

# Dispute flares over controversial Thai temple tigers

April 24 2015

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"The Tiger Temple" in western Thailand has long proved a hit among tourists who flock there to be photographed next to the monks and their huge feline pets

Thai wildlife officials began a headcount Friday of nearly 150 tigers kept by monks at a temple which has become the centre of a dispute over the welfare of the animals.

Wat Pha Luang Ta Bua in Thailand's western Kanchanaburi

province—commonly known as "The Tiger Temple"—has long proved a hit among tourists who flock there to visit the monks and be photographed next to their huge feline pets.

But the authorities say the temple has been keeping the animals without the proper paperwork and have vowed to seize them, sparking standoffs in recent weeks between officials and angry monks blocking their way.

Thailand's Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP) said earlier this week it planned to take the animals away on Friday.

But when officials arrived at the temple Friday morning they contented themselves with counting the [tigers](#), most of whom are microchipped, to ascertain how many there are in the sanctuary.

"We have come to check and scan the tigers to see whether the numbers match what we have or not," DNP official Somsak Poopet told AFP, adding his department said they had been told there should be 147 tigers at the temple.

Asked whether the department would consider seizing the animals he replied: "We have that idea but in our actions so far it has not reached that process yet."

Unlike previous visits, the monks did not object to officials entering the sanctuary, an AFP photographer on the scene said.



A warden hugs a tiger at The Tiger Temple in Kanchanaburi province, western Thailand, on April 24, 2015

The tigers were led out in groups of four and tied to a tree to allow [officials](#) to scan their microchips.

The headcount was sparked by allegations from a temple vet earlier this week who complained to police that three tigers had recently disappeared from the sanctuary, sparking fears they may have been sold on.

Local animal rights groups have accused the [temple](#) of failing to properly look after the tigers.

In February, [wildlife officials](#) said they conducted a raid and discovered dozens of hornbills, jackals and Asian bears that were being kept at the

sanctuary without the correct permits.



A Buddhist monk sprays water onto a baby tiger at The Tiger Temple in Kanchanaburi province, western Thailand, on April 24, 2015

"I think a lot of the people here are very motivated, I think they really love the animals, but they're doing it absolutely the wrong way," Edwin Wiek, founder of Wildlife Friends Foundation Thailand, which has



campaigned to have the tigers removed, told AFP.

"Wildlife management, whether that's in the wild or captivity, comes with a lot of knowledge, a lot of rules, a lot of dos and don'ts. And walking around with adult tigers like this, that could snap their mood at any time, is an accident waiting to happen," he added.

Temple authorities were unavailable for comment Friday. But they insist they are a genuine conservation project and have previously denied allegations that they have failed to look after the [animals](#) or illegally traffic in them.



Thai wildlife officials have been threatening to seize the 147 tigers being kept by monks at The Tiger Temple in Kanchanaburi province

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