

Outreach Organization, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India
E-mail hyd2masawa@gmail.com

BHARGAVI SRINIVASULU Zoo Outreach Organization,
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India, and Biodiversity Research
and Conservation Society, Hyderabad, Telangana, India

HARPREET KAUR Wildlife Biology & Taxonomy Lab,
Department of Zoology, Osmania University, Hyderabad,
Telangana, India

Enhancing conservation science capacity in India: first decade of the Master's programme in wildlife biology and conservation

India is a mega biodiverse country but, with a human population of 1.2 billion and aspirations for further economic growth, conservation of this biodiversity faces huge challenges. A decade ago, identifying the need for strong academic programmes to train conservation professionals, the Wildlife Conservation Society collaborated with the National Centre for Biological Sciences of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research to initiate a Master's degree programme in wildlife biology and conservation, comprising cutting-edge course modules taught by practising scientists and conservationists, followed by a dissertation. The programme trains a cohort of 15 students every 2 years, and the fifth cohort graduated in September 2014. In all, 74 budding conservationists have graduated in the programme's first decade. Their field research has spanned multiple species and ecosystems in 20 Indian states, and alumni of the course now form the core of many academic and conservation institutions. The alumni have engaged in practical conservation initiatives, driving both policy and practice in India by setting high standards of research and science-based conservation. The sixth cohort of 15 students began their training in July 2014.

DIVYA VASUDEV, AJITH KUMAR and K. ULLAS KARANTH Wildlife
Conservation Society, India Program, Bangalore, India
E-mail vasudev.divya@gmail.com

Does the tiger image on medicinal plasters create the wrong impression among consumers and hinder conservation efforts?

The tiger *Panthera tigris* is listed in Appendix I of CITES. In 1993 China banned all trade in tiger bones, and subsequently manufacturers of medicinal plasters stopped using tiger bone and musk as ingredients in tiger-bone plaster, which was renamed musk bone-strengthening plaster. Nonetheless the image of the tiger is still commonly used on plaster packaging, although tiger bone is not listed as an ingredient. In a survey carried out among urban residents in China 38% of respondents claimed to have used tiger-bone plasters (Gratwicke et al., 2008, *PLoS ONE*, 3(7), e2544). However, the number of people who actually used tiger bones may be overestimated, as people may have been misled by the tiger's image printed on the package.

In a questionnaire survey carried out in Beijing in July–August 2014, we found that 44% of respondents (183 of 418) alleged they had used tiger-bone plasters. Of these, 179 indicated there was an image of a tiger on the plaster packaging. However, 167 of these users confirmed that the plasters they had used were musk and bone-strengthening or other types of plasters rather than tiger-bone plasters. Only three users alleged that the plasters they had used were tiger-bone plasters but they were unsure whether the products actually contained ingredients from tigers.

Although few respondents, if any, had used plasters containing tiger bone, people are more likely to choose plasters printed with tiger images than those without tiger images. The manufacturers are using the tiger image to take advantage of brand effect. The tiger image fosters and reinforces habitual thinking that the plasters still contain tiger bone. To protect tigers and deter consumption motivations that trigger tiger poaching and illegal trade, we recommend that the manufacturers should remove the tiger image from musk and bone-strengthening plaster and related products, following the regulations of CITES.

ZHAO LIU and ZHIGANG JIANG Key Laboratory of Animal
Ecology and Conservation Biology, Institute of Zoology,
Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China
E-mail jiangzg@ioz.ac.cn