



A SNAPSHOT

# EXOTIC SPECIES TRADE IN VIETNAM 2021



NOVEMBER 2021



# OVERVIEW

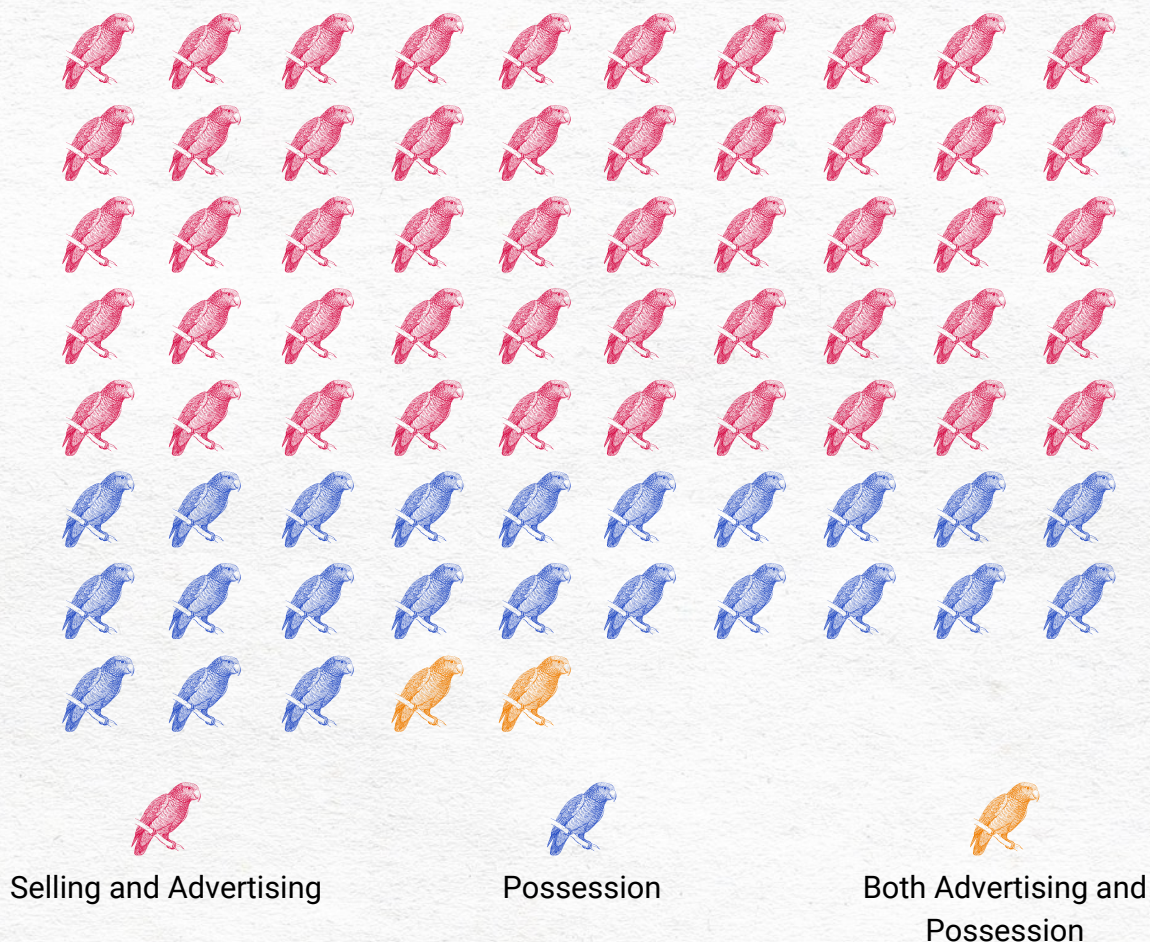
The trade in exotic species mainly to be kept as pets represents a growing trend in Vietnam, particularly amongst the younger generations.

However, the rise in the trade of these non-native species poses considerable risks to Vietnam's biodiversity, human health, and globally threatened species.

# TRADE IN EXOTIC SPECIES IN VIETNAM

The number of exotic species cases reported to ENV's Wildlife Crime Hotline is increasing rapidly. A total of **75** exotic species cases were documented on the ENV Wildlife Crime Incident Tracking Database between January 1, 2021 and June 30, 2021.

Among these 75 cases, **50** cases involved selling and advertising exotic species (approximately **67%**), **23** cases involved possession of exotic species (approximately **30%**), and **two** cases involved both advertisement and possession (approximately **3%**). The majority of advertisements and sales of exotic species are on Facebook, though other cases have been logged in smaller numbers on YouTube, Zalo, Instagram, TikTok, and other online platforms and websites.



## Cases by species group

Exotic species of reptiles, birds, and small mammals were most commonly traded in Vietnam during the reporting period. Reptiles accounted for the highest proportion of cases by species group (**60%**), ranking first with **49** cases. The reptile group includes three commonly traded exotic species: turtles/tortoises, iguanas, and pythons. Small mammals contributed to **27%** of the total cases with various species such as chipmunks, marmosets, sugar gliders, arctic foxes, and more, comprising **22** cases. Birds constituted the third most-traded group with **10** cases, totaling **12%** of the overall cases related to exotic species (Chart 1).

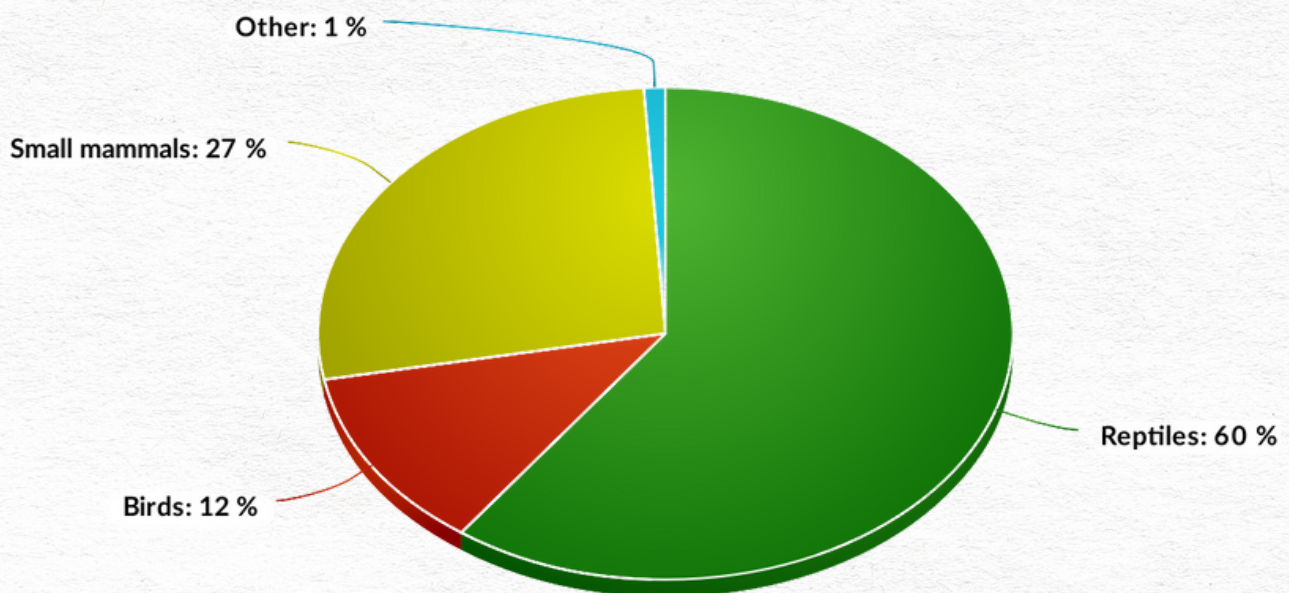


Chart 1: Cases by species group

**Note:** The chart does not represent duplicated cases which involved two or three species groups in one case. Four of the total cases related to both small mammals and reptiles; one case related to small mammals and birds; and one case recorded violations relating to all three species groups.



## Reptiles

49 cases

The most prevalent reptile violations involved iguanas, with **21** cases documented involving an estimated **266** individuals advertised for sale and/or possessed by subjects. Common snapping turtles (*Chelydra serpentina*) represented the second most commonly traded reptile species, with 16 cases logged involving an estimated **556** animals. The third most commonly traded reptile species was sulcata tortoises (*Centrochelys sulcata*), with **349** animals recorded across **10** cases. Fourth are both the alligator snapping turtle (*Macrochelys temminckii*) and Chinese pond turtle (*Mauremys reevesii*) with 7 cases each, composed of 179 and 172 individuals respectively. And finally, the fifth most commonly traded species are red-eared slider turtles (*Trachemys scripta elegans/Trachemys scripta*) and black pond turtles (*Geoclemys hamiltonii*), both amounting to **5** cases comprised of **75** and **14** individuals respectively.

## Mammals

22 cases



The majority of small mammal violations involved chipmunks, with **9** cases involving **264** animals kept in possession and advertised for sale. Standing in second place, marmosets were documented in **7** cases that involved **23** individuals. Additionally, **4** cases involving **65** sugar gliders (*Pteromyini/Petauristini*) brought this species to the ranking of third most commonly traded small mammal, while Arctic foxes (*Vulpes lagopus*), caracals (*Caracal spp.*), and small mammals comprised the remaining cases.



## Birds

10 cases

As evidenced from the collected data, the grey parrot is the most popular exotic bird species traded in Vietnam, with **4** cases comprising **43** recorded individuals. The grey parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*) is followed by **106** Mandarin ducks (*Aix galericulata*) and **16** blue and yellow macaws (*Ara ararauna*), with both species ranking as the second most commonly traded exotic birds due to their documentation in **3** cases. Ranking third with a significant quantity of individuals, **4,000** parakeet individuals were reported in **2** cases. Despite the difference in quantity, other species of exotic birds were reported in just **one** case each.

# RISKS OF TRADE IN EXOTIC SPECIES

There are three critical risks associated with the exotic species trade in Vietnam:

## 1. Risk of introduction into the wild

Wherever in the world there is a legal trade of exotic animals, some of these animals inevitably end up in the wild, where they may establish healthy and growing populations that compete with native species, and in many cases, result in harmful and lasting impacts on local biodiversity and the ecosystem.



These impacts include predation on native species, including both plants and animals; non-native species outcompeting native species for food, causing declines in the native species; changes in the environment due to the ecological impacts of the invasive species; impacts on agriculture; and the risk of diseases being introduced to native wildlife. All of these are serious enough reasons to warrant that every effort be made to prevent non-native exotic species from ending up in Vietnam's natural landscapes.

The principal pathways for exotic species being introduced into nature are escape from captivity or intentional release. In recent years, the invasive red-eared slider turtle (*Trachemys scripta elegans*/*Trachemys scripta*) has been released into temple ponds, Hoan Kiem Lake in Hanoi, and other bodies of water around the country.

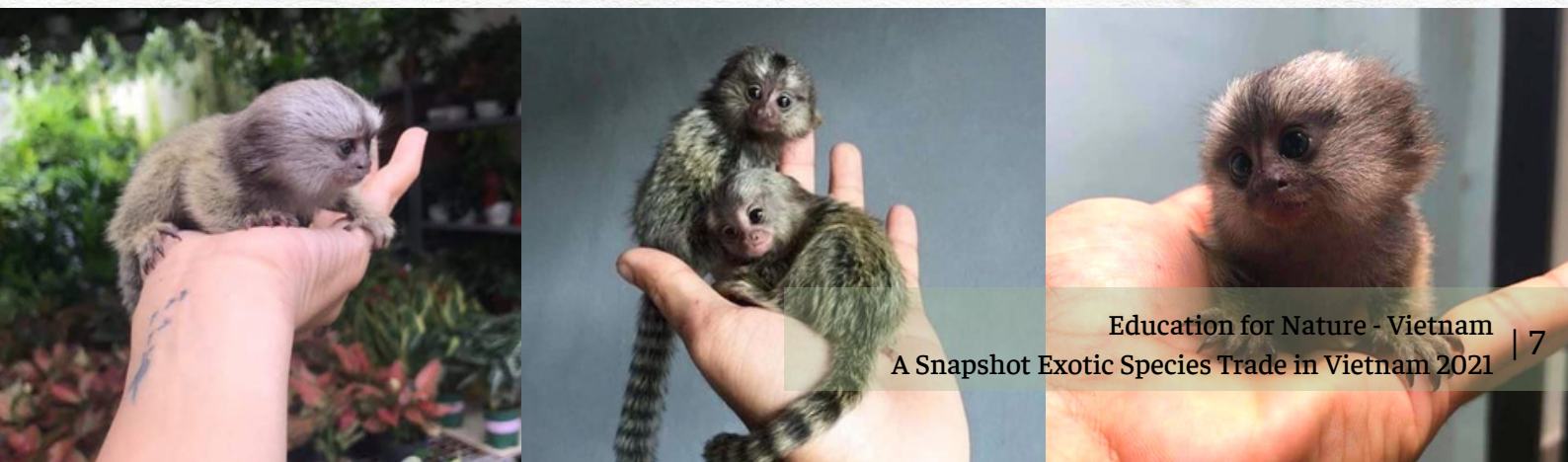
Similarly, other reports suggest that nonindigenous iguanas are also being released into the wild in Vietnam. Due to such releases, these species in particular have become widespread in many countries outside of their native range and threaten native animals by competing for food and, in some cases, preying on native species.

## 2. Risk of introduction of zoonotic diseases

Exotic species could provide a vector for the introduction of zoonotic diseases that could be harmful to humans or transmitted to other animals, should captive or farmed non-native species escape or be released into the wild.

Exotic species are sourced from international breeders, exotic pet dealers, and in some cases, massive production farms outside of Vietnam. All three sources present specific risks of bringing diseases into Vietnam that could either transfer to humans or impact native fauna.

Given the catastrophic impacts that the Covid-19 pandemic has inflicted upon the world, establishing effective controls that limit Vietnam's exposure to future risks from zoonotic diseases is critical to both human health and the economy.



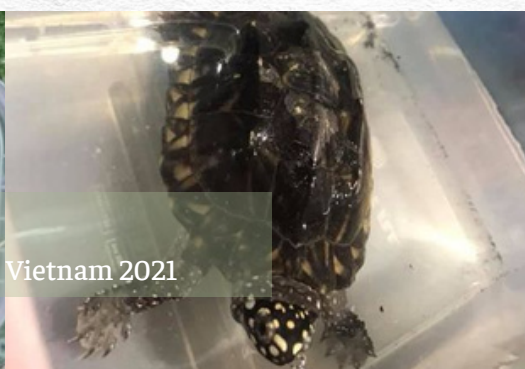
### 3. Impacts on endangered species globally

While Vietnam must make it a priority to protect our own biodiversity, we also share a broader responsibility to protect global biodiversity. Similar to the commercial wildlife farming industry in Vietnam, international pet suppliers also launder wildlife through legal establishments, passing animals off as “captive bred,” when in fact, they may have been collected from the wild.

Critically threatened species, such as the Burmese star tortoise, are making an appearance in the pet trade in Vietnam, raising alarms regarding the impact that Vietnam’s growing exotic species trade may have on wild populations of endangered species across the world.

While CITES helps regulate the trade of the most endangered species across borders, Vietnam has a responsibility as a “consumer country” to make every effort to relieve the pressure upon wild populations of endangered species globally by reducing and eliminating market demand in Vietnam, where species are threatened.

The exotic wildlife pet situation is similar to Vietnam’s position on importing rhino horn. While some horns may be legally sourced, Vietnam prohibits trade of all rhino horn in order to ensure that wild rhino populations are fully protected, and that Vietnam does not contribute to further the demand for horns from these globally threatened rhino species.



# CURRENT CHALLENGES

While all captive wildlife must be accompanied by proof of legal origin, the law does not specifically address the keeping of non-native species as pets, and thus, most owners do not have legal papers for the animals they are keeping, and in some cases, breeding. The result is a large and growing hobbyist community keeping, breeding, and selling reptiles, birds, and some exotic mammal species.

“THE LAW DOES NOT SPECIFICALLY ADDRESS THE KEEPING OF NON-NATIVE SPECIES AS PETS”



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TACKLING EXOTIC SPECIES TRADE IN VIETNAM

<b>01</b>	In consultation with scientists and experts, the CITES Management Authority and the CITES Scientific Authority should establish a list of exotic species that may be legally imported, advertised, and sold in Vietnam as pets, based on the conclusion that keeping, breeding, and selling of each species will have no detrimental impact on native biodiversity, has minimum risk of disease transmission, and that demand for each species will not impact wild populations of the species globally.
<b>02</b>	Require a similar evaluation by the CITES Scientific Authority in consultation with scientists and experts prior to issuance of permits to commercially farm any exotic species in Vietnam.
<b>03</b>	Ensure that no breeding of exotic species is permitted at private farms prior to approval from both the Scientific Authority and the Management Authority.
<b>04</b>	Establish a registration process for private breeders and hobbyists that allows for legal documentation of animals that are bred in captivity.
<b>05</b>	In order to phase out existing animals that are not listed on the Scientific Authority's and Management Authority list of non-native species that may be kept or bred in captivity in Vietnam, suspend any further breeding or sale of these species. Animals without legal origin will be confiscated.
<b>06</b>	Exclude zoos, research facilities, rescue centers, and other licensed non-commercial facilities from restrictions on keeping and breeding non-native species, provided that adequate health and human safety protocols are in place, and that these licensed facilities do not engage in commercial trade of any species.

### What can law enforcement authorities do?

- Strictly monitor and handle violations involving exotic species.
- Strengthen management and monitoring at borders to prevent exotic species from entering Vietnam without legal documentation.
- Increase the monitoring and management of exotic species' origins, especially in the legal import process.
- Produce legislation to manage specimens of exotic species once these species enter Vietnam.
- Clearly prohibit the release of exotic species into the wild, stipulating punishments for those violating the law in this regard.

## CONCLUSION

It is critical for the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) and the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (MONRE) to initiate dialogue aimed at proactively addressing the rise of the exotic species trade in Vietnam, BEFORE widespread introductions of non-native species to the wild, and BEFORE the illegal market grows to a point where the crisis is unmanageable.

If we fail to respond to the warning signs presented by the rapid growth of the exotic pet trade in Vietnam while the potential problem is still manageable, the problem will grow exponentially in the coming years, to the point where addressing impacts on our biodiversity, human health risks, and threats to global populations of species will require substantial investments in time, energy, and resources.





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ACTION AGAINST EXTINCTION