



# Victims of a Hidden Trade: Vietnam's Cat Meat Trade

FOUR PAWS' and Change For Animals Foundation's nationwide investigative findings into Vietnam's cat meat trade and recommendations for how to safeguard animal welfare and public health and safety.

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Pet ownership is rising rapidly in Vietnam and with that comes growing political and societal responsibilities to safeguard these animals from cruelty and exploitation

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## Foreword

Cats play a special role in Vietnam. For thousands of years, these inquisitive creatures have worked alongside farmers to protect grain crops from rodents. Today, they continue this important role but now have also taken on a new role in our societies, joining many of us as cherished family members, bringing us much joy and comfort as indispensable companions.

But this special relationship is under threat from the illegal, cruel and dangerous cat meat trade, with cat owners living in constant fear of their pets being stolen to be slaughtered, cooked and served in restaurants. Thousands of cats are disappearing every day due to rampant theft, and families across the country are devastated after their pets go missing, often desperately searching for their beloved companions in filthy slaughterhouses and in restaurants. This has led to a growing public outcry in Vietnam against the cat meat trade.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic brings into stark reality the dangers of the live animal trade. The conditions seen at Wuhan, the likely origin of COVID-19 – animals kept in cramped and brutal conditions, unsanitary practices, the mixing of several species including sick

animals – all leading to an ideal environment for the emergence of new viruses – are also all seen throughout Vietnam's cat meat trade. The global devastation wreaked by COVID-19 – not only in terms of lives lost but also economically – should serve as a stark warning and points to our need to re-evaluate how we treat animals, including those taken for the meat trade. In addition, the cat meat trade's practices inhibit Vietnam and the world's efforts to eradicate rabies with laws on animal movement and rabies control being blatantly flouted by those involved in the trade.

Sadly, despite the dangers and the health risks that the cat meat trade poses, our investigation has shown that the trade is now spreading throughout Vietnam. However, there is no doubt that the theft, transportation, slaughter and consumption of cats relies on illegal activities and lack of law enforcement, and action must be taken now to strengthen, socialise and enforce laws against the cat meat trade to bring it to an end.

**Josef Pfabigan**  
CEO, FOUR PAWS



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*FOUR PAWS and Change for Animals Foundation worked with agency Tracks Investigations to conduct this investigation in 2019. Tracks Investigations is an ethical investigation agency supporting the work of conservation and animal protection NGO's and charities worldwide.*





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# Executive summary

The exact origins of cat meat consumption in Vietnam are unknown but available data and testimonials suggest that it has increased in popularity only in the last decade. Once a relatively small-scale and opportunistic trade localised in the North of the country, today's cat meat trade consists of complex international and trans-provincial trading networks spanning distances of over 1,000 km, connecting holding areas to restaurants and slaughterhouses, and generating significant profits for those involved.

Cat meat, referred to in Vietnamese as 'thịt mèo' or 'little tiger', is now available throughout Vietnam, and the inherent cruelty and suffering endured by the over one million cats involved in the trade each year is immeasurable. The brutal nature of the theft, grueling and long-distance transport, cramped holding, and cruel slaughter is further exacerbated by cats' unique sensitivity to stress.

Those involved in the trade are profit-driven, acting in breach of laws and regulations that exist to prohibit the trade, as well as relying on the lack of enforcement of these laws

Those involved in the trade are profit-driven, acting in breach of laws and regulations that exist to prohibit the trade, as well as and relying on the lack of enforcement of these laws. Unlike Vietnam's dog meat trade that is neither explicitly illegal nor regulated, there is a precedent in Vietnam for an explicit ban on the hunting, slaughtering and consumption of cats, under a Directive issued by the Prime Minister in 1998<sup>1</sup>, that was in place until 2020. There are laws and regulations in place that, if enforced, would offer cats protection from the trade. However, with little enforcement thus far, the trade in cats goes largely unchallenged, and the situation is

further confounded by evidence that suggests that many of those who are responsible for enforcing the laws (police and anti-corruption units) are actually involved in the trade, as well as consumption of cats.

Both cat and dog theft in Vietnam is rampant. Cat populations are being decimated in some areas, driving up the price of meat and encouraging more and more brazen and aggressive behaviour from those profiting from the trade. This in turn has resulted in further societal unrest and violence, and, in extreme yet increasingly frequent cases, vigilante justice in the form of thieves being seriously injured and even killed by infuriated pet owners.

In 2019, FOUR PAWS and Change For Animals Foundation (CFAF) commissioned nationwide investigations into Vietnam's cat meat trade. This report, detailing the workings of the trade, is believed to be the first of its kind, and the findings are shocking:

- While often overshadowed by the dog meat trade in the media, the cat meat trade affects over one million animals each year. Black cats in particular are targeted for their purported medicinal value.
- Cat meat consumption is increasing in popularity; sourcing sufficient cats to meet demand is getting more difficult.
- To meet national demand, cats, many of which are owned, are stolen off the streets or from homes, and trafficked on long journeys, sometimes lasting for days without food or water. The conditions are barbaric, and many die whilst being trafficked from heat stroke, exhaustion, or injuries incurred during capture and holding.
- Slaughter methods are brutal, and commonly involve drowning and bludgeoning. The suffering of the animals involved is immense.
- Motivations for cat meat consumption vary, but its consumption has strong links with superstition, medicine, and as part of dietary tradition.
- There is a precedent in Vietnam for an explicit ban on the hunting, slaughtering and consumption of cats, which could be reintroduced.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has brought global attention to the dangers that live animal markets pose

to public health and safety. The investigation presented here demonstrates that markets, slaughterhouses and restaurants involved in the cat meat trade are often concurrently involved in the illegal wildlife trade and trade in dog meat. As a result, Vietnam's cat meat trade presents conditions almost identical to those seen from COVID-19's likely source in Wuhan, China. It is imperative to end the cat meat trade in an effort to protect public health, including a disastrous prospective future pandemic.

FOUR PAWS and Change For Animals Foundation thereby call on the Vietnamese government to take strong and immediate action to enforce and strengthen laws and regulations that would serve to restrict and ultimately prohibit the trade in, slaughter and consumption of cats. This is based on the extreme cruelty involved, its reliance on illegal and dangerous activities, its risk to public health, and the societal discontentment and unrest it causes due to pets being stolen for the trade.



<sup>1</sup> Circular 09/1998-CT-TTg. (1998)



# 1. Background information

Vietnam is home to a rampant dog and cat meat trade that results in the suffering of millions of animals each year, the majority of which are stolen pets. Available data and evidence suggest that an estimated five million dogs and more than one million cats are traded and slaughtered each year to supply the demand for their meat. While the dog meat trade has received significant attention over recent years by both national and international animal protection organisations and resultant media coverage, cats are the unspoken victims of an equally cruel and brutal trade.

Cat meat, referred to in Vietnamese as ‘thịt mèo’ or ‘little tiger’, is increasing in popularity in Vietnam, spreading from the North of the country to the South, with cat meat restaurants reporting an increased demand for the dishes. As cat numbers dwindle in certain areas due to rampant theft, traders are forced to travel further distances to source cats. This prolific and highly profitable trade results in the international and trans-provincial trade in and slaughter of thousands of cats daily, with cats being imported through the unchecked borders with neighboring China and Laos, and passing through in-country provincial quarantine stations also unchecked. Regardless of the origins of the cats, the cruelty involved is immeasurable and extreme at all stages of the trade; and many animals are still wearing collars when slaughtered – a sign that they are pets.

Both the dog and cat meat trades have continued to flourish in Vietnam despite an increasing market for pet ownership, driven largely by changes in social dynamics, increased urbanization and rise in disposable income. An ever-growing sector of society no longer views cats and dogs as simply serving a function, such as protection or pest control, but are increasingly treating their dogs and cats as members of their family. Pet ownership in Vietnam has soared over the last 20 years, as evident by increasing pet food sales. The pet food market segment in Vietnam is estimated at US\$42 million in 2019 with a predicted compound annual growth rate of 7.3% through 2023<sup>2</sup>. In 2014, cat food specifically accounted for approximately 45% of the market share of pet food<sup>3</sup>.

Despite increasing pet ownership, pet owners live in constant fear of their animals being stolen for the dog and cat meat trade, and the rampant theft of pets is causing severe societal unrest and violence. In extreme yet increasingly frequent cases, vigilante justice has been seen in the form of thieves being seriously injured and even killed by infuriated pet owners. The media in Vietnam is flooded with stories of vigilante attacks against dog and cat thieves<sup>4,5</sup>, as the growing pet-owning population becomes increasingly frustrated with the lack of enforcement of laws to protect their pets.

**“No cat (or dog, or any animal) should undergo unnecessary suffering from inhumane transportation, handling or slaughter methods, and no owner should have their beloved pet stolen. We should not unthinkingly impose our cultural views on others, but some reports of suffering cannot be passed over in silence. Regardless of our or others’ cultural views, eating preferences are not sufficient to justify severe suffering or theft.”**

James Yeates, Chief Executive Cats Protection, United Kingdom

There is no accurate data on the total number of cats in Vietnam, but it is likely to be in the millions. In larger cities such as Hanoi, people frequently keep cats as pets whereas in rural provinces cats are more likely to be outdoor or community cats. There is little national sterilization capacity for cats, leaving outdoor cat

population numbers controlled largely by disease, road traffic accidents, and theft for the meat trade. Animal shelters providing care for cats throughout the country are few, with most being severely under-resourced. In at least one instance, shelters have been caught selling shelter animals into the meat trade<sup>6</sup>.

# 2. Legislation

Unlike Vietnam’s dog meat trade, there is a precedent for a cat meat ban. The hunting of, slaughtering and consumption of cats was explicitly banned in 1998 under a Directive issued by the Prime Minister, in an attempt to encourage cat ownership to keep the rat population under control to protect crops. The Directive was followed by a Circular issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), guiding the implementation of the Directive at the provincial level. However, these protections were revoked on the 3rd January 2020.

The unregulated international import and trans-provincial movement of cats (and dogs) has been illegal since 2009<sup>7</sup>; and on the 14th September 2012, the Vietnamese Central Government enacted regulations under a veterinary ordinance to control and eliminate rabies that included updated regulations on the

transportation of cats and dogs, requiring all cats and dogs to have quarantine and rabies vaccination certificates and proof of origin of the animal. If this information is not provided, the authorities/ inspectors can confiscate the animals. In addition, if the inspectors are suspicious that the animals are infected with rabies, they can confiscate them to be euthanized. However, interceptions of illegal traders at quarantine checkpoints are rare, and lack of enforcement of existing regulations enable this illegal trade in cats and dogs to continue. This is probably due to there being little incentive to enforce the relevant laws. In addition, there is evidence that those purchasing cat meat in bulk include members of police departments, anti-corruption units, and government ministry departments.

To date, there appears to be little motivation to enforce these laws, except in very rare incidences. For example,

Lost / stolen pet flyers in Vietnam



<sup>2</sup> Statista. (2019)  
<sup>3</sup> Mordorintelligence.com. (2019)

<sup>4</sup> Viet, H. (2019)  
<sup>5</sup> Winter, Stuart. (2019)

<sup>6</sup> Clifton, Merritt. (2019)  
<sup>7</sup> Humane Society International. (2014)



in 2015, “three tons” of live cats were found cramped together in bamboo crates in a truck after being smuggled into Vietnam from China<sup>8</sup>. The cats were impounded in Hanoi, but the authorities lacked the capacity to manage the intercepted cats and refused international offers of assistance. Tragically, the cats were culled by means of burial, most of them believed to be alive. Subsequently, in 2017, Vietnamese officials stopped a truck transporting 1.5 tons of rotting cat and chicken carcasses which were being delivered to the cat meat eating “hotspot” of Thai Binh province<sup>9</sup>.

### 3. The Investigation

In 2019, FOUR PAWS and Change For Animals Foundation (CFAF) commissioned nationwide investigations into Vietnam’s cat meat trade following preliminary research and gathering of data and evidence that suggested a growing and brutal trade, involving over a million animals each year. The key findings are documented here, including information related to the origins and motivations for cat meat consumption, and data pertaining to key areas for supply and demand, profitability, and operations of the trade. To the authors’ knowledge, this is the first report of its kind detailing the cat meat trade in Vietnam.

...following preliminary research and gathering of data and evidence that suggested a growing and brutal trade, involving over a million animals each year

“An ever-growing number of countries and territories throughout the region and the world are passing progressive laws prohibiting the dog and cat meat trades on grounds of both animal welfare, and animal and human health. With pet ownership rising rapidly in Vietnam and around the world, it is essential that this important human-animal bond and relationship is recognized and suitably protected under adequate and enforceable legislation to protect both the animals’ welfare and to safeguard societal harmony.”

Sarah Grant  
Animal Welfare Coalition Coordinator,  
Asia for Animals Coalition\*



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## 4. Origins of and motivations for cat meat consumption in Vietnam

The exact origins of cat meat consumption in Vietnam are unknown but available data and testimonials suggest that it has increased in popularity only in the last decade. Historically, Vietnam has a history of wartime and famine. The consumption of many animals, dogs and cats included, became a routine practice. This continued, however, long after the end of the war, and today, cat meat is perceived as an increasingly exotic, specialty dish, and its consumption has strong links with custom, medicine, and as part of dietary tradition.

Cat meat dish



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In Vietnam, the lunar calendar is considered very important, with much superstition attached to certain times of the month and year with regards to luck and prosperity. This influences everyday activities as well as dietary traditions and customs. In this way, the popularity of cat meat varies depending on times of the month or to coincide with lunar changes, as the meat is perceived as being auspicious when eaten at certain times. For example, in some areas, cat meat is eaten at the end of the lunar month in the belief that it dispels

Cat bones being dried on a sidewalk in Hanoi



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bad luck from the previous month; and in other areas it is eaten at the beginning of the month in the belief that it brings good luck for the coming month. In addition, there are certain dates in the lunar month when cats are not transported or killed because it is believed to bring bad luck.

Cat meat is also considered by some consumers to have special healing powers. However there is no scientific evidence that this is the case. For example, cat bones are dried to make a balm which is believed to help remedy aches and pains. Others report that they believe cat meat to be healthier than dog meat. Another popular belief is that black cats are more pure than other cats and have better qualities for health and healing. Black cats are at higher risk of theft from homes and streets, and sold at a higher market price. The bile from black cats is frequently used to make rice wines for medicinal purposes.



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The age range of cat meat consumers is wide, representing a diverse range of people eating the meat. However, the profile of a person most likely to eat cat meat is generally male, having attained at least a high-school education, married with children and from lower-income groups<sup>10</sup>. The older generation tends to believe that consumption has health benefits but for the younger generation, cat meat consumption is becoming a trendy activity, often accompanied by alcohol.

<sup>8</sup> AFP. Business Insider. (2015)

<sup>9</sup> Hoa, Thanh. Thanhniennews.com. (2016)

\* The Asia for Animals (AfA) Coalition is composed of 22 well-known and respected animal welfare organisations that have a shared focus on improving the welfare of animals in Asia.

<sup>10</sup> FOUR PAWS and MSD. (2020)



## 5. Operations of the trade

**The trade is brutal. From capture to slaughter, the entire journey that cats are subject to causes immense suffering on an immeasurable scale.**

The inherent cruelty and suffering endured by the over one million animals involved in the trade each year is immense. The brutal nature of the theft, grueling and long-distance transport, cramped holding conditions, and cruel slaughter is further exacerbated by cats' unique sensitivity to stress. Those involved in the trade are profit-driven and acting in breach of laws and regulations that exist to prohibit the trade and relying on the lack of enforcement of these laws.



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**“While both dogs and cats are prone to stress, unlike their canine counterparts, cats are exceptionally sensitive, with the physiological reaction to stressors often manifesting as illness and even death. While cats do not typically demonstrate their emotions as obviously as some other species and tend to become more withdrawn, their suffering in reaction to stressors is intense and they undoubtedly suffer in silence. Internationally, initiatives focused on improving feline welfare in captive situations is increasingly focused on reducing fear, anxiety, and stress, in recognition of the significantly negative impact psychological stressors have on their health and welfare.”**

Julie Levy, DVM, PhD, DACVIM, DABVP  
(Shelter Medicine Practice)  
Fran Marino Endowed Professor of  
Shelter Medicine Education, University of Florida, USA

### 5.1 Sourcing

While most media in recent years have focused primarily on the theft of dogs for the meat trade, the theft of cats is equally pervasive and cruel.

Cat theft is now so rampant that seeing a cat living outside in Hanoi, a hotspot for consumption, is rare, and local animal protection groups in the capital operate hotlines and social media pages dedicated to helping pet owners find their stolen pets. While pet cats may be more easily caught, some restaurant owners reported that strays are preferred because domestic housecats tend to have ‘too much fat’. Black cats are specifically targeted by traders due to the belief that black cats are more ‘pure’ than other cats and have better qualities for health and healing. Black cats are therefore sold at a higher price.

Undercover investigations have never identified the operation of any “cat farms” or breeding facilities to supply the meat trade in Vietnam, and all cats sourced are stolen pets or stray cats collected from the streets. In some cases unwanted pet cats are surrendered to traders in exchange for pots and pans, or a small amount of cash.

The increasing demand in consumption “hotspots” and resultant decrease in availability of cats in these areas, has forced traders to travel further afield in search of cats. This has created cross-country transportation routes, to move cats from areas with large numbers of stray and pet cats to areas with a high demand for their meat.

Motorbike cage for transporting cats



© FOUR PAWS

The collection of unwanted pet cats usually occurs during the day by traders who are often seen driving on a motorbike with pots and pans to be traded in exchange for unwanted cats and dogs in local communities. In some cases, if cats in a household breed, the owner will keep the kittens for two years and then sell them to the traders when they are at good market size and value. The cats are taken and transported in cages attached to the motorbikes.

In contrast, the theft and capture of stray cats typically occurs at night, using either baited spring-loaded traps or snares which tighten around the cat's neck as they attempt to eat a piece of fish or other bait. Cats might also be netted, particularly those that are less fearful of people.

Cat trap



© Vietnam Cat Welfare

Once caught, the cats are placed either in sacks or in cages mounted to the back of motorbikes, and then either sold directly to restaurants for slaughter or to a wholesaler for further distribution across the country. There are no questions asked about where the animals originate from and no authentic documentation at any stage.

Metal pliers used to catch and handle cats



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During capture, cats frequently sustain severe injuries in the form of wounds, lacerations, ruptured eyes, and broken bones from the snares and metal tongs used to handle them, or from the rough handling when the cats are captured and thrown into the cage.

### 5.2 Wholesalers

Once captured, cats are typically delivered to wholesalers where they are kept for hours to days, awaiting further transport or slaughter. Wholesaler premises can be quickly identified by the overpowering stench of cat urine. These facilities are typically squalid, with cats kept packed tightly together in overcrowded



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cages with no food or water, with animals urinating and defecating on one another. Many cats will have been traveling for more than two days before arriving. While some cats howl and desperately look for a way to escape the cage, most tend to be too exhausted to fight, and succumb to exhaustion and stress. Some appear ill, with nasal discharge and laboured breathing. Local animal protection groups have witnessed cats giving birth while in the holding areas, most likely a result of a combination of extreme stress and late term pregnancy.

Wholesaler with cages packed with cats



© FOUR PAWS | Change for Animals Foundation

Once there are enough cats to justify the cost of transport, cats are transported to slaughterhouses and restaurants across the country. FOUR PAWS and CFAF are aware of the existence of several cat wholesalers in central Vietnam (Da Nang and Hoi An) which provide restaurants throughout the country with live cats, transporting them under inhumane conditions. There are likely dozens of these across the country. One particular holding area in Da Nang reported sending one crate of cats (150kg or ~60 cats) to Hai Phong by bus daily.



5.3 Transport

Whilst some cats are transported directly from capture to a restaurant, most cats entering the meat trade are transported twice: once from capture to a wholesaler and then on to a restaurant or slaughterhouse. Depending on where the cats are caught, they are often transported on journeys lasting for days to their final destination, spanning hundreds of kilometres through provinces and even across international borders.

The transportation of cats throughout Vietnam is barbaric, with no purpose-built vehicles. Following capture, cats are usually put into a burlap or mesh sack, or put into a cage on the back of a motorbike, with no provision for either food or water. Motorbikes are commonly retrofitted with metal cages on the back which can carry 10-15 cats at a time. When the crate is full, it is taken to either a restaurant or wholesaler where the cage is weighed and sold per kilogram. Many animals do not survive the trauma of transport, and cat traders readily admit that they anticipate losses along the way, as death due to heat stroke, exhaustion, or injuries is common.



International Cat Care (iCatCare) is a charity founded in 1958 to improve the health and wellbeing of all cats everywhere, working towards a world where each cat’s life experience will be as good as it can be. In 2020, iCatCare issued a statement on the cat meat trade which explained why the trade is in direct conflict with its vision, largely because of the significant negative impacts on the welfare of cats involved.

“The cat meat trade has been witnessed and documented to involve the following processes:

- Theft of pet cats
- Inhumane confinement and transport

- Overcrowded cages containing cats unknown to each other
- No water, food or toileting facilities
- Long-distance travel spanning several hours to days
- Lack of appropriate temperature control and proper ventilation
- Inhumane handling and slaughter methods such as drowning or bludgeoning

These processes conflict with internationally recognised accepted standards of care known as the Five Freedoms which are commonly applied to all animals under human control.”

Cats being loaded into the cargo hold of a passenger bus



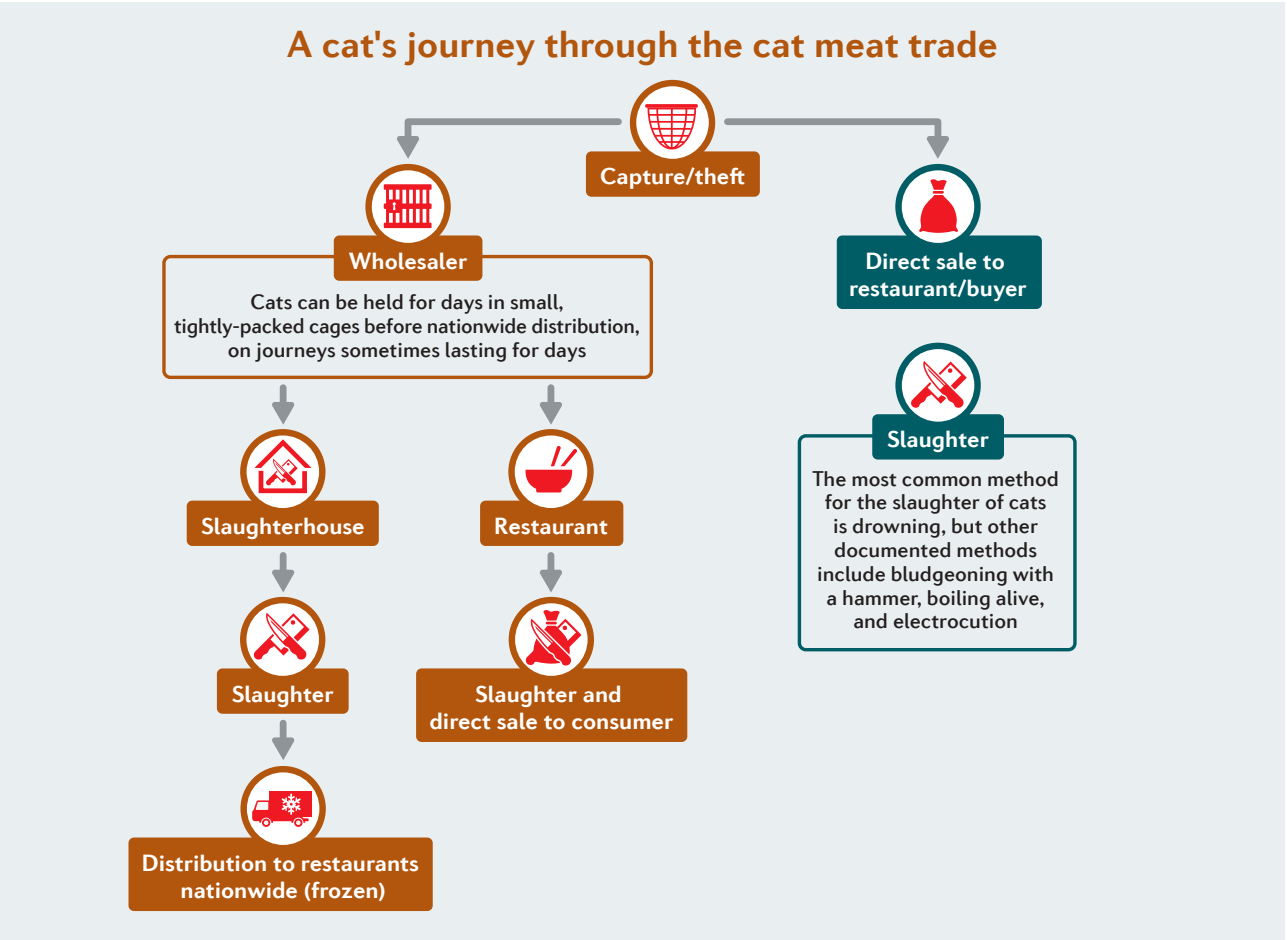
On one occasion, the investigations team identified a cat dealer in Quảng Nam province (central Vietnam) who buys cats from local cat traders and then sells them daily to a buyer in Hai Phong, over 850 km away. The cats are packed tightly in cages in the cargo hold of a passenger bus on a grueling journey lasting – 20 hours with no food, water, or ventilation. He admitted that in Nghệ An province, which is located on the way to Hanoi, checks are sometimes made on the bus and its cargo by local authorities. To circumvent any potential issues, the driver is given bribe money to keep quiet in case of interception by the authorities.

“The method of transportation was surreal, we documented one crate full of dogs and two crates full of cats being put into the luggage hold of the passenger bus. The cats were stacked on top of each other. With no provision for food or water these animals were then to endure a journey of approximately 20 or more hours in complete darkness and no ventilation. The outside temperature was around 35 degrees Celsius and very humid, needless to say in the enclosed metal luggage hold of a bus this would be horrific.”

Investigator

Cats are also trafficked into Vietnam from Southern China, both alive and as carcasses. During the investigation, restaurant owners expressed their

preference to source cats from within Vietnam, as cat meat from China is typically frozen as opposed to ‘fresh’.



5.4 Slaughter

Cats are typically packed tightly in metal cages at the slaughterhouse or restaurant. Cats are exceptionally sensitive to stress by nature, and they are often seen cowering in cages, attempting to hide underneath one another while awaiting slaughter.



The slaughter of cats is brutal and is done in full view of other animals. There is no regard for animal welfare, and cats are killed in the cheapest and easiest way possible. The most common method for the slaughter of cats is drowning; but other documented methods include bludgeoning with a hammer, boiling alive, and electrocution. The slaughter method depends on the slaughterhouses’ or restaurants’ preferences. For example, one restaurant in Hanoi that routinely bludgeons cats to death with a hammer explained that, “if the cats are bludgeoned to death then the bile is kept and used later.” Restaurant owners who used drowning as a slaughter method explained that this method was preferred to bludgeoning because all of the cat’s head can be eaten.

Drowning

Drowning is the most common form of slaughter for cats in Vietnam. In restaurant settings, cats are removed from the cage with a noose which is tightened around the cat’s neck and then the cat is submerged into a bucket of water until it stops struggling and drowns.



“By the time cats are scheduled for slaughter, many have been without food and water, for days, trafficked under horrific conditions. When being removed from the cage individually by hand to be placed in a wire net to be drowned, the investigator noted, the cats barely struggled ... they looked so exhausted and frightened they simply could not fight anymore. The net was then dragged across the concrete floor out of the building and taken to a pond where they were then thrown into the water [to be drowned].”

Investigator

At large-scale wholesalers, cats are taken from the holding crates and transferred into basic custom-made net sacks. The handling and transfer of the cats can be brutal, often facilitated using metal tongs or pincers. The cat-filled sacks are then submerged until the last bubbles of air are seen coming from the water. The drowning process usually takes several minutes. A variation documented with the drowning process was the use of hot water as opposed to cold water. Subjectively, the cats drowned in hot water seemed to struggle less but in no way indicative that the process is any less painful or stressful for the animal. In larger slaughterhouses, the crates full of live cats are simply lowered into the water and the cats drown.

### Bludgeoning

Cats may be removed individually from holding cages with a noose that tightens around their neck, or metal tongs. Cats are then thrown onto the floor and hit over the head repeatedly with a small hammer. This can cause an agonizing death with cats flailing and vocalizing on the floor.

Cats being drowned



“At one restaurant, the cats were bludgeoned to death with a hammer. This method of slaughter was one of the most horrific ways to kill an animal I have ever seen. The first cat died fairly quickly but the second cat was hit on the head several times over several minutes before it eventually died.”

Investigator

## 5.5 Carcass preparation and final distribution

Cat carcasses



In order to prepare carcasses for consumption, the hair must be removed. If done manually, a large bucket of hot water is prepared so the cats can be soaked before the hair is ripped out. If done mechanically, the dehairing

Poultry defeathering machine with cat fur



process is conducted by placing the animal in a dehairing device, often in the form of a poultry defeathering machine. Butchers report that manual hair removal is better because the machines tend to bruise the meat, but the process is more time and labor intensive. The meat is then cut with a cleaver, and the bones are kept aside in a pile for use as balm.

Hay fire



After the hair has been removed, the skin is usually burnt prior to gutting and cooking. A gas torch or hay fire is used to perform the skin burning. Most of the cat's carcass is typically eaten apart from the lungs, tail, feet and ears.

Frozen cat meat



The carcasses of cats slaughtered at large-scale wholesalers can then be distributed as frozen meat. This meat is sold to restaurants across the country and is frequently distributed by motorbike or van. Suppliers report that cat meat can be transported for up to 16 hours wrapped in ice.



Menu featuring cat meat

### 5.6 Pricing

As demand continues to outpace supply in many areas, the price for cat meat has steadily increased over the years. One restaurant owner in Hanoi reported that the price of cat meat in the past was 30,000 VND (1.30 USD) /kilo and now is as high as 200,000 VND (8.50 USD)/kilo.

Pricing varies depending on the location and restaurant. The following prices represent averages, with black cats being priced separately.

- Live cat (not black) – 150,000 VND (6.50 USD) / kilo
- Live cat (black) – 200,000 VND (8.50 USD) / kilo
- Cat meat (not black) - 230,000 (10.00 USD) – 260,000 VND (11.25 USD) / kilo
- Cat meat (black) – up to 500,000 VND (21.50 USD)/ kilo
- Cat meat dish (single serving) – 150,000 VND (6.50 USD)

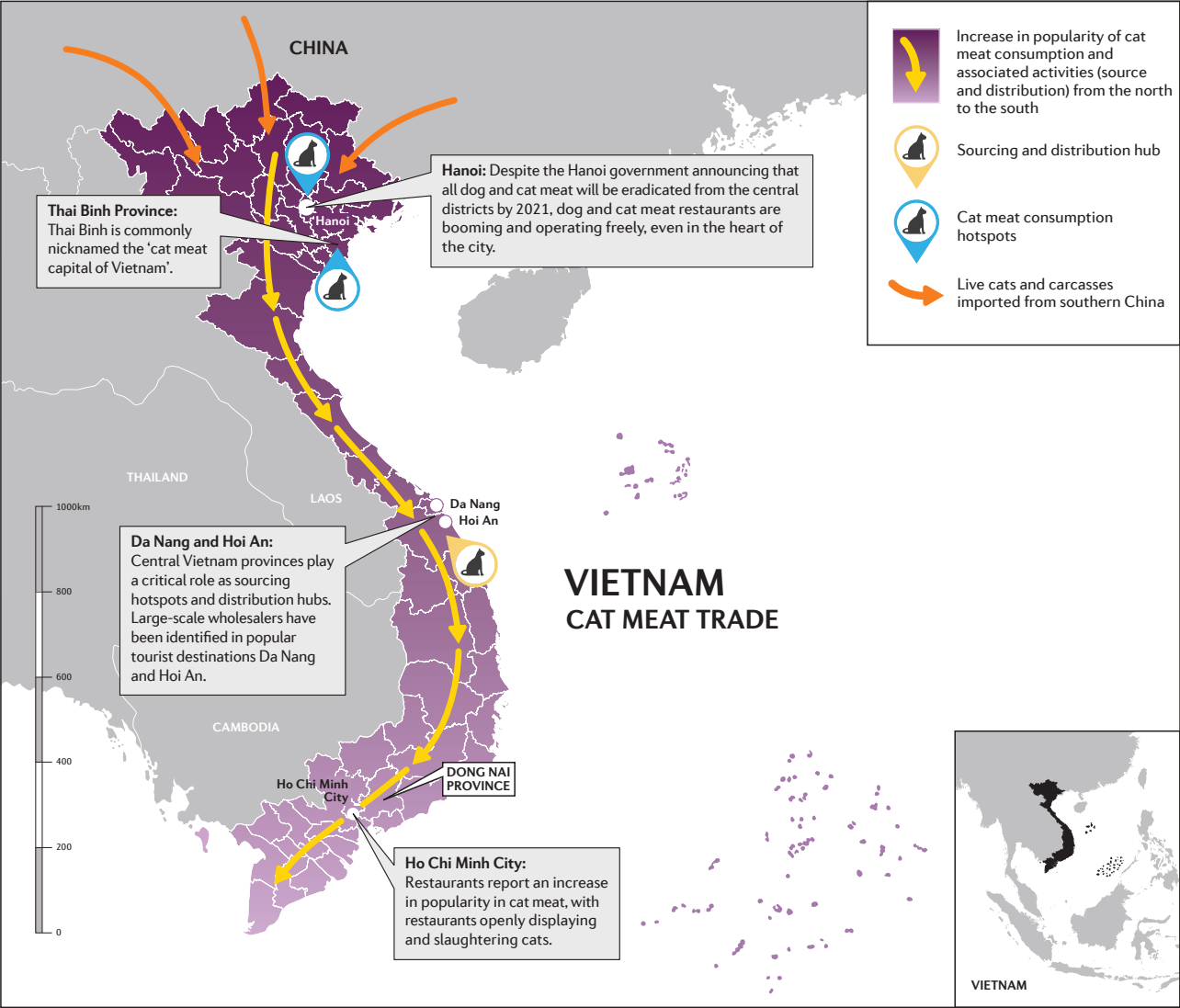
The profit margin tends to be much higher for restaurants who source and kill cats themselves, rather than restaurants who are supplied by a wholesaler.



6. Trafficking routes

Cat trading routes are extensive and difficult to document given that cats can be easily concealed and if discovered, bribes are frequently paid to officials to allow transport to continue undetected. Our investigation has revealed, however, the existence of several “hotspots” for collecting, holding, slaughtering, distributing, and consuming cats, as well as trafficking routes in between, as detailed in the map below.

Our investigation has revealed, however, the existence of several “hotspots”



6.1 Hanoi and surrounding provinces

Despite a recent declaration by the Vice Mayor of Hanoi to ban the trade in dog and cat meat in central districts of Hanoi by 2021, dog and cat meat restaurants are booming and operating freely, even in the heart of the city. Most restaurants slaughter animals themselves, rather than relying on a distributor. The vast majority of

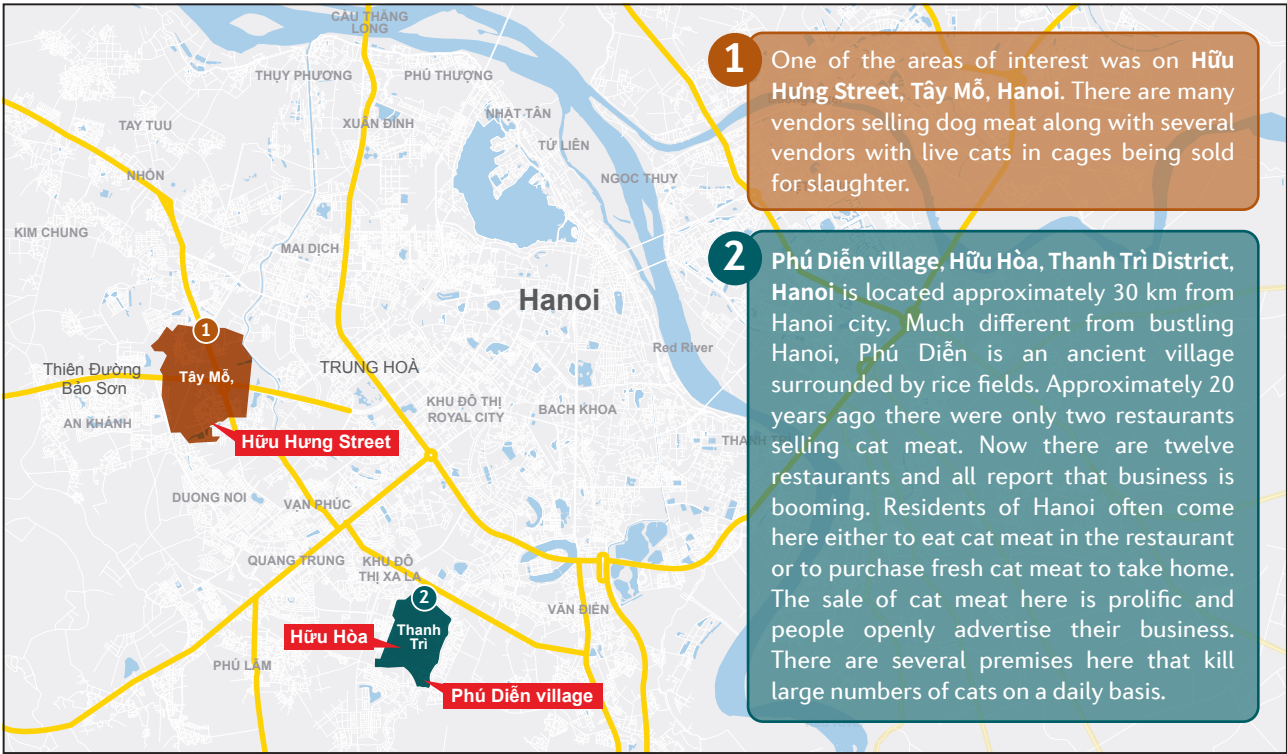
restaurants serving cat meat slaughter every day, and most report a higher demand for cat meat on the 1st day of the lunar month; however, they sell cat meat all month long. Cats are often killed to order, and sourced from as far away as Southern Vietnam and beyond.

Most report slaughter in the city must be done before dawn at around 4:00am. The reason given is that any blood will be washed away by morning so if any police came around, they would not be aware that slaughter had taken place.

Restaurant owners in Hanoi displayed blatant disregard for the cats’ origins. Restaurant owners stated that they do not know of, or care about, the animals’ origins or if they are stolen pets. At these restaurants, cats were either drowned or bludgeoned to death. One restaurant owner boasted that customers can point out which live cat they like from the cage to be killed and the cat can be killed in front of them, and served within 30 minutes.



Frozen cat meat



6.2 Thai Binh Province

Thai Binh is a coastal province located to the East of Hanoi around 3 hours by car and is commonly nicknamed the ‘cat meat capital’ of Vietnam. Thai Binh is home to both cat meat restaurants and large wholesalers, killing hundreds of cats each day. The investigations team visited and documented three wholesalers. However, many more are likely to be in operation.

Wholesalers supply cat meat to restaurants locally in Thai Binh, and to the neighbouring provinces of Hai Phong, Quang Ninh, and Hanoi. One wholesaler visited had freezers full of frozen cat meat, in addition to a variety of wild animals (tigers, monkeys, etc) bottled for sale.

Preserved baby tigers





### 6.3 Central Vietnam

Central Vietnamese provinces play a critical role as a sourcing hotspot and distribution hub.

#### 6.3.1 Da Nang

A large cat meat wholesaler houses, on average, 125 -150 cats at a time, cramped in five crates in the facility. Cats are provided no food or water, and many are seen open mouth breathing due to stress and heat. The cats are transported to an unknown location daily.

Cat holding area in Da Nang



#### 6.3.2 Hoi An (Quảng Nam Province, Điện Bàn)

Hoi An is home to a large-scale wholesaler and distributor of live cats. The facility receives, holds, and traffics hundreds of cats across the country every week, with cages of cats arriving and leaving the facility daily.

Cats awaiting slaughter with bucket used for drowning



**While cat meat consumption is more prevalent in the north, restaurants report it is increasing in popularity in the southern city of Ho Chi Minh**

On-site, cats are kept packed in cramped cages with no food or water. During our investigators' visit they were told by the wholesaler that he could source as many cats as they wanted to buy.

#### 6.4 Ho Chi Minh City

While cat meat consumption is more prevalent in the north, restaurants report it is increasing in popularity in the southern city of Ho Chi Minh. Restaurants were openly selling and slaughtering cats, with many vendors displaying cages of cats. Interviewed restaurant owners reported killing 10 cats per day on average, most killed to order, and most used drowning as the slaughter method.

## 7. Public health risk

Rabies is a viral disease that can infect all warm-blooded animals, including cats, dogs, and people. When clinical signs of rabies occur, it is an almost invariably fatal disease. In Southeast Asia, dogs and cats are the most important vector for rabies. Despite ongoing efforts to eradicate the disease, in Vietnam, rabies has persisted as a notifiable disease for more than 40 years.

Cats in holding area



A key factor undermining rabies control efforts is the continued long-distance transportation, importation, slaughter, and consumption of dogs and cats of unknown disease and vaccination status. The dog and cat meat trade is simply incompatible with the ASEAN Plus 3 pledge<sup>11</sup> to eradicate rabies by 2020, and further incompatible with the "Zero by 30"<sup>12</sup> global goal of eradicating rabies by 2030. The trade clearly operates in breach of national disease control laws and regulations, as well as recommendations for mass vaccination and the restricted movement of animals by leading human and animal health advisory bodies including the World Health Organization (WHO), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). The smuggling and trafficking of unvaccinated animals into Vietnam, particularly from countries with no formal rabies control program, is particularly concerning.

According to the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA), a leading international veterinary authority,

***“Due to the many animal welfare and public health concerns, we strongly discourage the consumption of and trade in dog and cat meat. Instead, we encourage rigorous enforcement of existing laws and support new controls and regulations where current legislation does not exist aimed at banning what is typically an inhumane and dangerous practice.”***

While the majority of human cases of rabies in the region are dog-mediated, infected cats can also transmit the disease to humans. A bite from a rabies-infected cat can be fatal. The average incubation period for the disease in cats is two months but can range from 2 weeks to several months or even years, depending on the dose of virus transmitted and the severity and site of the wound. In neighboring Cambodia, in early 2019 a video depicting a dying 10-year-old Cambodian girl infected with rabies, resulting from a cat bite, went viral on social media, sparking national panic<sup>13</sup>. The cat meat trade places catchers and butchers at blatant risk of rabies exposure during the capture and handling processes associated with the cat meat trade.

Cats after skin was burned using a hay fire



Because of the public health risk associated with susceptible cats becoming infected following exposure to rabid animals, leading animal health authorities recommend that all cats in endemic areas be vaccinated<sup>14</sup>. Rabies in cats can be controlled by

<sup>11</sup> ASEAN. (2017)

<sup>12</sup> WHO. (2017)

<sup>13</sup> Taing, R. (2019)

<sup>14</sup> D, M.J., Horzinek, M.C., Schultz, R.D. and Squires, R.A. (2016)



traditional inactivated vaccines and at present, several products are available commercially. These products have been shown to induce protective immune responses after a single vaccination. The cat meat trade however directly undermines potential cat vaccination programs by removing vaccinated cats from the population, eliminating one of the barriers protecting humans from rabies.

Human deaths have also been reported as a result of cat meat preparation. In research published in the PLoS Medicine, Dr. Heiman Wertheim and colleagues from the National Institute of Infectious and Tropical Diseases and the National Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology in Hanoi reported on 2 patients who died from rabies infections<sup>15</sup>. In the first case, the patient had prepared and eaten a dog that had been killed in a road traffic accident; rabid dogs were known to inhabit the neighborhood. The second patient had butchered and eaten a cat that had been sick for a number of days.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has brought global attention to the dangers that live animal markets pose to public health and safety. Nationwide investigations have demonstrated that the markets, slaughterhouses, and restaurants that serve the cat meat trade often also serve those involved in the illicit wildlife and dog meat trades, presenting close to identical conditions to those



Cat carcasses for sale in Hanoi

from which COVID-19 is believed to have emerged in Wuhan (China): numerous species of animals from various sources of origin brought into densely-populated cities in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions where they are kept for days prior to slaughter. Under these conditions, animals are stressed and immunocompromised, as well as shedding and being exposed to pathogens, which can then be easily transmitted to other animals and to humans. Furthermore, it is impossible to ensure meat sold at these markets is safe for human consumption, potentially exposing tens of thousands of people every day to a variety of zoonotic diseases, which can have devastating impacts for both local and international public health and economies.

Cat meat vendor in Hanoi



<sup>15</sup> Wertheim HFL, Nguyen TQ, Nguyen KAT, de Jong MD, Taylor WRJ, et al. (2009)

## 8. Potential damage to tourism and international reputation



The economic importance of tourism to Vietnam cannot be understated. The image of the country portrayed throughout the world is important. Governments want their country to be seen as forward-thinking and progressive, and animal welfare is becoming of increasing concern to both international tourists and governments. Vietnam's tourism industry contributes to approximately 6 million direct and 2 million indirect jobs<sup>16</sup>. While Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi are two of the main tourist destinations, other cities including Da Nang and Hoi An are actively promoted as tourist destinations. Research surveys into tourism and people's attitudes towards animal welfare highlight how important it is for international travellers not to be exposed to animal cruelty:

- 90% of travellers surveyed said it was important that their holiday company takes animal welfare seriously<sup>17</sup>.
- 83% of travellers felt that tour operators should avoid activities that cause suffering for wild animals<sup>18</sup>.
- 64% agree that holiday companies should not promote or sell attractions with captive animals<sup>19</sup>.
- 54% agree they would complain to their holiday company if they felt an animal was being abused<sup>20</sup>.
- 52% agree they would not visit a country again after being exposed to animal cruelty<sup>21</sup>.
- 52% agree they would take action after seeing mistreated animals<sup>22</sup>.

A negative reputation due to animal welfare issues can have an impact on tourism, as the statistics suggest. This has already been recognised by some authorities in the region, and in a statement issued by the Vice Mayor of Hanoi, Nguyen Van Suu in 2018 stated: "Slaughtering and using dog and cat meat has created objections among tourists and international visitors living in Hanoi, affecting the image of a civilized capital"<sup>23</sup>. Similarly, in September 2019 the Ho Chi Minh City Food Safety Management Board urged locals to stop eating dog meat in an effort to improve the national image, as well as highlighting health risks of dog meat<sup>24</sup>.

Cats awaiting slaughter



Undoubtedly, the brutality and scale at which cats are slaughtered in Vietnam, an animal cherished by so many around the world, has the potential to negatively impact tourism and the country's image.

<sup>16</sup> AP News. (2018)

<sup>17</sup> Fankhauser, P. (2018)

<sup>18</sup> Kantar Research on Behalf of World Animal Protection. (2017)

<sup>19, 20, 21, 22</sup> ABTA. (2019)

<sup>23</sup> Murray, B. (2018)

<sup>24</sup> Australian Associated Press. (2019)



# 9. Recommendations



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An ever-growing number of countries and territories throughout the region and the world are passing progressive laws prohibiting the dog and cat meat trade on grounds of animal welfare, and animal and human health.

With pet ownership rising rapidly in Vietnam and around the world, it is essential that this important human-animal bond and relationship is recognised and protected by adequate and enforceable legislation to protect both the animals’ welfare and to safeguard societal harmony.

Vietnam has already taken measures in the past to ban the cat meat trade, setting an important precedent. In addition, there are other active laws that are applicable, but rarely if ever enforced; and these investigations have revealed that the cat meat trade is spreading, and the consumption of cat meat is increasing in popularity. This increase in popularity results in increased illegal activities, societal unrest, and threatens the health and welfare of Vietnam’s people and animals, as well as its international reputation.

Whilst those involved in the trade are profiting, the burden to the country must be considered in forms of economic, public health, and societal costs, particularly in light of the potential for novel pathogen emergence as is evident in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. These range from costs associated with the role the trade plays in potential disease transmission, to those associated with damage to Vietnam’s international reputation, negatively impacted tourism and other

investment industries and opportunities, as well as societal unrest.

FOUR PAWS and Change For Animals Foundation thereby call on the Vietnamese government to take strong and urgent action to reinstate and enforce Directive No: 09/1998/CT-TTg, banning the hunting of, slaughtering and consumption of cats.

FOUR PAWS, Change For Animals Foundation and our partner organisations in Vietnam are well-positioned to assist the government with effective and positive nationwide campaigns to tackle the illegal activities associated with the cat meat trade. This is based on many years of experience working throughout the region and globally on animal welfare issues – including the dog and cat meat trade, as well as live animal confiscations, rescue and rehabilitation. Through the provision of expertise, support, coordination and resources, we can assist with the implementation of holistic approaches that are required to tackle such complex issues. This would be based on targeting illegal activities and providing public education on the risks and dangers of the cat meat trade. This would be in addition to socialising the Directive prohibiting the killing of cats if and when this is reinstated, which we strongly recommend.

Based on extensive investigations and collective experience working throughout Vietnam, we thereby propose and encourage the following actions to be taken by the government of Vietnam with local and international NGO’s to support:

1. Raise awareness of the risks and illegality of the cat meat trade, as well as encourage responsible pet ownership to improve health, welfare and stability of cat populations.
2. Reinstate, update and strengthen laws and directives pertaining to the cat meat trade, with clear penalties for those who violate the law.
3. Take concrete actions towards socialising the illegality of the cat meat trade and the government’s opposition towards it, and ensure law enforcement, including:
  - a. Developing a timeline for enforcement of concrete actions. This is essential so as to ensure:
    - i. The facilitation of law enforcement;
    - ii. That those involved in the trade are encouraged to transition voluntarily to alternative sources of income/ alternative livelihoods;
    - iii. The minimisation of the number of animals being confiscated from traders and illegally operated establishments processing cat meat.
    - iv. The support of the ever-growing pet owning population, nationally and internationally.
    - v. International public and political support
  - b. Providing training and incentives for provincial law enforcement departments to socialise and support enforcement of related laws.
4. Building in-country veterinary capacity to facilitate targeted humane stray animal population measures, as well as encouraging cat sterilization and vaccinations. This could be part of or an extension of the existing program FOUR PAWS operates in central Vietnam with local charities “PAWS for Compassion” and “Vietnam Cat Welfare” called “Cats Matter Too”, which offers free sterilization and medical services for cats, and educational workshops on the potential dangers of cat meat consumption to improve community awareness to help keep cats safe.
5. Devise action plans in collaboration with key stakeholders to ensure adequate care of confiscated cats following closures of establishments operating illegally, after the period of law socialisation. This will:
  - a. offer animals the best possible outcome;
  - b. help to raise public awareness to educate people of the dangers and cruelty of the dog and cat meat trades;
  - c. Encourage positive national and international media coverage and support.
6. Develop a descriptive action plan to implement the widely-publicised commitment to make Hanoi dog and cat meat free in all of its central 21 districts by 2021.



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# Appendix I. Position Statements from Leading Feline Welfare and Veterinary Organisations, and Feline Experts

## International Cat Care

iCatCare is a charity dedicated to helping people improve the welfare of cats, both owned and unowned, across the globe. Through the charity’s various activities, it aims to help people to better understand cats’ individual needs and perspective, so that they feel confident to act in the best interests of each cat and its welfare.

With this in mind, iCatCare recognises that the cat meat trade seen in several South East Asian countries is in direct conflict with its vision, because of the significant negative impacts on the welfare of cats involved.

For example, the cat meat trade has been witnessed and documented to involve the following processes:

- Theft of pet cats
- Inhumane confinement and transport
  - Overcrowded cages containing cats unknown to each other
  - No water, food or toileting facilities
  - Long-distance travel spanning several hours to days
  - Lack of appropriate temperature control and proper ventilation
- Inhumane handling and slaughter methods such as drowning or bludgeoning

These processes conflict with internationally recognised accepted standards of care known as the Five Freedoms which are commonly applied to all animals under human control:

- Freedom from hunger and thirst.
- Freedom from discomfort.
- Freedom from fear and distress.
- Freedom from pain, injury, and disease.
- Freedom to express normal behaviour.

The current processes involved in the cat meat trade clearly subject cats to experiences contrary to these freedoms and which will cause high levels of physical and mental suffering. For these reasons, iCatCare condemns the trade.

## American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP)

The AAFP is an Association dedicated to improving the health and welfare of cats through high standards of education and providing support for veterinary professionals. We recognize that cats are sentient animals, and should be provided the opportunity to live out their natural lifespan in accordance with the Five Freedoms:

- Freedom from hunger, thirst, and malnutrition.
- Freedom from physical and thermal discomfort.
- Freedom from fear and distress.
- Freedom from pain, injury, and disease.
- Freedom to express normal patterns of behaviour.

As such, we condemn the cat meat trade.

## The World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA)

The farming and trade of dogs and cats for human consumption are arguably amongst the most significant and contentious of contemporary companion animal welfare issues, particularly in areas of Asia and Africa.

An estimated 25-30 million dogs and an unknown number of cats enter this meat trade annually. Dogs and cats may be stolen (or purchased) from their owners, taken from the streets, or sourced from farms. These animals are frequently transported long distances and then inhumanely slaughtered. Investigations have documented the severe cruelty inherent in all stages of the dog meat trade including sourcing, transport, sale, and slaughter.

The World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) believes that dogs and cats are sentient beings and have the capacity to suffer. Whenever animals are under human care, their welfare must be ensured, and their suffering prevented in every possible manner. We should always strive to ensure that the Five Freedoms are met:

- **Freedom from hunger or thirst** by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
- **Freedom from discomfort** by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.



- **Freedom from pain, injury or disease** by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
- **Freedom to express normal behaviour** by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
- **Freedom from fear and distress** by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

The dog and cat meat trades encourage the mass and unregulated movement of unvaccinated companion animals both domestically and internationally. There is mounting qualitative and quantitative evidence documenting the public health risk the trade poses, in addition to compromising regional rabies control efforts. The trade, slaughter and consumption of dogs poses a risk to human health in the form of disease transmission, notably from rabies, but also from cholera and trichinellosis. Studies have revealed substantial incidences of rabies- infected canine tissue in restaurants, slaughterhouses, and markets in areas where dog meat is prepared and sold.

Additionally, antimicrobial and other pharmaceutical / chemical residues are significant issues in dog meat. Dog meat rarely falls under food-hygiene or meat-sanitation laws and is not subject to controls at source nor testing before human consumption. This is therefore a veterinary public health concern, as well as a potential antimicrobial resistance issue.

The WSAVA is sensitive to cultural variances and recognises that, while in western societies the consumption of dog or cat meat may be considered unacceptable, for other societies the consumption of dog or cat meat has not only economic but cultural and traditional significance. However, due to the many animal welfare and public health concerns, the WSAVA strongly discourages the consumption of and trade in dog and cat meat. Instead, it encourages rigorous enforcement of existing laws and supports new controls and regulations where current legislation does not exist aimed at banning what is typically an inhumane and dangerous practice.

### The Asia for Animals (AfA) Coalition

The Asia for Animals (AfA) Coalition is composed of 22 well-known and respected animal welfare organisations that have a shared focus on improving the welfare of animals in Asia. The coalition is further supported by a global network of hundreds of animal welfare organisations working together to tackle issues across Asia as one voice.

Every year an estimated one million cats and five million dogs are captured, traded and slaughtered for human consumption in Vietnam. These significant trades – that involve the large-scale transport of animals of unknown disease and vaccination status – continue to operate freely and openly, despite being illegal. A Directive explicitly prohibits all aspects of the cat meat trade while laws and regulations restrict the unregulated movement and slaughter/sale of dogs and their associated meat products. These trades are driven by profit, with total disregard for the laws in place to safeguard human and animal health and welfare. **The Asia for Animals Coalition therefore strongly condemns the dog and cat meat trades.**

The dog and cat meat trades cause severe animal cruelty from capture, to transport, to slaughter. The majority of animals are stolen pets which causes great societal distress and unrest in a country where pet ownership is rising rapidly, and dogs and cats are considered family members by many.

Stolen animals are kept in squalid conditions; transported long distances (often days) without food or water; and slaughtered through a process of bludgeoning, drowning, boiling, exsanguination, and/ or strangulation. None of these methods are considered humane or safe means of killing any animal, let alone dogs and cats. The slaughter process is performed in full view of other animals and often in public areas. The cats and dogs exhibit clear signs of severe psychological and physiological distress including: laboured breathing, nasal discharge, loss of fur, extreme salivation, vomiting, lethargy, injuries from chewing on their cages, stereotypic behaviours, and vocalisations.

Not only are the dog and cat meat trades inherently cruel, cause societal unrest, and encourage threatening and dangerous activities; they also pose grave risks to public health and safety. They are reliant on the lack of enforcement of existing national and international laws and guidelines pertaining to disease control, disease prevention, and animal health and welfare. It has also been documented extensively that the majority of tourists have a strong negative view towards animal welfare abuse in the countries that they visit.

Investigations from throughout Vietnam have documented the grossly unhygienic conditions of markets, slaughterhouses, and restaurants where dog and cat meat is prepared and consumed. The conditions provide the perfect environment for disease transmission, and perhaps of greatest concern to

date has been the risk of a rabies outbreak, which has already been documented in the past. Slaughterhouse investigations in Hanoi and surrounding areas have revealed the high prevalence of rabies-positive dogs. The demand for dog and cat meat encourages the illegal large-scale and long-distance trade in animals of unknown disease and vaccination status; in contravention to global regulations, laws, and guidelines on restricting disease transmission. The transportation of rabies-infected dogs into previously rabies-free areas in other countries has resulted in the establishment of a long-term rabies public health risk. The dog meat trade has been directly linked to rabies and cholera outbreaks in Vietnam.

Furthermore, given the unregulated and illegal nature of the trades, dogs and cats are often sold and slaughtered alongside other species of animals including wildlife. There are growing global concerns regarding the emergence of novel and deadly viruses from markets where multiple species are sold and slaughtered. These live markets provide an ideal environment for viral recombination and transmission between species, and as we have seen multiple times, with deadly results.

Whilst cultures and habits are not easily changed, it is the government's responsibility to ensure the nation's laws are abided by, are enforced, and comply with global animal welfare standards and proven animal disease prevention measures to limit the spread of zoonotic diseases, including rabies which is an endemic disease across Asia.

An ever-growing number of countries and territories throughout the region and the world are passing progressive laws prohibiting the dog and cat meat trades on grounds of both animal welfare, and animal and human health. With pet ownership rising rapidly in Vietnam and around the world, it is essential that this important human-animal relationship is recognized and suitably protected under adequate and enforceable legislation to protect both the animals' welfare and to safeguard societal harmony.

The member organisations of the Asia for Animals Coalition from around the globe and the millions of members they represent urge the Vietnamese government to ensure the strengthening and enforcement of existing laws and regulations against the dog and cat meat trade. This will serve the interests of the majority of the Vietnamese population and protect animal welfare, rather than give in to the preferences and profitability of a few.

### James Yeates Chief Executive, Cats Protection

"No cat (or dog, or any animal) should undergo unnecessary suffering from inhumane transportation, handling or slaughter methods, and no owner should have their beloved pet stolen.

We should not unthinkingly impose our cultural views on others, but some reports of suffering cannot be passed over in silence. Regardless of our or others' cultural views, eating preferences are not sufficient to justify severe suffering or theft."

### Julie Levy, DVM, PhD, DACVIM, DABVP (Shelter Medicine Practice)

### Fran Marino Endowed Professor of Shelter Medicine Education, University of Florida Co-Founder, Million Cat Challenge

Cats may be the only species to truly domesticate themselves, living alongside human society for more than 10,000 years. They play a diverse and important role with humans in today's society, as both family members and companions, as well as effective rodent control, protecting crops and controlling the transmission of diseases. While both dogs and cats are prone to stress, unlike their canine counterparts, cats are exceptionally sensitive, with the physiological reaction to stressors often manifesting as illness and even death. While cats do not typically demonstrate their emotions as obviously as some other species and tend to become more withdrawn, their suffering in reaction to stressors is intense and they undoubtedly suffer in silence. Internationally, initiatives focused on improving feline welfare in captive situations is increasingly focused on reducing fear, anxiety, and stress, in recognition of the significantly negative impact psychological stressors have on their health and welfare.

Every day in Vietnam, tens of thousands of cats are traded and slaughtered for human consumption, subjected to extreme cruelty and stress. Vietnam's cat meat trade is fraught with extreme brutality and disregard for even the most basic animal welfare principles, from capture, transport to slaughter. Stolen from homes or trapped on the streets, cats are brutally handled, kept in overcrowded cages with little to no access to water or food, and trafficked in inhumane conditions across provinces and sometimes even countries. Many cats die along the way from heat exhaustion and injuries incurred during capture, transport and lairage. For those who do survive the grueling journey, slaughtering



methods are particularly cruel, and fail to adhere to any published guidelines on humane slaughter of any animal let alone appropriate euthanasia of cats. Commonly employed methods include drowning and bludgeoning, performed in full view of other cats, and evidently cause prolonged pain and distress.

Given the immense suffering and distress that all stages of the trade pose, profitability nor culture can be used to defend the cat meat trade which has no place in

today's society. It is society's and the government's duty to ensure the nation's laws are abided by and enforced, and comply with global animal welfare standards.

To date, there has not been a single country that has ever devised a humane way of slaughtering cats destined for human consumption; and there is no substantiated evidence to suggest that regulation of the cat meat trade would resolve the systematic cruelty involved.



At FOUR PAWS and Change for Animals Foundation we believe in the welfare of all sentient beings and work tirelessly to make the world a better place for them all






## FOUR PAWS

FOUR PAWS is the global animal welfare organisation for animals under direct human influence, which reveals suffering, rescues animals in need and protects them. Founded in 1988 in Vienna by Heli Dungler, the organisation advocates for a world where humans treat animals with respect, empathy and understanding. FOUR PAWS' sustainable campaigns and projects focus on companion animals including stray dogs and cats, farm animals and wild animals – such as bears, big cats, orangutans and elephants – kept in inappropriate conditions as well as in disaster and conflict zones. With offices in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Kosovo, the Netherlands, Switzerland, South Africa, Thailand, Ukraine, Hungary, the UK, the USA and Vietnam as well as sanctuaries for rescued animals in twelve countries, FOUR PAWS provides rapid help and long-term solutions.

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## Change for Animals Foundation

Change For Animals Foundation (CFAF) works to achieve impactful and lasting change, tackling some of the most pressing animal welfare issues of our time. Founded in 2012, our goal is to inspire and deliver powerful and effective campaigns, projects and advocacy for animals. This includes ending the dog and cat meat trades in Southeast Asia, ending the exploitation of wildlife in captivity, protecting animals from the illegal wildlife trade and improving the welfare of street dogs and cats. CFAF works in partnership around the world to empower people, communities, organisations, institutions and governments to change policies, attitudes and behaviours to create an environment where the life and welfare of every animal matters.

## Change for Animals Foundation

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