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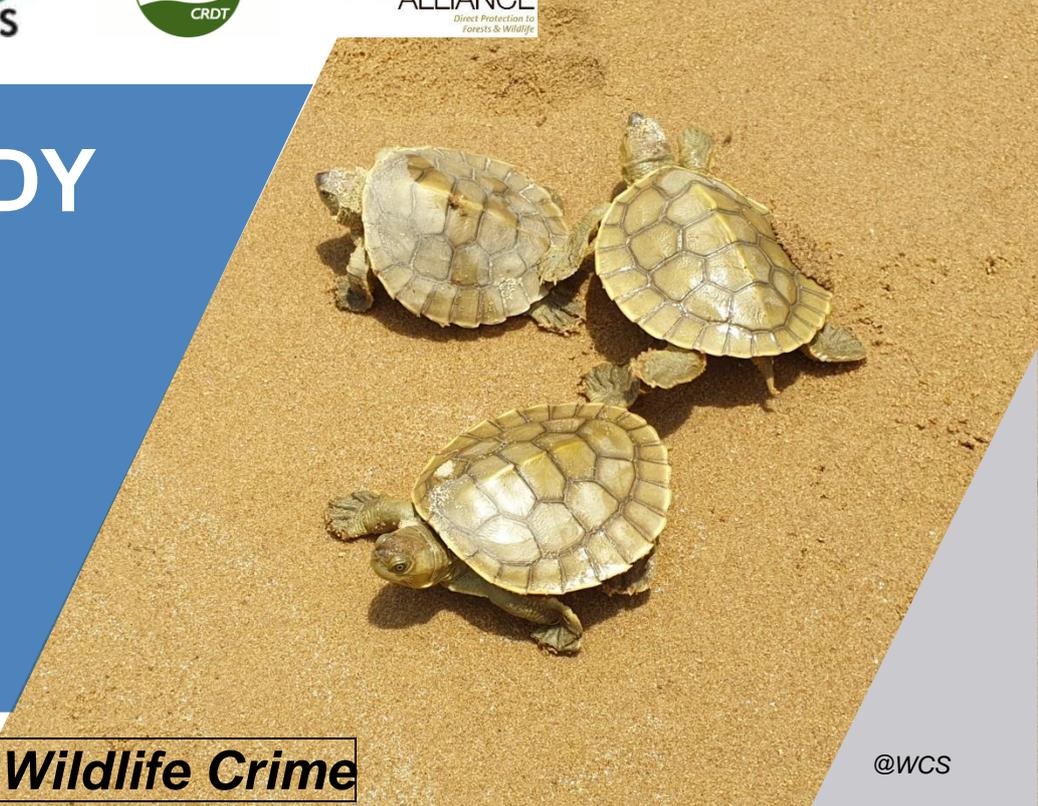


CASE STUDY

Cambodia

Endangered turtles and tortoises are protected and rescued, while judiciary actions are taken against large-scale wildlife traders

2019



Partners against Wildlife Crime

@WCS

Abstract

The project aims to disrupt illicit supply chains of wildlife from source to market by leveraging civil society partnership to increase the effectiveness of Government action. To achieve this objective, the work in Cambodia focusses on strengthening the protection of freshwater turtle source sites in Sre Ambel and Mekong rivers, enhancing enforcement against traffickers, increasing community participation in turtle protection and conservation, and improving the livelihood security of villagers in these two source areas.

Context

Freshwater turtles and tortoises are being driven to extinction as a result of illegal trade, with certain Asian species commanding a higher price per/kg than even rhino horn. These species are in demand primarily in China as pets, for traditional Chinese medicine, for meat, and increasingly now as long-term financial investment. Cambodia supports globally significant populations of a number of highly threatened turtles, now largely restricted to intact wetlands in the Mekong and Sre Ambel river systems. Logically, Cambodia has become a source for the illegal trade of turtles, but is also a transit country for turtle trafficked from Thailand and beyond on to Viet Nam and PR China.

Release of Royal turtles in a temporary enclosure in Sre Ambel river ©WCS



Objectives

- 1** TO ENHANCE PROTECTION IN KEY SOURCE SITES FOR FRESHWATER TURTLES IN CAMBODIA
- 2** TO INCREASE EFFECTIVENESS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AND JUSTICE SECTORS TO COMBAT WILDLIFETRAFFICKING
- 3** TO INCREASE TRANS-BOUNDARY COORDINATION TO COMBAT WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING BETWEEN MYANMAR, CAMBODIA, LAO PDR AND PR. CHINA



Mr. Chann Sopheap leading a WRRT rescue operation @WA

Results

- 1** **205 DAYS OF JOINT PATROLLING** achieved, covering 546 km largely on boat along the Sre Ambel and Mekong river systems. As a result of the increased intensity of patrolling, the level of threat per/km has been reduced 10-fold.
- 2** **443 HOUSEHOLDS** benefitting from livelihood development activities: incentive for nest protection, aquaculture development, vegetable gardening, etc.
- 3** **69 OPERATIONS AGAINST ILLEGAL TURTLE AND TORTOISE TRADERS** conducted, with 36% of those cases resulting in legal action against the perpetrators.
- 4** **53 TURTLE NESTS** protected by community members from nearby villages, as part of negotiated conservation agreements.
- 5** **2,259 INFORMATION REPORTS** recorded or received through the Wildlife Crime Hotline and other sources; following verification, those shared with law enforcement agencies resulted in some instances in law enforcement action including seizure, arrest and prosecution.



Testimonial

On 17th October, following a long investigation involving informants about a large-scale trader operating in Sihanoukville province, and in collaboration with local law enforcement agencies, a project team searched the house of a suspected trader. During the search, the Wildlife Rapid Rescue Team (WRRT) found and rescued 214 live turtles and tortoises (4 Asian box turtles, 128 Asian leaf turtles and 82 Elongated tortoises), 16 live Monitor lizards, and other live and dead wildlife items. The following day, the perpetrator was issued a transactional fine of 39,405,000 KHR (\$9,851) which he refused to pay, therefore the case went to the court and prosecution is ongoing. Mr. Chann Sopheap, the Chief of Endangered Species of the Fisheries Administration, said of this case: *“It sent a strong signal to other wildlife traders in the area, as this was exemplary operated, and that scared them. All authorities congratulated us on this job, including the local ones. All turtles that were confiscated are on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, so I am happy about this rescue. I believe that our work is and will help to decrease the illegal trade of turtles and tortoises and therefore, that we will see an increase of their population in Cambodia”.*

Joint patrolling on boat along Sre Ambel river ©WCS

