Perfect Mix of Animal Welfare & Conservation

Cuc Phong Endangered Primates Rescue Center

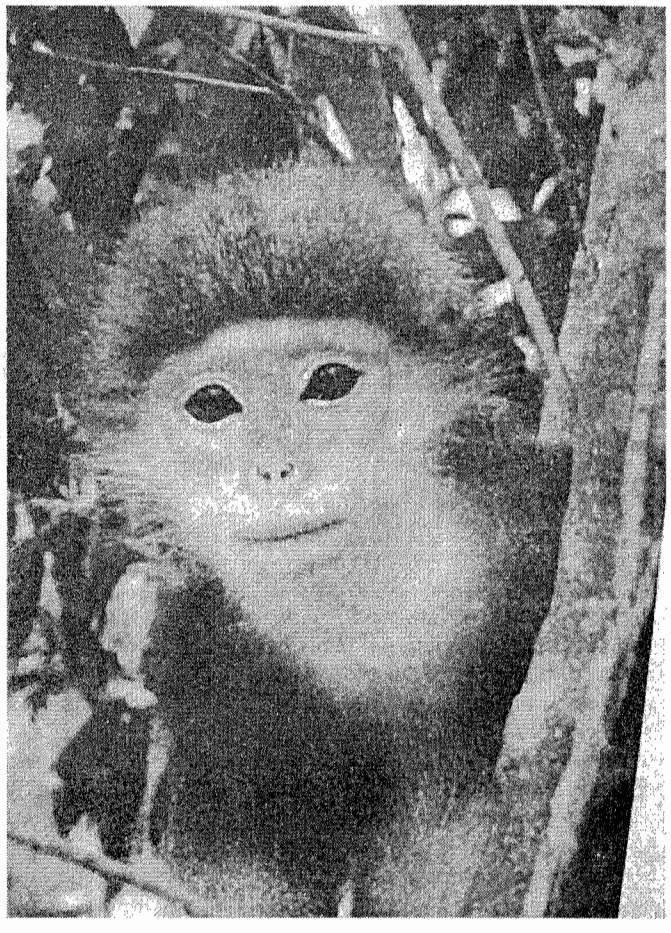
Sally Walker

The Cuc Phong National Park is located in the Northern part of Vietnam about 3 hours from Hanoi. A post-conference visit was arranged by the Saigon Zoo after the 8th South-East Asian Zoo Association Annual Conference in November 1999 and a group of us from Singapore Zoo, London Zoo, Australian NGOs, and Zoo Outreach Organisation had the privilege of visiting this beautiful park. The Park is sufficient cause to take the trip to Hanoi but the real reason for the visit was an amazing facility located on the pheriphery of the park, that is the Endangered Primate Rescue Centre EPRC.

Endangered Primate Rescue Centre (EPRC)

Entering the park area you might pass EPRC without noticing, as their sign is not ostentatious and this is deliberate. EPRC does not discourage tourists, in fact some of their income to run the centre comes from tourists who are considerate enough to donate funds for the time EPRC staff take to show them around and to purchase EPRC's posters, t-shirts and stuffed toys. EPRC does not want to be overwhelmed with tourists, however, or to have a crowd of people around at all hours like a zoo. The whole point of the centre would be compromised if this was the case. A couple of groups a day for a few minutes and none on some days are about average and this doesn't disturb the animals.

Tilo Nadler is a German zoology researcher who never planned to spend much of his life running an endangered primate centre in Vietnam. He is a strength and soul of the project. (Photo : Manuela Kloden, courtesy IPPL Newsletter.)



Grey-shanked douc langur, a new species of primate described from Vietnam only in 1997. (Photo : Tilo Nadler, Courtesy IPPL News)

Every group is taken around by senior staff and carefully monitored. The problems of the park, of Vietnamese development, of wildlife trade, and other factors which impinge on the survival of some of the world's rarest primate populations are related to groups at whatever level they require. A number of groups are highly aware and have come to Vietnam for the sole purpose of seeing the EPRC.

History

In 1996 Vietnam's Prime Minister recommended that several rescue centres be established in Vietnam for confiscated wild animals. In 1993 the Forestry Ministry had signed an agreement with a number of international organisations to set up the EPRC at Cuc Phong National Park. This Centre maintains a few species of primates some six species of which can be found in captivity only at this centre. The Centre takes in only certain types of primates (gibbons, leaf-eaters and lorises) that have been confiscated from trade, private keeping or hunting.

Breeding groups have been established and five species have been bred at the centre, two of them for the first time in captivity, the Delacour langur *(Trachypithecus delacouri)* and Hatinh langur *(Trachypithecus francoisi hatinhensis)*. These and other rare primates at the Centre will be used to establish stable populations which can be released in the wild to strengthen natural populations. A semi-free facility near the centre has been established on 1.5 ha. of primary forest and fenced so that the primates can both be studied in near natural conditions and also trained before release. Many foreign zoos and conservation groups are covering the expense of this facility, providing animal technicians to train the Vietnamese staff for this sensitive job, and just plain volunteers to help with the enormous work of protecting and caring for sensitive and rare species.

In 1997 EPRC was made an official department of the National Park, a decision of the Vietnamese Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development which increased the centre's duties. In addition to rescuing, rehabilitating and breeding rare primates EPRC is also responsible for conducting or helping with status surveys of primates in the wild. Three parties are included in an agreement or Memorandum of Operation, e.g. the Director of the Cuc Phong National Park, a Foreign Supervisor (that is Tilo Nadler, see photo, who started the entire project) and an International Coordination Committee with representatives from Europe, North America and Australia.

Trade

According to EPRC and IPPL Reports, there is a lucrative trade in wildlife in Vietnam which runs in the thousands of animals every year. The story is familiar -- traders and their associates have better facilities than the enforcement agencies which are expected to catch them. Fines are very low compared to the enormous profits to be had and can be considered by the traders as part of their expenses without really making a dent in their profit. In Vietnam animals are used for food, pets and medicine both within the country and outside, although reports indicate that 90% is for outside the country.

There are strong laws and penalties forbidding the sale of wild animals and animal parts but they are difficult to enforce. Vietnam is a signatory of CITES since 1994.

A vendor from the Dong Xuan market in Hanoi selling a young Red-shanked douc langur which is a protected species. Photo by Tilo Nadler compliments of IPPL News.

The EPRC jumps into this thorney issue when possible by doing reasearch, informing key individuals of their results and organising letter writing campaigns which have been very effective. The hundereds of animals in the Dong Xuan animal market in Hanoi were noted and reported by Tilo Nadler, Director of the Centre who initiated a letter writing campaign which seems to have had some good effect, at least on protected species. EPRC is a primate centre but takes in other animals from time to time and maintains a keen interest in protecting all wild animals and habitats in the country.

Veterinary problems

The primates in the EPRC have come from several origins, none of which guaranteed the best health scenario for the animals, to put it mildly. Some were kept by Vietnamese zoos, some by traders, some from Hanoi's notorious Dong Xuan Market some by private persons as pets, and so on. The animals are frequently dehydrated, parasite ridden, hungry, malnourished, depressed and ill for a variety of reasons -- from eating the wrong food to being crowded with other animals for days and all the expected effects.

There is a full - time veterinarian on 24 hour duty at the centre who takes the animals which come in from such conditions through a rigourous medical procedure. For some of these animals the survival rate is not good. The doug langurs are the most sensitive and often die within the first two weeks of their arrival. If the animal survives three months, it is considered as a "surviving animal". Should it expire after that it is considered to have died from causes other than its situation previous to arrival at the centre. Of the different origin of animals, those brought by tourists have the lowest survival rate (38%) and those kept in zoos next with (50%) and those confiscated 80%. The confiscated animals have been out of the wild a shorter length of time as compared to the others and not exposed, perhaps, to so many other animals with diseases or wrong food.

The veterinarian at EPRC has written a detailed article about the health problems of the douc langurs of which a xerox can be obtained -- see note below.

Semi-wild facility

To the left of the main enclosures, the station house and quarantine station, the EPRC has a semi-wild enclosure which encompasses a 2.0 ha hill just touching the Park. Electrical and safety fences keep endangered primates in and predators out.

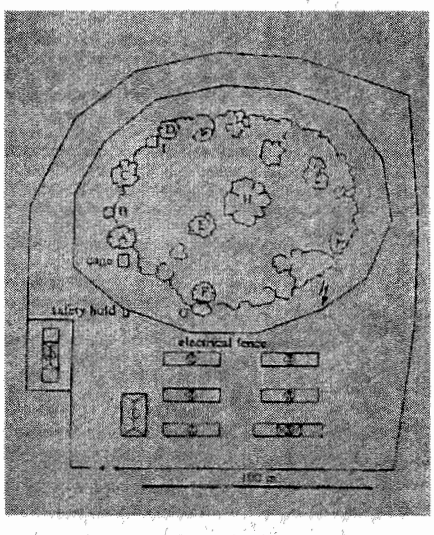
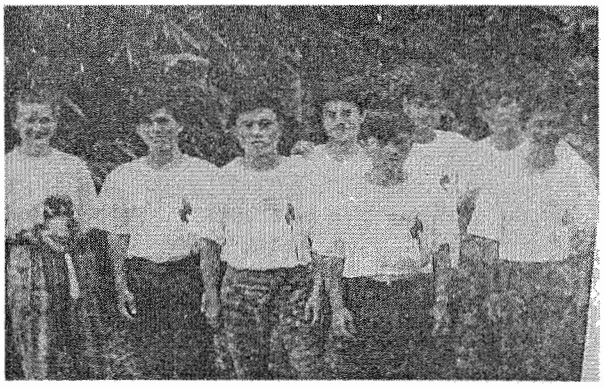


Diagram of semi-wild facility. EPRC Newsletter.

The centre's aim is to rescue endangered primates that have been confiscated through trade or other illegal ownership, to establish strong captive populations of several species

which can reinforce *in situ* populations with captive-bred animals. It was for the latter objective that the semi-wild facility was created and in July 1998 the facility welcomed two southern White-cheeked gibbons. These animals were still doing well in the facility in November 1999 and a wealth of information relevant to release of gibbons into the wild from observations and research has been generated. The centre is still not ready to release the animals to the forest and when it is, a "soft" release will be arranged. For now, there are still problems to overcome and much more to learn from the experience of keeping these primates.

EPRC claims their strength is in their staff (right) which are almost all Vietnamese villagers trained by expert German zookeepers and other animal technicians.



Expert zookeeper staff at the EPRC, all trained and dedicated local people

Conclusion

In the world today resources are very limited. If this centre kept each and every primate confiscated regardless of species rareity, endemicity, degree of threat, etc. the critically endangered and endemic primates of Vietnam would have a much lower chance of survival in the long term. The EPRC does not take in common species of primates but devotes its entire energy and resources to those which are on the verge of extinction.

In India we are going in the opposite direction. Rescue centres are being set up for any common or endangered animals which come into custody at a great cost. Even they are being set up in zoos where, although infrastructure is provided, additional keeping staff and vets are not. How many animals can be cared for their whole life in this way? Before these projects go further, we should think and look at other role models.

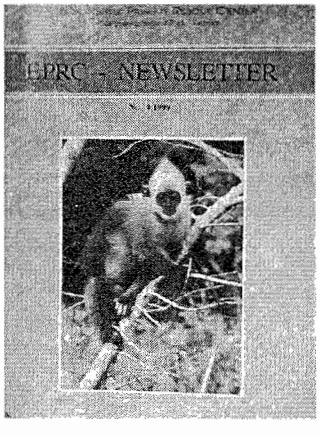
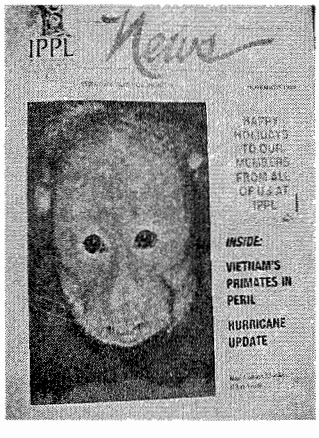
Register of primates held by EPRC since inception

Delacour langur (*Trachypithecus delacouri)* -- 4.3.0 + 7	[4 confiscated; 1 brought by villagers; 2 born EPRC]
Hatinh langur (*Trachypithecus francoisi hatinhensis*) -- 9.12.0 = 21	[5 conf.; 9 tourist/gift; 1 Hanoi Zoo & 6 born EPRC]
Black langur (*Trachypithecus francoisi ebenus*) -- 1.0.0 = 1	brought by tourist
Laos langur (*Trachypithecus francoisi laotum)* -- 1.0.0.=1	confiscated
Phayre's langur (*Trachypithecus phayrei*) -- 2.2.0 = 4	[2 confiscated; 1 brought by tourist; 1 private gift.
Golden headed langur (*Trachypithecus poliocephalus*) -- 0.1.0=1	confiscated
Tonkin snub-nosed lnagur (*Rhinopithecus avunculus)* -- 1.0.0= 1	[brought by foreigner]
Red-shanked douc langur (*Pygathrix nemaeus*) -- 12.9.0= 21	[5 confiscated;13 brought by tourists; 3 born EPRC]
Grey-shanked douc langur (*Pygathrix cinereus*) -- 6.0.0 = 6	[5 confiscated; 1 from Quy Nhon Zoo]
Black-shanked douc langur (*Pygathrix nigripes*) -- 0.3.0=3	[3 Suoi-Tien, Saigon]
White-cheeked gibbon (*Hylobates leucogenys leucogenys*) -- 0.2.0=2	[2 kept by a foreigner]
Southern white-cheeked gibbon (*Hylobates leucogenys siki*) -- 3.5.0d=8	[2 confiscated; 6 kept by foreigner or brought by tourist]
Gabriella's crested gibbon (*Hylobates gabriellae*) -- 0.2.0=2	[1 confiscated; 1 brought by tourist]
Slow loris (*Nycticebus coucang*) -- 1.1.1=3	[1 confiscated; 1 brought by tourist; born EPRC]
Pygmy loris (*Nycticebus pygmaeus*) -- 4.4.1=	[2 confiscated; 3 kept / brought by tourist; born EPRC]

Note :

Much of the material for this article was extracted or checked against the articles in two newsletters which contain a wealth of information about rescue operations and centres. These are the Newsletter of the EPRC and of the IPPL, the International Primate Protection League which carries an excellent article by a member who volunteered at EPRC for several weeks.

An excellent article about the semi-wild facility has been written by technical staff of the centre which appears in the recent issue of the EPRC Newsletter. A copy of this article has been included in a compendium for Rescue Centres compiled by ZOO with technical assistance from UFAW and CBSG and many other sources. Please look for information on how to obtain this volume in this issue. Should readers want a xerox copy of the EPRC Newsletter or any article they can write to ZOO, send Rs. 25 in stamps for the whole magazine and Rs. 8 in stamps for the one article.

OR, better, you can write directly to the Endangered Primate Rescue Centre and make a donation to their wonderful work. The address is
Endangered Primate Rescue Centre (EPRC)
c/o Tilo Nadler, Director, Cuc Phuong National Park
Ninh Binh Province, Nho Quan Distt., Vietnam

Also, the International Primate Protection League takes in members for which they get the newsletter. IPPL conducts projects and programmes one of which is to raise money for worthy causes such as EPRC. The address is IPPL, POB 766, Summerville, S. C. 29484 USA.