



Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme

First Assessment of Herpetofauna of the Lower Songkhram Basin Undertaken

Between 11-15 September, 2006, the MWBP Lower Songkhram Basin Demonstration Site was fortunate to be able to host Khun Tanya Chan-ard, a leading herpetologist based at the National Science Museum in Bangkok. Khun Tanya and two assistants (Sanchai and Lek) spent five days in the field, day and night, searching out some of the amphibian and reptilian fauna of several key sites or “hotspots” of biodiversity, identified in an earlier dry season field study under the Wetlands Inventory, Assessment and Monitoring (WIAM) component of MWBP. On Friday 15th September he gave a brief presentation and feedback session on his initial findings which produced some interesting results.



Team members boarding a boat for an evening foray for herpetofauna in receding floodwaters of the Nam Oon River, a major tributary of the Songkhram River

Previously, any information relating to herpetofauna (i.e. amphibians and reptiles) was extremely scarce in the LSB and only a handful of species had been officially recorded as being present at Beung Khong Long Ramsar Site in the northeastern sector of the basin. Hence, the rapid assessment undertaken by Khun Tanya and team has been very important in increasing our knowledge and understanding of a generally little studied and poorly understood floodplain wetland taxa. The

A JOINT UNDP - IUCN - MRC GEF-FUNDED PROGRAMME



CAMBODIA



LAO PDR



THAILAND



VIETNAM



IUCN
The World Conservation Union





survey in particular aimed to record both direct sightings and capture where possible herpetofaunal specimens, plus obtain local knowledge from riparian villagers of past and present species types and abundance, to help assess their conservation significance.

The wetland sites visited included the unique flooded swamp forest and lake called Nong Chaiwan at Ban Don Daeng, Sri Songkhram District, Nakhon Phanom and a small remnant sacred seasonally flooded forest next to the Songkhram River at Ban Tha Gon, Agad Amnuay District, Sakhon Nakhon Province. Each day a different site was assessed in daytime and later with lamps at night, while local markets in Sri Songkhram and Agad Amnuay were visited for records of herpetofaunal specimens for sale. Indeed, it was clear that certain species of wild frogs form an important part of local diets and earn some villagers a considerable income on a seasonal basis. Some species of amphibian and reptile are sold directly to middlemen traders, who regularly come into the village to purchase frogs, lizards, turtles and in some cases, snakes. Some are available year round, whilst others are limited to certain seasons, and like fish many species of amphibians and reptiles undertake seasonal migrations to complete their life cycles or take advantage of favourable habitats for breeding and feeding.

A brief summary of results obtained of herpetofaunal biodiversity are shown in table below.

Taxa	No. of species observed or collected	No. of species recorded from anecdotal evidence
Amphibians	12	16
Reptiles	22	34

Whilst some species are common and clearly not threatened by gross landuse and habitat changes that have taken place in the LSB, others are more sensitive and found at only a few sites e.g. *ngu luam* (Asian python) and *laen* (monitor lizard). Many species appear to be associated with the seasonally flooded forest (*paa boong paa thaam*), which is currently under many pressures to its integrity. However, Khun Tanya was pleasantly surprised to find communities undertaking their own conservation efforts of herpetofauna, such as butterfly lizards (*yae*) at Ban Dong San School and *laen* in the sacred forest of Ban Yang Ngoi. It is now hoped that there will be a follow-up visit of herpetofauna during the 2007 dry season, which should extend the list of species known from the Lower Songkhram Basin wetlands complex.



Some of the herpetofaunal biodiversity uncovered in the LSRB wetlands

