

Saola conservation in Quang Nam province

Minh Hoang, Barney Long & James Hardcastle

WWF MOSAIC Project
Forest Protection Department
77 Tran Quy Cap
Tam Ky,
Quang Nam

INTRODUCTION

The saola is distributed between 15° 30' – 20° 00' N and 104° – 108° E along the Annamite Mountains (Vu Van Dung, Tham Ngoc Diep, this volume). Quang Nam province is known to be the southern most limit of the saola's distribution, but its exact limits are not clearly understood (see Robichaud & Timmins, this volume). To ensure the saola's long-term future in Quang Nam, it is critical to identify its current and former distribution. This will allow prioritized and appropriate conservation efforts to be carried out.

Over the last two years, the Quang Nam Forest Protection Department in partnership with WWF have been implementing the MOSAIC project across Quang Nam. The results presented here represent saola data collected to date during this period. A focused saola initiative has just begun in the province, therefore data presented here should be treated as preliminary.

METHODS

In order to assess saola distribution and conservation requirements the following methods have been used:

- Literature search
- Semi-structured interview surveys
- PRA surveys
- Participatory forest sketch mapping and associated forest management discussions
- Field surveys
- Camera-trapping

RESULTS

Saola is distributed in two districts of Quang Nam; Tay Giang and Dong Giang (prior to 2003 these were a single district called Hien). These districts are the northern most in Quang Nam bordering A'Luoi and Nam Dong districts in Thua-Thien Hue province, where confirmed saola populations exist. No confirmed field records have been obtained from Quang Nam, however hunted animals have been recorded and their capture location identified.

Communes where saola is thought to be currently present:

These represent communes in which hunted animals, with identified hunting location, have been recorded.

- B'Halee commune A saola driven by dogs was caught and killed in November 2003 (Ha Phuoc Phu pers. comm.) with another being snared and eaten by local communities in September 2002.
- A'Vuong commune Last trapped in a snare in 2000
- A'Nong commune Present according to (Ha Phuoc Phu, pers. comm.)
- Song Kon commune Last snared in 2002 (Tham Ngoc Diep, this volume), but recent interviews suggest people in this commune are traveling to adjacent Thua-Tien Hue province to hunt and not necessarily catching saola within Quang Nam

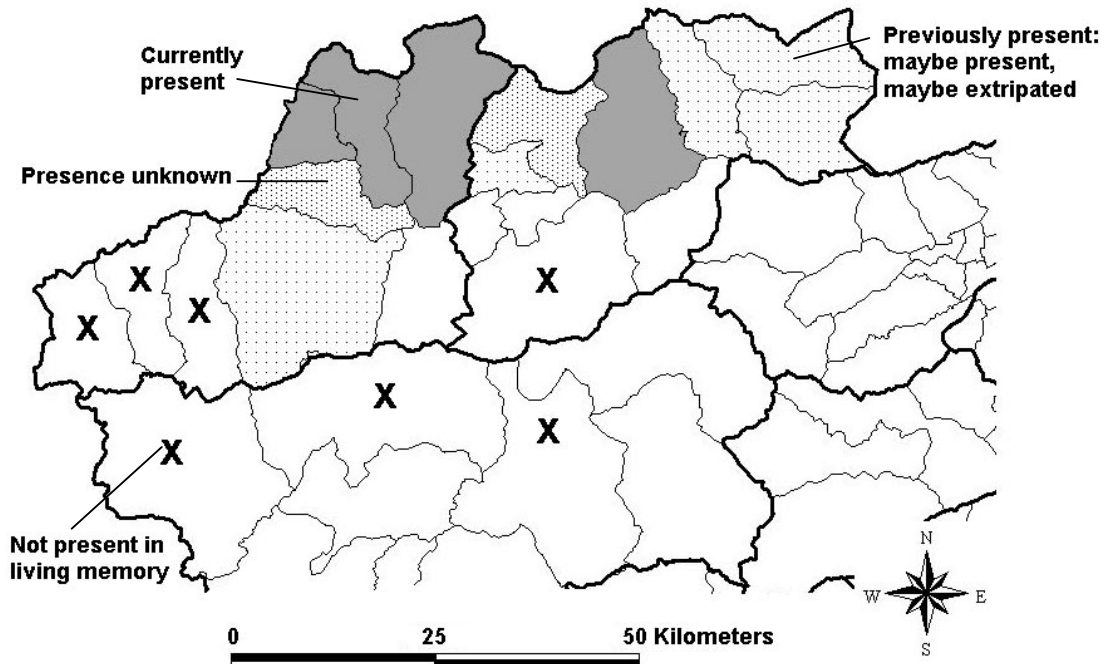
Communes where saola status has received no attention to date:

- A'Tieng commune Adjacent to known saola areas
- Ta Lu commune Between A'Vuong and Song Kon communes and known saola populations in Thua-Thien Hue province

Communes with historical saola records but not recent information:

- Prao Last hunted in 1999 in A'Dul village
- A'Ting No hunted animals recorded for 10 years
- Tu No hunted animals recorded for over 10 years
- Ba No hunted animals recorded for 10 years
- Lang No hunted animals recorded for 10 years

Current known state of saola distribution in northern Quang Nam province



Communes where surveys have occurred and communities are not aware of the saola (presumed non historical presence):

Tay Giang: Tr'Hy, A Xan, Ch'Om, Ga Ri

Dong Giang: Maccoih, Jo Ngay, Za Hung

Nam Giang: La Ee, Zouilh, Tabhing

A very old saola skull is present in La Ee commune (Vu Ngoc Thanh, pers. comm.). The people in La Ee were previously semi-nomadic, therefore the true origin of this saola skull is unclear.

Notes from interviews

Local Ka Tu people in A'Vuong commune believe the saola makes seasonal movements, moving into rocky, mountainous areas during the wet season to make use of caves, whilst moving to lower, but not flat, areas to feed in the dry season.

The saola is not targeted at present by the Ka Tu communities, but if they do catch a saola in either a snare or using a bamboo stake trap, they will eat it. They then use the skull to adorn their house or the village meeting hall, as they do with the majority of hunting trophies.

SUMMARY

Distribution

- Current saola distribution appears to be focused immediately east of the Ho Chi Minh Highway in B'Halee, A'Vuong, Ta Lu and Song Kon communes, with its distribution also stretching west of this area in B'Halee and A'Nong communes.
- Saola was historically distributed, and may still be present, to the east of the above area, in eastern Dong Giang, in A'Ting, Tu and Ba communes, and to the south-west in, A'Tieng and Lang communes.
- Saola does not appear to have been historically (living memory) distributed in the higher areas of western Tay Giang, west of the Ho Chi Minh highway, in Tr'Hy, A Xan, Ch'Om and Ga Ri communes.
- The lowland, inhabited valley running east-west through Dong Giang and Tay Giang appears to be the historical (living memory) southern limit of saola distribution.

Threats

- Saola is not specifically targeted by hunters at present
- Saola is typically eaten when caught with the frontlets used for house decoration
- Currently, no trade in saola appears to be present in Quang Nam although people from Da Nang recently have started visiting some communes to try and purchase skulls (in one case, in return for two fishing nets)
- Saola is most often caught in snares
- Dogs and guns are sometimes used to hunt saola

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Complete removal of snares and other non-selective hunting methods from critical saola habitat
- Removal of hunting guns as part of community-based initiatives and forest protection charters
- Protection of the entire northern Tay Giang – Dong Giang forested landscape through an appropriate provincial-level conservation management designation
- Habitat protection in two priority sites:
 1. Ho Chi Minh Highway
 2. A'Vuong commune (is threatening the removal of forest cover from Thua Thien Hue to Quang Nam)
- Focused field surveys and camera-trapping to obtain an accurate picture of the population's distribution
- Examine feasibility of the gazettelement of a saola protected area in the populations' core area (possibly B'Halee to A'Vuong). This activity should be combined with similar feasibility studies in Thua-Thien Hue, and a trans-provincial reserve should be considered.
- An awareness raising campaign focused on communities and government officials to increase the status of the saola everyone's minds will help reduce direct threats to the species survival in Quang Nam

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anon, 1996. Results of preliminary survey on the Saola *Pseudoryx nghetinhensis* in Quang Nam - Da Nang province.