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Pangolin Consumer Crime in Vietnam: The Results of ENV surveys and enforcement campaigns, 2011-2015

Pangolins are the most trafficked mammals on earth, which is largely due to the perceived value of their scales in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). Since 2005, ENV has been working to protect pangolins and other endangered wildlife through the implementation of an integrated strategy aimed at strengthening law enforcement, reducing consumer demand, and improving and strengthening laws that protect wildlife. ENV has performed a number of surveys and assessments aimed at investigating pangolin crime and consumption in a number of major cities in Vietnam. The results of these surveys were used to guide demand reduction campaigns and have since resulted in several major successful enforcement campaigns targeting urban centers in Vietnam.

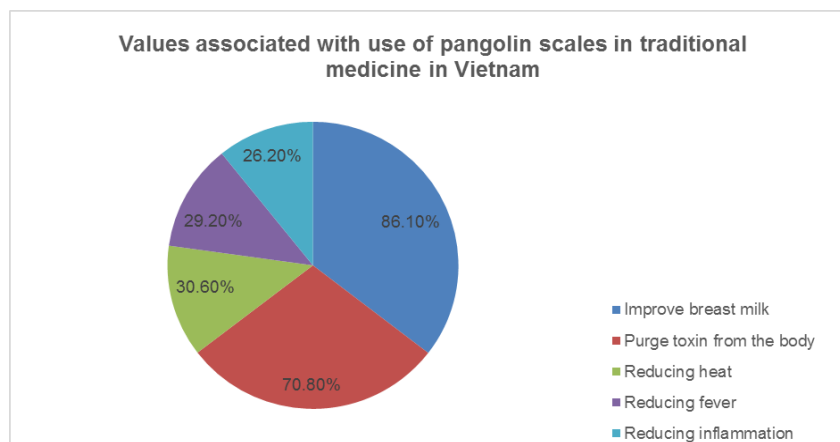


Identifying consumer values associated with use of pangolin scales in TCM

In 2011 and 2012, ENV surveyed TCM shops in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) in order to develop a better understanding of why pangolin scales are used as traditional medicine in Vietnam. In the surveys, ENV staff interviewed TCM practitioners at 72 shops (24 in Hanoi and 48 in HCMC).

The most common value associated with the use of pangolin scales was the belief that scales improve breast milk quality and quantity in nursing mothers. This value was reportedly 86.1% of TCM practitioners including 17 (70.8%) in Hanoi and 45 (93.8%) in HCMC. It appears that no other wildlife products in TCM are used for improving breast milk quality and quantity, making pangolin scales unique in this respect.

The second most common value attributed to the use of pangolin scales was the notion that scales purge toxins from the body. This belief was reported by 70.8% of TCM practitioners (45.8% in Hanoi and 83.8% in HCMC). TCM practitioners also reported that pangolin scales can be used for other purposes including reducing heat (rebalancing body temperature) (30.6%), reducing fever (29.2%), and reducing inflammation (26.2%).



TCM practitioners reported an additional 26 other medical uses associated with pangolin scales at low rates including helping improve blood circulation, and treating acne, boils, measles, malaria, and even cancer.

Pangolin consumer survey

In 2014, ENV performed a telephone survey in order to both determine how commonly pangolin products are used in Vietnam and to learn more about the public's perceived notions about the medicinal values of pangolin scales. Approximately 1,000 adults (18 years or older) living in Ho Chi Minh City were randomly selected and interviewed via telephone. The vast majority of people interviewed claimed that they had never used pangolin or pangolin products. Only three people claimed that they had either consumed pangolins in food or in wine, or used pangolin scales as TCM.

It must be noted that the sample size of this survey was small and may not reflect the use of pangolin and pangolin scales throughout Vietnam. The survey results did however indicate that the use of pangolin and pangolin scales might not be as common in Vietnam as previously believed.

Internet crime survey

In recent years, ENV has received a large number of wildlife crime reports through the internet thanks to the rapid development of social media networks in Vietnam. ENV believes that many traders use the internet to buy or sell illegal wildlife products because it is currently difficult for authorities to detect online crime.

As part of our 2015 enforcement campaign, ENV performed a survey of Vietnamese websites, forums, and social networking sites in order to determine the prevalence of online advertisements for pangolin scales or products. In the survey, a total of 37 violations were found, mostly involving advertisements of the sale of pangolin scales. This number was surprisingly low compared to a similar ENV campaign carried out in 2014 that investigated bear bile violations, where 22% of the total 1,569 wildlife violations involved bear bile. The results of the 2015 pangolin survey indicate that the size of the market for pangolin scales on the internet in Vietnam may be small relative to other wildlife products.

Consumer crime statistics

ENV established a wildlife crime incident tracking system in 2005. All cases reported or collected by ENV are documented on this database. To date, more than 9,000 cases have been recorded, with 9% of these cases involving pangolin violations.

Between 2013 and 2015, ENV initiated consumer crime reduction enforcement campaigns in six major cities including Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The campaign involved inspection of 100% of all restaurants, traditional medicine shops, bars, markets, and bars within specific targeted districts during which violations were documented and reported to authorities. Out of a total of 4,974 business establishments that were inspected, violations were found in 865 establishments (17%). Violations ranged from wildlife advertisements on menus to live wild animals observed by ENV inspectors. The surveys excluded any verbal advertisement.



The survey results show that pangolin crimes were found in 154 (17.8%) of the 865 establishments where wildlife violations were recorded.

In 2015 when ENV initiated an enforcement campaign targeting sale of pangolin scales in TCM shops, a total of 305 shops were inspected in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh with pangolin scales present in 98 of these shops (32.1%).

Both the consumer crime reduction enforcement campaign (2013-2015) and the targeted pangolin TCM crime reduction campaigns have both resulted in substantial reduction in wildlife crimes. Consumer wildlife crime has been reduced by an average of 63.5% in 14 targeted districts of four major cities including Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh. Likewise, follow up inspections show that pangolin crimes have been reduced in TCM shops by 68.3% following interventions by ENV and enforcement agencies.

In late 2015, new consumer crime reduction enforcement campaigns are already underway revisiting districts in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh, and expanding outward into new districts and additional cities.

This brief is intended as a summary of ENV pangolin survey and consumer crime data to date and has been made available to provide credible data about the prevalence of pangolin consumer crime, as well as the results of ENV's assessment of values associated with use of pangolin scales.

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