

# INDIAN PANGOLIN POACHING

## (*Manis crassicaudata*)

### ABOUT PANGOLIN ?

There are *eight species of pangolin in the world*, of which *two are found in India*. The Chinese pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*) is found in the northeast, and the Indian one (*Manis crassicaudata*) in the rest of the country.

A pangolin's scales weigh approximately 20 per cent of its total mass. These solid scales are their "weapon." When threatened, pangolins will quickly curl up into a tight ball, and by tucking their face under the tail, their overlapping scales serve as tough armour.

Pangolins are the world's only scaly mammals.

The pangolin is listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. Those found poaching or trading in its parts are liable to be jailed for *seven years* and fined *Rs 10,000*.

Much of the smuggling into China is *via* Myanmar, which shares a notoriously porous border with the southwestern province of Yunnan. Despite trade being banned by both governments, business is booming in the open markets near the border.

According to a 2015 report by Interpol, the pangolin is the most commonly smuggled and traded mammal globally. In addition to India, Africa is also a hub for pangolin poaching, and seizures are reported frequently.

### WHY PANGOLIN ?

Pangolin scales and rhino horns are chemically the same—both are rich in keratin and have the same applications in traditional Chinese and Tibetan medicine. When poachers found it difficult to get to the rhino, the pangolin emerged as an easier alternative." The animal's scales are crushed to make medicines, besides being used as an embellishment in fancy coats, bags etc.

There are eight species of Pangolin in the world, of which two species are found in India. These are the Chinese Pangolin and the Indian Pangolin.



World Pangolin Day is observed annually on the third Saturday in February, and this year it falls on *February 18*



**THE ECONOMY OF SCALES ?**

At the village level, the local poacher who does the killing usually gets about Rs 4,000 a kg for the scales. Between the village poacher and the entity delivering the contraband across the border into China, there are as many as eight to 10 middlemen. "No link in the chain knows much beyond the next two levels. This is designed to insulate the top levels from the lower links in case of a police bust-up. It also protects the profits of each operative," says a wildlife crime wing official. By the time the contraband makes the crossing, the value of the scales is up to about Rs 80,000 a kg.

**ROLE IN THE FOREST ECOSYSTEM : PREDATORS OF SOCIAL INSECTS, CREATORS OF BURROWS, PREY SPECIES, AND AS HOSTS OF PARASITES**

Pangolins are known as the guardians of the forest because they protect forests from the destruction caused by termites and ants. They contribute to maintaining a balanced ecosystem by regulating insect populations. Additionally, their burrowing activities likely influence soil processes, such as the turnover of organic matter and aeration, making them potential bioturbators. Furthermore, their burrows serve as shelter and thermal refugia for various commensal taxa. Pangolins are preyed upon by species like African (*Panthera leo*) and Asiatic lions (*P. l. persica*), tigers (*P. tigris*), and chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*). They also host a range of endo- and ectoparasites.

**Pangolin species in India | 2**  
**Feed on | Insects.** It helps keep a check on insect population  
**Ecosystem engineers | They build burrows.** It helps in circulation of soil organic matter, increase the soil moisture and aeration

**WHY IN NEWS ?**

❖ **Odisha Forest Dept Nabs Wildlife Smuggler, Live Pangolin Rescue** : Forest Department officials seized a live pangolin from wildlife smugglers on the Nabarangpur-Kusumi road under Raigarh Forest Range. The officials acted on a tip-off and intercepted a bike suspected of smuggling the pangolin to a neighbouring state. The bike rider managed to escape. The Indian pangolin, also known as the *thick-tailed pangolin*, is a *solitary, shy, slow-moving, nocturnal mammal* and is protected under the Wild Life Protection Act 1972. [Source : OdishaTV, 24 July 2023]

❖ **Pangolin poaching : Madhya Pradesh court sentences 15 to three years in jail** : Fifteen individuals from five states involved in pangolin poaching were *sentenced to three years in prison and fined Rs 10,000* by a trial court in Madhya Pradesh's Seoni district. Earlier, the Special Investigation Team (SIT) exposed interstate and international pangolin poaching gangs operating across India and abroad, leading to the arrest of 42 accused individuals. The wildlife wing dissolved the SIT and formed a more robust team, the Special Task Force (STF), to tackle pangolin-related offences. The STF dismantled an international poaching syndicate smuggling pangolin scales to China, and Vietnam had a well-established network in Madhya Pradesh.



In the early 1960s, Methamphetamine earned the nickname 'speed,' possibly due to its use in 'speedballs' alongside heroin or because of its reputation for providing a sense of increased energy and alertness. Ice, a form of Methamphetamine, is approximately 80% pure, while regular speed is usually around 10-20% pure. Speed is commonly found in white or yellow powder form, but it is also available in pill form. Users may choose to snort, inject, or swallow it in tablet or capsule form.

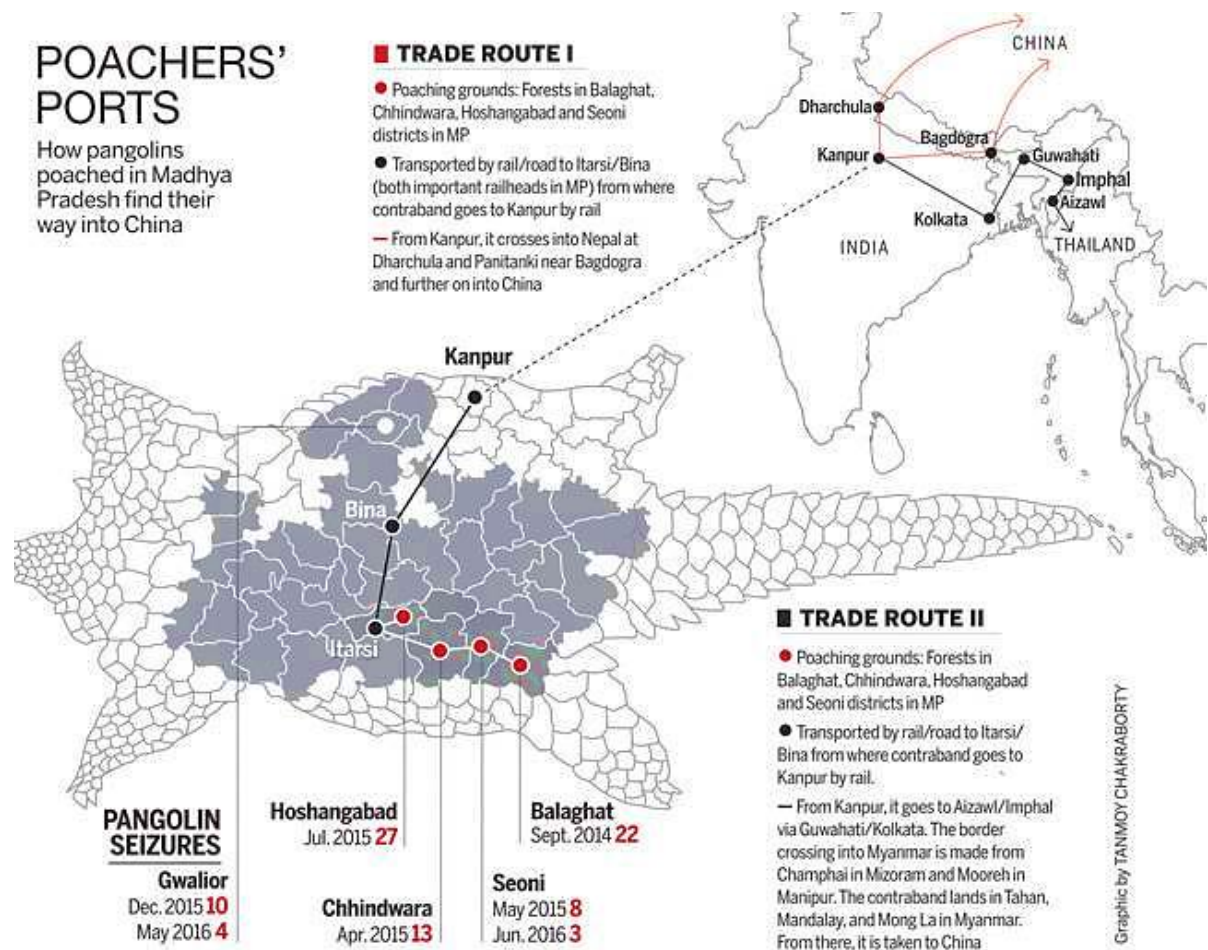


The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department dismantled the network with the arrest of its mastermind, and they sought assistance from Interpol. The pangolin scales, highly sought-after in China for its perceived aphrodisiac properties, have now become a popular commodity among party-goers in America. According to a recent Interpol report, 26 per cent of the scales from this endangered species are being channelled into the US party circuit.



While the Chinese demand for pangolins was widely known and prompted the crackdown on the racket with connections to Myanmar, the escalating use of pangolin scales in the production of crystal *methamphetamine*, a key ingredient in the *party drug* commonly known as *crystal meth*, *crank*, *speed*, or *ice*, has presented another challenge for the Madhya Pradesh Forest department's Special Task Force.

[Source : [Times of India](https://timesofindia.com), 9 June 2023]



❖ **Over 1200 poached, trafficked across country in last five years, [TRAFFIC Report](https://www.traffic.org)**

TRAFFIC (Trade Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce) is a global non-governmental organisation monitoring the trade in wild animals and plants, focusing on biodiversity and sustainable development. It was originally created in 1976 as a specialist group of the Species Survival Commission of the IUCN and evolved into a strategic alliance of the WWF and the IUCN.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS (MCQs)

1. The most important human activity leading to the extinction of wildlife is
- Pollution of wildlife
  - Hunting for valuable wildlife products
  - Introduction of alien species
  - Alteration and destruction of natural habitat

Answer : (d) Alteration and destruction of natural habitat

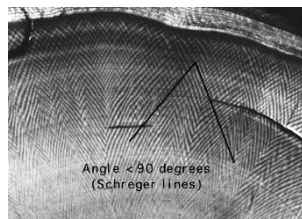
2. Illegal way of trafficking animals is known as
- Kidnapping
  - Poaching
  - Harbouring
  - Smuggling

Answer : (2) Poaching. Animals are poached for –

- \* Tiger : Skin and bones (Tiger bone wine is an alcoholic beverage originally produced in China)
- \* Elephant : ivory
- \* Rhino : horn
- \* Pangoline : Scales

3. *Schreger lines* are used for the identification of

- Rhino horn
- Ivory
- Antlers
- Pangolin scales



Answer and Explanation : (b) *Schreger lines* are the cross-sectional artefacts on the ivory of the elephants.

4. Consider the following statements with respect to Indian Pangolin

- It is protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- They are found in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka only.

Which of the above-given statements is/are incorrect ?

- 1 only
- 2 only
- Both 1 and 2
- Neither 1 nor 2

Answer and Explanation : (c) Out of the eight species of pangolin, the Indian Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) and the Chinese Pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*) are found in India. Indian Pangolin is widely distributed in India, except in the arid region, high Himalayas and the North-East. The species is also found in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Chinese Pangolin is found in the Himalayan foothills in Eastern Nepal, Bhutan, Northern India, North-East Bangladesh, and Southern China.

Protection Status

- Both these species are listed under Schedule I, Part I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- IUCN Red List
  - \* Indian Pangolin : Endangered
  - \* Chinese Pangolin : Critically Endangered

WRITTEN EXAMS

- ✿ What are the main reasons for the illegal wildlife trade, particularly tiger and elephant?
- ✿ Which regions are most affected by pangolin, rhino and tiger poaching?
- ✿ What are the potential consequences of pangolin extinction? How can individuals help in the fight against pangolin poaching ?