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Special Edition

The Mekong Messenger

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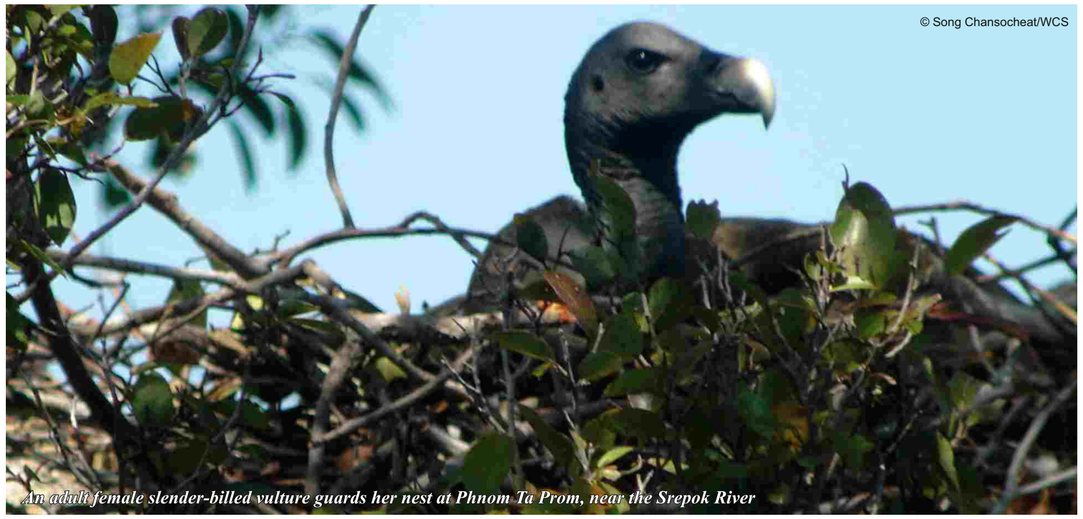

© Song Chansocheat/WCS

An adult female slender-billed vulture guards her nest at Phnom Ta Prom, near the Srepok River

NESTS OF CRITICALLY ENDANGERED VULTURES FOUND IN NORTHEASTERN CAMBODIA

by Chris Greenwood

There was jubilation among Cambodian vulture conservationists when a recent survey team comprising of staff from WWF Greater Mekong's Dry Forest Species Project, the World Conservation Society (WCS), and Birdlife International found six active nests of the critically endangered slender-billed vulture.

According to the Dry Forest Species Project Manager, Dr Andy Maxwell, given the rarity of the species, this may be the first documented sighting of slender-billed vulture nests ever made in Cambodia.

The team included WWF Provincial Counterpart Coordinator, Duong Kong, his community counterpart Moeung Kuy from Sre Sranok Village, and Song Chansocheat from WCS/Ministry of Environment (MoE) who is also Project Manager of the Cambodian Vulture Conservation Project administered by WCS and its partners.

"The survey team not only found six active nests but also saw three more currently inactive nests. Since the site is remote, the chances of us mounting a successful protection and breeding support plan are good, at least for this year," Dr Maxwell said. "However, in the long run, this site is under threat, because it is targeted as a potential logging concession and it is also subject to flooding if the planned Lower Srepok 3 Dam is ever built."

Vultures are threatened with extinction across South and Southeast Asia, with the populations in South Asia declining catastrophically over the past five to eight years, probably due to widespread veterinary use of the anti-inflammatory medicine Diclofenac (for cattle) in South Asia.

The Lower Mekong Dry Forest Ecoregion has become the last bastion of hope for recovery of vultures, with Cambodia's Eastern and Northern Plains becoming focal areas for the ecoregion.

There are three vulture species found in Cambodia, the white-rumped vulture *(Gyps bengalensis)*, red-headed vulture *(Sarcogyps calvus)*, and slender-billed vulture *(Gyps tenuirostris)*. Of the three species, the slender-billed vulture is the least common, averaging only 11-16% of the total vultures found during monitoring surveys.

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Celebrities speak out for wildlife

by Hoang Thi Minh Hong

On 18 January 2007, a Public Service Announcement (PSA) campaign aimed at changing consumer attitudes about unsustainable wildlife consumption was launched in Hanoi. The campaign, consisting of five TV PSAs and five print PSAs, is a part of a larger awareness-raising project between WWF Greater Mekong and TRAFFIC Indochina, addressing unsustainable wildlife consumption in Vietnam.

© WWF Greater Mekong

Celebrity PSAs are posted in public places in Hanoi

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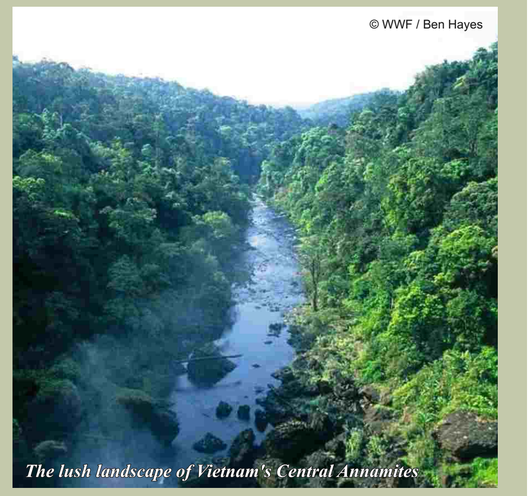
WWF expands conservation in Central Vietnam

by Barney Long

After the identification of the Central Annamites as a priority ecoregion in 2000, WWF Greater Mekong has been building a strong presence within this incredible landscape. After some initial activities on tiger conservation, sustainable forestry, and the establishment of the Song Thanh Nature Reserve, the MOSAIC Project was established in Vietnam's Quang Nam Province in 2002. Soon after this, through the support of the MacArthur Foundation, this work was enhanced in Quang Nam and extended into the Xekong Province in Lao PDR.

In 2004, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Prime Minister of Vietnam promulgated the Central Annamites Biodiversity Conservation Strategy for the Vietnamese side of the landscape. This development was quickly followed by the initiation of the Green Corridor Project in Thua Thien Hue Province and then a project, funded by the Royal Danish Embassy (DANIDA), looking at mitigating the environmental impacts of the Ho Chi Minh Highway in this amazing landscape.

Late in 2006, two additional projects were secured that enabled WWF Greater Mekong to expand its work into the adjacent province of Quang Tri. WWF now has offices and comprehensive conservation initiatives in four adjacent provinces within the Central Annamites landscape: Quang Nam, Thua Thien Hue, and Quang Tri in Vietnam and Xekong in Lao PDR. The new office in Quang Tri is currently staffed by four people and supported by DANIDA, as well as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Dutch Directorate-General for International Cooperation's (DGIS) Biological Conservation Corridor Initiative.


© WWF / Ben Hayes

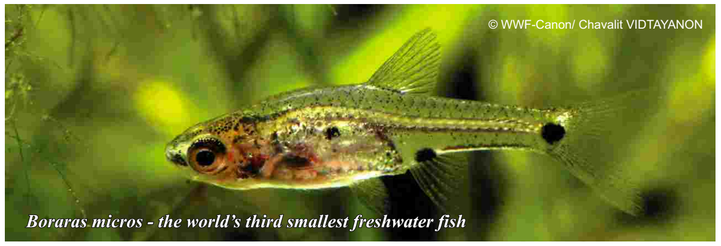
The lush landscape of Vietnam's Central Annamites

With increased capacity in the landscape, the next step is to design mechanisms where all offices and staff can support each other in a landscape-level approach to conservation implementation, which is currently being developed and will be trialed over the next few months.

THAI MARSH HOME TO THE WORLD'S THIRD SMALLEST FRESHWATER FISH

by Radda Larpnun

Goot Ting Marsh located in Thailand's Nong Khai Province, covers approximately 2,200 ha and is an extensive natural water storage area, which is connected to the Mekong River. The marsh is also home to the world's third smallest freshwater fish - *Boraras micros*.


© WWF-Canon/ Chavalit VIDTAYANON

Boraras micros - the world's third smallest freshwater fish

Attaining a maximum length of only 1.3 cm, it is known to inhabit Goot Ting Marsh and the nearby lower Songkram River wetlands, and probably also occurs in Lao PDR. First described by WWF Thailand's senior freshwater biologist, Dr Chavalit Vidthayanon and world fish expert, Maurice Kottelat, in 1993, *Boraras micros* feed on microplankton and have a lifespan of around one year. The fish is a good indicator of healthy wetlands, but is increasingly being taken from its natural habitat to be sold as an aquarium fish.

Boraras micros is classified under Thailand's Red List as Vulnerable (ONEPP, 2005), with major threats identified as loss of wetland habitat, eutrophication, invasion of alien species, and overfishing for the aquarium trade.

Discussing treasures of Green Corridor

by Chris Dickinson

On 28-29 November 2006, a group of national and international scientists and government officers met in Vietnam's Thua Thien Hue Province, to discuss the conservation value of the Green Corridor area in the province, an area of forest stretching between Bach Ma National Park and Phong Dien Nature Reserve.

The Green Corridor forest landscape has been shown through biological assessments to harbor an incredible amount of biodiversity, including birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, plants, and butterflies, and it supports some of the last remaining lowland forests in Vietnam. Thus, it has been identified as one of the highest conservation priorities in the Central Truong Son Range. Mr Hoang Ngoc Khanh, Director of Thua Thien Hue Provincial Forest Protection Department said that the area is of extremely high conservation importance and the province is committed to a conservation approach which protects the forest and contributes to sustainable development in the province.

The area supports unique animals that are only found in the Central Truong Son including the critically endangered white-cheeked crested gibbon, of which the project recorded over 60 separate groups; and the red-shanked douc langur, a beautiful and startling primate species. It is also one of the world's few remaining habitats of the elusive saola, a rare and unique large mammal which was only discovered by scientists in 1992. Recently, scientists have discovered a number of new species, including five new orchid species, one new snake species, and several butterfly species, including a new genus. Numerous species that occur in Vietnam's Red Book have also been recorded in the area, including 15 reptile and amphibians, as well as 6 bird species.


© WWF Vietnam

A new lizard species, Acanthosaura natalie, has been documented in the Green Corridor area

At the workshop, Dr Chris Dickinson, WWF Vietnam's Green Corridor Chief Technical Advisor, presented an analysis of biodiversity hotspots within the province. Scientists and local participants discussed these conservation priorities, and the actions needed to conserve them within the landscape. Included in the identified hotspots were the proposed 13,000 hectare extension of the Bach Ma National Park and a proposed reserve, which covers an area of over 10,000 hectares of primary forest, known to harbor many endemic plants, frogs, primates, and in particular the saola. The workshop also agreed on the importance of linking protected areas through a landscape corridor approach to maximize the biological importance of these areas.


© WWF Vietnam

Acanthosaura natalie

Taking community participation beyond borders

by Amy Maling

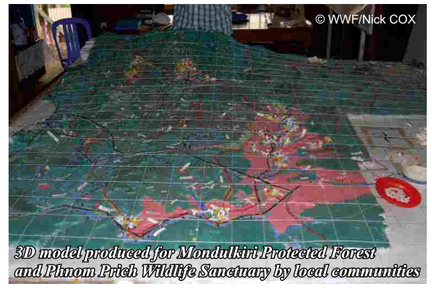
Throughout September and October 2006, the Srepok Wilderness Area Project (SWAP) team conducted a series of workshops with around 50 local community representatives, informing and exchanging information about the different land uses, vegetation, physical structures, and commune boundaries in the Mondulkiri Protected Forest (MPF).

Collection of information started with participants identifying the traditional commune boundaries - a long process involving intense discussion among commune members and village leaders.

In the identification of their traditional boundaries, community participants reflected their inherent stake in the protected forest. The fact that the boundaries of several communes extended all the way up to the proposed 'core zone' is an indication of the strong traditional claims in this area.

This 'stake' in the region, was further highlighted by participants' remarkable familiarity with the terrain inside the protected forest, as they identified the names of every pond, stream, spring, mountain, and even hill in the area. Even the location and estimated numbers of resin trees in a given area were clearly depicted on their maps.

After completing the strenuous process of delineating commune boundaries (where possible), identifying land use, and putting all other necessary information such as number of houses, location of schools, health centers, commune centers, and spirit forests on the maps, the participants identified the different management zones - community, sustainable-use, conservation, and core zones - within their respective traditional areas.


© WWF/Nick COX

3D model produced for Mondulkiri Protected Forest and Phnom Prich Wildlife Sanctuary by local communities

The next step will be to overlay all this newly collected information with the Forestry Administration's proposed zones for the MPF. Only then can negotiations start and can delineation issues be reconciled through a series of consultations involving more stakeholders. Through this process, the project hopes to strengthen communities' ownership over these zones, which will lead to a stronger sense of responsibility over its management.

Issues of overlapping commune boundaries notwithstanding, these communities share the same objectives of the government when it comes to identifying the areas that need to be conserved, as these are important habitats and watersheds to the rivers and streams that they depend upon for their livelihoods.

In terms of strategies, education, and information dissemination, participants said this approach was the key to encouraging people to participate in sustainable management of natural resources. Recognizing the Herculean task of reaching all the people around the protected forest, they signified their commitment to helping the project in its education campaign.

"We would like to learn from WWF the proper way of using our natural resources and the relevant laws, and share these with our co-villagers," they said.

New species discovered along Mekong

by Mark Bezuijen

Cambodian government and international WWF biologists have discovered a new plant species along a remote region of the Mekong River in Cambodia. The new plant species, *Amorphophallus sp.*, belongs to a large family of tropical and sub-tropical tubular plants, which includes the largest plant species in the world. The identity of the new species was confirmed by experts at the Nationaal Herbarium Nederland (Leiden, Netherlands) who examined specimens collected by the team.

The find was just one of the noteworthy discoveries made, which included identification of more than 20 species of endangered birds, primates, fish, and a rare giant turtle. Of equal significance was the discovery of a near pristine region of tall riverine forest, waterways, and island archipelagos, and remarkably, an almost uninhabited section of river 40-50 km long. In contrast, many mainstream sections of the "Mighty Mekong" elsewhere in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam are already cleared or developed.

One of the last strongholds of the Khmer Rouge, this area was off-limits to local and foreign agencies until as late as 1998. These were the first detailed surveys to be conducted since the relaxation of security restrictions. The first survey documented some of the highest freshwater biodiversity values in the entire Lower Mekong Basin. Surviving populations of many threatened species were observed, including large waterbirds, terns, fish-eagles, green peafowl, otters, silvered leaf-monkey, and turtles. Over 180 fish species were recorded, including a new record for Cambodia. All freshwater turtles in Asia are highly threatened from illegal trade, but populations of several species were found.

Preliminary analyses indicate the site supports higher biodiversity values than nearby sections of the Mekong River in Cambodia and Lao PDR, and complements the values of a small Ramsar wetland in Stung Treng Province, near the Lao border.

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© WWF/Mark BEZUIJEN

Large sections of riverbank support intact forest & few or no human settlements

New plant species, Amorphophallus sp

NEW SPECIES DISCOVERED ALONG MEKONG

from Page 03

Intact communities of fauna and flora, as well as valuable natural resources (especially timber and wild fisheries) that support local livelihoods and food security have so far persisted due to low human population pressure, and limited impacts from large-scale developments. Nonetheless, this situation is changing rapidly. The team observed extensive human in-migration to the site, typically by poor and landless people. New settlements are being created and established villages are expanding. Timber logging, clearance of riverbanks to create homes and rice fields, intensive fishing and wildlife trade are increasing daily. Massive land concessions by development companies are now awaiting government approval and include large sections of the Mekong River.

A workshop held in late 2006, with local stakeholders in the Kratie Province, identified illegal forms of fishing, over-fishing, clearance of riparian vegetation, gold mining, sand and gravel extraction, road building, and granting of concessions in seasonally inundated forest areas as major problems of local concern. Unchecked, these activities will soon degrade the local ecology, exhaust natural resources, and result in severe long term impacts for local livelihoods as well as biodiversity.

WWF Greater Mekong and partners are now developing a programme to assist national and provincial agencies to safeguard these unique wetland values, building capacity for effective management that supports local livelihoods.

Quick actions are needed if these values are to be conserved and managed effectively for the benefit of local people. Further exciting biological discoveries will almost certainly be made in this unique region of the Mekong River.

Provincial Wetlands Committee Established in Nong Khai

by Radda Larpnun

WWF Greater Mekong's Thailand Country Programme has achieved a major success by establishing the Nong Khai Provincial Wetlands Committee. Nong Khai Province has many significant wetlands of national and international importance, especially Goot Ting Marsh and Beung Khong Long Non Hunting Area (Ramsar no.1098). Since 1 October 2005, WWF has been implementing the Community Management of Wetlands in Thailand and the Mekong River Basin Project at these sites, with the support of partners - DANIDA and WWF Denmark

The Provincial Wetland Committee, a key institutional mechanism to promote the wise long-term management of provincial wetlands, has been established and consists of 38 members. The committee is chaired by the Provincial Governor, and includes representatives from the provincial Fisheries Office, Agriculture Office, Land Office, Land Reform Office, Rural Development Office, Academic Institution, Chiefs of the Subdistrict Administration Organizations, and villagers from local communities. The committee's duties are to balance the long term conservation of the target wetlands while maintaining the wise use of their natural resources.

This institutional mechanism is recognized and actively supported by the local government, which is a crucial achievement of the project. The committee is already influencing national government strategies for wetlands across the country, based upon the wise use approach promoted by the Ramsar agreement.

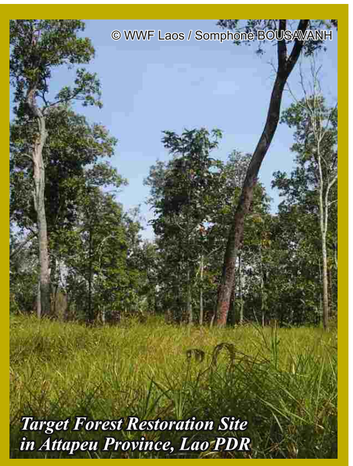
Beung Kong Long Wetland in Thailand

Restoring forests of Lao PDR

by Pauline Gerrard

A major threat to both the Greater Annamites and the Lower Mekong Dry Forest Ecoregions in Lao PDR is the loss of natural forest cover. To date, forestry in Lao PDR has existed primarily as logging activities and quotas with no plans for recovery of natural forest cover. The consequence of this has been a significant loss of habitat and large scale forest degradation, often resulting in the vicious evolution of increased bare land and conversion into other economic activities such as plantations and industrial crops.

A few years ago, through dialogue with the Lao government and international partners supporting forest activities, WWF Greater Mekong opened the debate regarding restoration as a tool to convert degraded forest to natural forest. This concept of forest restoration has now been adopted by the government of Lao PDR, who have included a target of 6 million ha of natural forest restoration in the Forest Strategy to the year 2020. In support of this target, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs endorsed a joint feasibility study by WWF Greater Mekong and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry for forest restoration in five provinces. This study has identified a pilot initiative of 8,000 ha of active restoration in over 130,000 ha of production forest. After this first success a full project proposal will be finalized and submitted to donors later this year.



Target Forest Restoration Site in Attapeu Province, Lao PDR

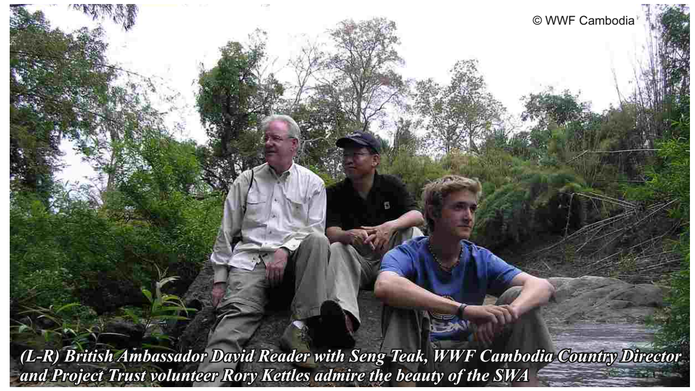
British Ambassador visits Mondulkiri Protected Forest

by Chris Greenwood

WWF's Srepok Wilderness Area Project (SWAP) in the Mondulkiri Protected Forest (MPF), recently received its first ever foreign diplomatic visit with a tour from the British Ambassador to Cambodia, Mr David Reader. The SWAP is partially funded by the Darwin Initiative – supported by the British government's Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs.

Inside the MPF the visitors took a boat trip up the Srepok River, one of the main tributaries of the Mekong, meeting with border police close to the Vietnam border and observing wildlife along the river. Also on the agenda was a visit to the picturesque Trapeang Pramaat and a refreshing dip in the clear waters of the Ply River. Wildlife observed included wild pig, muntjac, large waterbirds, including woolly-necked stork and lesser adjutant, and to the group's delight, fresh leopard tracks.

The last stop on the tour was the Koh Nhek District, reached by the newly upgraded Highway 76. Forest rangers received a tip-off of illegally harvested luxury timber and the whole group visited the site, meeting with the local police chief, while Forestry Administration staff ensured those responsible would be appropriately investigated. This small, but significant, incident provided a timely illustration of the range of threats facing conservation in this part of Cambodia, as well as highlighting the need for more resources to ensure the protected forest is adequately staffed to deal with the growing pressures.



(L-R) British Ambassador David Reader with Seng Teak, WWF Cambodia Country Director and Project Trust volunteer Rory Kettles admire the beauty of the SWA

Ambassador Reader noted that the pressure for a balance between economic development and conservation was well understood by WWF, but the Cambodian government needed to grasp the opportunity to protect this unique and unspoiled forest area for future generations.

"The Ambassador's visit not only encourages our project staff and government counterparts, but also generates greater awareness of the important conservation work that WWF Greater Mekong and the Cambodian government are working together to achieve. It also highlights some of the enormous challenges we are facing," said Martin von Kaschke, Technical Advisor for SWAP.

During his four-day visit, the Ambassador spent time in the WWF office in Sen Monorom and learned about its ongoing community extension work. A particular focus was on the three-dimensional model mapping workshops and WWF's strategy to engage local communities in land use planning and participation in the zoning process for the Mondulkiri Protected Forest.

"It is immediately apparent that WWF and its staff are totally committed to making the Srepok Wilderness Area Project work. The area is of major importance not only for Cambodia's eco-diversity but internationally," Ambassador Reader said.

Developing community-based fisheries in Lao PDR

by Roger Mollot

Freshwater activities of WWF Greater Mekong's Lao Country Programme began in late 2002, with a single Freshwater Officer working primarily on the Xe Bang Hieng, a large tributary of the Mekong River. Since then the scope of the work has been expanded to include five staff and scaled up to a national level with activities on over six rivers in six provinces. These activities are implemented by two projects: Community Fisheries – supporting food security and aquatic biodiversity (ComFish), and Aquatic Resources Management to Improve Rural Livelihoods of the Xekong River Basin (ARL – Xekong Basin).

The projects' strategies involve facilitating the development of community-based fisheries management that will protect the rich aquatic biodiversity of Lao PDR, in support of fishing communities who rely on this biodiversity as a sustainable source of food and income. Working with communities and government on the management of capture fisheries, the ComFish and ARL-Xekong Basin Projects are promoting fisheries co-management as a tool that builds capacity for the conservation of aquatic biodiversity and empowers communities with the role of managing the fish stocks they utilize as a key component in rural food security and household income. The skills and information generated by this process of fisheries co-management are being used to guide the development of national legislation for fisheries management in Lao PDR.

A fisherman harvests freshwater prawn from the Nam Khan, a tributary of the Mekong River in northern Lao PDR

In 2007, these projects will work on establishing fisheries co-management plans in 52 target villages, which typically involves establishing fish sanctuaries in critical aquatic habitats. The type of habitat and demarcation of the fish sanctuary is chosen by the community, and can range in size from 0.5 – 30 hectares. The ComFish Project has successfully established over ten fish sanctuaries to date with official sanction from local government agencies. The people from these communities are already informing the government counterparts that outside of the fish sanctuaries they are catching more fish, of larger size and diversity, proving the resilient nature of these riverine fisheries once management intervention reduces threats from fishing pressure and habitat loss.

In addition to conserving fish stocks, the ComFish Project is working on the conservation of other unique aquatic biodiversity, such as softshell turtles, freshwater prawn, and the endangered Siamese crocodile.

With a three-year time line and financial support from New Zealand's International Aid and Development Agency (NZAID), the ComFish Project will complete the activities by the end of 2008. Preparations are underway to develop a proposal based upon lessons learned from the first three years that will allow WWF Greater Mekong to continue activities under Phase II.

The ARL-Xekong Basin Project will complete activities by the end of 2009. Funded by the Dutch Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS) through WWF International, the outcomes of the project will support the development of a new programmatic approach to the work of WWF in the Xekong Basin, where the complex issues related to aquatic resources management, forest conservation, and poverty are best addressed at the river basin scale.

Cocoa supports sustainable development in Vietnam

by Richard McNally

WWF Greater Mekong has teamed up with ACDI/VOCA - an international NGO with expertise in sustainable cocoa farmer field school training – as well as the Forest Science Research Sub-Institute of South Vietnam, and district agricultural authorities to develop a 40-hectare demonstration plot for sustainable cocoa production in Vietnam's Lam Dong Province. This work will be supported by the Mars Company who are looking to source high quality and sustainably produced cocoa beans from Vietnam.

This is the first time in Vietnam that cocoa will be planted under existing forest tree canopy on degraded forest land. As part of the ongoing process of allocating barren and degraded natural forest land, cocoa may offer a realistic option to enhance, maintain, and expand the natural forest environment. The project is developing best practice guidelines for sustainable cocoa on agro-forestry systems, to protect natural species and biodiversity in corridor areas adjoining protected areas, as well as helping to improve the livelihood for local ethnic minorities. It is hoped that successful outcomes of this model will be shown as an example and adopted in other sites in Lam Dong and its neighboring provinces within the Southern Annamites landscape..


© Le Thi Tuyet/WCF

Sustainable cocoa in Ben Tre, Vietnam

Saving hog deer - the race is on

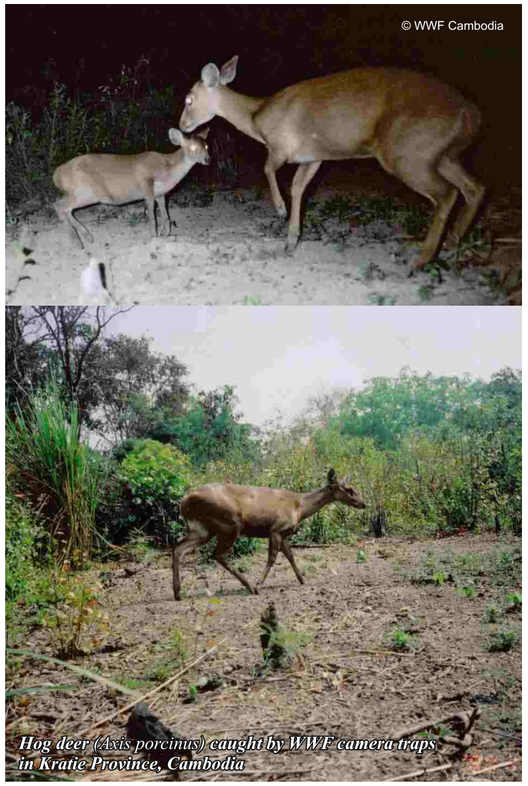
by Chea Nareth and Andy Maxwell

Since the recent confirmation of the presence of hog deer in the Kratie Province of Cambodia, WWF Greater Mekong's Dry Forest Species Project team has been racing against time to conserve what could be the region's last remaining population and habitat of this very vulnerable species.

The first steps towards establishing a formal hog deer conservation area and a project team to administer it have been taken, with the selection of three local community counterparts and one counterpart from a local Forestry Administration Triage (FA).

Local counterparts have been patrolling the hog deer area, educating villagers about the importance of the species, and monitoring local hunters and traders in the area. The FA counterpart is responsible for coordinating activities with commune authorities, leading the community counterparts, and applying law enforcement.

Patrolling is carried out with assistance from the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and Conservation International (CI), which provide both staff time and field equipment. During the past five months, the survey team has confiscated 210 traps, 2 homemade guns, 225 meters of large nets, one set of hog deer antlers, and made four contracts with hunters - who were using dogs in the hog deer area - to stop their activities.


© WWF Cambodia

Hog deer (Axis porcinus) caught by WWF camera traps in Kratie Province, Cambodia

The teams have completed extension programmes in 15 villages in 3 communes. People in each village have been invited to meetings to discuss the importance of hog deer conservation and to advise them of the laws which protect the species and the penalties for poaching activities.

A study of local socio-economic conditions has been carried out which aims to understand village dependency on local natural resources and identify 'livelihood gaps' that could be filled by alternative activities.

Despite the combined efforts of the patrolling and extension teams, hog deer are still suffering from hunting and land encroachment. In recent months three hog deer, including one sub-adult, were killed by local community dogs. Additionally, villagers throughout the area have been enlarging their rice paddy land, which seriously threatens the small remaining area of tall grassland habitat needed by the hog deer.

WWF Greater Mekong and its partners, working through the Forestry Administration and local communities, will step up their patrolling activity during the next few months. The good news is that villagers are generally supportive of the conservation effort, gradually realizing that this population is very special, possibly the only remaining wild population of the species in all of Cambodia, Thailand, Lao PDR, and Vietnam.

NESTS OF CRITICALLY ENDANGERED VULTURES FOUND IN NORTHEASTERN CAMBODIA

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"Vultures may not be as majestic as most flagship species, but their ecological role as scavengers is absolutely essential for healthy ecosystems and the conservation of the landscapes of northern and eastern Cambodia is key for the successful preservation of these three species," Dr Maxwell said. "Unfortunately resources are stretched very thinly over this project and WWF Cambodia and our partners in WCS and Birdlife International urgently need an injection of funds to continue this important project."

Mobilizing communities for watershed conservation


© WWF Thailand / Colin MCQUISTAN

The Chi River in Thailand

by Colin McQuistan

WWF Greater Mekong's Chi River Watershed Project in northeastern Thailand, which is part of a global partnership between WWF and the Coca Cola Company, operates at a large spatial scale and deals with a complex landscape made up of a patchwork of different land units. The project aims to reverse ongoing environmental degradation in order to restore this watershed, thus conserving biological value, improving water quality and stabilizing flow rates, revitalizing the agricultural landscape, and rehabilitating the local social environment. However, this must be done sustainably and project interventions must produce tangible benefits for villagers living in the watershed.

The project site covers a total area of 735.8 km2, occupying the flood plain area of the Chi River and delineating an intensive agricultural mosaic, dominated by rice, cassava, sugar cane, and eucalyptus. Most farmers own a small herd of cattle and the majority of households rely on small patches of remaining dry forests *(Dipterocarp sp.)* for non timber forest products and fuel wood. The main issues faced in the watershed include: insidious land conversion, fuel wood collection, forest fire, soil salination, water security, reduced water quality, and invasion of alien species.

When viewed from the ground, the watershed is a complex biophysical construct stretching from the distant high ground down to the Chi River as it flows past. At first sight this quiet landscape appears fixed forever, however following discussions with villagers it is immediately apparent that this is a dynamic landscape continually evolving.

Twenty years ago Eucalyptus trees were an exotic sight in a landscape dominated by forest patches, rice fields, and grazing buffaloes. Unfortunately the forest patches are mere remnants of their former selves, the buffaloes have long gone, and most of the rice fields have been converted to eucalyptus plantations, producing pulp and paper for the nearby paper mills. Sugar cane has also arrived, along with the benefits and woes of contract farming. Villagers living in the harsh conditions of this landscape are easily attracted to the thirty thousand baht ($1,000) offered up front to enter into a sugar cane contract. It is only when the contract conditions are not met that a spiral of debt begins. On average, only one year in three produces an adequate harvest to generate sufficient income for the farmer.

Therefore, the project is developing an outcome assessment approach to help assess the extent to which activities improve both the environment and local livelihoods within the watershed. The project activities will measure their impact not only on nature (natural capital) but also on local people's health, knowledge, education and skills (human capital), their cultural norms, social rules and the institutions that regulate their lives (social capital), the physical infrastructure and other local assets (physical capital), and the savings and remittances that can be used to fund improvements in the other forms of capital (financial capital).

During this period of baseline data collection and participatory consultation with local people, the project is developing participatory methods to assess performance of the entire landscape mosaic in providing flows of conservation and development benefits. Local villagers are helping to develop indicators for each of the five capital assets (outlined above) that reflect the wider landscape processes, conservation objectives, and the preferred scenarios of local people. It has been quickly appreciated that local people focus on those capital assets that bring direct benefit to their lives, such as non-timber forest products, soil fertility, and water quality.

This project aims to develop and refine this approach over the next five years to explore linkages and improve understanding of the tradeoffs and synergies in the local watershed between livelihood and conservation choices. This will provide the basis for negotiating and measuring the outcomes of the project and will enable project management to adapt project activities to changing perspectives and circumstances.


© WWF/FA

Leopard caught by camera trap in Mondulkiri Protected Forest in January 2007

Researching Cambodia's big cats

by Nick Cox

A pilot survey has recently begun in the Srepok Wilderness Area (SWA) of Cambodia's Mondulkiri Protected Forest (MPF), aiming to assess the feasibility for a long term study on the Indochinese leopard. Julia Chase-Grey, a Durham University post-graduate student working on her PhD on leopard conservation and management, has joined the WWF Cambodia's SWA team for two months, to undertake a preliminary study on the number and density of the leopard and its prey in the MPF dry forest habitat.

"The Indochinese leopard, occupies a large range across Southeast Asia but very little information exists on the ecology or conservation of the leopard in Cambodia," Ms Chase-Grey said. "Cambodia is a country where illegal hunting is the most immediate threat facing wildlife. Recent reports indicate that leopard is considered a high value species on the wildlife market, but no information exists on the level of threat that illegal hunting poses to the leopard or its prey."

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Review of Annamites Programme

by Marc Gross

From 29 January to 2 February, WWF colleagues from Lao PDR and Vietnam met in Hanoi for a workshop to finalize the review of the Greater Annamites Ecoregion Action Programme (GA EAP). The purpose of the review was twofold. First, it reflected on the current EAP, reconfirming its strengths as well as identifying challenges and areas in which it might be improved. Secondly, it was intended to convert the current EAP into the new WWF Network Standards format. This involved reviewing biodiversity targets, goals, threats, and testing the logic of interventions.

John Morrison, Deputy Director of the WWF United States Conservation Science Programme, supported the Greater Annamites Team in the review process and facilitated a smooth application of the WWF Network Standards. Key components of the review have been developed and the review will be finalized by the end of March.

The next step will be to seek additional funding to design and implement programme components for identified gaps.


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Wildlife trade is one of the biggest threats to the Greater Annamites Ecoregion

RESEARCHING CAMBODIA'S BIG CATS

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By investigating local hunting and farming practices, she hopes to be able to shed some light on the threats posed by illegal hunting; how heavily leopards and their prey are being poached and the reasons, be they wildlife trade, subsistence, and/or human-wildlife conflict.

Lack of alternative livelihoods is already known to be a major cause of illegal hunting, but developing sustainable alternative livelihoods is not easy, nor straightforward.

"As part of this study we hope to collect information on resident socio-economics and carry out an assessment of alternative livelihoods to hunting, in order to offer some other options to local communities," Ms Chase-Grey explained.

Furthermore, this study may pave the way for wider research into some of the other important predators in the landscape, such as other cat species like the enigmatic tiger. Tiger was last photographed in the area in late 2005 and was seen by rangers in late 2006. The pilot survey has met with early success by capturing a female leopard and her cubs in a camera trap photograph, the first photograph of its kind known from Cambodia.

Female leopard and her two cubs caught by camera trap in Mondulkiri Protected Forest in January 2007

CELEBRITIES SPEAK OUT FOR WILDLIFE

from Page 01

For the first time in Vietnam, celebrities have joined WWF and TRAFFIC in the effort to curb the illegal trade and consumption of wildlife products, which is considered one of the biggest threats to the country's biodiversity. Five celebrities, representing different sectors (science, beauty, sport, music, and TV), appear in the PSAs, appealing to Vietnamese people not to consume wildlife products during the coming Tet (Vietnamese New Year) holiday season. They are Professor Lan Dung, Miss Vietnam Ngoc Khanh, body builder Ly Duc, composer Huy Tuan, and television MC Thao Van.

Ngoc Khanh, Miss Vietnam 1998, appeals to the Vietnamese people not to consume wildlife in the New Year

The rampant trade of wildlife in Vietnam has pushed many animal and plant species dangerously close to extinction, threatening not only the species and natural resources of the country and its neighbours, but Vietnamese livelihoods as well. *A Matter of Attitude - Reducing Consumption of Wildlife Products in Hanoi, Vietnam*, the joint project between WWF and TRAFFIC, which has been funded by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), is addressing this urgent issue through a variety of activities aimed at increasing consumer awareness. According to the results of recent attitudinal surveys on the issue, the consumption of wildlife products in Vietnam always increases dramatically around the end of the lunar year, when people often throw parties with their business partners and friends. As wildlife products are considered a symbol of social status and wealth, they are consumed extensively as party food and gifts around Tet, primarily in January and February. The PSA campaign therefore aims to change this destructive habit, in order to conserve the endangered wildlife of Southeast Asia.

Since the launch, with the support of Vietnam Television (VTV), the TV PSAs have been broadcast on VTV channels. In these PSAs, the five celebrities talk about different issues related to unsustainable wildlife consumption, and then repeat the campaign slogan: "Let's have a Tet without consuming endangered wildlife products". While Professor Lan Dung, a member of the National Assembly, and a famous TV personality, warns people of the illegality of this consumption, famous body builder, Ly Duc, advises people to play sports to keep fit instead of using wildlife products. Miss Vietnam 1998, Ngoc Khanh, discusses the fact that many species are facing extinction due to unsustainable consumption. This is echoed by renowned composer, Huy Tuan, who calls for everyone to contribute to the conservation of Vietnam's natural heritage, while television MC, Thao Van, mentions the necessity of maintaining sustainable consumption practices in a time of rapid economic development in Vietnam.

The print PSAs, with the same celebrities and the same slogan, are also being published in popular publications, particularly the Tet editions, as well as in issues directly before and after the lunar New Year. The print PSAs have been made into posters, which are currently posted in hundreds of restaurants, cafes, bookshops and other public places around Hanoi.

Mr Eric Coull, WWF Greater Mekong Representative, opened the launch expressing his high appreciation of the great enthusiasm and strong commitment of the celebrities towards the project. "I think with the great talent, fame, and winning personalities of the celebrities, these PSAs will have a huge impact on changing people's behaviour, and eventually their consumption habits."

Speaking on behalf of the celebrities, Professor Lan Dung said, "I am proud to stand alongside the four other participants in this campaign, together we can urge all Vietnamese people to conserve this country's irreplaceable natural heritage".

WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by:

- conserving the world's biological diversity
- ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable
- promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption

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