

April 28, 2010

PRESS RELEASE

New ID guide and film to strengthen enforcement and combat tortoise and freshwater turtle trade in Vietnam

Hanoi, April 28, 2010 – Education for Nature – Vietnam (ENV) has released a new set of resources intended to strengthen efforts by frontline law enforcement officers to combat illegal trade of tortoises and freshwater turtles. The resources include an electronic identification guide to tortoises and freshwater turtles of Vietnam and a supplemental film intended to help wildlife protection authorities and police better understand the crisis that turtles face from hunting and trade.

The Vietnamese language turtle identification guide was developed by ENV in partnership with the Cuc Phuong Turtle Conservation Center (TCC) and the Vietnam-based Asian Turtle Program (ATP). The guide includes illustrations and photos of all 25 native species of tortoises and freshwater turtles, with an emphasis on highlighting key features used to distinguish between species, linked to a series of galleries at the end of the document where similar species can be viewed side-by-side and identified. In addition to a chart listing the legal and conservation status of each species and range maps denoting their distribution in Vietnam, the guide also prescribes options on placement of confiscated turtles and local contacts for inquiries and expert advice. Six species are flagged as critical priorities urging authorities to take specific action if encountered in the trade.



The supplementary film on the Asian Turtle Crisis was produced in 2009 by ENV and Vietnam Television. The film features an introduction on the ecology of turtles and the Asian turtle crisis, highlighting the impacts illegal trade has had on native populations of Vietnam's turtles, and urging law enforcement agencies to take active measures to strengthen protection. Cuc Phuong Turtle Conservation Center director Bui Dang Phong narrates the 19 minute film, which has already been aired nationally on VTV. Link to film: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LigcmDOlyEU> (Part 1)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FryGbIAzYPY> (Part 2)

The new resource packet was designed to serve as an electronic version of ATP's Turtle Identification, Ecology, and Trade training workshop.

"Over the past 12 years, we have been carrying out numerous training programs for law enforcement agencies throughout Vietnam focused on the identification, ecology, and trade of Vietnam's turtles," says Douglas Hendrie, a technical advisor to ENV and founder of the Asian Turtle Program. *"However, our*

efforts thus far have reached probably no more than 300 forest rangers, police, and customs officers.” Hendrie says the new electronic resource packet was designed to deliver the key components of the law enforcement workshop, and reach many more frontline officers at a fraction of the cost that is spent on training workshops. “We recognize that the value of personal contact is lost in producing a film and electronic version of the training, but we are confident that many more of the people who need this resource will get it electronically as it is copied from computer to computer, hopefully down to the district level.”

ENV is initially distributing the ID guide and film to provincial Forest Protection Departments, Environmental Police and forest ranger units assigned to protected areas throughout Vietnam. The resources will also be available to download online.

ENV and the Asian Turtle Program wish to thank the Humane Society International (HSI) and the Taronga Zoo for their continued support of efforts to protect Vietnam’s tortoise and freshwater turtles.

Vietnam’s Turtles

Vietnam is home to 25 native species of tortoises and freshwater turtles, including several species that are endemic only to Vietnam and a giant soft-shell turtle, Swinhoe’s soft-shell (*Rafetus swinhoei*) for which only four living specimens are known to remain in the world, two in a zoo in China, one in Hanoi’s Hoan Kiem Lake, and the world’s only known wild specimen in a lake just west of Hanoi. Vietnam’s turtles, like those of most other Asian countries, are threatened by widespread hunting and trade to meet the demand mainly from Chinese consumers who value turtles in exotic dishes and traditional medicine. In Vietnam, wild populations have declined sharply since the early 1990s when tons of turtles were reportedly smuggled across the border to China each day. Vietnam also plays an important role as the backdoor to China for turtles and other wildlife sourced from neighboring Cambodia and Laos.

About Education for Nature - Vietnam

Education for Nature-Vietnam (ENV) was established in 2000 as Vietnam’s first non-governmental organization focused 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. We employ creative and innovative strategies to influence attitudes and behavior, not only highlighting the need to protect Vietnam’s rich natural heritage and the living world around us, but also encouraging greater public participation in achieving this important and challenging task.

The Asian Turtle Program

The Asian Turtle Program (ATP) was established in 1998 with the development of the Turtle Conservation Center at Cuc Phuong National Park. The ATP administers field projects aimed at protection of critically endangered species including *Rafetus swinhoei* and *Mauremys annamensis*. The ATP is also tasked with training of forest rangers, raising public awareness about the importance of protecting Vietnam’s turtles, conducting conservation-focused research, and building the next generation of young scientists and professionals with expertise in Vietnam’s turtles.

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Stop Wildlife Crime!

If you observe wildlife being kept, sold, transported, traded, consumed, or advertised, contact your local authorities or call the ENV Wildlife Crime Hotline: **1800-1522** Email: hotline@fpt.vn