

To: James Compton, Traffic Vietnam
Subject: Trade Action Report, Ninh Binh Seizure
Date: July 23, 1999

On July 22, 1999, Forest Protection officers from the Ninh Binh Forest Protection Department received information about a truck, registered in Hanoi, heading from Binh Dinh Province in Central Vietnam to Hanoi with a cargo of wildlife. The rangers waited on Highway One in Ninh Binh for nearly 24 hours before the truck arrived, at which time it was seized, along with its wildlife cargo.

The contents of the truck included several large rice sacks of monitor lizards (*Varanus* sp.) and 218 kg of turtles (representing 12 species).

Amongst the species included in the shipment were:

Species	Quantity	Note
<i>Cuora galbinifrons</i>	~ 150 (est.)	Three full rice bags (87 kg). This is the largest number of <i>C. galbinifrons</i> that we have observed in a single trade seizure.
<i>Cyclemys tcheponensis</i>	28	May include <i>atripons</i> and <i>pulchristnata</i>
<i>Manouria impressa</i>	41	Included many large individuals.
<i>Platysternon megacephalum</i>	21	(7.9 kg)
<i>Indotestudo elongata</i>	12	Usually comprises the bulk of turtle trade shipments along with <i>P. mouhotii</i> and <i>C. tcheponensis</i> . Unusually few.
<i>Ocadia sinensis</i>	9	Never seen this species on the Highway 1 trade circuit before. Usually pet market only. Also, several very large (>30 cm) specimens were present.
<i>Pyxidea mouhotii</i>	4	Very few <i>P. mouhotii</i> . Unusual for a trade seizure.
<i>Sacalia quadriocellata</i>	2	Never before seen <i>S. quadriocellata</i> on the Highway 1 trade circuit. Usually pet market only.
<i>Malayemys subtrijuga</i>	2	Two very small individuals. This species tends to be in seizures consisting only of <i>Malayemys</i> .
<i>Geoemyda spengleri</i>	2	Never before seen this species on the Highway 1 trade circuit. Usually pet market only.
<i>Cuora amboinensis</i>	1	Fairly uncommon in the trade
<i>Hieremys annandalii</i>	1	Fairly uncommon in the trade.

Protection Status

Both *Indotestudo elongata* and *Manouria impressa* are protected under CITES Appendix II. The large number of *Manouria* in this shipment, including at least eight adults with carapace lengths greater than 30 cm, was unusual compared with previous trade shipments observed. This species, which requires specialized habitat and diet requirements, is difficult to keep alive in captivity.

Indotestudo elongata is also listed on CITES Appendix II.

Hieremys annandalii, *Cuora galbinifrons*, *Cuora amboinensis*, and *Platysternon megacephalum* are listed in the Vietnamese Red Book of rare and endangered species.

Cuora galbinifrons, *Manouria impressa*, *Indotestudo elongata*, *Sacalia quadriocellata*, and *Hieremys annandalii* are also listed as vulnerable (VU) in the IUCN Red Data Book (1996).

The Highway 1 Trade Circuit vs. Pet Markets

Inspection of turtles seized in Ninh Binh and Hanoi over the past three years has enabled us to develop a pretty good idea of which species are most commonly found in the trade. Although there are other major wildlife trade routes (sea and air), the network along Highway 1 is the principal land route in Vietnam, and allows for traders to stop at “trade stations” to pick up additional cargo as they head north. Season and regional availability are likely to play an important role in determining the composition and numbers.

Although there are some species found both in the pet market (i.e. Dong Xoan) and trade seizures, certain species are distinctly found almost always only in the pet trade. These include *Sacalia quadriocellata*, *Ocadia sinensis*, and *Geoemyda spengleri*. The July 23, 1999 seizure was different than most other seizures based on the presence of these three “pet trade” turtle species, though there were only two *Sacalia* and two *Geoemyda*. The size and number of *Ocadia sinensis* was also unusual in that the nine individuals were large adults with carapaces of 25 cm or more. Prior to this date, we have not observed this size class of *Ocadia* in either the pet trade or cross-border wildlife trade networks.

The trade circuit also tends to differentiate from the pet market by size class. Larger turtles usually find their way to China while smaller species and size classes end up in places like Dong Xuan market in Hanoi. This is presumably a result of the relatively low value of these smaller turtles to Chinese traders who probably pay based on weight, not numbers of individuals. Smaller turtles are likely to be more valuable sold as pets in the market.

Final Disposition of Turtles in the Seizure

The project lacks facilities to deal with the number of *Manouria* and *Cuora galbinifrons* confiscated in the July 23 seizure. Subsequently, these turtles will be released back into the hands of dealers and sent on to China. One of the difficulties facing wildlife authorities is “what to do with animals confiscated from the illegal trade.” Without suitable well-protected release sites, nor facilities to accommodate animals over the long-term (quarantine and holding enclosures), there are few alternatives short of giving the animals back to traders. The project intends to expand its housing facilities in order to receive CITES-listed turtles confiscated from the trade. However, a long-term solution is desperately needed for Vietnam’s turtles that will provide greater protection to their habitat in the wild, help reduce hunting, and raise public awareness about the need to protect Vietnam’s turtle fauna.

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