou here use this loophole to smuggle over 1 million USD or Euro cash into China via Amsterdam not to mention teeth.



A Case Study of Criminal Networks SA1 and SA18

Through its investigation, ELI identified and researched the two most powerful wildlife trafficking networks in Suriname, which we titled SA1 and SA18. These networks are two of the most robust and resourceful wildlife trafficking networks in South America. As found in our other operations, SA1 is a multi-commodity criminal network composed of Chinese individuals operating from multiple countries in South America. ELI has been collecting intelligence on the group for over 3 years and discovered that this network is involved in wildlife crimes (jaguar fangs, shark fins, and seafood trafficking), other environmental crimes such as illegal mining, and serious crimes like money laundering and human smuggling. The network also has connections with mafia groups and Colombian and Brazilian cartels.

SA18 is a Fujian criminal network based in Suriname involved in wildlife trafficking (jaguar) and money laundering. Interestingly, all the members have US visas, and they have members operating from within the U.S. or those that frequently travel back and forth. Network SA18 launders money through USD, and Euro from Suriname, the US, and China. The ring can launder around half a million USD per day.



Environmental Crime Convergence in SA1 and SA18

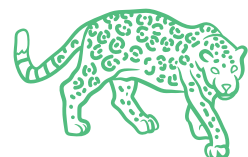
TYPE 1 – SPECIES CONVERGENCE

ELI found that SA1 has been engaging in the trafficking of jaguar parts (mostly fangs and bones) in convergence with shark fins and seafood. Our team discovered that SA1 has been sourcing, processing, and selling jaguar parts for years, while also engaging heavily in the procurement and smuggling of tons of shark fins and illegal seafood. Members of SA1 personally hunt jaguars and process the carcasses to eat the meat. They later use the bones to make jaguar bone wine, which they produce in collaboration with a famous Chinese jaguar wine brewer in the region. SA1 traffics shark fins by collaborating with a network partner based in Brazil (SA2). SA1 can provide 1-2 tons of shark fins per month, equaling 12-24 tons/per year. According to the leader of SA1, the sharks are fished by Chinese big state-owned companies in Venezuela that can procure 30 to 50 tons of shark fins per month using their Chinese- operated boats, which fly Venezuelan flags. In 2021, these companies had more than 80 tons of shark fins stocked in Venezuela. The networks sell these wildlife products in the South American region and then to China. This network controls a supply chain also to Europe.

ELI found that SA18 also trades jaguar parts as well as sea turtles and other seafood. Through our investigations of SA18, our team also identified a couple of traders who have ample availability of jaguar fangs and shark fins. They own a shop in the capital of Suriname and one of the traders works in the customs clearance department to ensure that the containers of illegal wildlife products coming from China are not flagged.

TYPE 2 – ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME CONVERGENCE

ELI has verified knowledge that SA1 has diversified its activities to include illegal logging and illegal gold mining. SA1 collaborates with a variety of criminal networks, including the Chinese mafia, Venezuela mafia, and Brazilian groups, who illegally log into the forest or work in the illegal gold mines in the region. SA1 also utilizes links with prominent entities that run the largest timber, gold, and stone businesses in the country.



TYPE 3 – SERIOUS CRIME CONVERGENCE

The wildlife crimes committed by SA1 also occur alongside a variety of other illicit activities, including money laundering, drug trafficking, human smuggling, and corruption. Our team has gathered extensive evidence and details regarding SA1 involvement in a variety of serious crimes

Convergence with Corruption

Informants within the Chinese trader community confirmed the high level of corruption in Suriname. SA1 can bribe customs officials to have the jaguar and other products shipped out of the country without issues. Moreover, through agreements with corrupt officials, traffickers can also secure export and hunting permits. The same mechanism is often used to get paperwork for other illegal purposes, such as human smuggling. Corruption also enables the movement of huge amounts of cash between Suriname and Europe, allowing the network to successfully engage in money laundering.

Convergence with Human Smuggling

Many individuals in China pay thousands of dollars to these criminal networks to be smuggled into Suriname. The first half of the payment is due before they depart from China, then the rest of the debt is paid off by working for the Chinese mafia in Suriname. If the mafia is not satisfied with the individuals' performances as workers, the trafficked and their families back in China are threatened and harassed. Moreover, the immigrants are often smuggled without their passports or IDs.

Convergence with Money Laundering

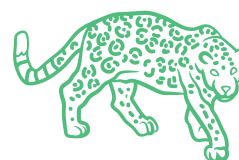
Both the criminal groups SA1 and SA18 can launder about half a million USD per day. Pol Sa74 has been laundering money through USD and Euro from Suriname, the U.S., and China.

Convergence with Drug Trafficking

Like jaguar parts, the networks smuggle cocaine to China via containers of hardwood. The illegal contraband is hidden inside the logs. The resistant core of the tree allows for cocaine and other substances to be hidden inside without being recognized by the scanner controls before shipment.

TYPE 4 – NETWORKS CONVERGENCE

SA1 works with another network at the regional level and is closely affiliated with mafia groups and drug cartels in Colombia and Brazil. SA1's Brazilian partner is a mafia boss and together they engage in weapons trafficking, drug smuggling, and money laundering. ELI's investigations also revealed that the network SA18 and the American branch of the Chinese mafia based in NY are connected and conduct money laundering business together.



Peru and Ecuador

ELI has also identified the most important jaguar trafficking networks in the countries of Peru and Ecuador. Like the other countries in the region, the illegal jaguar trade is driven by the continued demand for jaguar products in China.

Key findings:

- **Products:** Jaguars are poached for their meat, teeth, bones, and skin.
- **Buyers:** Chinese are the major buyers of jaguars. They attribute medicinal power to jaguar parts or use jewelry made with jaguar parts (such as pendants) to symbolize social status.
- **Traders:** The top trafficker identified by ELI oversees multiple fully functioning networks that allow him to smuggle jaguar products and other illegal goods without detection from South America (Peru and Ecuador) to mainland China. Although the networks are independent of each other, they also cooperate when needed to achieve their aims.

Transcripts from a conversation with a Pol:

Pol: This business really depends on the insights of what stuff needed in China. [...] Every government leader (in China) has special tastes for these stuffs, and I am the person here (in Peru) to source all these rare stuff for the Chinese boss or leaders. These people will tell me exactly what stuff to source here.

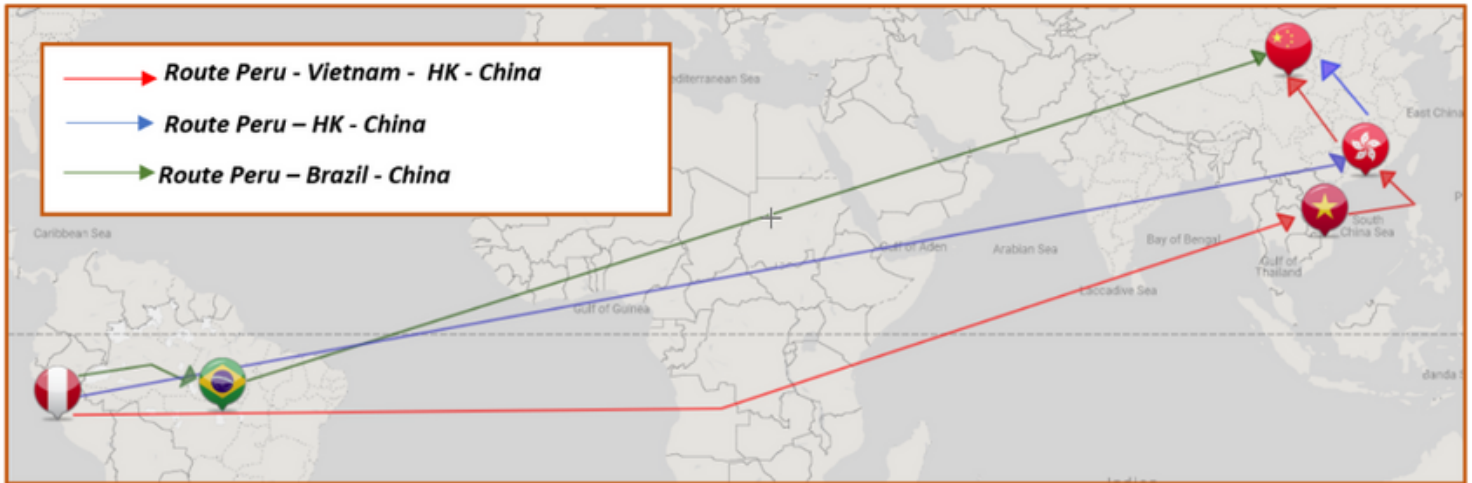


- **Sourcing:** ELI found that Chinese buyers source fangs from locals.
- **Smuggling methods:** The Same smuggling routes are often used for different products, such as jaguar parts, donkey skin, and Maca[4]. ELI's sources reveal that smuggling has become more difficult and riskier over the past year, and thus, sellers are more aware and cautious now.
 - Iquitos (Peru) and the Amazon areas are the safer spots for jaguar trafficking, according to the main Pol. Any product that is in demand and produces money can be smuggled from these regions to several locations, including Brazil and Colombia. ELI discovered that the same routes and methods are also used to smuggle drugs. Furthermore, the geographic nature of these areas renders it difficult to monitor, particularly as traffickers move deeper into the forest.
 - Individual travelers are often used to transport products. According to a source, tour guides sometimes smuggle goods for the sellers.
 - When smuggled by air, jaguar teeth are normally placed into pieces of luggage and shipped. Some individuals also smuggle them by carrying pieces on their bodies. This is considered riskier, however, and sellers suggest carrying only a piece or two. To avoid x-rays and scans, jaguar teeth are generally wrapped into many layers of plastic paper.

[5] Maca is a root vegetable that has become a favorite food of the Chinese, who believe it to be a powerful aphrodisiac. Officials say that many Chinese buyers smuggle the root out of the country in violation of a law that requires maca to be processed in Peru before it can be exported.

- **Smuggling Routes:**

- In Peru, products are most often shipped through transit points to the final destination. A popular shipping route goes from Peru through Vietnam and Hong Kong to China. Another route passes through Brazil.



Pictured: Smuggling routes from Peru by air

- Companies also hide jaguar parts in timber containers shipped to China. Three identified shipping companies are competing to control the smuggling/shipping business in Peru. Big companies do not take the risk of smuggling large amounts of illegal goods; therefore, smugglers use small companies that manage no more than 10 boats. Most of the owners of these small companies are from the Zhejiang province in China.
 - Whenever maritime transport occurs, the goods are directly transported to the final destination, without passing through third countries. Every trafficker who needs his products to be transported to China pays a portion of the total transportation costs, which are often quite high. By shipping their goods with other traders and splitting the costs, sellers reduce the money they would lose in the case the ship was seized. The costs associated with maintaining and using the “boat pipeline” from Peru to China are calculated based on the weight of the jaguar parts and other products. The fixed fee is USD 280/ kg.
 - Once arrived at the destination, the illegal goods are rapidly moved to warehouses, waiting to be picked up by the networks’ members operating in China.
 - The same maritime smuggling method is also used by big Chinese bosses residing in China, who make use of trusted subordinates in loco to organize the shipment from Peru to China.

Transcripts from a conversation with a Pol:

Pol: By boats. First, we must transport the stuff to open seas. Usually, it’s gonna take 7 days to be delivered to open seas. They use a small boat to transport, and it can be very fast, also they have to hide from ocean patrol teams. Then they would move my stuff to a ship that I have already set up in the open seas. They would meet there. Once my stuffs has all been moved to the ship, it should be safe. Open seas are not controlled by anybody.



- In Ecuador, jaguar products are transported either by air, generally via transit points, or by sea. Peru is often the first transit destination. From Lima, products are shipped to China. Other transit points are Hong Kong and Vietnam. ELI also found that some of the individuals identified in Ecuador as primary traders in jaguar trafficking are also major traders or shipping facilitators in shark fins. This provides evidence of networks' ability to trade in different species.
- **Pricing:** The price of jaguar fangs in China (but sold as tiger fangs) is up to ten times the price paid in South America. Money transfers for the wildlife products are typically done in person OR can be done via WeChat (if the person is in China).
- Ecuador is extremely important for shark fin trafficking. ELI's investigations revealed that shark fins are usually sold by the same networks and traffickers who engage in the illegal wildlife trade of other species, such as jaguar parts and seahorses. Thus, they use the same methods and smuggling routes for all products.

A Case Study of Criminal Networks SA7, SA8, and SA11

During Operation Jaguar, ELI identified many sources and possible targets. Since 2018, more than 30 PolS, those who are directly or indirectly involved in the jaguar trafficking network, as traders, middlemen, or sources, have been identified. ELI's investigations reveal that three major criminal networks dominate the illegal jaguar trade in Peru and Ecuador.

These networks function independently, each having its leader based in South America, who then directs the illicit trafficking to China. The criminal rings operate between Peru and Ecuador, with members located in the two countries. One of the networks has its base in Peru, and the other in Ecuador. They also have separate networks of subordinates and business links. However, the networks also have a flexible structure with the main players collaborating in some instances to achieve their aims. For example, ELI learned that Network SA7 used to supply jaguar products (teeth, skins, and bones) to SA8. At the same time, SA8 also acts as a direct seller to both locals and buyers in mainland China. However, with the goal of targeting the most important traffickers, ELI developed an understanding that SA8 is the strongest network in Peru.



Network SA7

SA7 is a wildlife trafficking network that operates both as a trader and supplier for other rings and traffickers. The leader, Pol Sa28, is based closer to the Amazon jungle and therefore has direct contacts with locals who provide him with wildlife products. SA7 has been found to traffic mainly in jaguar parts (fangs, skins, and bone), and has sourced 100-200 fangs per month for clients upon request. ELI discovered that SA7 collected over 400-500 teeth since the COVID-19 pandemic started in Peru in March 2020. SA7 also smuggles other wildlife products, including seahorses and other seafood. Members of the network are based in China, where they store and sell some products in loco. SA7 often utilizes SA8's services in money laundering or shadow banking.

Network SA8

SA8 is a multi-commodity criminal network composed of Chinese individuals based in Peru. The network is also well connected with other traders and criminal groups transnationally, particularly in China, Malaysia, and Africa. ELI has been collecting intelligence on the group for over 3 years and has found ample evidence that SA8 is heavily involved in wildlife crimes (jaguar parts, shark fin, seahorses, and live Galapagos turtles), and serious crimes like money laundering, corruption, and passport counterfeiting.

Network SA11

SA 11 is a multi-commodity network, specializing in shark fins and other illegal seafood. The network owns a drying seafood factory in Ecuador and engages in the seafood business from Guayaquil to Hong Kong and China.

Environmental Crime Convergence SA7, SA8 and SA11

TYPE 1 – SPECIES CONVERGENCE

Investigations revealed that SA8 has been successfully trafficking jaguar fangs for years. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, SA8 adapted to the difficulty in transnational shipping and gradually shifted its sales to jaguar bones wine, which can be transported more easily locally in South America. Furthermore, there is a higher demand for jaguar bone wine in Peru and neighboring countries. SA8 usually resorts to maritime transport to smuggle illegal products transnationally. The goods are transported with smaller boats to bigger cargo ships waiting in open seas, where the South American countries don't have jurisdiction. Once loaded, the products are smuggled directly to the destination country, mostly China. When smuggled by air, the jaguar fangs are normally hidden in pieces of luggage. Some mules also smuggle them by carrying them on their bodies. However, this is considered riskier, and sellers suggest carrying just a piece or two.





Alongside jaguar products, SA8 trades in other prohibited wildlife, like seahorses, shark fins, rhino horns, birds, donkeys, and Galapagos giant turtles. SA8 has had shark fins for years, and according to informants within the network, SA8 stores enormous quantities of fins that it can have readily available upon request. Sales are conducted in person or via private groups in the social network WeChat. Thanks to its links with another trafficking ring in South Africa, SA8 can provide rhino horns, whole or in pieces, to its clients around the world. Chinese and Malaysian associates oversee the transportation of the horns. The criminal network can ship at least one 40 feet long shipping container of wildlife products to Asia each month. SA8 network has the connections, links, and capabilities to ship every sort of illegal good by air and sea, using sound methods and routes, which are the same irrespective of the product smuggled.

TYPE 3 – SERIOUS CRIME CONVERGENCE

Convergence with Corruption

From various sources very close to these networks, we learned about the involvement of embassy staff and officials in Peru in jaguar trafficking. All the sources spoke about a high degree of corruption within the embassy ranks, mentioning several occasions in which the government intervened to remove culpable agents. The network SA8 has customers within state-owned enterprises and certain embassies. Bosses and important leaders tell the network what products they desire and SA8 makes sure to source them.

Convergence with Human Smuggling

SA8 is involved in human smuggling, providing authentic Ecuadorian passports to Chinese businessmen and officials who are on the run in Peru and South America.

Convergence with Money Laundering

SA8 is heavily involved in money laundering and focused even more on this after the increased difficulties in the transnational smuggling of wildlife products. Informants confirmed that SA8 made real estate investments aiming to use those stores as a front to cover their money laundering activities. Through various sources close to the network ELI also understood that the networks provide shadow banking services to customers.

Network SA11 also does money laundering in connection to the seafood trade. The group offers shadow banking services to clients who want to move money from China and pick up cash in Ecuador.

TYPE 4 – NETWORKS CONVERGENCE

The network SA8 has partnered for numerous years with a network based in Peru titled SA7 to receive jaguar fangs. In turn, SA8 offers money laundering services to SA7. SA8 has close collaborations in Malaysia and South Africa for its wildlife trafficking activities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The rising global scarcity of natural resources increasingly attracts transnational criminal organizations. Alongside their traditional activities, organized crime syndicates diversify into the lucrative business of tropical timber, illegal gold mining and other minerals, human trafficking, money laundering, and trade in (products of) endangered species. Our report showed the interconnectedness between the trafficking of jaguars and other serious crimes. This implies that traditional law enforcement approaches focused on isolated illegal businesses are no longer appropriate for understanding and dealing with the increasing complexities of organized crime. For the same reasons, tackling jaguar trafficking using traditional methods presents investigative challenges for law enforcement and opportunities such as more resources and capacity, operational safety, access to technical services, and more powers of search, seizure, and arrest.

In recent years we have seen an increase in attention to the precarious situation of the jaguar and the illegal trade in its body parts. It is however still not a priority for several governments in the jaguar range states. In 2021 CITES Commissioned a study into the jaguar trade. The report ‘Study on the illegal trade in jaguars (*Panthera onca*)’[5] provides an excellent overview of the increasing threats the jaguar is facing, the seizures reported, and the nature and drivers of the trade. In this CITES report, two aspects caught our attention

First of all its states: *“Illegal trade in jaguars is largely opportunistic and undertaken by marginalized individuals through networks of family, friends, and acquaintances. However, there is evidence suggesting that the illegal trade is becoming more organized in some range States.”*

ELI’s investigation found that sophisticated, well-organized networks are driving the procurement and trafficking of jaguar parts. Standing orders are placed to supply jaguars and their parts to middlemen in for example Santa Cruz (Bolivia), Lima (Peru), and Paramaribo (Suriname). Based on our research and investigations, we can conclude that the statement that ‘illegal trade in jaguars is largely opportunistic and undertaken by marginalized individuals’ is in many cases no longer an accurate representation of the reality.

In addition, the report states: *“Given the presence in several jaguar ecosystems of criminal networks operating in illegal mining, illegal logging, and illicit drugs, existing domestic trade could rapidly and easily be absorbed by those networks to supply the demand for jaguar products in international markets.”*

The convergence with other crimes is clear. The domestic jaguar trade is already an integrated feature of transnational organized crime, as transboundary criminal networks have diversified their activities to include wildlife/environmental crime. The persons identified by ELI have such networks, which they use for a variety of criminal activities, such as human trafficking, narcotics trafficking, and money laundering, as well as for the trafficking of wildlife products, including jaguar body parts, dried seahorses, shark fins and other illegal goods from South America to China.

Showing the convergence with other serious crimes is key in tackling jaguar trafficking because it shows how harmful these networks are when left to operate unchecked. Furthermore, information on convergence strengthens the capacity of authorities to engage in arrests, prosecute traffickers and tier-1 middlemen for multiple crimes, improve policy and enforcement activities, and enhance cooperation amongst governmental agencies.

Recommendations

Based on the investigations and results, we recommend the following actions be taken:

- Provide **technical support** to the governments (through the training of law enforcement agencies and sensitization of prosecution and judiciary services) considering the rise of environmental crime, **its convergence with other crimes**, and the **illicit network development cycle** that starts with opportunistic alliances and continuing through convergence and domination of the trade, as described by the criminological science[7].
- Invest in **research to understand the scale, trade dynamics, and crime convergence** with other serious crimes to focus on dismantling networks more effectively, instead of targeting only those lower down in the hierarchy.
- **Enhance the detection and interdiction of poaching** and trafficking of jaguars and other wildlife by allocating sufficient financial – and human resources to relevant law enforcement agencies. This can include using **alternative instruments such as technology or scent dogs**.
- Promote **information sharing and collaboration with neighboring countries** to improve coordination between governments and international bodies working on combating other illegal networks active in illegal mining, narcotics, human trafficking, document forgery, and money laundering among others.
- **Implementation of the Jaguar National Action Plans**

The development of Jaguar National Action Plans has been an important process in all the range countries, to build consensus among the different stakeholders on the priorities and actions needed to protect the jaguar. (*see textbox*)



[7] https://cites.org/sites/default/files/articles/CITES_Study_on_Illegal_Trade_in_Jaguars%20.pdf

In August 2022, **Peru** approved its National Jaguar Conservation Plan (2022-2031)[8]. It was developed with the participation of more than 80 stakeholders from 26 national and regional public and private organizations. It has set an ambitious target of reducing illegal hunting by 50% by 2031. The Jaguar Action Plans of **Bolivia** (2020-2025) and **Suriname** (finalized October 2022) present a comprehensive series of actions, including actions targeting international demand for wildlife, sharing information on various levels, and supporting law enforcement [9].

The **Suriname** Jaguar Species Action Plan for example defines the following SMART objectives:

By 2027, cooperation with SUDWEN (South America Wildlife Enforcement Network), UNODC, and Interpol will be strengthened to support Suriname's efforts in protecting jaguars.

By 2027, there is more capacity to detect wildlife crime and prosecute and sanction wildlife criminals

The Jaguar Action Plan from **Bolivia** contains a strategy line “Investigation, Conservation and Management”, where one of the action lines is:

- Systematize information on jaguar parts trafficking at the national and international levels, mainly in Asia (China) and Europe, with data on place of origin, parts trafficked, quantity, date, people involved, mode of transport, routes, and points of trafficking and trade, among other relevant information”.

Under the strategy line “Institutional Regulations” they have the ambition to:

- Strengthen bi-national relations through agreements, conventions, or others, for the control of wildlife trafficking.
- Establish inter-institutional coordination mechanisms to promote compliance with environmental regulations.

[8] Peru: <https://www.gob.pe/institucion/serfor/noticias/647515-serfor-aprueba-plan-nacional-de-conservacion-del-jaguar-periodo-2022-2031>

[9] Bolivia: <https://citesbolivia.mmaya.gob.bo/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/PLAN-DE-ACCIO%CC%81N-JAGUAR-1.pdf>

