

# Preserve of the wild: protecting the elephants of Nam Pouy

Ian Lacey / WWF-Laos

**W**orshipped for centuries, the mighty Asian elephant once roamed the scrub forests of Asia, from Iraq in the west, to the Yellow River in China. Today, impacted by habitat loss, poaching and conflict with humans, its diminished range tenuously stretches from India to Vietnam.

In Laos, the elephant has for centuries been integral to society – in utility, ceremony, and symbolism. However, it faces as many conservation challenges here as it does throughout Asia. Indeed, the country's ancient name – 'Lane Xang' or 'Land of a Million Elephants' – is a glaring reminder of the past status and present needs of this revered animal.

It is estimated there are between 500 and 1,000 Asian elephants living in the wild in Laos, making it perhaps the single most important national population in Indochina. Worldwide, there are just 25,000-32,000 remaining in their natural environment.

Habitat loss driven by population increase has seriously impacted the elephant. Demand for timber has fuelled forest encroachment across its range, as people fell trees to expand their settlements. So too, the food and resources required to sustain these communities has risen, meaning forests are pressured by agricultural

development.

When habitat fragmentation occurs, elephants face being unable to follow traditional migratory routes. In turn, herds become isolated and are unable to socialise with other families, eventually leading to inbreeding and a high juvenile mortality.

Squeezed into ever-tighter spaces often within protected area systems, their own requirements for food and space grows. The destruction of crops, property and even loss of human life by roving elephants in search of these basic needs can lead to retaliation by villagers.

"Maintaining a positive relationship between elephants and humans is crucial and must be kept up," says Mr Soum Senserk, Head of the Nam Pouy National Protected Area (NPA) office in Xayaboury province, a site identified as a priority for elephant conservation by the Lao government in 2008.

"We need to build on programmes to reduce illegal activities and support the protection of this animal."

In 2010, the Lao government, in partnership with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), initiated an elephant conservation project in Nam Pouy NPA. Covering 1,912 square kilometres of montane evergreen forest, this remote tract of forest in northern Laos also contains white-handed gibbons, sambar and clouded leopard. It may also hold one of Laos' remaining tiger populations.

The project, which aims to improve the patrolling and law enforcement capacity of the NPA's management team, is making encouraging strides towards maintaining and hopefully increasing the elephant population in the area.

"There are between 40 and 60 elephants in Nam Pouy and we want to make sure they have a safe home. By increasing monitoring and data collection on their population, we are able to plan for their conservation," said a specialist in elephant conservation with WWF, Mr Khamkhoun Khounboline.

The overarching goal of the project is to integrate elephant issues into provincial planning, not just in Nam Pouy NPA, but also throughout Laos.

Doing this takes a dedicated approach by NPA staff, the military and villagers. Eager to learn and with modern technology on hand, they have been trained in law enforcement and patrolling procedures to tackle prohibited activities inside Nam Pouy, including fishing, hunting and collection of non-timber forest products. So too, patrols aim to eliminate poaching of elephants for their ivory and hides, a critical intervention considering Nam Pouy's elephant population stood at 250-350 individuals in 2004, about five times the number at present.

One of the most innovative tools used is called SMART, or the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool. SMART is open-source software that allows ranger units to enter data on their patrols to produce useful information such as graphs and maps that improve the effectiveness of their activities.

Despite the 1989 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), there is still a thriving ivory market in a number of Asian countries which fuels international trade. However, with tools such a SMART available, protected areas such as Nam Pouy are taking huge steps to deter or intercept potential poachers.

"We are also working hard to prevent negative outcomes with communities living so close to the park," says Mr Senserk.

He believes the only way to



Asian elephants in Nam Pouy National Protected Area.

be successful is through training of NPA staff, and teaching communities surrounding the protected area of ways to look after their property.

"We look at crop protection measures that are inexpensive. We are developing local guard teams to watch over people's property and providing equipment such as firecrackers to scare away elephants."

Indeed, the combination

of community managed methods to avoid human-elephant conflict, enforcement training for NPA staff, and an improvement in forest conservation appears a critical first step to safeguard perhaps Laos' most enigmatic and culturally significant animal.

"Through the government's partnership with WWF, we have been successful in stopping elephant poaching

and improved the community's understanding and support for conservation," added Mr Senserk.

With the Elephant Festival taking place from February 13-15 in Xayaboury, a light will be shone once again on the status of the great pachyderm. Let's hope then that places like Nam Pouy NPA can become beacons of hope in the fight for its survival.



Setting camera traps inside Nam Pouy's evergreen forest

## caritas LUXEMBOURG Seeking Expressions of Interest for Final Evaluation

Fondation Caritas Luxembourg (Caritas) is an international non-government organization, working for the fundamental rights of all people to secure access to food, water, health, education, employment and income around the world. In Lao PDR Caritas works in Thathom District, Xaysomboun Province and Mok district, Xiengkouang Province, to build sustainable livelihoods, and to reduce their vulnerability to natural disaster.

The overall purpose is to implement a final evaluation of the **From Vulnerability To Resilience (V2R) Project in Thathom district, Saysomboun Province**. The review is expected to be participatory in nature and will highlight the successes and challenges of the V2R to date, examining the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, progress toward impact, potential sustainability and participation and ownership. The review will recommend potential action for changes necessary for Caritas future program. Refer to the ToR for details and will be available upon requests. Please contact: **Mrs. Keophouvieng Phanthalangsy: keo@carluxlao.org**

**Expressions of Interest must be submitted either electronically or in hard copy, by 16:00 PM of 06 February 2015 to the office of Caritas Luxembourg in Lao PDR in Vientiane Capital.**

### Required Qualification, Experience and Personalities

- At least Master's degree in development studies, livelihood security, food and nutrition or relevant field.
- At least 7 years of experience working in INGO sector or relevant development programs.
- Must have experience on project evaluation focusing on livelihood security sector including DRR.
- Must have previous experience in conducting field surveys and assessments for INGOs or development projects.
- Excellent knowledge of participatory survey/assessment approach.
- Previous experience and interaction with Lao PDR government bodies and other relevant organizations.
- Experience in engaging with communities where different ethnic groups are present.
- Excellence in English is a must.
- Fluency in Lao, Khamu and Hmong languages is an advantage.

### Expression of Interest (Eoi) must include:

1. Copy of at least one previous final evaluation report conducted;
2. Proposed methodology;
3. Team composition
4. Budget
5. Time frame and start date

Please submit Expressions of Interest to:

Administration Manager at: keo@carluxlao.org or sending your applications to: Ban Haisok village, House No: 083, Unit 01 Chanthabouly District, Vientiane Capital. P.O Box: 2079; Tel/Fax: (+856)-21-254451

Expressions of Interest will not be accepted after 16:00 PM of 06 February 2015

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