

WILDLIFE WATCH

NOVEMBER
DECEMBER
2021

News from the front lines of ENV's efforts to protect wildlife



CRIME FIGHTERS

Covid-19, the delta variant, and now omicron. It never seems to end. ENV's crime unit is blinded in one eye by the inability to put people out on the ground to monitor business establishments or inspect tiger facilities, and one arm is tied behind our backs by the absence of available law enforcement partners in many regions struck hard by Covid. However, despite the impacts of Covid, our dedicated wildlife warriors fight on, achieving successes in their daily efforts to reduce and eliminate the illegal wildlife trade.

FEATURED SUCCESSES

A sting operation carried out in coordination with police resulted in the seizure of a bear cub and three arrests in Quang Ninh.



In another case, an online advertiser in Gia Lai was arrested with a small quantity of rhino horn in an operation conducted by police and ENV, while in a third case, an online seller who had been warned previously by ENV sought to sell two juvenile otters he had in his possession, resulting in his arrest and seizure of the otters.

Additional animals seized or transferred as a result of law enforcement responses on ENV cases included 11 turtles of four species from a pagoda, 2 kg of ivory products, a gibbon, three leopard cats, a pangolin, more otters, and a range of other birds, reptiles, and small mammals.

All in all, November and December were busy months, and despite the constraints of Covid, ENV's crime fighters prevailed.

WILDLIFE CRIME at a glance

THIS PERIOD

777 new cases logged by ENV
comprised of **1,812** violations

THIS YEAR

2,448 cases reported by the public through ENV's hotline this year, amounting to an average of **9.3** new cases reported each day

2,486 internet crime cases received by ENV so far this year, comprised of **8,161** violations

2,774 cases resulted in a successful outcome overall in 2021*

929 live animals confiscated and transferred this year, following reports to the ENV hotline

**Success rates include some cases reported prior to the reporting period that resulted in successful outcomes during the present period.*

SINCE 2005

22,017 wildlife crime cases comprised of

59,392 violations have been logged on ENV's Wildlife Crime Incident Tracking Database

KNOCKING THEM DOWN AS QUICKLY AS THEY COME UP



ENV's online crime fighters shut down 25 online wildlife markets comprised of 95,920 members during November and December. Groups ranged from those selling birds and exotic species, to others selling reptiles, small carnivores, ivory, and a wide variety of other live animals and wildlife products.

Two of the most exciting results in November were the issuances of substantial fines to two different online wildlife suppliers as a result of ENV interventions, with the subjects receiving fines of VND 71,000,000 (\$3,134.00) and VND 86,000,000 (\$3,796.00) for advertising wildlife. These fines set a new benchmark, encouraging law enforcement to issue serious financial punishment to online suppliers for advertising wildlife, even if no wildlife is discovered during inspections.

OUT OF TAKING A SEVENTH BITE INTERNET CRIME

ENV launched its seventh internet crime reduction campaign in November, logging violations in 166 cases involving tiger parts or products being advertised on the internet. Each crime reduction campaign focuses on a different species and involves use of an established methodology to troll for online violations involving the species over a given period. Violations are logged, generating a response ranging from issuance of a warning to the violator for minor crimes to forced link removals, deactivation, or a law enforcement response in the case of more serious suppliers and violations.

Among the seven crime reduction campaigns carried out in 2021, two focused on tigers, two on ivory, and one each on rhino horn, pangolins, and marine turtles. Success rates in addressing online crimes are typically about 80-90%, much of this being through voluntary compliance resulting in link removals.

IMPORTANT TURTLE TRAFFICKER TAKEN DOWN

After more than two years targeting street vendors in Ho Chi Minh City, police have taken down one of the local suppliers.

Inundated with reports of street vendors in Ho Chi Minh City selling turtles through the latter half of 2019, ENV undertook an investigation to identify suppliers. Eventually, we identified one supplier who reportedly smuggled in large quantities of turtles from Cambodia and resold them to local traders or traffickers that were shipping them to China.

More than a year of efforts paid off in December, following a sting operation in cooperation with Tay Ninh Provincial Police, which resulted in the arrest of the supplier and seizure of 122 turtles of five species.

The good news is that one important supplier is down for the count. However, the bad news is that street vendor turtle cases continue unabated, and thus, our efforts to eradicate this type of crime continue.



PAGODAS JOIN THE FIGHT AGAINST WILDLIFE CRIME

Closely aligned with ENV's street vendor campaign, which is in turn aimed at tackling highly mobile street vendors selling turtles, ENV's pagoda turtle campaign is aimed at ending the Buddhist worship practice of releasing turtles into pagoda ponds. Each year, hundreds – if not thousands – of turtles are released into enclosed concrete pagoda ponds in practice of the belief that releasing a wild animal such as a turtle is good for one's karma.

In contrast to the intention behind the act, the turtles that are purchased and released are predominantly wild-caught and then sold by street vendors and others to worshippers, directly financing the illegal hunting and trafficking of turtles.

ENV has approached the issue through collaboration with monks in pagodas across the country where turtle ponds exist, urging the pagodas to turn over their turtles and discourage worshippers from engaging in the practice of turtle releasing. By the end of 2021, a total of 11 pagodas had transferred 351 turtles to rescue centers.



Coinciding efforts focus on raising awareness of worshippers, securing further cooperation from monks, and beginning what will be a long, drawn-out effort to change consumer behavior.

At least our message is not in conflict with Buddhist belief; after all, buying turtles that came from the wild from criminals cannot possibly be good for anyone's karma.



Taking a beating FOR TURTLES

On the more humorous end of ENV's crime fighting efforts, a Ho Chi Minh resident took the law into his own hands by snatching two yellow-headed temple turtles from a street vendor and making a run for it. Several vendors chased him down, and the man reportedly sustained several blows before miraculously escaping with the turtles in hand and calling the ENV hotline to request assistance in their transfer to a rescue center. While ENV does not encourage citizens to take matters into their own hands, and routinely urges the public to report crimes and let the authorities do their jobs, street vendors are notoriously difficult to catch due to their constantly moving around in an effort to evade law enforcement. Perhaps from the turtles' perspective, no one was hurt, and they are now safe and sound at a rescue center – which certainly beats what might have awaited them had they been sold.

COOPERATION WITH INDONESIAN PARTNER YIELDS PARROT TRAFFICKER'S ARREST



Cooperation between ENV and counterparts from the Indonesia-based non-government organization, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), resulted in the arrest of an Indonesian bird trafficker.

The case started in June 2019 with the seizure of 322 red lorries (*Eos bornea*) at Noi Bai Airport in Hanoi. The birds originated from Indonesia and were shipped to Vietnam by air freight. While the receiver on the Vietnamese side – a well-known bird trafficker – refused to receive the shipment and claimed that it was not his, an investigation by ENV was able to identify the owner of the shipment on the Indonesian side. This information was provided to WCS in Indonesia, who passed it on to government partners, resulting in the arrest in October 2021. As for the lorries, unfortunately, almost all of them perished, with only 18 surviving parrots turned over to Hanoi Wildlife Rescue Center.



ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

URGING THE PUBLIC TO USE ALTERNATIVES TO TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

For more than 15 years, ENV has focused a part of our efforts on urging the public not to use traditional medicines made from wildlife. ENV's "End Bear Farming Campaign," launched in 2004, specifically targeted bear bile users and supported a government commitment to end bear bile farming in Vietnam, and similar sustained campaigns have targeted tiger bone medicine users.

However, ENV is ramping up efforts to influence users through a new campaign that combines the use of TV, radio, viral communications, outreach, and the media to amplify our message to users, while at the same time directly engaging traditional medicine practitioners to promote alternatives to wildlife medicines.



Viral designs for the traditional medicine alternatives campaign, with the main message, "Our lives are not medicines."

DA NANG MEDIA ROUNDTABLE FOCUSES ON POOR RECORD OF PORT SEIZURE ARRESTS

In December, ENV hosted a media roundtable discussion with journalists from the central provinces as part of an effort to establish ties with local media and build interest amongst journalists in covering key advocacy issues, such as the July 2021 seizure of 3.1 tonnes of lion bones and 138 kg of rhino horn at Da Nang seaport.

Law and Policy Director, Bui Thi Ha, told journalists from Customs, People's Police, Hanoi Security, and the People's Army media agencies, "It is undeniable that there are still challenges to be addressed in dealing with wildlife crime in Vietnam, especially in handling cases related to large volumes of wildlife seized at Vietnamese seaports." ENV crime data shows that 54.75 tonnes of pangolin scales, ivory, rhino horn, and lion bones have been seized at ports since 2018. Ha emphasized that not one of these seaport seizures has resulted in an arrest or conviction. She went on to say, "Da Nang authorities have an opportunity to show the world that we are serious about tackling transnational wildlife crime by identifying, arresting, convicting, and imprisoning the leaders of the trafficking network responsible for the July 2021 lion bone and rhino horn shipment."



ENV maintains a network of more than 300 journalists nationwide, through which it communicates on key wildlife protection issues and events. In 2021, ENV's media coverage included 834 news publications and TV and radio segments.

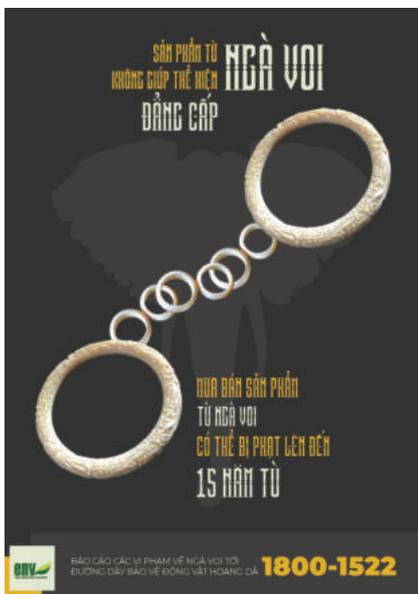
DODGING COVID-19: RECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS IN HUE



New volunteers undergo training in Hue to become members of ENV's Hue "Outpost"

Covid has reduced the ability of ENV's volunteers to conduct routine compliance monitoring of restaurants and other business establishments. As a result of restaurant closures and the dispersal of younger volunteers back to their home towns from universities, the ENV volunteer network has lost much of its momentum over the past year.

However, catching a break in Covid, ENV's Outpost recruitment team descended upon the city of Hue in December and carried out its first recruitment there since June 2020. During the mission, ten new volunteers were recruited and trained to carry out outreach events and conduct compliance monitoring in the city of Hue.



One of ENV’s viral advertisements aimed at deterring ivory crime. Released in December, the advertisement reached almost one million users on social media, becoming ENV’s most popular advertisement in 2021

“Pangolin scale is not medicine.” One of ENV’s most successful viral advertisements of November and December, reaching 363,000 Facebook users in Vietnam



MEANINGFUL IMPACTS

Strengthening law and policy

RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE

WITHIN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM



The criminal justice system in Vietnam cannot be criticized for being soft on wildlife crime, as its track record over the past few years surpasses most other countries in the region, as well as that of some Western countries.

Part of ENV’s efforts to bring greater protection to Vietnam’s wildlife involves working to strengthen the criminal justice system so that it functions in a way that will deter crime. This task involves identifying leaders within the ranks that share ENV’s vision of change, and by promoting the positive efforts of some, we can set new standards and expectations for others to follow.

One such way of promoting positive actions is through recognition. Whether achieved through ENV’s semi-annual National Wildlife Protection Achievement Awards, or through recognition immediately following an event such as a successful law enforcement intervention or prosecution, ENV remains committed to seeing that great work is recognized and encouraged.

In 2021, ENV issued formal recognition of nine law enforcement agencies, four police officers, and eight courts for their contribution to wildlife protection in Vietnam. In December, ENV produced a publication assembling accounts for all of the 2021 recognitions and shared it with 252 law enforcement agencies, procuracies, and courts across Vietnam.

COMMUNICATING COMMERCIAL WITH WILDLIFE FARMERS

An important element of ENV's efforts to tighten control over commercial wildlife farms in Vietnam involves communication with the commercial farm owners themselves.

What's the problem? Commercial wildlife farms in Vietnam are notoriously poorly managed, resulting in widespread laundering of wildlife through licensed farms and into the illegal trade. Wild animals that are illegally hunted and sold to licensed commercial farms are reported as captive-bred and raised on the farms, permitting the owners to sell them to restaurants or assemble huge shipments that are then shipped to China.

In addition to advocating for stricter laws and punishment for commercial farm owners that violate the law, as well as strengthening deterrence through publicizing and promoting cases where farm owners have been prosecuted and imprisoned, ENV is also communicating directly with 1,400 of the nation's largest commercial farm owners through regular mailings, aimed at increasing their awareness of the law and warning those that launder wildlife that: "We are coming for you."

ENV's most recent communique warned of the legal penalties of purchasing wildlife that is not of legal origin. The risk to commercial farm owners that violate the law? Up to 15 years in prison and as much as VND 400 million in fines.

ENV maintains a database of commercial wildlife farms covering most provinces, and is participating with law enforcement agencies to conduct inspections of farms in some provinces to evaluate current compliance with wildlife protection laws.

PROSECUTION TRAINING: ADVOCATING A TOUGH STANCE ON WILDLIFE CRIME

In December, ENV carried out its second training course for prosecutors, this time in Lang Son province. The training was attended in person by 20 prosecutors and staff, and an additional 80 prosecutors from 11 outlying districts in the province. The main goal of the training initiative is to familiarize prosecutors with wildlife protection laws and provide guidance on their application in real-world scenarios.

ENV is refining the course in preparation for delivery in key areas of the country in 2022.



14 YEARS! Vietnam's most impressive prosecution punishment in 2021 was a 14-year sentence handed down to a man involved in smuggling 126.5 kg of rhino horn into the country by air freight in 2019. The 14-year sentence, issued on December 4 by a Hanoi court, is Vietnam's strictest to date for wildlife trafficking.

SOME OTHER NOTABLE PRISON SENTENCES INCLUDE:

10-11 YEAR SENTENCES handed down to three smugglers caught with 54.5 kg of rhino horn and other wildlife products on a flight entering Vietnam from Angola

10 YEARS IN PRISON for a man caught smuggling 13 critically endangered big-headed turtles

7-YEAR SENTENCE for a man caught keeping 14 protected monitor lizards in his home

6.5-YEAR PRISON SENTENCE for an online exotic turtle trader caught in possession of Burmese star tortoises and other critically endangered turtle species, which he was advertising for sale online

6-YEAR SENTENCE for a woman caught with 17 protected monitor lizards

36 AND 30 MONTHS RESPECTIVELY for the owner and smuggler of 15 kg of ivory products arriving on an incoming flight from Japan

18-MONTH SENTENCE for a man selling otters online



KEY CRIMINAL CASE STATISTICS THIS YEAR

**Statistics for prosecution outcomes are based on trials that occurred this year but include cases from previous years that were pending prosecution until 2021.*

128

criminal wildlife trafficking cases in 2021

116

of these cases resulted in arrests (90.6%)

134

cases were tried in court in 2021*, all resulted in convictions

67

(50%) cases resulted in the imprisonment of one or more subjects

4,06
Years

The average prison sentence for wildlife crime in 2021



BEAR COUNTDOWN

In November, Son La became the latest bear free province after the last bear was transferred to the Four Paws Bear Sanctuary in Ninh Binh. As the number of privately owned bears on farms drops to 317 at 99 households by the end of December, the end is in sight for bear bile farming in Vietnam. Presently, there are 40 bear farm-free provinces.

ENV and World Animal Protection conduct regular convincing missions in partnership with local authorities, during which private farms are inspected, the microchips on captive bears are checked (to make sure all bears present are registered), and to meet with owners and make a determined effort to convince the owners to transfer their bears to one of Vietnam's "five-star" sanctuaries operated by Four Paws, Free The Bears or Animals Asia Foundation. In November and December, convincing missions were undertaken in 11 provinces, with 26 bear farms inspected.

While such efforts have resulted in the transfer of dozens of bears in recent years, it has become more difficult, as the remaining bile bears are in the hands of owners that are most reluctant to transfer them.

GETTING THERE, ONE BEAR AT A TIME



THROWBACK

ENV launched the "Action for Wildlife" drawing competition in November 2014. Participants focused on encouraging the public not to consume wildlife products, including rhino horn, tiger bone medicine, pangolin scales, or bear bile, and to take action to stop the illegal wildlife trade. In the space of three months, ENV received more than 155,000 entries from 58 provinces and 1,983 schools and art clubs across the country.



ENV's Rhino Ambassador, well-known top comedian Xuan Bac, and Nguyen Tuyen Nhi, 1st prize winner, at the awards event. Her artwork is titled, "Tigers also need a mom."

THE ENV CORNER

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

JOIN THE FIGHT TO PROTECT ENDANGERED WILDLIFE

We are so grateful for all the donations we received at the end of the year to our GlobalGiving campaign. Our incredible donors helped us reach 40% of our \$5,000 goal. We still have a way to go, and we're calling on you to help us make the home stretch. The funds raised will go towards facilitating wildlife rescues, monitoring businesses and facilities on the ground, and spreading public awareness and crime deterrence through promoting the prosecution of wildlife traffickers. This is especially important in the aftermath of Covid-19 having created a mountain of work for us to push through. Help us climb our mountain. **Donate today.**

ENV'S CRIME-FIGHTING WOMEN

At ENV, women comprise 79% of our staff, with 27 women working in departments spreading public awareness, receiving wildlife crime reports, investigating criminal networks, and advocating for stronger prosecutions. We caught up with our Offense Unit Team Leader, "The Woman with the Yellow Hat," to discuss what makes all the hard work worth it.

How did you end up in ENV's Wildlife Crime Unit?

When I moved to take a position in the crime unit almost a decade ago, I lacked confidence and was a bit afraid that the job would be too difficult! Everyone at ENV knows that working in the crime unit is the most demanding and difficult position in ENV. However, after many successful cases, I realized that I was good at fighting crime.

What motivates you to come to work every day?

There are many reasons. I am motivated by success; a seizure, arrest, a trafficker going to prison, knowing that I contributed to this. In my work, I can feel and see the impacts I have on wildlife protection. There is no greater satisfaction in work than actually making a difference. I also feel at home with ENV. We are like a family working together to achieve the same goals...each of us responsible for contributing our part, and helping each other when someone is stuck and can't move forward.

What do you hate most about the job?

I need more time. Sometimes, I need more energy. The work is rewarding, but it is also at times exhausting. A vacation would be good. Maybe if the wildlife traffickers would take a break, I could too. I also hate reports and paperwork. Though necessary to some degree, it gets in the way of our ability to do great things.

What is the secret ingredient that makes ENV special in your eyes?

There is no single secret ingredient, but I would respond that a combination of passion, experience, strategic focus, determination, and creative out-of-the-box approaches are certainly key ingredients.

Why do they call you the Woman with the Yellow Hat?

The name comes from a sting operation I conducted with police several years ago. I played the role as the buyer while the police response team waited nearby. I was wearing a bright yellow hat as part of my character and once I confirmed that the illegal goods were present in the trunk of a car, removing my yellow hat was my signal to police to move in. I guess the name stuck.

What advice would you offer to someone considering a career working for ENV?

You need to love nature. This is not a business, and it's not about earning money; instead, you must have a passion for protecting Vietnam's wildlife. It is also not a job for the timid or weak. At ENV you develop life skills, and strength to endure and overcome challenges of any kind. Of course, this comes with an investment in time with ENV. At ENV, we are changing the world for the better for wildlife. This is something I am proud of.



One of the dozens of sting operations completed by "The Woman with the Yellow Hat", yielding a successful outcome.

KEY links

-  **Decision-makers briefing:** Critical actions to tackle the illegal trade in Vietnam
-  **Exotic species report:** Growing concern over development of exotic species pet trade in Vietnam
-  **Macaque report:** Macaque crime overview 2010-2020 and future outlook in Vietnam
-  **Tiger PSA:** Superstitions in Vietnam – some harmless, and others destroying Earth’s wildlife
-  **Traditional medicine PSA:** Safer with Science
-  **Pangolin prosecution film:** Risks of arrest and imprisonment for pangolin traffickers are real
-  **Protect endangered wildlife against exploitation campaign**
-  **The women fighting wildlife crime in Vietnam**

EDUCATION FOR NATURE – VIETNAM

Education for Nature – Vietnam (ENV)

was established in 2000 as Vietnam’s first non-governmental organization focused on the conservation of nature and the protection of the environment. ENV combats the illegal wildlife trade and aims to foster greater understanding amongst the Vietnamese public about the need to protect nature and wildlife. ENV works closely with government partners to strengthen policy and legislation, and directly supports enforcement efforts in the protection of endangered species of regional, national, and global significance. ENV also employs creative and innovative strategies to influence public attitudes and reduce demand for wildlife trade products.

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