

WINGS FOR SALE

**An Assessment of the Online Trade in Wild Birds
& Trapping Tools in Viet Nam**



ABOUT WILDACT

WildAct aims to protect endangered species and fragile ecosystems by empowering communities through education, sustainable practices and innovative conservation efforts. We strive to safeguard existing forest and wildlife, fostering a sustainable future for our planet.

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Executive Summary

2,212

Total Posts Recorded

6 Facebook groups · Oct–Nov 2025

227,458

Birds Advertised

From seller-advertised quantities

38,342

Migratory Birds

16.85% of total

21,048

Total Likes

242 shares · 18,826 comments

Key Findings

1

A dual market structure: high-volume professional supply hubs in biodiversity-rich provinces feed into diffuse consumer networks in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

2

Traders use coded slang, misspellings, group renaming, and encrypted off-platform transactions to evade moderation and law enforcement.

3

Trapping equipment sold year-round indicates a mature commercial supply chain — sustaining harvest pressure independent of bird migration cycles.

4

Despite Art. 244 Penal Code permitting up to 15 years imprisonment, zero enforcement actions were detected against any online observed seller during the course of the survey.

Methodology

Study Design

Covert digital market survey methodology, adapted from established protocols (Siriwat & Nijman, 2020). Non-interactive and observational — no accounts were created, no posts were made. The research documents activities contravening Vietnamese legislation; observation for conservation purposes is justified in the public interest.

Study Period & Team

Study period: 1 October – 30 November 2025 — coinciding with peak autumn migration along the East Asian–Australasian Flyway (EAAF).

Survey Team: 1 WildAct project officer + 2 trained volunteers averaging 16 combined hours per day of monitoring.

Keywords: Vietnamese terms for bird types, buying/selling, and trapping equipment; expanded via snowball sampling of trade-specific slang discovered during monitoring.

Platforms Monitored

Facebook

6 groups selected for high activity (15–20 posts/day), trade focus, and accessible membership. Groups ranged from open to semi-private with lax review processes.

TikTok (Case Study)

1 account selling birds of prey; ranked #1 for search term 'Chim săn mồi' (Bird of Prey). Monitored October – December 2025.

Comment Coding Scheme

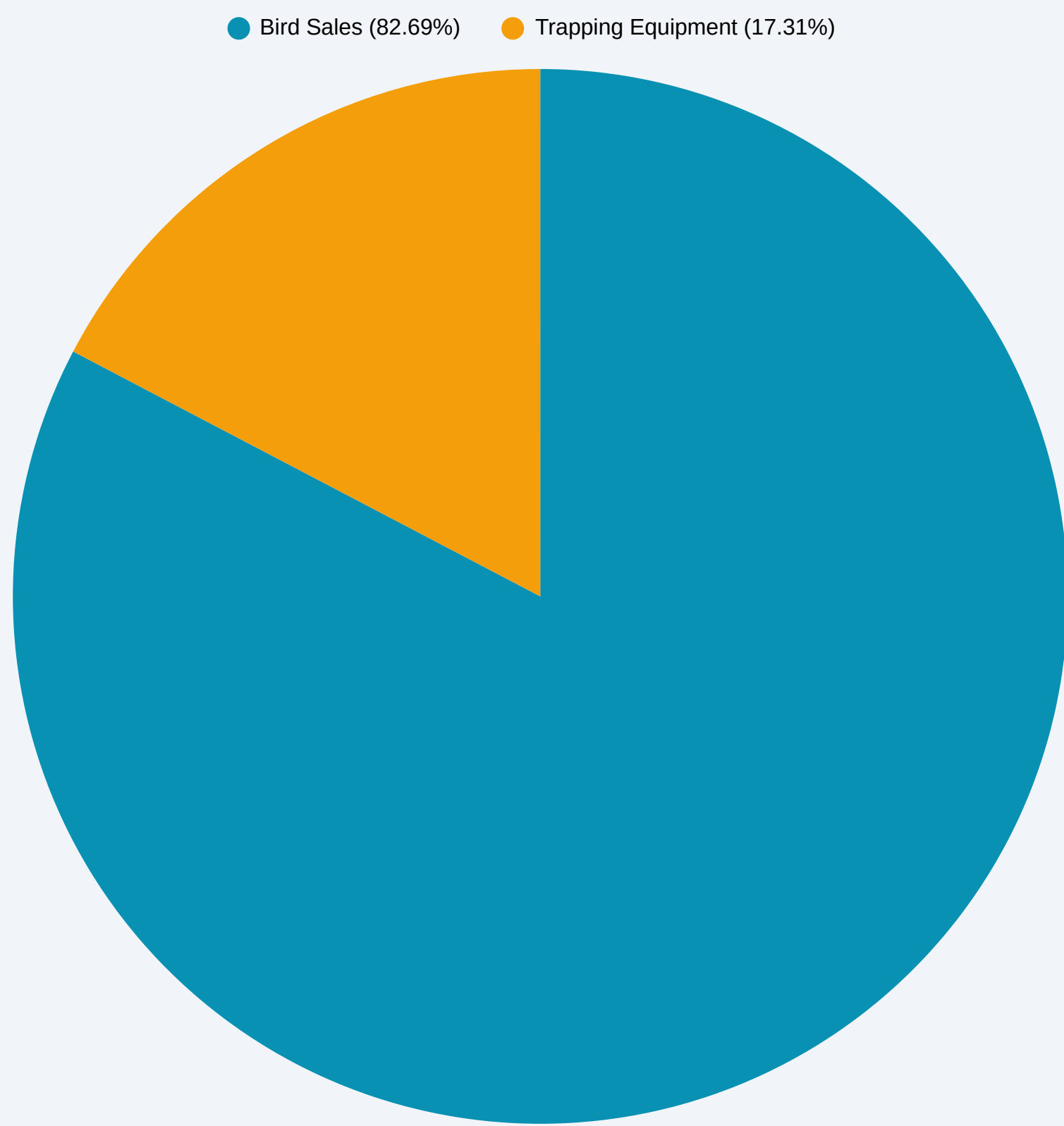
- **Interest in Purchase:** Price, availability, shipping queries
- **Offering to Sell:** Counter-ads posted in comment sections
- **Approval / Endorsement:** Positive statements about product or trade
- **Disapproval / Awareness:** Legal or welfare concerns expressed
- **Cite Laws & Decrees:** Links or references to wildlife legislation
- **Factual Exchange:** Species ID, care advice, technique questions

LIMITATIONS

Findings cover only the monitored groups. Other platforms (Zalo, Telegram, YouTube) were not captured. Species ID depends on seller-provided descriptions.

Market Overview

5.1 Post Composition



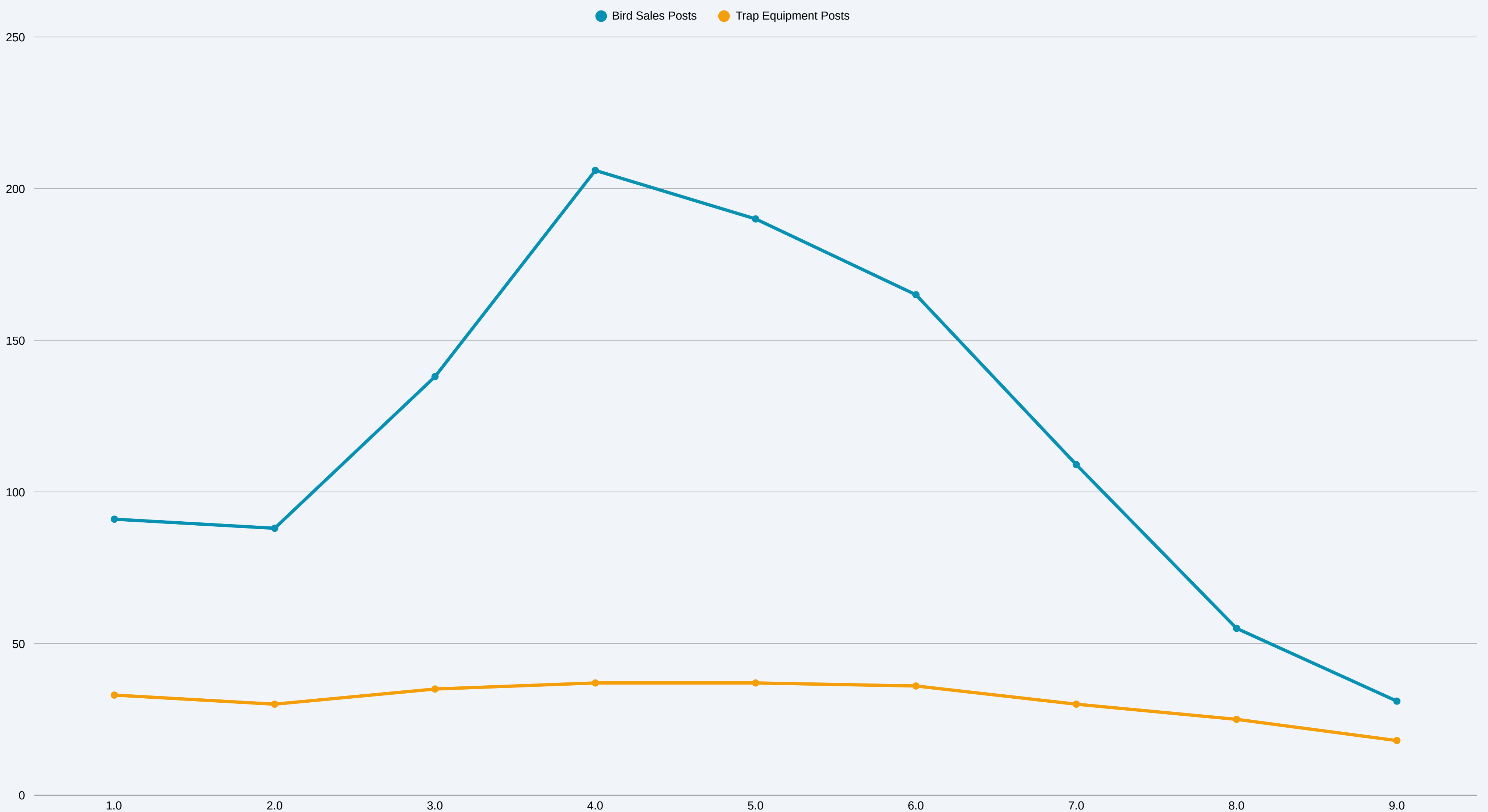
| Category | Posts | % |
|--------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Bird Sales | 1,829 | 82.69% |
| Trapping Equipment | 383 | 17.31% |
| Total | 2,212 | 100% |

KEY INSIGHT

The 17.31% share of trap equipment posts signals an integrated supply chain — harvesting tools promoted alongside the birds themselves.

5.2 Temporal Patterns — Post Frequency

Post frequency spiked markedly in late October aligning with the autumn EAAF migratory influx. Trapping equipment posts remain flat year-round — indicating professional commercial suppliers independent of seasonal bird availability.



MIGRATION EXPLOITATION

The temporal spike in trade precisely coincides with the EAAF autumn migration. Online trade data functions as a real-time indicator of poaching pressure on migratory populations.

Adaptive Evasion Strategies

Traders employ a sophisticated array of linguistic and operational tactics to evade platform moderation and law enforcement detection — continuously adapting as monitoring capabilities evolve.

Slang & Euphemisms

Protected species renamed with culturally specific terms meaningless to algorithmic filters but instantly understood by the trading community.

Eurasian Coot → "black goose"
White-browed Crake → "slanted-eyed bird"
 "wild bird" = broad euphemism for any wild-caught species

Intentional Misspellings

Deliberate character substitutions, diacritic removal, and phonetic teen-code transcription defeat string-matching algorithms entirely.

"C.ò" / "V.ạc" — dot inserted mid-word
 "Ch1m b0i" — number substitution
 "chim chao mao" — diacritics stripped

Regional Dialects

Vietnam's considerable regional linguistic diversity provides vocabulary inaccessible to any national keyword list — requiring hyper-local expertise to detect.

Little Grebe → "Bánh Ít" (Central dialect)
 Regionally specific terms for common species vary widely across North/Central/South Vietnam

Off-Platform Encryption

Public posts are advertisements only. All commercial specifics — price, location, species quantities — are moved to encrypted Messenger or Zalo channels immediately upon interest.

"IB" / "ib" → Inbox (Facebook Messenger)
 "ZL" / "Zep" → Zalo messaging app
 "lovely price" / "giá yêu thương" → negotiate privately

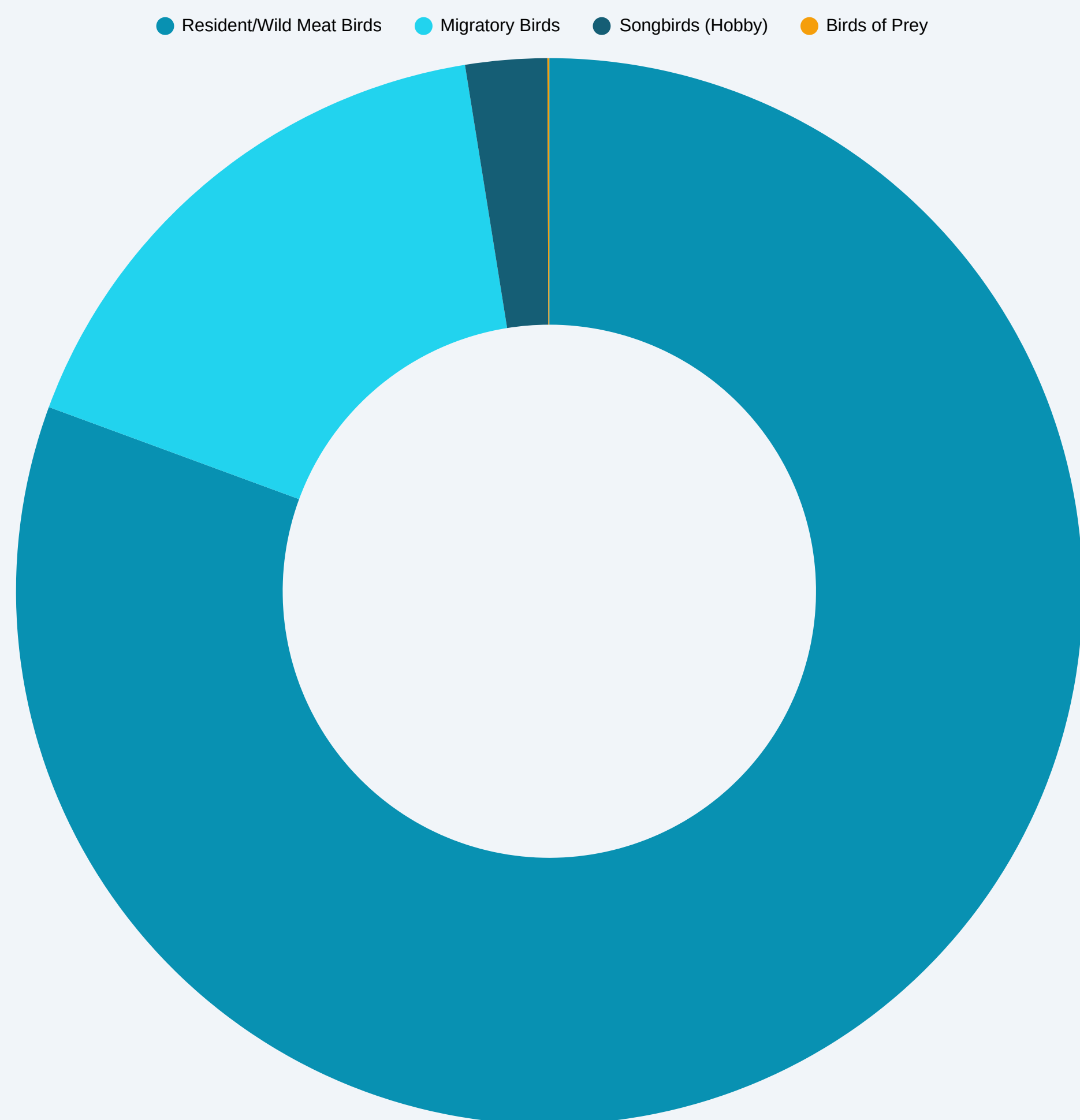
Group Renaming

Groups systematically rename themselves to evade content moderation algorithms, maintaining their audience while removing searchable terms.

"Bird Selling Group"
 → "Forest Clothing Selling Group"
 → "Job Search Group"
 (timed with declining bird availability)

Wild Bird Trade: 227,458 Individuals

6.1 Classification of Birds Recorded



221,705

Meat Bird Group

Resident/wild birds and migratory birds exploited primarily for consumption (restaurants, household). Dominated by sparrows, egrets, herons, cuckoos, crakes.

38,342

16.85%

Migratory Birds (subset)

Targeted during EAAF autumn passage. Particularly vulnerable at stopover sites. CORRECTED from draft (was 38,433).

5,753

2.53%

Recreational/Hobby Group

Songbirds (5,620) and raptors (133). Smaller in volume but disproportionately targets species of highest conservation concern.

Source vs. Consumer Market Structure

Thai Nguyen

2,881 birds/seller

10 sellers → 28,814 birds · Professional wholesaling hub

Ha Noi

337 birds/seller

52 sellers → 17,508 birds · Fragmented retail network

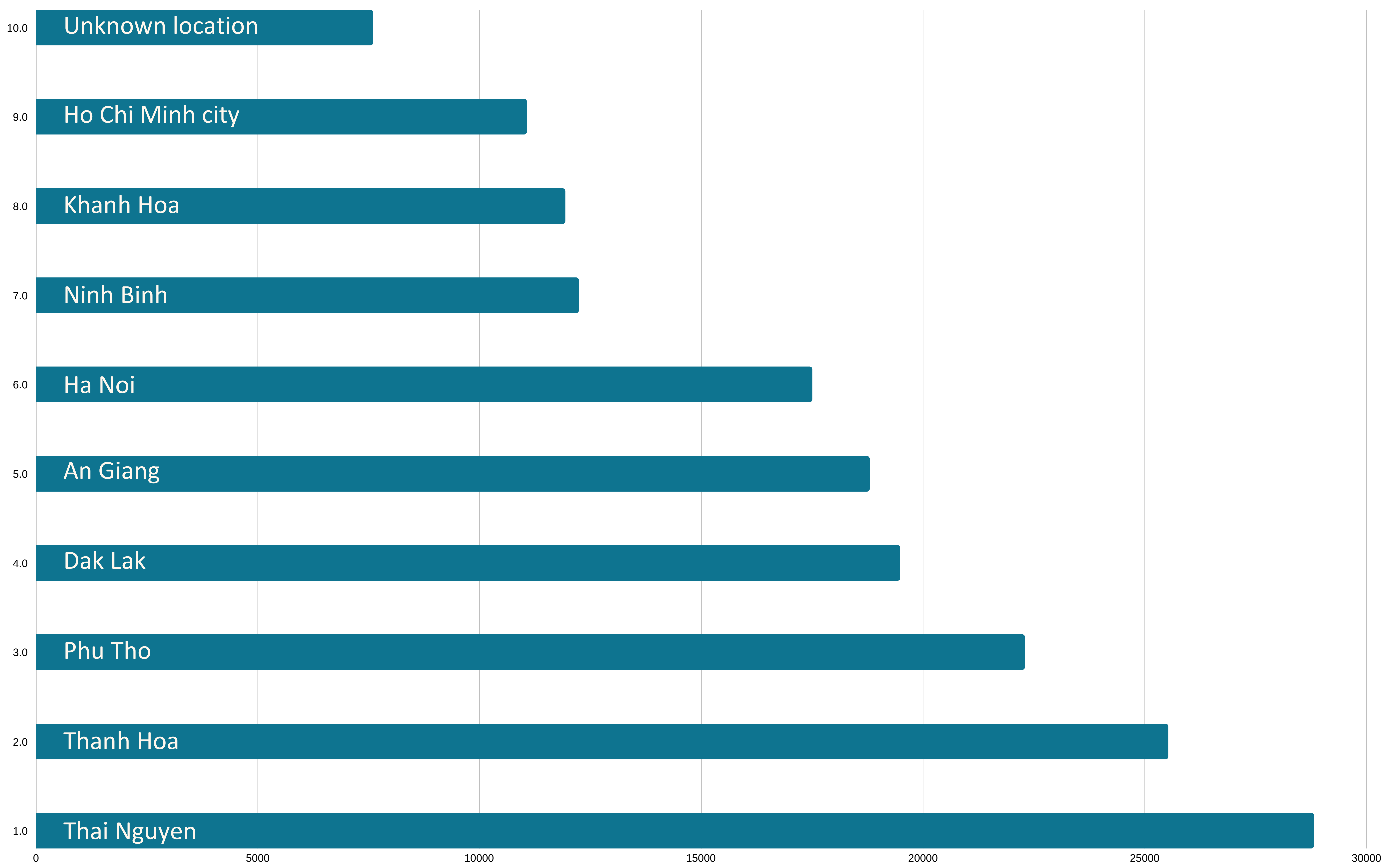
6.2 Species & Conservation Status

14 bird orders were recorded. Passeriformes (songbirds) dominate at 64.1% of posts. Legally protected species include:

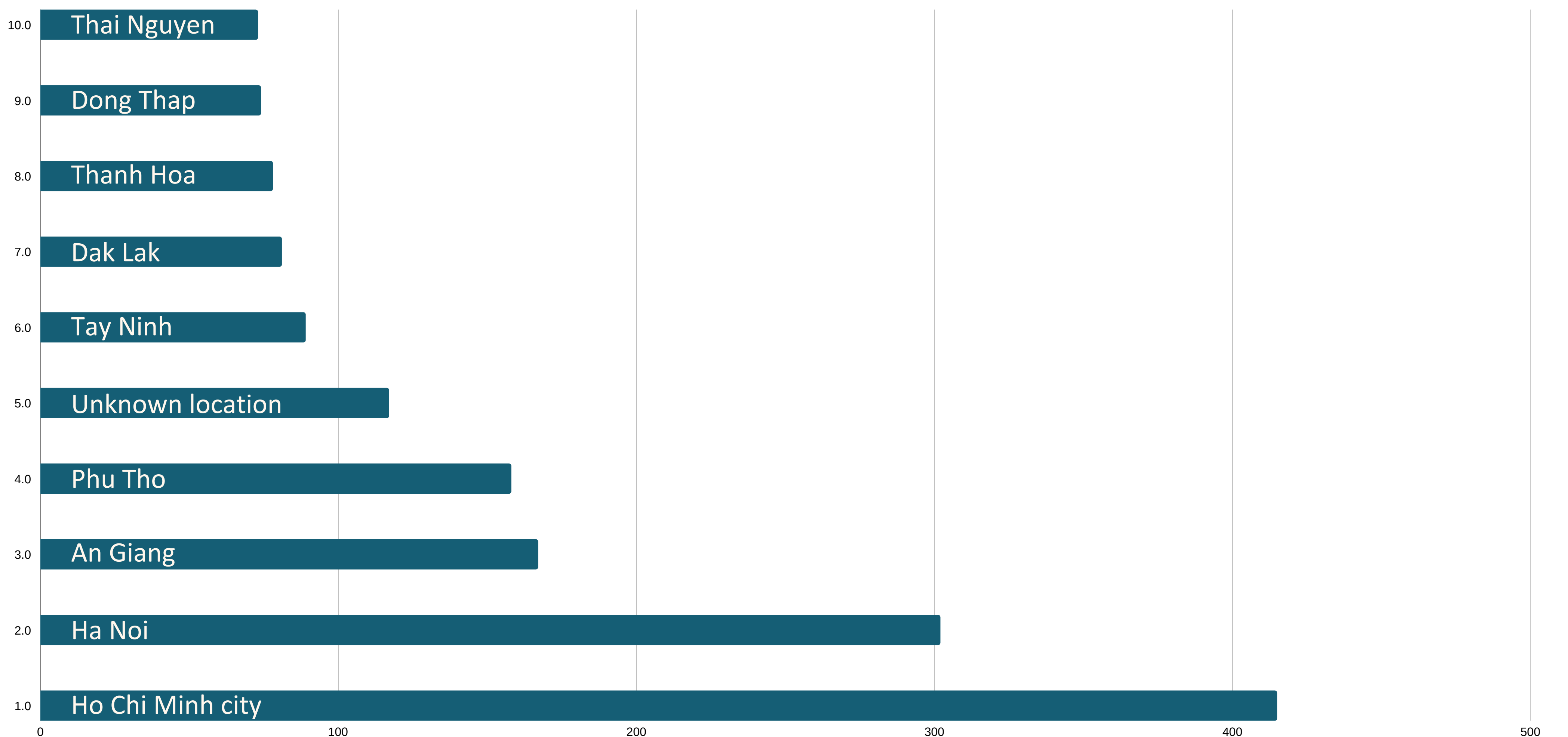
| Order | Key Species | % Posts | Status |
|-----------------|---|---------|--------------------------|
| Passeriformes | Bulbuls, Sparrows, Mynas, Laughingthrush | 64.10% | LC; Laughingthrush IIB |
| Pelecaniformes | Egrets, Night Herons, Ibis, Bitterns | 12.61% | LC |
| Galliformes | Quail, Francolin, Silver Pheasant, Fireback | 4.34% | IIB / NT |
| Accipitriformes | Black Kite, Shikra, Crested Serpent Eagle | 0.03% | IB / IIB ⚠ |
| Falconiformes | Peregrine Falcon | 0.03% | IB — strictly prohibited |
| Psittaciformes | Red-breasted Parakeet | 0.22% | IIB · NT |

Geographic Distribution of the Bird Trade

Top 10 Provinces by Number of Birds Advertised



Top 10 Provinces by Number of Posts

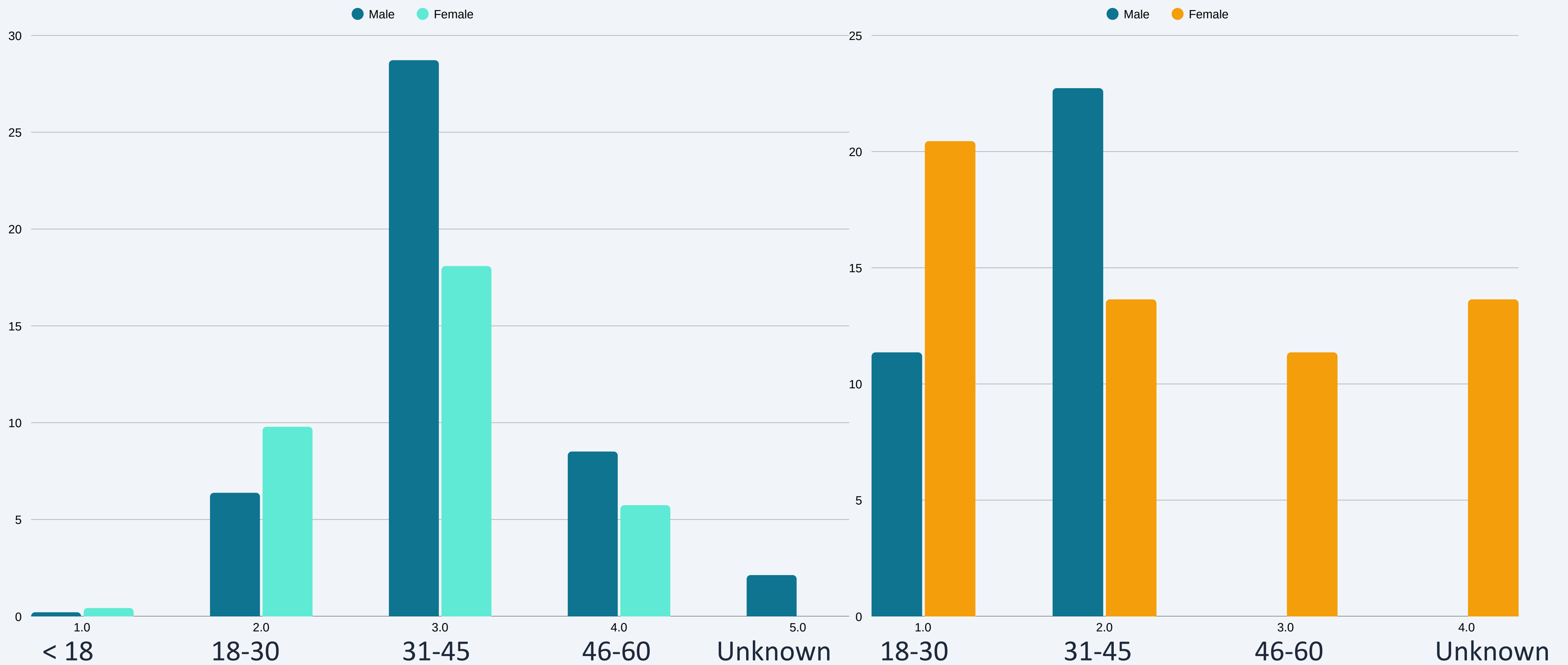


SOURCE VS CONSUMER MARKET PATTERN

High birds-per-seller ratios in Thai Nguyen (2,881/seller), Dak Lak (2,292/seller), and Khanh Hoa (1,530/seller) signal organized wholesale hubs. High post counts in Ha Noi (415 posts, 337 birds/seller) and HCMC (158 posts, 270 birds/seller) reflect fragmented retail consumer markets. Vietnam's illegal bird trade is spatially correlated with EAAF flyway corridors and biodiversity hotspots.

Seller Demographics & Trapping Equipment

6.4 Bird Seller Age & Gender Distribution



NOTABLE FINDING — TRAP SELLERS

Female sellers comprise 59.09% of trap seller accounts vs. only 34.09% male — a near two-fold difference suggesting gender-specific supply chain roles worth further investigation.

7.1 Types of Trapping Equipment Recorded

- 1 Mist Nets**
Nylon nets in various mesh sizes; non-selective

EXTREMELY HIGH
- 2 Glue Sticks**
Sticky resin adhesives; often lethal

HIGH
- 3 Spring Traps**
Mechanical, various sizes; may capture or kill

MEDIUM-HIGH
- 4 Cage Traps**
Decoy (foam/live bait); targets songbirds

HIGH
- 5 Audio Lures**
Electronic playback devices; massively amplifies trapping radius

HIGH

SYNERGY EFFECT

Audio lures + mist nets + glue sticks combined create an exceptionally efficient harvesting system — directly explaining the high per-seller bird volumes in source provinces.

Community Attitudes: Comment Analysis

21,048

Likes

18,826

Total Comments

Incl. 3,756 spam

242

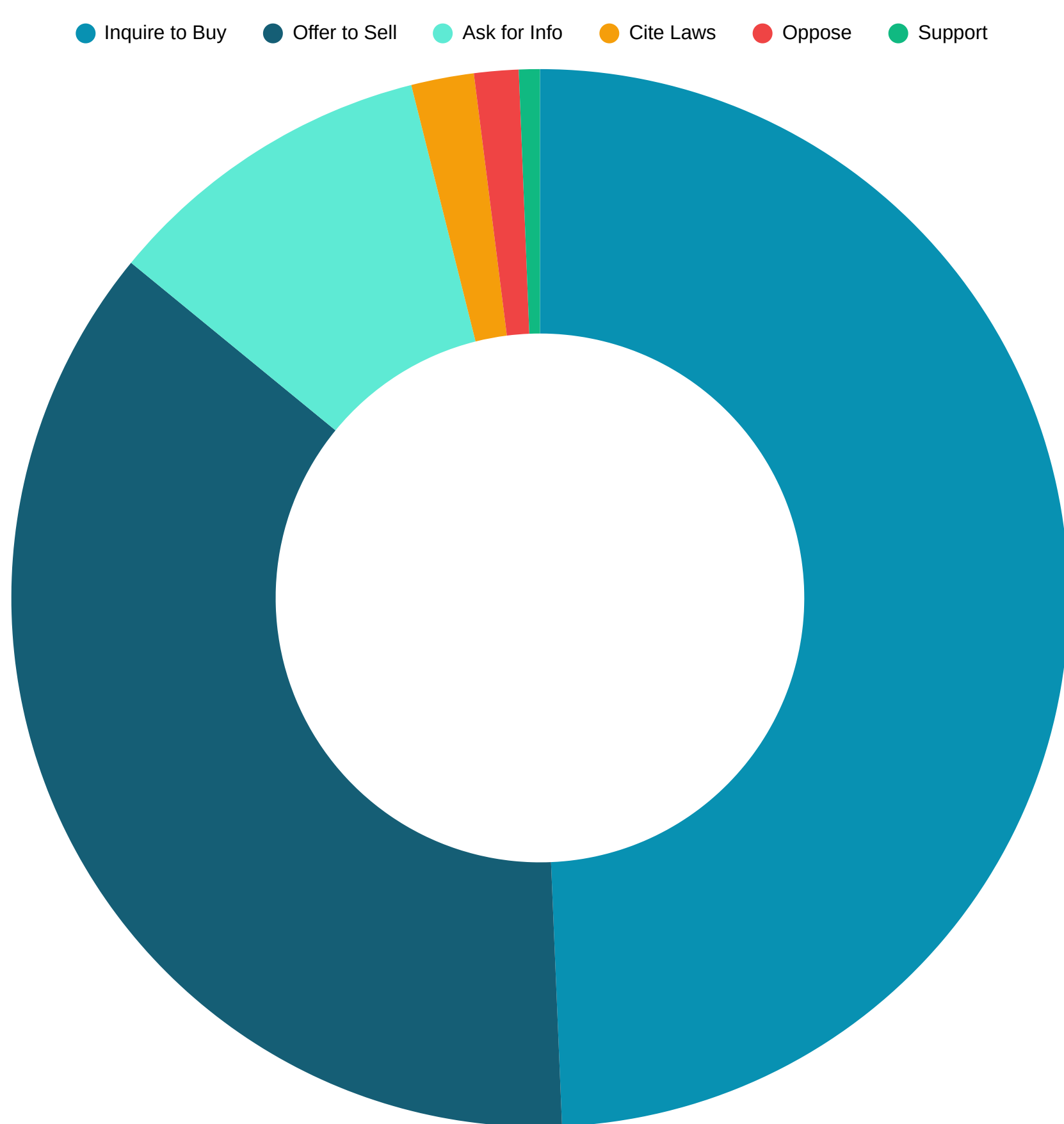
Shares

15,070

Substantive Comments

Excl. spam

8.1 Comment Category Breakdown



| Type | Count | % |
|---------------------|-------|-------|
| Inquire to Buy | 7,410 | 39.4% |
| Offer to Sell | 5,496 | 29.2% |
| Ask for Information | 1,526 | 8.1% |
| Spam/Irrelevant | 3,756 | — |
| Cite Laws/Decrees | 288 | 1.5% |
| Oppose/Disapprove | 204 | 1.1% |
| Support/Approve | 96 | 0.5% |

Key Behavioural Observations

~70% Commerce

Buying inquiries (39.4%) + selling offers (29.2%) confirm these groups function as explicit commercial marketplaces, not interest forums.

Risk-Averse Trading

The frequent use of 'IB' (Inbox) shows adaptive awareness of legal risk — transactions shifted to encrypted Messenger to remove public evidence trail.

Normalization

Husbandry advice (8.1%) fosters a sense of legitimate community, reframing exploitation as 'care.' This lowers ethical barriers to participation.

Counter-Discourse

Opposition (1.1%) and legal citations (1.5%) form a minority counter-narrative — an entry point for targeted awareness campaigns.

Case Study: TikTok Raptor Trade

27

Sales Posts
Oct–Dec 2025

44

Birds Advertised
4 Species

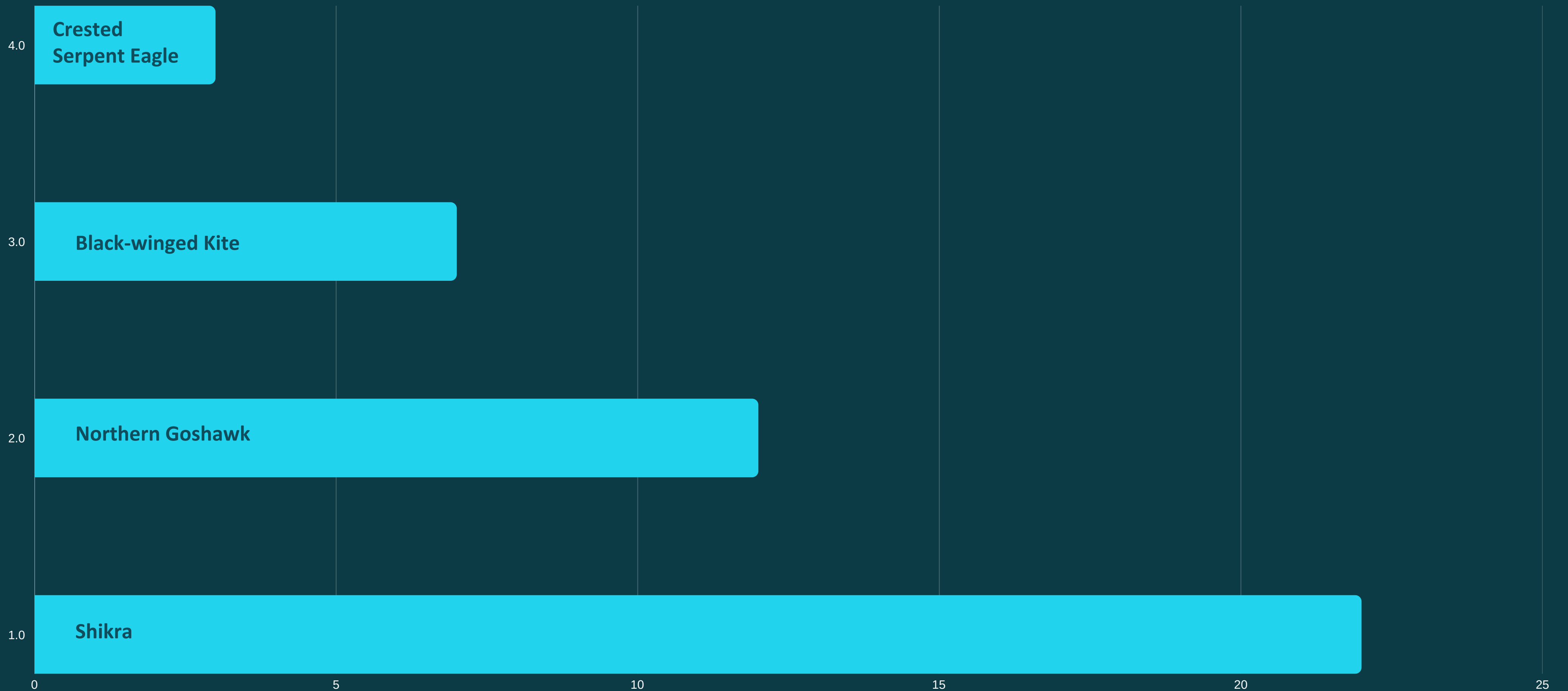
3,384

Post Likes

305

Comments
(98 inquiries)

Account monitored: ...xx.fanconry 0 (Ho Chi Minh City) · 1,533 followers · 13,000+ total likes. Selected as it ranked #1 for Vietnamese search 'Chim săn mồi' (Bird of Prey) and featured numerous viral sales videos.



Pricing:

400,000–1,000,000 VND per bird. A 6-level training taxonomy (wild-caught → fully trained hunting companion) signals a sophisticated, differentiated market with premium pricing tiers.

Engagement:

Posts received 3,384 likes, 305 comments (98 purchase inquiries, 54 active selling offers), and 188 shares. Strong buyer interest despite strict legal prohibition on all 4 species.

Algorithm Risk:

TikTok's recommendation engine delivers content to users already interested in birds of prey — creating an echo chamber with near-zero counter-discourse. Zero opposing comments recorded in the entire dataset.

Governance Gap:

Sales conducted openly with no visible reference to wildlife protection laws or permit requirements. The absence of counter-discourse makes TikTok potentially more dangerous for trade normalization than Facebook.

1 Normalization through Community Building

Social media platforms foster a sense of legitimate community through shared jargon, husbandry advice, and coded language — socially framing exploitation as 'hobby' or 'care.' This normalization lowers ethical barriers and sustains consumer demand, as documented in Southeast Asian cage-bird trade studies.

2 The Cat-and-Mouse Dynamic

Traders demonstrate sophisticated adaptation: coded language, frequent group renaming, strategic migration to private channels. This mirrors documented dynamics in Thailand and Indonesia where online wildlife markets continuously innovate to outpace static keyword filters and reactive reporting mechanisms.

3 Exploitation of Biological Phenology

The temporal spike in trade precisely coinciding with the EAAF autumn migration confirms that online trade data can serve as a real-time indicator of poaching pressure. Migratory birds — fatigued and concentrated at stopover sites — face additive harvesting mortality during their most vulnerable period.

4 The Persistent Enabling Infrastructure

The year-round professionalized market for trapping equipment is a foundational enabling layer often overlooked in enforcement strategies focused solely on animals. This constant, low-cost tool availability lowers barriers to entry and amplifies harvesting efficiency across the entire illegal trade.

5 The Governance Gap

Despite a robust legal framework (Art. 244 Penal Code; Decree 84/2021; Decree 160/2013/ND-CP), enforcement remains critically weak against the speed, anonymity, and cross-jurisdictional nature of online trade. Proving commercial intent and tracking transactions across platforms and private messages requires entirely new institutional capabilities.

Conclusion

The illegal trade in wild birds and trapping equipment has rapidly migrated to social media in Vietnam, creating a severe and escalating crisis for avian biodiversity. A dual market structure, professionalized traders, coded language, private-channel transactions, and year-round trapping equipment supply sustain constant pressure on bird populations. Despite a robust legal framework, enforcement remains critically weak against the speed, scale, and anonymity of online trade.

Recommendations by Stakeholder

Law Enforcement & Regulators

Establish dedicated digital wildlife crime units with cyber patrol, forensic financial tracking, and network investigation capability. Prioritize prosecution of high-volume source hub sellers in Thai Nguyen, Dak Lak, and Phu Tho. Leverage Decree 146/2026/NĐ-CP online trade provisions.

Meta (Facebook) & TikTok

Deploy AI trained on Vietnamese-specific evasion tactics and visual cues — not static keyword filters. Close loopholes in Facebook Marketplace and TikTok LIVE. Establish prioritized, transparent data-sharing channels with Vietnamese law enforcement.

Conservation organisations & agencies

Continue systematic trade monitoring to track emerging lexicons and evasion tactics. Develop targeted counter-messaging for the 30–45 age demographic in Hanoi, HCMC, and source provinces. Report intelligence to TRAFFIC, BirdLife International, and EAAFP partners for regional coordination.

Public Engagement

Empower citizens to recognize, reject, and report illegal wildlife products through clear, platform-specific guidance. Frame messaging around Vietnam's avian biodiversity heritage and the ecological role of wild birds. Target food-culture communities given the meat bird trade dominance by volume.

Only through unified, persistent, and adaptive collaboration can the digital infrastructure enabling illegal bird trade be dismantled.

securing a future for Vietnam's irreplaceable avian heritage.

227,458

Birds in trade posts

2,212

Posts documented

38,342

Migratory birds
(corrected)

0

Enforcement actions
detected

WildAct — Centre for Wildlife Action · Hanoi, Vietnam · wildact.vn

Appendix: Coded Language Glossary (Key Terms)

IB / ib — Inbox — move to private Messenger

Tn / tn — Wild-caught bird

Võ trận — Location with many birds caught

Xả — Bulk resale / clearing stock

Xâm / Ngan đen — Eurasian Coot (Sâm Cầm)

ZL / Zep — Zalo messaging app

Hàng lạnh — Frozen, processed, ready-to-ship

Giá yêu thương — Trapper/wholesale price

BOOM / BOM — Buyer refused delivery

Mắt Xéo — White-browed Crake

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