

# News from the front line

A brief summary of the activities of Education for Nature - Vietnam

**Issue 2 - May 2012**

[www.envvietnam.org](http://www.envvietnam.org)

## Tightening up the law: Illegal bears must be confiscated

In 2005 the Vietnamese government launched efforts to phase out bear farming. The first step of this process was to register all known captive bears and prohibit any new bears on farms. Despite this, ENV has documented cases involving 146 illegal bears that owners were allowed to keep after the 2006 registration deadline.

According to the Ministry of Justice, illegal bears and other species listed under Group IB of Vietnam's wildlife protection law, Decree 32, must be confiscated when discovered and may not, according to the law, be registered with the owner.

ENV took up this issue more than three years ago following correspondence sent to all provincial Forest Protection Departments by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) suggesting otherwise. The MARD correspondence advised local authorities that they could allow owners to keep illegally obtained protected species after the owners were punished under administrative law. There were subsequently a number of cases involving illegal bears in which provincial authorities fined the owners then allowed them to keep the illegal bears, in some cases specifically citing the MARD correspondence as the basis for their decision.

On September 9, 2011, ENV was asked to report on the issue at a meeting hosted by the Ministry of Justice, which included representatives of MARD, the Environmental Police, and other agencies. During the meeting, the Ministry of Justice confirmed ENV's position, stating that authorities were required to confiscate illegal bears when discovered, and asked MARD to clarify the issue with provincial authorities. The Forest Protection Department verbally clarified the issue at a national meeting in



ENV works with local authorities to ensure confiscation and placement of illegal bears that are reported through the Wildlife Crime Hotline

*Photo: ENV*

November, and ENV is urging them to follow up this clarification with official correspondence from their legal department. ENV has also sent an official letter to all provincial law enforcement authorities advising them of the decision.

"This issue is not just about illegal bears, but also has implications for other species," says Tran Viet Hung, operations director at ENV. "Allowing owners to keep fully protected species that they obtain and possess in violation of the law is in direct conflict with the spirit and intent of our wildlife protection laws. We at ENV see this as a direct threat to endangered species and a critical priority to address."

Since the September 2011 Ministry of Justice meeting, there have been no new cases involving owners being allowed to keep unregistered and illegal bears. In March 2012, a high-ranking leader in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development confirmed with ENV that MARD would ensure that there are no further incidents involving illegally obtained bears being left with 'owners'.

### Conspicuous consumption of rhino horn



ENV has documented a total of 41 cases involving advertising, selling, trading or smuggling of rhino horns to or within Vietnam

*Photo: ENV*

In recent years, there have been a number of media reports claiming that the so-called ‘cancer curing’ properties of rhino horn are driving illegal poaching and trade, mostly from South Africa, where last year a record 448 rhinos were killed for their horns by poachers.

However, the preliminary results of a four-month investigation by ENV suggests that rising income and a strong desire to flaunt new money and success amongst friends and business partners, may be a more important factor driving the trade with Vietnam.

“We call it “the Ferrari factor” says Douglas Hendrie, a Technical advisor to ENV who has been involved with the investigation, referring to the growing prevalence of expensive sports cars on the streets of Hanoi. “The new rich want luxury goods that are rare, exotic, and expensive as indicators of their success,” says Hendrie. “These values in addition to the fact that rhino horn is also supposed to be good for you may be driving the surge in demand here in Vietnam.”

Initial findings from the ENV investigation do not fully discount the idea that desperation amongst cancer patients may account for a portion of the trade. However, as traditional Chinese medicine

(TCM) practitioners, doctors, pharmacists, and even those afflicted with cancer suggested in interviews: rhino horn’s value as a treatment for cancer was a minority view.

“A lot more interviews are required to get a better sense of direction on where this is going,” says Hendrie, “but we have not yet found a strong cancer-linked demand for rhino horn. Our feeling is that the ‘mania’ surrounding use of rhino horn in Vietnam is more likely linked to its perceived general health benefits. Certainly we will know more in the coming months.”

Medically, rhino horn appears to be mainly valued as a means of reducing “hot blood”, balancing body temperature (balancing yin and yang) and eliminating toxins, as well as reducing fever. Like most other wildlife TCM, the list goes on with other perceived medical values.

Rhino horn is not readily available at commercial retail establishments, but is sold in the shadows like other high-value and illegal goods such as tiger bone and narcotics. Much of the rhino horn on the market is fake, particularly that which is readily visible and accessible to the public, according to TCM practitioners. “If you want rhino horn,” says Hendrie. “You talk to someone who knows someone, not skip down to the pharmacy.”

ENV is working to protect African rhinos through its cooperation with law enforcement agencies in Vietnam and through public awareness activities. A new ENV campaign, currently under development, will raise public interest and action in helping to end rhino horn trade, and target primary consumers once the initial consumer investigation is complete.

### Investigating the consumer end of the TCM market

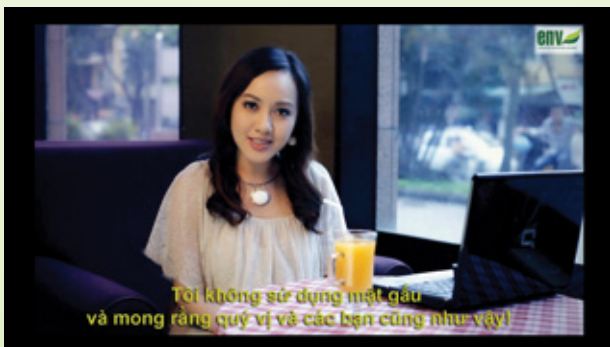
ENV’s Wildlife Crime Unit is investigating the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) market in Vietnam as part of an initiative started in September to examine bear, tiger, rhino, and pangolin TCM use in Vietnam. The investigation has involved undercover surveys at TCM shops, as well as interviews with TCM specialists at universities, doctors at hospitals, and patients to learn more about the retail side of the TCM trade.

### We don't use bear bile and neither should you!

In February, ENV launched a new series of advertisements on television featuring celebrities urging the public not to use bear bile. "I don't use bear bile, neither should you", says VTV1 anchorwoman Hoai Anh in the first of four ads that will air through July 2012. The other advertisements include rock star Thai Thuy Linh, along with Vietnam's football superstar and coach Hong Son, and comedian Pham Bang.

The short 30 second advertisements are scheduled to run on national TV in addition to provincial TV in 40-50% of the provinces.

"There is a rising tide of public opposition to the bear bile industry" says Mr. Tran Viet Hung, ENV's Operations Director. "Many people, from celebrities to ordinary citizens are speaking out against this cruel and illegal practice."



Hoai Anh, a celebrity TV anchorwoman, appearing in a new series of celebrity Public Service Announcement (PSA) was one of more than a dozen celebrities that have joined ENV's efforts to reduce bear bile consumption and protect bears.

*Photo: ENV*

Hung notes that the availability of modern medicine and the many herbal alternatives for ailments that bear bile is said to 'treat', have made use of bear bile unnecessary. "It's time that this dirty business of exploiting bears for their bile ends, as it does not belong in part of our modern life as Vietnamese," Hung says.

ENV has been working to end bear farming and trade in Vietnam in support of a government plan to phase out the illegal industry. Major program activities focus on reducing consumer demand for bear bile, encouraging greater public involvement in reporting bear crimes, and cooperating closely with enforcement agencies to combat illegal trade in bears. ENV also works with government leaders to strengthen policy and laws protecting bears and other endangered wildlife. From 2008 up to September 2011, over 100,000 people signed pledges not to use bear bile. In 2012, ENV will launch a series of national events aimed at bringing attention to the need for public involvement and action in ending bear farming and trade.

### Public feedback

#### On the welfare of bears

There is growing concern – particularly amongst the younger generations – about the treatment of wildlife in Vietnam. Some comments recently collected from ENV events and online reflect these feelings.

"Bear bile extraction is cruel. I never imagined that bears had to suffer such kind of pain. Doing this to bears is a form of violent crime." Linh, Hanoi (February 2012)

"Exploitation of bears for bile is inhumane. Nowadays, there are many kinds of alternative medicines that are effective." Tam Ky, Quang Nam (March 2012).

### ENV facts

ENV focuses much of its national awareness program on reaching audiences through TV, radio, and the media. ENV aired two public service announcements (PSAs) in 2011 on national television, as well as on many provincial stations. A total of 11 PSA's have been produced since 2004. Four new celebrity PSAs started airing in March 2012. Three more PSAs are planned to air later in the year. ENV runs PSAs on 3-6 month cycles.



## ENV launches new Corporate Alliance for Wildlife Protection

In early March, ENV launched a new initiative teaming up with companies throughout the country to help protect wildlife. More than 40 companies have joined forces with ENV as members of the Corporate Alliance for Wildlife Protection, placing exhibit banners in their lobbies and urging employees not to consume wildlife. ENV has conducted special presentations for staff at some companies on wildlife protection, asking employees to step beyond just “saying no” to consumption of wildlife. Employees are encouraged to “get involved” and report wildlife crimes to authorities, or volunteer their time to help monitor restaurants and other businesses involved in wildlife crimes. The program, which started in 2011, is part of an expanding initiative by ENV to enlist support from the business community in efforts to protect wildlife.



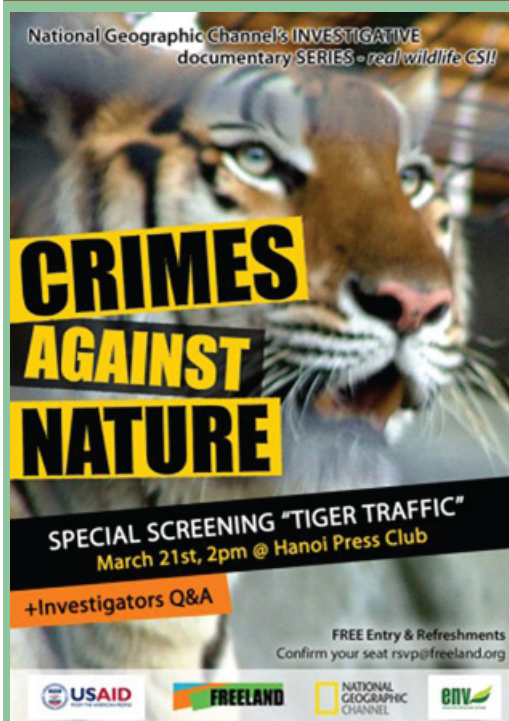
ENV banners placed in the dining area of a major manufacturing firm in central Vietnam urge employees not to consume wildlife and report wildlife crimes

Photo: ENV

“Corporate involvement in educating their employees is an important contribution toward addressing rising consumer demand for wildlife in Vietnam” says Nguyen Thi Phuong Dung, head of ENV’s consumer demand reduction program. “ENV is committed to working with our corporate partners to foster change in public attitudes and creating a Vietnam where people respect nature and wildlife, so that our biodiversity remains a part of our living culture.”

ENV’s Corporate Alliance for Wildlife Protection partners include Cannon Vietnam, Unilever Vietnam, Standard Charter Bank, the Melia Hanoi Hotel and Sofitel Plaza Hotel, amongst others.

Join ENV and become a member of the Corporate Alliance for Wildlife Protection. Contact Hoang Thi Thu Hoa at 844-3514-8850 or email at [hoangthuhua.env@gmail.com](mailto:hoangthuhua.env@gmail.com)



## Taking down Asia’s tiger traffickers

At the end of March, in collaboration with the Freeland Foundation and with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), ENV hosted a special screening of a National Geographic Crimes Against Nature Series focused on cross-border tiger trade, and highlighting the recent arrest by Thai Royal Police of several important suspects responsible for smuggling tigers to Vietnam and China.

Representatives of the Thai Royal Police were on hand to discuss with counterparts from Vietnam ways to enhance cooperation in combatting transnational wildlife crime, and the need to raise awareness and reduce demand for wildlife amongst consumers. About 60 guests attended the event including representatives of key law enforcement agencies in Vietnam, journalists and NGOs.

[Link to National Geographic Series](#)

## Regional ENV teams engage public

ENV's mobile awareness teams spent much of March in the field carrying out missions to the central Vietnam province of Quang Nam and northern province of Quang Ninh. In Ha Long City, the northern team hosted a range of activities from university seminars at the Ha Long University of Art, Tourism and Culture, to public wildlife trade and "End Bear Farming" events.

ENV monitoring teams worked with volunteers to check business establishments where crimes had previously been reported, and a recruitment meeting was held to bolster the ranks of the National Wildlife Protection Network Ha Long City Chapter.

Meanwhile in Quang Nam, the central region team hosted a seminar on wildlife trade with students from the Quang Nam University, and carried out both a wildlife trade, and an "End Bear Farming" event in Tam Ky city. The central team met with provincial authorities to discuss cooperation in combatting wildlife crime. The team also conducted a formal consumer trade survey of local business establishments, checking 77 restaurants, bars, and hotels and documenting nine cases where owners violated wildlife protection laws (a reasonably good result for the province).



Market mob. Market events can be tricky with limited space and many people. The mobile north team carries out an "End bear farming and trade" event at a local market in the "heart" of a major bear farming community

Photo: ENV



Students urging their friends not to use bear bile and other wildlife products at the end of their "Especially for Bears" performance

Photo: ENV



University students take a quiz testing their knowledge of wildlife protection during an ENV wildlife trade exhibit

Photo: ENV

### ENV facts

Major cases and investigations: ENV does not publicize any detailed information of ongoing investigations, many of which are in cooperation with law enforcement agencies. However, active major investigations involve activities involving bears, tigers, rhino horn, endangered langurs, pangolins, ivory, and marine turtles.



## Wildlife Crime Unit battling for wildlife

The ENV's Wildlife Crime Unit has been in operation since January 1, 2005 and operates a toll free national Wildlife Crime Hotline. Crimes that are reported through ENV's hotline are passed on to the appropriate authorities. ENV case officers then track the cases through to conclusion, documenting the results and reporting back to the person who reported the crime.

For minor crimes, ENV urges the violator to comply voluntarily with wildlife protection laws. For more serious cases, warnings are issued to the violators and ENV works directly with local government to resolve cases. ENV evaluates the effectiveness of both law enforcement responses and violator compliance through regular monitoring carried out by volunteer members of ENV's Wildlife Protection Network. The Network comprises about 3,200 volunteers representing 19 provinces.

Since 2005, ENV has documented 4054 cases (as of March 31), resulting in hundreds of successful outcomes including closures of businesses, confiscation of animals or products, and confirmed voluntary owner compliance.

In 2011, ENV documented 768 cases including 1,620 reported violations of wildlife protection laws.



Since December 2011 there have been four major tiger seizures involving a total of five tigers. A seizure in Hanoi on January 9th involved a suspect who had previously been arrested in 2007 and sentenced to 30 months in prison for tiger trading

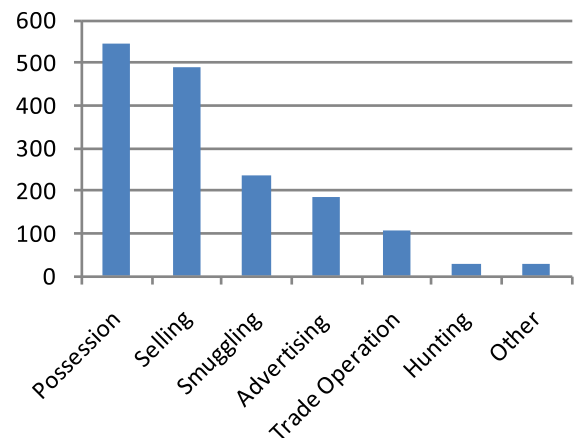
Photo: Ninh Binh FPD



Case officers of ENV's Wildlife Crime Unit track wildlife crimes throughout the country

Photo: ENV

### Crime profiles



Wildlife crimes documented by ENV according to classification of the violation 2011

#### Of interests


The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development reported that provincial authorities had confiscated 18,000 animals weighing a total of more than 35 tons in 2011. The largest confiscations occurred in Quang Ninh near the Chinese border, Ho Chi Minh, and Thanh Hoa province.

## Alert: Endangered turtles in need of protection

The Cuc Phuong National Park, Turtle Conservation Center (TCC) and ENV have produced an “alert sheet” for Forest Protection Departments in the central and northern region of the country.


The alert sheet highlights the need to confiscate and find placements for tortoises and freshwater turtles of six target species when discovered in wildlife trade seizures. Of particular interest are three endemic species: the Vietnamese pond turtle (*Mauremys annamensis*), Bourret’s box turtle (*Cuora bourreti*), and the lesser Indochinese box turtle (*Cuora picturata*).

All three species are critically endangered, and continue to be hunted and traded, mainly to consumer markets in China. The alert is intended to raise the profile of these species and ensure that they are not simply dumped back into the trade by Forest Protection Departments following confiscation.




### CÁC LOÀI RÙA CỰC KỲ NGUY CẤP CẦN ĐƯỢC LƯU Ý ĐẶC BIỆT


Bất kỳ loài nào trong số các loài dưới đây nếu được phát hiện trong các vụ buôn bán trái phép cần phải được tịch thu và chuyển giao cho Trung tâm Bảo tồn Rùa tại VQG Cúc Phương (TCC) để được chăm sóc hoặc thả về môi trường sống phù hợp dựa trên tư vấn của các chuyên gia.



**Rùa hộp trán vàng miền Bắc**




**Rùa hộp trán vàng miền Trung**



**Rùa hộp trán vàng miền Nam**

Cả ba loài rùa trên đều thuộc nhóm cực kỳ nguy cấp, đang đứng trước nguy cơ tuyệt chủng do số lượng trong tự nhiên đang suy giảm nghiêm trọng. Rùa hộp trán vàng miền Trung và Rùa hộp trán vàng miền Nam là loài đặc hữu của Việt Nam. Không có loài nào trong số những loài này có thể nhân nuôi thành công trong môi trường nuôi nhốt vì chúng sinh trưởng chậm và tỉ lệ sinh sản thấp.



**Rùa Trung Bộ**

Đây là loài cực kỳ nguy cấp và là loài bản địa của Việt Nam. Các quần thể của loài này trong tự nhiên đang dần bị tiêu diệt vì chúng thường bị săn bắt để nhân nuôi vì mục đích thương mại. Nếu phát hiện loài này trong các vụ buôn bán, cần tịch thu và chuyển giao cho TCC để đảm bảo chúng được cứu hộ và đưa trở lại môi trường tự nhiên.




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### Confiscated tigers should not end up as glue

Over the past year there have been a number of cases in which provincial authorities have sought to dispose of tigers, ivory, and other fully protected wildlife (seized from illegal trade) in a manner that is potentially illegal, and almost certainly does not represent the interests of the law intended to protect these species.

For the record, when frozen tigers and tiger skeletons are seized from illegal trade, they should be either destroyed or turned over to a legitimate institution such as the Museum of Natural History in Hanoi. They may not be used to make tiger bone glue, sold or auctioned off to raise state funds.

On May 16, 2007 the Former Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Sinh Hung issued correspondence 611/TTg-NN asking that provinces and Police, Customs, Forest Ranger, and Market Management authorities turn evidence over to the Natural History Museum. Many provinces have complied with this correspondence. However, some have not, and recent cases in Thanh Hoa, Ninh Binh, Quang Ninh and Quang Tri are of particular concern, as the tigers involved either remain where they are pending a decision by the provincial finance department, have disappeared, or have been turned into tiger bone glue.

The issue of disposal, or what to do with confiscated tigers is an issue that reflects how provincial authorities perceive their role in protecting endangered wildlife.



Photo: Ninh Binh Forest Protection Department

Are they promoting illegal trade by their actions or working hard with others to put a stop to illegal activities?

In Ha Tinh, the People’s Committee issued a correspondence instructing functional agencies to hand over any confiscated tigers to the Natural History Museum in Hanoi. This represents a responsible course of action that should be followed by other provincial leaders, so that their departments have clear guidelines and can no longer take advantage of ambiguity in the law.

The issue of properly disposing of confiscated tigers and tiger parts, also applies to other fully protected

## Wildlife Crime Bulletin

Download ENV’s latest Wildlife Crime Bulletin focused on important issues facing government and law enforcement agencies in efforts to combat wildlife crime.

## Film competition promotes protection of bears

In March, ENV launched a national **film competition** calling for films from aspiring artists that promote the protection of bears. The competition, which is open to the public, asks participants to produce and submit a film of no more than 45 seconds. Winners will fall into two categories: the best message promoting protection of bears, as judged by a panel of ENV experts, and the “most popular” film based on public voting from a short-list posted on ENV’s YouTube site. Winners in both categories will take home an i-Pad, and their winning films will be potentially aired as public service announcements on national and provincial TV.



ENV in Action



Young soldiers in Ho Chi Minh take a rest in a public park to visit an 'End Bear Farming and Trade' event and sign pledges not to consume bear bile

Photo: ENV



Volunteers of the Ha Tinh chapter of ENV's Wildlife Protection Network at a meeting in March, during which they received further training on monitoring of business establishments

Photo: ENV



One of three lorises confiscated by authorities in Ho Chi Minh after being advertised on the internet. ENV worked with police to set up a buy that led to the arrest of the suspect and seizure of the animals

Photo: ENV



"Young men at a water park in Hanoi gladly use the back of Ms Thao, ENV volunteer coordinator, to sign pledges not to consume bear bile

Photo: ENV



Hanoi residents take a break from an evening in the park to sign pledges not to consume bear bile during a public event targeting older generations

Photo: ENV



A popular part of ENV's public wildlife trade events is the exhibit board where members of the public can pose for photos as the evil trader (seated), hero (standing) or lucky monkey (being released by the hero)

Photo: ENV





Education for Nature-Vietnam (ENV) was established in 2000 as Vietnam's first non-governmental organization focused on the conservation of nature and protection of the environment. Our mission is to foster greater understanding amongst the Vietnamese public about environmental issues of local, national and global significance, ranging from the protection of endangered wildlife and natural ecosystems to climate change. We employ creative and innovative strategies to influence attitudes and mobilize Vietnamese citizens to live in balance with the natural world and to take action to protect Vietnam's precious environment.

ENV specializes in four major program areas that collectively form ENV's integrated and strategic approach toward achievement of our mission. These include:

- Reducing demand and consumption for wildlife products
- Strengthening and supporting law enforcement in dealing with wildlife crimes
- Mobilizing public support and participation in efforts to stop the illegal wildlife trade
- Strengthening legislation and advocating effective government policy in addressing the illegal trade

#### ENV wishes to thank the following donors for supporting our efforts to protect nature and wildlife in Vietnam:

- World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA)
- The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
- Humane Society International (HSI)
- Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)
- The Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation
- Freeland Foundation
- The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)
- US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- SeaWorld & Busch Gardens Conservation Fund
- Cleveland Metroparks Zoo
- Auckland Zoo
- Houston Zoo
- Columbus Zoo
- United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

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