



15 Bears Transferred to Bear Sanctuaries as Owners Come Together to Expedite an End to Bear Bile Farming

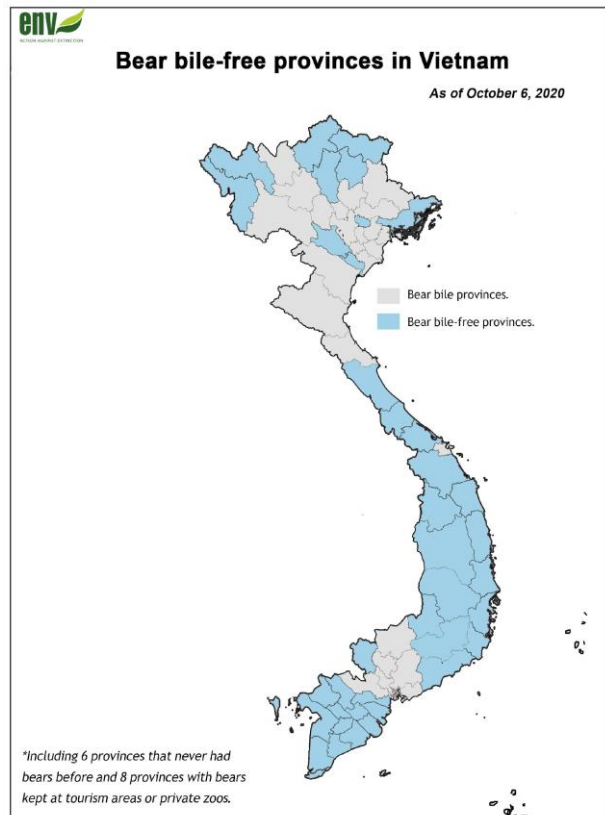
Hanoi, November 13, 2020 – Seven bears from two farms in Binh Duong have been successfully rescued and are now on their way to the Four Paws bear sanctuary in Ninh Binh. Today's transfer is a result of the owners deciding to give their bears a better life outside the confines of a cage, following in the footsteps of many other ex-bear farmers across the country.

In addition to the seven bears transferred today, six bears were transferred in October 2020, and another two were transferred on November 3rd, 2020 in Phu Tho province, totaling 15 bears surrendered to rescue centers since October 1, 2020.

“Over the past few years, we have witnessed many bear owners transferring their bears to sanctuaries,” says Vu Thi Quyen, Executive Director of ENV. “ENV will continue to work hard to encourage other bear owners across the country to do the same until there are no more bears caged at bear bile farms in Vietnam.”

More than 4,300 bears were discovered at bear bile farms across Vietnam in 2005. By November 2020, this number has decreased to less than 400 individuals, and 60% of Vietnam's provinces are now bile bear-free. This progress has been possible thanks to many years of hard work from the government, law enforcement authorities, the public, and a number of NGOs in Vietnam.

“It is very exciting to see the light at the end of the tunnel for bile bears in Vietnam, says Maya Pastakia, Global Campaign Manager of World Animal Protection. “We commend the government of Vietnam for working so hard to end bear bile farming in this country. Great strides have been made to date, with the number of bears on farms having fallen by 90% since 2005. We urge the government to close all legal loopholes to put an end to the cruel and illegal practice of bear bile farming once and for all.”



Ms. Pastakia notes that these 15 bears are amongst the lucky ones that have been given a second chance to live a better life at bear sanctuaries. However, many others are not as fortunate and have died at farms or continue to live there in horrendous and unsanitary conditions.

“This is our biggest bear rescue in 2020,” says Barbara van Genne, Head of Wild Animal Rescue & Advocacy at Four Paws. “Luckily, we work with a very experienced team that is committed to providing quality care and an excellent living environment for bears that narrowly escape spending the rest of their lives on bile farms.”

With its bear sanctuary in Ninh Binh, Four Paws provides an outstanding home for rescued bears comprised of open space, a healthy diet, social interaction with other bears, and quality veterinarian care.



Four Paws Bear Sanctuary in Ninh Binh

The Bear Coalition in Vietnam, comprised of ENV, World Animal Protection, and Four Paws, is calling on the People's Committee leaders in provinces where bile bears remain in captivity, urging them to take strong measures to expedite an end to bear bile farming in their provinces. Authorities in bear bile provinces should encourage local bear owners to turn over their bears and strictly punish those who trade or exploit bears for their bile. Aggressive action and punishment will effectively deter others from doing the same and contribute to the nation's efforts to make Vietnam a bear bile-free country.

The Bear Coalition also calls on all bear owners across Vietnam, especially in Hanoi – the country's biggest hotspot for bear bile farming – to follow in the footsteps of other bear owners who have voluntarily turned over their bears.

"The time has come for remaining bear owners to join the rest of the country in making sure this embarrassing and cruel remnant of the past is completely eliminated from Vietnam's progressing society," says ENV Executive Director, Vu Thi Quyen.

ENDS.

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Important bear facts in Vietnam

In 2005, World Animal Protection partnered with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to secure the country's landmark agreement to phase out bear bile farming and bring an end the bear bile industry in Vietnam.

At the time, around 4,300 bears were being kept on farms. Nearly all of these bears were purchased illegally as cubs in the mid to late 1990s. During that time, bears were still fully protected under the law, however, authorities were lax in enforcing the law, which allowed illegal bears to accumulate on more than 1,300 farms.

In collaboration with the government, World Animal Protection and ENV provided equipment and training for the microchipping of bears in Vietnamese farms. By 2006, all of the 4,300 captive bears in Vietnam were registered and microchipped, with the aim of preventing new bears from ending up on farms. Provincial Forest Protection Departments then initiated an extensive monitoring program to check microchips and ensure no new bears appeared on bear farms. This led to unregistered and/or unchipped bears being confiscated and taken to government rescue centers or one of the sanctuaries operated by Four Paws, Free the Bears, or the Animals Asia Foundation.

In 2005, ENV launched a multifaceted strategic campaign aimed at ending bear farming in Vietnam. To achieve this goal, ENV initiated efforts to: 1) reduce consumer demand for bear bile and products made from bears, 2) strengthen law enforcement's response to bear crime, and 3) work with government partners to strengthen laws and policies that positively impact collective efforts to end bear farming in Vietnam.

Progress

Since 2005, the number of bears on farms has decreased more than 90%, with less than 400 bears remaining on bile farms as of November 13, 2020.

An ENV attitude survey in 2009 showed that 22% of the 3,000 people surveyed had used bear bile in the last two years. When ENV repeated the attitude survey in 2014, the results showed a 61% reduction in bear bile use over the previous 5 years.

In the first three quarters of 2020, ENV's Wildlife Crime Unit documented 246 bear crime cases. Many of these cases had multiple violations, totaling 483 bear violations, most involving the advertisement and selling of bear parts or products on the internet. Thus far in 2020, ENV's success rate on bear crime stands at 72.8%.

Since 2005, ENV has worked with authorities to facilitate the transfer of bears to sanctuaries and rescue centers, including both illegal unregistered bears confiscated by police, as well as voluntary transfers by owners.

The law

Under Decree 64 and 06, it is a criminal offense to sell, transport, trade, keep, or possess bears or their parts and derivatives, including bile. It is also illegal to advertise bears or their products or parts. Punishment for crimes involving bears can result in up to 15 years in prison.

Long term care for bears

In 2019, Four Paws opened Bear Sanctuary Ninh Binh, providing additional space for bears that are rescued from bear farms. The Animals Asia Foundation also runs a sanctuary at Tam Dao National Park, and Free the Bears operates a southern sanctuary at Cat Tien National Park. Additional rescue centers that receive bears are located in Hanoi and elsewhere around the country.