

Dear Friends,

I'm pleased to share news from the last quarter of 2009 at Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Center (PTWRC).

It's been a busy quarter, especially in care for our seven rescued elephants. Orphaned youngster Chhouk received his second prosthetic foot from the Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics (CSPO) on October 10th. This has been made slightly larger and the sole higher to accommodate the young elephant's growth. The "shoe" appears to be more comfortable than the first and Chhouk is walking much more easily. Repairs to both shoes have been required, which our friends at CSPO continue to perform so professionally. Elephants Lucky and Jamran have been squabbling, which left Jamran with a badly bruised leg. She is now better. In turn Jamran whacked little Chhouk, although there was a steel fence between them. This left Chhouk with a nasty bruise above his right tusk, which has now healed well.



Chhouk and Lucky



CSPO's Cathy McConnell with second prosthesis

Other than the elephants, we stayed busy caring for more than 1000 other rescued wild animals from all over Cambodia. All of our wild boar fell ill to Swine Fever. Treatment was arduous and daily. Swine Fever is extremely dangerous to pigs; fortunately most recovered due to the annual vaccinations they receive.

An adult male smooth coated otter was donated from Ratanakiri in October. He was immediately placed in the vacant otter enclosure on Section 3 and was gradually paired up with a female that was born at PTWRC. The two immediately escaped and "shacked up" together in the rocks above their enclosure. Their whereabouts went undetected until I offered a reward



"...back in their cage..."

for their recapture. Keepers found them and had them back in the enclosure within an hour. This kind of tactic usually works pretty well.

Our young female fishing cat jumped out of her enclosure on October 8th when the keeper entered to clean. As always, when this kind of thing happens the cage door was left open and set so it would close if the cat re-entered. We left food inside the enclosure each night. The following day we found we had captured the male jackal we released several years ago. We released him again and nothing entered the enclosure to eat the food we left for a month and a half. On the morning of November 23rd the fishing cat was found in her enclosure once again. She was in perfect health, despite the fact that she had not touched the meat we were putting down for her.



Popoi, the legendary gibbon that broke his arm so badly two years ago, now healed, has been moved to an enclosure in our wildlife rehab area. He has a female in the adjoining enclosure and will be paired up with her when we feel this is appropriate.

The condition of the female serow that was confiscated in Pursat and arrived with a badly swollen foot due to a snare wound was causing concern. She began to lose weight so we moved her from the clinic to the enclosure we built for her in Section 3. She is much happier now and I hope I am not speaking too soon if I say her foot seems to have finally healed. A male serow, confiscated in December, also from

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"...despite our best efforts"

Pursat, did not fare as well. He was found in a trader's house, his legs tightly bound. He had been there for three days and had not been given food or water during this time. We kept him alive at Phnom Tamao for three days but he was too weak – could not eat nor even lift his head – and sadly he died despite our efforts. Other losses include the baby male smooth-coated otter that was donated and had been doing so well. He contracted distemper, a disease that has plagued our otters. With the help of Conservation International, a vaccine has at last been donated by Columbus Zoo and Aquarium and all the otters have been vaccinated. Hopefully this will put an end to our otter troubles. Our female painted stork that bred so successfully last year died on her nest. She was in good condition and it is a mystery why this happened. Her age was not known and she could have been old.



“...had been doing so well”

Releases in the Phnom Tamao Protected Forest over the quarter included three wild boar, four common palm civets, and two female jackals. All these are still returning for the food that is put down for them and are seen regularly. One civet was recaptured and taken to Quarantine when he was found sleeping in his old enclosure with a bite wound. He has now recovered. A mountain Scops owl, doves, and monitor lizards were also released. We took 42 Burmese and reticulated pythons to our protected forests in Koh Kong and released them there.

The numbers of pelicans and painted storks arriving to feed at Lakeside vary daily and continue to drop as they migrate to their breeding grounds. There are now around seven of each species seen each day and we also expect these to depart shortly.

New constructions in the quarter included a new loris cage. All the elephant night stalls needed repair and the enclosure was modified to give Chhouk more room outside. We completed a large serow enclosure to accommodate the new arrival and performed repairs and alterations when necessary to the gibbon, wild boar, tiger, and sambar enclosures during the year.



Water birds at Lakeside

*Nick Marx
Cambodia Wildlife Rescue Director
Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue
Center, January 2010*

2009 - Winds of Change

New initiatives implemented during 2009 include the creation of the position of senior Head Keeper, Try Sitheng; a forest demarcation and protection program; the beginnings of a zoo maintenance team; and the hiring of a resident Cambodian vet, Mr. Oung Chenda. Wildlife Alliance has assisted with all of these initiatives. The positive changes that took place during 2009 indicate that the Forestry Administration is taking its wildlife and the Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Center very seriously, heralding good things for the future. PTWRC is an excellent place for rescued wildlife, perhaps unparalleled in any developing country. Animals are well fed and housed and the site is tidy and free from rubbish.

PTWRC is currently in great shape and this progress looks set to continue. Wildlife Alliance financial and technical assistance at Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Center during 2009 included the total care for elephants and tigers, food for other animals, administrative and logistical costs, keepers' salary supplements and English lessons, salaries and equipment for forest protection police, forest demarcation, cage construction, maintenance and enrichment, animal medicines and veterinary care.

Below are some of the interesting animal arrivals as well as our progressive steps forward in Phnom Tamao during 2009. Thank you very much for your generous support – we look forward to reporting on continued progress throughout 2010.

RESCUES AND BIRTHS

- The Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team (WRRT) rescued a female gaur calf from a village in Ratanakiri province. She was taken to PTWRC and hand raised by keepers. She was initially fed every 2–3 hours, night and day. She seemed to be growing slowly and her health was impeded by a large abscess that developed on her shoulder, which proved very difficult to cure. She is now in good health and is gaining weight rapidly. When bigger she will probably partner with the male gaur that was sent from France and arrived at PTWRC in March 2009.



Female gaur calf

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- WRRT rescued a snared serow female in Pursat province and transported her to PTWRC in June. She was taken to the clinic. She had a snare wound to a foreleg and (as with all snare wounds) this has taken a long time healing. However the leg is now nearly better and she has been transferred from the clinic to a large forested enclosure with a shelter and pool that was specifically constructed for her. When her leg is completely better, a male serow born to our breeding pair of serow at PTWRC will be moved into her enclosure.

- In August, our Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team rescued two black bear cubs in Battambang. Both had serious snare injuries and had lost limbs before they were rescued. They were inhumanely kept in a tiny trailer awaiting sale to dealers. They have now recovered and live in comfort and safety at Phnom Tamao.



“...both had lost limbs”

- Births at PTWRC in 2009 include Southern serow, sambar, muntjac, wild boar, Eld’s deer, dhole, jackal, common palm civets, fishing cats, leopard cats, binturongs, pig-tailed and long-tailed macaques, Lyle’s fruit bats, painted storks, lesser adjutant storks, a Siamese fire-back pheasant, green pigeons, Siamese crocodiles, and lions (the only non-indigenous animals at PTWRC).



Binturongs, mother and baby

VETERINARY CARE AND REHABILITATION

- Veterinarian Oung Chenda started work at PTWRC for Wildlife Alliance in March 2009. He finishes his veterinary training in January 2010 at the Prek Leap School of Agriculture in Phnom Penh. He has been a revelation at PTWRC. Before he started work with Wildlife Alliance he spent two months with the French veterinary practice Agrovvet in Phnom Penh, to improve his skills. He has moved to the village of Samrounjoun Market near PTWRC and is always on hand in case of emergencies. He works extremely hard and gets involved in other aspects of work at Phnom Tamao as well as care for sick animals – overseeing the raising of baby animals, moving animals from Quarantine to the Main Center, ensuring keepers are caring for their animals properly, and capturing escaped animals. He helped hand-raise the baby Endangered white-shouldered ibis and treated the sick gaur calf daily after she developed a very large abscess on her shoulder. His constant presence at the rescue center ensures better care for sick animals there.



Vet Chenda and young ibis

- The leg of rescued elephant Chhouk, now completely healed, required prosthesis to prevent skeletal malformation and also to ease the elephant’s discomfort. After several false starts we ultimately contacted the Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics (CSPO) who agreed to help Chhouk. The first prosthesis was fitted in March 2009 and was an immediate success. Chhouk had no problems with it, walking into the forest as soon as it was fitted, as if he had been wearing it all his life. He is now on his second prosthesis, which has been made with a higher “sole”. He appears to be more comfortable and moves more easily.

- Animals released into the Phnom Tamao Protected Forest at PTWRC over the year include parakeets, doves, Brahminy kites, lesser adjutant storks, pythons, Bengal monitor and water monitor lizards, wild boar, sambar and muntjac deer, common palm civets, Asiatic jackal, long-tailed macaques and leopard cats. Burmese and reticulated pythons and lesser whistling ducks were taken to Koh Kong and released. We carefully monitor their release and ensure their safety. We are continuing our ongoing rehabilitation program with pileated gibbons being maintained in isolation from human visitors, and hope to win approval for their soft-release when appropriate.

- Pileated gibbon, Popoi, has fully recovered from the terrible arm fracture he suffered over two years ago. The steel pin has been removed from his arm and a lesion that subsequently developed has now healed. He has finally been moved to a large enclosure in the Wildlife Rehabilitation area of PTWRC. He remains trusting, affectionate and playful despite suffering two years of intensive treatment and sedation twice per week.



Released muntjac

ENCLOSURES AND MANAGEMENT



Shelter for Guar

- New enclosures funded and constructed by Wildlife Alliance at PTWRC in 2009 include a 40m x 80m Southern serow enclosure containing a pool and roofed area; a roofed holding area for the gaur from France, which is housed in a 1 hectare enclosure previously constructed by Wildlife Alliance; a slow loris enclosure and a flying squirrel enclosure. Maintenance and routine repairs and improvements were conducted on the elephant and tiger enclosures and other facilities throughout the year whenever necessary.

- Following continued requests from Wildlife Alliance, the Director of PTWRC has formed a unit to deal with minor enclosure maintenance. This is now up and running, although small problems are still being ironed out.

- In cooperation with the Cambodian Forestry Administration (FA), we streamlined and improved the management structure among the animal keepers. This has brought around great benefits to the Rescue Center. Each Section has one head keeper, who now takes the job more seriously, providing a clearer chain of command and furthering staff commitment and dedication to their roles. Mahout Try Sitheng is Senior Head Keeper in overall charge.

- At the suggestion of the Forest Administration, the Cambodian Government implemented patrol stations in the Phnom Tamao Protected Forest manned by community rangers. This heartening initiative demonstrates the Cambodian government's pride in preserving PTWRC and the surrounding forest. Wildlife Alliance funding makes the rangers' work to protect the forest and the released animals possible. This protection is essential if the forest is to be conserved and released animals are to survive. We have also helped to ensure that forest demarcation is carried out, which will make protection much easier.



Forest protection

PUBLIC OUTREACH



Jeff Corwin with WRRT

- American naturalist and TV host Jeff Corwin made his third visit to film Wildlife Alliance projects, documenting efforts to save species on the brink of extinction. He filmed our wildlife rehabilitation and release programs and a Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team bust on a restaurant selling wildlife for the series and book 100 Heartbeats. The film aired in November and the book is on shelves now.

- DNA testing of rescued Siamese Crocodiles made headlines in late 2009. DNA testing by Fauna & Flora International and Wildlife Alliance revealed that more than half of the rescued crocodiles at Phnom Tamao are Critically Endangered Siamese Crocodiles, providing a potential lifeline for a species once thought "functionally extinct" in the early 1990s.

There are aspects at Phnom Tamao that still need to be addressed – the education aspect, which is so important for conservation purposes, is weak – and our monthly running costs must be maintained but, funds permitting, the signs are good for this excellent wildlife rescue center for the coming year.



I seldom need to accompany the Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team nowadays. They are now extremely proficient at all aspects of their work and my presence would be superfluous. However I am always happy to accompany them on the odd occasion that Koy Visedh, the team's Cambodian manager, feels I might be useful.

One instance involved reports of a leopard skin being sold at the temple adjoining Phnom Kulen National Park, near Siem Reap. WRRT had attempted to seize the skin on two occasions but both times the trader got word of our arrival, the skin disappeared, and our team went home empty-handed. On December 12th I accompanied the guys to Siem Reap, where we spent the night. The next day I played tourist, donned dark glasses and a cap, and with Military Policeman Kong Samroul as my "guide" I traveled by motorbike to Phnom Kulen.



Leopard skin and other paraphernalia

The rest of the team waited in their trucks a distance away so as not to arouse suspicion. Samroul paid the police guards the required fee to watch the bike at the bottom of the temple complex and we walked up the flight of steps, accompanied by a young girl who attached herself to us, acting as an unofficial guide.

There are many small stalls, most displaying products purported to be from wildlife but much of which are fake. We passed these and continued up the steps a short way when I spotted the leopard skin. Samroul made the necessary phone call as I went over to inspect the trader's wares. In addition to the leopard skin he also had a bear skin, the bones, skull, horns and skin of a Southern serow, muntjac antlers, and other wildlife paraphernalia. I expressed an interest in the leopard skin and asked how much it was. "\$500," I was told. I told the trader I had a business in Sihanoukville importing foodstuff and we chatted. I then strolled off to look around the temple with the young girl. Samroul pretended he was too tired to walk further and sat on a wall close to the skin, making sure it did not disappear. I returned just as WRRT officers Sou Suret and Say Soi, both in civilian clothes, walked up the steps. Samroul and I went to the food stall below for a coffee. Our guide accompanied us. Then the WRRT went into action, confiscating the pelts and arresting the trader. As we finished our drink it was most satisfying to see Say Soi, 6 inches taller than the others, frog-marching the traders to the Ministry of Environment police office. Sorn Lin was carrying the skins. The offenders are now in prison awaiting sentence.



Tourist with guide

Perhaps the other most significant "busts" during this quarter came not from the WRRT but from Government officials with no links to Wildlife Alliance. On December 2nd, border police in Kandal Province made the biggest seizure of illegally traded wildlife ever conducted in Cambodia when they confiscated reptiles

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“Sorn Lin carried the skins”

weighing almost 2,000 kg leaving the country for Vietnam. Before this we had been given information of a sun bear cub being kept in a remote village near Siem Reap. The WRRT went to the village but the information was sketchy and we could not guarantee the safety of our informant. We informed the local Forestry Administration office, which put word out that no penalties would be imposed if the cub was surrendered safely. The bear was duly handed in.

These stories are fantastic news. They demonstrate how Government officials not linked with Wildlife Alliance are now taking this previously disrespected aspect of Cambodian law more seriously, thanks to the lead WRRT has taken. We of course get the job of dealing with the rescued animals. The reptiles were all released in Koh Kong Province. The tiny bear cub had been fed only sugar water during her six weeks of captivity. Her veins had collapsed and she was extremely weak. She died shortly after we gave her to Free the Bears at PTWRC, an Australian NGO that cares for all the bears we rescue so well. I guess the only surprise was that the little thing managed to survive so long. The WRRT were kept busy throughout with the usual operations. Many reptiles were rescued along with live macaques, three porcupines and the serow mentioned previously. Traders were fined and the cases documented for court.

Fines levied are no longer small amounts. The confiscation in Stung Treng of 27 long tailed macaques, 4 reticulated pythons, 1 rat snake, 3 monocled cobras, 14 elongated tortoise, 4 giant Asian pond turtles, 1 Asian box turtle, 1 Malayan snail-eating turtle, 3 East Asian porcupines, 6 Kg of Southern serow horns and 4 pairs of sambar antlers resulted in a fine of \$5,771. The trader of course also lost his contraband, which he also had to purchase. Hopefully this kind of action will persuade wildlife criminals to obey Cambodian wildlife laws in the future.

Try Sitheng - Elephant Keeper with a Difference

In the past I have not been particularly impressed by the elephant keepers I have met. I usually find them large, noisy and rough, which is how they seem to treat their animals. When developing countries “domesticate” their wild elephants it is usually a brutal business.

Our elephant keepers are different. They are kind men who love their charges. Elephants, although placid most of the time, can become dangerous. For safety reasons I insist the keepers always carry their hooks. However these are never used for any undesirable purposes and there are never any wounds on our elephants, which are gentle and trusting in their natures. Our mahouts are firm but kind with the elephants and it is this handling that enables the elephants to have happy relaxed lives, walking outside their enclosures into the forest twice per day, culminating in a swim in the Main Lake.



Sitheng and Lucky



“Gentle and relaxed”

Sitheng has looked after Lucky since her arrival at Phnom Tamao at the age of around 6 months old. She had been found wandering alone in the forest in Koh Kong and would certainly have perished had she not been rescued. Sitheng bottle-raised his over-sized infant and has done an excellent job – hand raising an elephant is no small task. He is gentle and relaxed by nature, traits that have rubbed off on Lucky. He has trained her to perform routine procedures, which ensures she can be safely handled. She also paints and dances to Khmer popular songs. She is Cambodia’s favorite elephant and is quite happy to go through her act – it means she receives small tidbits of food from Sitheng. Her mahout also benefits in the form of small tips from tourists. Although I do not completely approve of such entrepreneurial skills I turn a blind eye – Sitheng richly deserves the additional incentives for his years of hard work and dedication.

Lucky and Sitheng were incredibly helpful when I wanted to integrate a recently rescued elephant, Jamran, into the forest walks that the other elephants enjoy. I instructed that Lucky should lead the walks with Sitheng, and that Jamran and then Aram should follow. We would decide our direction and would not be diverted. If Jamran had other ideas I instructed that she should be ignored and we must continue on our way. Jamran did sometimes have other ideas but always returned immediately, preferring to be in the

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company of the other elephants. These walks started over very short distances and for very short durations of time and gradually extended to the two or three hours that they are today. Simple stuff thanks to Sitheng and Lucky.

Sitheng is fiercely proud of his job and the manner in which he conducts it. The younger mahouts look up to him and are happy to take his advice. Sitheng's ability, leadership skills and industry have been recognized by the director of PTWRC, who accepted my request that Sitheng be made senior Head Keeper of the whole rescue center, an entirely new position. This means he is less involved with Lucky nowadays but such is the bond between the two this is not a serious matter. They still see a great deal of each other. Sitheng's promotion makes my job infinitely easier. I merely mention to Sitheng that some matter needs attending to and I need worry no further. Sitheng is fond of animals, works extremely hard, and is happy and proud to have his new position. He is popular with the other keepers but unafraid to ensure they do their jobs properly. He is also quite prepared to tell his superiors about aspects he disapproves of if he feels the situation merits this, which is refreshing – we know we will be told if something is not right. He leads from the front and never asks anyone to do anything he is not prepared to do himself. This new staffing structure has provided immense benefits in terms of management. His new job means Sitheng now has less contact with Lucky; however, he is always on hand if he is needed.



Artist at work

Wildlife Rehab - Step by Step

Progress at our Wildlife Rehabilitation Station in the Cardamom Mountains not far from Chi Phat village has been slow but steady. Over the past months Roth Bunthoewn, my Cambodian colleague helping me run the project, has continued with his construction of our small bush camp using monthly project money he has saved – we now even have a toilet (of sorts) in the forest. My construction friend Chien Khal has erected a binturong enclosure to add to the small mammal and two bird cages he has already built. He is completing a 1 hectare bear rehabilitation enclosure at this moment.

The binturong cage he constructed in sections at his house near Phnom Tamao. He transported it to Chi Phat, completing the journey to the rehab station by ox cart – the final 8km to the site is impassable by vehicle. We put the cage up in 8 hours in unremitting pouring rain – and under equally unrelenting leech attack.



Indian roller



Mynahs before release

We have now begun the first wildlife releases. 40 hill mynahs that I hand raised myself over a year ago were given their freedom in November. They had been in their cages in the forest for several months and were coming under nightly attack from civets. After their feed one morning the cage roof doors were opened and gradually the mynahs departed. Food is still being put down for them three times per day and most of the birds return to feed. One pair in particular is making its presence strongly felt at our camp. The birds have already built a nest in a tree hollow created by an epiphyte beside my "bedroom". My releases are always gentle affairs and are probably among the happiest moments of the job.

The mynahs have been no exception. They are all completely free now, yet are happy to hang around and make nuisances of themselves. They are inquisitive and intelligent birds. I remember an Indian roller we released a few months before at our forest patrol station in Sre Ambel.... I had raised him at the same time as the mynahs. When we let him go I instructed the keeper, Mr. Thoeurn, to

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continue putting food down twice per day for the bird, while I continued with my other work elsewhere. He did not return but Thoeurn told me that he saw the roller flying around regularly and that he had paired up with a wild bird. I thought this was probably not true and that Mr. Thoeurn was just trying to keep me happy. But he carried on putting food down, which went uneaten. Then one morning, around six weeks later Mr. Thoeurn found the roller sitting on top of his old cage waiting to be fed. What more proof could there be that our methods are successful?



Bunthoeun (center)...wet season evening wash

More recently we released 19 lesser whistling ducks on a network of small lakes at Sre Ambel. These too are still around, enjoying the food we provide. They will ultimately disperse, but our food and our presence keeps them safe as they learn the ropes of a wild existence. The loyal and infinitely dependable Roth Bunthoeun keeps the project running and ensures my plans are implemented when I am not around. He also continues with his own camp improvements and initiatives, funds permitting – I hear we will have a shower of sorts soon, which might be a good thing as the forest stream that we use for washing almost dries up during the short dry season.

If all our hopes for the rehab station come to fruition it will be idyllic. I have obtained permission to release sun bears and binturongs from the Cambodian Forestry Administration and we have other animals at Phnom Tamao that will do well, such as sambar deer and muntjac. I look forward to spending more time at our rehab station in the future. My friend Bunthoeun is such excellent company and the area is beautiful... and as I say, releasing rescued animals is the best part of the job.



Lesser whistling ducks "...the best part of the job"

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From the Cambodian Wildlife Rescue Team

