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

INTRODUCTION

Online trade through e-commerce websites is increasing in Viet Nam with a market value estimated to reach USD7.5 billion by 2019 (Vietnamnet, 2016). TRAFFIC's research shows that these online market places, and social media such as Facebook in Malaysia (Krishnasamy and Stoner, 2016) and e-commerce sites in China (Yu and Jia, 2015; Stoner, 2014) are commonly used to sell and purchase wildlife illegally.

It is difficult to determine the impact of online trade on threatened species listed in CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) (Sajeva *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, at the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP16) to CITES, Decisions 15.57 and 16.62 were adopted. Under these Decisions the Parties are urged to assess and publish the extent and trends of CITES-listed species in e-commerce and social media trade.

This rapid assessment of the illegal sales of wildlife through e-commerce channels provides insights into the online trade of species protected by the Vietnamese wildlife protection law Decree 160 (2013), and those covered by CITES. It also provides actionable information for Vietnamese law enforcement agencies. However, as the regulatory framework is weak and law enforcement ineffective, other strategic approaches and partnerships

◀ Leopard Cat *Prionailurus bengalensis*

are required to strengthen efforts to combat illegal online wildlife trade in Viet Nam. An example of such a partnership is the co-operative agreement TRAFFIC signed with the Vietnam E-commerce Association (VECOM) in April 2016. VECOM and TRAFFIC are working together to reduce wildlife (cyber) crime in Viet Nam by implementing a range of interventions, which will make it harder to sell and buy threatened wildlife on the Vietnamese e-commerce sites.

METHODOLOGY

Eight e-commerce websites were surveyed for 30 minutes a day over a 23-day period (total of 11.5 hours) on regular working days (Monday to Friday) during June 2016. The keywords used are outlined in Table 1. These websites were selected from the VECITA list (Vietnam E-commerce and Information Technology Agency, a body that evaluates and reports on the economic status of the e-commerce trade and websites in Viet Nam) (VECITA, 2015) on the basis of best performing sites (i.e. generating the highest revenue through sales). Though not on the VECITA list, 5giay.vn was added because an earlier survey found 11 rhinoceros horn advertisements on this website (TRAFFIC, unpublished data).

English	Vietnamese
rhino	tê giác
rhino horn	sừng tê giác, sừng tê, sừng
elephant	voi
elephant ivory	ngà voi, ngà
otter	rái cá
leopard cat	mèo rừng
langur	voọc
gibbon	vượn
pangolin	tê tê
pangolin scale	vây tê tê, vây
bird	chim, chim cảnh

Table 1. The list of Vietnamese keywords used for the search on e-commerce websites.

RESULTS

During the course of the rapid assessment, 180 advertisements were found to be offering 10 different types of wildlife commodities (Table 2). The majority of advertisements—74%—offered live birds, which were likely traded as pets. The second highest percentage of advertisements, at 16%, was devoted to the sale of ivory products. There was one advertisement for rhinoceros horn and one for an Elongated Tortoise *Indotestudo elongata*. A total of eight Leopard Cats *Prionailurus bengalensis*—three live and five stuffed specimens—were also advertised, as well as eight elephant tails.

Wildlife advertisements were found on five out of eight e-commerce sites. These five sites are all VECOM members.

Class	Species commodity advertised	CITES Appendix
Bird	Live specimen (see Table 4 for the species list)	See Table 4
	Meat <i>Phasianus</i> spp.	
	Egg <i>Phasianus</i> spp.	
	Whole stuffed specimen (unknown species)	
Mammal	Ivory (pieces, jewellery, trinkets) Elephantidae	CITES I or II
	Stuffed and mounted Leopard Cat <i>Prionailurus bengalensis</i>	CITES I or II
	Elephant tail Elephantidae	CITES I or II
	Live Leopard Cat <i>Prionailurus bengalensis</i>	CITES I or II
	Rhinoceros horn Rhinocerotidae	CITES I or II
Reptile	Elongated Tortoise <i>Indotestudo elongata</i>	CITES II

Table 2. Wildlife commodities offered for sale on e-commerce websites.

The species of elephant and rhinoceros for associated items was not specified.



It is noteworthy that the largest number of advertisements for wildlife commodities were found on 5giay.vn (Table 3).

A total of 62% of advertisements were offering CITES I, II, or III Appendix-listed species, and/or species protected under the Vietnamese wildlife protection law, Decree 160 (2013), or regulated by Circular 47 (2012). Although there was no attempt made to determine whether any of the sellers had appropriate permits, previous experience has indicated this is unlikely to be the case, thus any sales are likely to be illegal.

Of the 180 advertisements, 15 referred to the provenance of the specimen (captive bred or wild caught) of which eight reported the commodity to be from the wild (all birds apart from one live Leopard Cat); the other seven were referred to as captive bred. None of the eight advertisements for wild-caught species provided the specific locations of where specimens had been obtained. It is not illegal to capture birds in the wild and trade these in Viet Nam, unless they fall under Decree 160 (2013). However, the Leopard Cat is protected under Decree 160 and therefore was likely illegally obtained and traded.

Name of websites	No. of advertisements	Species of the commodities advertised
5giay.vn	98	birds, elephant, Leopard Cat, rhinoceros
Enbac.com	51	birds, Elongated Tortoise
Rongbay.com	27	birds, elephant
Vatgia.com	3	elephant
Sendo.vn	1	elephant
Adayroi.com	0	n/a
Chodientu.vn	0	n/a
Lazada.vn	0	n/a
Total	180	

Table 3. E-commerce websites and the number of advertisements and species of the commodities advertised on these websites.

Some 38% of advertisements offered non-native or exotic species. For example, large numbers of (assumed) commercially bred non-native Island Canaries *Serinus canaria*, Saffron Finches *Sicalis flaveola*, and Budgerigars *Melopsittacus undulatus* were advertised. Some advertisements offered the Seychelles Magpie-robin *Copsychus sechellarum*, however it is questionable that the sellers are providing the correct identification. The videos and photographs accompanying advertisements suggest that these were in fact Pied Bushchats *Saxicola caprata*, which are native to Viet Nam. There is no evidence that the Seychelles Magpie-robin is available in Viet Nam; it has not been seen at physical bird markets and there is no mention of captive breeding of this species on bird fora in the country. It is possible that sellers are marketing Pied Bushchats as the more exotic and rare Seychelles Magpie-robin in order to fetch higher prices.

The Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus* and Oriental Magpie-robin *Copsychus saularis* were advertised in large numbers: both are native, although neither is endemic and these species are assumed wild caught. They do not fall under any environmental protection or commercial breeding legal frameworks. This kind of unregulated and uncontrolled overexploitation of native species can threaten the viability of the wild populations of these species (Harris *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore the unregulated trade in non-native and native species also increases the risk for transmission of zoonosis such as avian influenza (Edmunds *et al.*, 2011).

CONCLUSIONS

Not all trade in wildlife species and products on e-commerce websites is illegal under the current legislative framework in Viet Nam. However, this rapid assessment found 62% of wildlife advertisements on these sites potentially offering commodities illegally. Vietnamese e-commerce websites appear to be a low risk channel to supply consumers with illicit wildlife commodities. It is important, given the growth of e-commerce trade in Viet Nam, that this wildlife supply

Scientific Name	Common name	CITES Appendix/ IUCN*
<i>Accipiter badius</i>	Shikra	II
<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	Common Myna	
<i>Aix galericulata</i>	Mandarin Duck	
<i>Forpus</i> spp.	Parrotlet	
<i>Chrysolophus pictus</i>	Golden Pheasant	
<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i> ¹	White-rumped Shama	
<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	Oriental Magpie-robin	
<i>Copsychus sechellarum</i>	Seychelles Magpie-robin	Endangered
<i>Elanus axillaris</i>	Black-shouldered Kite	II
<i>Erythrura gouldiae</i>	Gouldian Finch	
<i>Garrulax canorus</i>	Chinese Hwamei	II
<i>Garrulax chinensis</i>	Black-throated Laughingthrush	
<i>Gracula religiosa</i>	Hill Myna	II
<i>Sturnus nigricollis</i>	Black-collared Starling	
<i>Leiothrix argentea</i>	Silver-eared Mesia	II
<i>Melopsittacus undulatus</i>	Budgerigar	
<i>Neochmia ruficauda</i>	Star Finch	
<i>Paradisaea rubra</i>	Red Bird-of-paradise	II
<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	Indian Peafowl	III
<i>Pavo muticus</i> ¹	Green Peafowl	II / Endangered
<i>Pellorneum albiventris</i>	Spot-throated Babbler	
<i>Phasianus colchicus</i> ²	Common Pheasant	
<i>Phasianus versicolor</i>	Green Pheasant	
<i>Poephila acuticauda</i>	Long-tailed Finch	
<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>	Red-whiskered Bulbul	
<i>Serinus canaria</i>	Island Canary	
<i>Sicalis flaveola</i>	Saffron Finch	
<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>	Eastern Spotted Dove	
<i>Spilornis cheela</i> ¹	Crested Serpent-eagle	II
<i>Stachyris herberti</i>	Sooty Babbler	
<i>Stagonopleura guttata</i>	Diamond Firetail	
<i>Taeniopygia bichenovii</i>	Double-barred Finch	
<i>Taeniopygia guttata</i>	Zebra Finch	
<i>Zosterops lateralis</i>	Silvereye	

Table 4. List of advertised bird species (in alphabetical order) on the surveyed e-commerce websites.

*IUCN Red List of Threatened Species ¹listed in Decree 160/2013/ND-CP Criteria for identification and management of endangered, rare and precious species, prioritized for protection; ²listed in Circular 47/2012/TT-BNNPTNT Regulating the Management of wild exploitation and Farming of common wild animals.

channel is closely monitored and any illegal activity reported to authorities for law enforcement action.

TRAFFIC's partnership with VECOM provides tangible opportunities to weaken the trade chains in wildlife illegally traded on e-commerce websites. In 2015, TRAFFIC alerted the moderators of 5giay.vn to 15 illegal advertisements for rhinoceros horn on its site. The website has since been moderated and only one illegal posting for rhinoceros horn was found during this assessment. This website however seems to be one of the most popular for traders and consumers in other illegal wildlife commodities.

In partnership with TRAFFIC, VECOM is increasing the barriers to trade wildlife illegally on e-commerce websites, consequently limiting the supply of illicit wildlife commodities to consumers. The outcomes of this rapid assessment prompted VECOM to develop a system for e-commerce websites—including 5giay.vn—to moderate advertisements for illegal wildlife commodities.

In countries such as Viet Nam, where regulatory frameworks are weak and law enforcement ineffective, strategic partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs) like VECOM are critical to combat illegal wildlife trade.

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