

WSPA Partner provokes Vietnamese crackdown on bear farms

18 March 2011: Hanoi, Vietnam: The Vietnamese government has announced a crackdown on illegal bear bile tourism, following reports of bile extraction for tourists by WSPA's local member society, Education for Nature-Vietnam (ENV). (Footnotes 1 and 2)

In a communication sent out this week, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism spelled out that tour companies engaged in so-called bear bile tourism risk losing their business licences. The letter was sent out nationwide following ENV's expose last month of bear owners in the touristic province of Quang Ninh who continue to extract bear bile – much of which is bought by Korean tourists.(Footnote 3)

"This is fantastic news and clearly demonstrates that the government of Vietnam sees the damage bear farming is causing their tourist industry. We urge the authorities to now step up their efforts to ensure an end to the farming of thousands of bears across the country for their bile," said Dave Eastham WSPA Captive Bears Campaign Leader.

According to the Government's communication, the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) requires that: "All the provincial Departments of Sports, Culture and Tourism are to promote awareness raising activities and the responsibilities of businesses in protecting wild animals. They are to seriously implement the recommendations from international communities and national agencies involved in wildlife protection and are to cooperate with the authorities to treat all violations in accordance with the law."

The VNAT then states that the same departments are "to prohibit all travel companies that organise tours that take tourists to bear farms where bears are illegally kept and bear bile is extracted. For a serious violation, VNAT will consider withdrawing the company's International Travel Business License". The document also warns that the bear bile industry "negatively influences the friendly and attractive image of the country and people of Vietnam and also harms the healthy and sustainable content of activities of local tourism".

Tran Viet Hung, ENV Vice Director from ENV said "Authorities have been aware of illegal bear bile tourism for a long time, but it has taken an article to be published and put into public view for them to take action. We welcome the stern words from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism and expect to see prosecutions of the very visible perpetrators of this illegal industry."

WSPA and ENV, together with NGOs Free the Bears and Animals Asia Foundation, jointly lobby as the Vietnam Bear Task Force to prevent illegal bear bile tourism in Vietnam. Outlawed bear bile is still widely available in the country, where approximately 3,000 bears, almost all stolen from the wild, continue to be kept under terrible conditions in bear 'farms', also prohibited by Vietnamese law since 2005.

Bile is regularly extracted from the bears' gall bladders with a syringe, causing the animals to suffer. Bear bile is used in traditional medicine and as a status symbol. The bears are kept in tiny, barren cages, often with no space to stand or move, for the duration of their lifetime of as long as 20 years. Vietnam is a member of the United Nations' Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna CITES, committing it to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. The Asiatic black bear is most commonly used in bile extraction and is listed in the appendix of CITES.

Additionally, under the Vietnamese Government's Decree 32/2006, bears are listed as an endangered species and owning and selling bears or their by-products is illegal.

World Society for the Protection of Animals

Despite herbal alternatives being available, bear bile continues to be used in some Traditional Asian Medicine (TAM) to treat conditions such as reducing fever, protecting the liver, improvement of eyesight, breaking down gallstones, and as an anti-inflammatory. TAM experts around the world agree that bear bile is completely replaceable. Surveys of global TAM practitioners by WSPA and others have shown that there are more than 50 herbal alternatives to bear bile as a medicine, as well as synthetically-produced alternatives.

Vietnam's most profitable tourist resort of Ha Long City in north-eastern Quang Ninh Province continues to be one of the most popular destinations for Korean tourists to witness extractions and purchase bile to illegally transport back to Korea. WSPA hopes this crackdown will signal an end to such businesses.

Notes for Editors:

Images of the illegal bear bile extraction and are available at:

<https://www.yousendit.com/download/eURDRm82UEN5UkZFQIE9PQ>

All images used must be credited to ENV

A short video clip of bear bile extraction on a Vietnamese bear farm is available to view at:

<http://www.envietnam.org/videos/quang-ninh.html>

1. The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) is the world's largest alliance of animal welfare organisations, currently representing more than 1000 member societies in over 150 countries. WSPA strives to create a world where animal welfare matters and animal cruelty ends. WSPA brings about change at both grassroots and governmental levels to benefit animals and has consultative status at the Council of Europe and the United Nations.
2. Education for Nature-Vietnam (ENV) was established in 2000 as Vietnam's first non-governmental organization focused on the conservation of nature and the environment. Its mission is to foster greater understanding amongst the Vietnamese public about environmental issues of local, national and global significance, ranging from the protection of wildlife and natural ecosystems to climate change.
3. ENV's article is available at <https://www.yousendit.com/download/eURDRm82UEN5UkZFQIE9PQ>

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