

Articles on Illicit Wildlife Trading in Southeast Asia

A Trans-border Wildlife Trade Network Unmasked - Part I

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Located near the remote Ka Tum border gate, connecting Viet Nam's south western Tay Ninh province with Cambodia, a wildlife breeding farm owned by Tan Hoi Dong Co. Ltd. is well known as one of the country's first farms to obtain CITES¹ certification. However, most people not know that it is also an essential transit site for the most sophisticated and largest trans-border wildlife trafficking network in Viet Nam to date. This network involves forged CITES permits from Lao and inaccurate reporting of macaques actually caught in Cambodia, a country with weak wildlife protection enforcement.

According to descriptions in some Vietnamese newspapers, the Tan Hoi Dong's wildlife farm applies modern technology and scientific processes in their efforts to raise and breed snakes, turtles, and monkeys for use in medical testing and research of vaccines. There has been widespread reporting about the farm after the chairman of an American biological company said

Development Program, Viet Nam exported 2,700 and 4,300 Long-tailed Macaques to the U.S market in 2004 and 2005, respectively.

During recent years, the Vietnamese Government prohibited exploitation of wild Long-tailed Macaques, said Mr. Do Quang Tung, director of Viet Nam's CITES office, in a meeting with a team of journalists on July 23rd at the Hanoi-based FPD. So, if wild macaques in Viet Nam are protected, wild-caught macaques exported from Viet Nam might be captured from other countries.

According to the export permits issued from 2003-2005 provided by FPD officials, all Long-tailed Macaques exported to a Chinese company by Trung Viet have been verified to be wild-caught, not bred-captive. Even the Long-tailed Macaques exported by Trung Viet since 2006 are all reported as wild-caught (this problem will be covered in other investigative reports).

The question is how they are caught and transported, and whether this is done legally or illegally. Dr. Nguyen Xuan Binh, Vice Director of the Regional Veterinary Centre VI (RAHO-6), says that the export of Long-tailed Macaques has occurred for over 10 years. The only two companies in this business are the famous Primate Breeding & Development Joint Venture (NAFOVANNY) and Tan Hoi Dong, with which the U.S. Primate Products Corp. is looking for cooperation opportunities.

NAFOVANNY is reported to be the world's biggest Long-tailed Macaque exporting company, with about 8,000-9,000 individuals exported per year over its 14-year history. Its only competitor is Tan Hoi Dong is a close affiliate of Trung Viet. Mr. Tran Quy revealed the real connection between Trung Viet and Tan Hoi Dong: he knowingly signs his name on a contract with his partner as the Director of Tan Hoi Dong, while is at the same time the Director of Trung Viet. So he is the director of both companies.

It was probably through this connection that Tan Hoi Dong was able to quickly become a partner of Primate Products Inc. immediately after it was established in 2005. The joint venture has the potential to overtake the powerful NAFOVANNY. An \$8 million stem cell research laboratory, with Long-tailed Macaques provided by Tan Hoi Dong, will be built at the foot of Ba Den Mountain in Tay Ninh Province. If this project is successful, it will become a leading biotechnology facility not only in Viet Nam , but also throughout the region.

Attracted by potentially lucrative profits, such as a return of \$100-800 per macaque, Tran Quy has made serious mistakes. Prior to this report, these mistakes have been kept secret by Tran Quy, his allies and his anonymous supporters in government agencies. Since 2003, after leaving his job in the Ministry of Public Security, he planned to build the largest macaque breeding farm in Cat Ba National Park, in the north of Viet Nam, in order to compete with the powerful NAFOVANNY, operating in the south of Viet Nam for 10 years but majority-owned by VANNY, a Hong Kong company.

The author of this report has been following Mr. Quy's career his departure in 2003. His plan to build a breeding farm has advanced after receiving strong support from the director of the Hanoi-based Institute of Ecological and Biological Resources (IEBR). IEBR is one of the government's four CITES Scientific Authorities in Viet Nam. Mr. Quy's breeding farm plan was also approved

by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). The company was allowed to import 5,000 Long-tailed Macaques from Laos.³

The project almost received approval by the People's Committee of northern coastal city of Hai Phong, but was eventually blocked by strong opposition from environmentalists. This was because Cat Ba National Park was being proposed to UNESCO to be named as a World Biosphere Reserve.⁴ Thus, the plan was considered to be unrealistic. At the time, I strongly believed Tran Quy would give up on a plan that was proving to be costly and unrealistic, so I didn't try to meet him as I had once intended. Moreover, he was a busy man and I often failed to meet him despite my ongoing efforts. I also abandoned my attempts to find out why the leader of IEBR – one of the biggest zoological and botanical research bases in Viet Nam - supported the project, which would ruin the Cat Ba national park (near the World's Natural Heritage site of Ha Long Bay). This question is worthy of more investigation.

Fortunately for Tran Quy, the permit from MARD allowed Trung Viet to

certificate of origin” said Mr. Cao Van Tien, NAFOVANNY’s Executive Director. The company eventually sent staff to Hanoi to meet with FPD officials, and strenuous efforts produced some documents. NAFOVANNY claims they did not know these documents were counterfeit.

In October of 2004, Trung Viet changed the wildlife import location to a new area, 1,500 km south of the Cau Treo border gate. The new import site was the Ka Tum border gate in the southern Tay Ninh Province, adjacent to Cambodia’s Kompong Cham province. There were two main reasons for this move: firstly, Trung Viet had, since its establishment, actually imported its macaques from Cambodia, not Laos. Secondly, until last year, the main customer of Trung Viet had been NAFOVANNY – which was situated in the southern Dong Nai province, just 120 km from the border of Tay Ninh province.

Currently, it is difficult to explain why NAFOVANNY wants to buy Long-tailed Macaques from Cambodia, although this will be the subject of a future in-depth investigation. Mr. Tran Van Trong, Vice Director of the Ka Tum border gate customs department says that Trung Viet’s network imported 15,850 macaques through Ka Tum border gate over 2005 and 2006. Such import volumes are an impossibility for NAFOVANNY. Each year the company imports less than 1,000 macaques directly from Cambodia with a price of US\$300 per head, says Mr. Cao Van Tien, executive director of NAFOVANNY.⁶ According to Dr Nguyen Xuan Binh, was NAFOVANNY requested to follow quarantine procedures for importing only 400 macaques from Cambodia in the first half of 2007. It is interesting to note that Trung Viet’s network did not apply to import monkeys at this time, and thus did not have to deal with quarantine procedures.

In order to find the secret that enables Trung Viet to import macaques we attempted to acquire the original files concerning their import. Under the Vietnamese press law, reporters are empowered to request that appropriate authorities provide relevant information or documents concerning investigations, as long as these documents are not listed as secret records stipulated by Government. Like we were told at the Cau Treo border gate (in Ha Tinh Province, 400 km south of Hanoi), other agencies have also informed us that all macaques imported by Trung Viet and its network were approved by permits from Laos. However, none of the government agencies would provide or show us copies of the export permits from Laotian government agencies. The Vietnamese authorities repeatedly passed the buck, refused to answer or gave conflicting responses to our queries, or were simply absent from their offices.

At RAHO-6 on 10th July, 2007, Vice Director Dr Binh said he was not in charge of wildlife quarantine management for import/export. He put the responsibility on the Director, Mr. Dong Manh Hoa. However, Mr. Hoa was on a business trip to Hanoi that day. Dr. Binh, agreed to provide some documents related to quarantine work even though he was not responsible for quarantine. However, when we mentioned the permits from Laotian authorities, he refused stridently and said that he would need directives from his managers for giving out those papers. We contacted the Hanoi-based National Veterinary Department (NVD) via telephone in the afternoon of the same day, and they approved our request. However, after later speaking with Dr Binh, the same person from NVD subsequently refused to confirm this prior approval.

⁶ By comparison, a long-tailed monkey illegally imported from Cambodia is said to cost only US\$50-60.

We went to the Tay Ninh Customs Department and asked Mr. Nguyen Van Don, Head of Administration, for copies of permits from Laos. Mr. Don said those documents would be available from the Ka Tum Border Gate Customs Department

is too far away, nearly 2,000 km from Hai

It should be made clear if this figure includes the 5,000 macaques that Trung Viet was permitted to import from Laos through the Cau Treo border gate in central Ha Tinh province under the MARD permits issued in 2003, signed by two deputy ministers of MARD. MARD's Correspondence Letter No. 3322/ dated 9 October 2003 signed by Vice Minister Bui Ba Bong and sent to NAFOVANNY mentioned the permission for Trung Viet to import 5,000 Long-tailed Macaques.

Puzzling data from the FPD was also found in a recent letter to Tien Phong.⁷ It reported the total number of macaques imported by Trung Viet and Tan Hoi Dong from the year 2000 to the present as 16,182 individuals. However, the next correspondence letter dated 30th July, 2007 received by Tien Phong (No. 853), signed by the same official, showed a lower number: 14,985 individuals. To clarify that difference, the later correspondence letter explained, "it is hard to correctly sum up data because those companies are asked to amend their permits so many times". Adding more confusion to the picture, Mr Tran Van Trong, the Ka Tum Customs Department's Vice Director, stated to the media that during 2005-2006 Tran Quy's network imported 15,850 macaques through Ka Tum border gate.

If we include 5,985 individuals imported in 2004 that the FPD reported to CITES and that can be found on the CITES website, between 2004 and 2006 the number of macaques imported would reach 21,853 individuals. In short, there is a significant difference between the macaque data provided to Tien Phong by the FPD and the macaque data provided by the Ka Tum customs department or displayed on the CITES website. Why do these differences exist? Is there any illicit manipulation of data, and what is the purpose of that change? Only the FPD can answer these complicated questions.

Finding clues from Laos

Interview with the Director of Xay Savang Company

Below is part of the interview with the Director of Xay Savang Company with the help of a Lao interpreter who translated from Lao into Vietnamese.

Reporter: Have you ever re-exported wild animals to other countries, such as Viet Nam?

Xay Savang: Never.

Reporter: Has your company ever exported wild animals captured in Laos to other countries?

Xay Savang: Never.

Reporter: Do you have any foreign counterparts in the wildlife trade?

Xay Savang: No, except recent cooperation with a Chinese partner to develop a 22-hectare farm, which received a permit to operate in the late 2005.

Reporter: Do you know a Vietnamese business named Trung Viet, based in Hai Phong, Viet Nam?

Xay Savang: I have never heard of this company. There are very many Vietnamese companies dealing with us in several fields such as timber import and export and consumer products. None of them has a name like that.

Reporter: Have you seen this set of documents? (I hand Mr. Keosavang a copy of the documents provided to me by the Viet Nam FPD, permit no.0852 issued on 12 April 2004, concerning the business between Xay Savang Company and Trung Viet Company).

Xay Savang: I don't know this set of documents. May be someone has borrowed my company's name to carry out his business?

Reporter: Can I ask again: Have you ever heard, seen or received this set of documents?

Xay Savang: This is the first time I've ever seen them.

Xay Savang: 300 individuals, and they have been bred here since January, 2006.

Reporter: How many workers work in the farm?

Xay Savang: Seven Lao and five Chinese.

Reporter: How much are they paid?

Xay Savang: The Laos receive 500,000 - 1,000,000 kips (about 50 - 100 USD) a month, the

their operations after Laos became a member of

After that, Mr. Vongchanh gave me a list in Lao language of wildlife trade seizure cases by the CD during 2006-2007. There have been arrests in 13 cases, worth 158 million Lao kips. But there is no case involving Long-tailed Macaques. If there is no transport of monkeys here, how can we manage to seize monkeys, Mr. Vongchanh asked with a friendly smile. To double check, I asked to meet with the Lao CITES Management Authority and the Lao Forestry Department. After waiting a long time, the meeting was arranged successfully. Mr. Thongphath Vongmany, Vice Director of the FD, and Mr. Bouaphanh Phanthavong, Acting Head of Forestry Resources Conservation Division, FD, welcomed me into their office.

A Trans-border Wildlife Trade Network Unmasked
Part IV: Exposing the Truth

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In March 2004, Trung Viet Co. imported nearly 1,000 Long-tailed Macaques through Cau Treo border crossing, Central Ha Tinh province, bordering Laos' Bolikhamxay Province. The permit for this transfer¹⁰ was not issued until 12 April 2004 by the Laos Management Authority. If the time of import is correct, it is clear that Trung Viet completed shipment without prior approval. More significantly, the copy of the Laos permit obtained from the Viet Nam's FPD was almost totally altered, except the date of issue.

In the set of documents that Viet Nam's FPD reluctantly provided in Ha Noi after many requests over a period of more than one month, there is a list of specimens attached to the export permits. The list shows a dubiously large number of wildlife specimens. According to the FPD documents, in addition to the permit for Trung Viet to import 7,000 monkeys from April 12th to

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More surprisingly, the whole set of documents allowing Xay Savang Co. to export 80,000 wild animals to Trung Viet Co., was confirmed as fake by Mr. Thongphath Vongmany, the Vice Director of the Forestry Department. Viet Nam's FPD provided me copies of these four documents after many requests and initial refusals:

1. A Vietnamese translation copy of export permit no.0652/LN.04, purportedly issued in Vientiane, dated June 12th, 2004 by Lao Forestry Department;
2. A Lao version of the above document;
3. A list of goods in English enclosed with the export permit no.0652/LN.04, dated April 12th, 2004, and
4. A confirmation letter in English dated April 12th, 2004, regarding the same permit, signed by Mr. Veunevang Bouttalath (then Vice Director of the FD) to Dr. Nguyen Ba Thu (then Director of Viet Nam FPD and Head of Viet Nam's CITES Management Authority).

Examining these documents with me, Mr. Vongmany notes the following:

The fourth document is invalid because the signature of the then-Vice Director of Laos FD (Mr. Veunevang Bouttalath) is not stamped with an official seal. In addition, this document was not numbered: the space for the document number was left empty. The second document is very different from the original archived in the office of Lao Forestry Department. Generally, both documents¹¹ mention the wildlife trading business. That is, the documents concern transport of wild animals by a Lao company to a Vietnamese counterpart. Furthermore, the lists of goods in two documents are relatively similar in terms of categories of species like snakes, turtles, and monkeys. Nevertheless, according to Mr. Vongmany, the discrepancies between them are fundamental and lead to major changes of the entire trading situation. Instead of only allowing transit of goods from Malaysia to Viet Nam through Laos in the original document, the copy states the permission for the Lao company to directly export wild animals from Lao to Viet Nam. Moreover, according to the copy, the number of monkeys allowed to be exported from Laos to Viet Nam is much higher than the number allowed to leave from Malaysia to Viet Nam through Lao.

Deadly discrepancies

Here are the major discrepancies between the two documents, the original and the copy

No	checking items	The original (from Laos FD)	The copy (from Vietnam's FPD)
01	Document number	<i>0652/LN-04</i>	<i>0652/LN-04</i>
02	Date of issue	<i>12 April 2004</i>	<i>12 April 2004</i>

		<i>dated 29 March 2004 - Agreement of MARD – Vietnam</i>	<i>- Blank</i>
06	Origin of goods	<i>Malaysia</i>	<i>Lao and Asian countries</i>
07	Duration of validity	<i>From 12 April 2004 to 12 June 2004</i>	<i>From 12 April 2004 to 30 December 2004</i>
08	List of goods	<i>Listed on the same page of the document</i>	<i>Attached as appendix</i>
		<i>See table I</i>	<i>See table II</i>
09	Stamp and signature	<i>See picture 1</i>	<i>See picture 2</i>
10	Sent to	<i>Bolikhamxay Province Khamuon Province Champasak Province</i>	<i>Blank</i>

Table I

1.	Pangolins	Individual	10,847
2.	Snakes	Individual	35,000
3.	Soft-shell turtles	Individual	88,540
4.	Turtles	Individual	10,648
5.	Monkeys	Individual	1,450
6.	???	Kg	4,519

Table II

DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY
1. Live turtles (Origin: Lao and other Asian countries) Scientific and English names	(individuals)
1. <i>Cuora amboinensis</i> /Asian Box Turtle	20,000
2. <i>Hieremys annandalii</i> /Yellow Headed Temple Turtle	10,000
3. <i>Siebenrocliella crassicollis</i> /Black Mash Turtle	10,000
4. <i>Orlida harnehensisi</i> /Malaysian Giant Turtle)	10,000
5. <i>Heosemys gradis</i> / Asian Giant Terrapin	10,000
6. <i>Cuora trifassetala</i> /Three-lined Box Turtle	08
2. Live snakes (Origin: Lao) Scientific and English names	
1. <i>Ptyas mocosus</i> /Common Rat Snake	5,000
2. <i>Naja najal</i> /Menocellate Cobra	5,000
3. <i>Ophiophagus hannah</i> /King Cobra	3,000

3. Live monkeys (Origin: Lao)	
Scientific and English names	
1.	<i>Macaca fascicularis</i> /Long- tailed Monkey
2.	<i>Macaca mulatta</i> /Rhesus Monkey
3.	<i>Macaca hemestrinal</i> /Pig-tailed Monkey
	5,000
	1,000
	1,000

In short, the original permit for transit of wildlife from Malaysia through Laos to Viet Nam was turned copied and into an export permit from Laos into Viet Nam.

There are other notable discrepancies, such as the number of monkeys. While the original permit allows the transit of only 1,450 monkeys, the copy permit gives permission for direct import of 7,000 monkeys, including 5,000 Long-tailed Macaques.

An international network?

We have navigated a long process to prove that the Lao permits to export wildlife to Viet Nam’s Trung Viet company turned out to be forged. With proof collected and assembled, it is believed that the wild animals imported by Tran Quy did not come from Laos. So where did they come from? Our initial investigation at Ka Tum border gate, in southwest Tay Ninh province, shows that the animals actually came from Cambodia through illegal channels. (There will be another report on this issue).

In principle, if animals originated from Laos with the permission of Lao authorities, and were then transited through Cambodia, that would require the Cambodia CITES Management Authority to issue re-export permits. The Cambodian Customs Office would have also had to provide customs clearance permits to Tran Quy’s shipments that transited through Cambodia. After these procedures, the specimens could then be legally re-exported to Viet Nam, using the same process of transporting animals from Malaysia through Laos to Viet Nam that was referred to above. However, at the Ka Tum border gate the CD, where Tran Quy’s network submitted the wildlife import files, Vietnamese authorities did not provide any papers from Cambodia.

In addition to Cambodia, some of the wild animals imported by Tran Quy’s network supposedly came from Malaysia. The original transit permit from the Laos FD verified that all snakes, soft-shell turtles, turtles and monkeys came from Malaysia with the permission of Malaysia CITES. In fact, there were fewer wild animals imported to Viet Nam by Mr Tran Quy’s network from Malaysia than stated in the permit. According to an anonymous source, who is in Tran Quy’s network, the remaining quantity came from illegal sources in Cambodia.

So, is it possible that the papers from Malaysia were also forged? One of our sources claimed that documents were forged for exporting goods from each country. For example, in Malaysia, permits supposedly issued by Malaysian authorities were forged to allow transit through Laos, Thailand or Cambodia into Viet Nam and then to China. Monkeys captured in Malaysia must go through illegal transportation channels because Malaysia prohibited export of monkeys from 1987 until August of 2007. According to the above-mentioned anonymous informant, these animals were transported via hired airplanes, and they were declared to authorities to be goods

such as vegetables to allow transit through airports. The monkeys were anaesthetized, bound and gagged in order to keep them silent.

The source revealed that other networks, beside Tran Quy's, smuggle animals from Malaysia and Cambodia through Viet Nam to China. Each animal brings an average price of US\$200-300 at the Viet Nam-China border. According to an official from the south central Khanh Hoa province's FDP, a shipment of Long-tailed Macaques was confiscated in Khanh Hoa province of Viet Nam on 11 September, 2007. The truck was driven by Mr. Trinh Xuan Huy, a resident of northern Ninh Binh province, and held 90 Long-tailed Macaques. The anonymous official noted that Chinese companies prefer to buy monkeys from Trung Viet over other networks because only Trung Viet can obtain so-called 'legal' permits.

In many cases, Trung Viet was not able to supply enough monkeys to fulfil the permits. By purchasing the excess permits from Trung Viet, the Chinese would be able to convert smuggled monkeys from other sources into legal ones. This is reported to be the trick used by Mr. Tran Quy's Tan Hoi Dong Company, who established wildlife farms to make the illegally imported monkeys from Cambodia and other South-East Asian countries appear to be legally bred monkeys.

A relationship between Tran Quy and Viet Nam CITES Authority?

"Is there any special relationship between Tran Quy and someone in Viet Nam CITES Management Authority", an official from the Viet Nam's Environment Police Department asked this reporter.

For the original permit issued to Tran Quy, see the report by the author, "The illegal trade in monkeys in Viet Nam", available at <http://www.cites.org/eng/press/2007/07/07070701.pdf>.

CITES regulations. They can collect and export thousands of wild animals using their forged CITES documents.

It is easy for Tran Quy to have legal documents like the ones issued by the FPD in southern Dong Nai province, where NAFOVANNY (which is 40 percent state-owned) is located. For example, one document dated 6 May 2005 concerns verification of monkeys that were allegedly illegal to import. It states, "Today, in Dong Nai: The monkeys arrived at the [NAFOVANNY] farm from a legal source".

According to the UNDP email discussion forum on wildlife conservation in Viet Nam, the three top countries with booming exports of monkeys to biological research labs in the US are China, Viet Nam and Indonesia. Conservation experts in this forum say most of the monkeys imported to the US are wild. International conservation organizations have investigated the suspicious trade networks in Viet Nam. Until now, they have not found any significant evidence.

Primate Products Inc, the American partner of Tran Quy's Tan Hoi Dong company, is among four major Long-tailed Macaque labs that import more than 1,000 individuals annually. In 2004,