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VIET NAM ONLINE

A rapid assessment of e-commerce wildlife trade in Viet Nam in 2017

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TRAFFIC REPORT

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An ornamental Tiger claw for sale in Viet Nam
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An ornamental Tiger claw for sale in Viet Nam



Tiger *Panthera Tigris*

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INTRODUCTION

This short report provides a snapshot of wildlife items for sale on websites with a Viet Nam country domain (“.vn”) in 2017. It combines data collected during three online surveys for wildlife products from the following species searched by common name: elephants, leopards, pangolins, rhinos, Saiga Antelope, marine turtles, and Tiger.

Fourteen advertisements were found selling a total of 1,072 wildlife products on four of the 13 websites monitored between March–October 2017. When compared to data collected in Viet Nam on commercial websites (“.com”) and social media platforms during the same or similar time periods (Indraswari *et al.*, in prep.; Nguyen *et al.*, in prep.; Indenbaum, in prep.), the findings of this report indicate that Viet Nam’s online wildlife trade is occurring on websites with a Viet Nam country domain, but in smaller numbers than on social media.





Chinese Pangolin *Manis pentadactyla*

BACKGROUND

Over half of the population in Viet Nam uses the internet. In 2017, Viet Nam’s official population was 93.64 million with 53.86 million people using the internet (57.5% of the population) (Statista, 2018c). Notably, 68% of internet users in Viet Nam, or 36.75 million people, were using social networks as of 2017 (Statista, 2018b). With such a large portion of the population using the internet, it is not surprising that e-commerce is booming. The latest figures show that business-to-consumer online sales revenues in Viet Nam have topped USD4 billion (Statista, 2018a).

Large-scale internet usage and e-commerce activity has facilitated online vectors for trade in wild animals and plants, and various wildlife products. TRAFFIC has been monitoring the online availability of wildlife and wildlife products offered for sale in Viet Nam since 2016; e-commerce platforms, such as online stores, online forums, and auction sites are monitored, as well as social media and social networking platforms, with a focus on commodities offered illegally or outside of regulated trade.

All species within the scope of this study are listed in the Appendices of the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES). As such, their trade is restricted or prohibited under domestic Vietnamese law Decree 82/2006/ND-CP. Trade in native species listed under Decree 32/2006/ND-CP is also prohibited or restricted. At the time of the surveys, illegal trade of CITES Appendix I or II species and/or native species as listed in Decree 32 were subject to criminal offences under Penal Code 37/2009/QH12. Effective 1 January 2018 (after the surveys), Penal Code No. 100/2015/QH13 along with Law No/12/2017/QH14 has amended the previous Penal Code.

Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus*, Tiger *Panthera tigris*, two species of pangolin *Manis javanica*, *M. pentadactyla*, Javan Rhinoceros *Rhinoceros sondaicus*, four species of marine turtles *Eretmochelys*

ONLINE WILDLIFE TRADE IN VIET NAM: KEY POINTS

-  online trade in wildlife occurred on at least **four .vn websites in 2017**
-  It is likely that much of the online wildlife trade in Viet Nam occurs on **social media**
-  A frequently encountered wildlife product for sale online in Viet Nam is **ivory, particularly jewellery**

imbricata, *Lepidochelys olivacea*, *Caretta caretta*, *Chelonia mydas* and Leopard *Panthera pardus* are fully protected against commercial exploitation of any kind under Viet Nam’s main wildlife protection laws: Decree 160/2013/ND-CP and Decree 32/2006/ND-CP.

Online trade in Viet Nam is regulated by Law No 51/2005/QH11 on Electronic Transactions and Decree 52/2013/ND-CP on e-commerce, which prohibits the online trade of certain goods (including wildlife where applicable). Offenders of this law are treated with equal severity as those flouting physical trade regulations. However, identifying suspects and collecting evidence of illegal online wildlife trade remains a challenge for law enforcement. Few arrests for online wildlife crime have been made in Viet Nam (Anon., 2016).

METHODOLOGY

The analysis for this short report uses data from the following surveys: Survey 1, Survey 2, and Survey 3.¹ The same researcher conducted all three of the surveys analysed in this report, however the methodology differed slightly in terms of length and scope. For all surveys, the survey effort was fixed at one hour per day with the researcher systematically surveying the pre-selected websites for relevant advertisements.

Based on the volume of advertisements posted, the researcher was only able to survey between one and five platforms per day within the allocated survey effort time. Advertisements were found by entering Vietnamese key search terms into the search function of the platform’s search functions. Only Vietnamese-language advertisements were surveyed and recorded. For all surveys, the research captured advertisements with date stamps from 1 January 2017 to the date of monitoring. Websites included e-commerce sites, online forums and auction sites. Although the scope of the original surveys may have been broader, only data collected from sites ending with a Viet Nam country domain (“.vn”) on the following species were analysed for this report: elephants, leopards, pangolins, rhinos, Saiga Antelope *Saiga tatarica*, marine turtles, and Tigers (**Table 1**). Ultimately, this resulted in an analysis of 13 websites (**Table 2**).

	Date range of survey*	Time	No. keywords analysed	No. websites analysed	Species analysed
Survey 1	27th March–28th April 2017	1 hour	20	7	elephant, rhino, pangolin
Survey 2	27th March–28th April 2017	1 hour	12	8	Tiger
Survey 3	16th–20th October 2017	1 hour	10	10	marine turtle, Saiga Antelope, leopard

*Monday through Friday

Table 1

Scope and methodology of surveys analysed

¹ Referring to the data collected and published, in whole or in part, in Nguyen et al., in prep. (Survey 1); and Indenbaum, in prep. (Survey 2). The data collected for Survey 3 are published in the first instance here.



Ivory jewellery and pendants

	Survey 1	Survey 2	Survey 3
Website 1	-	Y	Y
Website 2	-	-	Y
Website 3	Y	Y	-
Website 4	-	-	Y
Website 5*	Y	Y	Y
Website 6*	Y	Y	-
Website 7*	Y	Y	Y
Website 8	-	-	Y
Website 9	Y	Y	Y
Website 10*	Y	Y	Y
Website 11	Y	Y	-
Website 12	-	-	Y
Website 13	-	-	Y

Table 2

Websites surveyed and analysed for this report by survey

(Y) surveyed
(-) not surveyed

* website selling wildlife products within the scope of this report

Data extracted from the advertisements included the quantity of items for sale. To avoid inflating the number of items present in each advertisement, only advertisements with images were recorded. Care was taken to review and eliminate duplicate advertisements (i.e. exact same image and text) from the analysis, including those that were posted on different dates within the timeframe covered by the survey.

The number of items recorded for sale was determined based on the wording/photos accompanying the advertisement, excluding any wording/photos found in the comments section of the advertisement. On all platforms, for advertisements in which the number of items was difficult to determine from the wording/photos, the highest number reasonably determinable to the naked eye was recorded. The results of these surveys, therefore, represent the minimum number of items for sale and may be an underestimation of actual online trade volume.



SURVEY RESULTS

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

30%
of surveyed sites
found selling wildlife
products

**elephant
& tiger**
products were
the only wildlife
products found

1,072
items found for sale

Of the 13 sites surveyed that fell within the criteria of this short report, only four were found selling wildlife products from the set list of species (**Table 3**).

Website 5 was surveyed on three different occasions, but wildlife was found during only two surveys: Survey 1 and Survey 2. Similarly, Website 7 was surveyed on three different occasions and wildlife was only found during Survey 1. No websites were found selling wildlife items from target list of species during Survey 3.

	No. of adverts	No. of items	Survey(s) in which items were found for sale
Website 5	3	3	Survey 1; Survey 2
Website 6	4	5	Survey 1; Survey 2
Website 7	4	1,035	Survey 1
Website 10	3	29	Survey 1; Survey 2
TOTAL	14	1,072	

Table 3

Viet Nam domain websites selling wildlife products 2017

Of the seven common names searched, only elephant and tiger products were found. Eight of the advertisements contained elephant products and the remaining six contained tiger products.

A total of 1,072 items were found for sale in 14 advertisements (**Table 3**). All but six of the items found for sale were elephant ivory. Of these, all were ivory, all of them jewellery items except for two items on Website 6 which were decorative carvings. The jewellery items were made up of pendants (1,002), rings (60), and bracelets (2).

It is notable that one single advertisement on Website 7 accounted for more than 1,000 ivory pendants, or 93% of the total number of items found.

The prominence of ivory items and of items categorised as jewellery is consistent with the findings of other online market surveys conducted in Viet Nam (Indraswari *et al.* in prep.; Nguyen *et al.*, in prep.; Nguyen & Willemsen 2016). The other six items found for sale were all tiger products comprising one tooth, two claw pendants, and bone glue.

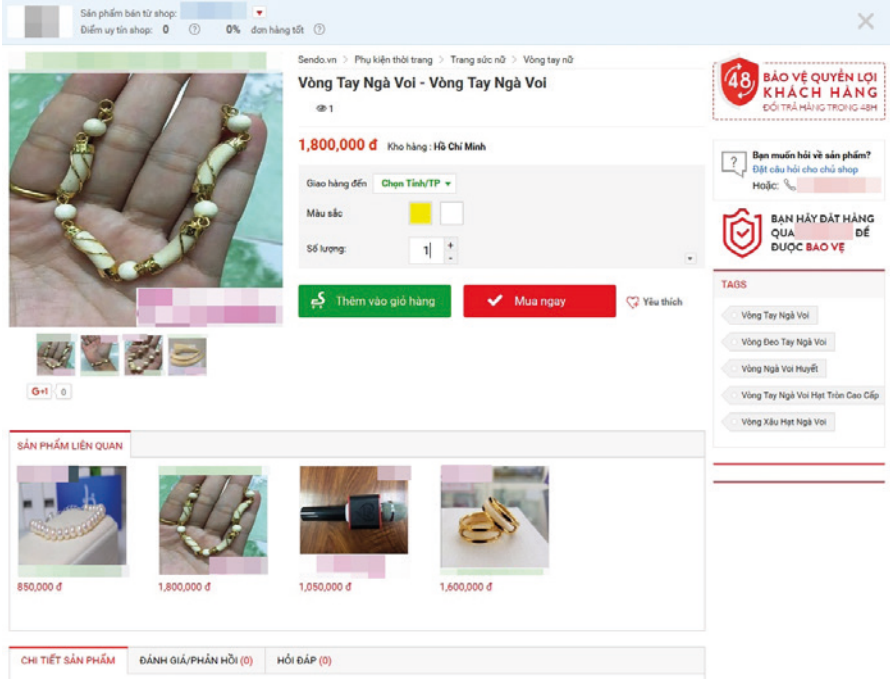


Figure 1

Ivory items observed in Survey 1



Figure 2

Tiger teeth observed in Survey 2

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the data from the three surveys analysed here covered 13 websites, some of them on multiple occasions, the prevalence of wildlife items for sale was low compared to data collected on Vietnamese-language websites with commercial domain names (".com") and social media platforms during the same or similar timeframes (see e.g. Indraswari *et al.* in prep.; Nguyen *et al.*, in prep.; Indenbaum, in prep.). While trade is occurring on websites with Vietnamese country domains, future research into the online trade in wildlife in Viet Nam should include commercial (formalised and/or registered) and social media websites.



Tiger whiskers for sale in Viet Nam

RECOMMENDATIONS

With the findings from this report in mind, TRAFFIC makes the following recommendations to improve the monitoring of online wildlife trade in Viet Nam with the aim of supporting effective law enforcement.

REGULATION

The Vietnamese government is encouraged to adapt and apply existing regulatory frameworks to ensure effective law enforcement against illegal behaviour involving online trading channels, including the development of capacity to detect and combat illegal online trade in ivory. Furthermore, the Vietnamese government is encouraged to develop a special law enforcement unit to specialise in online wildlife trading, given that policing online marketplaces involves a different skillset than that of physical markets.

1

2

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Members of law enforcement agencies, with assistance from cyber security experts and relevant NGOs, are advised to improve efforts on addressing the illegal online market for wildlife.

Members of law enforcement agencies and the public are encouraged to report illegal or questionable advertisements through the online platforms directly where possible. Other reporting avenues, such as the mobile application Wildlife Witness <http://bit.ly/2khkghg>, the Environmental Police Online Reporting Platform <http://bit.ly/2xcaA0W>, and the Education for Nature–Viet Nam phone hotline (18001522) can also be used to report online sale of wildlife.

AWARENESS

3

4

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

NGOs and other stakeholders should target commercial websites and social media companies in their work on corporate social responsibility and build capacity for self-monitoring techniques.

NGOs and other stakeholders should highlight the proportionally large role of Viet Nam in the e-commerce and social media sector to encourage international e-commerce companies (such as commercial websites and social media companies) to focus time and resources on monitoring wildlife trade in Viet Nam.

MONITORING

5

SOURCES

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