

Cuc Phuong Report

News from the Cuc Phuong Conservation Project

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Highlights

- Project Summary: Four Years of Conservation at Cuc Phuong National Park
- Project 2000: National Training Program for Conservation Awareness
- Conservation Awareness Program Review
- Education Program Returns to Hoa Binh Province
- CAP Developments
- Baseline Surveys Help Measure Success of Education Program
- Visitor Education Program Review
- Training and Visitor Education Program Activities
- Special Visits
- Biological Program Review
- Owston's Palm Civets Matched for Breeding Season
- Biodiversity Database Training
- Wildlife Watch
- Socioeconomic Program Review
- Institutional Capacity Building Review
- GEF Workshop Brings Forest Protection Authorities Together
- Wildlife Trade Notes
- Expansion of Turtle Center Facilities
- Staff News: Departures

Distribution

The present distribution of the Cuc Phuong Report is 342, including 147 institutions, government agencies, and non-government organizations.

Four Years of Conservation at Cuc Phuong National Park

The new year marked the Cuc Phuong Conservation Project's fourth year of conservation efforts at Cuc Phuong National Park. The project, established in 1996 with a grant from the BP Statoil Alliance, has committed its efforts to helping conserve Cuc Phuong's unique biodiversity through a multifaceted approach to conservation and protected area management. The main focuses of project activities have been socioeconomic research, community-based environmental education, visitor interpretation, institutional capacity building, biological research, and species conservation.

A brief summary of the progress of each of these components is included within this issue of the newsletter.

Project 2000: National Training Center for Environmental Awareness

With its second phase due to be completed sometime in early 2001, the project has already begun to shift its focus to building upon the success of the education program through development of the National Training Center for Conservation Awareness (NTC), based at Cuc Phuong National Park. This national program will offer training for staff and rangers from other National Parks and Protected Areas, as well as teachers, student groups, and the core staff from other project.

The Cuc Phuong Conservation Project's Conservation Awareness Program is the first and longest running community-based education program of its kind in Vietnam. Through the NTC, the project will share its experience in the field of environmental education, and provide opportunities for others to be trained and acquire experience from an active program currently running in the field.

"Our experience and success should be made available to other parks and protected areas in the country, avoiding the need for institutions and organizations to consistently reinvent the wheel when it comes to environmental awareness and education," said Ms. Vu Thi Quyen, Program Officer for the Cuc Phuong Conservation Project. Ms. Quyen added, "Other areas should learn from what we do well, as well as from our mistakes. Our program at Cuc Phuong is a resource that should be used for the benefit of conservation in Vietnam."

The project has already initiated focused training programs for staff from the SFNC project in Pu Mat Nature Reserve, as well as a ranger from Na Hang Nature Reserve, and routinely runs specialized programs for park staff and university groups.

Conservation Awareness Program

Conservation Awareness Program Review 2000

The community-based Conservation Awareness Program (CAP) represents the largest component of the project. CAP is aimed at raising the level of knowledge and awareness of nature, the environment, and the need to help protect Cuc Phuong National Park amongst people in local communities. The program began in late 1996 and has progressively expanded within the three provinces surrounding the park through the establishment of Conservation Clubs at local schools. Presently, Conservation Clubs are running in 30 schools (in three of four districts), with about 8,900 students participating in the clubs. Project staff, hired from communities surrounding the park, are trained to administer club meetings along with a counterpart teacher from each school. Staff and teachers follow prepared lesson plans covering important themes relating to nature and conservation at the park, such as "Endangered Wildlife" and "Animal Homes". Lessons involve a variety of activities, games, discussion, and stories relating to the theme, and are designed to maximize student involvement.

The Conservation Awareness Program also administers a Village Program (VP) which focuses on adults through hamlet-level meetings within communities around the park. Village Program 1 (Introduction to Cuc Phuong National Park) was completed in 1999 in all but one of four districts bordering the park. Village Program 2 (Values and threats to Cuc Phuong National Park) began in September 1999 and is presently circulating through its second district. The Village Programs use slides and video presentations, discussion, and performance to address conservation and protection issues, with audiences ranging in size from 100-300 people per meeting. A key part of this program has been the direct involvement of local residents in the meetings, with village leaders, Women's Union leaders, and village elders working with local staff and leading discussions with other residents. VP2 also features a film about the values and threats to Cuc

Phuong that was produced by the project and filmed within the communities surrounding the park. The film features local residents discussing the threats to the park, and talking about alternative economic activities that have helped reduce their dependence on forest resources.

It is estimated that the combined efforts of the Village and school-based Conservation Clubs have reached approximately 21,000 people so far. In 2000, the Conservation Clubs will expand into Yen Thuy District, the fourth and final district bordering the park. The project will also focus on transferring the leadership of the program to local staff, a process that began last year with the promotion of a park ranger and member of the Youth Union to leadership positions.

Education Program Returns to Hoa Binh Province

After nearly six months arranging permissions and an election in Hoa Binh Province, the Provincial People's Committee granted authorization for the Conservation Awareness Program to return to schools in the district of Lac Son, and begin operations in Yen Thuy District. In June of 1999, district police closed the Conservation Clubs in Lac Son District after only one month due to concerns that the education program might represent a "security risk". Despite support from the People's Committees and Education Departments of both districts, as well as efforts undertaken by the park director to reopen the program, Hoa Binh authorities remained hesitant to allow the program to continue. Copies of letters from the Prime Minister's Office endorsing the project, and permission papers from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development both failed to sway provincial authorities, who were apparently hoping to delay the decision until after the autumn provincial elections.

However, following the elections in late November, Hoa Binh authorities authorized the program to return to the province. Children at An Nhiep's primary school and local counterpart teachers excitedly welcomed the CAP leaders back and launched into the program where they had left off in June.

Lac Son District, northwest of the Cuc Phuong, includes two communes that border the park. Yen Thuy District, lying along the park's northern border, includes six communes. The project plans to initiate Conservation Clubs in Yen Thuy District after the Vietnamese New Year in early February. The adult-focused Village Program had already circulated through Yen Thuy District prior to the provincial closure. District authorities had been requesting for the project to initiate Conservation Clubs in the Yen Thuy District since 1998.

CAP Developments

Student and Teacher Visits

In November 1999, the project hosted a visit by all 40 Middle and Primary School teachers from Thach Lam commune in the western Buoi and Ngang River Valleys. Thach Lam commune, which includes some of the most inaccessible hamlets in the region, joined the school-based Conservation Clubs in June of 1998. However, difficult road conditions had prevented the project from bringing the school teachers until then to the park.

Eighty-one Conservation Club members from Cuc Phuong's Primary and Middle Schools visited the park during November and December. The project routinely hosts visits for students from local communities, that involve the children in a special day activities, games, discussion, and a visit to some interesting sites within the park.

Counterpart Teacher Workshops

Two workshops were held in December for counterpart teachers participating in the Conservation Clubs. Teachers from three districts attended the workshops to practice lessons with local staff and discuss program development and other issues relating to the Conservation Clubs.

The first workshop involved eleven new counterpart teachers from Yen Thuy District who were attending their first meeting with local staff at the park. The second workshop hosted 14 teachers from Nho Quan and Lac Son Districts. During the workshop, teachers raised a number of important issues including how to increase their role in CAP sessions, and their need to meet with project staff in advance of each lesson so that they can be better prepared. The teacher workshops have provided a meaningful forum through which counterpart teachers have contributed to the program's development and improvement.

While counterpart teachers involved in the Conservation Clubs early on tend to have a lower level of participation in club sessions, teachers in newer districts have been brought into the program as full partners, and have demonstrated their eagerness and commitment to becoming actively involved in leading the Conservation Clubs.

Village Program

In January, the adult-focused Village Program (VP) proceeded with plans to carry out the second of its two programs (VP2) in Thach Lam commune. The plan called for three evening meetings at hamlets situated in the Buoi and Ngang River Valleys at the extreme western end of the park. The distant nature of these villages required the staff to remain in the commune for three days to complete the program. However, after meetings were held in three hamlets, local leaders asked that the staff to remain for a fourth night to carry out a meeting for residents at a fourth hamlet, leaving project staff back at the offices to wonder what had happened to the Village Program team.

Meanwhile, in Thanh Yen commune, south of the park, VP staff were surprised to find an audience of more than 1,200 residents waiting for them in Yen Son hamlet after local leaders organized a meeting of VP2. This marked the largest audience yet for the program which includes a video presentation, discussion amongst residents, and a short performance by staff of the play, "*Mr. Man Goes to the Forest*". A second presentation in Sanh hamlet was also a bit unusual in that the village could be reached only by a narrow trail. Staff had to carry in a portable generator and television, as well as other materials for the program, and returned exhausted to the project headquarters after a day-long ride in a buffalo cart (see photo below)!

PHOTO: CAP staff returning from Sanh hamlet in buffalo cart

CAP Initiates Baseline Surveys to Evaluate Program Success

Efforts are underway to conduct a second round of baseline surveys for the Conservation Awareness Program in Yen Thuy District prior to beginning there. The baseline surveys will measure the level of knowledge and awareness of students about nature, the environment, and the park in order to provide a basis for determining change over the first year of the program. An initial survey was conducted in Nho Quan district in 1996 prior to the program's initiation. However the survey was not intended as a means of measuring the education program's success because the program had not yet been developed fully at that time.

In the Yen Thuy survey, 40 randomly selected children from two class levels were interviewed by questionnaire and their answers graded based on the level of knowledge indicated from the answers given. Two years were selected in order to determine the natural level of increased awareness over a year without the influence of the education program. Although the sample size was small, the baseline survey should provide a rough indication of how well the program is contributing to increasing local awareness when the schools are surveyed again in 2001. The surveys will also enable the project to perfect a model for use with programs at other parks and protected areas in Vietnam.

Visitor Education Program

Visitor Education and Interpretation Review 2000

Cuc Phuong National Park receives about 40,000 Vietnamese visitors each year, in addition to about 4,000-6,000 foreigners. The park's proximity to Hanoi and status as Vietnam's first national park contributes to its popularity amongst Vietnamese in the region. Approximately 70% of the Vietnamese visitors are students, many of these arriving in groups organized by their school or university.

The Visitor Education Program shares many of the goals of the community-based education program, except that it targets a national audience, most of which has little connection to Cuc Phuong. The program is therefore aimed at enhancing the educational value of visiting the park through provision of information about Cuc Phuong, its values and threats, as well as transmitting a more nationally focused message about the need for the public to become involved in protecting the environment and conserving nature in Vietnam.

The Cuc Phuong Conservation Project began its visitor program in 1997 with the initial printing of the park's present tourist information brochure, provided to all visitors. The program then expanded with the development of special educational activities for student groups. However, initial efforts to present a formal educational program for visitors was restrained by poor communications (lack of an ability for student groups to organize their visits in advance), and the absence of a focal point with which to draw visitors in and provide a base for educational activities.

The Visitor Center: A Significant Resource for Visitor Education

In 1999 the project embarked on plans to establish the country's first visitor center at a National Park. The center, supported with funds from AusAID, was completed in January 2000, with current efforts focused on developing approximately 25 exhibits to provide an interesting overview of the park's natural history, its values and threats, as well as other issues relevant to nature conservation in Vietnam (e.g. the wildlife trade).

Although delays have prevented the center from opening as planned early in the new year, the completed center will provide a significant resource for the visitor education program and add to the project's efforts to enhance public awareness and understanding at the national level.

Training and Educational Visits

Training workshops this term included:

The Flora of Cuc Phuong: In December, Mr. Tran Quang Chuc, head of the park's Botanical Gardens, held a workshop on "The Flora of Cuc Phuong" for park and project staff. The workshop involved discussion on the native flora of Cuc Phuong, values associated with different plant species, and some relationships between animals and plants. Ten park staff and 15 project staff attended the workshop.

Husbandry and Veterinarian Care of Wildlife: Veterinarian Ule Streicher of Cuc Phuong's Endangered Primate Rescue Center (EPRC) hosted a workshop for animal keepers and staff of rescue centers. Project leader Huong Van Nguyen, responsible for animal care on the project's Owston's palm civet and turtle species conservation programs attended the four day workshop.

Conservation and the Environment: The project held its usual monthly workshops on Conservation and the Environment during which staff members research and present talks on key conservation and environmental issues based on news articles acquired from national newspapers and periodicals. The workshops are meant to give project staff experience in presentation delivery, as well as increase their knowledge of conservation and environmental issues relevant to Vietnam.

Japanese University Student Visit: In November the project received Dr. Ryunosuke Hamada from Edogawa University and a group of Japanese university professors and students who were interested in the project's Conservation Awareness and Visitor Education programs. Project staff took the university group through the nearly completed visitor center, and provided a brief overview of the project's Conservation Awareness Program. The group then toured the new Turtle Conservation and Ecology Center and discussed the threats to Vietnam's wildlife resulting from the illegal trade with China.

Xuan Mai Forestry College: Dr. Pham Nhat and 37 of his students visited Cuc Phuong National Park from the Xuan Mai Forestry College visited Cuc Phuong National Park as part of the college's efforts to provide students with practical field experience as part of their course structure. The project conducted several instructional sessions with students, discussing the illegal wildlife trade with particular focus on the threat to Vietnam's turtles. Students then toured the Turtle Conservation and Ecology Center and Owston's palm civet facilities with staff biologists Mr. Le Trong Dat and Mr. Le Thien Duc. Cooperation and training with the Xuan Mai Forestry College is viewed by the project as particularly important since many of the students will go on to be rangers after graduation, or find jobs in protected areas and parks in Vietnam.

During the evening, the project hosted a Night Activities Program featuring a role-playing exercise during which Forestry College students and visiting staff of a CARE project in Thanh Hoa Province assumed roles as major stakeholders of the park; local communities, park management, tourists, rangers, and plants and animals. During the exercise ("*The Cuc Phuong Debate*") students are divided into stakeholder groups and given a brief presentation by project staff outlining the values and threats to the park. The groups must then discuss amongst themselves how to work out solutions for some of the park's conservation issues, bearing in mind that the solutions they come up with must be acceptable to all the other stakeholders. The groups then discuss with each other their ideas and try to come to some form of agreement. In the case

of the Forestry College students, a healthy discussion quickly regressed into an emotional argument as animals and plants fought off tourists, and park management tried to negotiate an agreement with local communities demanding economic assistance and permission to harvest forest products from within the park. While no solutions were reached, the purpose of the exercise was to encourage students to acquire a better understanding of the various stakeholder interests, as well as the difficulty in finding solutions that meet each stakeholder's needs.

Special Visits

U.S. Ambassador Pete Peterson (November) The project hosted a visit by U.S. Ambassador Douglas Peterson and the Embassy's Scientific Advisor, Mike Eiland. Ambassador Peterson had the opportunity to attend a session of the Ky Phu Primary School Conservation Club where children were learning about mammals, as well as to see a little of the park and tour the project's Owston's palm civet and turtle facilities. Although the ambassador's visit was short, project staff were delighted that he finally could find time to drop in.

Kathy MacKinnon and WWF

Kathy MacKinnon of the World Bank, Robert Tizzard, (WWF Lao), and Gert Polet and Ina Becker (WWF- Cat Tien) visited the park in late November and attended an unplanned "conservation luncheon" prepared by project staff. Kathy MacKinnon's visit was intended to give her a glimpse of FFI's project at Cuc Phuong in advance of a proposal to the World Bank for a project along limestone range west of Cuc Phuong, to be submitted in early 2000. Rob Tizzard heads WWF's Lao operations, and Gert and Ina Becker were visiting from Cat Tien National Park in the south of Vietnam where they manage a conservation project for WWF.

Mike Thoresen and Vance Hartke (January 2000): The project hosted a visit by Mike Thoreson of the Thoreson Foundation and Vance Hartke of Counterpart International (CI) who were looking at FFI conservation projects around the world as part of a global tour. Both Mike and Vance enjoyed their visit to Cuc Phuong, attending a Conservation Club meeting at Yen Quang Primary School, hiking through the forest, spending the night at a Muong minority village in the Buoi River Valley, and observing much of the project in action. The staff of the project really enjoyed their company and humor, and hope that Mike will develop his email capacity enough to expand from his present limit of two words per message!

Klaus Schwettmann and Dr. Martin Falke

In January the project hosted a DED-organized visit by Dr. Klaus Schwettmann and Dr. Martin Falke. Dr. Schwettmann is presently working on environmental education in Lao with the Department of Forestry's Center for Protected Areas and Watershed Management. Dr. Falke, also working in Lao, is a geologist for DED. In addition to discussing Cuc Phuong's Conservation Awareness Program, Dr. Falke led a tour of the Cave of Early Man, pointing out geological features and answering questions that have long remained mysteries. For example, the spots on the ceiling of the Cave of Early Man likely resulted from precipitate through small fissures in the limestone created by mud-dwelling invertebrates (i.e. worms) back in the days when Cuc Phuong's limestone was calcium-enriched mud on a shallow seafloor. Dr. Falke also pointed out clear examples of fossilized algae formations within the stone, and had us stop along the road on the way back to park headquarters to point out shale outcrops marking ancient river deposits. Dr. Schwettmann and Dr. Falke ended their tour of the project with a visit to the Owston's palm civet facilities and Turtle Conservation and Ecology Center.

Danish Ambassador

Danish Ambassador Ove Ullerup and several guests from the Danish Ministry of Justice visited the park in January during a return trip from Ninh Binh city. The group visited the Owston's palm civet breeding program and EPRC, before making a brief trip into the forest and Cave of Early Man. Although the visit was not an official project visit, discussions are currently underway with the embassy to provide some support for utilizing the Conservation Awareness Program as a model for the establishment of similar type programs elsewhere in Vietnam. The project frequently receives both official and unofficial Danish visits that have included the ambassador on several occasions, as well as representatives from DANCED and DANIDA.

Australian Volunteers International

Bill Armstrong, CEO for Australian Volunteers International (AVI), and Colin White, the organization's regional manager, visited in November to see the Cuc Phuong Conservation Project in action and meet with the project's current AVI volunteer, Mark Deters. A volunteer from AVI, formerly known as OSB, has been involved in the Cuc Phuong Conservation Project since early in 1997 when Lisa Elliott began a two-year term working with the education program. After Lisa's departure in March 1999, the project sought a second volunteer to assist with development of the new visitor center. Mark Deters arrived in early September and has committed a year to the project. The project has consistently been pleased with the hard work and dedication displayed by Australian volunteers, and the project hopes to continue to provide opportunities for AVI volunteers for the foreseeable future.

Biological Research Programs

Biological Research and Training Review 2000

Since 1996 the biological research component of the project has carried out a number of different studies on the park's fauna and flora, aimed at expanding the base of knowledge about the biodiversity of the park.

Highlights of biological research carried out by the project include:

- ⌘ A two year field study on the home range and ecology of the common palm civet (*Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*), completed in early 1998.
- ⌘ Surveys in 1997 and 1998 discovered that Cuc Phuong was one of Asia's hotspots for bats with 38 species recorded for the park. Nineteen of the bat species were recorded at a single cave-site, this cave presently recognized as the single most diverse site known for bats in Indochina.
- ⌘ A yearlong butterfly study in 1998 documented over 250 species occurring at the park. The final report will provide insight into the ecology, distribution, and relative abundance of the park's butterfly fauna.
- ⌘ A study in 1998 by Professor Thin of Hanoi University examined the park's lianas, recording over 300 species and resulting in the country's first key for lianas native to the north of Vietnam.
- ⌘ Amphibian surveys carried out in 1998 and 1999 documented 26 new records for the park.
- ⌘ Surveys of forest fish recorded 60 species, many of these found in the Buoi and Ngang River Valleys at the western end of the park. The final report will provide valuable insight on the park's forest-dwelling fish species, many inhabiting seasonal streams and the vast network of underground caves and streams that comprise the park's subsurface drainage system.

More importantly, the project's biological work has provided opportunities for Vietnamese biologists and student scientists to develop their skills and experience working in the field. The project's biologist, Mr. Le Trong Dat, who is also a member of the park's scientific department, presently leads the project's biological component, working with other park staff or students from national institutions and universities to carry out field research. The project has provided additional training through specialized workshops, and in 1999 hosted a ten-day workshop on field survey techniques for park scientific staff.

Owston's Breeding Season Arrives

While most of Vietnam is gearing up for the approaching Tet holiday (New Year), project biologists Le Trong Dat and Le Thien Duc are spending late nights monitoring the activity of several pairs of Owston's palm civets (*Chrotogale owstoni*) that have been matched for this year's breeding season. The Owston's palm civet's breeding season is only about 6-8 days each year. If the pairs are not matched at the right time, they will not mate. The gestation period ranges from 70-80 days, with newborns usually arriving in late April. This year, two pairs have been matched, the pairs selected based upon genetics and the long-term breeding potential of the project. If all goes well and the civets are not influenced by the recent bout of cold weather, 3-4 offspring can be expected in April.

In 1997, the project celebrated the first known successful captive births of Owston's palm civet in the world. Shelagh Rosenthal, a PhD student from Cambridge University and co-founder of the Cuc Phuong Conservation Project, worked with the civets for three years, documenting their captive ecology, diet, and breeding, resulting in additional offspring during subsequent years. 2000 marks the fourth breeding year for the Owston's. Shelagh remains an active advisor to the breeding project and studbook keeper for the species. The project currently has 17 of the endangered small carnivores in captivity, seven of which were confiscated from the trade, the remaining ten having been born in captivity at Cuc Phuong.

Plans for 2000 include conducting research on the activity and behavior of several Owston's that will be released at Cuc Phuong in the spring, as well as negotiating a loan program with "sister: breeding projects abroad to ensure the genetic security and survival of the species.

(PICTURE: Owston's Palm Civet)

Caption: Owston's palm civets are endemic to the region, their natural range including Lao, northern Vietnam, and possibly southern China. Loss of habitat and hunting present significant threats to this forest-dwelling species' survival.

Biodiversity Database Training

Progress continues of the park's long-awaited biological database that will enable the park's Scientific Department to document species records. The database, first designed in 1998, has recently been developed further by the project's technical advisor, Mark Grindley, and training began in January that will enable park scientific staff to manage the system. Prior to its transfer to the park, management guidelines must be developed that will ensure its proper maintenance and use, after which the park will begin maintaining records of documented species occurrence. The database was designed for park managers to use for monitoring species occurrence, and potentially, changes in numbers and distributions of species.

Cuc Phuong Wildlife Watch

Elaphe Moellendorffii

Project staff and visiting scientists were lucky during a trip to the Cave of Early Man in late November when they came across an unexpected visitor in the back of the cave's upper chamber. Ina and Gert Becker of WWF Cat Tien discovered the adult *Elaphe moellendorffii* (rat snake), measuring well over a meter and climbing up the back wall of the cave. The observation marked a first record of this species for the park, adding to the list of 25 snake species known to occur at the park, and becoming the 19th new snake record contributed by the project.

PHOTO: *Elaphe moellendorffii*

Leopard Sighting

Historically, six species of cats are known to occur at Cuc Phuong National Park and the surrounding region: the clouded leopard, golden cat, leopard cat, fishing cat, leopard, and the Asian tiger. However, the region's shrinking forests combined with intense hunting pressures have probably reduced the populations of most cat species to only small numbers. For example, evidence suggest that tigers were once somewhat commonly seen or heard at Cuc Phuong 30-40 years ago, though loss of habitat, hunting pressure, and reduced availability of prey (e.g. deer) has led to their extirpation within the park.

The leopard (*Panthera pardus*), the park's second largest cat on record, has also not been reported for many years within the park. However, villagers in Ky Phu commune recently reported several sightings of a leopard along the northeastern border of the park. According to Ky Phu residents, in late September an adult leopard tried to raid several goat pens on consecutive nights, in both cases being chased away by villagers with torches. At about the same time, a third resident reported that he had observed an adult leopard lying on a mound of gravel near where the road rises to the park entrance. Other residents also reported hearing a large cat "roar" in the vicinity of the village during the same night. Project biologist Le Trong Dat investigated the reports and concluded that based upon the witnesses' description, the large cat was likely a leopard as reported. This would suggest that leopards, despite their apparent absence in recent years, may continue to survive in Cuc Phuong.

SKETCH: Leopard by Mark Grindley
MS Publisher version only

Wildlife Trade News

Dry Season Brings Fewer Trade Seizures

The cooler winter months brought an apparent reduction in the amount of illegal wildlife trade along Highway No. 1. In November, Ninh Binh Provincial rangers seized a mixed shipment of turtles, snakes, water monitors, and two pygmy lorises from a public bus originating in the Quang Binh-Ha Tinh region. In December, a second shipment of big-headed turtles (*Platysternon megacephalum*) was seized which had reportedly originating in Lao. Authorities also seized shipments that included a binturong, common palm civets, and several Asiatic black bears.

Trade seizures tend to be fewer during the winter months, possibly related to the relatively low activity of most animals in the wild during the dry season, and the subsequent reduction in hunting activity at this time.

The efforts of provincial rangers have made it more difficult for traders to ship wildlife north along principal land routes. While shipment of wildlife were common on public buses two years ago, traders have increasingly been forced to use private cars and even tourist minibuses to avoid inspection by more alert enforcement authorities. Provincial rangers depend heavily upon the support and cooperation of other authorities and the public to provide information about illegal shipments.

The Cuc Phuong Conservation Project, working with TRAFFIC Indochina hope to help build stronger cooperation between wildlife protection authorities, and to encourage greater public in assisting rangers with the difficult task of protecting Vietnam's wildlife.

Wildlife Trade Observation Reports: Vietnam

Detailed information relating to observations within the wildlife trade are detailed in bi-monthly reports by the project to TRAFFIC SEA. To be added to our distribution list or receive electronic copies of current or past reports, please contact: cpcp@fpt.vn

Socioeconomic Research & Community Development

Socioeconomic Research Review 2000

The project's socioeconomic component has revolved mainly around research within local communities about the relationship between these communities and the use of resources from within the park. Two principal studies have been completed; Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs) in two districts, and a larger socioeconomic survey in 45 representative hamlets around the park. The surveys have provided important inputs to the park's management planning process, as well as baseline data in advance of the larger GEF proposal (*see Park Management and Protection section*).

In 1999 the project extended its assistance to local communities by facilitating small development projects aimed at helping improve the standard of living while reducing local reliance of forest resources. One project in Cuc Phuong commune involves establishment of a Muong Heritage Sight that will attract a share of the park's 40,000 annual visitors and provide opportunities for visitors to learn about Muong culture and tradition within an authentic environment. Discussions with BP continue on a carbon sequestration initiative that would involve local communities in replanting and protecting forest in specific areas of the park's buffer zone.

While the primary responsibilities of the project do not rest in community development, the project's knowledge of Cuc Phuong and the surrounding communities has provided a unique opportunity to facilitate projects as opportunities arise. The project has also sought to encourage other organizations with interest and expertise in community development to become more involved in the communities surrounding the park.

PHOTO: Muong Heritage Site

Caption: Near completion: Muong tourism project supported by the Belgian Embassy
MS Publisher version only

Institutional Capacity Building Review 2000

Project Management

The Cuc Phuong Conservation Project has always maintained a dual focus that includes both achieving its primary conservation and biological research-focused goals, while at the same time investing major efforts and resources in developing the capacity of its national counterparts to lead the project. During the first two years of the project, this investment went mainly into developing the project's core staff into leaders, a goal achieved in 1998 as Vietnamese leadership took responsibility for major project components. Since 1998, efforts have been focused on developing local staff leaders, including representatives from the park and local communities. Presently, a park ranger and local Youth Union leader jointly run the field operations of the Conservation Awareness Program, and a member of the park's scientific department leads the project's biological component.

The Park

A secondary goal of the project has been to help build the institutional capacity of the park. This aim has been achieved through participation and involvement of park staff in project activities, as well as through ongoing training programs such as the project's Internal Training Workshops for park scientific and tourism staff. Presently, six members of the park staff work within the project's conservation education, visitor, and biological programs.

Through training and participation within the project, key representatives of the park staff, as well as local communities, have acquired knowledge, experience, and skills that have enabled them to become leaders and provide a meaningful contribution to the conservation and management at Cuc Phuong.

GEF Workshop Brings Forest Protection Authorities Together

A GEF (Global Environment Facility) planning workshop was held at the park from November 30-December 2, involving representatives from the National Forest Protection Department, Cuc Phuong National Park, and the provincial Forest Protection Departments from the three provinces - Hoa Binh, Ninh Binh, and Thanh Hoa – that surround Cuc Phuong and the westward extension of the limestone range.

Frank Momberg, FFI's Indochina Manager, and Mike Appleton, FFI's South Asia Regional Director, were joined by experts from FFI and key leaders from the Cuc Phuong Conservation Project staff as they discussed the goals and proposed activities of the GEF with regional authorities. The workshop followed several weeks of field assessment by FFI staff in the western Pu Luong region, and neighboring Hoa Binh Province.

FFI is presently in the process of finalizing the project proposal that, if approved, would result in initiation of the project sometime after July 2000. The project's principal focus is on biological research, capacity building of protection authorities, and conservation awareness, activities aimed at helping protect the limestone range's unique biological and ecological values.

Turtle Conservation and Ecology

Turtle Facilities Expansion

Over the past three months the project has continued with expansion of its turtle holding facilities within the 2,800 square meter Turtle Conservation and Ecology Center. Six new tanks were built for aquatic and semi-aquatic species, and 14 terrestrial enclosures were completed. This enables the project to free previous holding facilities within the Owston's palm civet area as quarantine space for new turtles received from the wildlife trade.

Approximately a third of the new center lies in scrubby secondary growth, adjacent to the base of a large forested hill. Within this area are several large bamboo thickets and some existing tree cover. Six of the new terrestrial enclosures were built in this area, providing space for *Manouria impressa*, *Pyxidea mouhotii*, *Cuora galbinifrons*, and *Indotestudo elongata*.

Eight additional enclosures were built in the center's lower area, each with a small cement pool, deep enough for semi-aquatic species. These new facilities are intended for breeding and will house females of several species (e.g. *Indotestudo elongata* and *Cuora galbinifrons*) prior to the introduction of males during the early spring.

The Turtle Conservation and Ecology Center is intended as a half-way house for turtles confiscated by authorities from the illegal wildlife trade. In 2000, the project intends to translocate healthy individuals of certain species back into the wild at suitable sites within their native range. While "translocation" is not a perfect solution, the project's efforts are meant to provide authorities with an option for what to do with the large number of turtles seized from traders, that are presently either returned to the trade, or released in parks or protected areas without consideration for health, habitat, native range, or potential ecological impacts. Translocation also provides a "second chance" for many less fortunate turtles that have somehow managed to survive 20-60 years in the wild, only to be captured, bagged, and sent off to the markets of China.

Turtle Conservation and Ecology Center Guest Book

Trent Russell: Manager of Herpetofauna Department, Taronga Zoo (November 11).

Maik Schilde: Turtle breeder (November 8), Leipzig, Germany

Dr. Edgar Lehr: Herpetologist from The Scientific Institute for Nature Research of Senckenberg, Germany (January 29).

The Turtle Conservation and Ecology Project: An Overview

The objective of the Turtle Conservation and Ecology Project is to initiate immediate and urgent action in response to the threat to Vietnam's 22 native turtle species resulting from illegal wildlife trade and loss of habitat. The project is working with national and regional authorities, as well as other institutions and organizations, to implement a strategy aimed at providing greater protection for Vietnam's turtles, as well as establishing and building long-term public interest in conservation of chelonians (turtles and tortoises).

The project involves six main components:

- (1) Public awareness and education
- (2) Training and institutional capacity building of national protection authorities
- (3) Research on captive ecology and reproduction.
- (4) Translocation of turtles back into suitable habitat
- (5) Field research on the natural distribution and status of Vietnam's turtles
- (6) Investigation and monitoring of the wildlife trade

The Turtle Conservation and Ecology Project has received support from the following institutions and individuals:

The Columbus Zoo (USA)
Melbourne Zoo (Australia)
Tennessee Aquarium (USA)
James Bazyrk Fund (USA)
Rotterdam Zoo (Netherlands)
Douglas Hendrie (USA)
Partridge Films (UK)

The project would also like to thank the following individuals for their guidance and assistance:

Chris Banks, Melbourne Zoo
Dave Collins, Tennessee Aquarium
Jim van Abbama, New York Turtle and Tortoise Society
Dr. Charles Innis, Veterinarian
Peter Paul van Dijk, TRAFFIC SEA
James Compton, TRAFFIC Indochina
Bryan Stuart, WCS Lao PDR
Edgar Lehr, Scientific Institute for Nature Research
Dave Lee, North Carolina State Museum

Further help is needed:

Immediate funding priorities include:

- 1.) Holding facilities and care for confiscated turtles
- 2.) Training of provincial authorities
- 3.) Trade studies and translocation site assessment
- 4.) Graduate student research volunteer (12 months minimum)

To help the Turtle Conservation and Ecology Project, please contact us at cpcp@fpt.vn

Staff and Project News

Staff News

Cuc Phuong sadly bid farewell to Ms. Ngoc Thi Men and Ms. Tran Huong Thu, two long-term core staff members who left the project in December and January.

Ms. Men, who joined the Cuc Phuong team in March of 1998, returned to Hanoi and enroll in a masters program at Hanoi University. Ms. Men spent most of her term on the project working on the Visitor Education Program, and is credited for her early involvement in helping establish the visitor center, as well as running the Internal Training Program and developing educational programs and activities for visitors of the park. Ms. Men is best known for the trail of broken hearts she left behind, as well as for her lethal claws and the subsequent injuries others received during sessions of Cuc Phuong's infamous "spoon game". Men is presently looking for full-time employment in Hanoi as she attends classes at night, and continues to work part-time for the project in Hanoi.

Ms. Thu was one of the project's original five core staff, and has been a valuable part of the Cuc Phuong team since July 1996. Initially involved in completing the project's socioeconomic research (1996-1998), Ms. Thu later assumed leadership of the community-based Conservation Awareness Program (CAP). Ms. Thu is credited with helping transform CAP into a well-run environmental education program active in three districts around the park. Her creativity and sense of humor were invaluable contributions to the education program, particularly the numerous stories, puppet shows, and performances she created for the Conservation Clubs. Notorious for her fierce competitive spirit, and deadly twist-pinch, the project would like to wish Ms. Thu and her soon-to-be husband Mr. Thu, success and happiness in the future. The "last tiger of Cuc Phuong" has officially moved to Hanoi.

PHOTO: Ms. Thu and Ms. Men
MS Publisher version only

Christmas at Cuc Phuong

PHOTO: Merry Christmas from the core staff of CPCP
Caption: Core staff enjoy a quiet project Christmas celebration at Cuc Phuong that included a visit by Santa and a few presents left beneath our non-native plastic Christmas tree
MS Publisher version only

Outputs of the Cuc Phuong Conservation Project

Conservation Awareness Program Resource Guide: A complete guide to lesson plans 1-15 and resources used in the Conservation Awareness Program at Cuc Phuong National Park (English/Vietnamese)

Conservation Awareness Program Film: A film produced by Ninh Binh TV about the Conservation Awareness Program and how education is being used as a major force in helping protect Cuc Phuong National Park (*Vietnamese*)

The Kitchen God Comes Late: A conservation-focused storybook for children (*Vietnamese*).

Conservation Club Booklet: A membership and activities booklet distributed to all new Conservation Club members who join the program in 1999 (*Vietnamese*)

Wildlife Trade Poster: An anti-wildlife trade poster, featuring a pigmy loris and discouraging foreigners from buying wildlife in Vietnamese markets.

Draft Management Plan for Cuc Phuong National Park: A draft plan based on the results of the park's 1998 Management Planning Workshop.

"Green Forest" Conservation Club Newsletter: Quarterly editions distributed to Conservation Club members.

Bat Report 1998: The final report for 1998 summarizing the results of the year's bat surveys on bats.

Butterfly Report 1998: An interim report summarizing the findings of the 1998 year-long butterfly study at Cuc Phuong carried out in cooperation with the Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources (IEBR), Vietnam-Russian Tropical Center, Cuc Phuong National Park, and the Cuc Phuong Conservation Project.

Snails of Cuc Phuong: A report by J.J. Vermeulen on snail fauna at Cuc Phuong (1998).

Owston's palm civet program summary: A preliminary report by wildlife biologist Shelagh Rosenthal on the Owston's palm civet breeding project at Cuc Phuong National Park (featured in the IUCN Small Carnivore Specialist Group publication)

Aquatic Resources of Cuc Phuong National Park: A comprehensive study by Douglas Hendrie of aquatic resource use by local communities surrounding the park, including identification of the park's water resources and an assessment of local impacts upon these resources.

ABC Animal Poster: An ABC poster for children of animals used in the school-based Conservation Clubs junior primary level education program.

Village Program Film: A film produced for the Village Program by Ninh Binh TV about the values and threats to Cuc Phuong National Park, and featuring local residents discussing how the park has changed over time, and about some of the alternative economic activities people are involved with that reduce their dependence on forest resources. (*Vietnamese*)

The Cuc Phuong Conservation Project

Brief summary – January, 2000

Cuc Phuong National Park

Cuc Phuong National Park was established in 1962 as Vietnam's first national park. Located only 120 kilometers south of Hanoi, Cuc Phuong is one of the last large fragments of protected forest in northern Vietnam and remains the flagship of Vietnam's national park and protected area system.

The park encompasses an area of 220 square kilometers of rich tropical forest set on limestone hills and mountains, forming a green island amidst the intensely farmed lowland area that surrounds the park. Cuc Phuong is ecologically important for its diverse botanical composition, with 28% of all plant species in Vietnam represented at the park. The park is also home to a diverse variety of endangered and threatened wildlife including Delacour's langur, the clouded leopard, Owston's palm civet, and a number of endemic species. A total of 88 mammal species are known to occur in the park, in addition to over 300 bird species, and approximately 50 reptile and amphibian species.

The park is valued as an important site for tourists, receiving about 40,000 visitors each year. Several caves within the park remain sites of national cultural importance, where the bones of prehistoric humans have been discovered. Additionally, local communities retain strong ties to former village and grave sites within the park

Threats to the Park

There are approximately 2000 residents, mostly of the Muong ethnic minority, living within the park borders, and an additional 50,000 people occupying the surrounding buffer zone. Many of these people are dependent upon the park's natural resources for their livelihood. Cutting of timber, collection of firewood and other forest products, clearing of land for agriculture and hunting threaten the park's forest ecosystem. Although protection efforts continue to be strengthened, these efforts alone can not address the conservation and protection needs of the park.

About the Cuc Phuong Conservation Project

Objectives

The Cuc Phuong Conservation Project, administered by Fauna & Flora International (FFI), was established in 1996 with a grant from the BP Statoil Alliance. In response to the threats posed by human encroachment from neighboring communities surrounding the park, FFI has developed and implemented a multifaceted approach to assist the park with protection and conservation of its unique biodiversity.

FFI also manages two species-focused conservation programs based at Cuc Phuong National Park, aimed at helping provide protection for species threatened by the illegal wildlife trade.

The project has focused its attention on four principal areas to achieve these goals:

Socioeconomic Research: Research within local communities aimed at developing a better understanding of the relationship between these communities and their use of resources from within the park. The results of our socioeconomic research will be used to identify development projects and activities that will reduce local dependence on forest resources.

Conservation Awareness Program: Enhancing the level of people's awareness and understanding of nature, conservation, and Cuc Phuong National Park through programs established in local schools (Conservation Clubs), within hamlets (Village Program), and at the park (Visitor Education).

Biological Research and Monitoring: Research on the park's flora and fauna to establish baseline information about the park's biodiversity. The results derived from the project's studies are aimed at providing park managers with the ability to effectively monitor changes over time, and to address protection and conservation priorities. Additionally, research at Cuc Phuong contributes to regional and international knowledge about forest ecosystems and Vietnam's native fauna and flora.

Institutional Capacity Building: Providing training opportunities and experience that support the development of strong professional skills amongst park and project staff, as well as national institutions and organizations. Work with local organizations and institutions (Youth Union, District Education Department, Women's Union, school teachers, and community leadership) to develop relationships that will enhance conservation efforts and ensure sustainability of existing programs.

Species Conservation: The project administers two species-focused programs aimed at the conservation of wildlife threatened by illegal trade; the Owston's Palm Civet Breeding and Ecology Project and the Turtle Conservation and Ecology Project. Both of these projects are broadly focused at the national level.

Funding

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The British Petroleum Statoil Alliance
AusAID
The Canada Fund
IUCN Netherlands

Additional Support is received from:

ARA (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Regenwald und Artenschutz)
Compaq Computer Corp.
Australian Volunteers International (AVI)
The DBH Staff Support Fund

(Also see Turtle Conservation and Ecology Project)

Staff of the Cuc Phuong Conservation Project (January 31, 1999)

Project Management

Douglas Hendrie, project manager
Vu Thi Quyen, Project Coordinator

Core Staff

Ms. Tran Hong Thu, CAP Education Officer
Ms. Ngoc Thi Men, Visitor Ed. Program Officer
Mr. Dinh Trong Thu, socioeconomic program leader
Ms. Nguyen Hai Hau, Training Officer
Mr. Le Trong Dat, biological field team leader
Ms. Phan Thi Thanh Binh, CAP Development Officer
Ms. Hoang Thi Hanh, Program officer

Species Conservation/Biological Program

Mr. Le Thien Duc, Field Staff
Mr. Huong Van Nguyen, civet keeper
Mr. Dinh Van Binh, Turtle Keeper

Support Staff

Mr. Nguyen Xuan Giao, driver
Mr. Dinh Van Tha, security

Advisors

Shelagh Rosenthal, Owston's palm civet research
Dr. Mike Hill, Biological Advisor

Conservation Awareness Program (local staff)

Ranger Luong Ngoc Voi, CAP Program leader
Mr. Do Minh Cuong, CAP Program leader
Ms. Ha Thi Thanh, CAP
Ms. Le Thi An Tinh, CAP
Ms. Luu Thi Huong, CAP
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Ms. Nguyen Thi Nga, CAP
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