

Dear Friends

In 2009 we took great steps forwards in the development of Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre (PTWRC). The rescue centre is now excellent from an animal aspect and the aim for 2010 is to ensure that the progress we have made is maintained. Issues that now need to be addressed are mainly from a visitors' standpoint. This might seem trivial to the conservationist, however if PTWRC is to become more sustainable and independent of external funding it needs to be more visitor friendly – the centre is hot, dry, and dusty, there is little proper shade other than that provided by the trees and there is nowhere to buy a coffee or an ice cream. From an educational aspect too, great opportunities are being lost. With between 200,000 and 300,000 Cambodian and international visitors per year PTWRC stands as the ideal site to educate Cambodian people about their wonderful wildlife and the threats it faces. Therefore we hope to start working towards rectifying the situation during 2010 through educational signage, and 'discovery centers' where visitors can learn about Cambodia's rich biodiversity and also take a break from the scorching sun.

News has been generally good. During the first 3 months babies from many different species were born, including jackal, dhole, binturong, variable squirrel, wild boar, leopard cat, gibbon, slow loris, parakeet and, wait for it... clouded leopards! Most have survived and their stories come later. The lion cubs born in May last year continue to do well. The female serow that spent so much time in the clinic being treated for her damaged leg was moved to her new enclosure. The oldest male born to our breeding pair at Phnom Tamao has now been introduced to her. They have settled well but are seldom seen, preferring to hide away together amongst the trees of their large forested enclosure.



Leopard cat and kittens



Quick recovery

Two vultures were brought to us from Stung Treng province on March 2nd. Poison is sometimes used as a form of hunting in Cambodia. Eight vultures were found dead having eaten poison and ours arrived dehydrated and weak. However, with medicine and care they quickly recovered and within a fortnight we were driving them back up to Siem Pang for release. In February Bunthoeun and I took a pair of binturongs to our rehabilitation station in the forest in Koh Kong. My son, Ben, was visiting from the UK and he accompanied us. Releases included 16 pythons, an Indochinese water dragon and an assortment of birds. The usual moves from Quarantine into the main centre took place, including civets, pig-tailed-macaques, gibbons, and lorises, and 16 long tailed macaques were taken to our release enclosure at the Main Lake.

You will remember Popoi, our bionic gibbon who ultimately made such a remarkable recovery from his fractured arm. At the end of last year I was expressing my delight at being able to move him into a large enclosure once again following over two years in quarantine. My joy was short lived. Around two weeks after doing so he broke the same arm again. He is now back in Quarantine, another steel pin holding his arm together. He is such a lovely character and we will not give up on him, but we will have to pay special attention to his accommodation when his arm is mended once again.



Bionic gibbon

The really bad news is Dara, our hairy nosed otter, died on February 1st. He was the only one of his species in captivity. The cause of his death was probably ultimately stress, to which this species is particularly sensitive. They are also susceptible to pollution, either in water or food. We did better than others in keeping this species of otter alive but if we are to go further we need to address every aspect with greater precision – cage construction, fish and water quality, and levels of human intrusion. Hairy nosed otters should not be treated as merely another otter for this they are most certainly not.



Dara



Silvered langur

Routine repairs and enclosure construction continues. We built a new pool for our young male elephant, Chhouk. We want him to spend as much time in water as possible to take his weight and reduce the pressure on his front legs. The shoulder of his right, uninjured leg is beginning to bow outwards. This can only increase in time and we need to delay the process as much as possible. We enlarged and lifted the roof of the civet complex on Section 3. Our civets were frequently falling sick and we felt this was because the enclosures are too hot. We also began construction on a large silvered langur enclosure. For 8 years we have rescued only female langurs, however on February 1st a young male finally arrived. He was being kept in a house on an island outside Phnom Penh with an adult female. In time we hope at last to be able to breed this beautiful primate.

Finally, many apologies for the late arrival of the Newsletter for the first quarter of 2010. The intention is always to have these finished by the end of the following month, however work load and minor difficulties have caused delays. As I have said before, this not intended to be yet another “ask” but a documentation of events and a cost-free “Thank you” to all the loyal supporters of our wildlife rescue, care and release programmes, without whom we could not continue. My heartfelt thanks to you all.

Nick Marx,

Cambodia Wildlife Rescue Director,

Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre, April 2010

Vultures – Natures' dustmen

I do not accompany the Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team very often nowadays. There are few things relevant to their job I can do that the team cannot do themselves. Although from a personal point of view this is not necessarily a step forwards – I always enjoy my time with the guys – it is very important from an organization standpoint and the way every NGO should be driving its projects.



On arrival

On March 2nd Birdlife International delivered two Critically Endangered vultures– one white-rumped vulture and one slender billed vulture – to PTWRC from Siem Pang in Stung Treng. They had been poisoned and were very weak. Our vet, Chenda, treated them and we cared for them at PTWRC for two weeks. Permission was granted by the Forestry Administration to release them again once they recovered. Vultures throughout Asia are now very rare. They act as the countryside's cleaners, feeding on dead carcasses of cattle and wild animals. In India the vultures' decline is as a result of Diclofenac, an anti-inflammatory given to cattle. In Cambodia it is because local people use poison as a form of hunting and also because there is very little meat left lying around – if a cow dies people will eat it just the same. The conservation organizations Birdlife International and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) are working together to conserve the remaining birds. WCS was going to transport the vultures back to Siem Pang but in the event could not do so. I took advantage of this and drove up with the birds along with WRRT members Poev Sary and Heng Kimchhay. The vultures had recovered well and were ready to go. I asked the guys to stop in the city of Stung Treng so we could buy some meat to feed the birds that night. Kimchhay and I entered the market and bought a couple of kilos of beef. On returning to the vehicle Mr Leng Bunna from WCS who accompanied us remarked that the people here were frightened of us. As Kimchhay and I walked into the market four or five vendors were seen making themselves scarce clutching bags. They had obviously been selling wildlife meat and knew we spelled trouble. The vulture release the following morning went without a hitch. All the relevant organizations attached to the vulture project were present. The birds flew away with full bellies and there is no reason to think they will not do well.



Release

On our return drive south, Poev Sary, our kindly MP, took a small detour through the town of Kratie. He knew I had never seen the river dolphins that live in the River Mekong there, which have now nearly all gone, killed by pollution and fishermen's nets. He parked up at the best vantage point and we had been there for only a minute or two when seven dolphins surfaced, arcing out of the water. They came quite close to the bank and we saw them very clearly. So all in all a successful operation – two vultures returned to a wild population that is now slowly increasing again and I finally managed to see Cambodia's irrawaddy dolphins..... and yes, the following week WRRT made the necessary return visit to Stung Treng market.

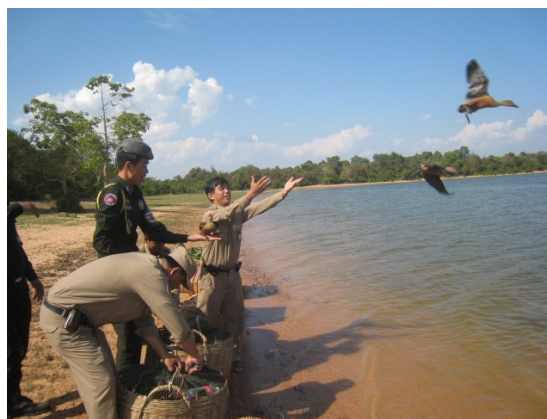
Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team – the uphill battle

WRRT, as usual, worked like dogs throughout the quarter. There are many problems attached to their work, much of which involves waiting, either for information or for a suspect's vehicle. They have to drive long distances – they cover the whole country as they are the only team of their kind in Cambodia – and often they have to stake out a trader's house or a road until they can obtain official permits to inspect premises, which cannot be obtained between the hours of 6pm and 6am. The hours the guys work can be very long.

WRRT project manager, Koy Visedh, received information that a trader in the town of Siem Reap had wildlife. We arrived after dark and our three trucks waited a short distance away from the house along the different roads along which the animals could be transported. The informant kept watch on the house. The next morning a car left the house, which we intercepted. We returned to the trader's house with the car and obtained a permit from the local Forestry Administration (FA) offices. We rescued 332 lesser whistling ducks. 16 had already died but the survivors were released. The trader was fined \$1,992 and the sleepless night was not in vain.

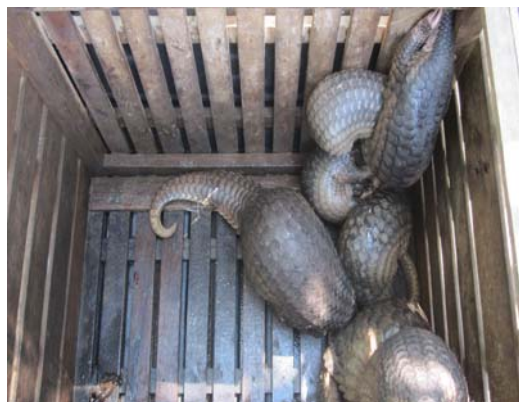


The captured ducks



Freedom

Pangolins, slow moving and completely inoffensive scaly anteaters, are easily captured and because of this they are now Endangered. There is a high value placed on them by wildlife traders and the price can reach \$100 per kilo. Our informant discovered a trade route for pangolins running between a National Park and its nearest town. He provided a motorbike taxi service for a local hunter and ultimately managed to gain access to the wildlife trader's house. Thanks to his knowledge we not only confiscated the 4 live pangolins he had delivered to the house but also another six that were being "stored" at a farm nearby. All the pangolins were released and the trader paid an on the spot fine of \$6,300. The informant had to lie low for a while after this operation – it is hazardous work and his life would be in danger if he was suspected – but Visedh tells me he is now at work again.



Slow moving and inoffensive



Porcupine and macaques await their fate in Kampong Cham....

We knew another wildlife trader was operating in Kampong Cham but had problems dealing with him because the nature of his premises made a raid difficult to implement. The row of connected houses meant that wildlife could “disappear” down the line if we obtained a permit and raided the premises. Our informant in the area built a relationship with the wildlife trader, but even so the house we inspected revealed nothing. We were about to leave when MP Kong Samroul saw a cool box next door. He went to inspect and found a porcupine caged underneath a basket close by. We ultimately confiscated around 200kg of wildlife, including macaques, a porcupine, civets, turtles, monitor lizards, snakes and an assortment of dead wildlife paraphernalia. A fine of \$7,032 was paid by the trader. Fines are not small. Amounts will vary and depend on the market value of the animals rescued in each area. The money is paid to WRRT, who then hand it over to FA officials at the main FA offices in Phnom Penh. I am quietly happy with this system. In the past traders would pay bribes for officials to turn a blind eye. These bribes would need to be less than the market value of the contraband. If on the spot fines are higher than the previous bribes it is in FA’s financial interests to work alongside us.

WRRT has been described as wildlife’s “last line of defense.” Theirs will always be an uphill battle until people take more notice of the laws protecting wildlife. But we are making an impact and will continue to harass the wildlife traders until offenders understand that laws protecting wildlife are important, will be implemented and must be obeyed.



“Last line of defence...”

Baby boom – Mother knows best

Breeding most species of wild animals in captivity is not difficult. One usually needs only to keep one's charges as sympathetically and naturally as possible and the animals will do what comes naturally. If females do not breed and then raise their own babies it is most likely the fault lies with their human guardians rather than with the animals. Mother Nature has been doing her own thing successfully for many millions of years and is unlikely to need mankind's intervention at this late stage. A first-time mother should always be given every opportunity to raise her baby herself and the best thing any keeper can do is nothing at all. Instinct will tell mum and baby how they should behave. In the case of primates and herbivores observation from a distance is probably easy enough. With secretive carnivores, if the food placed in the cage each day disappears and there are no signs that things are amiss then they are probably not. There will be plenty of time to check and sex babies after a couple of months, once they are settled – and whatever the gender you will not be able to change it anyway. Watching our mothers at Phnom Tamao we realize that raising their young is the finest form of behavioral enrichment any animal could enjoy. For most fathers too. Even male tigers seem to get pleasure out of their offspring long after Mum has tired of their small but razor sharp claws and teeth. Many zoos in the west remove baby animals on principle. We see this as abuse. Following the changes in circumstances that have taken place at PTWRC since our arrival many animals are now breeding and raising their own young.

It is not unreasonable to think that all our gibbons at PTWRC saw their parents slaughtered. To capture a baby gibbon it is first necessary to kill the parents. Any babies are sold on as pets, which almost always means they will be poorly raised. The youngsters will have no recollection of a natural way of life and gibbon family values, which are admirable. Gibbons are monogamous to such a degree that if a female is killed her partner may never find another mate. We currently have four breeding pairs of gibbons at PTWRC and all do a grand job raising their infants. Cataracts is a great example. Her fourth baby was born on February 26th this year. Cataracts body bears testament to a life of hardship, she is no oil painting. One eye is white due to a cataract, several fingers are grotesquely bent and she looks old. Yet she remains trusting and loves people. She will come to the fence and gently place a visitor's hand on her head requesting



“...no oil painting”

a stroke. Her gentleness and maternal ability is very apparent.



Slow loris and baby

During the first three months of the year there were two litters of both jackal and leopard cats. Though we have been trying to prevent it, our wild boar had piglets. We had separated the sexes but a released male managed to gain access to an enclosure and have his way with a female. Litters have also been born to two wild boar we released into Phnom Tamao forest earlier in the year. Our dhole now have three pups. However, the founding female did not produce this year. Usually only the alpha male and female in a pack of wild canids have young. This year it was a different female that gave birth. A baby slow loris is being diligently cared for by its mother and we have a parakeet hatched in our aviaries.

However the most pleasing arrival so far is our new clouded leopard cub. The Aspinall Foundation in England donated a pair of young adult clouded leopards to PTWRC in 2006. As one would expect from this great wildlife park the cats were perfect in every way and we were confident we would breed this most difficult of species. There are very clear guidelines to breeding clouded leopards that must be adhered to - if not males will kill their partners, mothers will kill their cubs, or they will simply not breed.

Our new cloudies settled well in a large wild enclosure that is off show to the public and we had every reason to be hopeful. However there is many a slip twixt cup and lip and towards the end of 2007 the Cambodian Forestry Administration told me I was no longer welcome at PTWRC. It was during this time that the cloudies decided to breed. They subsequently had three litters and every baby disappeared. At the end of 2008 I was invited to return to Phnom Tamao and I immediately set about trying to rectify the problem. To give the female a rest I split the pair up – often a mistake with this species as the male will often kill the female when re-paired unless great care is taken. I also moved the female to a smaller, more controllable enclosure.



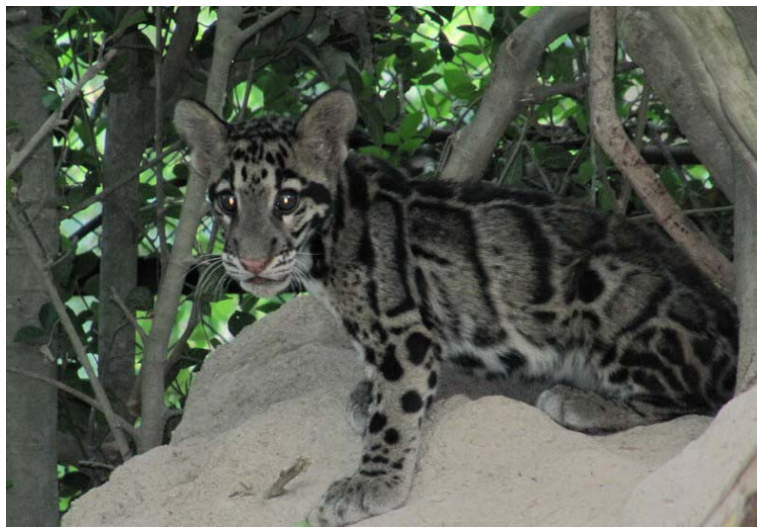
Male cloudie on arrival

I put 4 different nest boxes into the cage, all at different levels and in different areas. I then reintroduced the pair. All went well and on January 20th, 2010 two cubs were born. The cloudies are cared for by our tiger keeper, Mr Rong. He is a good keeper but can be a bit fussy. I told him exactly what to do – feed the cats once per day and make sure they have water. Do nothing else. Do not clean the enclosure and definitely do not try to check on the new mother. I told him if I caught him fiddling about I would cut his hands off. We listened for mews when visiting to feed each day and were usually reassured. By the end of March we started seeing one young cloudie outside the nest box. The loss of one kitten indicates to me that Mr. Rong has fiddled now and again and I have told him so. But we do still have one youngster... and Mr Rong still has both hands. Breeding clouded leopards used to be one of the pinnacles that all zoos strove to achieve. That we have now done so in Cambodia we feel is a testament to the level of care our animals now receive and the methods and values we have instilled in our keepers.



Mother and cub

We are extremely proud of our successes at Phnom Tamao, but it has not been rocket science. It has taken only hard work and a modicum of common sense. We have trained the keepers and looked after their needs. Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre is now something the Cambodian Government can be proud of. A unique facility. Wildlife Alliance is happy to have been instrumental in transforming Phnom Tamao into what could be the best run government wildlife rescue centre anywhere in the world.

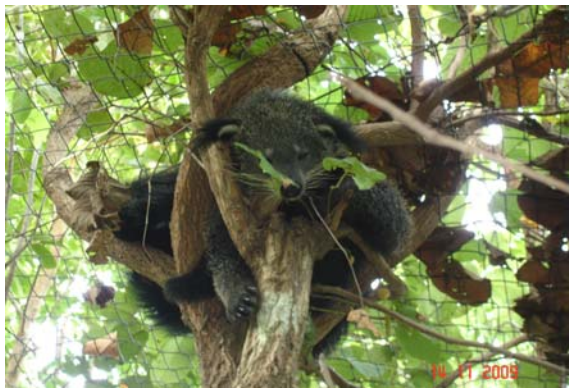


Wildlife Rehab – slow but sure

Development of our Wildlife Rehab Station has been steady and continues to go in the right direction. The one-hectare sun bear enclosure has been completed. The bears, two female sun bears, are currently undergoing health checks at PTWRC. If they are given clean bills of health we hope to move them down over the next quarter. In March we moved a pair of binturongs from their rehab enclosure at PTWRC to their cage in the forest. They have settled well and we will keep them here for the next five or six months before opening the door to a wider world. We will continue to provide them with food of course and I hope they stay close – it will make radio tracking them so much easier.



Binturongs in transit



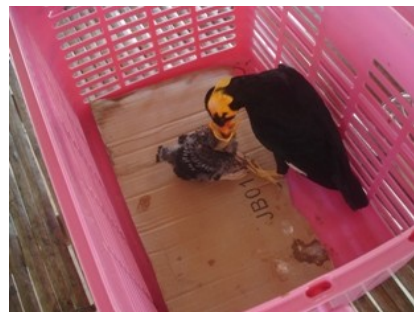
Before the move

A coucal was occupying a cage in Quarantine at Phnom Tamao. I thought it would be fun to release him down at our camp and he now occupies one of the bird cages. He was hand raised at PTWRC by keeper Mr Nang and is very tame. The hook on his bill tells of his trade and like others of his kind I am sure he will develop into a wicked bird. Many of the mynah birds we released are now nesting. One pair raised chicks in a tree within the camp. They were unphased by our activities and we had to make sure we skirted around the nest tree or risk the wrath and sharp beak of protective parents. Unfortunately the nest became infected with ants and two chicks died.



“...a wicked bird”

Without my knowledge the guys moved the survivor to a box on the ground below the nest. Had I known I would not have allowed this as I felt it would be construed by the parents as intrusion and they would reject the chick. How wrong I would have been! The mynahs continued to feed their baby in its new home on the ground. The youngster is no longer a chick but is now a perfect replica of its parents.



Mynah chick

Already forest animals around the rehab station are becoming more apparent, realizing we pose no threat to them. We regularly see wild pig, sambar, muntjac, and mouse deer or their tracks. Porcupines and civets pay us visits and silvered langurs occasionally come to view the camp from the trees. Bunthoeun has ploughed an area of grassland around the camp and planted it with crops.

This will act as a firebreak for the camp and should also encourage the animals to come closer. We have placed salt licks in the grass clearings and will put more around the pool we intend to build near the camp, which will allow us to watch in comfort as wildlife comes to drink.

Access to the camp is difficult, particularly in the wet season. This suits me well as it keeps people away. However it can become tedious for those of us who need to be there. I hope to have some cement bridges built before the next wet season to enable us to traverse more easily the many swollen streams that cross our route. And I guess the option of keeping a little drier ourselves is not a bad idea.....



Bunthoeun on old bridge to rehab station

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

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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.