

# CAT NEWS

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Quang, should also be attempted. Satellite imagery and the low density of people in this area suggest that this is possible. Professor Vo Quy, who has been making excellent progress with his ecdevelopment work in the Ho Ke Go watershed area, also considers that it is possible to link the area with Vu Quang as there are tenuous continuities. Net River and Ho Ke Go watersheds are of great conservation significance as they form part of the Annam Lowland, one of the endemic bird areas in Vietnam. It is likely that Edwards's pheasant (*Lophura edwardsi*), if it still survives, Vo Quy's pheasant (*Lophura hatinhensis*), Imperial pheasant (*Lophura imperialis*), and Annam partridge (*Arborophila merlini*), endemic birds of the Annam lowlands, may be found there. The critically-endangered Francois'leaf-monkey (*Presbytis francoisi hatinhensis*), reported to be endemic to Central Vietnam may also be present. Mom Ray, in conjunction with the adjacent forest areas in Cambodia, could be another transfrontier Tiger Reserve. According to Professor Vo Quy this is the only area in Vietnam where the Malayan Tapir (*Tapirus indicus*) might be found. Discussions with the wildlife officer trainees brought to light that there is still continuity of forests between Yok Don and Bu Gia Map, though both are separated by a distance of 200 km and the entire expanse still has tigers, albeit at a low density. Bu Gia Map is also contiguous with Cambodia. Exploration of Yok Don-Bu Gia Map and adjacent Cambodia for habitat continuity and tiger occurrence is urgently needed.

Nam Cat Tien is an island surrounded by villages. Tiger and Javan rhino conservation could be combined here and a valiant attempt should be made to save both. Nam Cat Tien is also considered representative of Cochin China, one of the three endemic bird areas in Vietnam, by having Germain's Peacock Pheasant (*Polyplectron germaini*) and Orange-necked Partridge (*Arborophila davidi*). Several agencies, including the World Bank, are reported to be willing to fund projects in Nam Cat Tien.

It is apparent from the foregoing description that there is lack of information on the distribution and status of cats in Vietnam. This paucity of information is largely due to lack of research during the recent troubled years.

### Poaching

Vietnam's Conservation Law, No.18-HDBT, 17 January 1992, forbids tiger killing: anyone found poaching tiger can face 10 years imprisonment. Implementing this law, however, is difficult. Wildlife staff are out-numbered by the meat- and fish-loving, and poverty-stricken ethnic minority people. This is evident in places like Bien Lac Nui Ong, which is a horse-shoe shaped reserve encircling 50,000 people. In 1994, up to November, there were 320 Wildlife Law violations by the local people in the Reserve, which led to the collection of fines totalling US\$60,000. Three persons were sentenced to 18-months' imprisonment for poaching. An Indian wildlife biologist, Shantini Dawson, recorded three incidents of tiger poaching in Vu Quang in a period of two years. The tigers were caught in snares and then shot.

### Conclusion

Conservation of the tiger and other large cats is going to be extremely difficult in Vietnam because of the high density of people ( $220/\text{km}^2$ ) and the magnitude of poaching of all forms of animal life. However, in some protected areas, the efforts and the achievements of the Vietnamese Government and the compliance of the people are unbelievably impressive. For example, to protect a  $60\text{ km}^2$  water catchment area, the core area of  $166\text{ km}^2$  Ben En National Park, which provides water to a  $21\text{ km}^2$  reservoir, 400 households with about 1,600 people were re-settled outside. The reservoir irrigates  $1,000\text{ km}^2$  of rice cultivation. Each family had asked for a compensation of US\$ 200, but were given US\$ 60 each.

During the training workshop it was decided that the participating wildlife managers would be provided with identification manuals for cats and other mammals in their ranges in order to improve collection of data. It is certain that with international support Vietnam will strive better for the conservation of its cats and other wildlife.

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## Fishing Cat in Peril in Java

The fishing cat in Java, *Prionailurus viverrinus rizophoreus*, is estimated to number fewer than 50 breeders, confined to a handful of isolated coastal wetlands, and must be considered critically endangered, according to a survey by wetland specialists (Melisch *et al.* 1995).

Only 41 of 581 coastal and inland sites surveyed had evidence of fishing cats, all in the area of Indramayu on the northern coast and Ujung Kulon National Park at the western tip of Java. No fishing cats were found further inland than 15 km from the sea or higher than 20 metres above sea-level.

The cat is threatened mainly by human encroachment into its habitat for agriculture and aquaculture. Its prime mangrove habitat now covers only 11% of the former area. The researchers point out that pollution by pesticide run-off from rice-fields and pesticide application to fishponds threatens top wetland predators who may accumulate toxins in fatty tissues and suffer decreased fertility or poisoning during periods of hunger. Fishing cats are also hunted and caught in fish traps.

The researchers, Roland Melisch, Priyo Budi Asmoro, Irwansyah Reza Lubis and Listya Kusumawardhani of the Asian Wet-

land Bureau, deduced that only four isolated subpopulations of the fishing cat exist in western Java, and the Bureau's data indicated no significant numbers in eastern Java. They suspect that surviving wild populations already suffer from immense genetic decline. Only in Ujung Kulon is the cat free from the threat of human pressure, they say.

The report calls for immediate conservation measures to safeguard the remaining fishing cat populations, including bans on hunting and implementation of existing animal and fur trade laws in known markets. It also proposes a public education campaign to create local pride in the fishing cat as the biggest feline predator on Java's northern coast.

### Reference

Melisch, R., Asmoro, P., Lubis, I., and Kusumawardhani L. 1995. Distribution and status of the fishing cat *Prionailurus viverrinus rizophoreus* Soe, 1936, in West Java, Indonesia. Faun. Abh. Tierd. Mus., Dresden, Germany.