

Selling tigers out the back door of farms

The recent sentencing by a Binh Duong court of one of the province's notorious tiger farmers is proof of what most tiger trade experts have known all along about tiger farming in Vietnam. Tiger farmers are violating the law that bans commercial trade of tigers by quietly selling tigers out the back door of their farms.

In March, Thanh Canh Tourism Park owner Huynh Van Hai, his wife, son and 12 other people were given sentences ranging from 18 months probation to 36 months in prison for their involvement in the selling of five tigers from the tourism park between 2003 and 2006. Authorities believe that all or most of the tigers that Mr. Hai sold during this period were born in captivity at the Thanh Canh Tourism Park.

Though yet to result in arrests or public trial, this same story is occurring at seven other private tiger farms in Vietnam. Owners at these farms breed tigers and maintain records that fail to account for some of the tigers born at the farms or tigers that reportedly die are not turned over to authorities as required. It is most, likely that these tigers are sold to tiger bone glue makers.



Photo: ENV

According to an informant working at one of the farms, an investigation revealed that the tiger farmer had reported that cubs had died but in fact he had sold ten live cubs to another farmer. In another case, the tiger farmer was linked to a number of tiger seizures in Hanoi for which relatives have been directly implicated. Other tigers that have died at farms have reportedly “disappeared”.

The collective knowledge of law enforcement and tiger trade experts indicates that most, if not all, of Vietnam's tiger farmers are engaged in commercial trade of tigers in direct violation of the law. Mr. Hai and his cohorts are just the first of those to be implicated directly in illegal dealings and subsequently prosecuted and convicted for their crimes.

These facts and continued suspicions should be enough to convince even the most skeptical of viewpoints within government that tiger farming in private hands is a bad idea. Allowing private interests to breed tigers invites abuse of the law. Given the limited capacity of government agencies to effectively deal with irregularities resulting from their inspections (e.g. two dead tigers recently discovered in the freezer of a tiger farm in Thanh Hoa), the best solution is to prohibit private interests from breeding tigers.

If the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is truly concerned about the need to know tiger population numbers in preparation for the day that wild estimates reach zero, then this form of tiger breeding initiative MUST be carried out under the direct supervision of a government institution. This would ensure breeding management for conservation, the accountability of offspring with deaths and disposal properly documented.



Tiger farms and private zoos are an ideal cover for illegal trade. Captive born animals and those that die in captivity can be sold on into the illegal trade

Photo: Hanoi Environmental Police

It is certain that if the same motivated Binh Duong police investigators examined records for other tiger farms in the country then other tiger farmers would also be in local courts facing prosecution.

ENV wishes to congratulate the police in Binh Duong for their successful investigation, as well as the Binh Duong court for making an example of Mr. Hai and his cohorts and sending a strong message to other tiger farmers in Vietnam.

Recommended actions

- Immediately prohibit breeding of tigers on private farms
- Initiate inspections of tiger farms by inter-agency law enforcement teams to evaluate records, interview staff and inspect and photograph all captive tigers. Confiscate any tigers discovered that are not registered as belonging specifically to the farm
- Identify tiger farmers that are suspected of being involved in selling live or dead tigers from their farms. Initiate investigations that successfully lead to their prosecution and imprisonment.
- Allow existing tiger farmers, who claim to be keeping tigers as pets, to keep same sex tigers only under strict permits that require them to immediately turn over the remains of tigers that die in their possession.

ALERT: Bear bile tourism banned!

In March, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Vietnam issued an instruction banning tour operators and travel companies throughout Vietnam from taking tourists to bear farms. The instruction sent to provincial-level departments and international tourism companies warned that violators faced potential loss of their international travel business license to operate in Vietnam if they continued to take tourists to these farms.

These instructions followed a similar instruction issued on the 1st of March by the Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism in Quang Ninh province to local travel companies and companies with branches in Quang Ninh.

Bear bile tourism operations involve tour agencies taking groups of foreign tourists, mainly Koreans, to bear farms where they witness a bear bile extraction and then are encouraged to buy bear bile, which they then smuggle out of the country in violation of CITES. Exploitation and sale of bear bile is illegal according to the law. Such tourism operations, most prominent in Quang Ninh province, but also found in Ho Chi Minh and a few other locations, undermine the international image of Vietnam by actively encouraging foreign tourists to violate the law.



Not long before the new instruction was issued by the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Sports, ENV investigators observed buses of Korean tourists continuing to enter bear farms in Quang Ninh during February 2011.

Photo: ENV

The new instruction from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism as well as the provincial government of Quang Ninh are clearly aimed at ending this practice by holding tour guides and the agencies they work for accountable for their actions.

ENV strongly encourages law enforcement agencies with information indicating that groups of foreign tourists continue to visit bear farms after the 11th of March to report this matter to the national and/or provincial-level Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism for immediate action. ENV will pursue this issue vigorously with the appropriate authorities and urge that the parties involved be held accountable and punished.

Help end illegal bear farming and trade by enforcing the law and pursuing and punishing those that choose to ignore the laws that are intended to protect the interests of society. Work with us to bring positive change to protect Vietnam's vanishing wildlife. Together we are making a difference.

National Wildlife Protection Network: Alert to all members

If you see bear bile tourism operations continuing in your network region, please ensure that you collect the following information that will help us pursue the issue once reported:

- Date and time of observation
- Name of the bear farm or establishment keeping bears to entertain tourists for the purpose of extracting and selling bile
- Name of tour company or bus company and registration number of the bus (particularly important!)
- Approximate number of tourists
- Specific observations

**Report this information in a timely manner to ENV through our
HOTLINE: 1-800-1522**

Enforcement advisor

All entries are based on actual questions and statements relating to real cases documented by ENV.

Persistence will succeed in the end

Q: The mobile team of our Forest Protection Department has inspected restaurants many times and fined the owner for violations on more than one occasion. However, new crimes continue to be reported at the establishment. We are unable to get the owner to follow the law so what do we do now?

A: By continuing to violate the law after receiving warnings and fines, the restaurant owner is sending a message to local authorities saying that he does not respect the authorities and the law. This is a perfect case to make a good example of. If repeated fines do not work, discuss revoking the owner's business license for engaging in repeated violations of the law. Increase the frequency of inspections and maximize fines that can be issued. It is critical to get these defiant violators to comply with the law as their lack of compliance also encourages others to engage in illegal activities.



Hanoi Economic Police recently confiscated 12 dried douc langurs. The langurs were discovered in a private car that allegedly transported the animals from Dak Lak and was heading for the Chinese border.

Photo: Unit of anti-smuggling and Forbidden products, Hanoi Economic Police

Where are the rangers?

Q: I read with fascination press reports on the Binh Duong court case involving Mr. Hai and his family being sentenced for selling tigers from his farm. This case makes me wonder about the Forest Protection Department's responsibility in dealing with tiger farming, and why their inspections and monitoring were not more effective in discovering crimes? Perhaps police agencies should take over responsibility for monitoring tiger farms.

In December 2010, there was also the issue of two dead tigers discovered at a farm in Thanh Hoa. Have these been confiscated yet? If they have not, what does this mean about the role of Thanh Hoa authorities in enforcing the law? Surely the Thanh Hoa farmer also plans to sell these tigers?

A: Your first question is a good question. The Forest Protection Department is tasked with monitoring tiger farms in their jurisdiction. However, it is our opinion that these monitoring efforts are ineffective based on evidence collected by police and independent investigators showing that many of these tiger farmers are involved in selling tigers, or at the very least, have inconsistencies in their records.

It is our belief, shared by other experts and many law enforcement agencies, that if provincial FPD's did their job effectively, it would become nearly impossible for tiger farmers to breed and sell tigers. As for police taking over for FPD, this is unnecessary as long as local FPD's can prevent any illegal trade from tiger farms.

Regarding the second part of your question, ENV is still waiting to see how Thanh Hoa authorities deal with the two dead tigers kept at Mr. Chien's farm since November 2010. This case is really no difference to the Binh Duong case. Dead tigers must be destroyed or transferred to museums in accordance with the law. They may not be sold.

The issue may be quiet at the moment, but the world is watching to see how Thanh Hoa authorities deal with this case.

Enforcement advisor

Animals of legal origin only

Q: We have a case involving cobras and other protected species being sold and consumed at a restaurant. The restaurant advertises cobra, porcupine, civets, wild pig and other wildlife on the menu. However, when we investigated, we found that the restaurant is substituting water snakes for cobra and other meats instead of the wildlife they advertise. As long as the substitutes are legal, there is no violation.

A: Actually, while the restaurant may not be charged with selling protected species, the fact that they advertise these species on their menu is a violation in itself and should be dealt with. Our concern is not with cheating the customers but the fact that advertising any form of protected wildlife is illegal according to the law. Thus confiscation of the menus and fines can be used to punish the owner.

Like other cases, stopping illegal trade and consumption of wildlife is all about setting examples of violators and publicizing these examples to deter others. Reducing visible trade and availability of illegal wildlife also reduces consumption and impacts demand as opportunistic buyers choose something else to eat.

International News Highlight

Major global wildlife trader imprisoned

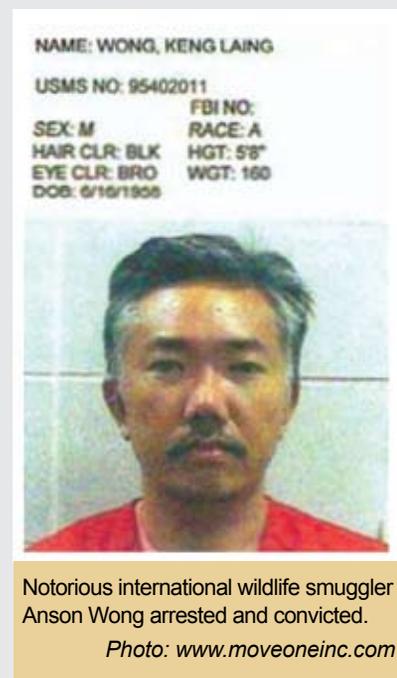
Perhaps few law enforcement agents in Vietnam have heard of the name Anson Wong before. Mr. Wong is widely considered one of the world's most notorious wildlife smugglers, with extensive global networks.

Based in Malaysia, Anson Wong was the target of a US Fish and Wildlife Service investigation more than a decade ago that resulted in Mr. Wong spending nearly two years in a US federal prison on wildlife trafficking charges. Released in 2003, Wong returned to Malaysia and picked up where he left off.

However, even the biggest fish eventually runs out of luck, and in October 2010, Wong, who is said to have close connections with Malaysian protection authorities, was bagged at Kuala Lumpur's international airport by authorities with a suitcase full of snakes and rare turtles. Wong was subsequently sentenced to six months in prison and fined about \$71,000 USD.

Authorities also reportedly withdrew his business license and prohibited Wong or his relatives from selling or possessing any wildlife in the future.

Wong's case may have few implications for wildlife conservation in Vietnam, but his arrest marks an important turning point in Asia whereby major criminal figures in the wildlife trade are no longer beyond the reach of the law. Good law enforcement backed by courts that see the value in punishing criminals engaged in wildlife crime are the future. Indeed, we have begun to see such progress in Vietnam with the recent sentencing in Thanh Canh of a major tiger farmer. Perhaps it will now be "open season" on major wildlife traders and time to prosecute other key figures who are operating in Vietnam?



Crime Log

BINH DINH

On February 10, a green sea turtle (*Chelonian mydas*) that had been caught in a net by a local fisherman, was released back into the sea by Binh Dinh authorities. The green turtle is one of five marine turtle species that are native to Vietnam. All of them are protected under Decree 59/2005/ND-CP. (Case ref. 3219/ENV)

LAM DONG

On February 28, a local resident voluntarily turned over a macaque to the Da Lat Forest Protection Department (FPD). The owner claimed the monkey was given to him by a friend. The animal is being kept at the FPD office and authorities plan to release it back into the wild soon. (Case ref. 3241/ENV)

BINH DUONG

On March 2, Binh Duong Environmental Police (EP) confiscated one male and one female northern white-cheeked gibbon (*Hylobates concolor leucogennys*) from a company. The gibbons were discovered in response to an anonymous call to the ENV hotline. The gibbons were transferred to the Cu Chi Rescue Center in Ho Chi Minh City. (Case ref. 3262/ENV)

KIEN GIANG

On March 1, authorities transferred a sarus crane (*Grus antigone*), that had been caught by a local resident, to the Phu My Grey Sedge Conservation Project. The sarus crane is a migratory species that is protected under group IB of Decree 32/2006ND-CP. (Case ref. 3265/ENV)

HO CHI MINH

On March 10, local police confiscated a northern white-cheeked gibbon (*Hylobates concolor leucogennys*) from a local resident. The owner claimed he and his friends had just caught the gibbon nearby. The gibbon was transferred to the Cu Chi Rescue Center. (Case ref. 3270/ENV)



A loris recovered from the trade shortly before it was released into Ba Vi National Park

Photo: Ba Vi Forest Protection Department



A local resident in Hue voluntarily turned over this redshanked douc langur to authorities. The animal was later transferred to Phong Nha Rescue Center.

Photo: Phong Nha Rescue Center

NGHE AN

On March 7, Ky Son district authorities confiscated a 2kg Asiatic black bear cub (*Selenarctos thibetanus*) that was reportedly smuggled into Vietnam on a bus from Laos. Authorities planned to transfer the animal to

the Animals Asia Foundation's (AAF) Bear Sanctuary at Tam Dao National Park. Unfortunately, the cub died nine days later while authorities were waiting for permission to allow AAF to receive the bear. (Case ref. 3271/ENV)

On the same day, Nghe An EP seized a shipment that contained 17kg of porcupines, 9kg of monitor lizards and 167 kg of turtles. The animals were being transported in a van that was registered in Laos. The subject claimed he bought the animals in Laos and planned to sell them in Dien Chau district of Nghe An province. (Case ref. 3268/ENV)

QUANG NGAI

On February 27, the Mobile Unit of Quang Ngai FPD confiscated a leopard cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis*) that had been abandoned by its owner. The leopard cat was transferred to the Cuc Phuong Small Carnivore and Pangolin Conservation Program several days later. (Case ref. 3264/ENV)

KON TUM

On March 14, Kon Tum FPD confiscated two Asiatic black bear cubs (*Selenarctos thibetanus*) from local residents who claimed they had caught the bears in Chu Mom Ray National Park. The animals were safely transferred to AAF's Tam Dao Bear Sanctuary. (Case ref. 3282/ENV)

THANH HOA

On January 10, Thanh Hoa authorities arrested a man for



A marine turtle shortly before it was killed and decapitated by local residents of Nui Thanh district in Quang Nam Province.

Photo: Kieu Dung



Photo: Kieu Dung

illegally transporting a shipment of wildlife including two masked palm civet (*Paguma larvata*), 42 porcupines, four wild pigs (*Sus scrofa*), and six common barking deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*). The shipment reportedly originated from Binh Thuan province and was heading for Hanoi. The subject was fined a total of VND 150 million (USD \$7,500). (Case ref. 3235/ENV)

On January 16, Thanh Hoa authorities confiscated another shipment of four sunda pangolins (*Manis javanica*) from a local resident who claimed the animals originated from Nghe An. The subject said he planned to sell them in Thanh Hoa. He was fined a total of VND 40 million (USD \$2,000). (Case ref. 3234/ENV)

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

The WCU is jointly funded by the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), the Humane Society International (HSI), The Whitley Fund for Nature, the MacArthur Foundation, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), the Rufford, the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, and SeaWorld and Busch Gardens Fund.

ENV wishes to thank WSPA for supporting the production of ENV Wildlife Crime Bulletin.

Contact Us

ENV Wildlife Crime Unit

Education for Nature - Vietnam (ENV)

N5. IF1, lane 192 Thai Thinh Str, Dong Da Dist, Ha Noi

Tel/Fax: (84 4) 3514 8850

Email: env@fpt.vn

ENV Vietnamese Website: www.thiennhien.org

ENV English Website: www.envietnam.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**