

July 27, 2016

## **Commercial Farming and Trade of Endangered Species in Vietnam - A Shortcut to Extinction**

*Hanoi, July 27, 2016* - Education for Nature - Vietnam (ENV) today hosted a press conference on the need to fully prohibit farming and trade of endangered species in Vietnam following a lively round-table meeting held yesterday (July 26) with representatives from law enforcement agencies, decision makers, scientists and conservation experts.

The wildlife trade poses a serious threat to Vietnam's biodiversity, and has directly resulted in the loss of species such as the Javan rhino in 2010, and is pushing other species like tigers, elephants, crocodiles, pangolins and rare primates, to the brink of extinction. The illegal wildlife trade is primarily driven by demand from consumers in Vietnam and China.

At the same time, there are voices from within certain segments of Vietnamese society promoting commercial farming and trade of wildlife, citing the economic benefits to farmers and the value that farming could have in conservation.

However, a growing number of people including frontline law enforcement officers, scientists, decision-makers, and the general public have joined the conservation community in opposing any measure that would permit endangered species from being commercially traded, questioning the wisdom of proponents of the plan to put profits over the importance of protecting wild populations of these species, and calling the commercial farming and trade of endangered species a "shortcut to extinction".

*"We believe that commercial farming and trade of endangered species will accelerate their rate of extinction,"* says Bui Thi Ha, Vice Director of ENV. *"Engaging in this sort of profiteering at the expense of the future of some of the world's most critically endangered species is reckless, benefiting only a small number of people at the expense of all of us."*



*Does commercial farming and trade of endangered species have any value in conservation?*

*Photo: FPD Hue*

Ms. Ha has outlined ENV's position calling for a 100% ban on the commercial farming and trade of endangered species that are protected under Vietnamese law or international treaty (specifically the Convention on Trade of Endangered Species, Appendix I) based on three critical factors:

- **Little if any conservation value**

There is an inherent conflict between conservation of endangered species and commercial farming. Conservation seeks to preserve biodiversity for the future benefit of all. The objective of commercial farming is to make money and gain profit, not to conserve wildlife. Commercial farms do not invest in proper breeding methods to ensure that there will be no inbreeding or cross-breeding, diluting the genetic value of animals kept on farms that would form the basis of future reintroductions of the species back into the wild. Moreover, most captive raised animals lack skills and abilities to survive in nature after they have been raised in captivity.

- **Legal trade compromises enforcement efforts**

The presence of both legally sourced and illegal wildlife products in the market compromises the ability of law enforcement agencies to effectively enforce the law, leading to confusion and uncertainty, and ultimately opportunities for criminals to circumvent the law.

This concern is echoed by Khong Trung, chief of the Quang Tri Forest Protection Department, *“It is impossible for law enforcement agencies to distinguish at the consumer end of the market between wildlife products that originated legally on farms and those that were sourced illegally from the wild.”*

*“Tiger bone medicine and bear bile from wild or captive animals, for example, would be indistinguishable in the market. The only way to really protect these species is ban any form of trade whatsoever and allow us to do our job”.*

- **Stimulate market demand**

By allowing legal trade of formally prohibited wildlife products, consumption of these products is likely to increase. Demand from consumers that previously did not consume the wildlife product would likely increase once the product becomes readily available. The likely increase in demand would accelerate the hunting and poaching of endangered species from the wild to meet rising demand.

Moreover, as is the case with other species where legal trade is allowed, as long as the species retains any value on the market, regardless of whether the price is high or low, it will be hunted in the wild. In some cases, wild sourced animals and products are preferred over captive raised wildlife.

Dr. Le Xuan Canh, director of Vietnam’s Institute for Ecology and Biological Resources, and chief scientist for the Vietnamese Scientific Management Authority under CITES has said, *“Conservation of our unique biodiversity is a critical task during our country’s development. In order to preserve this for our future, we must protect our wildlife, particularly those that we risk losing forever.”*

Dr. Canh added, *“Commercial farming of endangered wildlife can be profitable to some, but threatens our national biodiversity”.*

*“While farming of certain common species may be acceptable based on ecology of the species,”* says Ha of ENV, *“Endangered species fully protected under the law should NEVER be commercially farmed, and any activities associated with commercial trade of these species should be prohibited and aggressively enforced”.*

Ha cited a 2015 study carried out by ENV examining the operation of commercial wildlife farms in Vietnam which showed that commercial farming regulations were being widely abused by licensed farmers, and noted a more recent example of permits being issued to a tiger trader in [Nghe An](#) that allows a man, twice convicted for trading tigers, to keep tigers for “conservation and education” purposes.

Another example in [Tay Ninh](#) and Quang Binh provinces involved farm owners issued permits to “farm” pangolins, a species that neither breeds nor survives well in captivity, and fully protected under the law as an endangered species. Investigations at both farms found that farmers were laundering wild-caught pangolins through their farms and passing them off as captive born.

*“If we are to succeed in protecting our most endangered wildlife, and contributing to global efforts to protect species like tigers and rhinos, we must do so with determination to succeed,”* says Vu Thi Quyen, Executive Director of ENV.

*“Halfway measures will not work,”* says Quyen. *“We must give up the idea of profiting from the sale and consumption of our biodiversity, and remain steadfast in our commitment, without waiver or distraction, by maintaining a 100% ban on any form of commercial farming and trade of the species that we seek to protect. Our future rests in the decisions we make today.”*

## Supplementary Information

### Findings from ENV's "Wildlife Farming in Vietnam" Investigation: Evidence of Widespread Abuse

From October 2014 to July 2015, ENV carried out an investigation at 26 large multi-species wildlife farms across the country. Shocking figures from the [investigation report](#) demonstrated that wildlife farming practices in Vietnam are poorly regulated with widespread abuse of regulations reported at all of the farms that were targeted. ENV further concludes that commercial farming and trade of wildlife is without question impact wild populations of these species and pose a serious risk of accelerating the extinction of these species in Vietnam.

Results of the investigation at 26 large multi-species wildlife farms across the country:

- 100% of farms were involved in some degree of illegal wildlife laundering activity.
- 100% of farms revealed that captive populations are supplemented by a steady flow of animals into the farm.
- 89% of the farms had no planned precautions against inbreeding.
- 91% of the farms revealed that they bought transportation papers from other farms or FPD officials.
- 76% of the farms revealed that FPD officials had received illegal payments from them.
- Some common practice
  - Claiming false births, not recording deaths (replacing animals that died with illegally sourced animals to maintain the same number of captive animals)
  - Buying and selling animals without transportation papers
  - Buying, selling and reusing of transportation papers

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#### **About Education for Nature – Vietnam (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 the need to protect nature and wildlife. We employ creative and innovative strategies to influence public attitudes and mobilize Vietnamese citizens to live in balance with the natural world. We work closely with government partners to strengthen policy and legislation and directly support enforcement efforts in the protection of endangered species of national, regional and global significance.

#### **ENV's strategic approach to tackling the illegal wildlife trade**

ENV focuses its activities on three major program areas that comprise ENV's integrated strategic approach for addressing illegal wildlife trade. These include:

- Reducing consumer demand for wildlife products through investment in a long-term and sustained effort to influence public attitudes and behavior

- Strengthening enforcement through direct support and assistance to law enforcement agencies, and mobilizing active public participation in helping combat wildlife crime
- Working with policy-makers to strengthen legislation, close loopholes in the law, and promote sound policy and decision-making relevant to wildlife protection.