



**ENV's National
Counter Wildlife Trafficking**

PRIORITIES 2024

In 2016, ENV first identified critical actions that Vietnam should take to stop the illegal wildlife trade and positively impact the future of Vietnam's endangered wildlife, as well as to reduce and ultimately eliminate Vietnam's role in global wildlife trafficking.

In 2024, ENV identified the 12 following priorities for countering wildlife trafficking in Vietnam.



01 | TAKE DOWN MAJOR INTERNATIONAL TRAFFICKING NETWORKS AND THEIR LEADERS

In the last few years, Vietnam has made some progress in targeting the leadership of wildlife trafficking networks.

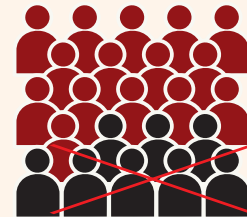
Since 2017, police investigations have led to the arrest of FIVE major top-tier international wildlife traffickers. Two additional "kingpins" are in prison for other crimes.

The most recent success was the July 2024 arrest of Cao Xuan Manh – a major trafficker behind the tiger trade in Nghe An and Laos.

While we should be proud of the progress, our efforts must be consistent and determined. There are currently at least **15** known "kingpins" behind the trafficking of large quantities of ivory, pangolin scales, and rhino horns into or through Vietnam. These top-level transnational wildlife traffickers continue to operate freely.

While the seizure of goods is a vital part of tackling the illegal wildlife trade, investigations that lead to the arrest of these senior traffickers leading organized international criminal networks are essential if Vietnam is to have any significant impact on ending wildlife trafficking. If these individuals were to face prosecution, Vietnam's role in international wildlife trafficking would reduce considerably, and the deterrence value of prosecuting these individuals would drive all but a few from the business.

WANTED



**THERE ARE CURRENTLY AT LEAST 15
KNOWN "KINGPINS" AT LARGE**

Action: It is of the highest priority for law enforcement agencies to invest time and resources into investigations that strategically target the leadership of major international and national criminal networks that traffic wildlife, resulting in arrests, prosecution, and strict punishment, as well as serving to reduce and eliminate Vietnam's role in international wildlife trafficking.



02 | INVESTIGATE MAJOR SEIZURES AT PORTS TO ULTIMATELY IDENTIFY, ARREST, AND PROSECUTE THE OWNER BEHIND THESE SHIPMENTS

Since 2015, 34 wildlife trafficking cases were discovered at shipping ports, involving nearly 80 tonnes of ivory, rhino horn, and pangolin scales. Notably, 8 tonnes of these illegal wildlife were seized at ports in 2023 alone.

On July 18, 2024, Hai Phong city Court sentenced Hoang Van Hao, director of a Thuong Tin based company that was behind the shipments of two containers holding 615 kg of ivory seized at Lach Huyen port, to 10 years in prison. This marked the first time a major seizure of wildlife seized at Hai Phong port resulted in the arrest and prosecution of the shipments owner. While Hai Phong authorities should be recognized for their excellent job in concluding an investigation that resulted in the arrest of Hao, this case should mark the beginning of a commitment to vigorously investigate major seizures at ports throughout Vietnam and ensure that the owners of these shipments are brought to justice. While many large-scale traffickers can bear the loss of a shipment seized by authorities, few will test the resolve of authorities if their own personal freedom is at stake.

Action: Port authorities, in cooperation with other relevant enforcement agencies, must conduct in-depth investigations into major seizures at shipping ports, identifying the senior traffickers behind these shipments rather than focusing on shipping agents and other smaller players. It is also critical that investigators consider the use of technology to analyze computers, cell phones, and other evidence seized in relation to the case, as well as track the movement of money that will link investors in the shipment with other traffickers and sources. Moreover, given that these shipments originate from abroad, it is crucial to enhance cooperation with external law enforcement agencies in order to dismantle major international trafficking networks. In some cases, foreign law enforcement agencies are investigating their side of the same case and may hold crucial pieces of information that could facilitate police investigations in Vietnam.

Additionally, the Ministry of Public Security should be given immediate access at the time of the seizure to the evidence seized at airports and ports, avoiding potential delays that can complicate or adversely impact investigations.

03 | ERADICATE CORRUPTION

Corruption is one of the most sensitive yet crucial challenges that Vietnam faces in the fight against wildlife crime, especially in cases involving the smuggling of high-value products like rhino horn and ivory.

Criminals rely on the cooperation of corrupt officials to help them circumvent the law. Corruption takes many forms, ranging from issuance of commercial wildlife farm permits that provide a cover for criminal laundering operations, to letting criminals go instead of arresting them, or facilitating clearance through airports, seaports, and along our land borders. After arrest, some criminals are also willing to pay a fortune in order to get reduced sentences or freedom from imprisonment.

Action: We as a country must apply higher standards of integrity, increase transparency, and promote accountability within the criminal justice system to tackle corruption. By applying the law effectively and consistently, Vietnam can ensure that no one is above the law, and that the law is applied fairly and equitably to the benefit of society.

04 | PREVENT CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR THROUGH ESTABLISHING EFFECTIVE DETERRENTS

The revised Penal Code came into effect in 2018, marking a significant legal milestone in efforts to combat wildlife crime. As evidenced by data recorded by ENV over the course of 10 years, Vietnam’s criminal justice system has made considerable progress toward increasing the risks associated with trafficking wildlife through the imposition of strict and consistent punishment that strengthens deterrence. While there was a slight reduction in both percentage of cases resulting in prison term as well as the average prison sentence once these figures reached their peaks in 2019 and 2020, overall, there has been a notable increase in the number of prosecutions, convictions, and length of prison sentences for wildlife-related offenses since 2018, surpassing figures from previous years.



Table 1: Court performance by verdict date from 2014 to 2023

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	Revised Penal Code	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Prosecutions	15	24	54	64		63	95	120	141	159	218
No. of cases resulting in prison term(s)	10	11	19	19		29	46	59	64	74	85
Percentage of cases resulting in prison term(s)	66.7	45.8	35.2	29.7		46	48.4	49.2	45.4	46.5	39
No. of subjects imprisoned	12	15	22	27		39	79	95	84	108	115
Average prison term (years)	1.46	0.98	1.55	1.21		3.08	4.48	4.09	3.60	3.06	2.80

ENV believes that consistent and strict application of the new Penal Code increases the perceived risks of wildlife trafficking and when applied over time and communicated effectively, will deter all but the most hardened of criminals from engaging in criminal activity.

Action: ENV calls upon prosecutors and judges throughout Vietnam to exercise “zero tolerance, zero sympathy, zero self-interest” in wildlife trafficking cases. In order to effect change, and where appropriate, law enforcement agencies and the courts should apply the Penal Code to the fullest extent, maximizing the deterrent value of the arrests and prosecutions, and in doing so, reducing wildlife crime nationally.



05

ADDRESS LAUNDERING OF WILDLIFE AND STRENGTHEN PROTECTION FOR VIETNAM'S BIODIVERSITY CONTROLS OF COMMERCIAL THROUGH THE ISSUANCE OF A "CLEAN LIST" OF SPECIES VIABLE FOR FARMING

As of 2022, there were around 8,600 licensed commercial wildlife farms in Vietnam (Forest Protection Department, 2022), and there are likely many more farms that are not properly accounted for or are awaiting licenses. These licensed commercial wildlife farms are currently permitted to commercially trade at least 39 species considered to be threatened globally. However, many of these species are being sourced from the wild and laundered through these licensed commercial farms, posing a substantial threat to biodiversity, both in Vietnam and our neighboring countries where the animals are illegally sourced.

Lack of an effective farm management and monitoring system, as well as weak punishment for violators opens the door for commercial wildlife farmers to launder wildlife through their legal facilities, obtaining animals at a much cheaper cost than that required to breed and raise them on their farms.

While not all licensed farms are engaged in illegal laundering of wild-caught animals, evidence from inspections by law enforcement and interviews with farmers suggest abuse of the system on a wide scale. Evidence suggests that traffickers can easily buy falsified documentation from farms, falsely showing that animals they are transporting are sourced from a licensed farm.

Action: Along with tighter controls and management of commercial wildlife farms, ENV is calling for the issuance of a "clean list" of species that CAN be farmed and the limiting of commercial farming to only these species. This approach increases efficiency and achieves the task of strengthening protection of Vietnam's biodiversity and prohibiting species that are in need of protection from being laundered through farms and exploited for commercial purposes. The CLEAN LIST approach is a win for commercial farmers, a win for authorities, and a win for wildlife.

Laundering of wildlife through farms is one of the most pressing issues threatening Vietnam's biodiversity. Rectifying the system to allow for legal commercial farmers to operate while shutting down wildlife traffickers that are abusing the system requires a long and persistent approach that involves tighter management, more effective monitoring, and harsh penalties, including heavy fines, forfeiture of violators license to operate, seizure of all wildlife, and in serious cases, arrest and prosecution.

However, one immediate measure that can be taken to reduce the impact on Vietnam's biodiversity resulting from laundering of wildlife through licensed commercial farms would be to adopt a "Clean List" system.

The clean list would only contain species that breed well in captivity, are economically viable and are not threatened in the wild. Potential disease risks should also be considered in producing the clean list.

Once a clean list is established, pressure will be reduced on both the authorities and the farmers, drastically simplifying the process of farm registration, management, and monitoring, and allowing more time for authorities to address laundering of wildlife over the longer term.



06

DEVELOP ONE OVERARCHING LAW ON NON-COMMERCIAL/CONSERVATION FACILITIES

The loose nature and conflicts between current legislation regarding the management of conservation facilities and non-commercial facilities present a threat to Vietnam's biodiversity. The increasing number and development of privately owned zoos, safaris, and ecotourism facilities requires more stringent regulations, enforcement, and monitoring to ensure that animals are legally sourced and that these licensed non-commercial facilities do not engage in any form of commercial trade of wildlife or wildlife parts or products. It is also important to consider how and if these facilities contribute to conservation and/or serve to educate the public – the only two acceptable purposes for establishing and licensing such facilities.

For the most part, many of these facilities operate within the law. However, illegal sourcing of animals, laundering of wildlife such as tigers at one zoo in particular, exploitation of captive animals, and commercial trade of captive wildlife, highlight the need for stricter regulations that benefit those in compliance with the law, while forcing those not in compliance to either meet the requirements of the law or cease operations.



Action: Develop ONE law that clearly defines conservation facilities and other non-commercial facilities with detailed conditions for their establishment and effective management tools to oversee facility operations. The law must effectively prohibit commercial trade at these facilities, require all animals to be legally sourced and registered, regulate the breeding of endangered species, and require each facility to meet basic requirements to secure a license to operate as a conservation or educational facility.

This new law should also include strict punishment for violations, ranging from fines for minor infractions, to criminal penalties and loss of their license to operate and closure where regulations are seriously breached.

07 | TACKLE TIGER TRAFFICKING IN VIETNAM, ESPECIALLY IN NGHE AN PROVINCE

Since 2018, ENV has recorded a total of 85 seizures involving 113 live and dead tigers being trafficked in Vietnam. A good number of these seizures are linked to Nghe An province, considered a notorious hotspot for tiger trafficking in Vietnam, and home to some of the country's most well-known transnational wildlife traffickers.

In fact, investigations undertaken by ENV indicate that the majority of top-tier tiger traffickers – who may control as much as 60-80% of the tigers trafficked in Vietnam – are concentrated in three districts of Nghe An province. ENV has long received reports of as many as a few hundred tigers being purchased as cubs from Laos and Thailand and raised in “basements” by many households in Yen Thanh, Quynh Luu, and Dien Chau districts.

The 2021 seizure of 17 tigers from two households in Yen Thanh district marked a positive starting point in Nghe An's efforts to address tiger trafficking within the province. However, there has been little progress since 2021, and traffickers continue to use Nghe An as a safe haven from which to operate their illegal business. Much more needs to be done in Nghe An and neighboring Ha Tinh province to put a stop to the illegal trafficking of tigers in Vietnam.

Action: ENV urges authorities in Nghe An to (1) launch focused investigations targeting the arrest and prosecution of five identified major tiger traffickers in Nghe An province; (2) seize all illegally held “basement” tigers; (3) shutdown of registered tiger facilities in the province known to be laundering illegal tigers; (4) cooperate with the Laotian government to close Vietnamese-owned or - operated tiger trafficking facilities based in Laos that are trafficking tigers into Vietnam; and (5) strengthen controls at Cau Treo border gate (of Ha Tinh province) to eliminate the flow of tiger cubs, as well as other forms of wildlife, from Laos into Vietnam.



08 | PULL THE PLUG ON WILDLIFE CRIMES ON THE INTERNET

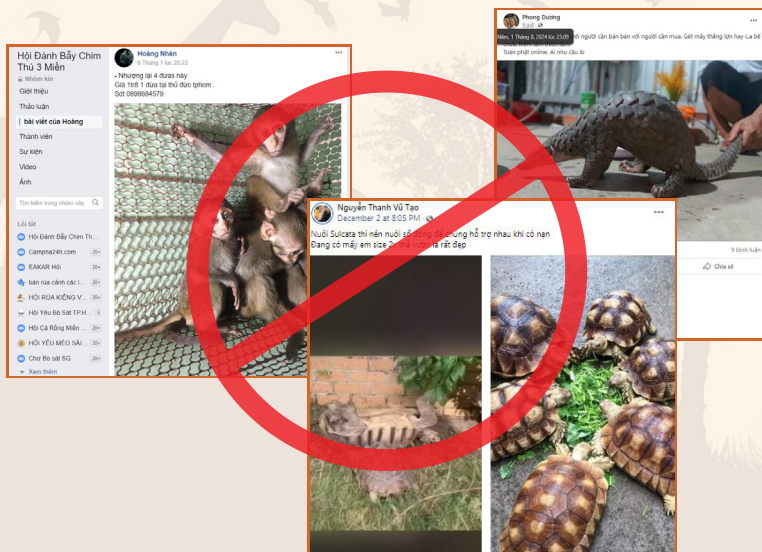
In 2015, 21% of all cases recorded by ENV involved online violations (284 cases). During the 2018 - 2023 period, the percentage of online crimes jumped to 54% (9,344) of all cases. With the current upward trend of online wildlife crime and given that trying to address each and every violation is not possible, it is important for law enforcement agencies and the justice system to take the issue seriously and aim at targeting major suppliers while focusing on deterrence.

ENV believes that about 90% of all online wildlife crime can be addressed through establishing and communicating effective deterrence. In other words, if the risk of punishment is present and suitably strict, most people will follow the law. In order to establish those risks, we need both effective laws, effective enforcement, and effective punishment to make examples of a few in order to influence the many.

Recently, there has been an increasing responsiveness by authorities in many provinces in efforts to tackle wildlife cybercrime. In addition to seizures and arrests, authorities have increasingly used financial penalties as a means to deter criminals from selling wildlife online, including penalties of up to 85,000,000 VND just for advertising wildlife. While small fines may serve to warn violators not to advertise and sell wildlife online, authorities need to take more decisive action when the violator does not comply with the law after the issuance of a reasonable warning.

Action: Instructions must be issued to provincial law enforcement agencies to actively strengthen law enforcement in relation to online markets and suppliers of illegal wildlife, followed by the issuance of heavy fines as allowed under the law, and the arrest, prosecution, and imprisonment of serious violators to strengthen deterrence.

Efforts must also focus on requiring social media platforms like Facebook to either actively address use of their platform for illegal activities, or to conclude operations in Vietnam until such time that they are ready and prepared to work effectively with the government of Vietnam to reduce and eliminate illegal activities on their platform.





09

FINISH THE JOB: ENDING BEAR BILE FARMING IN VIETNAM AND CLOSING DOWN ALL BEAR FARMS IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

With 192 bile bears remaining on farms in Vietnam and 46 bear farm-free provinces, the finish line for ending bear farming is not far away. The road forward is simple: strengthen monitoring at bear farms, strictly punish bear related violations, no compensation to bear owners for transfer of their bears to authorities, and regular visits to convince bear farm owners to give up their bears voluntarily. This requires concerted and determined efforts by relevant authorities, especially the local People's Committee and FPDs in all bear farming provinces, especially Hanoi.

Being the country's biggest hotspot for bile farms, authorities in Hanoi have demonstrated commendable efforts, resulting in noticeable progress in ending bear farming. Accordingly, in the first six months of 2024, there were seven bears voluntarily transferred to the State in Hanoi, out of a total of eleven bears transferred across the country. However, with 94 bears kept at 16 private households, mostly in the district of Phuc Tho, Hanoi accounts for 49% of the country's total, and more needs to be done to ensure that bear bile farming is completely eradicated in Vietnam's capital.

Action: The People's Committee in remaining bear farm provinces should, in partnership with subordinate agencies, strengthen efforts to convince bear farm owners to give up their remaining bears, with the aim of joining 46 other bear-free provinces that have successfully put an end to bear bile farming. In Hanoi, under direction of the city People's Committee, the Phuc Tho People's Committees should set a timeline for ending bear bile farming in the nation's capital and address the issue once and for all, so that other remaining bear-keeping provinces will follow the example set by Hanoi.



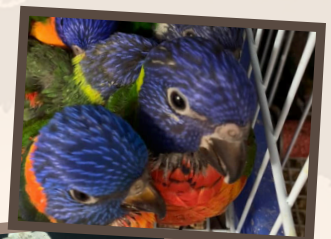
10 | ARREST THE GROWTH OF THE EXOTIC SPECIES TRADE

The trade in exotic species, mainly for keeping as pets, represents a growing trend in Vietnam, particularly amongst the younger generations. In 2023 alone, ENV recorded more than 316 cases involving at least 19,320 exotic animals being traded or kept. It is also of great concern that ENV has recorded a number of farms either registered or illegally operating that are farming hundreds if not thousands of exotic animals.

The exotic species trade poses a potentially serious threat to native biodiversity if captive animals are released or escape into nature. There are also risks associated with bringing exotic animals into the country that have not been adequately screened for possible zoonotic diseases that could be introduced and pose a threat to human safety. Moreover, some of the exotic species' trade includes critically endangered species that have been poached from the wild and trafficked to Vietnam.

Action: It is especially critical that the relevant ministries including the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment, and Ministry of Health take urgent steps to proactively address the rise of the exotic species trade in Vietnam, before illegal markets grow to a point where the crisis is unmanageable.

In addition to putting in place specific regulations on keeping wildlife (and exotic species in particular) as pets, imposing a ban on release of exotic species into the wild and carefully considering farming of exotic species, it is also important that law enforcement agencies strictly monitor and handle violations involving exotic species, as well as strengthening international border management and monitoring to prevent exotic species from entering Vietnam without legal documentation.





11 | PHASING OUT ILLEGAL BIRD TRADE STEP BY STEP

The illegal trade and exploitation of wild birds in Vietnam is a significant concern driven by demand mainly for pets and consumption as a delicacy. In 2023 alone, ENV documented **975** cases involving the advertising and trafficking of wild birds, comprising of about **162,971** individual birds. These numbers likely represent only a small percentage of the total volume of the trade each year, which may reach several million or more animals. Wild populations of many bird species cannot sustain this level of exploitation.

On May 17, 2022, the Prime Minister issued Directive No. 04/ CT-TTg banning the hunting and trade of migratory and non-migratory native birds. Since the issuance of the Prime Minister's Directive No. 04/CT-TTg, ENV has witnessed heightened efforts by many law enforcement agencies across the country to combat bird-related crimes. However, with the ongoing bird trade, an effective and specific campaign must be developed by each province/city to ensure the illegal trade is completely phased out. Of particular concern are restaurants serving native and migratory bird species and public markets, such as the Thanh Hoa market in Long An, where thousands of birds are offered for sale.



Action: It is imperative that provinces develop effective strategies to address the illegal bird trade, targeting restaurants and markets, including online sales, and imposing strict punishments on individuals involved in the hunting, trapping, and trade of wild birds. In the bird pet industry, while the common pet species are often sold, law enforcement agencies need to be able to identify protected native species and migratory birds and enforce the laws accordingly to eliminate the illegal trade of all of these species. In addition, the provincial authorities should launch communications campaigns targeting bird shop owners and restaurant owners to ensure compliance with the laws, as well as follow up with increased monitoring, and an aggressive campaign to remove nets and arrest bird hunters.

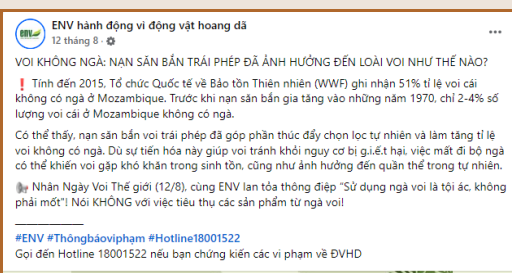


12 | REDUCE CONSUMER DEMAND FOR WILDLIFE THROUGH ACTIVE GOVERNMENT-LED INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS ON TV, RADIO, IN THE MEDIA, AND ON THE INTERNET.

According to experts, Vietnam serves as both a transit route and a major consumer market in the global illegal wildlife trade. Demand for wildlife in Vietnam, used in traditional medicine, consumed at restaurants, or to keep as pets poses a serious threat to both Vietnam's and global biodiversity.

While excellent laws and increasingly effective law enforcement are critical components of progress in tackling wildlife trade, it is equally important to address the issue of demand in Vietnam. While NGOs and other social institutions have traditionally conducted demand reduction campaigns, it is ENV's belief that messaging disseminated and backed by key government agencies at the central and provincial levels would increase the effectiveness of the demand reduction messaging and clearly communicate the government's position on the consumption and use of wildlife and wildlife parts and products.

Action: The provincial People's Committees should instruct relevant agencies to design and conduct regular and sustained public awareness campaigns, either independently or in collaboration with NGOs, aimed at reducing consumer demand for wildlife. Various communication channels including TV, radio, social media, and community outreach should be used effectively to encourage the public not to consume wildlife.





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 employs creative and innovative strategies to influence public attitudes and reduce demand for wildlife trade products. 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 STRATEGIC PROGRAMS

Since 2007, ENV has focused its activities on three major program areas that comprise ENV's integrated strategic approach for addressing illegal wildlife trade in Vietnam. These include:

- Working with policy-makers to strengthen legislation, close loopholes in the law, and promote effective application of laws and policy that protect wildlife;
- Strengthening enforcement through direct support and assistance to law enforcement agencies in combatting wildlife crime;
- Reducing consumer demand for wildlife products through investment in a long-term and sustained effort to influence public attitudes and behavior, including mobilizing public participation and action protecting wildlife by reporting wildlife crime.



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