

Feature

What Should We Do with Confiscated Wildlife?

One of the most difficult issues facing wildlife protection officers is “what to do with confiscated wildlife.” Today, most confiscated animals are either released into local parks and protected areas, or legally sold back into the trade. Neither practice is likely to benefit the conservation and protection of endangered wildlife.

In the December issue Wildlife Crime we discussed the problems associated with the common practice of legally selling animals back into the trade. This contributes to perceptions that government agencies benefit financially from the wildlife trade, undermining public support for efforts to protect wildlife, as well the authority of the agencies involved. Moreover, selling wildlife back into the trade contributes to the exploitation of endangered species by creating a legal market for illegally sourced wildlife. ENV believes that this practice should be stopped for all endangered species protected under Decree 32.

If selling animals back traders is not the right thing to do, how should police and wildlife protection agencies handle confiscated wildlife?



An oriental small-clawed otter (*Ambloonyx cinerea*) at a private zoo in Cau Mau Province. The species is listed as protected under group 1B of Decree 32

Placement is the First and Best Choice for Endangered Wildlife

When animals are confiscated, we should make every effort to place the rarest and most endangered species in rescue centers, zoos, and other non-commercial facilities. Such placement should apply to species listed in Decree 32 Group 1B and 2B, as well as species that are considered threatened and endangered listed on the IUCN Red List) but may not be specifically protected by law.

The IUCN guidelines for confiscated wildlife clearly suggest placement in rescue centers, zoos, and research facilities over release of animals back into the wild.

Unfortunately, few rescue centers and zoos have the space to accommodate the volume of confiscated wildlife coming out of the trade. Provincial authorities must find other solutions for confiscated wildlife that cannot be placed in existing facilities.

Release Sounds Like a Good Thing to Do, but is Rarely the Right Choice

In practice, other options include releasing animals back into the wild. Until recently, releases often involved dumping wildlife in the nearest forest without consideration of the natural home range or habitat requirements of the animals released.

There are a number of reasons why releasing animals back into the wild may not be the best option, particularly if the animals' origin is unknown. These include the risk of spreading disease to local fauna, the difficulty that the newly released wildlife may have in surviving in a new and unfamiliar environment, and genetic concerns such as hybridization and the dilution of locally evolved adaptations through interbreeding.

It has been suggested that releasing wildlife can actually increase biodiversity by augmenting wild populations or compensating for loss of species resulting from hunting. This is a mistaken belief that is not supported by science.

The truth is that most released wildlife probably does not survive. The animals fail to adjust to their new environment and have problems finding food or shelter. Weaker and disoriented animals become easy prey for animals further up the food chain, die of sickness or starvation, or are hunted and collected by humans again. Releasing wildlife is not necessarily a “humane” thing to do and has few conservation benefits. .

In some cases, however, release may be an appropriate course of action, particularly if there are clearly defined conservation objectives, such as the reintroduction of a species to a specific habitat. A good example was the reintroduction of Siamese crocodiles to Cat Tien National Park. The reintroduction was carefully planned and executed. Local populations were extinct. Only genetically tested pure Siamese crocodiles were released, and the health of each animal was carefully screened by a qualified veterinarian prior to its release.

Moreover, Cat Tien National Park initiated a long-term monitoring program (that continues today) to evaluate the results of the reintroduction and to determine the survival rate of the released animals. But these sorts of carefully planned releases are costly and may only be feasible under special circumstances.

Euthanasia is a Humane Choice

The IUCN guidelines prescribe euthanasia as a preferred humane option for confiscated wildlife that cannot be placed in a rescue center or zoo, and do not justify the long-term expenses required for a monitored release or reintroduction.

Many rangers may find it difficult to euthanize animals that have been confiscated; the idea seems to run against the grain of perceived notions of “rescue”. However, stopping the wildlife trade requires difficult and sometimes unpleasant decisions. It is essential that the animals are removed from the trade altogether and that no further financial benefits accrue to the traders from selling the animals back to them. This approach offers no deterrent to traders since they simply pass the extra cost on to the customer.

It is therefore recommended that provincial wildlife protection departments make every effort to place wildlife at rescue centers and zoos as the first option for consideration.

If placement cannot be made, experts should be consulted for advice to determine whether release makes sense (for certain species in certain controlled circumstances and at specific sites).

If placement and expert-advised release are not options, the animals should be euthanized, humanely.



A restaurant in Hanoi offers pangolins served in a variety of dishes in violation of the law. (Photo: APCP)

Most importantly, if you confiscate animals...

Don't sell them back to traders.

Don't dump wildlife in the local forest.

Get help.

The future of some of our most critically endangered species may rest in the decisions you make!

Placement facilities for confiscated wildlife

Below is a list of institutions and organizations that can help you make the right choices:

Northern Region

Soc Son Rescue Center	
Hanoi Forest Protection Branch, Soc Son, Hanoi	
Species accepted	All species
Conservation focus	Placement
Assistance available	Hanoi and northern provinces
Contact details	Mr. Ngo Ba Oanh (Director) Telephone: 04.8853071, Mobile: 0982558120 Mr. Nguyen Van Khai (Vice Director) Telephone: 04.8850294, Mobile 0913025940

Hanoi Zoo	
Hanoi	
Species accepted	All species
Conservation focus	Placement
Assistance available	Northern provinces
Contact details	Mr. Dang Gia Tung (Vice Director) Telephone: 04.7660707, Mobile: 0913238366

Central Region

Pu Mat Rescue Center	
Pu Mat National Park, Nghe An Province	
Species accepted	All species
Conservation focus	Temporary holding before placement or release
Assistance available	Nghe An province ONLY
Contact details	Mr. Dang Van Lieu (Chief of Science Department) Telephone: 0383.873034, Mobile: 0912591375

Phong Nha Rescue Center Phong Nha National Park, Quang Binh Province	
Species accepted	Primates, turtles, pythons, other wildlife
Conservation focus	Holding prior to release and some long-term placement
Assistance available	Quang Binh Province ONLY
Contact details	Mr. Dinh Huy Tri (Director of Rescue Center) Telephone: 052.675278, Mobile: 0983191335 Mr. Truong Thanh Khai (Vice Director of Rescue Center) Telephone: 052.675278, Mobile: 0982557383

Southern Region

Cu Chi Rescue Center Ho Chi Minh FPD, Cu Chi District, Ho Chi Minh City	
Species accepted	Reptiles, civets, lorises,
Conservation focus	Quarantine and temporary holding prior to placement or release
Assistance available	Southern provinces
Contact details	Mr. Nguyen Chuong (Ho Chi Minh FPD) Telephone: 08.7947045, Mobile: 0903697089

Cat Tien Wildlife Rescue Center Cat Tien National Park, Dong Nai Province	
Species accepted	Bears, small carnivores, snakes, turtles, pangolins, primates
Conservation focus	Placement and holding pending release
Assistance available	Dong Nai and surrounding provinces
Contact details	Mr. Luong Van Hien (Director of the Cat Tien Rescue Center) Telephone: 0613.669273 (Admin department, Cat Tien National Park) Mobile: 0919043084

Saigon Zoo Ho Chi Minh City	
Species accepted	All species
Conservation focus	Placement
Assistance available	Southern provinces
Contact details	Mr. Phan Viet Lam Telephone: 08.9101439, Mobile: 0903847316

National Species Focused Centers

The Endangered Primate Rescue Center (EPRC) Cuc Phuong National Park, Ninh Binh Province	
Species accepted	Langurs, gibbons, lorises
Conservation focus	Permanent placement and conservation breeding. Experimental release planned for specific species.
Assistance available	Nationwide
Contact details	Ms. Nguyen Thi Thu Hien (EPRC Coordinator) Telephone: 030.848002, Mobile: 0986898608

The Turtle Conservation Center (TCC) Cuc Phuong National Park, Ninh Binh Province	
Species accepted	Tortoises and freshwater turtles (all species)
Conservation focus	Placement and conservation breeding. Translocation, release, and head-start programs for some species.
Assistance available	Nationwide
Contact details	Mr. Bui Dang Phong (TCC Manager) Telephone: 030-848090, Mobile 0988424073

The Small Carnivore Conservation Program (SCP) Cuc Phuong National Park, Ninh Binh Province	
Species accepted	Owston's civets, binturongs, linsangs, clouded leopards, small cats, otters, and some other small carnivores excluding common species
Conservation focus	Placement
Assistance available	Nationwide
Contact details	Mr. Tran Quang Phuong (Coordinator of the SCP) Telephone: 030.848053, Mobile: 0988643539

Asian Pangolin Conservation Program Cuc Phuong National Park, Ninh Binh Province	
Species accepted	Pangolins (Sunda and Chinese pangolins)
Conservation focus	Placement
Assistance available	Nationwide
Contact details	Mr. Nguyen Van Thai (Pangolin Program Coordinator) Office: 030.848053

General Help on Confiscations/Releases/Placement

<p>Need Assistance? Call ENV</p> <p>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.</p> <p>04-775-5790 or toll-free 1-800-1522</p>

Crime Log – January 2007

Trade Seizures

- Quang Ninh: Police in Quang Ninh province confiscated two shipments of pangolins during the month of January. One shipment comprised of 136 animals was discovered in a taxi. The second shipment of 68 animals was found in a truck displaying a false registration number. Both cargos of wildlife were reportedly headed for the Mong Cai border crossing to China (Case Ref. 384, 393).
- Hanoi: A late night accident claimed the lives of three people and resulted in the seizure of 16 pangolins from one of the vehicles involved in the crash in Hanoi's Hoang Mai district. The pangolins were transferred to the Soc Son Rescue Center (WCU Case Ref. 387).
- Kon Tum: Provincial FPD confiscated two wild pigs (*Sus scrofa*) that were being transported on motorbikes outside a Kon Tum city restaurant. The pigs, with a combined weight of 78 kg, were later released in the Dak Ui special-use forest (WCU Case Ref. 388).
- Ha Tinh: Ha Tinh authorities confiscated 236 Indochinese rat snakes (*Ptyas korros*) and 36 tockay geckos (*Gekko gecko*) from a public bus. The animals were auctioned off and the driver of the bus was fined 21,450,000 VND (WCU Case Ref. 391).
- Binh Phuoc: Customs officers on the Cambodian border in Binh Phuoc province stopped a motorbike and confiscated 2 pythons and 48 kg of turtles. The turtles were transferred to the Cu Chi Rescue outside of Ho Chi Minh City where they will be quarantined prior to release (WCU Case Ref. 392).
- Hanoi: A security team at Hanoi Railway Station discovered five pangolins and 6 kg of rat snakes hidden on a passenger train. The animals were turned over to the Soc Son Rescue Center (WCU Case Ref. 394).
- Hai Phong: Customs officers discovered nearly eight tons of turtles and snakes in a refrigerated truck at the port of Hai Phong. The accompanying permits described the cargo as consisting of "frogs" and stated that the animals had originated in Thailand. Customs authorities confirmed that the illegal shipment had entered into Vietnam in Ha Tinh Province from Laos, and was to be loaded on a ship to China when customs officers made the discovery. All of the snakes and turtles were reportedly dead, and Hai Phong authorities advised ENV that the entire cargo comprising 5703 kg of turtles and 1978 kg of snakes was incinerated two days after the seizure (WCU Case Ref. 403).
- Hai Phong: Three men involved a wildlife trade seizure in November 2005 during which a forest ranger was killed were given sentences that included life in prison for two of the men and a 23 year sentence for the third. The forest ranger was killed after being thrown from the roof of a bus that he was inspecting as the driver sought to escape (WCU Case Ref. 127).
- Phu Yen: A woman caught transporting a cargo of pangolins, monitor lizards and turtles, which was seized by Phu Yen FPD in June 2006, was sentenced to 18 months house arrest and 36 months of probation. In addition, she received a fine of five million VND (WCU Case Ref. 239).
- Dak Lak: Two hunters found in possession of the head, legs, and skeleton of a banteng (*Bos banteng*) that they had hunted in Ea So Nature Reserve in June 2005 were sentenced to 34 and 28 months imprisonment respectively. The other two persons involved in the case both received 24 month sentences (WCU Case Ref. 243)
- Binh Phuoc: Wildlife protection officers of Bu Gia Map National Park confiscated an endangered Siamese fire-back pheasant (*Lophura diardi*) from a local resident who was trying to sell it. The bird was released back into the park and the resident received an administrative fine (WCU Case Ref. 409)

- Ho Chi Minh City: The owner of a house where 180.5 kg of wildlife meat and several live animals were discovered by Ho Chi Minh FPD in September 2006 was fined 30 million VND (WCU Case Ref. 303).

Public participations

- A resident reported observing a civet being cooked at a restaurant in Hanoi. ENV monitors visited the restaurant before informing the Hanoi FPB, and also observed a live porcupine, a bear paw, monitor lizards, and snakes in wine. When the restaurant was inspected, rangers found some live civets, and snakes, but reportedly did not observe the bear paw and monitors in wine. According to the rangers, the restaurant had obtained the snakes legally from a snake farm and the live civets had been purchased from an auction conducted by Ninh Binh authorities.

- A call to the ENV hotline reporting a gibbon was on display in a Hanoi café resulted in a three-day long, and ultimately unsuccessful, effort to have the gibbon confiscated. ENV monitors photographed the animal in a café on the first day and conducted regular checks over the following two days, observing the gibbon again shortly before lunch on the third day. That same afternoon, rangers and police inspected the café but were reportedly unable to locate the gibbon, confiscating only a flying squirrel (*Petaurista petaurista*) found in a second cage. Monitors suspect that the café owners were tipped off about the impending raid shortly before the authorities arrived (WCU Case Ref. 390).



A gibbon observed at a café in Hanoi disappeared shortly before the authorities could inspect the café (Photo ENV)

- After receiving a tip-off from a concerned foreigner about a Hanoi restaurant displaying a stuffed tiger, ENV's Wildlife Crime Unit alerted the FPD. Although the stuffed tiger was not confiscated, a subsequent inspection by an ENV monitoring officer confirmed that the stuffed tiger was no longer on display at the restaurant (WCU Case Ref. 372).
- The police arrested a woman who had been advertising rhino horns and tiger bone glue on the Internet, after the woman met with ENV staff posing as buyers at a Hanoi café. Police then apprehended the woman and confiscated the alleged rhino and tiger bone products. (WCU Ref. Case 400).
- After receiving a report from a foreign tourist about some tourist shops selling marine turtle products at a popular national landmark, ENV passed the information on to the management board responsible for the site, resulting in the removal of the products. (WCU Case Ref. 364, 376)

A shop in Hanoi that was displaying bottles of wine containing pangolins, monitor lizards and cobras was reported to the ENV hotline in December 2005. The FPD inspected the shop but did not administer any punishment, based on an agreement by the owner to no longer display or sell wildlife. The District FPD stated at the time that ongoing monitoring would be carried out to ensure no further violations, and that more serious punishment would follow if the owner did not comply with the agreement. However, a February 2007 inspection by ENV monitors indicated that the shop was continuing to display wildlife, including monitor lizards, cobras, and geckos in wine. (Photo: ENV)



ENV Note: Despite the disappointing results on some cases, ENV recognizes and strongly commends the efforts and contributions by the general public in helping to stop the illegal trade of wildlife in Vietnam. The trade of wildlife will end when the public realizes that the trade benefits only a few in the profits earned today, while we all share in the cost of losing a precious and irreplaceable part of our natural heritage.

Spotlight on Crime

Update on 19 Tigers Held at Beer Company

The fate of 19 tigers held in captivity in Binh Dong province awaits a decision from the government as to whether the tigers will be transferred to a holding facility. Four of the tigers in the group were allegedly smuggled into Vietnam from Cambodia, and later bred in captivity, resulting in 15 surviving offspring. One difficulty in placing the animals involves selecting a suitable facility(s) where the tigers will be kept and maintained properly. Existing rescue centers, and Hanoi and Saigon Zoo do not have space to house additional tigers.

Several experts have recommended that the adults undergo DNA tests to determine their origin, and also to help establish whether they are pure-bred Indochinese tigers, or hybrids.

According to the law, tigers may not be maintained in captivity in Vietnam without a permit from the national government. If the initial four tigers originated outside of Vietnam, as it appears they did, CITES permits would have theoretically been required to bring them across the border into Vietnam (Case Ref. 295).

Deciding the Fate of 15 Unregistered Bears

ENV has sent a letter to the provincial government and relevant authorities recommending that 15 unregistered Asiatic black bears currently being kept in captivity in Vinh Long province be transferred to the new Tam Dao Bear Rescue Center as soon as it is complete. According to Decision 02 of January 5, 2005, all captive bears are required to be registered and chipped by the 28th of February of 2005. After this date, persons holding unregistered bears will be punished in accordance with the law (stipulated in Decision 02 and Regulation 47 of June 2006).

The deadline was intended to halt further trade in bears and prevent new (unregistered) bears from being taken into captivity after that date. Wildlife protection authorities could then

confidently enforce the law based on whether bears were registered or not. The 15 bears in Vinh Long province are not registered, and are being kept in violation of the law. In order to demonstrate to other potential violators that the authorities stand firmly behind the law without exception, ENV believes that the bears must be confiscated and placed in a legal government facility (Case Ref. 275).

Vietnam's Critically Endangered Wild Elephants - Minus One?

A three-year-old male elephant caught by hunters in Dak Lak province remains in captivity while authorities seek a solution for dealing with the animal. The local hunters caught the wild elephant in Buon Don district in December and had planned to domesticate it (Case Ref. 382).

Can Tho Gibbon Dies Before Rescue

The gibbon being held at a resort in Can Tho province died before it could be confiscated and transferred to a rescue center, according to the Can Tho Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Department (DARD). The gibbon had been on display at the Phu Sa Eco Resort near Can Tho city, and plans were underway to confiscate and transfer it to the Endangered Primate Rescue Center at Cuc Phuong National Park. The case was originally reported to the hotline by a local businessman in November 2006. The death of the gibbon illustrates the need for a more timely response in dealing with wildlife, particularly endangered species (Case Ref. 354, 354B).

Crime Statistics

The ENV Wildlife Crimes Monitoring Unit has logged a total of 410 cases since January 1, 2005.

Period	Trade seizures	Selling	Advertising	Possession display	Other	Total *
January 2007	9	7	5	5	2	28
Total 2007	9	7	5	5	2	28
Total 2005 – 2007	120	120	21	88	58	410

* 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

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

Wildlife Crimes - 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.

For more information, contact:

ENV Wildlife Crimes Monitoring Unit

Ms. Nguyen Thi Van Anh

Education for Nature - Vietnam (ENV)

No.2/C5 Tap the Dai hoc Ngoai Thuong, pho Chua Lang, Ha Noi.

Tel: 04-775 5790

Fax: 04-775 3685

Email: hotline@fpt.vn

Website: www.envietnam.org

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