

Media Release**Immediate Release**

Surveys reveal Xe Sap NPA supports Annamite endemic biodiversity

Biodiversity surveys of Xe Sap NPA, southern Laos, the first intensive surveys within the protected area since the late 1990s, have revealed that the site supports a characteristic suite of Greater Annamite endemic birds and plants. A large population of the conifer *Pinus dalatensis* (IUCN classified as Data Deficient) which dominates hill evergreen forest in large sections of western Xe Sap NPA above 1,000-masl was recorded. This restricted range Annamite endemic species was previously only known from central and southern Vietnam and one other site in Laos (Phou Ak in Nakai Nam Theun NPA).

A number of encounters with Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush *Garrulax konkakinhensis* and Black-crowned Barwing *Actinodura sodangorum*, two globally threatened endemic birds previously believed to be restricted to central Vietnam, suggest that Xe Sap NPA may support the largest global populations of these species. The globally threatened Impressed Tortoise *Manouria impressa*, typical of montane forest throughout south-east Asia, was also recorded and Xe Sap may be globally significant for this species.

Researchers from the University of Copenhagen have recently demonstrated that Annamite forest leeches can be used to detect mammals living in tropical forests by analyzing the genetic make up of the blood inside the leeches. In May 2012 the CarBi project held a 4-day training workshop for Hue and Quang Nam forest guards (40 forest guards and team leaders) in Vietnam on how to collect leeches during law enforcement patrols.

The CarBi project is now organizing landscape-wide collection of leeches from suitable forest habitat in the Hue and Quang Nam Saola Reserves (Vietnam) and in Xe Sap NPA (Laos). In May two members of the IUCN Saola Working Group, visited eastern Xe Sap NPA and collected more than 600 leeches. Both felt that the relatively undisturbed forests of eastern Kaleum district are suitable for the elusive Saola and hope that the species' unique genetic fingerprint will be in some of the collected leeches.

Collected leeches will be sent, in August, to the University of Copenhagen, Denmark for genetic analysis that will paint a picture of the mammal community in this unique part of the world. It is hoped that this work will also help to detect the critically endangered Saola and thus influence protected area management and law enforcement activities by the CarBi project and its government partners.

Collecting leeches in protected areas in order to try and understand the status of Saola and other endangered mammal species within the landscape, is now acknowledged as a potential strategy for detecting the presence of species which would previously be extremely difficult to prove, said Mr. Fanie Bekker, the Trans Boundary Director for CarBi.

According to Bekker, alternative solutions had to be found to ensure that cost-effective and scientifically robust technology is applied to detect rare animals in this extremely challenging environment. It is believed that this progressive partnership between the scientists and WWF's CarBi Programme, will provide robust evidence that Saola is still present in CarBi's project areas said Dr Thomas Gray of WWF's regional conservation programme.

Note for editor

Photos:

More about WWF's CarBi project:

http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/where_we_work/greatermekong/our_solutions/projects/carbi/

CarBi's Six-month technical report:

http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/where_we_work/greatermekong/our_solutions/projects/carbi/photos_videos_and_publication/

About WWF

WWF has a long history of engagement in the region, the organization helped establish conservation programmes in Thailand in the early 1980's and has been active in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam since 1990.

WWF-GM: www.panda.org/greatermekong

WWF-Laos: www.panda.org/laos

WWF-Vietnam: www.panda.org/vietnam

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