

NOTICE The Global Mail has ceased operations.

THE GLOBAL MAIL

Independent Journalism for Independent Minds

↑ back to top

↻ share story

🖨 print story

📖 read later

💬 117 comments

🏠 POWER RESOURCES CULTURE **PEOPLE** TECHNOLOGY BLOGS MULTIMEDIA



LIVE EXPORTS

TIM BARKER

Dog-Meat Mafia: Inside Thailand's Smuggling Trade

By Craig Skehan May 20, 2013

An exclusive video report following Thailand's illegal live-export trade in dogs — from rounded-up strays to stolen pets — destined for human consumption in Vietnam.



Craig Skehan



✉ Email

EDITORS' PICKS



The Coal Mine And Maules Creek – Ecological Haven or Whitehaven?



The Crowded Desert



Australia's Real Surveillance Scandal



Mining the Abyss



Inside the Offshore Fraud: The Villains and Victims of Australia's Biggest Pension Scam



An \$8,000 Gag Visa



Thai authorities are struggling to stop dogs from being stolen and smuggled to northern Vietnam, where one million dogs are eaten each year.

Stray dogs and pets are being illegally snatched, bought, or even bartered for household items, then smuggled to Vietnam, where they are sold, butchered and eaten.

With bribery at border checkpoints, apathy in the transit country of Laos, and northern Vietnam's appetite for one million dogs a year, Thai authorities are struggling to stop an estimated 200,000 dogs every year being exported alive in this international racket.

Smugglers pay helpers, often poor farmers, to comb rural areas and towns, buying dogs, grabbing strays or stealing pets.

Dogs are collected throughout the northeast of Thailand, then taken to holding pens in the provinces of Nong Khai, Bueng Kan, Nakhon Phanom and Mukdahan.

In transit, conditions for the animals are horrendous. The dogs are loaded by the hundreds onto open-sided trucks, starving and dehydrated, and stacked on top of each other, suffering from bite wounds and broken bones — some even dying en route.

According to Tuan Bendixsen, director of Animals Asia Foundation in Vietnam, the slaughter process is particularly traumatic for the dogs. Dogs are often killed at or near restaurants, or at stalls where restaurant owners pick the dogs they want before they are slaughtered.

"Dogs are highly intelligent animals, so when you kill a dog and you have a whole cage of dogs next to the one that is being killed, obviously those dogs that are being killed next, they know what is going on," Bendixsen told *The Global Mail*.

"Okay, culturally there is an issue about dog eating, we need to work on that, but up to the point where the dogs are being killed, obviously these dogs can be treated much better in terms of animal welfare," he said.

Thailand's maximum penalty for illegal export of animals, including dogs, is two years in prison and a \$3,000 fine, but activists say nobody has been jailed under the law. Focus within Thailand is on reducing the stray dog population, but while dog meat remains at a premium in Vietnam, the trade continues to flourish.

Transcript

CRAIG SKEHAN: Pet shows are a new trend in much of Asia, with well-groomed, expensive dog breeds crowd favourites. While pet ownership is on the rise, the practice of eating dogs continues in many places. An insatiable appetite for dog meat in Vietnam, coupled with huge numbers of stray dogs in Thailand — and a racket of stealing pets — fuels a cruel and illegal cross-border dogs-for-slaughter trade, with dogs packed for days like sardines in steel cages, up to a thousand on a single truck. Dogs are collected throughout the northeast of Thailand, then taken to holding pens in the provinces of Nong Khai, Bueng Kan, Nakhon Phanom and Mukdahan. Within Thailand, efforts are being made to over-time reduce the stray dog population.



It's Not About The Money — A Gambler's Hard-Won Wisdom



Off Their Nut In PNG



Are You Scared Yet? The Mugging Of The Australian Electorate



Full-Service Gambling: Addiction Treatment On The House

TOON WERATHUMJUMRUS, Soi Dog Foundation: We stress upon the sterilisation program because we think the stray dog problem in Thailand starts with uncontrollable populations of the dogs.

CRAIG SKEHAN: And Thai celebrities are popularising the issue.

KAE CHOLLADA, model and television presenter: We are the mercy country and I believe that we love dogs because dog's still are man's best friend. So we should not eat them, at all.

CRAIG SKEHAN: On Thailand's northern border with Laos is a government shelter for dogs rescued from smugglers. When pressure from campaigners resulted in raids being stepped up in 2011, such shelters were unable to cope and a high proportion of the dogs died from contagious diseases and other causes.

CHUSAK PONGPANICH, head of the national government's Nakhon Phanom Province Dog Shelter: We try to stop dogs being carried out of the country in response to the big demand outside Thailand. The foreign consumption of dog seems to be much bigger these days.

CRAIG SKEHAN: A major highway runs through the dusty northern Thai town of Ta Rae where many Mr Bigs of the Thai dog export business are based. Mainly Catholic migrants from Vietnam brought the habit of dog-eating with them. Now a so-called "dog-meat mafia" pays catchers — including poor farmers — to comb rural areas and towns, buying dogs, grabbing strays or stealing pets. Household items such as plastic buckets can be offered for dogs that local people may consider a nuisance. But if nobody is around to see, just about any dog can be treated as fair game. The holding pens they are taken to are increasingly at secret locations to avoid detection. At one such pen many dogs were found to be weak or dead, and stolen pets there were recovered. The maximum penalty for illegal export of animals, including dogs, is two years and a \$3,000 fine, but activists say nobody has been jailed and there is usually just a small fine. Conditions for the animals are horrendous.

TUAN BENDIXSEN, PhD, animal scientist and Vietnam director of Animals Asia Foundation: These dogs will be starving, they will be dehydrated, because they are not getting enough water. So broken bones is quite normal, and they have a lot of bleeding injuries because during the trip obviously when you get dogs stacked on top of each other, they start biting — against each other.

CRAIG SKEHAN: Thailand has been doing more to intercept the dog smugglers' trucks, but bribery remains a problem. And there is no specific co-ordination with neighbouring provinces in Laos and little government-to-government co-operation.

MONTHON TIPAYACHANT, Bueng Kan Province police major-general: Now here, on this matter, we don't really know what the legal standing of these dogs is in Laos.

We can act firmly in our country, but beyond the Laos border we have no control.

Stop the dogs going to Laos — that's the best thing!

CRAIG SKEHAN: Dogs are smuggled out of Thailand across the Mekong River and again loaded onto trucks. Once on Route Eight, the trucks have a virtually free run through Laos — where the trade has not yet become a significant public policy issue. Campaigners say they have never heard of a dog truck being stopped in Laos. At the Vietnamese check-point at Cau Treo, vehicles are searched for contraband, but the dog trucks just go through after paying a per head livestock tax without proper checks for diseases such as rabies and cholera.

TUAN BENDIXSEN: And once that closed population on that dog truck reaches a populated human area and those dogs are distributed to different areas, then you have no idea where the infection is going to go next.

CRAIG SKEHAN: Once in Vietnam, the open-sided trucks travel with their living

cargoes north along Highway One to the capital, Hanoi. Here they are sold to middlemen according to their weight. By then, their value has tripled from about \$10 for each dog in Thailand — and that can be doubled again by the time they are killed, butchered, cooked and served to restaurant patrons. In Duc Thuong — on the outskirts of Hanoi — restaurant owner, 48-year-old Hong Hiep, the father of five children, says he was taught the trade by his grandfather and has been killing dogs for 30 years, these days at a rate of several thousand a year.

HONG HIEP, dog meat restaurant owner: I'm a cook of a Vietnamese speciality, just like a job in any other country. This restaurant is my main income. It's very normal, cooking food, serving my customers.

We hit the dogs on the head to kill them so that they can come back in another life.

CRAIG SKEHAN: It is widely claimed that dogs are regularly killed slowly in Vietnam, so that adrenaline is pumped into their bodies to make the meat more tender.

TUAN BENDIXSEN: I heard that from China in the early days, but I think now that, from what we gather, is that the dogs are being killed quickly. But despite that it is very cruel, the way they are killed. Well, I mean, dogs are highly intelligent animals, so when you kill a dog and you have a whole cage of dogs next to the one that is being killed, obviously those dogs that are being killed next, they know what is going on. Okay, culturally there is an issue about dog eating, we need to work on that, but up to the point where the dogs are being killed, obviously these dogs can be treated much better in terms of animal welfare.

CRAIG SKEHAN: Now anti-dog-smuggling groups are pushing for a high-level regional conference to tackle the issue. Thai raids are gaining momentum. And, as the country between the supplier and consumers, Laos is geographically well placed to act. Slowly changing cultural attitudes towards dogs in Vietnam could, over time, reduce demand. However, many Vietnamese owners of pet dogs continue eat the meat of other dogs. And while there is still a ready market, dog smugglers in Thailand will look for new ways to ply their trade.



For further information and to learn how to help stop the illegal dog trade in Thailand visit the Soi Dog Foundation's site:

<http://www.soidog.org/en/dogmeat/>

 117 COMMENTS ON THIS STORY

SHOW PREVIOUS 114 COMMENTS



by Michelle

People who are cruel to animals should suffer the same pain they inflict. Hopefully there is a hell so these people can get what is coming to them. Animals are friends not food you monsters!

 October 17, 2013 @ 9:57am



by Kevin Gagnier

How about the cows folks? Why not look at things from God's perspective. HE is pained when any of His children - all forms of life are abused

 October 18, 2013 @ 11:30am



by Sevastian

Typical western BS.

Wesytterners show so much compassion for certain animals, but no regard for anything when they bomb a city turning every living thing into dust and whole countries back into the stone age.

Where do these ugly people come from?

Why is it ugly people get fixated on the welfare of one particular animal, but they will not say good morning to a neighbour or show any concern for starving mutilated children.

Hitler loved his dogs, but hated every other living thing.

If dogs were the main problem in Asia, and, everything else was fixed, we could talk about it.

We need a medicine for these sick people.

 December 17, 2013 @ 7:18am



Follow



Subscribe on iTunes

PHOTOJOURNALISM



The Last of the Mongolian Eagle Hunters



Croc Culture, It's A Top End Thing



Fight Night In Pictures

BLOGS

Greater Powers To Deport On Nauru

GUEST BLOGS

The Global Mail
STAFF STATEMENT

Offshore Leaks
China: How We
Did It