



SUCCESS STORY

Teaching Cops to Thwart Nature Crimes

Environmental police join the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network to fight animal trafficking throughout Southeast Asia



Photo: FREELAND

A Royal Thai Police Officer lifting a slow loris from a crate after a raid in a Bangkok market. The endangered slow-moving primate is often sold illegally as a pet.

USAID supports ASEAN's network to coordinate police, customs and environmental agencies to stop wildlife crime.

Southeast Asian authorities cracked several wildlife trafficking rings in 2008 and 2009 after attending USAID-sponsored workshops to fight wildlife crime. Traffickers are increasingly targeting Southeast Asia because of its rich biodiversity, porous borders, and excellent transportation network.

Recognizing the need for a coordinated effort to counter wildlife trade, the world's third-largest illicit market following arms and drugs, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations formed the Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) in 2005. USAID and U.S. Department of State support the organization.

ASEAN-WEN has developed anti-trafficking training programs for police, customs, and environmental agencies, as well as a system to help officials exchange intelligence about the trafficking of animals and plants.

This has led to increased arrests, prosecutions, and convictions: 168 wildlife trafficking arrests and 30 convictions during the 12 months to June 30, 2009.

Following training last year, Thai officials nabbed a smuggler with 25 fly river turtles, 30 monitor lizards and 20 baby slow lorises at Bangkok's international airport. A month later, the Royal Thai Police – many trained by ASEAN-WEN – raided 10 shops suspected of selling rare and endangered species in a Bangkok weekend market.

In March 2009, Indonesian police arrested a Czech citizen wanted by INTERPOL for his leadership of a Brazilian wildlife smuggling network.

In April 2009, Vietnamese courts sentenced 29 gang members up to 19 years to jail for organized wildlife poaching. Two months later, Thai courts sent a trafficker to jail for smuggling 245 Malayan pangolins (protected scaly anteaters) and 63 black marsh turtles through Bangkok's airport in 2006.