



Mekong Wetlands  
Biodiversity Conservation and  
Sustainable Use Programme



## Back from the brink

Recent scientific surveys confirm that wild, highly endangered Siamese crocodiles still exist in Viet Nam. The surveys identified fresh tracks and observed an adult individual during a night-time observation exercise.

These findings are an amazing discovery for Viet Nam as the Siamese Crocodile (*Crocodylus siamensis*) was thought to be extinct in the wild, and is ranked Critically Endangered by IUCN – The World Conservation Union.

The surveys were instigated in December 2004 reports of wild freshwater crocodiles were uncovered from local villagers and fishers. A ten day field survey was arranged to confirm and assess the status of the crocodiles. These surveys involved a range of standardized scientific methods, including daytime searches for sightings of crocodiles and their signs (e.g. dung, tracks, slides, burrows, nests, etc.), night-time spotlighting to search for 'eye-shine' and interviews with the local people.

One fresh track of a large individual was found on a steep swamp bank during a daytime search, while a direct observation of an adult individual was made during a night-time spotlighting survey. Research findings reveal that there is a small group of crocodiles living in the wild but their survival is highly threatened given heavy pressures of illegal hunting, habitat destruction and over-fishing.

Urgent effort is presently needed to save the last wild crocodiles in Viet Nam. Current work on a conservation action plan is being conducted and awareness raising activities about the global significance of the crocodiles and the need for their conservation will be implemented. These surveys also suggest other potential sites for further crocodile surveys in Viet Nam.

The surveys are a joint collaboration of the Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP), the Institute of Tropical Biology (ITB), Fauna and Flora International (FFI) Cambodia and local government authorities. The Siamese Crocodile is also one of the four designated flagship species of the MWBP's species conservation work in the Lower Mekong Region.

The Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP) is a joint programme of the four riparian governments of the Lower Mekong Basin – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam – managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), IUCN – The World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Mekong River Commission (MRC), in collaboration with other key stakeholders. With funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP, the Royal Netherlands Government, MRCS, the Water and Nature Initiative (WANI) and other donors, the programme addresses the most critical issues for the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in the Mekong wetlands.