

Hornbill news

Update from the Helmeted Hornbill Working Group

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We provide here updates from the Helmeted Hornbill Working Group (HHWG).

1. CITES COP 18 in Geneva, Switzerland (August 2019):

Several members of the HHWG may have followed the meeting hosted by Sarawak Forestry Corporation in February 2019 in Miri (Sarawak, Malaysia) in which experts (including several HHWG members) met and revised the Resolution Conference 17.11 to expand its focus of Helmeted hornbill conservation from range countries to include transit and demand countries.

The revised document 84 was tabled at COP 18 in Geneva on 20 August 2019 by Indonesia (Fig. 1). Malaysia made an intervention, requesting all parties to adopt it. Several others supported the document including governments of China, USA, and the EU, besides NGOs. However, a revision was requested to be made. A working group to review the proposed amendments was made (comprising of Parties, NGOs, CITES Secretariat). We understand that they have already revised the proposed document.

We would like to extend our kudos to Yok Hadiprakersa (Rangkong Indonesia), Kanitha Krishnasamy

(TRAFFIC), Madhu Rao and Sue Liebermann (WCS), and others who were physically present at the COP and rallied its support for the species. The new document will ensure that the CITES Secretariat shall request Parties—especially the range, transit and consumer states—for the implementation of Resolution Conference 17.11 for the conservation of the Helmeted hornbill.

2. Recent poaching incidents

There has been recent news about the first confirmed Helmeted hornbill poaching incident in Thailand (Bangkok Post 2019; Thai PBS News 2019). The news generated quite a turmoil in Thai social media, even a petition was created and circulated (Coconuts Bangkok 2019). There has also been news about Helmeted hornbill products being sold in Thailand but fortunately, monks and celebrities have spoken against their superstitious use.

We have since learned from Dr Vijak Chimchome that the poacher was not specialised in Helmeted hornbill hunting and is being kept an eye on. In a positive development, Department of National Parks (Thai govt) has given a go-ahead for the development of national Helmeted hornbill action plan.

Some seizures in Sarawak have also been recently made.

3. Contributing to HHWG subgroups and tracking the progress of action plan

Most subgroup leads have followed up with members on progress updates in 2019 so far. There are far too many to list here, but we are heartened to see several rapid assessments and detailed surveys being undertaken at the range countries. Actions on the transit and demand side seem to be slower but are also happening.

The HHWG subgroup leads meet remotely and members and others may please share your updates with them from time to time so they can be captured in one place. We are using these action updates to track the progress of the Helmeted hornbill action plan.

4. Change in trade subgroup leadership and state facilitators

Dr. Chris Shepherd of Monitor has stepped down as lead of the trade subgroup though he is still a member and contributor to HHWG. Ms. Serene Chng of TRAFFIC is now leading the trade subgroup, co-lead by Mr. Dwi Adhiasto of WCS. Dr. Jiraporn Teampanpong has stepped down as Thailand state facilitator and has been replaced by Mr. Somkiat Soontompitakkool from DNP. The list of all state facilitators in HHWG so far are:

- Mr. Lay Win for Myanmar
- Mr. Somkiat Soontompitakkool (DNP) for Thailand
- Md. Khusaini (Perhilitan) for Peninsular Malaysia
- Mr. Oswald Braken (SFC) for Sarawak
- Mr. Yok Hadiprakarsa (Rangkong Indonesia) for Indonesia

5. Stand against sensational reporting

The media article in August on helmeted hornbills on the front cover of the *Star News* in Malaysia was an example of irresponsibly sensational reporting. While the reporters may have good intentions (raise awareness about an emerging wildlife issue), the sensational title ('WANTED! There's a price on this bird's head') and related emphasis may actually do more harm than good and lead to driving demand (Fig. 2). The HHWG coordinators and leads felt concerned and put together a response letter which Dr Aparajita Datta, as IUCN SSC Hornbill Specialist Group Chair, sent to the Chief Editor of *Star News* highlighting our concerns. We didn't hear back.

A general point to take note is that we, as HHWG members, should be very careful not to indulge in any form of sensational reporting on Helmeted hornbill. Also, DON'T use the term 'red ivory' for Helmeted Hornbill or quote the price of the casque as much as possible.

References

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Fig. 1. Yok Yok Hadiprakarsa of Rangkong Indonesia delivering an intervention on the conservation of the Helmeted Hornbill at the CITES COP in Geneva, Switzerland.



Fig. 2. A sensational article that appeared on the front cover of the Star News in Malaysia in August 2019. HSG members should be careful to not indulge in sensational reporting that can cause more harm to the species by stimulating demand for illegal trade