

Dear Friends,

It has been business as usual for the Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team (WRRT) over the third quarter of the year. There have been some good rescues, most notably the two snared black bear cubs rescued from a trader in Battambang. They had serious leg injuries but have recovered well at Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Center (PTWRC) in Cambodia. In July a baby sambar deer was rescued in Kratie. She now shares our deer nursery at PTWRC with another fawn, our gaur calf and two wild boar piglets.



Rescued Black Bear cubs
Deer nursery

On August 26th 96 Bengal monitors were rescued from a wildlife trader in Kampong Cham. Two days later 198kg reptiles were rescued from a house in Phnom Penh and on September 5th a trader's car was stopped with 15 pangolins, also snakes and turtles totaling 168kg. All the animals were released the day after confiscation in appropriate habitat in the south west of the country. A busy 10 days for the WRRT and Koy Visedh, their Khmer manager, who coordinates the job of information gathering from our network of informants and running the team of military police and forestry officials so well.

Progress at Phnom Tamao during this quarter has been steady if unspectacular, which probably indicates that things are going in the right direction. Chhouk is getting along fine on his prosthesis. He has been fitted for a new "shoe" but there were some small design problems and he is still using the original while the Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics create foot wear our little elephant is comfortable with. Popoi, our tolerant pileated gibbon, has finally been moved out of Quarantine and into a small enclosure on Section 1. The steel pin has been removed and his arm seems to be completely healed after over two years of treatment. We are short of large enclosures in the main centre but will move him into a better cage as soon as we can.

Births over the quarter include sambar deer, fruit bats, fishing cats, leopard cats and a pig-tailed macaque. I am particularly happy about this last addition. For some reason we have never been particularly successful breeding these primates. The youngster recently born in Section 2 is doing well. Releases include several monitor lizards and Burmese pythons, also the usual doves that have been given time to recover following their rescue from restaurants. The transfer of animals such as gibbons, macaques and many species of birds from Quarantine into the main centre has continued to ensure we have room for new arrivals. The number of spot billed pelicans and painted storks arriving daily to feed has dropped dramatically from 132 pelicans and 36 storks to as few as 27 pelicans and 22 painted storks in September. It is too early for them to be migrating back to their breeding grounds and we think the reason for the drop in numbers is because it has been very wet this year and the birds have been able to go further afield to feed due to the extra water around.

I finally got around to moving to PTWRC my two arrow-tailed flying squirrels that I raised, which shared my apartment for over a year. We have constructed pools for our brown fish owls, which we keep stocked with fish. The birds have now learned to catch these and I hope to obtain permission to move some to one of our protected areas in Koh Kong and release them there.

My annual visit to the United States took place a little early this year. I started at the annual conference of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) in Portland, Oregon. From there I went to San Francisco, LA, Denver, New York and Washington, D.C. My heartfelt thanks goes to everyone for your hospitality, kindness and generosity. I am from England and I have said many times that I am quite sure you would not receive the same friendship if you were in the same position visiting my country. Fund raising and public speaking is not what I was put on this earth to do. I am uncomfortable and find it difficult. The reception I always receive, wherever I go makes it so much easier. You are wonderful people. Many thanks and take care, all of you.

*Nick Marx
Cambodia Wildlife Rescue Director
Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Center, November 2009*

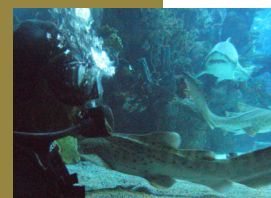
Flat mates



Released
Bengal
monitor



Pig-tailed macaques
- doting mum



At the Denver
Downtown Aquarium

When I first started with Wildlife Alliance I was viewed with some suspicion by the Khmers I worked with. They usually see “barangs” – foreigners – as over paid management that sit on the sidelines. It quickly became apparent to members of the WRRT that this did not apply to me and we all quickly became friends. Sou Suret, always anxious to be involved, was usually on hand to help out with the animals, which was my particular responsibility at the time. He was equally inclined to enjoy a few beers after work. Sou Suret is hyperactive and at his most dangerous when he has time on his hands. He is unafraid to do his job and it is usually him that races off on a motorbike in pursuit of suspects. He has been known to shoot out car tyres as offenders attempt to speed off. He is very fond of animals and for one so non conformist he is surprisingly strong in his beliefs on upholding the law.



Sou Suret - The kind of man we need

It is often the tale of a specific incident that paints a picture more clearly than mere description ever could. The arrest of the wildlife trader and rescue of 381kg wildlife on the Pursat bridge in March, described in my first Newsletter of the year, was as a result of Sou Suret leaping from our vehicle and racing after the man on foot, apprehending him himself by hand. However a more recent incident clearly demonstrates Sou Suret's character. A wildlife trader's premises in Phnom Penh had been under observation for several months. Visedh had two informants working for the trader and we were waiting for the appropriate moment to implement the operation. Things seldom happen at a convenient time and word came through around mid morning on August 28th that we had to move. However there were no trucks available. Sou Suret rushed into my office and asked to borrow my motorbike. There was not a moment to lose. I tossed him the key. Wildlife was being loaded onto the trader's truck and would be leaving shortly. Sou Suret arrived in time and single handed, prevented the trader and his team from departing. Realising he had been caught red-handed the offender's last refuge was bribery. He offered Sou Suret \$2,000 (several times the monthly salary of our MP) to let him leave – after all no one would be any the wiser, Sou Suret could simply say he had arrived too late. Sou Suret maintained his position, preventing the truck's departure until backup arrived and the trader could be apprehended. I helped the WRRT load the rescued wildlife - 198kg of snakes, turtles and monitor lizards, which were given water and released the following day.



Apprehending a trader

In the early days I used to dread bumping into Sou Suret towards the end of the day if we were both in Phnom Penh. “Toe nyam beer. Toh!” – “Lets go and drink beer!” This used to happen frequently and always resulted in feeling much worse for wear the following day. Sou Suret is thankfully now much more reserved. After a meal and a few beers he quietly slips away. He has a fierce wife who will not tolerate any messing around. She takes a firm hand with her husband – indeed she is the only person who can control him. I call her “Sray Sart” or Beautiful Lady.

She is brave and is also my very good friend. I am quietly relieved that Sray Sart has managed to tame her husband, ensure that his beer drinking is more restrained and his behaviour a tad more conventional.

There are many aspects to wildlife rescue work. The documentation is painstaking and deadly dull. Animal handling and care is a large part of the job and needs special care. Expert drivers are important in the high speed car chases that frequently take place. Diplomacy is essential when dealing with all offenders but particularly with senior officials who may have contravened wildlife laws. The hours are very long for the WRRT, who frequently do not see their beds. Sou Suret will never be run of the mill and without his special talents there would be less busts and a great deal fewer wild animals rescued. He is just the kind of man we need in our battle to stop the illegal wildlife trade.

Since our involvement at Phnom Tamao Wildlife Alliance has constructed around 140 enclosures. The final one last month being a large forested enclosure for the female serow we recently rescued. She was snared and has spent many months in our vet clinic. As with all snare wounds her injury has been very slow healing and she seemed to be going downhill. Our vets did not want to amputate the damaged foot so we quickly erected a large enclosure for her. She seems much happier now she is back in the forest.



Pig-tailed Rock



Pileated gibbons in rehab enclosure

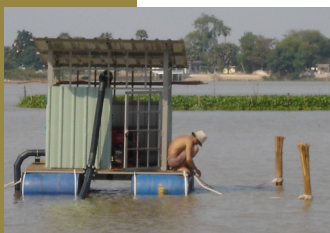
Other cages have been equally simple and cost effective but more than achieve the job they were built to do. Our gibbon rehab enclosures of 1ha each or Pig-tailed Rock, our superb pig-tailed macaque enclosure are good examples. All we need to do is fence around a patch of forest and its natural features, erect a den or holding area, put in an appropriate pool and the job is done. Not rocket science.

However our most perplexing problem and most valuable contribution to Phnom Tamao has unquestionably been the implementation of the current water system. Phnom Tamao is set in 2,500ha forest. This natural setting lends many opportunities for different projects.



Ancient water tanker

However nothing can be perfect and there are one or two down sides to the site the Government selected for their wildlife rescue centre. The forest is very dry, receiving very little rain fall and has no sizable places of permanent water. When we started work water was distributed around the centre by 2 ancient water tankers, the water being taken from the Main Lake or convenient pool. These ancient trucks were always breaking down and the water supply, particularly during the dry season was sporadic and animals frequently fell ill. Over the years many ideas were hatched at solving this problem – and then shelved again. We conducted a ground survey and sunk bore holes to a depth of 80 metres. They produced nothing. We had considered lining the bottom of the Main Lake with clay but this would still mean we were dependant on the water trucks and also on rain fall, which is limited. We thought better of it. Finally we raised sufficient funds to pump water from the Tonle Bati, the nearest permanent water source 8km away, to a reservoir tank near the bears at Phnom Tamao. The project had many false starts but was finally completed in August 2006.



Installing the pump

We also managed to put in an infrastructure of pipe work around the Centre, ensuring all enclosures have water. So at last our animals have a permanent source of clean water at the turn of a tap. Quite an achievement and it has been an epic

struggle – raising sufficient funds, laying the pipe through the forest, installing the pump and getting the system operational. Phnom Tamao still does not have electricity other than the odd solar panel. We feel we can do without too much modernization, but fresh water and good enclosures are essential.



Unloading the water pipe.

We are always very busy with our work at Wildlife Alliance and there is little time for self indulgence. However now and again it is good to spend time with our heavy brigade, such a source of pleasure to all who are involved with them. Our elephants were all rescued from different situations and all would probably not be alive today without our intervention.



Jamran, Aram and Lucky

Lucky is around 10 and was found wandering alone in Koh Kong Province when she was 6 months old. Her mother may have been shot. She was bottle raised by her keeper, Sitheng, and is now a healthy young elephant. Sitheng adores his elephant as he does his own children. She is not merely his job. He has trained her to an acceptable degree as it is often useful to be able to handle captive elephants so long as it can be done with kindness. Our elephants are never badly treated and Sitheng could never consider being harsh.

Aram is the name of a Cambodian pagoda. She was rescued by Wildlife Alliance from a pleasure resort on Mekong Island, near Phnom Penh along with two other elephants, Sambo and Pau, in late 2001. They were all malnourished and had been badly abused, having spent months standing in water during the monsoon season. They were heavily infested with parasites, they had tender feet and cracked nails. Despite intensive care, Sambo died shortly after confiscation. Pao, also an elderly female, survived and is now well cared for at Phnom Tamao. She is very dangerous – probably a result of previous bad treatment. Reluctantly we have decided that a “hands off” policy is kindest for her and safest for those who look after her. Nonetheless she has a night stall and a large outside enclosure in which she is always free to roam. She seems happy enough. Aram is now a very good natured elephant, but was extremely depressed when she was brought to the rescue center. She was emaciated and weak when she arrived. Originally she teamed up with the infant elephant, Lucky, aged 2 at the time. They are housed together and have become firm friends. Aram has a mind of her own and has developed into a beautiful elephant.

Jamran was a member of a small herd of wild elephants that lived in the forest around the seaside town of Sihanoukville. Our first involvement with her was the time she got herself stranded on rocks off the coast. I went to rescue her with Heng Kimchhay, a member of the WRRT. We reunited her with her small herd in one of the most worrying and longest nights of my life that ultimately had a happy ending. However she started raiding crops on the nearby farms and as a result local people were threatening her life. The Cambodian Forestry Administration requested Wildlife Alliance capture her and take her to PTWRC for her own safety. I again went down to the small forest outside Sihanoukville with head wildlife vet Dr Nhim Thy. We captured her and transported her to the Rescue Centre. The next job was to integrate her with Aram and Lucky. This was taken very slowly but went without problems. The final stage was to include her in the twice daily walks through the forest that Lucky and Aram enjoy. This too was taken step by gradual step and went without a hitch.

This remained the situation, the three elephants going on their twice daily walks until the arrival of Chhouk, the most recent addition to our group of elephants. Once we had healed Chhouk's injured foot and fitted him with his prosthesis we realized he needed elephant company. Lucky was the obvious choice and she now accompanies Chhouk on his twice daily walks to his small pool in the forest, while Aram and Jamran make their own way to the Main Lake or through the forest twice per day. Whether we will ultimately integrate Chhouk with the two big girls time will tell.

Continue...



Jamran captured, sedated for transport

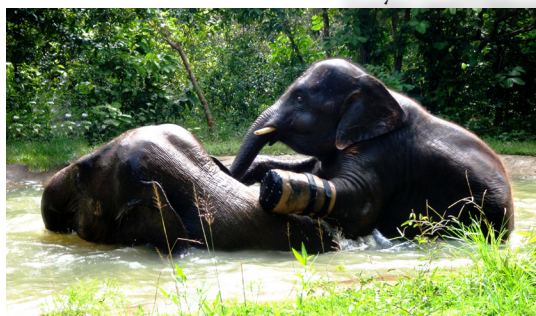


A swim at the Main Lake

A walk in the forest



Lucky and Chhouk



Aram and Jamran





Therapy indeed

The situation is happy and relaxed at present. Like a big sister, Lucky is extremely protective of Chhouk. She often wanders off when out on her walk and the keepers have realized that if they get Chhouk to trumpet Lucky comes running to see what the problem is – it beats wasting energy going to look for her themselves. The elephants have been trained to some degree and this includes painting sessions, which they enjoy. The relationship with their keepers is easy and visitors say these are the healthiest and happiest captive elephants they have seen.

Aram and Jamran, Lucky and Chhouk have happy lives and they respond to this with their gentle, trusting natures. Busy as we are it seems self indulgent, however time spent on a casual stroll through the forest with them, culminating at the Main Lake or Chhouk's pool, where the elephants enjoy a bath and excited games is therapy indeed when other problems begin to crowd in.

Mr Rong – he's a bit of alright

Paen Rong, our tiger keeper, is a perfectionist. He is also loyal, honest, hard-working and kind. His tiger dens are spotless and at feed time he weighs out the exact amount of meat for each animal. The outside enclosures are kept neatly and the pools are cleaned regularly. Mr Rong loves his tigers as he loves his own family and the tigers are inordinately fond of him in return.



Mr Rong loves his tigers...

Rong is an Adonis. He is lean but has the physique of a body builder, which when added to his boyish good looks, cheerful, polite personality and charming smile makes him an extremely attractive addition to our crew. In the beginning Mr Rong was told to watch his tigers carefully and separate them when a tigress came into season to avoid the arrival of cubs. Something went wrong and our least well-balanced tigress, Soomie, produced 2 babies. She is a very nervous animal and showed no interest in her cubs. Nowadays the situation has changed and we could probably ensure that conditions are more attractive for her to care for her young herself but 7 years ago things were different. The cubs were removed and Mr Rong was doing a sterling job of bottle raising the infants. His thoroughness and professionalism were apparent. Unfortunately he had the babies for no more than a week when he fell seriously ill. He was taken to hospital in Phnom Penh and was diagnosed to have contracted Tetanus. Mr Rong's father, Paen Run, took over the cubs. His attention to detail was not as exact as his son's, which when combined with the difficulties of hand-raising animals at PTWRC, made for problems. Both cubs fell seriously ill. They were removed and taken to Phnom Penh. Sadly one youngster did not see the day out. I raised the other – and called him Areang. I visited Rong in Calmette Hospital daily, ensuring he received the best of care. His beautiful girlfriend never left his bedside. At times we thought he may not survive and it was over a year before Rong was back to full strength again, although it was well before this that the young workaholic returned to his tigers. He worries greatly and does not like being away from them. If he takes even one day off he has to be completely sure of the keeper standing in for him. It has got to the stage nowadays that he will only allow one other man to take his place if he is away. Unlike his close friend the loutish Mr Tam, Rong is a hypochondriac. He had been complaining for several weeks that his legs hurt and ultimately visited his local doctor. He was prescribed the statutory multi-coloured pills, which he swallowed regularly. After several months it transpired he was merely not drinking enough fluids.



Rong and Areang



His tiger dens are spotless

Mr Rong has now married his girlfriend, bought his own house and now has a small son and a daughter too. Time moves on. Due to changes in keeping staff and an increase in animals Mr Rong has had to take on other duties. He now cares for the clouded leopards that were donated to Phnom Tamao by Howletts Wild Animal Park in UK. He also looks after a pair of binturongs in our rehabilitation area. So all in all Mr Rong is pretty busy...but that is just how he likes it.

***Many thanks to our current Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team
and Care for Rescued Wildlife supporters...***

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And a special acknowledgement to these new supporters:

Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund for integrating the Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team with the ASEAN-WEN network.

Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation for support of rescued elephants at Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Center.

Many thanks to all our supporters.

Without you, our work would not be possible. Your kindness and encouragement enable us to continue in our efforts to protect and care for the Cambodian wildlife that needs our help.

From the Cambodian Wildlife Rescue Team

