

Feature

Farming of Wildlife: The Debate Continues

There has been much controversy recently in the news about the issue of wildlife farming in Vietnam. Proponents believe that wildlife farming will contribute to the long-term preservation of species, producing a resource that is in demand, and bringing in profits. Opponents argue that wildlife farming could lead to the extinction in the wild for some endangered species, while making it difficult for authorities to enforce wildlife protection laws by blurring the lines between legal and illegal trade of protected species.

The real question is: How do we strike a balance between business interests in developing captive breeding and ranching operations to supply market demand for wildlife, and the need to conserve wild populations of species that will almost certainly perish if trade were allowed to continue?

Some farming and ranching interests claim that the conservation community is opposed to any form of wildlife farming and trade because we seek to protect "all wildlife".

This is in fact not true. Most of the conservation community are opposed to any illegal form of wildlife trade, and support efforts to conserve species that are directly threatened by unsustainable hunting, trade, or loss of habitat.

Some species can be farmed

However, many of us in the conservation community also recognize that certain species may present reasonable opportunities for successful farming with low impacts on wild populations.

From a farmer's perspective, the best species to farm are those that breed and survive well in captivity, grow to a market weight within a reasonable period of time, and are economically viable, meaning that there is both demand for the product and a reasonable potential for a return on their investment.

When we examine species observed in the trade today in light of these criteria, the numbers of species that we might consider suitable for farming is actually quite small. For example, pangolins do not survive in captivity, while some hard-shell turtles require more investment in care and feeding to get them to a sellable size than they are worth in the market. First generation (F1) captive bred cobras are not producing young (F2) on farms according to some snake farmers. In contrast, crocodiles and Chinese soft-shell turtles are capable of breeding in great numbers, and are producing reasonable market returns.



From a legal and conservation perspective, we need to look at the impacts of farming on wild populations of species.

Both supporters and opponents of wildlife farming share the goal of wanting to prevent any species from becoming extinct in the wild. Some supporters might argue that wildlife farming can reduce pressure on wild populations by establishing a legal alternative to catching animals from the wild.

Filling the gap with animals of wild origin

However, the truth is that farmers, driven by profits, will seek to increase production by supplementing their breeding stock with additional animals sourced from the wild (if not available through other sources). Increased availability of wildlife products may also stimulate increased demand from consumers. If production from farms cannot satisfy consumer demand, farmers will seek to fill the gap with animals of wild origin. Moreover, if the business is profitable, others will also seek to develop similar farming operations, and the industry will grow. The result: Greater pressure placed on wild populations of

Farming of Endangered Species Can Compromise Efforts to Protect Wildlife

Legal farming of *endangered* or *protected* wildlife also greatly reduces the ability of enforcement agencies to protect the species in the wild, as it becomes more difficult to distinguish between *legally*

farmed and *illegally* sourced wildlife and their products in trade.

One of the best examples of this problem is the case of the Chinese tigers. In China, there are thousands of tigers in captivity, and tiger farmers are pushing the government to legalize the trade of tiger products originating from farms.

However, despite the thousands of tigers in captivity, tiger farms can not possibly meet the demand for tiger products from consumers, and any loosening of the law would only serve to diminish the capacity of the enforcement agencies to control the trade, while resulting in the continued exploitation and trade of tigers of wild origin. This diminished capacity would largely result from difficulties in distinguishing between illegal from legal tiger products on the market. Legalization of the tiger trade in China, if it happens, will only accelerate the decline of wild tiger populations and directly contribute to their extinction.

Difficulties in management and monitoring of registered farms

Another conflict between advocates for the farming of wildlife and those concerned with protection of animals in the wild relates to the current capacity of enforcement agencies to regulate farming operations.

Currently, the law provides for legal registration of wildlife farms, and places responsibility for monitoring these farms at the provincial level. However, lack of capacity to effectively manage and monitor registered farming operations leaves the system weak and open to abuse. Laundering of wildlife (buying wild caught specimens and claiming that they were born in captivity and are therefore of "legal" origin) and supplementing breeding stock with wild-caught animals are two typical examples of abuse within wildlife farming operations.

If the goal is to protect endangered wildlife in the wild, then the government needs to deter people from illegally hunting and trading wildlife. Effective measures need to be sufficiently tough.

When serious violations of the law occur (e.g. laundering of wildlife) the violators must be held accountable and receive punishment that is convincingly stern to deter further violations. In the absence of such punishment, the rule of law becomes an exception, and the task of enforcement becomes an impossible task with violations ranging far and wide.

A good example of this problem concerns the issue of bear farming. Despite requirements to register and chip all captive bears and new legislation banning the exploitation of bear bile, many large farms continue to sell bear bile extracted from their registered bears in violation of the law.

If regulated and controlled, wildlife farming is possible for certain species that meet specific biological and ecological criteria. However, we must distinguish between those species that can and cannot be farmed and fully ban the commercial trade of protected



wildlife, including the current practices of selling animals back into the trade after they have been confiscated. Moreover, farming operations must be carefully monitored by competent authorities, and violators must be dealt with according to the law.

Key points

- * Certain wildlife species can be farmed based on their reproductive ecology and ability to survive in captivity. However, only a small number of species meet these criteria and should be farmed.
- * Farming of common wildlife species should be permitted if farming (including supplementing of breeding stock with animals of wild origin) is deemed to have insignificant or no impact on wild populations based on the collective views of national and international scientists.
- * The most threatened species should be FULLY PROTECTED from hunting and trade in order to avoid confusion between legal and illegal animals and animal products in the trade, and to ensure that frontline enforcement officers are empowered to do their job effectively and efficiently.
- * Management of legal farms requires greatly improved enforcement capacity and regular and intensive monitoring in order to ensure compliance with the law.
- * Punishment of violators must be effective to deter further violations and to set an example for others to follow.

An Example of a Successfully Farmed Species

The Chinese soft-shell turtle (*Pelodiscus sinensis*), is a good example of a species that has been successfully farmed illustrating the need to consider a species' ecology as a factor in decision's to permit farming of wildlife

The Chinese soft-shell turtle grows and matures quickly, survives well in captivity, and produces many young, with a reasonably high survivorship rate. Current market prices return reasonable margins of profit, and current farming production can generally meet increases in demand, as well as provide breeding stock to support expansion of the soft-shell turtle breeding industry. In the case of soft-shell turtles, internal production has been able to meet growth within the market, largely as a result of the species' ecology.



Crime Log: February & March 2007

Trade Seizures

Binh Phuoc: Wildlife officers from Bu Gia Map National Park confiscated a Germain's peacock pheasant (*Polyplectron germaini*) and a dead pygmy loris (*Nycticebus pygmaeus*) in two separate cases from local hunters. Rangers released the pheasant back into the forest, and plan to prosecute the hunters for illegal hunting within a protected area. (Case Ref. 411, 412).

Quang Ngai: Rangers of Son Ha district FPD confiscated 47 kg of pythons and porcupines being transported from Son Ha district to Quang Ngai city. The animals were subsequently released and the driver received an administrative fine of 13,955,000 VND. (Case Ref. 434)

Ho Chi Minh: Rangers from Ho Chi Minh FPD raided several resident's houses on Pham Viet Chanh Street after receiving reports from a journalist that they were selling wildlife. A total of 54 kg of wild pig, porcupines and common barking deer were recovered from four resident's houses. The subjects collectively received administrative fines totalling 5,920,000 VND. (WCU Case Ref. 419).

Hai Phong: Traffic police confiscated 102 kg of unidentified birds hidden in a car heading for Hai Phong city from Nghe An province. The birds were destroyed and the subjects were required to cover the costs of handling and destroying the illegal shipment (WCU Case Ref. 421).

Kon Tum: One of the five subjects involved in a trade shipment of 21.9 kg of pangolins seized by Ngoc Hoi district FPD of Kon Tum province was sentenced to 18 months in prison. The four other subjects in the case each received sentences of 6-9 months probation (WCU Case Ref. 285B).



A Sun bear observed in Laos that was reported by a tourist awaits rescue.

Photo: visiting tourist

Quang Ngai: FPD seized two shipments of snakes weighing a total of 155 kg that were hidden in a truck and on a motorbike destined for Quang Ngai city. The snakes were released back into the forest and the subjects received administrative fines of 15,620,000 VND. (WCU Case Ref. 433, 436)

Hai Phong: Traffic police confiscated 7 5 kg of pangolins found in a car traveling from Nghe An province and destined for the Mong Cai border crossing into China. The animals were auctioned off and the driver faces prosecution. (WCU Case Ref. 427).

Quang Ninh: FPDs from Hai Ha district and Cam Pha town confiscated 100 crab-eating macaques and 70 pangolins in two separate incidents involving shipments heading for the Mong Cai border town. The macaques were

Transferred to Soc Son Rescue Center and the pangolins were auctioned off. (WCU Case Ref. 438, 439)

Quang Tri: Customs officers at the Lao Bao border gate discovered a total of 41.5 kg of pangolins, rat snakes, turtles and monitor lizards as traders attempted to smuggle the animals into Vietnam from Laos. The animals were reportedly released into the forest by FPD. (WCU Case Ref. 441)



A pangolin confiscated by rangers in Quang Tri Province.

Photo by Mark E. Grindley, WWF

Public participation

Hanoi: A concerned citizen contacted ENV's Wildlife Crime hotline to report bear bile and other wildlife products being advertised in a major national newspaper. The WCU contacted the editor-in-chief of the newspaper to suggest that the advertisement be pulled. The editor responded promptly, ordering the advertising department to cancel any contracts involving advertisements for wildlife products in the newspaper (WCU Case Ref. 402).

Hanoi: A tip-off from a Hanoi resident on a loris being kept in captivity at a coffee shop in Hanoi resulted in a joint police/FPD inspection.

Inspecting officers confiscated the loris and transferred the animal to the Soc Son Rescue Center. Only a month prior, ENV also received a report of a gibbon being kept in captivity in the same café. Unfortunately, the owners removed the gibbon from sight before the police and FPD could organize an inspection (WCU Case Ref. 413).



The menu at a popular restaurant in Ha Tay offers pangolin and other wildlife specialties in violation of the law

Hanoi removed menus advertising pangolins and other wildlife species after ENV issued a warning letter, requesting the restaurant owners to cease the advertisement and sale of wildlife (WCU Ref. Case 337B, 405, 408).

Hanoi: Three restaurants in

Cau Mau: After receiving a report from a foreigner about an otter being held at a private house in Ca Mau, the FPD inspected the residence and found an Oriental small-clawed otter (*Amblyonyx cinerea*), listed in Group 1B of Decree 32. Despite its protected status, the otter was not immediately confiscated, and ENV is working with the Ca Mau FPD to have it transferred to the Cu Chi Rescue Center (WCU Case Ref. 407)

Ha Tay: Two companies that were displaying and selling products reportedly made from wildlife during the Giang Vo Trade Festival in Hanoi voluntarily agreed to cease their illegal activity after discussions with the ENV WCU (WCU Case Ref. 415, 416).

Ho Chi Minh: A man advertising "Siberian" bear bile and other wildlife products on the internet voluntarily agreed to cease the advertisements following discussions with the ENV Wildlife Crime Unit. The man claimed to be unaware that he was violating the law and subsequently offered to join ENV's new national network of Volunteers for Wildlife (WCU Ref. Case 423).

Hanoi: A Hanoi resident voluntarily turned over a pig-tailed macaque that he was keeping as a pet after contacting the National Wildlife Crimes Hotline. The macaque was transferred to Soc Son Rescue Center. (WCU Ref. Case 429).

Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh: Two grey-shanked douc langurs were transferred to the Cuc Phuong Endangered Primate Rescue Center by the Quang Ngai FPD after being turned over by local residents. (WCU Ref. Case 432, 435)

Hanoi: A yellow headed temple turtle was transferred to the Cuc Phuong Turtle Conservation Center after a Hanoi resident voluntarily turned

the 8 kg animal over to ENV. (WCU Ref. Case 437)

Hanoi: Rangers from Hanoi FPB confiscated a pygmy loris, two striped squirrels, and two red-bellied squirrels from street vendors after a Hanoi resident reported the crime through the ENV Wildlife Crime Hotline. The animals were then transferred to the Soc Son Rescue Center. (WCU Ref. Case 441)

Hanoi: A shop owner voluntarily agreed to stop selling bear bile and other wildlife products preserved in wine after receiving a written warning from ENV together with a copy of the relevant law. ENV monitoring officers continue to check the establishment to ensure ongoing compliance with the law. (WCU Ref. Case 266B)



Pangolin and snakes in wine

Photo by Tim McCormack

Crime Statistics

The ENV Wildlife Crimes Monitoring Unit has logged a total of 443 cases since January 1, 2005.

Period	Trade seizures	Selling	Advertising	Possession display	Other	Total *
February 2007	1	6	2	1	3	13
March 2007	8	4	1	5	2	20
Total 2007	18	17	8	11	7	61
Total 2005 – 2007	129	130	24	94	63	443

* These statistics represent only a small fraction of the active trade in wildlife in Vietnam, and only account for those cases that are reported to ENV.

About the ENV Wildlife Crimes Monitoring Unit

Established in January of 2005, the ENV Wildlife Crimes Monitoring Unit runs the national Wildlife Crimes Hotline, a toll-free number that was established to provide a mechanism for the public to report wildlife crimes. Reports are quickly passed on to the appropriate functional agency by ENV, after which the monitoring unit tracks each case through to its conclusion with special attention focused on the disposal of the animals or animal parts, and the punishment administered to the perpetrator in each case. Sources are contacted and advised in detail as to the outcome of the case that he/she reported. Cases are then documented and filed, and recorded on ENV's Wildlife Crimes Database.

The main aims of the program are to:

- * Encourage public participation and support in efforts to combat the illegal trade of wildlife
- * Support enforcement efforts by government agencies
- * Document crimes and identify factors that contribute to the wildlife trade

The ENV Wildlife Crimes Monitoring Unit is jointly funded by the Humane Society International and Conservation International, with additional support from the Whitley Awards.

In the Corner

We at ENV recognize a positive trend in efforts to protect wildlife and enforce wildlife protection laws, with a growing number of notable successes on record from throughout Vietnam. However, some reoccurring problems continue to plague enforcement efforts on the ground. This section of the bulletin is intended to highlight common problems in efforts to enforce wildlife protection laws:

The following case illustrates how enforcement measures can fail when frontline enforcement officers do not take a strong stand with violators.

Honest officer, I won't sell wildlife!

Enforcing the law requires frontline officers to exercise judgment in how they handle cases. The aim is to enforce the laws governing the management and protection of wildlife, punishing violators and most importantly, deterring further criminal activity or others from violating the law.

In a recent case, a merchant on the street was caught selling an eagle, thanks to a report from a concerned citizen. However, the eagle was not confiscated and the man was released with a verbal warning after he promised not to engage in selling wildlife again. Unfortunately, the man was back on the same street the very next day, attempting to sell the same bird.

Clearly, the merchant did not take the warning seriously, and as a result, the energy and resources invested by the ranger were wasted.

The ranger might have exercised good judgment in deciding to issue a warning rather than fine the merchant, but clearly the decision not to confiscate the eagle was a mistake. Confiscating the bird would have sent a clear message to the merchant that the ranger was serious about his warning, and that the merchant would risk further fines or penalties if caught again selling wildlife.

Perhaps the ranger did not want to bother with the confiscated bird. Dealing with confiscated wildlife can be a lot of trouble. The animal needs to be transported, fed, maintained in captivity, and eventually placed or released.

The outcome of the case was a failure. A failure to deter the subject from engaging in further criminal activity. A failure to set an example that might deter others from breaking the law. And a failure to uphold the laws of Vietnam that prevent people from hunting and trading endangered wildlife.

A warning is only as good as the inspection that follows

If a warning is issued, it is critical that such warnings are followed up with an inspection, and another soon after the first. If you find that the subject continues to break the law, stronger punishment should be administered that succeeds in getting the message across to the violator. "Your behavior will not be tolerated." Our aim? To get the violator to stop breaking the law.

Laws are only as good as the people that enforce them

We need to get tough. It's the only way we are going to achieve success and bring a stop to criminal activity. If warnings work, use them. But remember that warnings can only be considered to have succeeded if we stop the illegal activity and deter others from engaging in similar illegal activities. Anything short of this outcome is a failure.

Winning the war against wildlife crime will require us to act firmly and decisively, setting examples for others to see and follow, and gaining the support and respect of the public as upstanding representatives of law and order.

We can win this battle to save our wildlife from extinction. It is not beyond our means or our ability. The cause is worthy. But we must fight.

Questions and Comments

Public Comments and Quotes

More on auctioning wildlife

"Wildlife trade is too often viewed as an economic crime, rather than an issue of protecting wildlife. This is evident by the authorities practice of selling confiscated wildlife back to traders rather than acting in accordance with the purpose of the law; to protect wildlife. Provinces get the proceeds of wildlife sales so rather than look at a trade seizure as an issue of wildlife protection and enforcement of the law, it is seen only in economic terms. How much are the animals worth? This is why fines and penalties are based on weight and market value of wildlife, rather than the number of animals and their protection status. We need to get the provincial authorities to understand that the law is intended to protect wildlife, not generate state income. The problem isn't about what is legal or not. It is about knowing and doing what is right. Provincial governments should not pass the responsibility for caring about the future of wildlife to others. They should take responsibility and use their power to do something about the problem." Loopholes on farming wildlife

Sold and sold again

During a recent inspection of a restaurant in Hanoi, a civet was observed being cooked for patrons. Inspecting rangers asked the restaurant owner to show papers to prove that the civet was of legal origin. The papers showed that the civet had been legally purchased from the authorities in Ninh Binh during an auction of confiscated wildlife. Commenting on the circumstances of the case, a wildlife conservation expert stated, "Yes, the civet purchased in Ninh Binh has been sold and eaten 100 times before today."

Your Voice and Ideas or Questions are Welcome!

If you have a question about some aspect of the wildlife trade, email us and we will do our best to find you an answer. Your question might also be selected for the community voice section of our monthly wildlife crimes radio show on the Voice of Vietnam. Email: Hotline@fpt.vn

New Developments and Resources

Circular 19 on the Criminal Code relating to Forest Crimes

A new inter-agency circular No 19/2007/TTLT/BNN&PTNT-BTP-BCA-VKSNDTC-TANDTC was issued on March 8, 2007 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development outlining guidelines for the application of certain articles of the Criminal Code to violations of forest protection and management laws.

Vietnamese and English language copies of the circular available by request from ENV.

Circular 16 on Export Permit Requirements for Souvenirs

A new circular (No 16/2007/TT-BNN) was issued on 14 February, 2007 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development on the management and use of certificates authorizing export of souvenir specimens listed under CITES.

Vietnamese and English language copies of the circular available by request from ENV.

Mobile Investigation Unit Established

On February 9, 2007, the head of the National FPD signed decision No. 0173/QD-KL-TC, regulating the duties and responsibilities of the various departments and teams under the National FPD, including those of a new mobile crimes unit.

The new mobile unit is responsible for inspecting, monitoring and preventing wildlife crimes with particular emphasis on major crimes and high profile cases, as well as crimes transcending provincial borders; working in cooperation with other relevant agencies on investigation of wildlife crimes; and implementing actions to combat corruption relating to the inspection, management, and enforcement of wildlife and forest crimes.

National FPD Crime Statistics

A recent report by the National Forest Protection Department highlights the volume of trade over the past two years. Some interesting facts from the report are summarized below:

- * An estimated 3000 tons of wildlife are traded in Vietnam each year.
- * In 2005, a total of 65,169 kg of wildlife was confiscated (7,406 animals)
- * In 2006, a total of 51,176 kg of wildlife was confiscated (10,429 animals)
- * About 50% of all wildlife traded is exported to China and other Asian countries
- * The remaining approximately 50% is consumed domestically
- * The illegal wildlife trade was estimated to be worth about \$USD 66.5 million annually.
- * Authorities succeeds in apprehending only about 3.1% of the total volume of trade

From these figures:

- * More than 230,000 animals are illegally traded in Vietnam each year
- * Each day, about 8.2 tons of wildlife is traded in Vietnam

Source: National Forest Protection Department Annual Report 2005-2006 and Report by the National Forest Protection Department on a Survey of 20 National Wildlife Trade Hotspots, 2006.

Need Assistance with Confiscations/Releases/Placement of wildlife?

ENV will connect you with national and international experts on any species group and provide assistance and practical advice on dealing with confiscations, transfers, and placement options.

04-775-5790 or toll-free 1-800-1522

Wildlife Crimes in Vietnam is produced monthly by Education for Nature Vietnam in Vietnamese language and is distributed to Provincial People's Committees, functional agencies tasked with wildlife protection, and protected area managers and rangers in 64 provinces.

An English language version of the bulletin is also produced and distributed within the conservation community.

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Stop Wildlife Crime!



If you see wildlife for sale in restaurants or other business establishments, contact your local Forest Protection Department or the ENV Wildlife Crime Hotline.

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

YOU can make a difference