

Dear Friends

Though not entirely uneventful, the past three months have been relatively quiet at Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre (PTWRC). The two big festivals of the quarter – 4 days of Khmer New Year in April and the same number of days for the King's Birthday in May – ensured that PTWRC was very busy. If progress can be measured by discarded litter we have moved on hugely. Years ago one would be wading knee deep in rubbish around the aviaries. Nowadays there is very little waste thanks to signs requesting people not to litter and a team of youngsters paid to keep the place tidy.

In many ways Chhouk, our young elephant bull, who lost his left front foot to a snare, continues to dominate. The Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics (CSPO) have been so helpful in creating and repairing Chhouk's prostheses for just the price of the materials. However it was becoming apparent that the time spent was insufficient and Chhouk needed more special care. I contacted CSPO and the Cambodia Trust in England and we have come up with an arrangement that will benefit everyone. I cannot thank them enough for their broad-mindedness.

We finally moved Popoi into an outside cage at last. Our bionic gibbon, who fractured the same arm twice, now has a specially constructed enclosure. It is lower than our other gibbon cages and the mesh is finer, which stops him putting his arm through the wire. Hopefully this will prevent him causing himself further damage. We have paired him up with a new female and they are now getting on well together.

Our clouded leopard cub born in January continues to do well, but the most notable birth of this quarter was another baby serow. Before we became involved at Phnom Tamao serow did not survive long enough to breed. However we are now doing very well with this species and we have bred 5 babies.



Popoi outside at last



Serow now doing well

Animal welfare organizations promote non breeding as the best policy in zoos, particularly in zoos of developing countries. Where the animals cannot be cared for properly this is probably wise. However in a world that is losing its wildlife at an alarming rate this policy seems a waste of a very precious resource, particularly in a rescue centre such as Phnom Tamao, which has the option of reintroduction when appropriate.

There were the usual comings and goings over the quarter. Lorises, civets, leopard cats, tortoises, turtles, doves, parakeets and mynahs were rescued by WRRT. We released many of the birds including some more lesser whistling ducks, that joined up with our small group at Sre Ambel in Koh Kong. Macaques, pythons and monitor lizards arrived and most have now been released. 18 long tailed macaques were taken to our release enclosure near the Main Lake and released once they had formed a group and accustomed themselves to the area. The forest patrols and police protection we are now implementing will hopefully ensure their safety. An Endangered greater adjutant was confiscated in April. He has not yet been moved to the Waterbird Aviary and is currently enjoying the freedom of the Quarantine Area with our two Sarus cranes. On June 22nd a young male hairy nosed otter was brought to PTWRC by rangers working for Conservation International. He is being quarantined in the clinic and has been vaccinated for distemper. We are sterilizing his enclosure in preparation and have implemented appropriate protocols to ensure his survival. We know hairy noses are extremely sensitive and need special care if they are to survive in captivity.



Douc

The most interesting arrival was the rescue of a baby douc langur on May 7th, being kept as a pet in Kratie. He is a male and would probably not have survived had he been left with the family, who bought him but had ostensibly done nothing wrong, merely wanting to ensure the monkey came to no harm. The Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team (WRRT) diplomatically requested he was donated to Phnom Tamao, which is ultimately what happened. I have never encountered a douc whilst I have been in Cambodia and they are extremely rare. He is currently being hand raised in Phnom Penh by Maline, the sister of my friend and colleague Mr Mao and he is doing very well. As with all langurs, doucs are leaf eaters. When kept in captivity they will usually be cared as if they are macaques or gibbons and be fed rice and fruit. A sure recipe for disaster.

Our spot-billed pelicans and painted storks are making their annual pilgrimage back to PTWRC. Currently 95 pelicans and 24 painted storks are feeding daily at Lakeside, but numbers are continuing to increase. I am purchasing 40kg extra fish per day to ensure these beautiful birds do not go elsewhere to feed and get hunted. As more birds return I will have to provide more fish – an expensive but necessary aspect of this time of year.

There were two sad losses during the quarter. Our founding male otter fell ill and subsequently died. He must have been at least 14 years old so this was not entirely unexpected. I will miss seeing him perform his back flips into his pool. We also euthanized our oldest male dhole. He too was very old, rescued from the illegal wildlife trade and he bore the scars to prove it. He had lost a leg and most of his nose and top muzzle in his various battles. His injuries did not seem to hamper him, old age ultimately taking its toll on the old warrior.

We were busy with construction over the previous three months, building two enclosures for our silvered langurs, two new gibbon cages and an outdoor enclosure for our iguana, which somehow found its way into the country. I also decided that our Quarantine Area could wait no longer while we try to secure funds to rebuild it. It is falling into disrepair and frankly is now an embarrassment. I have told my constructor to get on with renewing it. I have some funding already and I know I will cover the shortfall one way or another. Isn't it strange how things always work out fine when we need them most....

Nick Marx,

Wildlife Alliance Wildlife Rescue and Care Director,

Cambodia, July 2010

Mr Mao – field logistics and a whole lot more

I have been remiss in not introducing my great friend and colleague, Mr Mao, before now. When I arrived in Cambodia to work for what was then WildAid I was employed to oversee the care of our elephants and tigers at PTWRC and sort out the animal handling skills of the WRRT. Vann Mao was the “driver” who took animal food to the rescue centre and as such was assigned to me. I could not speak a word of Khmer and everything I did was through him. Nowadays we live in a world of meaningless titles and Mao’s is no longer “driver”, he is “Field Logistics Officer”. It means nothing. There is not a title to fit what Mr Mao does. He sorts things.



Mr Mao



Maline neglecting the house work

Mao was my khmer language teacher on our daily run to PTWRC. He taught me how to speak..... properly. Slang or bad words – the usual method of having a laugh at the new boy’s expense – was not an option for Mao, though he used to laugh harder than anyone when I found them out for myself. There were many problems in those early days. PTWRC was in terrible shape and the WRRT had all the heart in the world but little appreciation of how to care for or release animals. Mao was my right hand and everything looks very different today. Between us we worked around the problems we encountered, too many to mention. Mao’s younger sister, Maline, cleaned my apartment for a time in the early days. She adores all animals and when any orphans arrived she would help out with a couple of bottle feeds during the day – and neglect the house work – in order that I could get on with things at PTWRC. She now has her own son, Panyawat, but

still does a lot of hand-raising babies. When I told Mao about the douc langur, which was far too delicate to send down to Phnom Tamao, he said, “No problem, Mr Nick. I will tell Maline to look after him.” This was no hardship for his sister and carries the added advantage of a little extra money. Mao takes down all the necessary daily purchases he has to make in his diary. The list is very long and he is painstaking and methodical in his work. Mao does not rush, he gets the job done. Animal food, equipment, tools and materials, Mao deals with it all. But his work is not entirely animal-oriented. We need to ensure keepers and staff are happy also and celebrations are regularly required. I tell my friend and he sorts everything to perfection. My job will be to deal with the bill at the end, which Mr Mao also checks assiduously to ensure I am not being cheated.

Mao lost both parents while he was still very young. Being the oldest child it was his job to care for his younger brothers and sisters. As he does with everything, he took this very seriously. He was studying law but had to leave. Early in our relationship he told me that he wished he could have completed his law degree. I told him he could and paid for the four year course, which he took each evening when he finished work. I have helped him on other ways too, returning the favours he has done me. Mao now implements his own small initiatives at Phnom Tamao. He employs local youngsters to keep areas of the rescue centre tidy, others go and cut leaves in the forest each day for the langurs. He also feeds the long tailed macaques we have released by the Main Lake – and by default the wild boar – to prevent them returning to the centre and causing trouble and he puts up bird tables to provide for the wild forest birds.



Sray Nik, Panyawat and house guest



Mao and binturong



Bird table

Although I am Mao's boss we are very close friends – he has called his daughter Sray Nik – and I am still guided by his advice. I hope he will have time to visit my home in England next year – Mao has never left Cambodia. He has made many comments about our friendship, many too touching too repeat. Several times lately he has said that I must never leave Cambodia, at least not on a permanent basis, that when we retire we will meet regularly at a road-side stall to drink coffee and reminisce. I will always have time for a coffee – or a beer – with my friend. But retirement? With Mao by my side it is a bit soon for that just yet.

Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team – in spite of the law

It is often the apparent irrelevancies that build the picture. The small facts that demonstrate the frustrations that we face in combating the illegal wildlife trade. Surprisingly often the offenders we apprehend are women.



Long-tailed macaques for sale

On May 17th the Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team (WRRT) left Phnom Penh at 02.00hr for Kampong Thom. Our trucks are known and we do not want word going down the line that we were on the way. The next morning the wildlife trader's house was easily identified – long-tailed macaques were visible in the house from the road. A warrant was not necessary as the lady of the house realized there was little point in arguing and agreed to let us enter. We confiscated the macaques, she was fined \$2,248 and gave the possibly meaningless thumb print of non re-offense. Her husband was nowhere to be found.

On May 7th 91.6kg wildlife meat was found at a trader's house, the offender again a woman. The fine was \$1,849, a little high because it included pangolin meat, which is an Endangered species. Two weeks later Visedh, the manager of the WRRT, received information that a truck containing wildlife was leaving Phnom Penh, heading for Koh Thom in Kandal Province, on the border of Vietnam. There was a need for speed. On arrival the animals would be quickly loaded onto a boat and then make the short river crossing into Vietnam, after which we could do nothing. Five members of the WRRT arrived first. A brief search of the area revealed fresh tire tracks outside a house near the river. The resulting search of the house uncovered 623kg wildlife, including tortoises, turtles and cobras. The size of the offense dictated the case should go to court. The offender was another woman. I asked Visedh why it should so often be that we apprehend women. Could it be that women are more likely to be wildlife traders? He told me that often the man of the house will make himself scarce as he will more easily obtain his wife's release than she could for him. Also, if he is an important figure he will not want to be connected to the crime, though he will invariably be the major player. He prefers to let his wife take the rap.



...the offender another woman

On May 18th Visedh was told of a bus leaving Battambang for Phnom Penh. The WRRT stopped the bus on the outskirts. The driver told our guys he was transporting wedding gear but a search of the truck revealed 148.5kg wildlife, including pangolins, tortoises, turtles and snakes. We told him to call his boss – the story we gave was the truck had broken down. However the bus owner obviously realized something was amiss and turned his phone off shortly after. The driver was charged with transporting wildlife and paid a fine of \$4,247.25. We could not catch the bus owner within the allotted time to prosecute him as Cambodian law states that investigations of wildlife crime must be completed and submitted to a prosecutor within 48 hours or the case

will not be accepted.

At the beginning of May the WRRT went to Siem Reap and confiscated 147 lesser whistling ducks from the same offender as in the previous quarter. I asked Visedh why the offender had not received a prison term. Visedh told me that with common species a repeat offense has to be committed within 1 month for a jail sentence to be imposed.

The WRRT has to work within the law, although the people we are dealing with do not. Fines will be levied on offenders, prison terms if possible. We must accept that offenders may not always receive the penalty they deserve. Some may not even be caught for their offense. But of one thing you can be sure – the guys will always do their best on their uneven playing field, as they fight to level the odds in the battle against the illegal wildlife trade.



Bus haul

Wildlife Rehabilitation Station – a sting in the tail

The quarter started well at our Wildlife Rehabilitation Station (WRS) near the village of Chi Phat in Koh Kong. My constructor, Chien Khal, finished building five small bridges to help us negotiate the rising waters of the wet season. They are not masterpieces of construction but should do the job. He also constructed a pool that is visible from our camp. We have added water plants and already a muntjac deer is making use of his new accessory. Bunthoeun and I took some young parakeets down in April, for release when they are ready. The WRRT confiscated a porcupine with an extremely bad snare wound around his neck. He recovered at PTWRC thanks to vet Chenda's excellent care and we were able to take him down also. I was sure he would dig out of his cage within a day. However this did not happen and we released him on my last visit to the WRS in June. We put food down for him in the evening and left the cage door open, as is our practice when releasing nocturnal animals. He did not bother with the meal, preferring freedom. He has not even returned for the food we always provide our animals following release, opting to raid the cassava "fire break" that Bunthoeun cleared and planted in the grassland around camp.



Recovering...



Porcupine transport

In May we released our greater coucal. Unfortunately his presence has meant that our mynah birds have decided that the WRS is no longer a safe option for them and their young and we see less of them. The mynahs are all independent by now and are quite capable of fending for themselves in the forest, so although we miss their cheerful song they will be fine. We have done our job well. Their transition has been very gentle. We still put food out three times per day, but this is now being made less use of. The coucal is still very apparent, following us around as we make our checks of the area, pecking unwary fingers when he gets the chance.



Unwary fingers

The binturongs we took down in March have settled very well. I visited the WRS at the beginning of June and went to see the “binties” as soon as I arrived. They no longer welcome human presence, preferring to hide themselves away nowadays and we always approach quietly, although they always know when we arrive. We were standing outside the enclosure – a strong wind had blown a tree over, missing the enclosure by centimeters. What luck! Then I heard a faint mewling...and again. “We have baby binturongs,” I told my guys. They doubted my words, but I was correct. We do indeed have one baby binty. I am very happy about this. Although it may delay the release, I feel it will locate the adults and make them less likely to run off when we finally open the door.

The wildlife around our camp is becoming much more apparent, having become accustomed to our benign presence. We regularly see a pair of mouse deer in the trees behind my “bedroom”. Silvered langurs have paid us a visit and a leopard cat and a monitor lizard have also been seen close by. Tracks of muntjac enjoying the new pool, as well as those of sambar, wild pig and porcupine making use of Bunthoeun’s cassava, demonstrate how quickly wild animals come to accept human presence when the hunting stops. I enjoy my trips to our new camp very much. It is remote and peaceful and I switch my phone off, leaving the problems of the world behind me for a few days. It was like this at the end of May when I visited. I enjoyed the customary evening beers with Bunthoeun, Soeurn, Goeurn and his attractive wife and retired to my hammock. I always sleep better here than anywhere else. This night I awoke and heard a distant gun shot. “There is still much to be done,” I thought as I fell back to sleep. In June the porcupine release, the coucal’s presence and some welcome cooling rain made the trip very pleasant. Bunthoeun and I were eating breakfast before preparing to leave for the civilization of Phnom Penh around 7.30am. There was another gun shot, this one not far from the camp. Then another in the distance and a third not 1 kilometer away. I jumped up, grabbed the guys and went in an unsuccessful search of

the hunters. I returned to camp feeling angry and sad. I raged at Bunthoeun for most of the journey back, finally lapsing into silence. We arrived at the office. “*Knyom kri-em krom, Mr Nick.*” – “I am so sad, Mr Nick” – said Bunthoeun. I was too. There are still a lot of issues to address before any more animals can be released from our rehab station.

Conservation – moments of doubt

We are very proud of our work and usually feel we do a pretty good job. Wildlife can be subjected to extreme cruelty, situations are often difficult and dangerous and no-one shirks what they consider to be their duty. For example most would consider that what we have done in combating the illegal wildlife trade, our elephant and bear interventions and Chhouk’s rescue have been successful. But sometimes one wonders....



Bear rescue on the Tonle Sap

Cambodia retains only remnants of its magnificent wild fauna. Forests are now fragmented and the once abundant wildlife within is being harassed to extinction. Forests are logged or burned, wild animals are hunted and people set up *chamkas* - homesteads. Large wild animals flee in an attempt to seek sanctuary elsewhere. Government officials and Ministers have frequently requested us to assist local people and wild animals when injury or damage has occurred in such situations. Species involved include elephants, sambar, serow, gaur, muntjac and many other smaller animals that have fled their diminishing forests in search of safety. Many survive, some do not. Despite laws passed by the Cambodian Government recently protecting forests

and their wildlife, in practice they are not always implemented. Hunting is rife, inroads continue to be made into shrinking forests, wild animals come into conflict with people and they are subsequently killed or “rescued” – taken into captivity. If this situation remains the same there would seem little hope for what remains of Cambodian wildlife outside of captivity.

Conservation organizations estimate that there are now only around 300 wild elephants left in Cambodia and almost no tigers. We have removed 6 elephants of varying ages from this equation, usually at the request of the Cambodian Government. The animals were “rescued” indicating they were taken from their forest home either for their own safety – some were persistent crop raiders – or because they were alone and too young to fend for themselves. They are now in captivity. Shrinking forests and human encroachment or hunting pressures are the reasons this was necessary. Unless these problems are addressed by ensuring greater protection of forests and their wildlife, human/elephant conflicts will continue for as long as Cambodia can hold on to populations of these great animals.



“Rescued”... now in captivity

Even at Phnom Tamao, where wild animals are probably at their safest, problems occur. There are attempts to snare birds and long tailed macaques living in the forest. When wild sambar deer stray onto village property they are often captured and beaten so brutally they die before we can intervene. The gun shots fired close to our wildlife rehab station in Koh Kong indicate we have not achieved our goal despite all the money and effort we have poured into the area. With all this in mind one sometimes feels that there must be an easier way. Amongst other factors the emotional expenditure is great. Perhaps it might be easier and wiser to allow circumstances to take their course.....

Then I remember the short story my friend and ex-colleague Nev Broadis tells:



“A huge fire erupted in the forest in the heart of Africa. The blaze was fierce, consuming everything in its path. Flames leapt through the undergrowth, racing across the ground. Trees were set ablaze and fell to the floor. The heat was intense and animals were fleeing lest they perish. All except the little sunbird, who hurried immediately to the nearest river and scooped up a tiny beakful of water. She flew to the thick of the flames and dropped her load. She then went back to the river, collected another minute mouthful, beat her tiny wings and returned to the fire once again. This continued several times. The other animals saw and smiled as they passed, but did not stop to help. Then the mighty elephant, bringing up the rear, came by. He bellowed

“Trees were set ablaze...”

his derision. “Better to save yourself,” he roared. “If I cannot douse the flames what hope have you got? What on earth do you think you are doing, you foolish bird?” The tiny sunbird paused in her duties for a second, hovered in front of the mighty animal, looked up at him and said quietly, “I am doing what I can.”

The moments of doubt disappear. There is work to be done...

Many thanks to all the supporters of our Wildlife Rescue and Care programs:

Ahimsa Foundation

Arlene Hoffer

Asian Elephant Art and Conservation Project

Badreyyah Alireza

Anderson-Rogers Foundation

Aspinall Foundation

Paul Berg

David Bohnett Foundation

Barb Braniff

Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics

Cambodia Trust

Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund

Barbara Delano Foundation

Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation

Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund

Gibbon Conservation Centre

Global Giving

Jacki Goodridge

Jessica Kingdon

Frank Kling

Landry's Aquarium

Michael Perkis

John Roberson

Sarlo Foundation

SeaWorld & Busch Gardens Conservation Fund

Super Natural Distributors
Wallace Research Foundation
Westminster Public School, London

Wes Wang

And thanks also to all who give via the internet. There are far too many to list, but your kindness and encouragement helps us to continue with our work to protect and care for the Cambodia wildlife that needs our intervention and help so badly.