Press Release

ANOTHER TIGER TRADER NABBED BY POLICE
(Hanoi) July 21, 2009 – ENV congratulates the fine work of the Hanoi Environmental Police in this week’s seizure of the frozen remains of a tiger, and bones from at least one other tiger. The tigers were seized from a taxi in Hanoi on the morning of July 16. Three men have been arrested in connection with the case including the alleged owner of the tiger, the driver of the taxi, and an accomplice.

Environmental Police has been working with ENV for nearly seven months, on an investigation of the tiger trade in Vietnam, with the aim of identifying key figures in the illegal trade and better understanding the trade network from source to consumer.

Another study by the Environmental Police, the Forest Protection Department, and ENV has focused on surveying tiger farms to determine the number of tigers currently in captivity in Vietnam. ENV will soon produce a report for senior government officials detailing the findings of both investigations.

At present, there are more than 80 tigers in captivity in Vietnam. However, this number does not include circus animals or all of the animals known to be kept at zoos. ENV is working to ensure that Vietnam does not follow the path of China where tiger farming has developed to the point where about 5,000 tigers are in captivity, and tiger farmers are lobbying to legalize trade. ENV and other conservation organizations acknowledge that this would have a devastating impact on remaining populations of wild tigers throughout their range. Although consumer trade of tiger products is illegal in China, the black market trade continues, and many experts believe that Chinese tiger farmers are selling tiger products out the back door of their farms.

“The same situation may be beginning to develop in Vietnam”, says Nguyen Van Anh, manager of ENV’s Wildlife Crime Unit. The tiger case this past week is highly suspicious given some of the circumstances surrounding one of the subjects. At this stage it is too soon to tell the extent to which Vietnamese tiger farmers may be using the cover of “breeding for conservation or education purposes” to engage in illegal activities.

A new DNA study being conducted by the Environmental Police and ENV will help identify the source of tigers that have been confiscated in the trade over the past two years. Police will collect the samples.
which will then be tested by the wildlife forensic laboratory, Trace Network, in the UK. ENV hopes to learn the subspecies identification of some of the tigers that have been seized in trade, and if possible, the country of origin. This information will help investigators determine the source and mechanism involved in the illegal trade of tigers throughout the region.

ENV has also sought to work closely with leaders in relevant ministries and within the National Assembly to strengthen the protection of tigers and other fully protected species, such as bears and gibbons, both relatively common in illegal trading. Last month, at a meeting organized for key members of the National Assembly. At that meeting, ENV representatives expressed concern over the possibility that regulations allowing breeding of protected species like tigers and bears will open the door for commercial trade as Vietnam implements its new Biodiversity Protection Law in 2009 which permits the establishment of "conservation breeding farms" for some endangered species.

Vietnam may have fewer than 100 tigers remaining in the wild. About 3,500 tigers are believed to remain in the wild throughout Asia. However, with tougher laws and stricter punishment on the books, ENV and others on the front lines of conservation are hopeful that Vietnam will not follow, but lead regional efforts to protect tigers.

“Our focus might have once been about protecting our own tigers,” says Van Anh. “However, we can no longer afford to think just about our own tigers. The illegal tiger trade is a global issue transcending borders, and we in Vietnam need to step up and take responsibility as a member of the international community to ‘do our part’ and help stop the illegal trade of tigers before they are lost.”

Contact ENV for more information about our efforts to protect the region’s tigers:

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Some other places of interest to visit:

Visit “A Day in the Life of the Wildlife Crime Unit”:
http://www.savingvietnamswildlife.org/Documents/Meet_ENV_WCU_Team.pdf


Watch a short film produced by the International Tiger Coalition (ITC) on tiger farming in China:
http://envietnam.org/videos/tiger-trade.html

See the Vietnamese language version of the ITC tiger film produced by ENV:
http://thiennhien.org/index.php?page=documentView&parent=172&id=113

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About Education for Nature - Vietnam

About ENV
Education for Nature-Vietnam (ENV) was established in 2000 as Vietnam's first local non-governmental organization to focus on conservation of nature and the environment. Our mission is to foster greater understanding amongst the Vietnamese public about environmental issues of local, national and global significance, ranging from protection of wildlife and natural ecosystems to climate change.

ENV's young and passionate team is committed to working in innovative ways to raise awareness amongst the people of Vietnam about environmental problems, ranging from protecting wildlife to climate change and empowering them to become part of the solution.

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