



STATE OF THE TRADE IN VIETNAM:

# BEARS

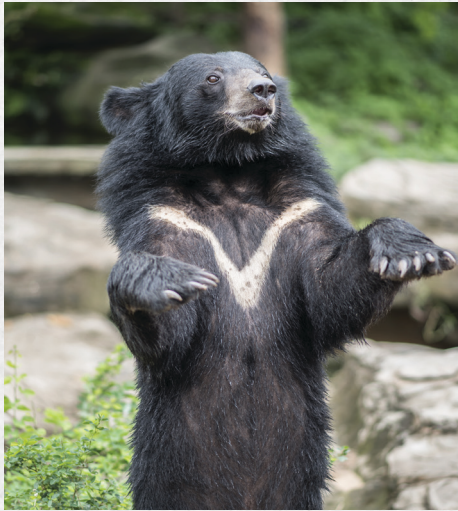
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OCTOBER 2024

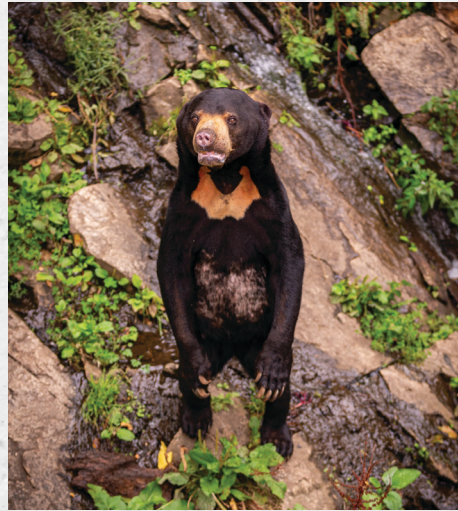


## SPECIES

There are two species of bears that are native to Vietnam: Asiatic black bear (*Ursus thibetanus*) and Malayan sun bear (*Helarctos malayanus*).



Asiatic black bear (*Ursus thibetanus*)



Malayan sun bear (*Helarctos malayanus*).

## LEGAL PROTECTION

Both bear species are fully protected in Vietnam, in addition to being listed under CITES Appendix I. According to the current law<sup>1</sup>, the advertising, buying, selling, and trading of bears or their parts and derivatives is illegal and subject to fines and/or imprisonment.

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<sup>1</sup> In Vietnam, both bear species are listed as fully protected under Decree 64 (2019) and Group IB, Decree 84 (2021).

## CONSUMER VALUES

- **Bear bile:** Bear bile is the most common form of bear product available in the trade. Sold in 1cc vials, bile is extracted from live bears, and used as a topical treatment for bruises, as well as consumed in wine as a treatment for a variety of ailments including digestive or liver disorders, or as a general health tonic.
- **Bear gallbladders:** Prior to advancements such as use of ultrasound and non-lethal forms of bear bile extraction, gallbladders were the predominant form of bear-derived traditional medicine (TM). The gallbladder was extracted following the slaughter of the bear and dried before being sold as TM. Like bear bile, dried gallbladder is believed to be beneficial in treating a host of ailments.
- **Bear paws:** Although still seen today, bear paw wine was more common in the past, when enforcement was lax and large jars containing bear paws were openly displayed in bars and restaurants. Bear paw wine is considered beneficial for one's health and is thus also considered a form of TM.
- **Bear claws and teeth:** Bear claws and teeth are mostly used to make pendants and necklaces. Claws and teeth are often set in gold or silver or decorated with precious stones.
- **Other bear parts and products:** Bear meat, bones, and other parts or products are not commonly found in the trade. However, when a bear is slaughtered, virtually all parts are used, consumed, or sold. Bones have been used as a substitute for tiger bone in tiger bone TM production.
- **Bears as pets:** In the past, some bears were kept as pets by individuals and businesses. Stricter laws and enforcement, combined with efforts to phase out bear bile farms, have all but eliminated this practice. Malayan sun bears, which are not commonly used for bile extraction, have more commonly been found being kept as pets.





## THE DEVELOPMENT OF BEAR BILE FARMING IN VIETNAM

By 2005, approximately 4,000 bears were being kept illegally at about 1,390 bile farms. Virtually all of these bears were illegally poached from the wild, most as cubs.



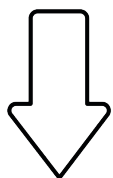
In response to the massive growth of bear bile farming in Vietnam and the continued poaching of wild bears, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) in collaboration with World Animal Protection (WAP) launched a campaign aimed at phasing out bear bile farming in Vietnam. As part of this initiative, MARD produced Decision 02/2005/QD-BNN requiring all existing captive bears to be registered and inserted with a microchip that uniquely identified each bear. Any new bears without microchips discovered by authorities would be confiscated.

Following the registration that was completed in 2006, FPDs and WAP have carried out regular monitoring at farms to ensure that no new bears entered these farms.

Efforts by organizations like WAP, ENV and Animals Asia Foundation (AAF) have focused on urging as many bear owners as possible to voluntarily transfer their bears. More recently, Four Paws and Free the Bears established sanctuaries in Vietnam and joined in efforts urging owners to transfer their bears.

With support from WAP, ENV conducted a robust nationally-focused awareness program aimed at reducing consumer demand for bear bile across the country. The campaign included hundreds of university seminars and public awareness events, public service announcements on television, radio advertising, billboards, and media campaigns. Public engagement was further bolstered by a long list of celebrities, all urging the public to put an end to the cruel and illegal practice of bear bile farming by not consuming bear bile.



 **61%** REDUCTION IN BEAR BILE CONSUMPTION

As a result of a number of factors, Vietnam witnessed a 61% decrease in bear bile consumption between 2009 and 2014, according to a comprehensive attitude survey conducted by ENV of residents in all three regions of the country.

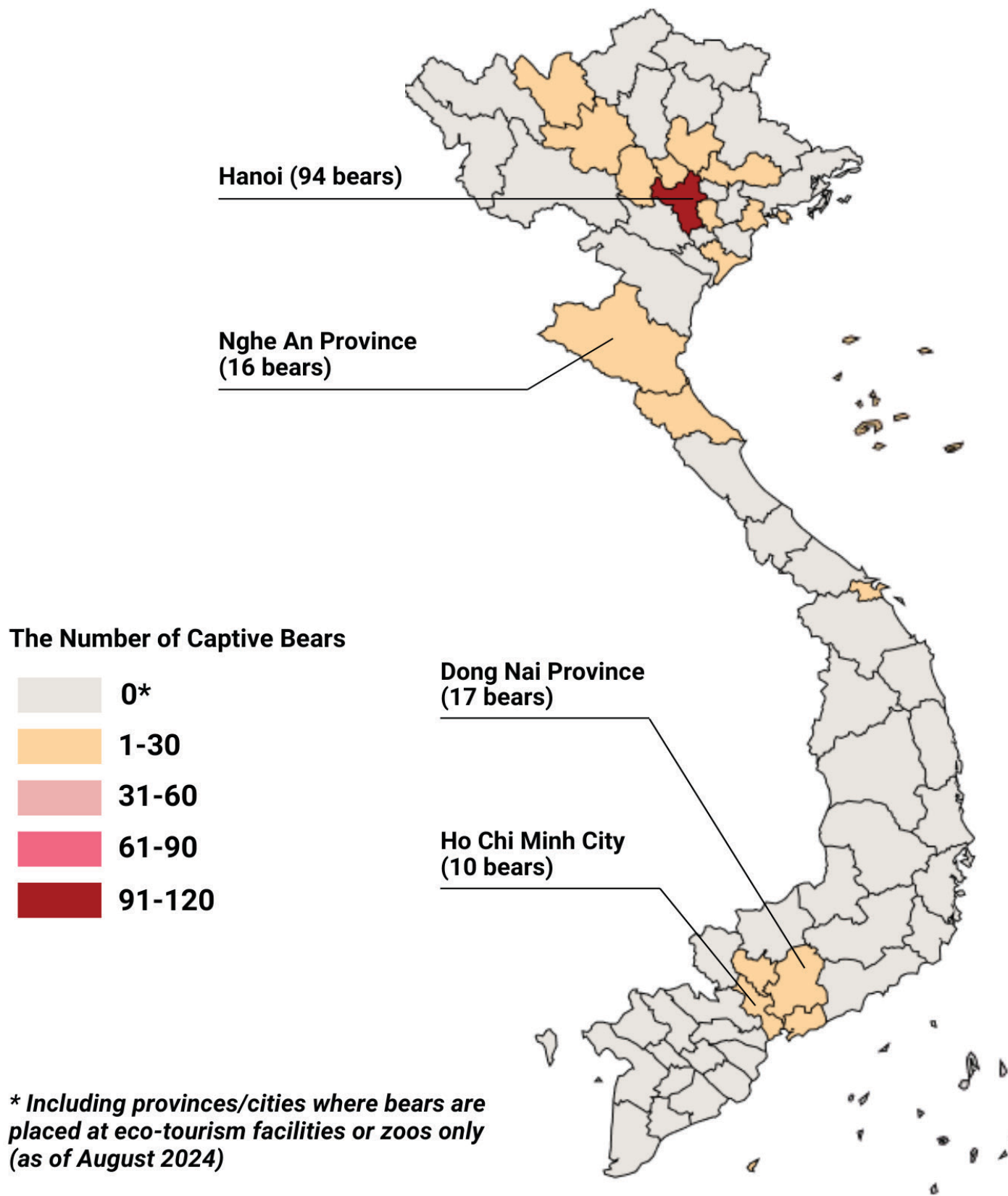


## 192 BEARS LEFT ON BEAR FARMS

After nearly 20 years of sustained efforts to end bear bile farming in Vietnam, the number of bears on bile farms dropped by 95% from roughly 4,000 bears in 2005 to 192 bears on 60 bear farms as of August 2024.

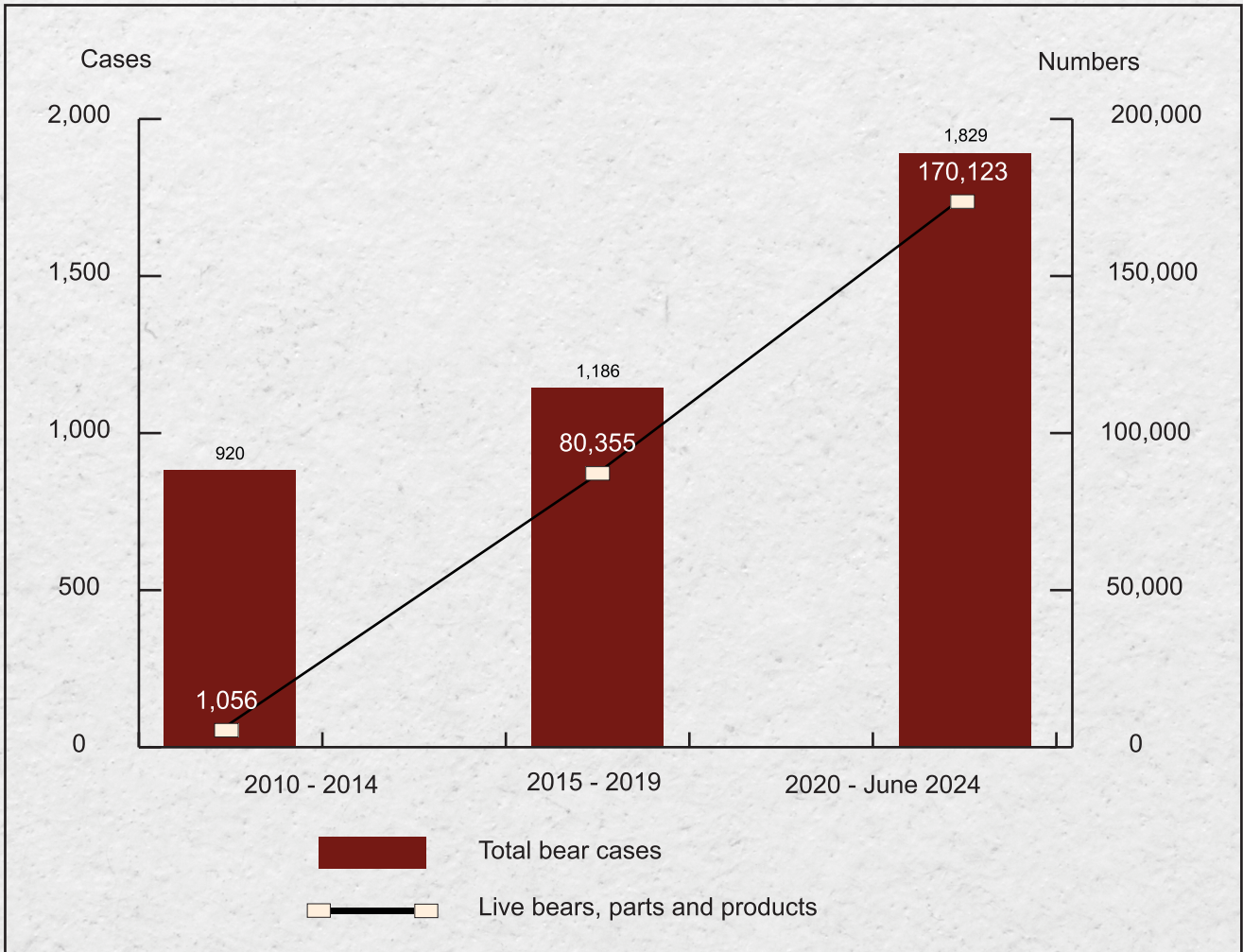


# Cities and Provinces with Captive Bears in Vietnam



# BEAR CRIME STATISTICS 2010-2024

ENV crime statistics over the past 15 years show a substantial increase in bear crime, with the number of cases logged by ENV doubling from 920 during the 2010-2014 period to 1,829 during the 2020-2024 period.



This upward trend can be in part explained by the growth of online markets in Vietnam over the past ten years. Of the **1,829** cases logged between 2020 and June 2024, bear parts and product online advertisement accounted for **94%** of these violations, and comprised of **166,532** bears, parts and products.

Of the **1,647** cyber crime cases involving advertising and selling of bears or their parts since 2020, violations on Facebook accounted for **86%** of all cases.

**Violations on Facebook**  
accounted for  
**86%**  
of all violations on social media



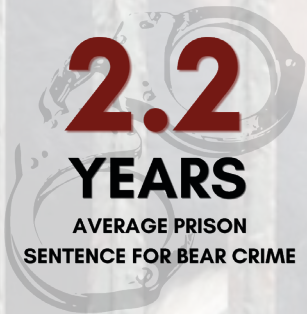
**Bear seizures 2005-2024**

Between 2005 and June of 2024, ENV has logged a total of 90 seizures by authorities totaling **144** live bears.



Since 2010 when ENV began monitoring prosecution outcomes, **186** cases involving seizure of bear parts and products have resulted in arrests, of which 145 of these cases were prosecuted, **37%** resulting in a prison sentence for one or more subjects.

The average prison sentence for a crime involving bears between 2010 and 2024 is **2.2** years.

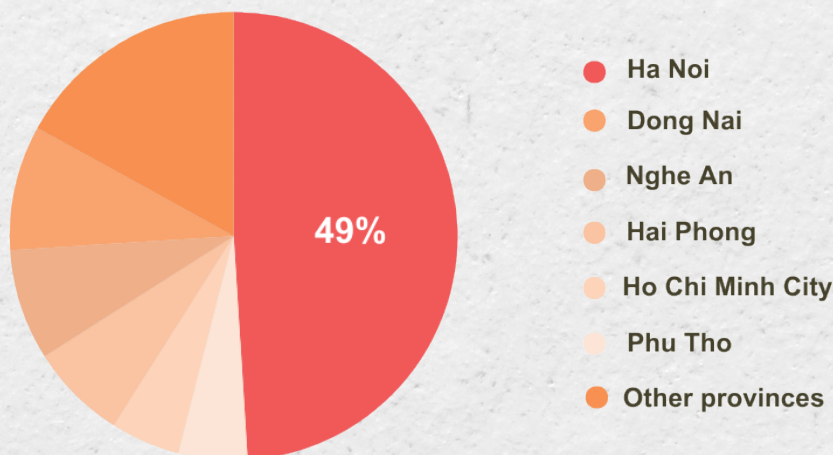




# HANOI IS VIETNAM'S LARGEST REMAINING HOTSPOT FOR BEAR FARMING

Today, Hanoi still has the largest number of bears remaining on bile farms. As of August 2024, a total of 94 bears are being kept at 16 bear bile farms in Hanoi, with 94.7% of these bears located in Phuc Tho district alone. Captive bears in Hanoi account for 49% of the nation's total bears remaining on bile farms.

Bears on bile farms by provinces (August 2024)



Recent developments in the nation's capital, including local government instructions to tighten law enforcement monitoring and propaganda, as well as securing voluntary bear transfers and the arrests of violators are encouraging. However, these efforts have not yet resulted in a substantial reduction and elimination of bear bile farming in Hanoi.

With the end of bear bile farming in Vietnam in sight, it is more imperative than ever that the authorities in Hanoi urgently take decisive action by summarily declaring an end to the practice of bear bile farming in the nation's capital and transferring all remaining bears to rescue centers.





## **THE FUTURE OF BEAR BILE FARMING IN VIETNAM**

Bear bile farming in Vietnam is coming to an end. Continued momentum in convincing bear farm owners to give up their bears, increased law enforcement and monitoring, and a commitment to end the industry, all combine to create a promising forecast.

Expediting the end of this cruel and illegal industry, that has decimated wild bear populations throughout the region, requires provinces where bear bile farms remain to take immediate and decisive action by transferring all 192 remaining bears to appropriate rescue and sanctuary facilities.

Additionally, sustained efforts must focus on suppressing online sales of bear bile, gallbladders, claws, and canines, particularly on social media platforms like Facebook. This should continue until increased awareness, combined with corresponding deterrence resulting from fines and prosecutions, reduces and ultimately eliminates consumer demand.

The market for bear bile remains an undercurrent in society, and thus the job is unfinished. However, the children of an old generation of bear bile users have different attitudes and beliefs that fit well with the protection needs of bears and other wildlife species.



*Photo: Four Paws Việt | Jeremy Lamberton*

Of concern is the rise in demand for bear canine and claw jewelry, now widely available in online marketplaces. Crime data shows that the exponential increase in the advertising and sale of bears and other wildlife online market represents one of the most serious and growing threats to Vietnam's biodiversity.

### **Lessons learned**

The rise of bear farming and the challenges faced in efforts to end it illustrates a valuable lesson for authorities responsible for enforcement of Vietnam's wildlife protection laws; It is crucial to deal with problems when they are small and remain manageable. To allow problems to escalate to the point where they become a crisis requiring substantial investment and time to deal with, is entirely unnecessary.

Virtually, all of Vietnam's bile bears were illegally sourced, and according to previous versions of the law protecting bears, they were all subject to immediate seizure, and in many cases, criminal prosecution of their owners. Since the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development partnered with World Animal Protection and committed to phasing out bear bile farming in 2005, nearly 20 years of energy, time, and money have been dedicated to this effort, and the job is only nearly finished.

# 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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