



WILDLIFE WATCH

JANUARY - MARCH 2022

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

LAST WOMAN STANDING: COVID STRIKES NEARLY ALL



For two years, ENV has continued to work under the constraints of Covid, with two shut downs forcing staff to work from home, and a few less fortunate staff ending up in quarantine due to proximity to Covid F0 cases. However, the Delta variant of Covid came with a vengeance in February, striking ENV staff and leaving virtually no one left standing. One after another, staff tested positive and were confined to their homes to recover. At one point, the office was manned by two staff. Even ENV's Director of Law and Policy, Ms. Ha, aka "the ENV tiger," who had declared her invincibility as she stood nearly alone in an empty ENV office commanding an army of zero, eventually got the virus.

Fortunately, all of ENV's staff were previously vaccinated, resulting in most having mild flu-like symptoms and no hospitalizations. As of the beginning of March, the ENV team began returning to work and operations have since returned to normal.



CRIME FIGHTERS

Despite the advent of the Vietnamese New Year, Tet, when much of the country slows down for the weeklong celebration, as well as the immediate subsequent major outbreak of the Delta variant of Covid and widespread closures due to sickness, the Crime Unit still managed to prevail at what they do best – fighting wildlife crime.

Some success highlights include:

In January, a sting operation with Hanoi police resulted in the seizure of three bear paws that had been advertised online. Two suppliers were arrested.



WILDLIFE CRIME at a glance

THIS YEAR

808 new cases logged by ENV comprised of

1,631 violations

472 cases reported by the public to ENV through our Wildlife Crime Hotline, averaging

8.1 new cases each day

416 internet crime cases logged by ENV so far this year, comprised of

1,008 violations

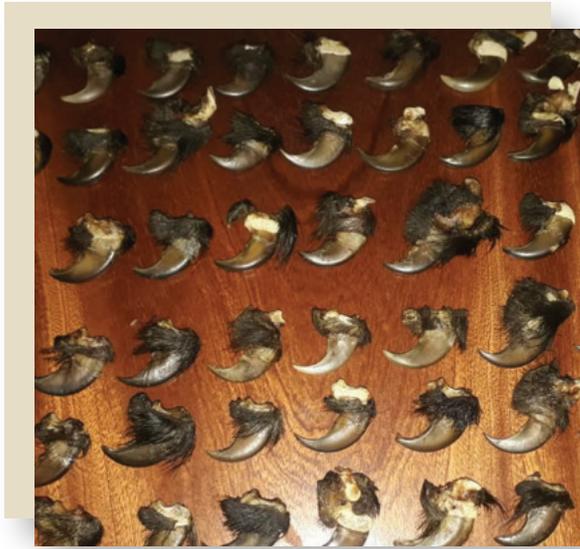
555 cases in 2022 resulted in a successful outcome thus far

291 live animals confiscated or transferred this year following reports to the ENV Wildlife Crime Hotline

SINCE 2005

22,825 wildlife crime cases comprised of

61,328 violations have been logged on ENV's Wildlife Crime Incident Tracking Database



Also in January, another sting operation in cooperation with police in Tay Ninh province targeted an online ivory- and bear product seller, resulting in his arrest along with the seizure of a live leopard cat, turtles, cobras, bear claws, wildlife wine, and frozen wildlife.

A February sting operation with Hanoi district police resulted in the seizure of a tiger trophy from an online seller, who had been selling it among other wildlife trophies.

In February, police seized 27 ivory bracelets from a souvenir shop in Kien Giang province, after the shop was reported to ENV through the Wildlife Crime Hotline.

In late March, Vinh Phuc police seized 42 vials of bear bile from an online supplier following a report from ENV, while in Ho Chi Minh City, police seized a live great hornbill in a sting operation with ENV, resulting in one arrest. The subject in this case had advertised the hornbill for sale on Facebook.

Some other ENV successes during the first three months of the year include the seizure or transfer of 291 live animals, and the confiscation of more than 40 wildlife products like bear claws and skulls, trophies, and wildlife wine jars.

TARGETING SUPPLIERS

ONLINE IVORY AND RHINO HORN

In February, ENV's Wildlife Crime Unit carried out the first of three crime reduction campaigns targeting online ivory suppliers. Over two days, trained staff searched on websites, social media, and online market places for ivory advertisements, identifying 122 new cases. While the more serious advertisers will be handled through law enforcement, a majority of the violations involve small quantities of ivory products for sale, such as bracelets, carvings, rings, and other items. ENV has issued verbal or written warnings to minor offenders, requiring that links be removed voluntarily. All of the cases are documented on ENV's Wildlife Crime Database and are subject to further monitoring, as well a stricter response should the seller choose to violate the law again.

During the last few days of March, the Crime Unit also carried out a similar crime reduction campaign targeting rhino horn advertisements. Surprisingly, only 12 cases were identified, which is well below what was expected. Moreover, at least half of the cases involved fake horns being sold as rhino horn. ENV is currently evaluating the results of this campaign to determine why violation numbers were so low, and may initiate a second round in the coming weeks to verify the results.



CAT AND MOUSE WITH POLICE FOR TURTLE SELLERS



Misfire. A police inspection fails to turn up turtles, but results in a seizure of snails and fish from the women, as public sales of any goods in the area is prohibited.

Does releasing a turtle into a pagoda pond feel good? Many people think so, but what they don't know is that most of these same turtles sold to be released actually came from the wild. The money they paid for the turtle in order to release it has been paid to criminals that poach, traffic, and sell wild-caught turtles to unsuspecting worshippers.

ENV set out in 2019 to address the issue through a combination of enforcement and awareness raising aimed at securing the cooperation of Buddhist pagodas to help educate patrons. Although Covid generally disrupted the campaign over the past two years, at least a dozen pagodas throughout the country have voluntarily turned over their turtles. Moreover, at least one major supplier has been arrested, and police in Ho Chi Minh continue to play cat and mouse with street vendors selling turtles.

In Hanoi, the problem has been reduced to one pagoda, where three stubborn women continue to sell turtles despite numerous dispatches of police and market authorities to the pagoda following sightings.

ENV has hence changed its approach. All three women were identified and profiled by ENV's Investigation Team, and ENV has stationed a monitor at the pagoda to monitor activities and dispatch police when the turtle sellers are spotted. This change in tactics has resulted in regular checks by police and formulation of a response team that includes senior district leaders, whereby progress can be monitored. As a result, the now famously stubborn turtle sellers have resorted to harassing anyone with a cell phone that they think might be photographing them or reporting their business, including innocent visitors and anyone else with a visible mobile device! For more than a week now, no turtles have been sold, but following a meeting with the district People's Committee, it now appears that there is sufficient will to effectively address the issue.

CRIME REDUCTION CAMPAIGN TARGETS BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENTS

At last, after two years waiting, ENV is able to return to cities around the country to carry out "GEO" crime reduction campaigns targeting restaurants, markets, pet shops, and other business establishments aimed at reducing retail wildlife crime.

In March, ENV GEO officers conducted Phase I surveys in Dong Hoi city of Quang Binh and Dong Ha city of Quang Tri province. In Dong Hoi city, a total of 245 establishments were checked, 154 of which were open post-Covid. Of the 154 open establishments, violations were detected in 18, with these mostly consisting of menu or signboard violations.



In Dong Ha, a total of 238 establishments were checked, 188 of which were open post-Covid. Violations were detected in 21 establishments, including some live turtles, civets, and birds, in addition to menu violations. Four out of ten TM shops also had bear bile available.

GEO crime reduction campaigns involve three phases. During Phase I, every business within a given geographic area is inspected for violations. The results of the first phase are shared immediately with the city People's Committee, who then presumably task subordinate agencies with addressing the crimes. After 60-90 days, ENV returns and evaluates the effectiveness of the city enforcement efforts by revisiting all establishments where violations were previously recorded.

The results are then shared with the provincial People's Committee Chairman and copied to the subordinate city People's Committee, after which the local officials are given another 60-90 days before ENV conducts a third evaluation to determine how the city responded to the violations. The results of this third phase are incorporated into a Report Card, including the results of all cities where crime reduction campaigns have been completed recently. This is shared with the provincial People's Committee, letting them know how the city performed overall, as well as how the province compares to others in Vietnam.

The crime reduction success rate on a typical GEO campaign is currently 71%. However, it has been as high as 100% in some provinces and as low as 40% in a few poor-performing districts in Hanoi.

A DELICATE EXPERIMENT: THE THUA THIEN - HUE HOTLINE



Twice in the past, efforts have been undertaken in Vietnam, under the management of local authorities, to establish wildlife crime hotlines through which the public can report crimes. In both of cases, these well-intentioned initiatives have failed; one because it was not designed to be successful, and the other because the particular agency manning the hotline appeared not to have the will to do the job (the initiative was pushed upon them by an NGO as a result of a donor commitment).

Let's face it – running a hotline for public reporting of wildlife crime is a lot of work. Receiving reports, making sense of often limited information, logging cases, and generating an effective response all require a level of dedication and persistence that may be beyond the ability of your average agency. However, at some point in the future, ENV strongly believes that there must be a functioning mechanism for the public to report crimes to the authorities.

For the first time since ENV established our own hotline in 2005, ENV has committed to help a government agency take up the challenge of managing their own hotline, partnering with the Thua Thien Hue Forest Protection Department (FPD) to establish a hotline for publicly reporting crimes.

Thua Thien - Hue Provincial new crime hotline number

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In December, ENV undertook an evaluation mission to Hue and met with the provincial FPD to learn more about what they wanted to do and ascertain their vision of operating a hotline. The evaluation was followed by three days of training in March at ENV's Wildlife Crime Unit, aimed at helping Forest Protection Department rangers visualize ENV's hotline operation and learn specific key skills, like documenting incoming cases, dispatching law enforcement responses, and interacting with the public.

Of course, the Hue hotline will not attempt to replicate exactly what ENV is doing. ENV has committed to help custom-design a hotline operation in Thua Thien Hue that is both practical and also meets the needs of establishing a functioning reporting mechanism for the public in the province.



DETERRING WILDLIFE CRIME: AN ESSENTIAL PART OF ENV'S STRATEGY

While one arm of ENV focuses on dealing with crime through warnings, deactivations, and enforcement responses, ENV's communication arm is all about stopping crime before it starts. While reducing consumer demand represents a long-sighted approach, ENV has invested heavily in strengthening deterrence. This means making sure the public is aware of the law and the prescribed punishment for wildlife offences, but much more importantly, demonstrating that the law is, indeed, enforced. We show the law to have real teeth by using actual examples of arrests and prosecutions to increase the perceived risks of selling or trafficking wildlife.

It is fine to say you can go to jail for 15 years for trading wildlife online, but it is more important to show examples of person XYZ being prosecuted and imprisoned for 10 years. This strategy lends credibility to what otherwise might be perceived as empty threats.

ENV's deterrence campaign began in 2018 and remains a vital part of our integrated strategy to combat wildlife trafficking. Our communication team sits at the center of this campaign, advertising on radio, TV, through social media advertisements, and via the media to get the message across.

A new deterrence film released in February focuses on rhino trafficking, using real-world examples of sufficiently strict prison sentences to convey the message clearly.

Link to film: [Rhino horn crimes' prosecutions](#)



The average prison sentence for rhino horn crimes is 6,15 years, while that for other wildlife crimes is 4,15 years.

15 năm

Mức phạt CAO NHẤT cho hành vi tàng trữ chi gấu trái phép

Thông báo vi phạm về ĐVHD qua hotline 1800-1522

The highest sentence for illegally possessing bear paws is 15 years in prison.

MOON CAKES ARE GOOD, BUT TIGER BONE MEDICINE IS NOT OK



ENV re-released its 48th public service announcement (PSA), titled “Tiger King,” in early March, beginning the Year of the Tiger by urging the public not to consume traditional medicine made from tiger bone.

The PSA features a king who is offered tiger bone traditional medicine by a rich patron, only to be rebuffed by the king, much to the embarrassment of the patron. As the man awkwardly retreats from the throne, the king pulls out a cell phone and dials in the ENV Wildlife Crime Hotline to report the crime.

The PSA was first developed and aired in 2016 and re-released this year by ENV to coincide with the Year of the Tiger. The Tiger King PSA will air on television throughout the country during the month of March and April.

PSA link: [Famous comedians Quoc Khanh and Cong Ly urge the public to protect tigers - YouTube](#)

PRODUCTION BEGINS ON ENV’S “KITCHEN FLY” PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT



In March, ENV began production of its 49th public service announcement (PSA), referred to within ENV as the “Kitchen Fly” PSA. The PSA aims at highlighting the risks of exposure to zoonotic diseases that an ordinary family unknowingly faces by eating at restaurants that serve wildlife.

Many common species of wildlife served at restaurants come from commercial wildlife farms. However, an ENV investigation of 26 major commercial wildlife farms showed signs that all but one of these operations were laundering wildlife that was illegally poached from the wild. Commercial wildlife farms are often little more than storage operations, where wild-sourced animals are kept prior to sale. It goes without saying that these farms tend to be highly unhygienic and understandably high-risk areas for disease growth and transmission both between animals and to humans.

ENV has identified commercial wildlife farms and wildlife restaurants as the two most likely potential “flash-points” for the next SARS, Covid, MEHRs, Ebola, or other zoonotic disease. ENV’s “Kitchen Fly” PSA urges the public to consider the risks of exposure to wildlife in restaurants – a small step in ENV’s larger campaign to tighten regulations and eliminate laundering of wildlife at commercial wildlife farms in Vietnam.

Each of ENV’s PSAs air on about 60 television channels nationally, in addition to being shared by ENV and other viral channels.

TIGER PRIORITIES: ARRESTING THE GROWTH OF CAPTIVE TIGER POPULATIONS

The NGO community often talks about “tiger farms” in Vietnam as if the country is operating legal facilities that commercially trade in tigers. The fact is, there are only three facilities keeping tigers in Vietnam that could be called “tiger farms,” mainly because they are privately owned and closed to the public. The other 15 privately-owned facilities are zoos, and only one of these zoos is linked to any active tiger trading activities. The remaining four facilities are rescue centers and state zoos. In all, there are 364 tigers legally in captive facilities in Vietnam, with 301 of these at privately owned facilities.



ENV Law and Policy Director Ha briefs journalists about the tiger issue.

Vietnam’s problem with tigers is not the licensed facilities that are keeping tigers, but the illegal trafficking of tigers sourced from Laos and beyond.

When it comes to captive facilities in Vietnam, there is much talk of chipping tigers for identification, but ENV believes that this would be a mistake – even potentially irresponsible – without clear measures in the law to regulate captive breeding. While Vietnam’s captive tigers are not a problem today, ENV foresees a time in the future where growth of captive tiger populations could become a problem.

“Microchipping tigers is not the answer,” says Bui Thi Ha to a group of journalists at a recent media roundtable on the issue. “That is, unless it coincides with regulations limiting captive breeding. Tigers should only be bred to meet the educational needs of legal zoos, and any chipping process must take into account the need to register and chip all offspring too.”

ENV’s captive tiger campaign activities are focused entirely on revising the law to accommodate a realistic view of the future, getting ahead of the problem rather than reacting to it later down the line.

Hand-in-hand with efforts to strengthen the law, ENV’s enforcement team focuses on targeting tiger traffickers with arrests and prosecution, working with the Nghe An government to clean up illegal tiger trafficking in the province, tiger crime enforcement and reduction activities, and working with ENV’s external partners, EIA and WFFT, to address the sourcing of tigers from Laos and Thailand.

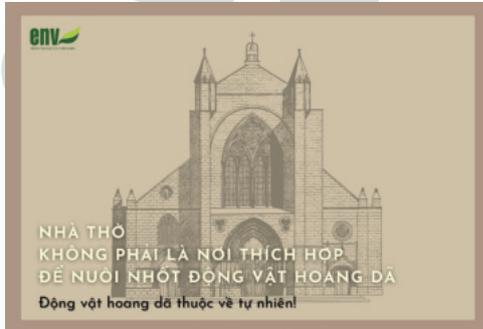
TIGER TRADE AT A GLANCE

Demand for tiger bone traditional medicine remains a serious concern in Vietnam. It is used in a paste form, mainly to treat bone-related ailments. Users are mainly in their late 40s to 60s. Tigers are sourced from zoos in Laos and Thailand and smuggled into Vietnam, where they are then cooked with other wildlife bones to make traditional medicine. Wild tigers in Thailand and Malaysia – and possibly Myanmar – continue to face serious poaching pressures, with some of these tigers ending up in Vietnam or China.

Between 2010 and 2022, the ENV Wildlife Crime Unit has documented 91 tiger seizures, comprised of 167 animals. This number represents only a fraction of the trade that is uncovered; the actual number traded is likely ten times the number seized.

NO WILDLIFE IN PAGODAS CAMPAIGN

In January, ENV continued with its communication campaign targeting pagodas and churches, urging monks to urge practitioners not to release turtles in pagoda ponds and asking priests not to keep macaques and other wildlife as pets at churches.



Postcards sent to 836 pagodas and 566 churches nationwide.

NEW PUBLIC AWARENESS MATERIALS



Macaques are not pets! They deserve freedom! (March 2022)

Don't gamble your freedom on illegally selling and possessing pangolins (January 2022)



Protect tigers in the year of Tigers. Say NO to tigers products! (March 2022)





GETTING TOUGH ON LAUNDERING WILDLIFE THROUGH COMMERCIAL FARMS



ENV's ongoing campaign to tighten regulations on commercial wildlife farms received a boost in January with the retrial of a commercial wildlife farmer who was caught in Quang Nam with five pangolins. The initial trial in November 2019 resulted in a suspended sentence and probation for the subject. However, ENV proposed to the High Court in Da Nang that the verdict be appealed and the case be retried on the grounds that the punishment for the crime was insufficient. The appeal was accepted in 2021, and the case was retried in January 2022, resulting in a two-year and nine-month prison sentence. Before the trial, legal papers for two of the subject's commercial wildlife farms in Kon Tum province were also withdrawn after interventions by ENV.

It is well-known within conservation circles that licensed wildlife farms in Vietnam are widely used to launder wildlife. Wild-caught animals are purchased from poachers and middlemen by licensed farmers, after which the farmers claim that the animals were born and raised in captivity at their farms. This permits the farmers to legally sell these wild animals to buyers in Vietnam and China. Hundreds of thousands of animals are likely laundered through licensed wildlife farms in Vietnam each year. While there are now efforts underway by relevant authorities to tighten regulations and closely supervise farms, the process is slow to bring about the sort of change that is needed to protect Vietnam's biodiversity, and that of its neighbors.

ENV is actively working with law enforcement and the courts to expedite reform within the commercial wildlife farming sector, identifying opportunities to target laundering operations, secure arrests, and strictly punish wildlife farmers who violate the law, ensuring that their licenses to operate are revoked. ENV communicates the fate of farmers that face consequences for their actions through an established network of more than 1,800 major licensed commercial wildlife farms nationally. It is our intention through our regular communications with farmers to ensure that they are both aware of the law, and understand that other farmers are being caught, prosecuted, and losing their licenses for violating wildlife regulations.

"Our message to wildlife farmers that are laundering wildlife is clear," says Bui Thi Ha, ENV's Law and Policy Director. "Forget about yesterday and what you have been able to do without risk. Use your farm license to traffic wildlife, and the law will come for you."

ENV's commercial farming strategy integrates real-time enforcement measures with advocacy for tougher regulations and oversight of commercial wildlife farms, while engaging farmers through communication intended to influence behavior change.

The Quang Nam case is a positive example to leverage behavior change amongst farmers and to encourage authorities elsewhere to get tough on laundering. Watch for more to come in the coming months as other ENV investments in tackling the problem begin to pay off.





HERE COME THE TIGERS!

A defunct zoo shut its doors, transferring three bears and four tigers to a State zoo and a bear sanctuary. Following efforts that started in June 2019 with a correspondence to the Binh Duong Provincial People’s Committee that urged the province to shut down the financially crippled Thanh Canh Zoo, in April 2021, the owner finally agreed to transfer his remaining tigers and bears, and after delays resulting from Covid, the transfer finally happened.



Eight tigers were also transferred from the Muong Thanh Zoo in Nghe An to Hanoi Zoo. The tigers had initially been placed at the private zoo following their seizure in August 2021. Seven other captive tiger cubs seized in Nghe An during the same month were also transferred from Pu Mat National Park Rescue Center and permanently placed at the Phong Nha Khe Bang Rescue Center in Quang Binh.



As enforcement efforts continue to tighten the screws on illegal tigers being kept in Vietnam, the issue of making permanent placement facilities available for tigers is becoming increasingly important. ENV expects that continued efforts in partnership with the Nghe An government and enforcement agencies will result in more live tiger seizures in the near future.

WILDLIFE CRIME IS A CRIME:

PROMOTING APPLICATION OF WILDLIFE LAW WITH PROSECUTORS IN HANOI

In February, ENV carried out training for 36 prosecutors from the Hanoi Procuracy and 10 districts in Hanoi. The training involved a review of key wildlife protection laws and an open discussion with prosecutors on the difficulties they face in applying the law in actual cases.

The training module was developed by ENV in response to needs identified through ENV’s daily work with prosecutors. Similar training sessions will be held in key wildlife trafficking hotspots around the country, so that we can ensure that prosecutors in these areas are well-versed and able to deal with wildlife crime cases as they arise.

One critical strength that ENV has in training prosecutors is the fact that the ENV prosecution team works every day full-time on real cases with prosecutors, courts, and law enforcement all over the country, supporting application of wildlife protection laws. ENV’s prosecution team doesn’t just know the law; in many cases, they have contributed to writing the law.

As part of ENV’s prosecutor training initiative, ENV has produced a new resource specifically designed for prosecutors and judges. The “Prosecution Handbook” provides practical responses to some of the most frequently asked questions from judges and prosecutors around the country. The handbook also emphasizes the importance of their role in tackling wildlife crime, including promoting deterrence through the strict handling of serious cases.



NHỮNG CÂU HỎI THƯỜNG GẶP
TRONG CÔNG TÁC XỬ LÝ TỘI PHẠM
VỀ ĐỘNG VẬT HOANG DÃ
(Tài liệu tham khảo dành cho các cán bộ tòa án và viện kiểm sát)



In February, ENV distributed the Prosecution Handbook to 800 prosecutors and judges throughout Vietnam.

WARNING:

EXOTIC SPECIES TRAFFICKING IS ON THE RISE

Trade in exotic species is on the rise in Vietnam. Ranging from turtles and iguanas to rare parrots and sugar gliders, all of these animals have two things in common: They are not native to Vietnam, and they are illegally brought into the country.

The exotic species trade is particularly visible on social media – so much so that ENV has a difficult time keeping on top of the incoming reports of crimes by the public. In 2021, ENV logged 165 cases comprised of more than 381 violations involving the advertising and sale of exotic species online, sparking concern that the rise of exotic species trafficking will become unmanageable if the issue is not effectively addressed while the problem is still small.

What are we concerned about?

1. The growth of a new form of illegal trafficking of wildlife that could impact wild populations of these species as a result of rising demand in Vietnam.
2. The potential that escapes and releases of some of these non-native species could result in establishing wild populations, threatening native biodiversity and ecosystems.
3. Trafficking in any animal species presents opportunities and risks of the introduction of zoonotic diseases, which can impact human health and cause severe economic disruption.

ENV has taken our concerns to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment, sounding the alarm and urging for regulations and enforcement to be immediately tightened, in order to deal with the problem while we still can.

In January, ENV issued an alert to all border stations in Vietnam, asking border checkpoints and Customs agencies to increase vigilance in detecting smuggling of non-native species into Vietnam from abroad.

ENV efforts have also focused on strengthening enforcement. In January, in a joint sting operation with Hanoi Police, 118 non-native parrots were seized, including five endangered gray parrots, which resulted in one online exotic parrot trader being arrested.

In a second case at the very end of December 2021, Ho Chi Minh Police responded to reports from ENV about an online seller advertising a range of exotic species on Facebook. Police raided the trader's home and seized 112 non-native geckos, bearded dragons, and king snakes. The trader was fined VND 37.5 million (\$1,640), and ENV had the online market that he advertised on shut down through our partnership with Facebook.

NOTE: ENV's success rate in shutting down exotic species trade on the internet exceeds our new exotic species case rate, largely due to cases from previous years being resolved successfully in 2021. During 2021, a total of 186 cases were successfully concluded, most of these by securing voluntary compliance and removal of violation links by the seller in minor cases, while others resulted from removal of links and deactivations by ENV's social media partners, notably Facebook, Google, and TikTok, as well as others. A far fewer number of cases resulted in seizures, arrests, and fines.

BAD GUYS GO TO JAIL

JANUARY - MARCH 2022

Some excellent examples of how the criminal justice system in Vietnam is responding to the need to deter wildlife crime:

13 YEARS for a pangolin trafficker, **12 AND 10-YEAR** sentences for two accomplices in a case in Ca Mau that was retried, with an additional **VND 150 MILLION IN FINES (\$6,560)**

10 YEARS for smuggling 63 big-headed turtles in Kon Tum

10 YEARS for a marine turtle poacher and **8 YEARS** for his partner in an appellate trial in Ca Mau

7 YEARS for trafficking monitor lizards, bamboo rats, and other wildlife in Dak Lak

7 YEARS for possession of 14 tigers in Nghe An

5 YEARS AND SIX MONTHS sentence to a trafficker for smuggling seven live tiger cubs in Nghe An

5 YEARS AND SIX MONTHS for turtle trafficking in Quang Ninh

5 YEAR AND 2-YEAR sentence for trafficking two lorises in Quang Ngai

2 YEARS years for possession of a frozen tiger and **VND 50 MILLION FINE (\$2,185)** in Ha Tinh

2 YEARS for a frozen tiger cub and bear- and tiger head trophies in Ho Chi Minh

15- AND 12-MONTH SENTENCES for two subjects keeping two gibbons in Dak Nong



KEY CRIMINAL CASE STATISTICS IN 2022

**Incidents that occurred in 2022 (prosecution pending)*

***Statistics represent cases tried in 2022 from 2021 and earlier*

25

*Criminal wildlife trafficking cases**

23

of these cases resulted in arrests (92%)

25

*cases were tried in court in 2022, all resulted in convictions***

20

(80%) cases resulted in the imprisonment of one or more subjects

3.4 YEARS

is the average prison sentence for wildlife crime in 2022

COUNTDOWN NEWS FLASH: BEARS AT RESCUE CENTERS NOW OUTNUMBER THOSE ON BILE FARMS

As of March 31, **309 bears** are still being kept **on bile farms**, while the number of bears **at rescue centers** across the country has risen to **327** – far surpassing their still-captive brothers and sisters for the first time ever. This tipping of the scales marks a milestone in the fight to end bear bile farming in the country, bringing hope that the end of this cruel industry looms near.



BINH DUONG WORKING TO END BEAR BILE FARMING IN THE PROVINCE; NINE BEARS TRANSFERRED



In February, nine bears made a 40-hour journey to freedom from Binh Duong to their new home at the Four Paws Bear Sanctuary in Ninh Binh. The bears come from the bile trade, where they have spent most of their lives in small cages being exploited for bile to meet the demand from bile consumers in Vietnam. The transfer follows efforts over several years to encourage the owners to transfer the animals, all of which are legally registered, to a rescue center.

“Most have been in captivity since prior to 2004, and thus their arrival at the spacious ‘five-star’ sanctuary in Ninh Binh is, in a sense, a positive way to spend their remaining years after a miserable life in the trade,” said ENV Vice Director Nguyen Phuong Dung.

Presently, there are about 309 registered bears remaining on 97 private farms in Vietnam, down 93% from 2005, when the government initiated efforts to phase out bear bile farms in Vietnam.

“One by one, bear bile farms close and provinces become bear farm-free provinces,” says Dung. *“ENV will not rest until the last bear is transferred to a rescue center and the bear bile industry in Vietnam is pronounced dead.”*

ENV and its Bear Coalition partners, World Animal Protection and Four Paws, have recently turned our attention on Hanoi, now the nation’s leading hotspot for bear bile farming, with more than 50% of the country’s 309 captive bile bears right here in the nation’s capital. There are 38 bear farms in Hanoi and 158 bears by last count. Efforts by the Coalition focus on working with the city People’s Committee to “clean up” the image of Hanoi as a bear bile farming hotspot by shutting down the industry as a whole.

ENV'S HISTORY: ESTABLISHING ENV'S WILDLIFE CRIME HOTLINE

When ENV first established its hotline in 2005, it was a phone on a desk that was referred to as “the hotline.” An administrative staff member answered it when it rang (which it never did). ENV tried posters and handing out business cards with the number on it, but the phone remained silent.

Our first case was reported six months later: Case 0001 – a restaurant in Hanoi selling softshell turtles and advertising crocodiles on the menu. By the end of the first year, ENV was receiving no more than five cases a month.

However, after 2005, word got out, and combined with TV and radio advertising, media attention, and development of our National Wildlife Protection Network of volunteers, the calls started coming in a few each week. It was at that time that we felt the need to develop a report form for recording cases. The report form necessitated dedicated staff and our first dedicated “Hotline Officer” in 2006.

As case numbers grew, we moved from a chaotic paper filing system in notebooks to an Access database, which we soon outgrew, moving to an online multiuser incident tracking system in 2010. It was probably in 2010, when we made that leap to a more effective tracking system, that we started making a real difference, generating enforcement responses, systematically tracking each case through to its conclusion, and documenting results.



Today, we have more than 22,000 cases under our belt. Our Wildlife Crime Unit is staffed with ten case officers and two “prosecutors,” receiving at least 9 new cases each day and generating daily successes ranging from arrests, successful prosecutions, and issuance of fines, to wildlife seizures, wildlife product confiscations, voluntary compliance, and online account deactivations.

We once wondered whether a gibbon chained in front of a restaurant would be confiscated at all; today, a same-day response by authorities is common and expected, and more than often successful.

Running an effective crime unit is exhausting for all involved. The cases pile up and case officers may juggle in excess of 150 active cases at any one time. Our case officers are overworked, and they would say, underpaid. But the work is rewarding, and although the fight is persistent and never-ending, these young and dedicated warriors are making a difference – changing the country, and getting ahead, one small step at a time.

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

ENV AMBASSADORS WILL RAISE CRITICAL SUPPORT FOR ENV ACTIVITIES

Become an “ENV Wildlife Ambassador” and help us raise support for our efforts to protect wildlife in Vietnam by hosting a fundraising event in your school, neighborhood, or community. 100% of all funds raised will go directly to activities on the ground. No salaries and no overhead costs. If interested, please contact Rebecca, our International Communications Coordinator, at internationalcomms@env4wildlife.org for more information. You can also support us by donating here

DONATE



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
-  **Penal Code PSA:** Don't do it, wildlife crime is not worth that risk
-  **Traditional medicine PSA:** Safer with Science
-  **Pangolin prosecution film:** Risks of arrest and imprisonment for pangolin traffickers are real
-  **Wildlife Law Guidance 2021:** A comprehensive guide for law enforcement on the application of wildlife protection laws 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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