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Major tiger farmer sentenced to imprisonment

The world has been turned upside down on long-time suspected tiger trader Huynh Van Hai, owner of the Than Canh Tourism Park in Binh Duong province. Hai was sentenced on March 10 to three years in prison for selling tigers out the back door of his park, fourteen other people linked to Hai's illegal activities, including his son, received sentences ranging from 18 months' probation to 30 months in prison. In addition to imprisonment, Hai and two other subjects were fined more than VND 1.4 billion (about USD 70,000.00).

The Thanh Canh Tourism Park is one of eight private zoos and establishments in Vietnam that keep tigers. In 2010, a major investigation carried out by ENV found that the Thanh Canh Tourism Park was suspected of involvement in the illegal trade of tigers born at the park. Suspicions were based on inconsistencies in records maintained by the park and observations during regular inspections carried out by ENV and police.

"ENV wishes to congratulate the Binh Duong authorities, and in particular, the Binh Duong Police for pursuing this investigation that led to the prosecution of Mr. Hai and the other suspects involved in this case," says Tran Viet Hung, Vice Director of ENV. "This is a huge step forward in our collective efforts to end illegal trade of tigers in Vietnam. Binh Duong authorities are sending a strong message to other tiger farmers that may be engaged in similar illegal activities they too may see the inside of a prison cell if they do not obey the law."

ENV's 2010 investigation also indicated that at least two other major tiger farmers in Vietnam were involved in illegally trading live tigers or selling off the remains of tigers that had reportedly died on their farms. The Thanh Canh Tourism Park and four other private establishments keeping tigers in Vietnam are known to have obtained their original tigers illegally from the trade.

"It is time to end illegal tiger trade in Vietnam by expanding and intensifying enforcement efforts targeting major kingpins in the trade and putting these people in jail," said Hung. Hung went on to suggest that authorities expand their focus to investigate other major tiger traders that are suspected of either raising and selling tigers from their farms or smuggling tigers into Vietnam from Laos and other countries.

Hung noted that efforts must also focus on reducing consumer demand for tiger bone glue, a form of traditional medicine made by boiling down tiger bones that is used to treat arthritis and strengthen bones.

"The myths surrounding use of tiger bone glue as a magic medicine persist amongst older generations of some Vietnamese. However, modern medicine and science are gaining ground amongst younger generations and this will show people that using tiger bone glue is a waste of their money, while more effective treatment is readily available through consultation with professional medical services."

The Thanh Canh Tourism Park, which is currently closed to business, also keeps tens of bears which are used to extract bile for foreign and domestic visitors, according to staff of the park. Dozens of other animals are also kept at the park to entertain visitors and a restaurant located in the park center offers a range of wildlife dishes. According to ENV investigators who visited the site in February 2011, some of the tigers at the tourism park appeared to be malnourished and in poor condition..

News of Hai's sentencing by Binh Duong courts, and others involved in the Binh Duong case, were cause for celebration at ENV which has worked long hours to expose illegal activities of tiger farmers and traders in Vietnam. "We feel that Binh Duong authorities have taken a vital first step in ending illegal farming and trade of tigers in Vietnam," says ENV Founder Vu Thi Quyen. "Let us see how this case can influence other provinces to get tough on criminals involved in illegal trade of tigers and other endangered wildlife.

"We will not rest until the people behind this dirty tiger trade business are in jail, and not a moment sooner says Quyen,

Background: Ending tiger farming and trade in Vietnam

Perhaps no other species has received as much attention and support as tigers, with hundreds of millions of dollars spent on their conservation, yet, governments and their conservation counterparts continue to document decline across the range of the species. Vietnam has seen its share of tiger dollars too over the years, but embarrassingly, most experts agree (including international NGOs which have been the recipients of much of these funds) that tigers are all but gone from the wild here, with a few animals perhaps living along the borders of the north and central regions of the country.

Following the 2007 discovery of approximately 60 illegal tigers being kept privately by businessmen, ENV embarked on a program aimed at arresting the growth and development of the tiger trade in Vietnam.

ENV's tiger strategy focuses on three components:

- Strengthening law and policy in relation to the protection of tigers and closure of tiger farms by working with key decision-makers at the central and provincial level
- Strengthening enforcement through promotion and support of the work of law enforcement agencies in investigating and combating illegal tiger trade, as well as monitoring existing tiger farming operations
- Raising public awareness to encourage greater public support in reporting crimes involving tigers and reducing demand and consumption of tiger products

This new program began with a major investigation of tiger farming and trade in Vietnam, the first such in- depth look at the illegal trade and the inner workings of tiger farms in this country, working in close partnership with law enforcement agencies at the provincial and national level. A year later, [a confidential investigation report](#) was produced highlighting the initial results of the year-long investigation. Amongst the findings were direct links between some tiger farms and commercial trade, as well as identifying a number of key figures in the tiger trade, and components of the trade network that smuggles tigers in from Laos to Vietnam on a regular basis.

Tiger Intelligence File

- Tiger farming: There are 100 known tigers in captivity in Vietnam. 81 are kept on eight private farms, the remaining tigers are at government-supported zoos and rescue centers (ENV March 2011).
- Since 2005, there have been 24 reported seizures of frozen, whole or cut up, tigers, tiger bones, or in one case, live tigers. A total of 41 tigers have been confiscated from these seizures (March 2011).
- ENV has documented a total of 134 tiger cases since 2005 including mounted tigers and all forms of products and parts, as well as advertising of tiger products (ENV Database November 2010).

- At least three tiger farms are reported to be involved in commercial trade of tigers raised on these farms in direct violation of the law. Evidence is lacking from other farms, but tigers known to have died at these farms have been processed to make tiger bone TCM.
- Most tigers smuggled into Vietnam are sold to Vietnamese consumers, not smuggled into China.
- The ENV investigation resulted in the identification of a list of major criminals involved in illegal tiger trade and smuggling into Vietnam, including several key figures suspected to be major players behind much of the illegal tiger trade into Vietnam.
- Tiger bone glue is the primary tiger product in demand by Vietnamese consumers. It is made from tiger bone mixed with the bones from other species, and sold at roughly \$900-\$1200 per 100 grams.
- The cost of raising a tiger in captivity to an age that it can be sold is approximately \$3,455 USD. The value of this same tiger sold in the form of tiger bone TCM is approximately \$20,000 USD (2010). *

*Based prices and estimates provided by tiger farmers and tiger bone TCM brokers (2010)

Reference

ENV's Summary of Tiger trade investigation findings

<http://envvietnam.org/library/Resource%20and%20Publication/Tiger%20summary%20%28ENfinal;%2013%20March%202010%29.pdf>

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