

# Greater Annamites Ecoregion



## Mountain Rainforest with Hidden Secrets

*In the heart of Indochina lies a region which, until recently, has hidden many of its natural treasures from the world. The Greater Annamites represent the southernmost extensions of the mountains that originate in the Himalayas. They form the backbone of Vietnam, much of the border between that country and Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR)), and extend to the south as far as Cambodia. This extraordinary region, once in the midst of fierce warfare now lies at peace, and is at last revealing its secrets. These revelations have amazed the world and allowed a glimpse into a hitherto unimagined area of richness and diversity. The distinctive biodiversity of the Greater Annamites is attributed to the continuation of warm, wet conditions during the last ice age. Across most of Southeast Asia, habitat fluctuated between moist evergreen rainforest and more open dry forest, but the unusual conditions in the Annamites allowed rainforest to persist, giving the forest and its animals thousands of additional years of refuge to evolve. These conditions persist today due to the short dry season, created by the mountain ridge holding the easterly monsoons over the mountains, while areas surrounding the ecoregion suffer major climatic changes.*

### Uniqueness

The Greater Annamites comprises the most unique and most diverse of the biodiversity within the Forests of the Lower Mekong Ecoregion Complex. The discovery of the Saola by WWF and Vietnamese scientists in 1992 in Vu Quang Nature Reserve drew the world's attention to the biodiversity of Vietnam. However since that first remarkable discovery, many other new species have been found marked by the number of large mammals including the Large-antlered (Giant) Muntjac and the Annamite Striped Rabbit. These discoveries highlight the Greater Annamites as one of the world's most remarkable and unique ecoregions. In addition to these species, totally reliant on successful conservation in the ecoregion, a number of highly threatened species such as the Asian Elephant, Tiger and the world's most endangered large mammal, the Lesser One-horned (Javan) Rhinoceros, struggle for survival in the ecoregion.

### Why save it?

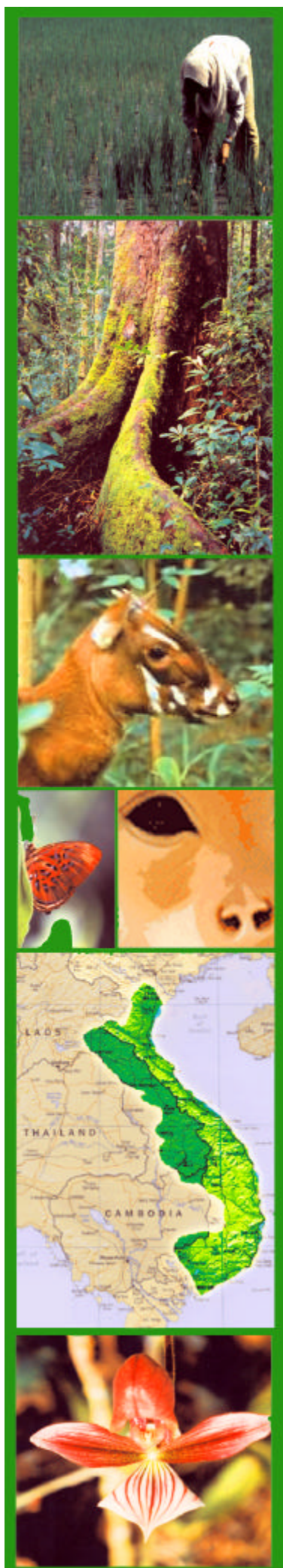
Just as we begin to understand the vast range of species found in the Greater Annamites, we realise this unique environment is under threat. This region faces dangers today that may finally destroy what has been built up over many thousands of years. In the past, this entire area was blanketed by forest, but today many patches have been cleared or degraded from past warfare or more recent human pressures.

Critical threats to the area are many and include agriculture, logging, hunting, fishing, the wildlife trade, exploitation of forest products, and infrastructure development. All of these are exacerbated by the increase in human population and in-migration of other ethnic groups into the area bringing with them different and often unsustainable ways of life. Such threats may if unchecked, irreparably destroy the landscape of the Greater Annamites within the next 15 years.

### Saving it

Few places on earth have experienced such tumultuous political upheaval as Indochina in the past hundred years. Without doubt this has severely affected the environment and has also delayed concerted attempts at conservation. The isolation afforded the Greater Annamites has helped protect the landscape, but unless coordinated action is taken soon, modern technology will compensate for nature's protection. In recent times, conservation efforts have progressed in leaps and bounds.

Since 1977, Vietnam has been establishing a network of protected areas. Currently numbering 105, these include protection for historical and cultural sites, nature reserves and National Parks. The Greater Annamites encompass 75 protected areas. 61 of these are in Vietnam, including the oldest in the country; Cuc Phuong National Park established in 1962. In Lao PDR 20 national protected areas established between 1993-1996 of which 11 are part of the Greater Annamites. The majority of the remaining forest is on the Lao side. Whilst the establishment of these protected areas is to be applauded, actual protection on the ground is less effective through a combination of shortfalls in funding, equipment, staff and training.



## Taking Action

In March 2000, over eighty scientists from Cambodia Lao PDR, Vietnam, and many other countries participated in a biological assessment of the conservation priorities within the Forests of the Lower Mekong Ecoregion Complex - *the first and most ambitious regional assessment of biological conservation priorities*.

After the biological assessment and an examination of the threats and opportunities (situation analysis), WWF decided to focus on two of the Global 200 ecoregions falling within the Forests of the Lower Mekong Ecoregion Complex (FLMEC) – the Greater Annamites and the Central Indochina Dry Forest ecoregions

An action plan to conserve the Greater Annamites is being finalised in early 2004. The action plan calls for partnerships in concerted action to conserve the Annamites. Under a long-term vision, more than 25 targets with 100 milestones have been identified to be achieved by 2010. Many partners will join in these efforts to make sure these targets are achieved.

## Actions at landscape level – the Central Annamites Initiative

*A pilot initiative involving a broad range of stakeholders, aimed at establishing the process of working at three scales - ecoregional/national policy; at the landscape level; and in priority sites.*

The Initiative is based on coordinated conservation action, designed under a large-scale framework and guided by a long-term vision of success. The approach is based on the recognition that uncoordinated actions at individual sites are neither efficient nor effective at conserving functioning ecological systems or halting the loss of natural resources. In order to be more effective, a more ambitious coordinated effort is required that is developed and designed under an overarching strategy. The need for such a coordinated effort resulted in the establishment of an advisory group comprising 16 government institutions and a range of international conservation NGOs. The Government of Vietnam has endorsed the Central Annamite Initiative in January 2004. This is a great step towards conservation success in the ecoregion. This is the first initiative in the Annamites and to make this initiative come alive, **immediate funding is required to establish the coordination unit of the Initiative for the next five years as well as continuing the approval and implementation process in the Lao side.**

## Local and international actors in the ecoregion

In Vietnam: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Forest Protection Department, Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources (IEBR), Forest Inventory & Planning Institute (FIPI).

In Lao PDR: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Department of Forestry, Science, Technology and Environment Agency (STE), Lao National Mekong Committee;

International: WWF, Birdlife International, IUCN, FFI, WCS, SNV, Oxfam, USAID, ADB, WB, Ford Foundation, the European Commission, Tropenbos International, MacArthur Foundation, CIDA, DANIDA, TFT

## Ten programmes for conservation action

The Annamites Conservation Plan has been designed by all stakeholders in Vietnam and Lao PDR with facilitation from WWF. The plan has set out a long term vision and targets for conservation of the Annamites in the next 50 years. It also sets out 10 priority programmes for conservation action in the ecoregion.

- Active protection of irreplaceable species and habitats
- Protecting Priority River Basins
- Effective Protected Area Network
- Three Major Landscape Scale initiatives
- Creating a Constituency for Conservation
- Understanding the Annamites
- Building the Capacity for Success
- Controlling Unsustainable Harvesting
- Promoting good infrastructure development
- People, Land and resources

With these programmes, each country has its own list of immediate actions for the next five years.

### For further information, please contact:

In Vietnam: **Nguyen Thi Dao**, WWF Indochina Programme, 53 Tran Phu, Hanoi, Vietnam, International P.O. Box 151, Tel: (84) 4 733 8387, Fax: (84) 4 733 8388, Email: [dao@wwfvn.org.vn](mailto:dao@wwfvn.org.vn)

In Lao PDR: **Roland Eve**, WWF Lao Office, P.O BOX 7871, Vientiane, tel: 856 21 216080; fax: 856 21 251 883, email: [roland.eve@wwflaos.org](mailto:roland.eve@wwflaos.org)

Map of Priority Areas in the Greater Annamites

