



Wildlife farming without effective monitoring leads to abuse of the law

Development of commercial wildlife farming has become a controversial issue in Vietnam in recent years. Many people believe that farming of wildlife is not only an ideal economic alternative to improve local livelihood, but also to protect wild populations by meeting market demand through farmed animals. Many people also believe that farming of wildlife can be applied to a range of species, from snakes, porcupines and macaques, to bears and tigers.

However, the success of wildlife farming operations depends largely upon whether the species can be raised and bred successfully in captivity. In addition, there needs to be an economically viable market for the species, that makes farming profitable.

One thing is for certain when it comes to farming wildlife, and proponents of farming often conveniently ignore this fact, Vietnam has not reached a point in development whereby “closed farming systems” are well managed and regulated, and so, abuse is widespread.

Despite reasonably good laws being in place, few provincial authorities have the ability to supervise the growing number of wildlife farms. Effective monitoring requires local authorities to be able to identify potential violations during inspections, and to respond to these violations decisively with the aim of eliminating illegal activities and abuse within the system.

Today, many, if not most, of our wildlife farmers ignore laws that were designed to ensure protection of native species, by laundering animals from the wild through their farms, obtaining animals illegally, and selling wildlife products without clear and legal documentation. Rangers are often told that the animals were



A bear farm in Hanoi keeping more than 80 bears that have illegal origins. The development of bear farming in Vietnam over the past two decades has resulted to more than 4,000 bears illegally hunted from the wild, pushing Vietnam's bears to the edge of extinction.

Photo: ENV

“born and raised” on farms, which in many cases may not be true, and would be easy enough to verify through inspections and interviews.

Weak enforcement results in widespread abuse of the law by wildlife farmers, and abuse of the law results in loss of our irreplaceable biodiversity. This has not only an environmental and economic impact, but also impacts on our national character, in the same way that loss of our historic sites, or an aspect of our culture does.

When it comes to farming wildlife, we are going down a road without thinking clearly along the way about where we are going. To avoid potential disaster, committed people need to take responsibility for ensuring that when we reach the



end of the road, our forests are not empty places.

Wildlife farming can only be developed responsibly, if there are strict measures in place to regulate farming and prevent farmers from engaging in criminal activities. These measures require regulations that place the burden of proof upon farmers to show that the animals they have are legal, and allow authorities to administer strict punishment in the form of fines and/or criminal prosecution, if farmers violate the law.

Farmers must understand that their business can only be profitable if they follow the law. Pursuit of profits

outside the law will result in loss of earnings in the form of fines and, in serious cases, loss of their business. When this fact is understood by farmers, through rigid and consistent enforcement, wildlife farming of certain species could perhaps flourish without the devastating impacts it now has on native wildlife.

ENV is not opposed to wildlife farming where species are both common and potentially profitable, but we also recognize clearly the abuse and damage that the current system is having on wildlife, not just in our own country, but also in our neighboring countries.

Local authorities need to proceed cautiously with wildlife farming development.

- Species that are farmed should be limited to common species ONLY (crocodiles being one of the few exceptions).
- Farms must be inspected regularly and violations documented and processed accordingly. Strict punishment sends a clear message to farmers that any violations of the law will have a devastating impact on their business.
- The burden of proof must be on the farmer to show that his/her farming operation is in compliance with the law. An animal in question, without papers, or not appearing to be the same animal as observed during previous inspections, should be treated as illegal and confiscated immediately.
- Farms suspected of illegal activity should be closely watched, and, if violations of a serious nature are linked to these farms (including buying shipments of illegal animals), they should be closed, not fined.

Protecting the last of our wildlife requires aggressive action, not surrender. Be part of the solution or remain part of the problem.

Lack of enforcement can break the back of any good law

The bear farming industry is a perfect example of how illegal trade on farms develops in the absence of effective management and control. Virtually ALL of the approximately 4,500 bears first documented on farms in 2005 were sourced illegally from the wild, contributing to the widespread decline in wild bears throughout Vietnam and neighboring countries. Despite strict laws, the growth of bear farming in Vietnam was poorly managed initially, until the number of bears on farms grew to such proportions in 2005, that confiscation of illegal bears was no longer a practical option for authorities.

Bear farm defies ban on tourism

Surveillance and monitoring of bear farms in Quang Ninh has shown that most operators have stopped the practice of bringing tourists to the farms.

This success has resulted from decisive action by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and Quang Ninh Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, both of which issued instructions earlier in 2011, prohibiting tour operators from taking tourists to bear farms. The instructions warn that violators could risk loss of their business licenses and are backed by increased provincial monitoring to ensure compliance.

However, while it is clear from evidence collected by ENV investigators that most farms are obeying the instructions, one farm in particular appears to be continuing their illegal bear bile tourism operation.

Surveillance and information from informants suggests that at least one farm still entertains groups of Korean visitors with bear bile extractions. Groups of Korean visitors were observed departing from the farm by an ENV team as recently as late August, boarding tour buses for their return trip to Hanoi.

ENV will continue to investigate and collect evidence of bear tourism operations in Ha Long, and results from these investigations will be submitted to the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism and other relevant authorities.



An ETS Tourist Company bus picking up Korean tourists outside a Quang Ninh bear farm in late August.

Photo: ENV

Vietnamese nationals sentenced to long prison terms abroad

Two Vietnamese nationals charged with attempting to smuggle rhino horns out of South Africa have been sentenced to 8 and 12 years in prison, respectively. This represents the harshest punishment ever handed down by a South African court for a crime involving rhino hunting and trade. Both men were arrested with rhino horns in their possession in June 2010, at Tambo International Airport, Johannesburg as they were attempting to return to Vietnam.

Transfer Bear

If you have an illegal bear that you wish to transfer, let us know and we will help you get it placed in one of the rescue centers. Call us at

1800 1522

Enforcement advisor

Need to focus on bringing down major players

Q: I read in the newspaper frequently about seizures of wildlife in the provinces and have noted that authorities are successfully arresting and prosecuting people caught smuggling wildlife. But I wonder, are we doing anything to catch the bigger traders who are behind the illegal trade? It seems that drivers and small traders are all we are able to catch.

A: It is true that most enforcement actions only result in catching the smaller traders. Part of the problem is that it is easier to prosecute people who are caught “red handed” smuggling wildlife, than it is to

investigate bigger criminal enterprises that are behind much of the organized illegal smuggling and trade. But it is true that there needs to be more focus on investigations of criminal networks and prosecution of key criminal figures.

Confiscating animals and arresting drivers is only the first step in an investigation. These incidents can almost always be linked to bigger traders, and a broader illegal wildlife trade network.

However, a number of recent cases show that police agencies are beginning to focus on major criminal enterprises in the region.

Recently in Malaysia, Anson Wong, a notorious international wildlife trafficker was convicted and sentenced for smuggling. Similar arrests are being made in Thailand of key regional traders. In Binh Duong, a tiger case at Thanh Canh was investigated over a five year period and resulted in the arrest and prosecution of several key people higher up in the trading network.

Thus, the tide may be turning in the region. We encourage law enforcement agencies here in Vietnam to pursue evidence leading to the prosecution of major traders. Removing a major player in the illegal tiger, pangolin, or ivory trade would truly be an accomplishment of international importance!



Two hunters caught red-handed with 15 dead and gutted black-shank douc langurs at Nui Chua National Park.

Photos: Nui Chua National Park

Report corruption

If you are aware of authorities accepting money or gifts from individuals involved in wildlife trade or wildlife farming, please report the incident to the National Anti-corruption Department at

080 48 228

Enforcement advisor

Crocodile farming - a good model?

Q: Wildlife farming seems to work when you look at the crocodile farming model in Vietnam. Why can't we replicate this model for other species?

A: The crocodile success story is widely heralded as an example of how farming of wildlife works. However, crocodiles became extinct in the wild in Vietnam, probably as a result of the development of crocodile farming. With the exception of occasional sightings in rivers (many suspect these have escaped from farms) and their reintroduction to Cat Tien, crocodile farming is blamed for the loss of wild populations. In addition, crocodile numbers in Cambodia were decimated as farming took off here in Vietnam.

Crocodile farming has been successful from an economic perspective because the animals breed and grow well in captivity, having many young, and produce a profitable product. This success should not be confused with protecting the species in the wild. We failed to do that successfully.

The re-introduction of crocodiles at Cat Tien is certainly a successful, but costly, example of how we can "restore" populations of a species in the environment after they have disappeared. However, we cannot rely on this method for reestablishing populations. It is costly, must be carefully planned, and success is always uncertain. It is much cheaper, and ultimately less work, to protect animals in their natural habitat in the first place.



Nui Chua National Park releasing a Green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) that was caught in a fishing net by a local fisherman.

Photo: Nui Chua National Park

From the front...

Illegal bear works out solution

In an unnamed northern province, there once was an unregistered bear. It was big and aggressive, and entirely illegal. This big, mean bear lived with a presumably smaller and gentler bear at the same farm.

As our Wildlife Crime Unit initiated efforts to work with local authorities to confiscate the illegal bear, something remarkable happened (or this is what we were told). The larger, illegal bear killed the legal smaller bear and ate the microchip, immediately becoming a registered and chipped bear.

Crime Log

THUA THIEN HUE

On August 17, Hue Forest Protection Department inspected a resident's home, and confiscated a rhesus macaque (*Macaca mulatta*). The owner planned to sell the macaque for VND 1,500,000 (USD \$75). The case was reported by a local volunteer (Case ref. 3630/ENV).

PHU YEN

On August 12, Phu Yen Forest Protection Department confiscated 16 Vietnamese pond turtles (*Mauremys annamensis*) and several dead animals, including one dead yellow-headed temple turtle (*Hieremys annandalii*), four four-eyed turtles (*Sacalia quadriocellata*) and one Indochinese rat snake (*Ptyas korros*). The subject claimed that he had bought these animals for VND 193 million (USD \$9,600). Phu Yen authorities have yet to determine the level of punishment to be given to the subject (Case ref. 3631/ENV).

HA NOI

On August 16, Hanoi Environmental Police and Thanh Tri District Police confiscated three king cobras (*Ophiophagus hannah*) that were being illegally transported in a private car. The subject was the owner of a restaurant in Thai Nguyen province. She claimed that she had paid VND 12 million (USD \$600) for the animals and planned to sell them in Hanoi. She is now awaiting prosecution. The animals were transferred to Soc Son Rescue Center (Case ref. 3633/ENV).

DONG NAI

On August 13, Cat Tien National Park authorities arrested two local hunters who had killed three black shanked douc langurs (*Pygathrix nigripes*) in the park, using handmade guns. The case has



A young macaque reported by a foreign tourist at an "Ecotourism area" in Can Tho province awaits confiscation. Macaques are commonly kept at hotels and tourist sites to entertain visitors. The law bans keeping of macaques as pets, which are listed under Group 2B of Decree 32.

Photo: Confidential

been transferred to the local district police for prosecution (Case ref. 3635/ENV).

GIA LAI

On September 6, a tourist company in Gia Lai voluntarily turned over a registered Malayan sun bear (*Helarctos malayanus*) to the provincial FPD. The animal was later transferred to the Animals Asia Foundation's (AAF) Bear Sanctuary in Tam Dao (Case ref. 3673/ENV).

Buying and selling wild animals and their parts is a CRIME.

On August 10, Gia Lai authorities released 17kg of water monitors (*Varanus salvator*) and 31kg of elongated tortoise (*Indotestudo elongata*) into Kon Chu Rang Nature Reserve. According to authorities, the animals were confiscated earlier from a man who was illegally transporting them from Binh Dinh to Gia Lai. The subject was fined VND 40 million (\$USD 2,000) (Case ref. 3638/ENV).

THAI BINH

On August 10, Thai Binh Border Military confiscated 60kg of pangolins that were being illegally transported in two cars. Vietnam is home to two species of pangolins: Chinese pangolins (*Manis pentadactyla*) and Sunda pangolins (*Manis javanica*). Both species are protected under Group IIB of Decree 32 (Case ref. 3639/ENV).

LAM DONG

In mid-July, Lam Dong FPD confiscated a yellow-cheeked gibbon (*Hylobates gabriellae*) from a local resident, thanks to an informant living in the area. The subject claimed that he had kept the gibbon since it was a baby. Authorities plan to transfer the animal to a rescue center (Case ref. 3566/ENV).

KHANH HOA

On August 23, Khanh Hoa FPD confiscated a macaque from a traditional embroidery shop in Nha Trang city. The animal was immediately released into a local forest. The case was reported earlier by a foreign tourist (Case ref. 3645/ENV).

DIEN BIEN

On August 26, Dien Bien authorities confiscated two bear cubs from a man who was transporting them illegally. The bears which probably

originated from Laos were later turned over to the Tam Dao Bear Sanctuary by Dien Bien FPD (Case ref. 3662/ENV).

BAC NINH

On August 30, Bac Ninh Environmental and Economic Police confiscated 500kg of pangolins which were being illegally transported in a car from Ha Tinh province. The shipment was probably heading to the Chinese border (Case ref. 3663/ENV).

NAM DINH

On September 15, Nam Dinh authorities confiscated three unregistered Asiatic black bears (*Selenarctos thibetanus*) which were received by the Animals Asia Foundation and transferred to the Tam Dao Bear Sanctuary. The bears were reported to ENV three years ago by a local informant (Case ref. 1134/ENV).



Two bear cubs confiscated by Dien Bien Forest Protection Department waiting to be transferred to the Animal Asia's Tam Dao Bear Sanctuary

Photo: Dien Bien FPD

The ENV Wildlife Crime Unit

ENV's Wildlife Crime Unit (WCU) was established in 2005 to facilitate and motivate public involvement in efforts to combat wildlife trade, and to improve the effectiveness of front line law enforcement agencies. The WCU administers a public toll-free national hotline for reporting wildlife crimes. Information reported through the hotline is passed on to the appropriate authorities. ENV then works closely with law enforcement agencies, tracking each case through to conclusion, and documenting the results on ENV's Wildlife Crime Database. The WCU has documented more than 3,200 wildlife crime cases as of February 2011.

The main aims of the WCU are to:

- Encourage public participation in efforts to stop the illegal trade of wildlife
- Provide support to law enforcement agencies tasked with combating wildlife crime
- Document crimes and work with authorities to identify and address factors that contribute to wildlife crime

ENV's Wildlife Crime and Investigation Unit's efforts to end illegal hunting and trade of wildlife are made possible thanks to the generous support from the following institutions:

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| Humane Society International (HSI) | Cleveland Metroparks Zoo |
| John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation | Auckland Zoo |
| Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) | Houston Zoo |
| World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) | Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation |
| Freeland Foundation | |
| SeaWorld & Busch Gardens Conservation Fund | |

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ENV English Website: www.envvietnam.org
Wildlife Crime Gallery: www.savingvietnamswildlife.org
ENV Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=47162312016>



Stop Wildlife Crime!

If you observe wildlife being kept, sold, transported, traded, consumed, or advertised, contact your local authorities or call the ENV Wildlife Crime Hotline:

Hotline: **1800 1522** Email: **hotline@fpt.vn**