



ENVIRONMENTAL
INVESTIGATION
AGENCY

RUNNING OUT OF TIME:

Wildlife Crime Justice Failures
in Vietnam



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ABOUT EIA

We investigate and campaign against environmental crime and abuse.

Our undercover investigations expose transnational wildlife crime, with a focus on elephants, pangolins and tigers, and forest crimes such as illegal logging and deforestation for cash crops like palm oil. We work to safeguard global marine ecosystems by addressing the threats posed by plastic pollution, bycatch and commercial exploitation of whales, dolphins and porpoises. Finally, we reduce the impact of climate change by campaigning to eliminate powerful refrigerant greenhouse gases, exposing related illicit trade and improving energy efficiency in the cooling sector.

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Executive Summary

Despite the rapid proliferation of organised Vietnamese wildlife trafficking networks driving illegal wildlife trade globally, the response from the Government of Vietnam has been inadequate and disproportionate to the scale of wildlife trafficking implicating Vietnamese criminal groups. With wildlife around the world under continuing pressure to sustain illegal markets in Asia, meaningful action by Vietnam cannot come soon enough.

Based on publicly available seizure data, Vietnam is implicated in over 600 seizures linked to illegal trade. This includes a **minimum** of 105.72 tonnes of ivory, equivalent to more than 15,779 dead elephants; 1.69 tonnes of horn estimated to be sourced from up to 610 rhinos; skins, bones and other products sourced from a minimum of 228 tigers; and the bodies and scales of 65,510 pangolins.

Seizures alone have had little deterrent effect on wildlife trafficking in Vietnam, with large-scale consignments of ivory and pangolin scales from Nigeria and other countries continuing to enter the country and vast quantities of tiger products available for sale. As well as being a destination market for Vietnamese nationals purchasing and consuming products such as ivory trinkets, powdered rhino horn, tiger bone 'glue' and pangolin meat, Vietnam also serves as an important transit hub for illegal wildlife trade into China.

Despite the fact that Vietnam has the basic legislation and institutional framework to combat wildlife crime, multiple independent sources have exposed its prominent role in wildlife trafficking.

While the Government of Vietnam has made some progress, including amending the Penal Code to increase penalties for organised wildlife trafficking, concerns remain about the adequate implementation of these measures. Recent EIA investigations in Africa and Asia exposed Vietnamese organised criminal networks involved in the trafficking of multiple species

such as ivory, rhino horn and pangolin but none of the individuals or companies identified have yet been prosecuted, including repeat offenders who continue to operate in Vietnam.

EIA urges the Government to consider urgent implementation of the recommendations listed on page 14 of this report.

The time for action is now and world governments should consider the implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) trade suspensions against Vietnam until demonstrable progress has been made to address its significant role in the illegal trade in species protected under CITES.

Seizures alone have had little deterrent effect on wildlife trafficking in Vietnam.

Tiger skin offered for sale by a Vietnamese trader on WeChat. Tens of thousands of social media accounts blatantly advertise wildlife for sale.



©EIA image



The World's Leading Destination for Illegal Ivory

Fuelling the decline of African elephants

Supplying the illegal ivory trade is the main reason for the worst elephant population declines in Africa in 25 years¹ – and the continent has become a playing field for organised Vietnamese criminal networks engaged in this trade. The failure of the Vietnamese Government to tackle and disrupt these syndicates is a key factor in the ongoing elephant poaching crisis. For example, Mozambique – a country exploited by Vietnamese syndicates to source, consolidate and traffic ivory – has witnessed a decline of 53 per cent of its elephant population in five years;² in 2017 alone, at least 124 elephants were poached in Niassa Game Reserve, in northern Mozambique.³

Vietnam has also been implicated in the largest quantities of illegal ivory traded globally.⁴ EIA analysis of ivory seizure data indicates that since 2004, Vietnam has been involved in the illegal trade of over 105 tonnes of ivory, the equivalent of more than 15,279 dead elephants;⁵ this includes over 74 tonnes of ivory seized in Vietnam and approximately 31.5 tonnes of ivory seized abroad but linked to Vietnam.

On 28 March 2019, Vietnam seized over nine tonnes of ivory. This is the largest single ivory seizure on record⁶ and also surpasses the annual amount of ivory seized in Vietnam over the past nine years (2009-17) which ranges between three and nine tonnes per annum.⁷ Further, the role of Vietnamese nationals in trafficking ivory around the world is well documented – since 2011, more than 21 tonnes of ivory have been seized from Vietnamese nationals travelling outside of Vietnam, including in South Africa, Angola, France and Hong Kong. Since ivory seizures represent a fraction of the actual levels of illegal trade, there is little doubt that the situation is



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39 large-scale ivory seizures (500kg or more) totalling 66 tonnes have taken place in Vietnam. Vietnam has failed to conduct forensic analysis for the majority of its large-scale ivory seizures. Further, there have been no convictions of those implicated in any of the large-scale seizures made by Vietnam Customs at ports of entry.

far worse, with much higher quantities of illegal ivory being successfully trafficked into Vietnam, which also serves as a key a transit hub for ivory entering neighbouring countries such as China.⁸

Role of organised Vietnamese criminal networks

Investigations and research conducted by EIA between 2016-18 have documented a number of Vietnamese syndicates involved in trafficking ivory, rhino horn and pangolins from Africa to Vietnam, driving the poaching of Africa's wildlife.⁹ With operations in multiple countries including Angola, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cambodia, Malaysia, Laos and, of course, Vietnam, the syndicates documented by EIA are linked to the trafficking of more than 25 tonnes of ivory, estimated to be sourced from 3,385 elephants; of this, only 6.3 tonnes of ivory have been seized, with the remaining 19 tonnes successfully trafficked into Vietnam.

As yet, no notable enforcement action has been taken in Vietnam against the criminal networks identified by EIA; instead, the response of the Government has been to reject and deny EIA's incontrovertible findings, along with information from other sources.¹⁰

Ivory processing

Vietnam is a major manufacturing hub for wildlife products, including ivory. Vietnamese 'carving villages' play a key role in the illegal ivory trade, where machine processing enables the mass production of worked ivory to produce jewellery, carvings and utilitarian items.¹¹ Historically, ivory carving was an insignificant art form in Vietnam; however, since 2008 Vietnamese carvers have multiplied in number and have rapidly increased their production of illegal ivory items.¹²

Sales of illegal ivory

A 2016 study concluded that: "*Vietnam has one of the largest numbers of newly worked illegal ivory items openly offered for retail sale in the world.*"¹³ Demand for raw and worked ivory in Vietnam exists among both Vietnamese consumers as well as visiting Chinese buyers particularly in Chinese tourist hot spots such as Ha Long, Mong Cai, Ban Don, and Lak.¹⁴

Ivory continues to be traded openly in several outlets throughout Vietnam and there are clear links between physical stores and online platforms, with many physical stores providing information on how ivory can be purchased online.¹⁵ Outside Vietnam, Vietnamese nationals play a prominent role as both traders/shop owners and consumers in ivory markets in neighbouring countries such as Laos,¹⁶ Myanmar¹⁷ and Cambodia;¹⁸ Vietnamese nationals are also known to purchase ivory in markets in Africa.¹⁹ Ivory is one of the most frequently encountered wildlife products available for sale online in Vietnam, yet little is done to prevent trade.²⁰ Numerous Vietnamese sellers are also active on Chinese social media platforms, trading wildlife products illegally.²¹ Loopholes in existing legislation further facilitates illegal online trade. Under Vietnamese law, illegal advertisements for sale of ivory through online channels are regarded as administrative violations, subject to fines of up to 100 million VND (approximately \$4,300); a criminal prosecution only takes place when a suspect is caught in possession of ivory.²² Further, the new Penal Code is triggered only if it involves a minimum of 2kg ivory; thereby creating a loophole for trade in small worked pieces.

Corruption in Vietnam: A major facilitator of wildlife trafficking

The most recent Corruption Perceptions Index published by Transparency International has found that corruption is worsening in Vietnam.²³

A 2016 report published by the World Economic Forum and the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation found that the Vietnamese customs administration is one of the most corrupt public sectors in the country.²⁴ There is also very little judicial independence and corruption remains a serious problem in the Vietnamese court system.²⁵

EIA investigations provide ample evidence of deep-rooted corruption at all levels of the trade chain, enabling illegal wildlife trade in Vietnam. Wildlife traffickers routinely pay bribes to facilitate wildlife trafficking through major entry points into Vietnam, including Hanoi's Noi Bai International Airport, Hai Phong sea port, Da Nang (Tien Sa) sea port and the Nam Phao-Câu Treo land border crossing between Laos and Vietnam.

The Government of Vietnam evidently does not consider corruption to be a problem for illegal wildlife trade: while Vietnam's previous iteration of its CITES National Ivory Action Plan (NIAP) committed to tackling corruption associated with ivory trafficking, its new revised plan has dropped corruption as a concern and fails to mention it at all.²⁶

Nguyen Tien Son (also known as Son Hoa) is a prolific Vietnamese wildlife trafficker documented by EIA, who claims to arrange "clearance" through corrupt channels for successfully trafficking ivory and other wildlife into Vietnam through Malaysia and Laos



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Fuelling Rhino Poaching

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More than 9,200 rhinos have been killed across Africa since 2006 to meet consumer demand for their horns. South Africa, home to three-quarters of Africa's rhinos, has been the hardest hit, accounting for an estimated 88 percent of rhinos poached during that time. As a result of this poaching pressure, the continental white rhino population has declined from an estimated 21,320 in 2012 to 18,067 today.²⁷

Vietnam's role as a consumer and transit nation

The rise of Vietnam as a rhino horn consumer country in the late 2000s coincided with the increase in rhino poaching in Africa. At that time, Vietnam was experiencing significant economic growth, increasing the purchasing power of Vietnamese consumers. Rhino horn became associated with this newfound affluence, functioning as a status symbol and used for its perceived detoxifying properties to alleviate hangovers. Rumours that rhino horn could cure cancer further increased demand and produced additional, distinct groups of rhino horn consumers in Vietnam.

Vietnamese nationals also travelled to South Africa to engage in pseudo-hunts to obtain rhino hunting trophies in order to illegally sell the horns in Vietnam.²⁸

Based on publicly available information, an EIA analysis found that between April 2006 and April 2019, a total of 646 rhino horn seizures have taken place globally involving approximately 6,350kg of rhino horn, equivalent to an estimated 2,284 individual horns. Vietnam and China together can be linked to more than 56 per cent of all seizures by

weight. Approximately 27 per cent of global seizures by weight (1,697.2kg) have been linked to Vietnam, while China accounts for 29.7 per cent (1,886.4kg).

Vietnamese nationals comprise 40 per cent of individuals from Asian countries arrested in connection to rhino horn trafficking over the past decade.²⁹

In addition to its role as a consumer country, Vietnam also serves as a major transit point for rhino horn destined for China.³⁰ Small villages within an hour's drive of Hanoi, such as Nhi Khe, have become infamous for producing carved rhino horn products such as beads, bracelets, pendants and libation cups coveted by Chinese consumers. Significant volumes of rhino horn are moved through these villages. For instance, over the course of a year's worth of field work during 2015-16, Wildlife Justice Commission investigators observed an estimated 1,061kg of rhino horn in trade and at one point were presented with a single consignment of 76 whole horns.³¹

Rhino horn was openly on display in Nhi Khe as recently as 2015.³² Today, dealers have retreated behind closed doors and spread out among other villages such as Dong Ky.³³ Chinese tourists still purchase rhino horn products directly from vendors in Vietnam, although dealers increasingly rely on online platforms such as WeChat and Alipay to market and sell rhino horn to international buyers.³⁴

Shipping companies, courier services, and even locals living near the Vietnam-China border are used to smuggle rhino horn into China.³⁵

EIA exposé of Vietnamese wildlife trafficking syndicate

A two-year undercover EIA investigation into a complex network of Vietnamese wildlife trafficking syndicates operating in Southern Africa and South-East Asia connected the traffickers to an estimated 299kg of rhino horn seizures since 2015, including the record-breaking seizure of 50 rhino horns intercepted in Malaysia in August 2018.³³

One of these syndicate kingpins, Phan Chi, told EIA investigators that he is able to supply 100-150kg of rhino horn per month from Mozambique (the horn likely originating from South Africa) to Vietnam and that, at the time, he had 100kg of rhino horn in Vietnam ready to be sold. Chi further bragged he could deliver the horn to Vietnam from Mozambique via commercial airline flights in 48 hours.

Rhino horn seizures are often treated as standalone successes instead of the start of an investigation to uncover and prosecute those responsible and there have been few convictions for major rhino horn trafficking cases.³⁷ Corrupt customs officials accept bribes to ensure rhino horn safely passes across the Vietnam-China border and have been arrested for pilfering stolen rhino horn from Government stockpiles.³⁸

Despite the rampant cross-border trade, in 2017, Vietnam reported that it had not conducted any joint investigations with China.³⁹

Certain elements within the Government have refused to acknowledge Vietnam's fundamental role in the illegal rhino horn trade. In 2017, despite all evidence to the contrary,⁴⁰ representatives from the Environmental Police Department strongly expressed their view to a CITES Secretariat delegation that Vietnam was not a rhino horn consumer country. Moreover, anti-wildlife trafficking laws are not always enforced by provincial authorities, which complain that a lack of support and resources from central government prevents them from conducting investigations into organised crime.⁴¹

Implementation required

After two years of delay, Vietnam's revised Penal Code came into force in January 2018. Under the new Code, rhino horn trade is punishable by up to 15 years in prison or a fine of up to 2,000,000,000 VND (\$86,000). However, these new restrictions do not apply to trade in rhino horn that weighs less than 50g.⁴² This loophole is especially problematic given the popularity of powdered horn among Vietnamese consumers and the small size of the rhino horn trinkets highly sought-after by Chinese buyers.⁴³

Vietnam submitted a report to the 71st meeting of the CITES Standing Committee on the implementation of the revised Penal Code yet provided no details on the outcomes of the illegal wildlife trade cases highlighted nor any information on associated penalties that may have been imposed.

Moreover, the report fails to identify the wildlife products or species involved for the vast majority of cases and it is unclear whether the cases mentioned amounted to anything more than isolated seizures or busts, underscoring that much work remains to be done to dismantle the organised wildlife crime networks operating in the country.⁴⁴

Courtesy of Julian Rademeyer/killingforprofit.com



Vietnamese pseudo hunter in South Africa – fake hunters were used to exploit legal trophy hunting in the country to obtain and then illegally sell rhino horns in Vietnam.

Lack of political will

Vietnam has failed to implement CITES recommendations to “adopt **and implement** comprehensive legislation and enforcement measures” to reduce illegal trade in rhino parts and derivatives (emphasis added).³⁶

The Vietnamese Government has failed to take meaningful action to investigate, disrupt and prosecute the syndicates trafficking rhino horn.



Crossroads of Illegal Tiger Trade

After years of relentless poaching pressure, Vietnam's wild tiger population is now functionally extinct. Despite this, Vietnam remains a key source of parts and products of captive-bred tigers, a transit route for tiger products heading to China and a major consumer of tiger products.

Vietnamese nationals are involved in every step of the tiger trade chain, in Vietnam and around the world, yet the Government's response to date has been woefully inadequate.

Since 2005, Vietnam has been involved in 198 seizures (161 in Vietnam, and 37 outside Vietnam including in China, Russia, Czech Republic and South Africa) of at least 228 tigers plus tiger bones, teeth, claws, meat etc. A majority of the tigers in trade in Vietnam is suspected to derive from captive sources.

The significant role of Vietnam in the illegal captive tiger trade flies against CITES Decision 14.69, adopted in 2007, which calls for the phasing out of tiger farms and ensuring that tigers are not bred for trade.

Seizures alone do not reflect the true scale of the Asian big cat trade and vast quantities of tiger parts and products continue to be offered for sale in Vietnam. For example, in 2015-16, the Wildlife Justice Commission documented the parts and products of between 158-225 tigers traded in Vietnam.⁴⁵

Poaching of South-East Asia's last wild tigers

Vietnamese nationals have been implicated in the poaching of wild tigers in Malaysia since at least 2010.⁴⁶ In July 2018, close to Taman Negara National Park, six Vietnamese nationals were arrested in possession of the parts of three tigers, a clouded leopard skin, a host of other wildlife products and several snare traps.⁴⁷

In the face of this onslaught, Malaysia's wild tiger population has fallen from an estimated 500 in 2010 to less than 200 today, while Myanmar has confirmed it has only 22 wild tigers.

Similarly, in October 2018 in Tak, Thailand, a tiger carcass destined for Vietnam was seized from two Vietnamese nationals; investigations found they had employed poachers to source wild tigers in Thailand. The two are suspected to be members of a Vietnamese crime syndicate who have previously travelled to Thailand and Malaysia on several tiger-sourcing trips.⁴⁸

Source of illegal captive tiger trade

At least 199 tigers are kept in at least 17 known captive facilities in Vietnam, five of which have been identified by the CITES Secretariat as "of concern" for illegal tiger trade.⁴⁹ In 2015, Cu Chi Water Park zoo offered to sell a tiger cub to police and NGO investigators⁵⁰ and in 2017 staff at the zoo stated that they produced wine from tiger cubs which had died there. In 2011, 15 people connected to a facility with five tigers in Binh Duong were convicted relating to tiger trade.⁵¹

Nghe An province is a known hub for illegal trade in captive-bred tigers and an unknown number of tigers are reportedly held in small-scale backyard operations,⁵² although traders claim there are hundreds of tigers kept across the province. Nghe An traders play an important role in supplying tiger parts and products to Vietnamese and Chinese buyers in Vietnam.

The tiger trade in Vietnam is exacerbated by the Government's weak approach to managing tiger facilities. For example, in 2016 the owner of Hon Nhan Ecological Conservation Centre, in Nghe An, was given a licence to keep tigers "for conservation purposes"⁵³ and was allowed to import nine tigers from the Czech Republic, despite the fact that the owner's husband was a twice-convicted tiger trafficker suspected of laundering tigers through the facility.

Transnational illegal tiger trade

A tiger farm in Laos has reportedly exported large amounts of tiger products to Vietnam,⁵⁴ including tigers trafficked from farms in Thailand.



A recently established tiger farm in Laksao, Laos, close to the Vietnamese border is reported to be owned by a Vietnamese national known for smuggling wildlife.⁵⁵

Voi Game Lodge, in South Africa, is owned by a company set up by Vietnamese national Chu Dang Khoa and is reportedly engaged in the canned hunting of tigers and the export of tiger bones as lion bones.⁵⁶

Between 2013-16, eight seizures of tiger parts and products took place in the Czech Republic, largely destined for Vietnam.⁵⁷ Subsequent investigations culminated in the seizure of five tiger skins, a recently killed tiger carcass and equipment for processing tiger bones into tiger bone 'glue' at a Czech tiger- and lion-breeding facility in 2018 which was supplying tigers for Vietnamese consumers in Vietnam and the Czech Republic.⁵⁸

Online tiger trade

Huge quantities of tiger parts and products are offered for sale by Vietnamese traders online, with many traders uploading multiple images of illegal wildlife products every day. In just six months in 2018, Education for Nature Vietnam logged 164 cases of advertising and selling tiger parts and products online.

Vietnamese consumers driving big cat trade

Vietnam is a major consumer of tiger parts and products, second only to China. Tiger bone 'glue' – a resin-like substance produced by boiling tiger bones and mixed with wine – is in particular demand in Vietnam.⁵⁹

Demand for tiger is also exacerbating trade in other big cats. For example, in May 2016 a Vietnamese trader was arrested in possession of what he believed were 680 tiger claws: testing revealed them to be lion.⁶⁰

Vietnam as a conduit into China

Since 2012, tiger parts and products have been seized in at least 10 separate incidents in China's Guangxi region, which borders Vietnam, with Vietnam specifically reported as the source in at least five of these cases. Tiger products seized in at least two incidents in Yunnan province had also reportedly entered China from Vietnam. Seven tiger skeletons seized in northern China in 2014 were smuggled into the country from Vietnam.⁶¹

EIA investigations in 2018 documented a Vietnamese trader who claimed he had sold 20 tiger skeletons to China in four months and that most tigers in Nghe An were sold to China. As recently as April 2019, a tiger skin and bones were seized at the border from a trader attempting to carry them into China from Quang Ninh Province.⁶²

Poor conviction rates and lenient sentencing

Convictions for illegal tiger trade rarely result in deterrent sentences in Vietnam. Between 2010-17, 44 cases of illegal tiger trade resulted in the prosecution of 30 offenders. However, only seven were jailed while others received suspended sentences or probation. For example, in 2018, Nguyen Mau Chien, a prolific wildlife trafficker implicated in illegal trade in tiger, ivory, rhino horn and pangolins, was sentenced to just 13 months imprisonment, and a further 3 months on appeal.⁶³



A Major Transit Hub for Trafficking Pangolin into China

Shift in trafficking of pangolins from Africa to Asia

Over recent decades, pangolin populations across Asia have been decimated by a wave of hunting and poaching to supply meat and scales to domestic and international markets in East and South-East Asia. The four Asian pangolin species are now classified as either Critically Endangered or Endangered on the IUCN Red List.

In Vietnam, where there are populations of Sunda (*Manis javanica*) and Chinese (*Manis pentadactyla*) pangolin, decades of illegal trade have led to dramatic declines in wild pangolin numbers.⁶⁴

With the decline of Asian pangolin populations, wildlife traffickers have shifted their attention to Africa, where there are also four pangolin species. There are age-old traditions of pangolin product use in some African societies and the domestic trade in pangolins, particularly in west and central African countries, has existed for some time.

However, since 2009 there has been a massive surge in the number of large-scale pangolin scale seizures involving shipments to Asia from African countries. Concern over the dramatically escalating scale of this trade led to the transfer of all eight pangolin species from CITES Appendix II to Appendix I in 2016, thereby establishing a ban on international commercial trade.

Demand for pangolin products

The high levels of pangolin trade across East and South-East Asia are being driven by demand for their meat, products containing pangolin scale and, increasingly, their body parts for jewellery. In Vietnam, while the consumption of pangolin

meat is illegal it is associated with affluence and consumed as a delicacy. Elites from business and government are known to consume pangolin meat and other products to convey status and impress associates.⁶⁵ In addition, pangolin fetuses and blood are used for medicinal purposes such as 'healing', to increase virility and as an aphrodisiac.⁶⁶ Such behaviours normalise the practice of pangolin consumption in Vietnam and feed a climate of impunity in which organised pangolin traffickers are not adequately investigated and held accountable for their crimes.

Vietnam is a top pangolin trafficking destination and hub

While the demand for pangolin meat and scales is a growing problem in Vietnam, the majority of traded pangolins are being smuggled to China.⁶⁷

Vietnam is a major transit point for pangolin trafficking into China. Between 2003-19, 5,853 whole pangolins and 35.15 tonnes of pangolin scales have been seized in Vietnam. These seizures represent approximately 22,019 individual pangolins in trade. Further, approximately 3,190 whole pangolins and approximately 30.58 tonnes of pangolin scales have been seized abroad but linked to Vietnam; these seizures are equivalent to 43,471 individual pangolins in trade.⁶⁸ Thus, in total, Vietnam is involved in the illegal trade of approximately 65,510 pangolins.

Seizures in Vietnam have been linked to a string of African and Asian source and transit countries, including Nigeria and Cameroon, two countries experiencing escalating transnational wildlife trafficking. Others have included the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Laos, Indonesia and

Malaysia. One case from 2008 is particularly indicative of Vietnam's role in the trade, when two large shipments of pangolin were seized over a one-week period. These involved a total of 21 tonnes of whole pangolins and 900kg scales seized in Hai Phong; they were found in the cargo of a Vietnamese company transiting from Indonesia to China and misdeclared as fish.

Vietnamese syndicates involved in pangolin trafficking from Africa to Asia

Despite global efforts through CITES to stop the global trade in pangolins, transnational organised crime groups are flouting domestic laws to traffic pangolins.

In Vietnam, both native and non-native pangolins are afforded legal protection⁶⁹ and in 2018 the country passed an amended criminal code which included strong penalties for wildlife trafficking, especially when conducted in large volumes and by criminal syndicates.



©EIAImage

Globally, there has been a massive increase in pangolin scale seizures to meet the demand in China.

This has done little to deter Vietnamese nationals from becoming increasingly engaged in the organised trafficking of pangolin scales outside their country, in Angola, Côte d'Ivoire and Uganda. In 2018, EIA exposed the involvement of Vietnamese national Nguyen Tien Son in the sourcing and export of pangolin scales from Africa. He was found to be connected to other prolific wildlife traffickers and had conducted a trial export of contraband from Nigeria and clearance of 20 tonnes of pangolin scales from Malaysia in October 2017.

Vietnamese syndicates linked to a convergence between ivory and pangolin trafficking

There is substantial convergence between ivory and pangolin trafficking from Africa, with organised Vietnamese syndicates involved in illegal trade in both species.

Between 2004-19, there have been at least 17 seizures involving both ivory and pangolins related to Vietnam (nine seizures in Vietnam and eight seizures linked to the country).⁷⁰

A recent case involving Vietnamese traffickers operating in Uganda demonstrates the continued trafficking of pangolin scales and ivory from African countries to Vietnam; in February 2019, the Ugandan authorities announced that they were seeking 18 Vietnamese suspects for trafficking ivory and pangolin scales in containers en route from South Sudan to Vietnam. The wildlife contraband was concealed in wax, moulded inside hollowed timber logs.⁷¹

There are several other recent examples of a convergence between ivory and pangolin trafficking from Africa which demonstrate a link with Vietnamese syndicates. These include a seizure in August 2018 in Angola where authorities seized 535kg of raw ivory, 263kg of worked ivory and 895kg of pangolin scales from two ivory processing workshops in the São Paulo area of Luanda, in which five Vietnamese nationals were arrested.⁷² In January 2018, authorities seized around 600kg of ivory and 600kg of pangolin scales in Côte d'Ivoire. Six suspects were arrested during the operation, two of them Vietnamese and one Chinese. One Vietnamese national was thought to be the leader of the syndicate.⁷³



Whole pangolin preserved in alcohol in Vietnam to brew "wine".

©Photo Nitay

Wildlife trafficking routes to and from Vietnam

KEY:

- Road border crossings
- Sea ports
- International airports

BURMA

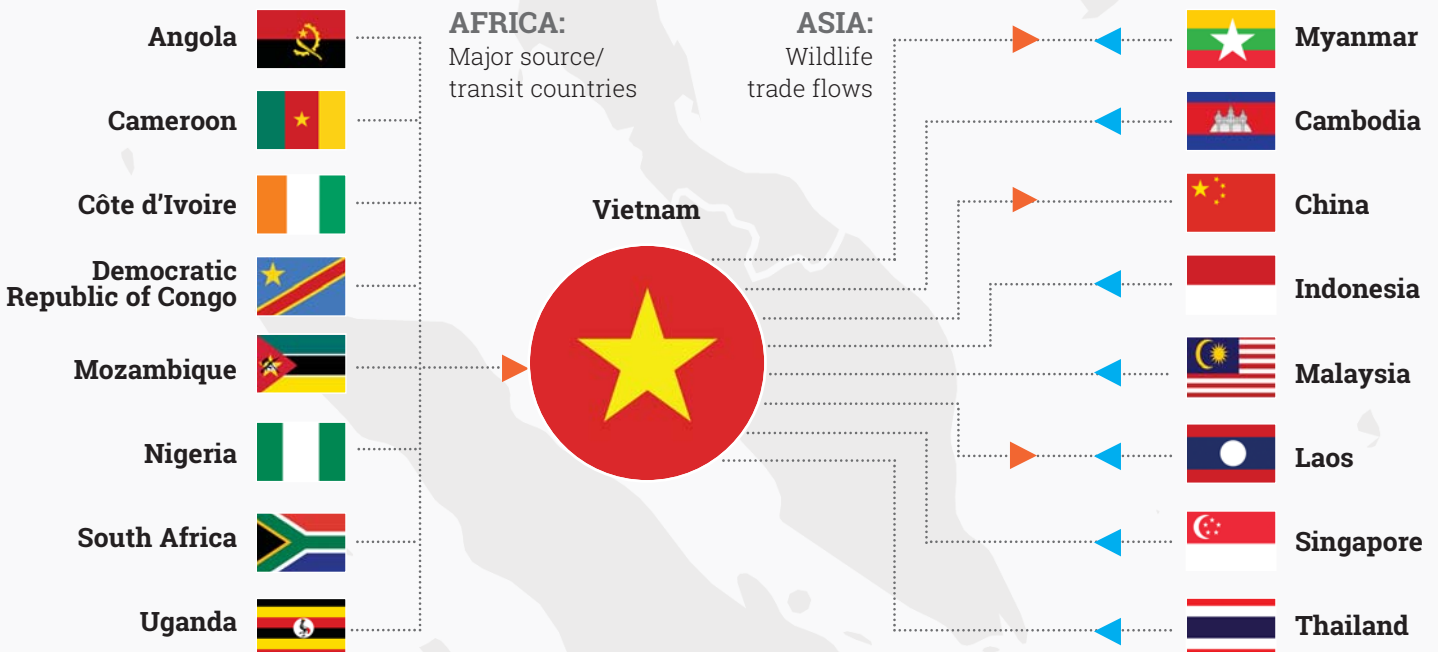
VIETNAM

LAOS

THAILAND

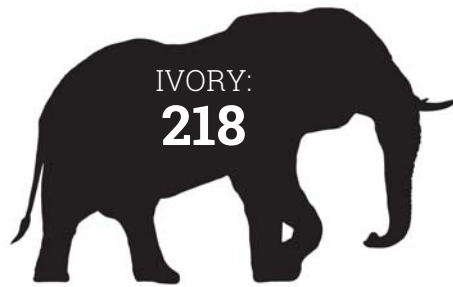
CAMBODIA

Tan Son Nhat Airport, Ho Chi Minh City



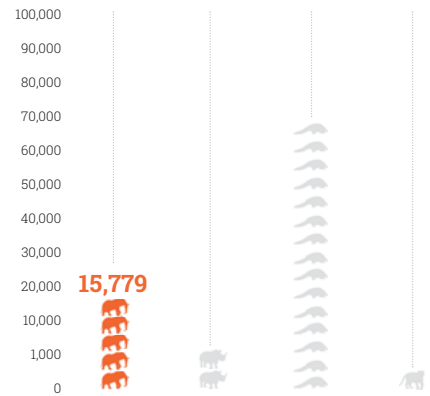
Wildlife seizures in and linked to Vietnam

Number of Seizures and Amount Seized:

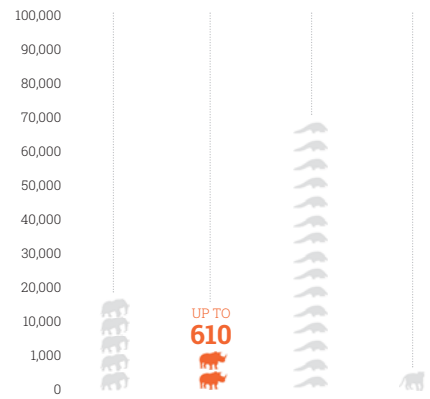


105.72 tonnes

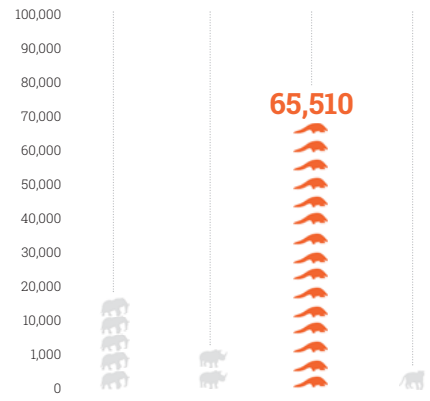
Estimated number of individual animals represented by seizures:



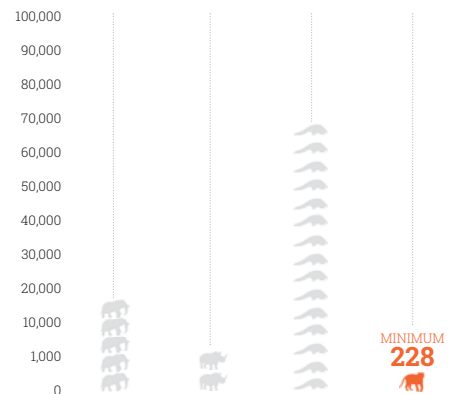
1.69 tonnes



9,043 whole pangolins + 65.73 tonnes of pangolin scales



228 tigers plus bones, teeth, claws, meat etc.



Sources: EIA wildlife crime database - time period covered 2004-April 2019 (ivory); 2003-April 2019 (pangolins); rhinos (2006-April 2019). For tigers: Education for Nature - Vietnam (ENV), EIA wildlife crime database - time period covered: 2005-April 2019.

Conclusion and Recommendations

EIA urges the Government of Vietnam to prioritise implementation of the following recommendations to address wildlife trafficking and calls for CITES trade suspensions against Vietnam until such time as sufficient progress is proven.

GENERAL

- Implement the recommendations outlined in the implementation of the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) Wildlife and Forest Crime Analytic Toolkit.

ENFORCEMENT

- Conduct follow-up investigations on major wildlife seizures to disrupt the criminal networks involved. This should include:
 - investigating the companies and individuals listed on shipping documentation
 - investigating associated financial flows
 - strengthening inter-agency co-operation with relevant national authorities
 - conducting forensic analysis on all 39 large-scale ivory seizures that have taken place in Vietnam to identify the origin of seized ivory in accordance with CITES Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev. CoP17) on Trade in elephant specimens
 - sharing images of 108 tiger skins and carcasses seized in Vietnam to identify the origin of the seized tigers in accordance with CITES Resolution Conf. 12.5 (Rev. CoP17) on Conservation of and trade in tigers and other Appendix-I Asian big cat species
 - cross-referencing DNA samples from seized tiger specimens against profiles of captive tiger databases (where available) in Vietnam, Thailand and Laos
 - conducting forensic analysis on all rhino horn seizures to identify the origin of seized rhino in accordance with CITES Resolution Conf. 9.14 (Rev. CoP17) on Conservation of and trade in African and Asian rhinoceroses, which should include sharing samples with South African authorities
 - conducting an independent inventory and audit of seized wildlife stockpiles.
- Improve methods of detection and implement anti-corruption measures at key entry and exit points along known wildlife trafficking routes identified on Page 12.
- Use financial investigations and other specialised investigation techniques to prosecute offences associated with wildlife crime such as fraud, corruption, bribery and tax evasion.
- Identify, freeze, seize, confiscate and repatriate assets and proceeds to eradicate the profit motive which is fuelling wildlife trafficking.

- Use existing mechanisms such as the UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime, UN Convention Against Corruption and bilateral agreements with countries such as Mozambique and South Africa to strengthen international cooperation, including extradition, evidence-sharing and the use of controlled deliveries. Key countries to target in this regard are identified on Page 12. In particular, it is critical to strengthen enforcement with China to stop the purchase and consumption of illegal wildlife products by Chinese consumers in Vietnam and neighbouring countries.
- Increase awareness among the judiciary about the nature of wildlife crime and deterrent penalties now available under the revised Penal Code for wildlife trafficking.
- Establish a special law enforcement unit to investigate illegal wildlife trade online.
- Urgently submit the CITES annual illegal trade report for 2017 which was due last year and, going forward, routinely submit and make publicly available accurate and comprehensive illegal trade reports.

LEGISLATION AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

- Recognise wildlife trafficking as a high-risk area for money laundering in Vietnam's national risk assessment in compliance with Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Recommendations.
- Close loopholes in the Penal Code which currently allows legal trade in rhino horn and ivory weighing less than 50gm and 2kg respectively.
- Amend Vietnam's CITES National Ivory and Rhino Action Plan (NIRAP) to include the recommendations listed above.
- Adopt and implement appropriate policy to immediately halt the breeding of tigers and phase out tiger farms in accordance with CITES Decision 14.69. Building on the success of phasing out bear farming, Vietnam should expedite measures to close its captive tiger facilities.

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