

Establishing a community of practice to address illegal wildlife hunting and trade through integrated community surveillance and evidence-based protection

Day 2 | 11 July 2026, 4:30-6:00 PM

1. Purpose

The SIG was convened on the premise that too few researchers and organisations study illegal wildlife hunting and trade (IWHT) through a scientific lens, and that enforcement-centred responses, while necessary, stay reactive without a robust evidence base. It set out to bridge science, governance and practice by examining community-led surveillance alongside evidence-based protection tools, and to initiate a standing community of practice. Two ninety-minute sessions were held across two days, comprising short technical presentations, a moderated segment with community practitioners, and open discussion.

2. Day 1, 10 July 2026

Context setting: Mr. Jose Louies (WTI) opened the SIG. He made the case for moving away from militarised conservation and towards working alongside communities to control and prevent wildlife crime, and argued that conservation organisations operating in this space need to work together rather than in parallel. That framing set the terms for both days.

Community participation in pangolin conservation: Mr. Chingrisoror Rumthao (WTI) presented a case study from Nagaland and Manipur that put the opening argument into practice. Both states front the Myanmar border. Pangolins are hunted opportunistically for meat and scales, with wild meat openly sold in local markets. Three root causes were identified: limited awareness of wildlife protection law, weak on-ground enforcement, and the breakdown of community stewardship, which leaves a gap no other authority fills. The response worked with customary authority rather than around it. Khel, clan and village councils passed binding resolutions prohibiting the hunting, sale and consumption of pangolins on their customary land, resolutions were communicated across villages so rules and consequences were understood, and community members and youth groups monitor compliance alongside forest and wildlife authorities. Reported results include hunting bans in more than 300 villages, six pangolins rescued and released in Manipur and over 10,000 people sensitised. Outcomes are still being tracked, and the model is positioned as replicable across other hill districts rather than as a completed intervention.

Community's perspective on trade in threatened plants: Mr. Lokesh Mam and Mr. Thongsai M, conservation community practitioners, with Ms. Uttara Mendiratta (WTI) as moderator. The work follows from an IWECC 2024 panel that called for attention to the medicinal plant trade in Northeast India, with *Paris polyphylla* singled out. The species, a Himalayan perennial harvested for its rhizome for traditional medicine and assessed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List, has been driven to near disappearance in several areas by collection pressure. The two practitioners, who conducted the interviews themselves, also set out the social cost: collectors with few alternative sources of cash income are drawn into a dangerous illegal trade that erodes the resource base they depend on. The findings point to organised networks moving not only *P. polyphylla* but orchids, insects, bear bile and musk pods across porous borders with Myanmar. Discussion turned

to the legal and policy measures such trade demands, and to the role communities can play in monitoring demand originating abroad.

Open-source information for wildlife crime data collection: Ms. Binita Baruwati (Aaranyak), set out how publicly available and digital sources can support wildlife crime intelligence and feed practical problem solving.

Pet shops as trafficking nodes: Ms. Ivy Farheen Hussain (Aaranyak), drew on a city-wide survey in Guwahati to examine pet shops as nodes in trafficking pathways, arguing for closer attention to urban trade networks as sites of intervention. Discussion pressed on how pet shops sit within wider trade chains and on the difficulty of acting on urban pathways.

3. Day 2, 11 July 2026

Context setting: Dr. Jimmy Borah (Aaranyak) shifted the emphasis from intelligence generation to surveillance systems, analysis and response.

Integrated surveillance and the CSMT model: Ms. Ivy Farheen Hussain (Aaranyak), presented the Community Surveillance and Monitoring Team (CSMT) model as a community-led route to prevention, drawing on experience from Arunachal Pradesh. Discussion focused on communities as active partners rather than informants, on adapting the model across landscapes, and on coordination with enforcement agencies.

Evidence-based prevention using SMART: Mr. Mizing Boro and Mr. Bijeet Baro (Aaranyak), demonstrated Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) for threat identification, protection planning and decision support, prompting discussion on the use of systematic field data for patrol planning.

Trade dynamics of parrots in India: Dr. Asha Poonia (Chaudhary Bansi Lal University), established that twelve Psittaculid species are native to the subcontinent and that the order remains under commercial pressure. India's CITES export records for 1975 to 2010 span 33 countries. A separate analysis of 182 media reports covering 109 seizure events between January 2010 and December 2020 recorded 25,850 birds seized across 58 species, 18 native and 40 exotic, with Psittacidae the most frequently seized family at 16,928 individuals. Seizures peaked in the first and last quarters, coinciding with the festival season. Comparison of NCRB, CITES and online-sourced data exposed a mismatch across all three. The closing argument was direct: South Asian avian trafficking is under-valued and structurally neglected, and systematic supply-side field research needs funding.

Cyber-enabled illegal wildlife trade and online markets: Mr. Prakash and Ms. Apurva (WTI), reported an LLM-assisted monitoring system running across 26 platforms in seven South Asian countries over fifteen months from March 2025 to June 2026, detecting 2,008 listings covering 75 species. The method combines a curated trafficking lexicon, LLM-generated query matrices in ten Indian and five regional languages, site-specific search operators, scheduled daily execution and a minimum of three hours of human verification. Parrots and parakeets dominated the species mix, the African Grey Parrot leading at 341 detections. Four social media platforms accounted for 85 per cent of detections and India for 73 per cent of traceable detections. CITES-listed species featured in 86.1 per cent of listings, over half of those Appendix I, and close to three-quarters of detected items were live animals. Outputs included eleven law enforcement actions supported,

1,049 YouTube videos blocked in India and 112 items removed by Meta. The presenters were explicit about scope: closed groups, encrypted messaging and dark-web venues sit outside monitoring, so the figures represent detections on monitored platforms, not the size of the trade.

Studying IWT using criminology tools: Ms. Uttara Mendiratta and Mr. Prakash (WTI), critiqued the mainstream response to IWHT, built on penalties, patrolling and criminal justice, as reactive, one-dimensional and in some contexts productive of militarisation and human rights abuses. Problem-Oriented Wildlife Protection (POWP) was positioned as an alternative combining the breadth of community engagement with the focus of standard policing. The presenters worked through the SARA process of scanning, analysis, response and assessment, and connected it to situational crime prevention, crime scripting and opportunity theory. Two Indian case studies (Sharma and Mendiratta, 2023) showed such responses already in use. At Pangti and the Doyang Reservoir in Nagaland, engagement with hunters, village councils, the church and the forest department, formalised through the Amur Falcon Roosting Union and community falcon guards, produced a lasting reduction in hunting from 2013. In the dancing bears case, arresting a key middleman alongside alternative livelihoods and community stewardship in Sambalpur led to most performing bears being surrendered by 2006. Limitations were stated plainly: dependence on adaptive leadership, scope drawn too narrow, displacement rather than elimination of crime, and the absence of rigorous evaluation.

4. Synthesis

The two days delivered a continuum rather than a set of unconnected talks. The opening argument against militarised conservation was not left as a principle. The pangolin case and the CSMT model both demonstrated customary and community authority doing enforcement work that state agencies cannot do alone, and the plant trade findings showed what happens where that authority is absent. Community knowledge and open-source material generate intelligence. Pet shops, plant supply chains and online platforms locate where trade concentrates. CSMT and SMART convert that into surveillance and patrol response. Problem-oriented wildlife protection supplies the frame that decides which problem to work on and how to test whether the response worked. Two presentations, on parrots and on online markets, converged independently on parrots and parakeets as the dominant traded taxon in India, which is the cross-method corroboration a community of practice exists to produce.

5. Way forward

As convening organisations, WTI and Aaranyak will continue to work together, and with the experts and community practitioners who participated in this SIG, to carry the community of practice forward and sustain the collaboration initiated over these two days to address illegal wildlife hunting and trade.