

CONSERVATION HOTLINE

Going to Market in Vietnam

THE MOUNTAINS AND HIGH PLATEAUS OF VIETNAM, one of the largest countries in southeast Asia, were once covered with forests and inhabited by many species of animals. But new land is being cleared daily to plant crops to feed the 65 million Vietnamese people. Perhaps only 10 percent of the country is still primary forest. And in some of these forests virtually all the birds and mammals have been wiped out, trapped or shot to meet the growing market. Parks and reserves have only recently been established and their infrastructures are far from adequate.

After visiting Vietnam in 1991, journalist Elizabeth Kemf said, "During a recent interview in Hanoi, Professor Vo Quy [of the University of Hanoi] expressed concern over the region's burgeoning wildlife trade, which is draining Indochina of some of the rarest animals in the world. Wildlife markets in both Ho Chi Minh City [Saigon] and Hanoi are spilling onto the sidewalks."

Vietnam has hardly any wildlife trade regulations and is not a member of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species). In 1989 the Ministry of Forestry banned the killing of and trade in certain animal species, but the regulation is not adequately enforced. In the 1950s, there may have been several hundred Javan rhinos in Vietnam; today, only ten to 15 have managed to escape poachers. Habitat destruction and commercial trade may also wipe out other endangered species, such as the douc langur and the white-headed leaf monkey, unless the government takes action.

In Ho Chi Minh City, the improved economy and growing number of visitor facilities are attracting tourists and businessmen, mostly from capitalist countries, who can afford to buy wild animals and their products. Traders, especially from Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand, export animals and products from Vietnam to their home countries. The main live-animal market is Cau Mong, one of the largest in southeast Asia featuring endangered species. I surveyed the market in 1991 on behalf of WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) and was appalled by what I saw.

Cau Mong covers about one and a quarter acres and consists of walls of stacked cages. In this oppressively hot and humid site, animals were so tightly packed into wire boxes that many could hardly move. Bats and birds clung to bars, unable

to stretch their wings. Birds died in front of me, and every hour or so, the dead ones would be swept up. They were not even kept for food because they were probably diseased.

When I arrived, I photographed a sick-looking otter lying in its cage surrounded by its own excrement. A few hours later, the animal was dead and had been tossed on the ground to be swept away with the cigarette butts and other debris.

For economic reasons alone, keeping animals under such conditions makes little sense. For example, a clouded leopard with a severe skin infection was being offered for only \$290, half the normal price.

Monkeys were sometimes taken out of their cages, to which they remained tied, and teased to make them bare their teeth.

Equally disturbing were baby Malayan sun bears huddled alone in separate cages.

I visited the market three times in a week and saw crocodiles, geckos, snakes, and turtles; many species of birds; and bats, binturongs, gibbons, macaques, mongooses, palm civets, pangolins, porcupines, and slow lorises. Fishing cats and tigers

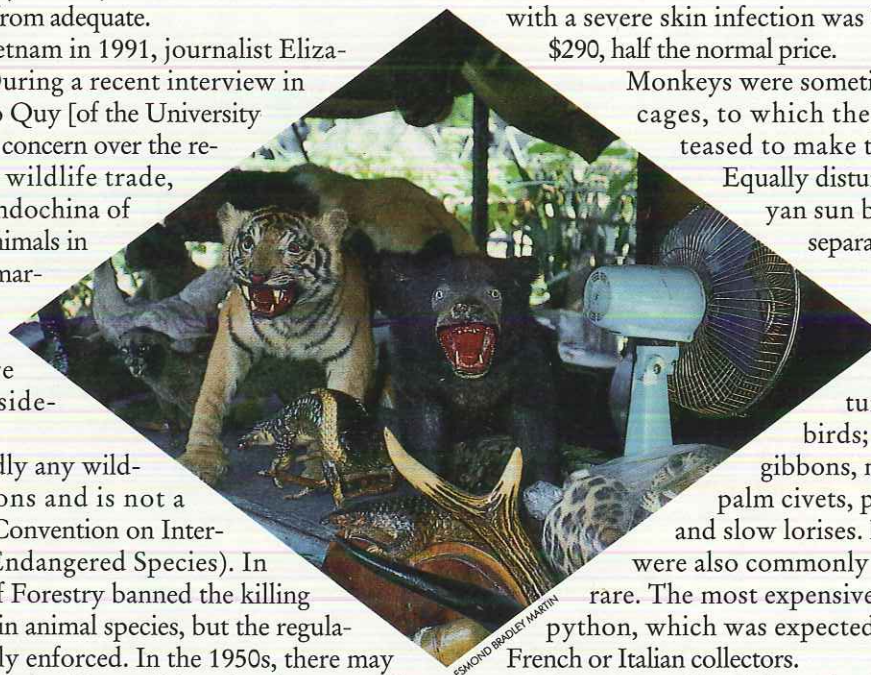
were also commonly for sale, despite being rare. The most expensive animal was an albino python, which was expected to bring \$3,500 from French or Italian collectors.

On the street, stalls sell live animals for food. Wild-game meat sells for less than a dollar a pound, approximately the same price as meat from domestic animals.

The Cho Pham Viet Chanh market has six stalls to which hunters from the highlands bring live animals and meat virtually every day. There were fewer endangered species than at Cau Mong, but almost all the animals that had been snared had a leg or a foot missing and were dying slow, agonizing deaths. The welfare of the animal was not a consideration; its meat was simply a source of income.

The Vietnamese are fast losing their rare and valuable wildlife. Yet few people are aware of it. The Vietnam government should be encouraged to join CITES, which attempts to control the international trade in endangered species. Domestic law enforcement and trade controls need to be improved dramatically. Endangered species are simply taken out of the country by road, air, and sea, unchecked.

Esmond Bradley Martin

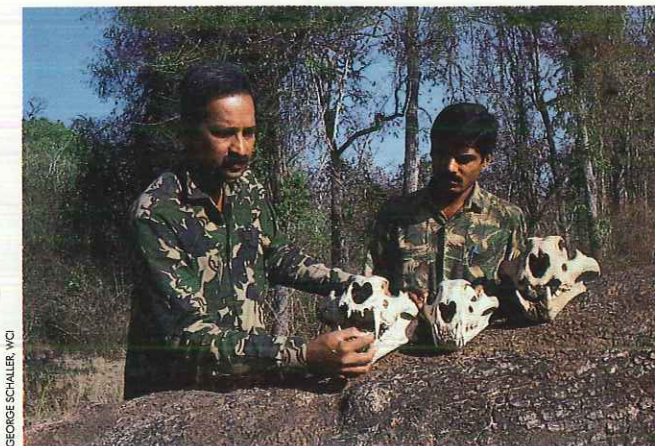


ESMOND BRADLEY MARTIN

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Indian Park Invaded

ULLAS KARANTH, A Wildlife Conservation International researcher, reports that a mob of more than 500 people invaded Nagarhole National Park, in southwestern India, in mid-March and set fire to the forest. On March 12, a suspected poacher was killed in the reserve, but according to Karanth, the bullets recovered from the dead man's body were not buckshot issued to park staff, but rather were heavier bullets of the type used for shooting large game. Local politicians and supporters from several poaching-smuggling gangs demanded the arrest of well-known conservationist and park ranger K.M. Chinnappa. On March 14, the mob of people from surrounding villages assaulted forest department staff, ransacked park facilities and Mr. Chinnappa's personal property, and set fires that destroyed the finest wildlife region of the sanctuary. The 230-square-mile reserve harbors more than 400 wild Asian elephants, tigers, mouse deer, and other endangered species. Dr. Karanth was studying the resident tigers and, ironi-



GEORGE SCHALLER, WCI

Ullas Karanth (left) and assistant with tiger skulls

cally, the role of fire in large mammal ecology. Most of the forest staff abandoned the park after the invasion, and there were reports of widespread poaching.

For information on how you can help support protection of endangered wildlife in Nagarhole National Park, contact Wildlife Conservation International, 212-220-6891.

Source: Ullas Karanth, WCI

Deborah Behler

A New Primate Survey in Vietnam

According to Polish zoologist Radoslaw Ratayszczak, "If hunting and deforestation continue unchecked, the Tonkin snub-nosed monkey will be gone in ten years." Ratayszczak and his colleagues surveyed the primates of northern Vietnam this past February and March, particularly the snub-nose and the Cadbar langur. It was the first such survey of the region in more than 30 years.

The Cadbar langur is known from only one island, much of which is formally protected as a national park. Plans for controlled tourism to the island and better protection measures offer hope for the langur. But Ratayszczak could find only 300 Tonkin snub-nosed monkeys in seven isolated populations.

Though the Vietnamese government has a long list of protected species, "you can place an order for any Vietnamese animal or skin at Naformix [in Hanoi], which belongs to the Ministry of Forestry," says Ratayszczak.

Martin Williams

Watchable Wildlife

ACCORDING TO A U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SURVEY, NEARLY 135 million Americans visit the 661 million acres of federal public lands each year to look at wildlife. This popular pastime prompted an odd mix of organizations to launch in late 1990 a nationwide program called Watchable Wildlife. The brainchild of Defenders of Wildlife, the program is sponsored by long-feuding groups such as the Bureau of Land Management, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Izaak Walton League.

The coalition will hold its first National Watchable Wildlife Conference from September 10 to 12 in Missoula, Montana. By the year 2000, the coalition hopes to have established 5,000 Watchable Wildlife sites on public and private lands, identified by a symbol of binoculars. Some states, including Oregon, Idaho, and Montana, already have programs in place, along with viewing guides. The guides cost \$5.95 apiece and are available through Defenders of Wildlife, 1244 Nineteenth Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

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Source: Watchable Wildlife, Sports Illustrated

Deborah Behler

