

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 in a report on the June 1, 2007 that a group of specialists would go to the Ka Tum border gate to inspect the Tan Hoi Dong farm. Unfortunately, as this series of articles will document, the Tan Hoi Dong company and its associates have long used false documents to import wild animals with their breeding program as a cover for allegedly illegal imports. Recently, many significant illegal wildlife trading cases have been stopped in Viet Nam.² However, until now there has been no evidence of violations of forest protection laws involving officials in the Vietnamese Forest Protection Department (FPD) or CITES Authorities – agencies that are charged with defending forests and conserving endangered species. If the evidence in this article is true then this a case of severe government misconduct, according to an official of a Hanoi-based international conservation.

Mr. Tran Quy, Director of Sino-Viet Border Trading Joint Stock Company (Trung Viet) warns that if the Long-tailed Macaque *Macaca fascicularis* is not protected and captive-bred as soon as possible, Viet Nam will no longer be able to use this species in biological technology. Mr. Tran Quy says Viet Nam's export of Long-tailed Macaques ranks third all over the world. According to information from an email discussion forum on conservation sponsored by the United Nations

¹ The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. See Box II and III at the end of story for more on CITES and macaques, respectively.

² Last October, some 6,000 kg of wildlife was confiscated nationwide, according to the Viet Nam's Forest Protection Department (FPD). And since the beginning of the year of 2007, around 5,866 individuals were intercepted.

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 sell all 5,000 imported macaques to NAFOVANNY. If there had not been such a permit,⁵ Trung Viet would not have otherwise known how to deal with this alien and invasive species. Doing business with NAFOVANNY offered possibly best strategy for Trung Viet to traffic its wild-caught Long-tailed Macaques as 40 percent of NAFOVANNY's shares belong to the Viet Nam Forest Corporation, an enterprise governed by MARD. In other words, the failure of the Cat Ba project brought Trung Viet a reason to sell macaques imported through the Cau Treo border gate, bordering Bolikhamxay province in Laos, to NAFOVANNY. Since then, NAFOVANNY has been the only large-scale trading partner of Trung Viet's macaques.

However, no one knows the exact nature of the relationship between Trung Viet and NAFOVANNY. It is rumoured that their businesses depend on one another. Trung Viet is able to exploit an extremely profitable source of macaques, while NAFOVANNY connects this trade to international markets. Such a symbiotic strategy seems to be kept obscured, and it continues to appear as though the two companies are operating independently from each other.

The board of NAFOVANNY agreed to buy macaques from Trung Viet based on advice from MARD officials, according to spokesperson from NAFOVANNY in a meeting on 14 July, 2007 at its office in Dong Nai Province. However, during the transaction, NAFOVANNY failed to receive a permit from Laos, the alleged exporting country. "We would feel secure if we have the

³ As stated in the Correspondence Letter No.1261/BNNPTNT released on 26 of May, 2003 and signed by a vice minister of MARD

⁴ Cat Ba Island, located about 150 km east of Hanoi, is a national park known for its amazing biodiversity. Cat Ba is home to many unique native species, including the extremely rare golden-headed Cat Ba langur. Escaped bred macaques (a potential problem with any large primate facility) could infect both wild animals and humans with a variety of diseases, according to Dr. Rosi Stenke, Manager of the Cat Ba Langur Conservation Project. "If some animals escaped, they would be potential transmitters of herpes, hepatitis B, tuberculosis, and/or other diseases for human beings as well as local wildlife", she said in a letter.

The plan is also said to be costly. The logistics of transporting, feeding, and caring for 2,000-5,000 primates are very complicated. "Would the animals go through quarantine? Who would be responsible for this? What measures would be taken to make sure none of the animals escape? (Electric fences can keep people out but may not be enough to keep clever monkeys inside the facility)" says the letter that opposes monkey shipment to Viet Nam, dated on May 20, 2004.

⁵ Correspondence, No 3322/NN-KL on 9th October, 2003 signed by Mr. Bui Ba Bong, Vice Minister of MARD

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. Mr. Tran Van Trong, Vice Director of Ka Tum Border Gate Customs Department, said his Department did not have those kind of documents. We only require the permits from the CITES Authority in Viet Nam when examining the import application forms of Trung Viet and Phat Thinh [another company affiliated with Trung Viet]. However, he immediately changed his rationale, saying he would need approval from the Provincial Customs Department to release the requested documents.

Moving up the bureaucracy, we made an appointment with MARD. We also contacted the national FPD in Hanoi. We finally had two meetings by the end of July, 2007 with the management board of FPD and Viet Nam's CITES Management Authority.

In these meetings we met Mr. Nguyen Huu Dung (Vice Director of the FPD), Mr. Do Quang Tung (Manager of Viet Nam's CITES Authority), Mr. Nguyen Phi Truyen (Head of the Special Forces), and Ms Ha Tuyet Nga (Program Officer of Viet Nam's CITES Authority, in charge of investigation, policy, and foreign affairs). They promised to provide us with copies of permits from the Lao CITES Authority. This promise was not kept. No copy of any permit has been sent by these agencies up to now.

Tran Quy and Mr. Kien, the director of a corporation said to be a Trung Viet shareholder, also promised to show us permits from Laos. In the end, everyone we contacted failed to provide the Lao permits. Copies of the permits from Laos are necessary in order to understand what was really happening at the Tan Hoi Dong macaque farm, so we began to hunt for Mr. Nguyen Hong Xuan. He is the Director of Tan Chau Duong Minh Chau Inter-district Forest Department, which is directly responsible for managing the Tan Hoi Dong wildlife farm. After many phone calls and nearly two months of waiting, on September 10th the FPD finally provided us with copies of the relevant permits. The documents were issued by a Lao government agency that was not the responsible CITES Authority. The permit was issued before Laos joined CITES on May 30th, 2004.

Tran Quy's Response

In an interview with the Hoang Quoc Dung of Tien Phong newspaper and Thanh Tung of Thanh Tra newspaper on July 15, 2007, Tran Quy, the director of the Trung Viet group of companies, made the following statements:

"My business is totally legal. I import wildlife directly from Lao enterprises in Bolikhamxay, Champasak, Sekong, and Vientiane provinces. All of my shipments of wildlife from Laos to Viet Nam are permitted by the Lao and Vietnamese management authorities";

About the Tan Hoi Dong company he stated:

I must say that it is managed by me. Setting up Tan Hoi Dong [was done] just to address the mountain of administrative procedures. The headquarters of my company, Trung Viet, are located in northern Hai Phong City and southern Tay Ninh province

is too far away, nearly 2,000 km from Hai Phong, my hometown. It is Tan Hoi Dong which helps me to resolve in time the ad hoc activities occurring there when my shipments to Viet Nam are implemented through the Ka Tum border gate";

And about moving the import activities from the central Ha Tinh province's Cau Treo border gate to the Ka Tum border gate further south:

[We did it] just to reduce the transport distance. In previous years, due to the long distance from Ha Tinh province to Dong Nai, where NAFOVANNY is located, many monkeys died while being transported. Now, with my import business being done through the Ka Tum border gate the transport distance is shortened a lot by taking advantage of [transport] on the Mekong River ."

A Trans-border Wildlife Trade Network Unmasked

Part II: Hunting Down

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With the help of Internews' Earth Journalism Network, we contacted a representative of the CITES Secretariat after researching the website of this well-known wildlife trade monitoring organization. All of the government agencies we met insisted that Trung Viet legally imported Long-tailed Macaques from Laos. Viet Nam's CITES Management Authority, the highest authority concerning trade in endangered species, assured us that companies in Tran Quy's network are the only ones importing macaques from Laos. Statistics found on the CITES website refer to the import data for Trung Viet and Tan Hoi Dong companies, explained Ms Ha Tuyet Nga, the Program Officer for Viet Nam's CITES Authority, in charge of investigation, policy, and foreign affairs.

There were suspicious discrepancies between the data provided by the Viet Nam FPD and the data published on the CITES website. CITES data is usually double checked carefully down to the smallest details. According to an official of CITES, comparing data is also a useful way to discover wildlife trade or violations of CITES regulations in a country. In an email responding to a reporter from Tien Phong, Mr John M. Sellar of the CITES Secretariat explained that one way to compare data is through checking annual reports on the export, import, and transit of wildlife from the 172 member countries. Data from these reports can be compared with that from wildlife importing countries. The information in the trade database comes from the statistics that CITES parties submit in their annual reports. This usually includes details of exports, imports and re-exports. Consequently, one can usually compare what has been reported by an exporting country against what has been reported by an importing country, Mr. Sellar stated in his email on the 10th of September, 2007. If there is any difference, the investigation team of CITES will study the case and the two countries will have to justify the discrepancies with CITES. Another reason for tight data control within CITES is that they do not allow importing and exporting over quota. A trader can export fewer specimens than authorized on a permit but never more Mr. Sellar explains.

According to an official from the FPD, CITES gave a certain number of labels to Viet Nam's CITES Management Authority to attach to each permit as a type of quota, like the ones on permits issued to Trung Viet. Every year, Viet Nam's CITES Management Authority has to report the number of labels used to the CITES Secretariat. Based on that report, CITES should know the situation of macaque importing and exporting in Viet Nam. However, the process works only if Viet Nam's FPD follows the CITES regulations. Because it is trust-based, CITES has no power or mechanism to monitor whether its members follow its regulations or not. Since the annual reports are received from CITES management authorities, which are usually government departments or certainly designated by governments, the CITES Secretariat has no reason to question their authenticity, Mr. Sellar wrote.

With regard to macaque imports and exports from Laos, Mr. Sellar said, “as you have noted, LPDR [the Lao People's Democratic Republic] only joined CITES in 2004. Consequently, it is only obliged to start submitting annual trade reports from 2005”. However, Mr. Sellar noted that, “as yet Laos has not submitted an annual report. My colleagues will have reminded it to do so. If it continues to fail to submit reports, the Secretariat will take the appropriate action”. Consequently, it appears that the only trade data that will be available at present will be that originating from annual reports submitted by Viet Nam. “I note that the most recent annual report submitted by Viet Nam relates to 2005”, he added. In other words, CITES has not received any reports from Laos, contradicting statements from Viet Nam’s FPD that the data concerning macaque imports and exports was submitted to CITES by both countries, Laos and Viet Nam.

Data Cooking?

Viet Nam’s FPD also gives different data from that collected elsewhere. When comparing the data from the FPD with data declared at the Cau Treo and Ka Tum border gates by Tran Quy’s network of companies, we found a big difference. In theory, each macaque allegedly smuggled from Cambodia and then re-exported to China can bring a profit of as much as \$500, even before it is exported to the United States (the problems regarding these profits will be covered in detail in another feature). Thus, a small difference between the reported and real exports, just 100 macaques for example, would bring an importer a chance to dodge income tax on \$50,000. This could amount to hundreds of millions of Vietnamese Dong (VND), much higher than the savings from salary of a high-ranking official in Viet Nam.

Comparing the two figures of macaques exported from Laos to Viet Nam from the CITES website and the FPD, we found the statistics on the CITES website (at the end of October, 2007) which showed that 2,000 individuals were exported from Laos to Viet Nam in 2005. On the other hand, FPD data provided on 28 August, 2007 by Mr. Do Quang Tung, Manager of Viet Nam’s CITES office, showed that 2,200 macaques were imported/exported during that time.

I don’t know whether the figure of 2,200 imported macaques provided by the FPD representative was also submitted to CITES or not. But bearing in mind John Sellar’s note that statistics from the year 2005 on the CITES website came from the FPD, it is worth emphasizing that the date on the CITES website and from the Viet Nam FPD are not the same. “I do not know why the data submitted to the trade database by the FPD of Viet Nam should be any different from what it has supplied to journalists”, wrote Mr. Sellar. This is a matter that should be raised with the Department.

The investigation by the team from the Viet Nam Forum for Environmental Journalists (VFEJ) found even more discrepancies with customs department data. According to the Ka Tum Customs Department, Trung Viet and Phat Thinh, a company also said to be among Tran Quy’s network, imported 6,200 macaques through Ka Tum border gate in 2005. Mr. Tran Van Trong, Vice Director of the Ka Tum Customs Department, reports that all of the imported macaques had permits from Viet Nam 's CITES Management Authority. This raises some intriguing questions: Why there is no information about these 6,200 imported macaques in the FPD’s documents that were sent to Tien Phong Newspaper? And why is there no mention of such imported macaques on the CITES website?

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

The biggest obstacles in our investigation came from the two Vietnamese agencies, the CITES Management Authority and the FPD, who we once regarded as potentially strong supporters. In the first meeting with CITES officials, on July 23rd 2007, Mr. Do Quang Tung, Manager of Viet Nam's CITES Authority, told us not to make any fuss and suggested he would help if we told him what we thought was the actual story. The meeting also included Ms Nga from Viet Nam's CITES authority, and Mr. Tran Dinh Hien, in charge of issuing permits and handling papers. We were not provided any materials, except a memorandum to Tien Phong with very general contents.

The second meeting with the FPD, on July 30th 2007, included Mr. Nguyen Huu Dung, the Vice Director of the FPD, officials of Viet Nam's CITES Authority, as well as Mr. Nguyen Phi Truyen, Head of the FPD's Task Force, whose presence there was not explained. The FPD officials said again that they were willing to cooperate. We asked the FPD to provide us with copies of permits from the Lao CITES Authority, as well as to help connect us with contacts in Laos. To date, these two requests have been ignored without explanation.

After substantial and difficult research, we finally contacted Dr Souroudong Sundara, General Director of the Lao Scientific Authority, via email. He reported that he had only approved

⁷ Correspondence Letter No. 824 dated 20/07/2007 signed by Mr. Nguyen Huu Dung (Vice Director of FPD)

permits to one Chinese company to export 200 macaques, and that he had never heard of the Vietnamese companies who we had been informed had received Lao permits.⁸ In principle, the Lao CITES Authority can not give permits to companies without the approval of the Lao Scientific Authority, said Mr. Thongphath Vongmany, the Vice Director of the Forestry Department in the Lao Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, in a talk with Tien Phong Newspaper.

Tran Quy shared with us his list of the names and addresses of Lao partners specializing in exporting macaques to Trung Viet and its associates. To confirm this information, we asked the Viet Nam National FPD for help. Unfortunately, the addresses of Lao and Chinese partners in the documents we received from FPD were intentionally redacted. Mr. Do Quang Tung, Manager of Viet Nam's CITES Authority, explained in the aforementioned email letter, dated 28 August 2007, that all of the permits above have no information about import-export partners (boxes No. 03 and 04) in order to protect the business secrets of these companies. He didn't explain why or what state laws required or authorized him to withhold such information.

The real business of Tran Quy's network inside Viet Nam is a secret. Since 2004, we have failed to find any legal irregularities in his network's activities. Many people believe the illicit wildlife trade network could not be unmasked until the investigation reveals evidence on the forging sources, including the identity of Tran Quy's partners that were redacted from documents provided by the manager of Viet Nam's CITES Office.

Accessing files from the other sources, we acquired some Lao addresses, which include the Xay Savang Import-Export Company (in Bolikhamxay province), the Xayasa Import-Export Trading Company (174 Una Sonxay village, Pakxan District, Bolikhamxay province), and the Champasak SLIE Import-Export Company (B. Keosamphanh in Pakse, Champasak province).

⁸ The actual e-mail from Dr. Sundara, received on July 23rd, 2007, stated: "As Scientific Authority we have had justified only one company to export 200 monkeys [Appendix 2 of CITES] to China PD, and the name of companies that you informed me in attached file I never done a scientific justification for CITES permit for Lao Management Authority to sign the official CITES document."

A Trans-border Wildlife Trade Network Unmasked Part III: Troubles and Unknotting

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Only three days after the Viet Nam CITES Authority and the National FPD issued the permit to the Ka Tum farm monkey farm, Trung Viet celebrated their success in a unique way. They exported six shipments of long-tailed macaques from their newly certified farm (a total of 900 individuals in 192 packages) to China, from the 10th to 18th of May, 2007⁹. At the same time, information we collected in Laos and verified independently revealed more suspicious problems relating to monkey trading activities at the Ka Tum farm.

From Vientiane I travelled toward Bolikhamxay Province, which is nearly 150 km southeast of the capital. I asked a local couple to take me to the Xayasa Trade Export & Import Co. Ltd as it seems to have a clear address: No 174 Una Sonxay Village, Pakxan District, Bolikhamxay Province. However, we failed to find the Xayasa Company after looking for half a day. Instead, we decided to look for the Xay Savang Company in another part of this big province. We noticed a hotel named Xay Savang located not very far from the main road. By luck, the owner of this newly-opened hotel is also the owner of the Xay Savang Export & Import Company – finally had we discovered the company that had been listed in the permit issued by the Viet Nam CITES Authority obtained from Viet Nam FPD. The Director of Xay Savang Company, Mr. Vixay Keosavang, discussed without hesitation issues that none of the Viet Nam CITES Authority officials nor the macaque trading magnate Tran Quy wanted us to hear.

It took about two hours in the Xay Savang hotel to wait for Mr. Keosavang. In the twilight, I saw an old mini truck with three people as it rushed into the hotel's courtyard. One of them was Mr. Keosavang, who looked fatter and whiter than his two workers. They were arriving back from a wildlife farm. According to Viet Nam officials, five sets of permits that had been signed by the head of the Vietnamese FPD (no.633-638; no.636 was not included) and shown to the investigative journalist team, allowed the Xayasa Company to export 1,700 Long-tailed Macaques to Trung Viet. Meanwhile, a Lao permit also allowed Xay Savang to export wild animals to Trung Viet. It was issued on 12 April, 2004 by the Lao Forestry Department (FD) of the Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry. The permit no.0652 was signed by the then-Vice Director of Forestry Department (FD), who is now the Director of the FD and of the Lao CITES Management Authority. After years of investigation and thousands of kilometres travelled, these permits obtained from Viet Nam and Laos were key to solving the mystery of the illegal macaque trade ring.

⁹ According to Document No. 2147/BC-HQSB, Ho Chi Minh City, 2nd July, 2007, issued by the Customs Department, Tan Son Nhat International Airport Border Gate)

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.

Reporter: Do you think these documents are fake?

Xay Savang: I think so.

Reporter: Please tell us if your farm is capable of exporting wild animals to Viet Nam ?

Xay Savang: We just started the business and have never exported any wildlife to Viet Nam.

Reporter: Are any of your counterparts in this business from Viet Nam?

Xay Savang: No. We work with a Chinese partner. They contributed the share of one million USD. We contribute 300,000.00 USD through land use and infrastructure.

Reporter: What kind of wildlife is bred most frequently on your farm?

Xay Savang: Long-tailed Macaques.

Reporter: Why do you focus on breeding this species and where are they exported to?

Xay Savang: I don't know. Mr. Chen from Kunming, China, said that all Long-tailed Macaques produced on the farm would be exported to China.

Reporter: How long does the contract between your company and the Chinese counterpart last?

Xay Savang: About ten years starting in January, 2006.

Reporter: How many Long-tailed Macaques are there in your farm now and how long have they been bred?

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 average income level in Lao. But I don't know about the Chinese side.

Reporter: How many Long-tailed Macaques are you going to raise?

Xay Savang: Our plan is to breed about 10,000 individuals.

Reporter: Do you know how many companies in Bolikhamxay Province have permission to breed wildlife like yours?

Xay Savang: There are two, my company and the Vannaseng Trading Co. Ltd.

Reporter: Do you know if there is any company named Xayasa Export & Import Trading Co. Ltd at 174 Sonxay Village, Pakxan District?

Xay Savang: There is no company with that name.

If the above responses provided by Mr. Keosavang are true, the permit signed by Mr. Veunavang Bouthalath raises questions about the validity of the permits issued by the former Vice Director of Laos FD. Under the circumstances, the interview confirms our suspicions: the documents provided by Viet Nam's FPD that mention Xay Savang Company, after many requests and delays, are almost certainly fakes. (Read more detailed information in Part IV: Exposing the Truth)

After this revealing interview, I decided not to go southward to Champasak province to verify the Champasak SLIE Import & Export Company, which is nearly 500 km from Bolikhamxay. Instead I made a tentative appointment with another company in Bolikhamxay Province, Vannaseng Trading Co. Ltd. As Mr. Keosavang said in the interview, this company also has a wildlife farm. The appointment was arranged in Vientiane, where I could contact Lao authorities to authenticate and clarify the documents that were supposedly issued there.

The interview with Mr. Keosavang created more complications, but it also provided more clues. Who could we believe? Mr. Keosavang? The Lao FD? Viet Nam FPD, who gave us the questionable documents? Or were all of these parties lying? In fact, the documents from Laos that could resolve this situation are permits issued by the Lao CITES Authority since 2005. The copy of the permit issued by Laos that the Viet Nam FPD received was not exactly what we needed from the Viet Nam's side... at first.

While this permit is useful to have for reference, it is hard to verify because it was issued when Laos was not yet a member of CITES. Moreover, Mr. Nguyen Huu Dung, Vice Director of Viet Nam's FPD, warned us at that time that Laos dealt with permits without following any CITES regulations. Instead, they followed procedures according to their own understanding, said Mr. Dung in a meeting with the investigative journalist team at FPD headquarters in Ha Noi, on July 30th, 2007. As a non-member of CITES, the Lao Management Authority Office was at that time the only agency responsible for the approval of export or transit of wild animals from their country. The Lao CITES Authority, created by adding CITES to the name of the agency, started

their operations after Laos became a member of CITES on 30 May 2004, ten years later than Viet Nam.

These two organizations (the Lao Management Authority Office and the Lao CITES Management Authority) have different international legal standing. But the new organization still belongs to the same parent agency, the Lao Forestry Department. Like Viet Nam, the Director of the FD is also in charge of the CITES Management Authority. I hoped to rely on this similarity of organizational structure when I registered for an appointment with Lao FD officials. Without a copy of the permit issued by the Lao CITES Management Authority, I had to depend on luck to find evidence that originated three years ago, when they [the Lao Management Authority] followed procedures ‘according to their own understanding’.

Revelations of Lao Officials

Through personal channels and with the support of the Department of Media Relations in Laos’ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we managed to contact respected officials and avoid the risk of facing unknown officials associated with Tran Quy’s network. I was able to get in touch with such an official, Mr. Athsaphangthong Siphandone, the Vice Director of the Customs Department (CD) in the Lao Ministry of Finance. A nephew of the Laos former President, H.E. Khamtay Siphandone, Athsaphangthong is also the son-in-law of the former Prime Minister and the incumbent State Deputy President of Lao. He is a young, well-trained and modern Lao official. Our meeting also included Mr. Vong Ratsachack, Head of the Planning & Statistics Division, and Mr. Vongchanh Lawkhamphromtakoun, head of the International Relations Division.

In principle, according to Athsaphangthong, the Customs Department (CD) issues transit permits to those wildlife export companies only if they have already obtained permits from the Lao Scientific Authority and CITES Management Authority, a certificate from the Veterinary Department, and a license from the Ministry of Trade. Mr. Vongchanh says the Lao CD has never issued transit permits for any local companies to export wildlife from Laos to other countries, including Viet Nam. In a unique recent case, the Lao CD gave a permit to a Lao company to export macaques to China, not to Viet Nam. The company is Vanaseng Trading Co. Ltd in Bolikhamxay Province, the same company we mentioned to Mr. Keosavang. The company’s name is not listed in the permits issued to Tran Quy’s wildlife trade network by Viet Nam’s FPD.

The permit was issued by the Lao CITES Authority on August 1st, 2007. It allows the company to export 1,300 macaques in three shipments of 600, 400, and 300 animals. Mr. Vongchanh provided a similar answer to the second question about specific companies in Lao and Viet Nam. We have never issued permits to any Lao companies with the names you are asking about to export Long-tailed Macaques to those Vietnamese companies, he said. According to the administrative structure of Lao, the customs office is structured in a way that the management activities are decentralized and delegated to local customs authorities. The relevant question is how the central CD comes to know provincial customs authorities have not yet given permits to any Lao companies to export wildlife to Viet Nam. Mr. Vongchanh confirms the decentralization mechanism. However, the central CD has checked with directors of provincial customs authorities over the phone and they provided the same information to me. In addition, reports from local customs authorities show that there have not been any permits issued for those mentioned export activities or companies.

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 December 12th, 2004 (including 5,000 Long-tailed Macaques), Xay Savang Company was allowed to export 13,000 rare and valuable wild snakes and 60,000 wild turtles.

An experienced wildlife trader says it's very rare to see the management authority of any exporting country allow export of such a great number of specimens with only one permit. Besides denial from officials in the Lao CD, two officials of the Lao FD who met me in Vientiane confirmed that they did not give permits to any Lao companies to export Long-tailed Macaques, snakes, or turtles to any Vietnamese companies. According to Mr. Bouaphanh Phanthavong, Acting Head of Forestry Resources Conservation Division of Laos' FD, permits to just three Lao companies were recently awarded to set up wildlife farms. To obtain these permits, the companies must have obtained certificates from the Lao Scientific Authority.

This helped to confirm the authenticity of the information provided by the head of the Lao Scientific Authority, Dr. Souriodong Sundara, who had told me he had never issued certificates to any Lao companies to export wildlife to Viet Nam. The two Lao FD officials were also surprised about the reports of Long-tailed Macaques being exported from Laos to Viet Nam being published on the CITES website. They admit they were not aware of the data provided by this reporter. Both of the Lao officials were very knowledgeable about illegal wildlife trade cases in Lao during recent years. However, they were unaware of any reports about the illegal monkey trade. Therefore, unlike the Lao CD, the Lao FD has not yet investigated or prosecuted any illicit wildlife trading cases. This is largely due to a lack of enforcement personnel, as acknowledgement by the aforementioned FD officials.

¹⁰ According to documents from Lao's Forest Department (FD) and Viet Nam's Forest Protection Department (FPD)

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>
03	Title	<i>Blank</i>	<i>Exporting Permit</i>
04	Ref:	<i>Transportation service of wildlife and aquatic goods from Malaysia to Vietnam</i>	<i>Export of live animals to Vietnam’s business</i>
05	Pursuant to	<i>..... - Permit of CITES Malaysia</i>	<i>.... - Blank</i>

¹¹ One given to this reporter by Viet Nam FPD (called the copy) and one from Lao FD (called the original).

		<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)	(individuals)
	Scientific and English names	
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 by the Lao FD allowing a Lao company to transit wildlife from Malaysia to Viet Nam, we found the Viet Nam Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development (MARD) should have probably known about the specific information in the original permit. The items in the box labelled "Pursuant to..." in the original document include "the agreement of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Viet Nam". This means MARD, which oversees the FDP, in principle, was to be informed before the deal. Furthermore, it is likely that the FDP, who provided the documents, knew they were fake.

The anonymous source described the relationship between Tran Quy and the Viet Nam CITES Management Authority, as follows: the export country's permits were usually faxed by Tran Quy's network to the Viet Nam CITES Management Authority with false titles and seals. Based on these fake faxed documents, an official of the Viet Nam CITES Management Authority issued hundreds of permits for Tran Quy's network with large quantity of wild animals allowed to be traded.

Also, according to the source, based on the fake Lao permits, Viet Nam's CITES Management Authority issued about 200 permits allowing Trung Viet to import more than 20,000 Long-tailed Macaques and hundreds of thousands of wild turtles and snakes since 2003. It is impossible to verify this information because no agencies in Viet Nam provided us with copies of permits issued by the Laos CITES Management Authority. However, the source noted, those Lao permits are not in the standard format used by CITES (with CITES-issued labels and the signature of the authorized person). Instead, they are just papers written in English with fake seals and signatures, and lists of species names and quantities. This process allows the local companies to ignore

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, Primate Products imported 1,152 *Macaca* spp. In 2005, the number increased to 2,340. The price is said to be around US\$1,000 per live monkey. Also according to the secret source, instead of using intermediaries, Primate Products managed to import monkeys directly from Viet Nam some years ago through contacts with Tran Quy. But it took until the end of 2006 for Primate Products to arrange their imports through the Tan Hoi Dong and Trung Viet companies, affiliates of Mr. Tran Quy’s network and agencies who can provide the animals at a lower price and with stable sources.

There are indications that Tran Quy is trying to erase the records of allegedly illegal activities. Trung Viet plans to sell 75 percent of its stock to its US partner, Tran Quy said in a private meeting in Hanoi on 15th July, 2007. He says his company, in partnership with Primate Products, intends to launch a stem cell research lab at Ba Den Mountain, a famous tourist site in southern Tay Ninh. If his statement proves to be true, the first step for Tran Quy will be to dissolve Trung Viet. The confidential resource explained that Tran Quy thinks that if the illicit wildlife trade ring is uncovered, he could escape prosecution if Trung Viet, which he directs, disappeared. According to the anonymous source, there is also information that Tran Quy is trying to set up another enterprise to replace Trung Viet.

Inquiries concerning these forged documents were sent directly to the Minister and the Chief Inspector of MARD since early July, 2007. There has been no reply from either of them. When we met with the FPD, we found these letters were forwarded to FPD and Viet Nam CITES Authority. Why didn’t the directors of MARD reply to reporters at Tien Phong as required by the National Press Laws? Did the leaders and inspectors of MARD know about the rampant, long-term and massive cross-border wildlife trade with by Tran Quy’s network?

A second series of investigative stories is due out around the end of December.