



Rising Phoenix

Annual report 2019



Rising Phoenix in 2019 and the year ahead

Message from the Chairman

Incorporated in 2015, Rising Phoenix Co. Ltd. is a social enterprise created to support the conservation of the globally irreplaceable Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary. We propose combining the traditional donor approach with a private sector business model to secure the long-term conservation of the site. If we are able to accomplish this, it will be a milestone for conservation in Southeast Asia, where the business-as-usual model of the non-profit sector supporting governments has had limited success and requires a new approach.

So what was the progress in 2019 with our vision to create a well-managed and restored protected area that contributes to economic development?

Partnership is at the core of our mission, and we continued our close collaboration with BirdLife International and the Ministry of Environment. Responsibilities are shared, with Rising Phoenix assuming responsibility for law enforcement and re-wilding, while BirdLife manages the livelihoods programme and species monitoring. We both work in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment.

In 2019 we were able to share our vision with our local partners from the Department of Environment by showing them the notable successes that African Parks and the Government of Malawi has achieved at Majete game Reserve. Here African Parks has taken over full responsibility for the site on a long-term lease and are realizing great conservation success.

In 2019, under our pilot re-wilding project, we completed construction of our new aviary, and with Angkor Centre for Conservation of Biodiversity, began a release programme of large water birds - the success of which we have been able to monitor via GPS trackers.

We sank six bore wells at six key trapeangs to provide water through the dry season. We are monitoring their use via a camera trapping programme in collaboration with the University of Queensland.

We have invested in the enforcement programme, establishing a control centre, putting in a radio communication system that has site-wide overage, and with Frontline have continued a programme of intensive training of our staff. Sadly we were not able to expand the size of our enforcement team. This remains a priority for 2020.

Our basis of support has increased, and Ryan Cook, Tony Foster, Tina Ju and Simon Meng, and Ly Tran all came on board. A big thank you to all our supporters.

We completed our 501c registration in the United States of America and I encourage supporters to take full advantage of the opportunity!

Importantly in 2019, we entered into a partnership with Meng Hieng, a Cambodian entrepreneur and businessman with whom we are working to secure an agreement with the Government to manage the site. This is a key initiative as it provides a firm basis for moving ahead with achieving our vision.

Dominic Scriven OBE, 2019





Thank you to our supporters

Thank you Amanda, Valerie and Dominic Scriven, Dinh Thi Hoa and Jonathan Eames, Peter and Thuy Ryder, Tony Foster, Andrew Huntley and Pham Linh-Dan, Meng Hieng, Tina Ju and Simon Meng and Ly Tran. Thank you also to Ryan Cook and Susanna Kim-Bracke.



“Partnership is at the core
of our mission”





Our team

In 2019 our total staff grew to 35. We recently welcomed In Visatha (Law Enforcement Coordinator) [centre left], Sry Vuthy (Intelligence Officer) [centre], Bhavadhna Tola (Data Intelligence Officer) (bottom left) and Mem Manh (Logistics Administrator) [bottom right].

2019 in view

Our programme of work at Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary is a collaborative partnership with BirdLife International and the Ministry of Environment. At present Rising Phoenix leads on supporting law enforcement and re-wilding activities, while BirdLife leads on biodiversity monitoring and supporting livelihoods through Ibis Rice. Under this heading we summarise notable achievements during 2019.

Enforcement

At the Siem Pang field office an enforcement operations centre was constructed and a radio system installed. These will both enable more efficient deployment of men and resources and permit closer monitoring and support to our field teams.

Rising Phoenix, Royal Gendarmerie, and Department of Environment management staff received training from Frontline covering tactical patrol orders, intelligence gathering, patrol tactics, and crime scene documentation. In collaboration with Frontline, protocols have been completed for all aspects of the enforcement operation. Signage has now been widely posted along the boundaries of the protected area.

Closer analysis and monitoring of data collected by the SMART enforcement team members allows production of hotspot maps for issues like snaring to enable better enforcement outcomes.

Unfortunately in 2019 we were unable to double the size of enforcement ranger team as planned.



We have now requested 20 additional Royal Gendarmerie officers join the enforcement team. Strengthening the team remains a top priority.

The zonation plan for Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary was approved by the Prime Minister. This will allow for more effective enforcement operations.

Re-wilding

In 2019 under our pilot re-wilding project funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund we completed construction of our new aviary. Together with Angkor Centre for Conservation of Biodiversity, we began a programme of hard and soft release of Asian woolly neck and lesser adjutants storks. The birds are captive-bred or rescued individuals. Each is fitted with a GPS tracker before release to enable us to monitor their movements and survival.

We sank six bore wells at six key *trapeangs* (water holes) to provide water through the dry season and monitor their use via a camera trapping programme in collaboration with the University of Queensland. Although providing water holes in this manner is widespread in semi-arid and dry conditions in southern Africa, it is the first time it has been piloted in Southeast Asia.

Our re-wilding feasibility study was published in the *Cambodian Journal of Natural History*. The study recommends re-enforcing existing populations of Eld's deer and banteng and re-introducing the Siamese crocodile, which will be a priority project in 2020.



Cambodian Journal of Natural History



Butterflies, Snails & Fruit Flies
Aquatic Insects in Urban Ponds
Leaf Traits on the Bokor Plateau
Rewilding in Western Siem Pang

December 2019



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Species monitoring

The BirdLife field monitoring team begins the year and most of the dry season searching for vulture and white-shouldered ibis nests. In 2019 12 vulture nests were found, comprising ten slender-billed vulture and two red-headed vulture nests. A total of eight nests fledged eight chicks, while four nests failed. By the end of the nesting season in 2018, nine nests successfully fledged young (seven slender-billed vultures and two red-headed vultures) while four nests failed. So similar results over the last two years. Rising Phoenix constructed a new large vulture hide and the site of the vulture restaurant was changed.

A total of 28 white-shouldered ibis nests were found and 23 nests fledged 47 young, with four nests failing. This represents an increase on 2018. In 2019 we found 11 giant ibis nests, out of which seven fledged 11 young and four failed. This represents a decrease on 2018 when 12 nests fledged 17 chicks, and four nests failed. Giant ibis under performed in 2019, perhaps because of the prolonged and heavy rains and flooding experienced this year.



In 2009 we discovered a population of gaur in the wildlife sanctuary and we have been monitoring them visiting a salt lick since July. Gaur is considered Globally Vulnerable and a comprehensive camera trapping operation has been initiated to determine the size of the population. A spectacular male gaur, photographed as part of this study, is shown on the cover of this report.

The 2019 Eld's deer rapid survey counted a total of ten individuals - the lowest daily number of Eld's deer recorded in five years of survey effort. The total number of sightings was 32. It proved difficult to calculate the number of Eld's deer based on individual recognition features in 2019, so we did not attempt to do so. Although *El Nino* activity was forecast by the time of the survey, there had been significant rainfall throughout the survey area. The season did seem more advanced than in a typical year and perhaps because of this Eld's deer were harder to detect. For example, during the annual survey, only eight males were seen, compared to a total of 17 females.



“Giant ibis under performed in 2019, perhaps because of the prolonged and heavy rains”

“During the annual survey eight male Eld’s deer were seen, compared to a total of 17 females”





“During the 2019 season
256 families from four
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Livelihoods

In 2019 BirdLife further expanded the Ibis Rice programme, which is a collaboration with Samsum Mlup Prey and Ibis Rice Co. Ltd.. Villagers joining this scheme receive agricultural extension support and rice seed and are able to sell the resulting organic certified product at a premium to Ibis Rice Co. Ltd., provided they adhere to the terms of a signed agreement under which they agree to not hunt, log or encroach in the wildlife sanctuary.

First piloted at Khet Svay village in 2017, when fewer than 50 families participated and sold nine tonnes of high quality jasmine rice, the project has grown. In 2018 around 200 families from four villages registering for the scheme, producing 43 tonnes of rice. During the 2019 season 256 families from four villages sold 182 tonnes of Ibis Rice. We now plan to expand the scheme to the three remaining villages surrounding the wildlife sanctuary and to take uptake to over 50% of households in the four villages currently participating.

Hunting and snaring - continued challenges

Local villagers hunting with dogs and setting snares remain key enforcement issues that consumes a great deal of time and resources. To hunt larger quarry, villagers manufacture rifles powered by compressed air (a bicycle pump). Since they have only a short killing range, dogs are used to bring the quarry to bay from where it can be despatched. Our Eld's deer population is small and highly vulnerable to this kind of hunting. Several Eld's deer were hunted in 2019 and we obtained film of dogs killing a wild pig. We can only enforce a no-dogs policy once the bylaw is clearly understood by villagers and once our ranger team is strengthened sufficiently.

The insidious use of snares remains a great threat to wildlife throughout Cambodia, including in Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary. Recently a female clouded leopard was snared in the protected area. Due to the severity of her injuries it was necessary to amputate her right leg. Veterinarians at Phnom Tamao Zoo conducted the surgery. As if her suffering wasn't enough, she miscarried a foetus whilst undergoing the operation. Unfortunately she later passed-away.

Sometimes we do enjoy successes. A Critically Endangered Sunda pangolin, confiscated from hunters, after a short period of recuperation, was released in back into the Sanctuary.



“Recently a female clouded leopard was
snared in the protected area...Unfortunately
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Milestones for 2020

Budget and fund-raising

Our 2020 core budget is US\$ 660,000 and we are seeking to raise a similar amount from foundations and individuals. In 2020 we will be hosting our US board members at our safari camp to further develop our fund-raising strategy.

We have developed a second re-wilding proposal to the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund and expect to conclude an agreement with them in the second quarter for US\$ 180,000.

Agreements with partners

We will strive to complete an agreement with the Ministry of Environment in 2020 for our future work.

Strengthen enforcement activities

We will continue to strengthen the capability of the enforcement team at Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary.

Commence phase two of the re-wilding project

A second re-wilding project with a focus of preparing the O'Khampa River for the re-introduction of the Critically Endangered Siamese crocodile will begin by July.





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