



The Turtle Conservation and Ecology Project - Vietnam

Report to TRAFFIC
Compiled Notes on the Wildlife Trade in Vietnam
June 1 – September 30, 2000

About the observation reports below;

This report is derived from accumulated observations during the period indicated above. The purpose for documenting such trade observations is to provide the conservation community, in addition to wildlife protection authorities, with further insight about the patterns and mechanics of the trade in Vietnam, particularly in relation to Chelonians.

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Douglas Hendrie
October 1, 2000

Forest Protection Department Wildlife Seizures

Ninh Binh Forest Protection Department Seizure July 7, 2000

Observers: Mr. Le Trong Dat

NB Seizure	Quantity	Weight	Notes
Owston's palm civet (<i>Chrotogale owstonii</i>)	1	2.4 kg	Adult male (to CPCP)
Common palm civets (<i>Paradoxurus h.</i>)	4	8.5 kg	
Javan mongoose	41	12.5 kg	

July 7 – Rangers discovered a shipment of mammals on a public bus from Quy Nhon town in Binh Dinh Province. The cargo included a single Owston's palm civet (*Chrotogale owstonii*), four common palm civets (*Paradoxurus h.*), and 41 Javan mongoose. According to the rangers, the bus was headed for the border city of Mong Cai in Quang Ninh Province (extreme northeast Vietnam). Rangers identified a woman aboard the bus, Ms. Nguyen Thi Thuay, as the trader. Ms. Thuay said that the Owston's palm civet was being sent to a Quang Ninh ranger (identified as Mr. Chuyen), who apparently had requested an Owston's palm civet on several occasions in the past, and that the other animals were going to China.

The adult male Owston's palm civet was received by the Cuc Phuong Conservation Project. The animal had a minor injury to its rear left leg, probably resulting from a snare wire. No information was available on the final disposition of the other animals in the shipment.

Note: bus registration 77K2806

Ninh Binh Forest Protection Department Seizure August 3, 2000

Observers: Le Trong Dat

NB Seizure	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Notes
<i>Ocadia sinensis</i>	1	1.6	Received by TCEP
<i>Ptyas korros</i> and <i>Ptyas mucosus</i>	?	9.0	
<i>Bungarus fasciatus</i>	?	4.0	

August 3 - Ninh Binh rangers stopped a public bus originating from Kim Tan town in Thach Thanh District (Thanh Hoa Province) and seized a shipment of snakes and a single turtle. The trader was identified as Tong Tich Nam of Ha Long Commune, Ha Trung town, Thanh Hoa. Ninh Binh rangers suspect that the snakes came from the Thach Thanh region on the southern border of Cuc Phuong National Park, however the trader possessed a permit stating that the snakes were raised in captivity. As a result, Ninh Binh rangers were forced to return the snakes to the trader. The turtle, an adult *Ocadia sinensis*, was not listed on the permit and therefore was confiscated by the rangers. According to rangers, the bus was destined for Hanoi.

Comments: Based on the local place of origin, it is likely that Mr. Nam is a regional small-time trader, shipping out of Thanh Hoa to Hanoi. Unfortunately, no further information was available about the type of permit or papers Mr. Nam possessed, and where these papers were issued. In any case, it is highly unlikely that the snakes in his possession were raised in captivity, as stated. The species observed in the shipment are common in the trade.

Ocadia sinensis is native to the lowland marshes and waterways around Cuc Phuong National Park, but are relatively uncommon in trade seizures in Ninh Binh.

Ninh Binh Forest Protection Department Seizure August 13, 2000

Observers: Le Trong Dat and Barney Long

NB Seizure	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Notes
<i>Platysternon megacephalum</i>	5	2.0	
<i>Indotestudo elongata</i>	8	10.8	
<i>Pyxidea mouhotii</i>	13	6.0	
<i>Cyclemys pulchristriata/atripans</i>	3	2.2	
<i>Cyclemys tcheponensis</i>	8	8.0	
<i>Cuora galbinifrons</i>	1	0.8	
<i>Mauremys annamensis</i>	1	1.0	
<i>Heosemys grandis</i>	3	10.8	
<i>Geoemyda spengleri</i>	12	1.6	
<i>Ocadia sinensis</i>	1	0.5	
<i>Manouria impressa</i>	38	55.8	
Total Turtles		99.5	
<i>Bungarus fasciatus</i>	?	4.8	
<i>Varanus salvator</i>	?	26.0	
<i>Varanus bengalensis</i>	?	14.0	
<i>Common palm civet</i>	3	4.0	
<i>Masked palm civet</i>	1	1.0	

August 13 - Ninh Binh rangers stopped a private truck on Highway No. 1 carrying a mixed shipment of turtles, monitor lizards, snakes, and civets. The turtles included 11 species comprising the bulk of the shipment.

According to the driver, the truck reportedly originated from Ha Tinh and Nghe An Province, and was bound for Hanoi. No one identified themselves as the trader aboard the truck, and Ninh Binh rangers confiscated the entire shipment of wildlife.

Comments: Based on the distribution of species (from many source regions), it is likely that the trader involved with this shipment is probably a distributor, collecting wildlife from many different points within the country. However, the shipment was rather small, and the Hanoi destination suggests that the wildlife would be sold to a larger trader in Hanoi before being shipped to China.

Although some species in the shipment are likely to have come from Vietnam, this author suspects that the trader collected turtles at a staging point in Nghe An (possibly Vinh city) from many different source areas prior to shipping them north. Many of the species could be native to Nghe An Province or were possibly shipped in from Laos. The presence of southern species (*Heosemys grandis*) also suggests that some turtles found their way up from southern Vietnam or Cambodia. The shipment also included both *Cyclemys tcheponensis* and *Cyclemys pulchristriata*, suggesting two regional points of origin, a single *Mauremys annamensis*, known only from the region of Hue and Da Nang, and *Geoemyda spengleri*, *Platysternon megacephalum*, and *Ocadia sinensis* (central to northern species).

Note: Truck registration was 29H0140

Hanoi Forest Protection Branch Seizure August 7, 2000

Observers: None. Reported by Director Bich, Soc Son FPD, Hanoi

Hanoi FPB Seizure	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Notes
<i>Indotestudo elongata</i>		385	
<i>Manouria impressa</i>		25	
<i>Malayemys subtrijuga</i>		180	
Total turtles		590	
<i>Naja naja</i>		320	
<i>Ptyas korros</i>		448	
<i>Ptyas mucosus</i>		1811	
<i>Enhydris sp.</i>		353	
Total snakes		2932	

August 7 - Soc Son Forest Protection Department reported receiving a shipment of 590 kg of turtles, and almost three tons of snakes seized by Hanoi-based rangers at Noi Bai Airport on a Vietnam Airlines flight from Ho Chi Minh city to Hanoi. The trader, of which rangers assumed was on the flight, failed to identify himself at the airport. However the receiving party was successfully apprehended by rangers. The turtles included 385 kg of *Indotestudo elongata*, 25 kg of *Manouria impressa*, and 180 kg of *Malayemys subtrijuga*. Traders intended to ship the turtles and snakes from Noi Bai Airport to the Mong Cai border crossing to China by road.

The entire shipment was confiscated, and Soc Son rangers reported the incident to the TCEP.

Comments: This is the first case in recent years that I am aware of involving wildlife being shipped via Vietnam Airlines. It is possible that shipments occur more regularly, and Director Bich of the Soc Son Rescue Center noted that in the past, airline employees were sometimes paid to allow similar shipments. The details of how the Forest Protection Department became aware of the shipment, resulting in the seizure are unknown.

Cuc Phuong Forest Protection Department Seizure August 28, 2000

Observers: Douglas Hendrie, Le Thien Duc, Rohan Holloway

Cuc Phuong Seizure	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Notes
<i>Pyxidea mouhotii</i>	6	3.2	

August 28 - Park rangers apprehended a hunter in the Buoi River Valley (western end of Cuc Phuong National Park) as he passed guard station No. 10. The hunter carried a bag containing six adult *Pyxidea mouhotii* that he claimed that he had collected from inside the park. The turtles were confiscated and turned over to the TCEP. All six turtles were processed and released the following day in the park's forested central valley.

Comments: The incident is particularly important for Cuc Phuong in that very few arrests are made of hunters with turtles, though turtle hunting is quite common during some seasons. It also illustrated an example of where enforcement efforts need to focus within Vietnam's protected areas, not just on the roads, but more importantly, within the protected area, where wildlife confiscated from hunters can be released immediately back into the forest, reducing the need for extensive quarantine, or concern over the origin of the animals being released.

Note: The new ranger station (No. 10) was established last year and controls the northern access point to the river valley.

Cuc Phuong Forest Protection Department Seizure September 10, 2000

Observers: Le Truong Dat, Rohan Holloway, and Doug Hendrie

Cuc Phuong Seizure	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Notes
<i>Pyxidea mouhotii</i>	2	0.52	juveniles

September 10 - Rangers patrolling the forest in Cuc Phuong apprehended a hunter with two juvenile *Pyxidea* in his possession. Both turtles were confiscated and turned over to the TCEP, before being processed, marked, and released again in the forest.

Ninh Binh Forest Protection Department, September 26, 2000

Observers: Le Thien Duc and Rohan Holloway (Sept. 27)

Ninh Binh Seizure	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Notes
<i>Manouria impressa</i>	1.5	2	
<i>Pyxidea mouhotii</i>	2.5	6	
<i>Cuora galbinifrons</i>	18	24	
<i>Sacalia quadriocellata</i>	0.5	1	
<i>Cyclemys tcheponensis</i>	1.2	2	
<i>Platysternon megacephalum</i>	?	1	
<i>Pelodiscus sinensis</i>	?	5	
Total turtles	23.7+	41	
<i>Pangolin</i>	?	1	
<i>Dragon lizards</i>	?	30	

September 26 - Ninh Binh rangers stopped a public bus originating from Hue and confiscated a small shipment of turtles, as well as a pangolin and a bag of water dragons. The animals were concealed in bags beneath seats aboard the bus, and were accompanied by several young well-dressed women.

About half of the turtles were turned over to the TCEP, while the remaining turtles were presumably given back to traders, including 18 *Cuora galbinifrons*, recently listed on CITES Appendix II and protected from international trade, requiring a permit issued by the national CITES Authority (Hanoi). Also present were five *Pelodiscus sinensis* and a single *Platysternon megacephalum*.

Very little information was provided by Ninh Binh rangers regarding the circumstances of the shipment.

Information Other seizures in September at Ninh Binh

During the September 27 visit, at least six buses and an army vehicle were also observed in the FPD compound, and a number of traders loitered in front of the building. One trader was a well-dressed young man from Quang Ninh Province (extreme northeast of Vietnam on the Chinese border). He had gone to Ca Mau Province (southern-most province of Vietnam) to buy snakes from a "farm". He loaded them on a public bus and was stopped in Ninh Binh because one of the species, *Naja naja*, was not listed on the permit. The other snakes, species unknown, were released back to the man, but the driver had to pay a 48 million VND (~\$3,400) fine for transporting the cobras without a permit.

The army vehicle was reportedly carrying an unknown number of pangolins and an unidentified "long-tailed" primate, that was not observed at the FPD station. Another bus was stopped in Ninh Binh carrying 18 pangolins (42.2 kg) and 15 *Ophiophagus hannah* that were hidden on the top of the bus under a false roof, according to the bus owner who told TCEP staff about the incident. Rangers said that the pangolin trader was fined 96 million VND (~\$6,800) for transporting the pangolins.

Market Observations

Dong Xuan Market Totals June 1 – September 30, 2000

Turtle Species	Quantity	Price (ea.)	Notes
<i>Cuora amboinensis</i>	0		
<i>Cuora galbinifrons</i>	4	\$5.70	
<i>Cuora trifasciata</i>	0		
<i>Cyclemys tcheponensis/pulchriata</i>	3	\$2.84	
<i>Geoemyda spengleri</i>	61	\$1.78	
<i>Heosemys grandis</i>	0		
<i>Hieremys annandalii</i>	0		
<i>Malayemys subtrijuga</i>	0		
<i>Mauremys annamensis</i>	0		
<i>Mauremys mutica</i>	0		
<i>Ocadia sinensis</i>	9		
<i>Pyxidea mouhotii</i>	28		
<i>Sacalia quadriocellata</i>	12	\$2.84 - \$3.56	
<i>Siebenrockiella crassicollis</i>	1	\$4.27	
<i>Indotestudo elongata</i>	1		
<i>Manouria impressa</i>	12	\$4.98	
<i>Pelodiscus sinensis</i>	0		
<i>Platysternon megacephalum</i>	0		
<i>Trachemys scripta elegans</i>	65		
	196		
Other Wildlife			
<i>Red-bellied squirrel</i>	8		
<i>Loris</i>	4	\$7.12	
<i>Squirrel sp.</i>	1		
<i>Shrew sp.</i>	1		

Summary: During the period of June 1 through September 30, 2000, nine inspections were carried out at Hanoi's Dong Xuan market in order to determine the number and species composition of turtles sold there. A total of 196 turtles were observed of ten species. *Geoemyda spengleri* was the frequently observed native species (n=61) followed by *Pyxidea mouhotii*.

Based on the nine surveys during the June through September period, and an estimated average turnover of three days, it is possible that as many as 885 turtles were sold through Dong Xuan during the four-month period, or 2,655 each year. Further research is being carried out to determine turn-over rates, and seasonal fluctuations in availability may influence total numbers.

The only unusual occurrence in the market during the survey period was a single *Siebenrockiella crassicollis*, the first time this species has been observed by the author in Hanoi markets.

Trachemys scripta yearlings are now common at the aquarium end of the market where tropical fish are sold. Numbers of individuals may be higher, since checks of the market did not always include the tropical fish area (separated from the pet and wildlife section of the market).

Field and Other Observations

Softshell Turtle Farm, Ha Tay Province, August 1, 2000

TCEP Associate Nguyen Quang Truong from IEBR, Professor Ha Dinh Duc, and Voice of Vietnam journalist Nguyen Quy Hoai visited a softshell turtle breeding farm (*Pelodiscus sinensis*) outside of Hanoi where four eggs from Hoan Kiem Lake, reportedly of *Rafetus* sp. were taken for incubation. The purpose of the trip was to follow up on recent press reports suggesting that some *Rafetus* sp. eggs had hatched at the farm, as well as observe a successful softshell turtle farm in operation.

On *Rafetus*: Observations at the farm indicated that recent press reports of *Rafetus* hatchings were erroneous, and that in fact the eggs recovered from Hoan Kiem Lake included *Pelodiscus sinensis* and another unidentified species of hard-shelled turtle, not *Rafetus*. No *Rafetus* nesting has occurred this year (also reported in the press and circulated internationally), and nine eggs, later recovered from Hoan Kiem Lake and hatched successfully by Professor Ha Dinh Duc were identified as *Pelodiscus sinensis*.

Softshell turtle Farm: Despite the disappointment of not finding *Rafetus* hatchlings at the farm, the visit was a valuable experience profiling the possibilities of softshell turtle farming in Vietnam. The farm's owner, Nguyen Sy Chinh, first considered farming softshells in 1989 after learning from another farmer in Xuan Khu, Hai Dung Province. His farm, consisting of a collection of small ponds surrounding his house, produces approximately 1000 new offspring each year. Most of the hatchlings are sold to dealers that visit his farm, paying about 10,000 VND per hatchling. However, Mr. Chinh keeps about 150 hatchlings each year and raises them himself, selling them live for approximately 220,000 VND/kg, mainly for food.

Mr. Chinh's original stock were collected in 1991 from the immediate region around his home (Ha Tay Province). He maintains a breeding stock of 20 adults in several ponds, and provides space for them to crawl up on land and lay eggs. The eggs are then collected and placed in a special incubation chamber (a cement box with a wooden door measuring approximately 0.5 square meters). Washed sand is maintained at the bottom of the box, and misted daily to keep it "dark", according to Mr. Chinh. *Pelodiscus sinensis* eggs hatch in roughly 60 days, or 90 days during the winter months.

Mr. Chinh said that 98% of the eggs he incubates hatch successfully. Hatchlings are raised in plastic tubs and fed worms, and small amounts of fish. Mr. Chinh stressed that the water needed to be changed regularly or the hatchlings often develop skin diseases and fungi (?) if water quality is not maintained.

Mr. Chinh said that his females nest up to three times each year at the farm (how he distinguishes between individual females, was not clear), with an average of ten eggs laid per clutch, or 16–17 at most. Maturity is reached at 3 years, with mature females weighing approximately 0.6 kg. His breeding stock includes six males and 14 females.

Mr. Chinh has been so successful in his farming venture that he presently trains others sent to his farm about his techniques. His average annual income was estimated at 33,850,000 VND (\$2,411) based on his sale of hatchlings and 150 adults each year. The more profitable side of his business appears to be raising the adults, accounting for 33,000,000 VND of Chinh's total income.

Mauremys Farm at Snake Village, Hanoi Suburbs, August 1, 2000

A second visit was made to Mr. Nguyen, the "snake doctor" of Snake Village, a popular tourist destination in the outskirts of Hanoi where restaurants serve snake dishes and wine (see December 1999 trade report). The Nguyen's wife is a turtle trader, specializing in *Mauremys mutica*, but often having a select small number of other species in her large outdoor enclosure (cage). During a visit in December 20, 1999, we found about 300 *Mauremys mutica* in her possession, the largest single collection of this species I have seen in Vietnam. She claimed that all of the turtles were purchased when they were small and raised until they reached a suitable size for selling. The flattened carapaces of many of the turtles suggested a long term in captivity and abnormal growth, probably resulting from dietary deficiencies (as observed in *Terrapene c carolina* pets in long-term captivity).

Total numbers of turtles observed during the August 1 visit were estimated at about 150 individuals. However initial observations indicated that while some turtles were being purchased young and raised, Nguyen's wife was also supplementing her captive stock with adult turtles from the trade. She claimed that all of the turtles were of the same species, *Mauremys mutica*. Closer inspection revealed 12–15

Mauremys annamensis, Vietnam's only endemic turtle species, as well as a single *Ocadia sinensis*. When asked where she had received most of her turtles during the previous years, she said that they came from forest streams all over Lao Cai Province.

Hanoi *Mauremys mutica* Births, August 1, 2000

During a day-long investigation of the turtle trade, this author visited the home of Nguyen Huu Nhan, a turtle hobbyist in Hanoi who had reportedly bred *Mauremys mutica* in captivity. The family had only four turtles in captivity, including an adult male and female *Mauremys mutica* and two hatchlings, reported to be ten days old. The family had bought two small *Mauremys* ten years ago and raised them in their garden. This year, they laid several eggs that both hatched successfully in captivity. The female nested again several days before our arrival, laying another egg in dark garden soil beneath some shrubby vegetation. Both adults were severely flattened, and were maintained in a dry pen in the shade.

Mauremys mutica have never been observed by this author in the wildlife trade south of Hanoi. Occasionally they show up in Dong Xuan pet market, and many captives can be seen at the snake village farm. The absence of *Mauremys* south of Hanoi suggests that this species may be largely extirpated from the southern fringes of its range.

Hanoi Ornamental Trade Observation, September 28, 2000

During a visit to Hanoi, a large well-lit and highly visible ornamental wildlife shop was discovered on Tong Duc Thanh street (No. 166) where a number of large carnivores and other stuffed wildlife were observed. Amongst the wildlife inventoried were five tigers (two rugs and three stuffed), one leopard, four clouded leopards, one golden cat, a lion, two Asiatic black bears (cub and adult), a white-cheeked gibbon, a single pangolin, dozens of mounted ungulate horns, owls, eagles, and assorted pelts.