30 YEARS STRONG

Partnering for Harmony between People & Nature

WWF-VIET NAM

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Partnering
for Harmony
between
People & Nature

In 1985, WWF became one of the first international non-government organizations to work in Viet Nam. That year, WWF began working on a national conservation strategy and since then has collaborated with the Vietnamese government and its partners on a diversity of environmental issues throughout the nation. Viet Nam is one of the world's richest biodiversity hotspots. Our mission is to protect the country's abundant wildlife and natural resources, and reduce its environmental footprint, for the benefit of this and future generations.

ABOUT THIS BOOK: This book highlights WWF-Viet Nam's achievements and impacts since 1985 across its priority landscapes and sites: the Central Annamites Landscape (CAL), the Mekong Delta Landscape (MDL), Marine programme and Yok Don National Park (YDNP). The book will also showcase our work nationally and regionally in the areas of Marine, Freshwater, Climate and Energy, Food, Forests and Biodiversity.

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ASSOC. PROF. DR. NGUYEN CHU HOI
PERMANENT VICE PRESIDENT
VIET NAM FISHERIES SOCIETY (VINAFIS)

WWF-VIET NAM HAS MADE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS to the protection of biodiversity and the environment for over 30 years.

Since 1985, the organization and its partners have carried out numerous significant studies, contributing to the development of conservation strategies in key areas especially in the Central Truong Son Range. WWF has also promoted cross-border cooperation with neighbouring countries to combat the illegal wildlife trade. These cross-border collaborations could lead to a better future for the elephants in Yok Don, and there is hope that we can reintroduce tigers in the coming decades.

WWF was also one of the first organizations to develop a conservation strategy for the Mekong Delta to protect its fragile ecosystem against threats such as rising sea levels due to climate change, dam construction upstream, and unsustainable agricultural practices. Scientific initiatives, such as establishing a sand bank and restoring species like the Sarus crane, showcase the organization's effective, innovative and persistent conservation efforts.

We also know WWF for its first initiatives to conserve sea turtles in Con Dao, which later was replicated in other regions in Viet Nam. In the early 1990s, while the country had not had a protected marine system, WWF conducted numerous studies to assess marine biodiversity, which later served as a basis for identifying priority conservation areas. The organization was the first to support the Viet Nam government to develop a master plan for the marine protected area system in the country. In recent years, WWF has worked with the government, community and businesses to address plastic pollution, advising and supporting the government in international commitments.

In addition to direct conservation solutions, WWF promotes sustainable livelihoods within communities, helping to stabilise and improve local living conditions. This approach helps prevent illegal or unsustainable resource exploitation by empowering local communities, including indigenous groups, to take ownership of natural resources.

Viet Nam is currently facing a dual threat: biodiversity loss, climate change and unsustainable use of natural resources. In recent years, the government has made many decisions and taken actions to address these issues. However, we cannot tackle these challenges alone and need the involvement of all sectors of society.

If more individuals and organizations act and are inspiring like WWF, we will make changes in this pivotal decade of biodiversity.

Sincerely,
Nguyen Chu Hoi

VAN NGOC THINH

CEO, WWF-VIET NAM

AS 2025 MARKS THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF WWF'S OFFICIAL PRESENCE IN VIET NAM, we are proud to present this book, which captures the triumphs and challenges of three decades of dedication to protecting our natural wonders. We invite you to journey through landscapes teeming with biodiversity and culture, meet the inspiring people of Viet Nam's diverse ethnic groups, and reflect on the progress we have made together. But first and foremost, we want to express our heartfelt gratitude to all who have stood by our side on this extraordinary journey.

We deeply appreciate the unwavering support of our government leaders—without their trust and partnership, we would not have reached this milestone. We are honoured to have contributed to groundbreaking initiatives, including the first conservation plan for the Central Annamites, as well as advising on vital international commitments like the Leaders' Pledge for Nature and the Net Zero targets.

We thank our partners and communities, whose courage and collaboration have made our conservation efforts possible. Together, we have built new initiatives that require bold ideas and unwavering commitment. Your dedication ensures that the seeds we planted have taken root and are making lasting changes in both nature and communities.

To our donors and supporters, we are deeply grateful for the trust you have placed in us, enabling us to turn vision into action and create tangible, meaningful impacts. Your support has allowed us to transform businesses, improve livelihoods, and protect the incredible natural heritage of Viet Nam.

Lastly, we extend our heartfelt thanks to the staff, both past and present, whose passion, expertise, and tireless work have been the driving force behind our mission. They are the soul of this organization, shaping a future where people and nature thrive together.

As we enter a critical decade for biodiversity conservation, the choices we make today will shape the future of our planet. WWF-Viet Nam is committed to standing alongside the government and the people of Viet Nam to protect the nation's rich biodiversity and to secure a sustainable future for all.

Thank you again for your trust, support, and belief in our shared mission. With your continued support, we are ready to make bigger changes in the next chapter.

Sincerely,

Van Ngoc Thinh

1985

Sets foot in Viet Nam

WWF and government partners began carrying out biodiversity research in Viet Nam to identify conservation issues and actions.

1995

Official registration

WWF signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Vietnamese government, affirming its commitment to preserve the country's biodiversity and build a sustainable future. This marked the official start of operations for WWF in Viet Nam.

Establishes Biodiversity Conservation programme in Central Annamites

WWF established its first Central Annamites project to enhance protection for Bach Ma National Park - an area of 54,000 hectares in the coastal mountainous zone. The project had a special focus on the needs of local people and developed a well-regarded ecotourism plan.

1996

Starts Yok Don National Park project in Central Highlands

The first project in the Central Highlands focused on the Eastern Plains Landscape, introducing participatory management and landscape ecology concepts to Viet Nam's protected areas, including Yok Don National Park. Since then, there have been ongoing activities to protect habitat and endangered species, especially wild elephants, leading to WWF establishing an official office in 2016.

1990

Starts Pre-registration Project

WWF implemented its first project, Viet Nam: Biodiversity Conservation Studies to research the distribution, diversity and conservation status of species in forest reserves and protected areas. Data was used in its action plans within Viet Nam, Indochina and for species conservation programmes.

1992

Discovers big mammals

Three large mammals - Saola (1992); Giant Muntjac (1994) and Truong Son Muntjac (1997) were discovered in the Central Annamites. The three were new to science, a feat that many thought was next to impossible. These significant discoveries demonstrate Viet Nam's rich diversity of species and habitats, which led to the country's first National Biodiversity Strategy and drew global conservation attention.

Starts first marine project

WWF started to collect information on marine areas in Viet Nam including Cat Ba, Hon Mun and Con Dao. At that time, there was no marine protected area system in Viet Nam despite the long and rich coastline and large offshore archipelago of islands. The information laid a significant foundation to initiate marine conservation programmes for Viet Nam.

1997

Establishes Southern Landscape programme

Biggest ever funded project for WWF-Viet Nam to expand our work in the southern landscape, at the newly extended protected area of Cat Tien National Park, where the last Javan rhinos lived in Viet Nam.

2006

Develops Mekong Delta strategy

WWF, one of the first NGOs to recognise the emerging threats to the Mekong Delta, put in place a strategy to support communities and the government to transition to sustainable, climate-resilient food production, better management of protected areas, and restoration of critical habitats.

2009

Launches Earth Hour campaign in Viet Nam

The lights-off event, started in Sydney in 2007, to raise awareness of people about climate change impacts was launched in Viet Nam. In its first year, six cities and provinces joined the campaign with support from MONRE and MOIT. Since then EH has become the biggest environmental movement, celebrated all over the country.

2011

Javan rhino declared extinct

The Javan rhino is declared extinct in Viet Nam. Habitat loss was the key factor, as well as inadequate law enforcement, land encroachment, and infrastructure development inside and near protected areas. These lessons urged WWF to establish community forest guard teams in the Saola Nature Reserves in Thua Thien Hue and Quang Nam provinces.

2018

Develops Organizational Development programme

WWF-Viet Nam develops its Organization Development programme to enhance its effectiveness in delivering conservation impacts, meeting global standards, and its new direction while harnessing new opportunities and challenges.

Starts working on marine plastics

The first plastics project, funded by the USAID Municipal Waste Recycling Programme, was "Phu Quoc – Toward Plastic Free Island" (2018-2020). The successes of the project have created a strong foundation for WWF-Viet Nam's plastic programme.

2019

Builds government partnerships

Establishing long-term cooperative relationships with two main central partners, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (2019) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (2022), through MOUs.

2012

RAMSAR established

Tram Chim National Park (NP) became the first Ramsar site in Viet Nam with the support of WWF. It resulted from an MOU signed between WWF and the National Biodiversity Conservation Agency, under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, to support the efforts of five wetland areas in the Mekong Delta to pursue Ramsar designation. Four others have been recognised as Ramsar sites since then and another is underway.

2015

Develops the organization's first Strategic Plan

WWF-Viet Nam developed its first strategic plan to chart a sustainable path forward in conservation in the country.

2022

Rewilding Programme Starts in the Central Annamites

WWF-Viet Nam, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Bach Ma National Park, Re:wild and the Asian Turtle Programme initiated a program for sustainable, long-term breeding and releasing for four endangered species, including the saola in the Central Annamites.

Doubles funding

WWF-Viet Nam's funding doubled from US$10M to US$20M in one year, making WWF-Viet Nam the largest Country Office within the WWF Network and the second-largest INGO in Viet Nam.

2023

Strategic plan moves to three pillars: Central Annamites, Mekong Delta & Marine

The organization developed a simpler and clearer strategy for impact landscape programmes, including the Central Annamites and Mekong Delta landscapes and the Marine Programme.

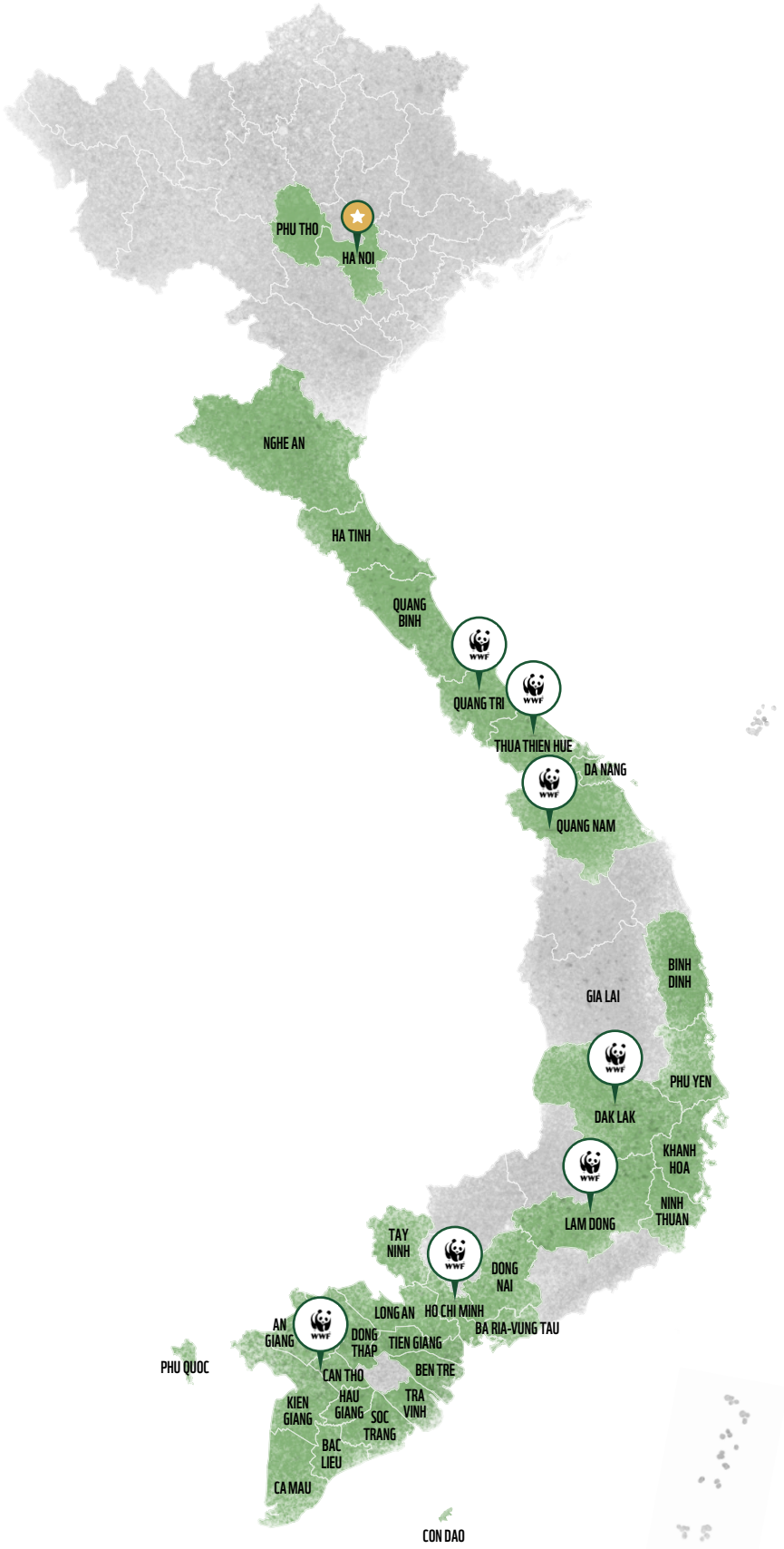
LEGEND

WWF-VIET NAM'S OFFICES

WWF-VIET NAM'S HEADQUARTERS

WWF-VIET NAM'S CURRENT WORKING AREAS

* THIS MAP INTENDS TO PRESENT THE WORKING AREAS AND OFFICES OF WWF IN VIET NAM AND DOES NOT REPRESENT THE ENTIRE AREA OF VIET NAM. THE MAP IS UPDATED UNTIL APRIL 2025.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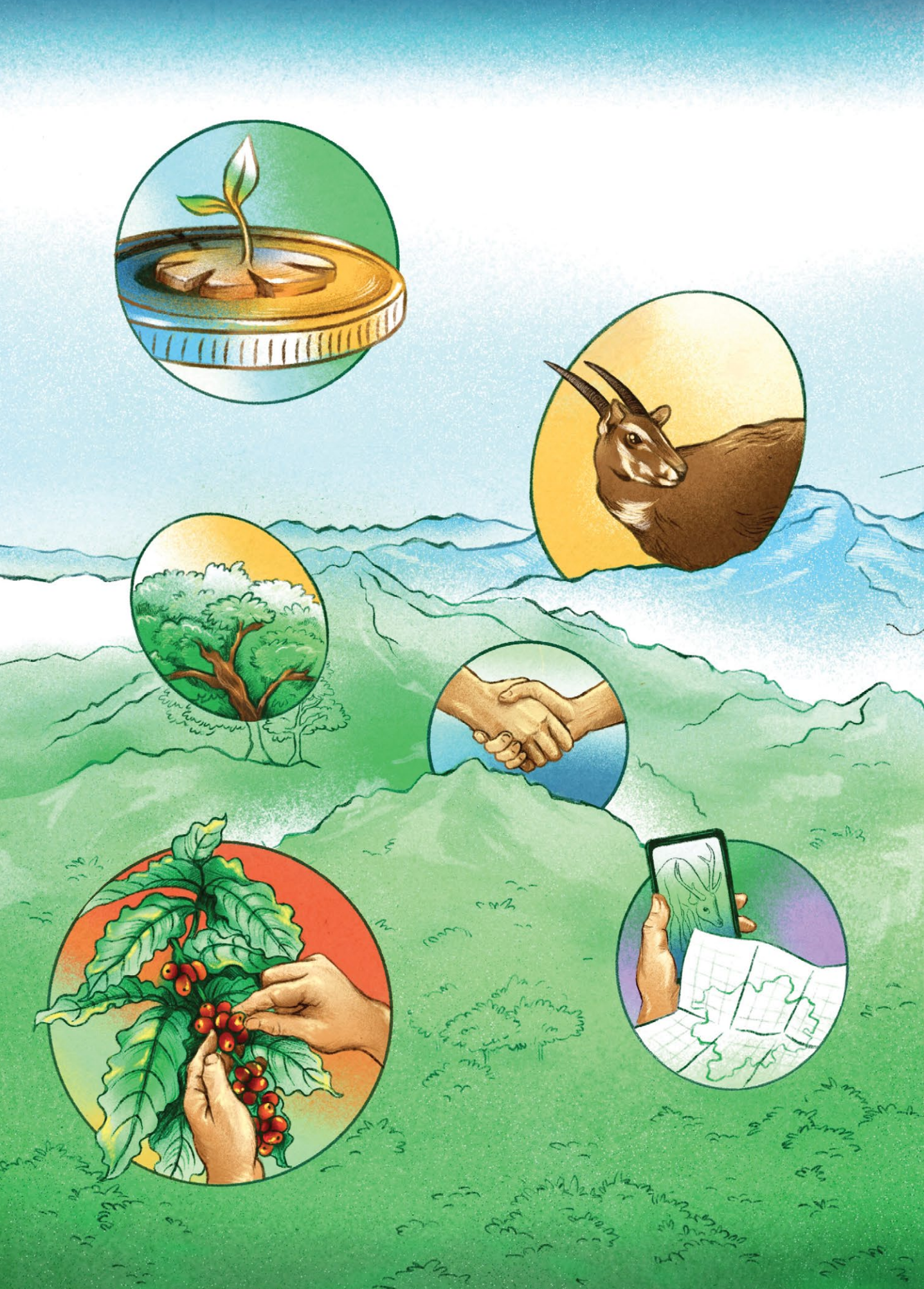


CHAPTER 1

The Central Annamites— The Rewilding Landscape

The Central Annamites

THE CENTRAL ANNAMITES, straddling the border between Viet Nam and Laos, are one of Asia's largest natural forest areas. This rugged, breathtaking landscape connects different forest ecosystems from the top of the mountains to the coast and hosts the Tam Giang Lagoon - the largest brackish water lagoon in Southeast Asia. Home to 134 mammal species, over 500 bird species, and 902 endemic plant species, the landscape is a living treasure trove of biodiversity and plays a vital role in regulating the Earth's climate. Recognised as one of WWF's Global 200 Ecoregions, this ecosystem isn't just important—it's irreplaceable.

But the Central Annamites are facing mounting challenges. Reduced wildlife population due to poaching, habitat loss and degradation due to illegal logging, and unsustainable harvesting, made worse by climate change, are putting immense pressure on this landscape. The wildlife and forests are struggling to survive in the face of these threats, making conservation here more urgent than ever.

Since 1985, WWF has been working to protect the Central Annamites. We have learned that saving this transboundary landscape requires large-scale action and a system-wide approach. This isn't just about preserving nature—it's about showing how biodiversity and healthy ecosystems can benefit communities and drive sustainable development.

A major part of our work focuses on restoring and protecting wildlife populations. Wildlife are the guardians of the ecosystem, and without them, the

(ABOVE)

FERN TREE IN THE CENTRAL ANNAMITES.
© WWF-US / JUSTIN MOTT

forests cannot thrive. We're working to rewild key species, protect their habitats, and strengthen enforcement against illegal activities. At the same time, we're disrupting the global illegal wildlife trade through the Viet Nam hub by collaborating with Laos and Cambodia on cross-border enforcement and reducing the demand for wildlife products.

But conservation is not limited to protected areas. We are promoting an integrated landscape approach, where the value of nature and nature-based solutions are considered in every decision. By partnering with governments, other development partners and businesses, we aim to create win-win solutions that benefit both people and the environment. With the support of impact investors like the Landscape Resilience Fund and the Dutch Fund for Climate and Development, we are driving initiatives that are scalable, adaptive, and climate-resilient.

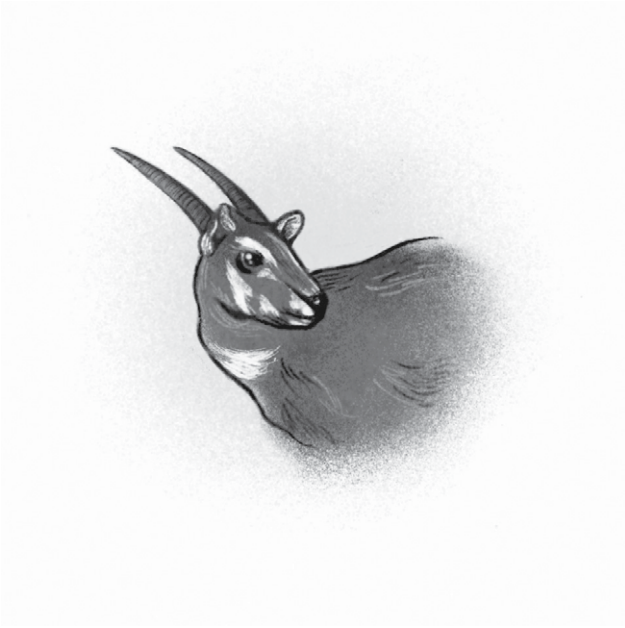
Looking ahead, WWF is preparing for the Viet Nam for Life initiative, an ambitious 20-year conservation plan launching in 2025. This blueprint will combine innovative funding, collaboration, and science-based solutions to secure a sustainable future for the Central Annamites Landscape (CAL).

The Central Annamites are more than just a biodiversity hotspot—they are a lifeline for people, wildlife, and the planet. Together, we can protect this incredible landscape and ensure it thrives for generations to come.

01

In Viet Nam, a search for the elusive saola

By Sandy Ong for World Wildlife Magazine, Summer 2024 Issue



(LEFT)
SAOLA (*PSEUDORYX NGHETINHENSIS*), ALSO KNOWN AS THE VU QUANG OX
© DAVID HULSE

CONSERVATIONISTS AREN'T GIVING UP hope that the mammal still exists in the Annamite Mountains.

In the 25 years that he's been with WWF, Ngoc Thinh has one date that stands out in his mind: Sept. 7, 2013. Thinh, WWF-Viet Nam's CEO, was at a conference when he received a message with a picture attached.

The image, captured at sundown by a camera trap in central Viet Nam, showed the lush understory and forest floor in a remote part of Quang Nam province, close to the Lao PDR border. But what took Thinh's breath away and almost brought him to tears was the large antelope-like mammal skirting the right edge of the frame, a creature so rare its nickname is the "Asian unicorn."

When the saola (*Pseudoryx nghetinhensis*) was first discovered by the scientific community in 1992 by a joint team from WWF and the Viet Nam government, it was the first large mammal new to science in more than 50 years.

> “ The saola is the mascot and flagship species of the Annamites [...] ”
>
> VAN NGOC THINH,
> CEO, WWF-VIET NAM

But the species is notoriously elusive. The saola was last spotted in the wild by a camera trap in 2013. A few had been captured in the past, but none had ever survived beyond a few months in captivity— including a baby that Thinh helped look after in the late 1990s while working as head of the scientific research division of Bach Ma National Park, whose deaths he describes as causing “a lot of heartache.” The last captive saola, an individual rescued from hunters in neighbouring Lao PDR, also died in 2010.

But here was finally proof that the species hadn’t gone extinct. “It was a very emotional moment for me,” recalls Thinh, CEO of WWF-Viet Nam.

The joy, however, was short-lived, for saola have not been spotted since, and none exist in captivity. Still, conservationists continue to be optimistic that the species, albeit critically endangered, survives today—with estimates suggesting up to 100 individuals might remain in the wild. Buoyed by this hope, WWF, alongside partners and other wildlife organizations, is working hard to locate saola in their natural habitat, while simultaneously drawing up plans that will help conserve the species for future generations.

A Relic of Time

Saola are found in only one place on Earth: the evergreen broadleaf forests of the Central Annamites, on the border of Viet Nam and Lao PDR. Compared to the rest of the region, the rugged Annamite mountains remained geologically and climatically stable throughout the ages, resulting in a biodiversity hotspot with exceptionally high levels of endemism—including the uniquely evolved saola.

“They’re the mascot here,” says Thinh of the animals, which are considered bovids like bison, antelopes, and cattle, but appear completely different, distinguished by a pair of long parallel horns. “They look like an ancient species.”

However, scientists know little about the saola—their range, courting and breeding behaviours, diet, and so on—a plight made only more worrisome by the animals’ small population, which has dwindled largely due to poaching pressure and habitat destruction.

Preserving and Protecting Saola

To help protect the species, forest guards remove any snares they encounter on their patrols and visit villagers’ houses to discuss the dangers of setting such traps. In recent years, with support from projects such as Biodiversity Conservation (BCA) and Carbon and Biodiversity Project (CarBi), rangers, the protected area’s staff, and local non-governmental organizations have also been trained in various biodiversity monitoring methods.

(ABOVE)

CAMERA TRAP PHOTO TAKEN ON 7 SEPTEMBER 2013 SHOWS A SINGLE SAOLA MOVING ALONG A ROCKY FOREST VALLEY STREAM IN A REMOTE CORNER OF THE CENTRAL ANNAMITE MOUNTAINS.

Meanwhile, plans are being drawn up to establish a captive breeding program for saola at Bach Ma National Park to reintroduce them in Central Annamite forests.

With so few individuals remaining in the wild, most conservationists agree that a captive breeding program is critical for bringing saola back from the brink of extinction—pointing to how similar efforts have helped boost wild population numbers of the endangered Arabian oryx and takhi (Przewalski's horse) in Oman and Mongolia, respectively.

"Both Viet Nam and Lao PDR have agreed that any saola found in either country will be brought to Bach Ma for captive breeding. Many questions still remain on how such a program would work should this day arrive, but we really believe this will help the animals and recovery of the broader ecosystem," says Thinh. "My dream is to see a saola again one day."

02

Full Circle

By Sandy Ong for World Wildlife Magazine, Summer 2024 issue

(LEFT)

SUNLIGHT HITS A FLOWERING TREE IN THE BAC HAI VAN WATERSHED PROTECTION FOREST. © WWF-US / JUSTIN MOTT

GROWING UP IN THE LUSH, green landscape of central Viet Nam, Blup Phu spent a lot of time in the evergreen forests close to his home in Karoong Aho. As a teenager, many mornings he would don a pair of plastic sandals and climb the rolling hills that surround his village, with his grandparents nimbly leading the way.

As they ascended, the rising sun would lift the blanket of clouds from the valley, revealing sweeping vistas of the rice paddies below where fellow villagers, often clad in the distinctive red-black brocade of their Ta Oi ethnic group, were already hard at work. In the forest, Phu found a respite from the relentless tropical heat and could glimpse an array of wondrous creatures, like muntjac deer with their magnificent antlers, red-shanked douc langurs, and Annamite striped rabbits.

> “A healthy forest teeming with plant and animal life makes everything and everyone thrive.”

MR. BLUP PHU, FOREST GUARD

But for Phu, now 34, these aren’t all happy memories. Those forays into the forest had a clear mission: to snare animals, feed the family, and sell the meat. For 12 years, he and his brother would help carry the carcasses back to their village in baskets, until things came to a head one day when Phu witnessed a particularly distressing incident involving a mother monkey dying while her baby watched on.

“This is very cruel,” Phu recalls saying to his family. “If we keep doing this, there will be nothing left for the next generation to see.”

He pledged to halt his visits and did so until 2021 when he was invited to become part of a team of community-based forest guards under the auspices of WWF’s Carbon and Biodiversity (CarBi) project. Launched in 2011, CarBi’s goals include the protection, restoration, and sustainable use of ecosystems, as well as the conservation of biodiversity.

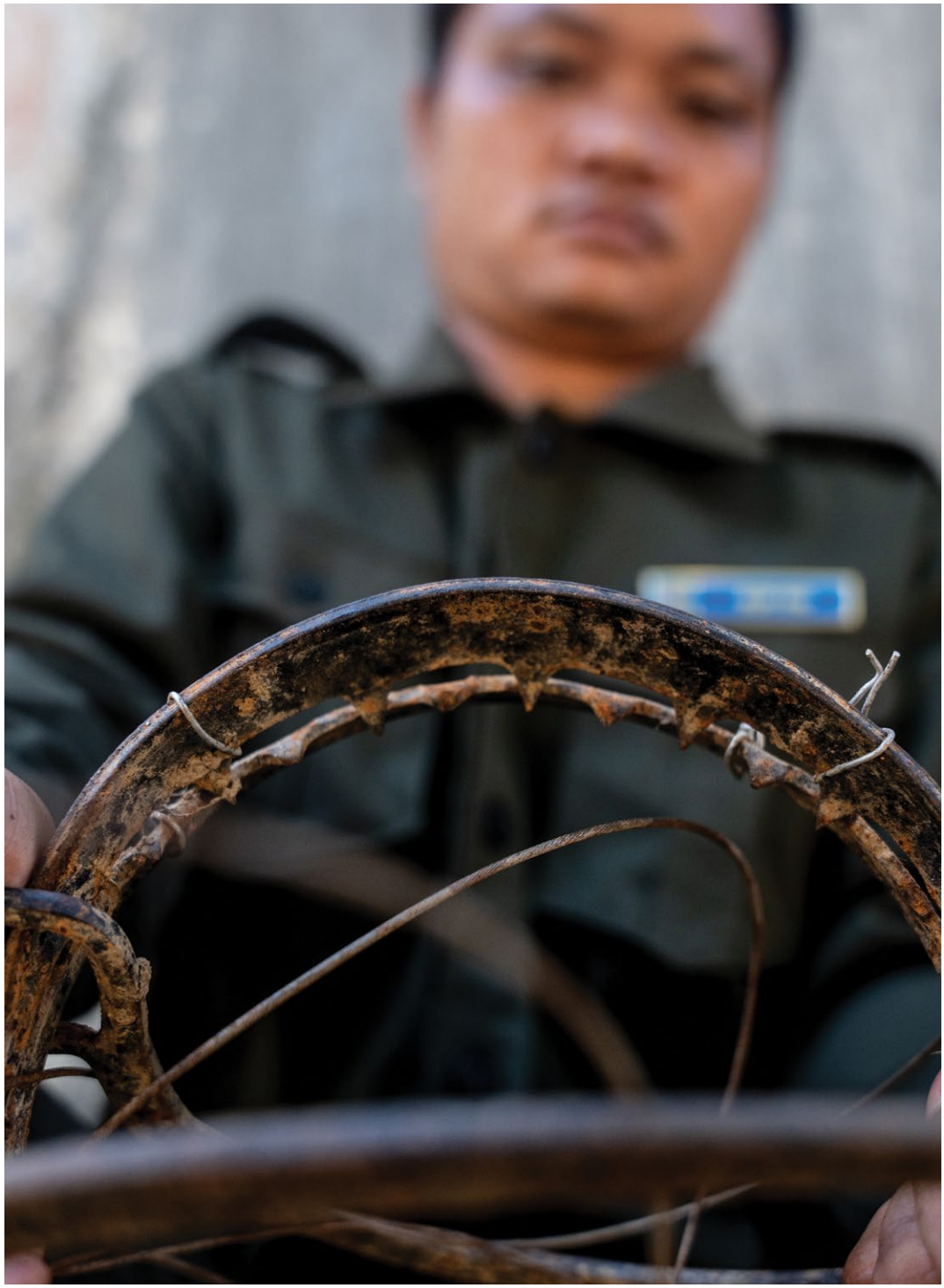
Launched in 2011 and funded by the German government, CarBi’s goals include the protection, restoration, and sustainable use of ecosystems, as well as the conservation of biodiversity.

“Joining the group made me realise how important the forest is,” says Phu, describing how it supplies the village with clean water and fresh air while preventing landslides. “A healthy forest teeming with plant and animal life makes everything and everyone thrive,” he adds.

Phu’s ties to the forest were further cemented when he began working in the nearby Thua Thien Hue Saola Nature Reserve alongside government rangers charged with law enforcement.

Under a mosaic of partnerships, Phu and his fellow guards work with WWF to maintain healthy forests and wildlife populations.

Today, Phu spends 22 days every month in the forest, protecting the wildlife and beauty of this very special part of Viet Nam.



(ABOVE)

FOREST GUARD BLUP PHU INSPECTS A WILDLIFE SNARE COLLECTED IN THE FOREST NEAR HIS HOME VILLAGE.

(RIGHT)
BACH MA NATIONAL PARK.
© HIEN PHUNG / ADOBE STOCK / WWF-VIET NAM

A Gem Under Threat

The Central Annamites cover more than 5.6 million acres comprising one of mainland Asia's largest contiguous primary forests. Dominated by the mountain range that straddles Viet Nam and Lao People's Democratic Republic, the region escaped the frosty grip of the last ice age, providing a warm, wet refuge for species to evolve uninterrupted.

Today, its forests shelter more than 500 birds and 134 mammal species. Many are found almost exclusively in the Annamites and remain poorly known to science, including the elusive and critically endangered saola.

"In Southeast Asia, there are really few of these forest gems left," says Dechen Dorji, WWF's senior director, Asian wildlife.

During the war in Viet Nam, large swaths of forest were torched or doused with toxic chemicals, including Agent Orange. To provide locals with a postwar income source, forests were replanted with quick-growing acacia trees that could be sold for pulp, paper, and timber. Unfortunately, this wiped out many native species and created a monocrop that outperformed native seedlings.

The rapid economic development that followed brought about additional pressures, including infrastructure development, as the population in the Central Annamites swelled to approximately six million people. In some parts of the region, forests have been halved.

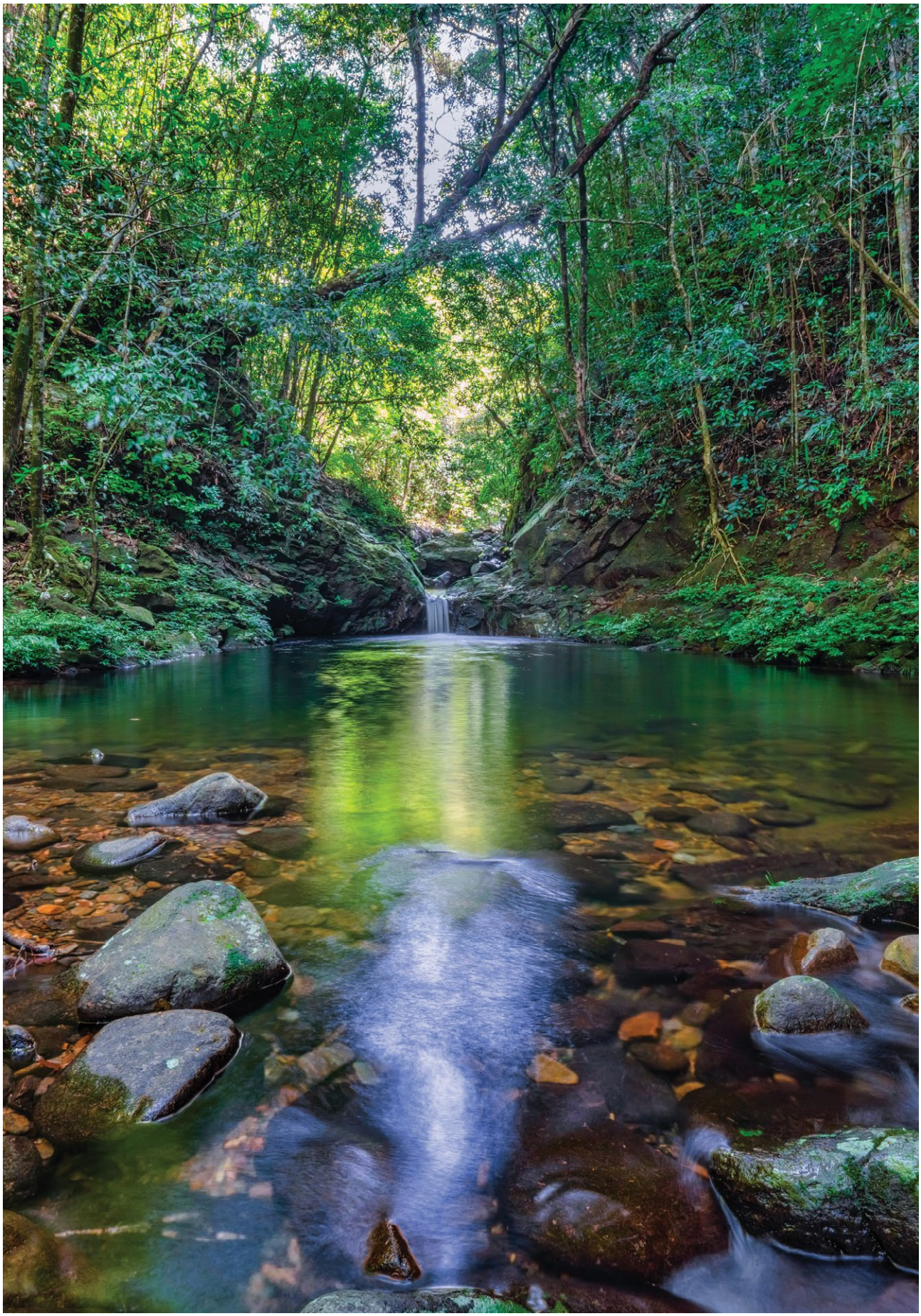
Today, the main threats to forest biodiversity come from large-scale legal and illegal forest conversion, logging, and poaching. In Viet Nam, wildlife is sometimes taken for subsistence or to supply local restaurants, but mostly to feed an illegal wildlife trade made up of local and native species like turtles and monkeys for the pet trade. Viet Nam is also a transit hub for wildlife products—like pangolin scales, tiger meat, and rhino parts—trafficked from other parts of the world.

A dimly lit room on the ground floor of the Saola Nature Reserve headquarters bears grim testament to the crisis.

Against one rough-hewn concrete wall is a trough the size of two bathtubs jam-packed with all manner of rusty snares—from homemade coils fashioned from motorbike brake cables to bulky clamshells with sinister-looking teeth. Between 2011 and 2022, forest guards removed nearly 146,000 snares from a more than 120-square-mile area alone.

While poaching has declined in recent years, forest biodiversity just isn't the same anymore, says WWF-Viet Nam CEO Van Ngoc Thinh. He recalls how early in his career, when he was a forest ranger at Bach Ma National Park, one of 16 protected areas in the Central Annamites, "you could just walk into the forest and see animal footprints."

"But nowadays, you're walking and walking and walking, and it's hard to see anything," says Thinh. "Ninety percent of the animal signs have disappeared. It really hurts to see the forest so empty and silent."



(ABOVE)
PAINTING OF ENDEMIC SPECIES IN THE CENTRAL ANNAMITES BY ARTIST DAO VAN HOANG. THIS IS ONE OF THE COMMUNICATION PRODUCTS OF THE USAID BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION PROJECT.


©USAID Biodiversity Conservation (VFBC)/ WWF-Viet Nam

A Plan to Protect Wildlife

One bright morning, Phu and four teammates heave camouflage-patterned rucksacks onto their shoulders and set off on their usual patrol in a part of the 60-square-mile reserve that's roughly a 10-minute motorbike ride from his house. At regular intervals, Phu pulls out a smartphone and keys their coordinates into a Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool—SMART for short. Should the team spot any snares, signs of illegal logging, or rare endemic species, he will log these too.

Shoring up equipment and training for community forest guards and government rangers is just one pillar of what the BCA project and CarBi aim to achieve. Both community forest guards and government rangers, for example, are equipped with mobile SMART devices, and work is now active—and coordinated—across seven provinces in Viet Nam. "Patrolling can now be done in a much more systematic way," says Nick Cox, WWF's chief of party for the BCA project, "which means we can expand our impact."

At the Saola Nature Reserve's operational nerve centre, staff collate and analyse SMART data, ensuring sufficient patrol coverage and modelling wildlife crime patterns. The projects are strengthening intelligence gathering and crime analysis at higher levels, too, and bolstering support for law enforcement agencies to tackle forest-related crimes.

Farther into their trek, Phu's team reaches a tree in a small clearing with a toaster-sized plastic box affixed to its base. Two teammates retrieve it and swap out the batteries. As they reattach and power it on, a third member crawls past its infrared sensor to test it and gets a thumbs up—the newly revived camera trap is good to go.

It's one of nearly 2,000 such devices dotted across the Central Annamites as part of the largest camera trap survey ever conducted in the region.

The first round of the findings are now in hand and while the results thus far confirm a striking loss of wildlife, the completed survey should offer millions of images, help create the area's first comprehensive biodiversity baseline, and—hopefully—capture a living saola on camera.

This work is accompanied by threat assessments, informed by rangers who sweep a wide arc around each camera trap for illegal activity during initial installation and again when they retrieve the devices two months later.

"It's not just about getting pretty pictures," says Cox. The information gleaned about wildlife, combined with satellite data on forest cover and other knowledge gathered through BCA, will "help guide future policy and protected area management decisions, including species reintroductions and rewilding," he says, "both of which help restore a landscape's natural functions."

(ABOVE / LEFT)

FOREST GUARDS SKETCH OUT THE PATROL ROUTE BEFORE HEADING INTO THUA THIEN HUE SAOLA NATURE RESERVE. © WWF-US / JUSTIN MOTT

(ABOVE / RIGHT)

A FOREST GUARD CHECKS ANIMAL IMAGES RETRIEVED BY CAMERA TRAP. © WWF-US / JUSTIN MOTT

(ABOVE / LEFT)

CLOSE-UP OF LIM XANH SEEDS (ONE OF THE NATIVE SPECIES) AT THE NURSERY GARDEN LOCATED IN DOI VILLAGE, THUONG LO COMMUNE, NAM DONG DISTRICT, HUE. © WWF-US / JUSTIN MOTT

(ABOVE / RIGHT)

MR. VUONG VAN GA - LEADER OF GROUP 6 FOREST MANAGEMENT - WHO OWNS THE NURSERY GARDEN AT DOI VILLAGE, THUONG LO COMMUNE, NAM DONG DISTRICT, HUE. © WWF-US / JUSTIN MOTT

A Return to Native Trees

A few hours' drive from the Saola Nature Reserve, a community in the Bac Hai Van watershed is cultivating multiple native tree species to replace the acacias that once dominated the landscape, stop encroachment into the forest, and increase climate resilience. Each tree on the roughly 25-acre site bears a laminated label with a QR code that can be scanned for information like species, age, and the ideal times to harvest seeds.

The project has established almost 25 acres of seed banks for healthy, native "mother trees" that can produce good-quality seedlings, explains Tran Quoc Hung, director of the local forest management board leading the project. The community can then sell both seeds and seedlings, replicating the model and propagating more native trees throughout the Central Annamites.

Not far away, the people of Doi village also work together to care for their forest. Members of one community team spend a few days every week tending to a shared nursery in a neat plot of land behind the house of their leader, Vuong Van Ga.

> “I really want to introduce ironwood and these other native species to my daughter and grandchildren. I feel like it’s their heritage.”
>
> VUONG VAN GA, DOI VILLAGE

With specialised planting advice from WWF and local partners, the group grows some 20 different species of plants, sowing some saplings in the hills behind their village and selling thousands to the district centre for agricultural services, which then distributes them to other communities for forest restoration. So far, nearly 9,500 seedlings have exchanged hands—generating an additional income source for Ga and his fellow villagers.

“It’s helped raise our standard of living,” says Ga, who spends every morning and afternoon pottering about the nursery, watering saplings, and pulling weeds. “If we can sell a lot, we don’t have to go work in other places far from home.”

On most days, Ga’s 4-year-old daughter trails after him, and he encourages her curiosity: “I really want to introduce ironwood and these other native species to my daughter and grandchildren,” he says. “I feel like it’s their heritage. Without this nursery, there will be nothing to introduce them to.”

(ABOVE)

MRS. HO THI LIA IS PLANTING NATIVE TREES IN THE FOREST TO HELP RESTORE NATURAL FOREST IN DOI VILLAGE, THUONG LO COMMUNE, NAM DONG DISTRICT, THUA THIEN HUE. © WWF-US / JUSTIN MOTT

A Growing Commitment

The projects in Bac Hai Van and Doi village reflect a larger trend in Viet Nam.

As incomes rise, public interest in conserving wildlife and protecting the environment has grown, along with a proliferation of passionate local conservation NGOs and increasing investments from big firms that source timber and other supplies from Viet Nam's plantation forests.

In fact, there's so much energy that WWF selected the Central Annamites as one of five initial landscapes included in its Nature-Based Solutions Origination Platform, which will mobilise, scale up, and coordinate public and private investments to harness the power of natural systems to meet societal goals and confront the climate crisis.

This is an especially good time to be doing conservation work in the country, reflects WWF-Viet Nam CEO Thinh. "Conservation goals are more achievable with economic development, and the government now has a stronger commitment to biodiversity."

In 2022, Viet Nam launched a National Biodiversity Strategy, which aims to increase the area of nature reserves from 7.2% to 9% of the country's total land area by 2030, among other goals. That same year, the country committed to reaching net-zero emissions by 2050 as well. WWF is an advisor to both projects.

All the right elements are in place, adds Thinh. "In recent years, the government has really been listening to the voice of the people," he says. "The younger generation is getting more engaged with nature. Conservation education has improved. Before, I could only dream of all this. Now, I have hope."

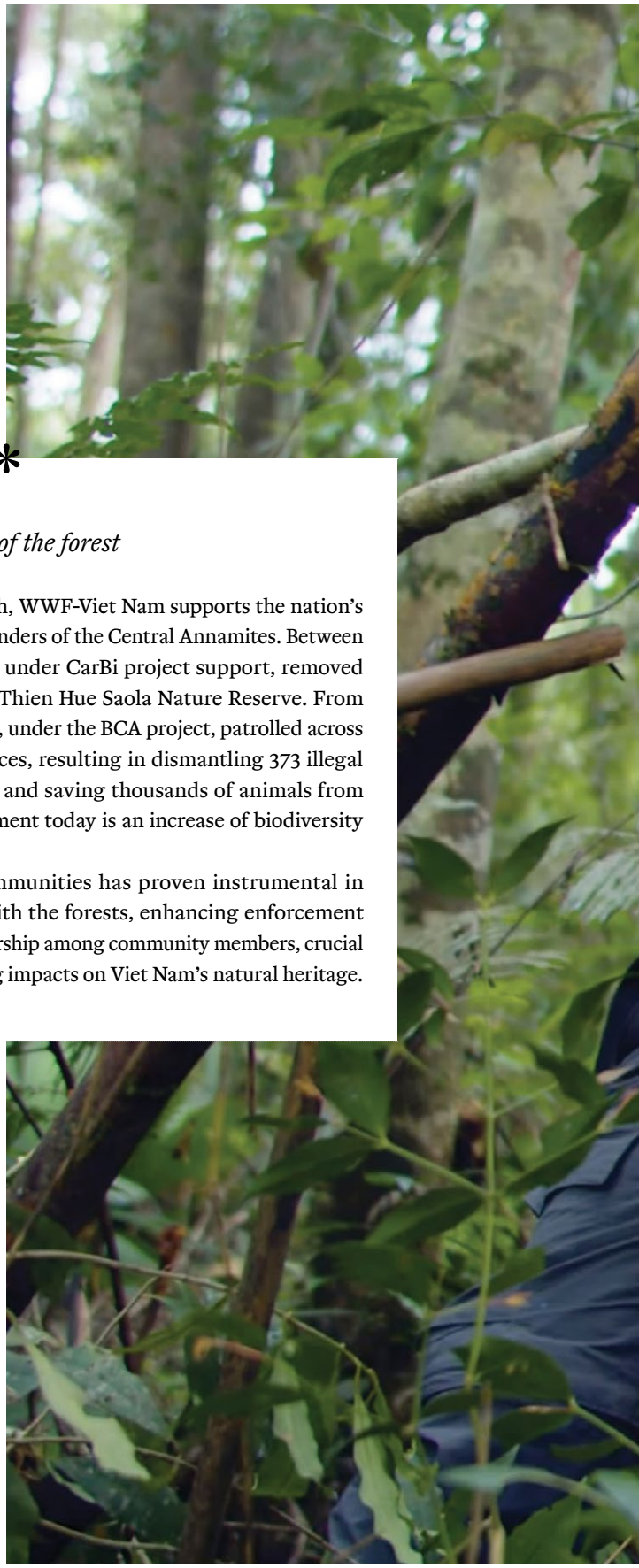
A Full Circle

One day before work, Phu reflects on how he came to be a guardian of the forest. He recalls a defining moment while on patrol, when his team encountered a monkey caught in a snare. They quickly freed it, but instead of scampering away as monkeys usually do, the uninjured animal stayed close by for a full 30 minutes, watching them from a distance—as if in gratitude, says Phu.

It was a full-circle moment, redemption for the actions of his youth, Phu adds. "I really want to contribute to forest protection and biodiversity conservation," he says. "I know what I do is small, but I just try my best."

> "We hope the Central Annamites will be a model landscape that can be used as a blueprint to inspire conservation in other parts of the country, or even other parts of the region."

NICK COX
CHIEF OF PARTY, USAID BCA



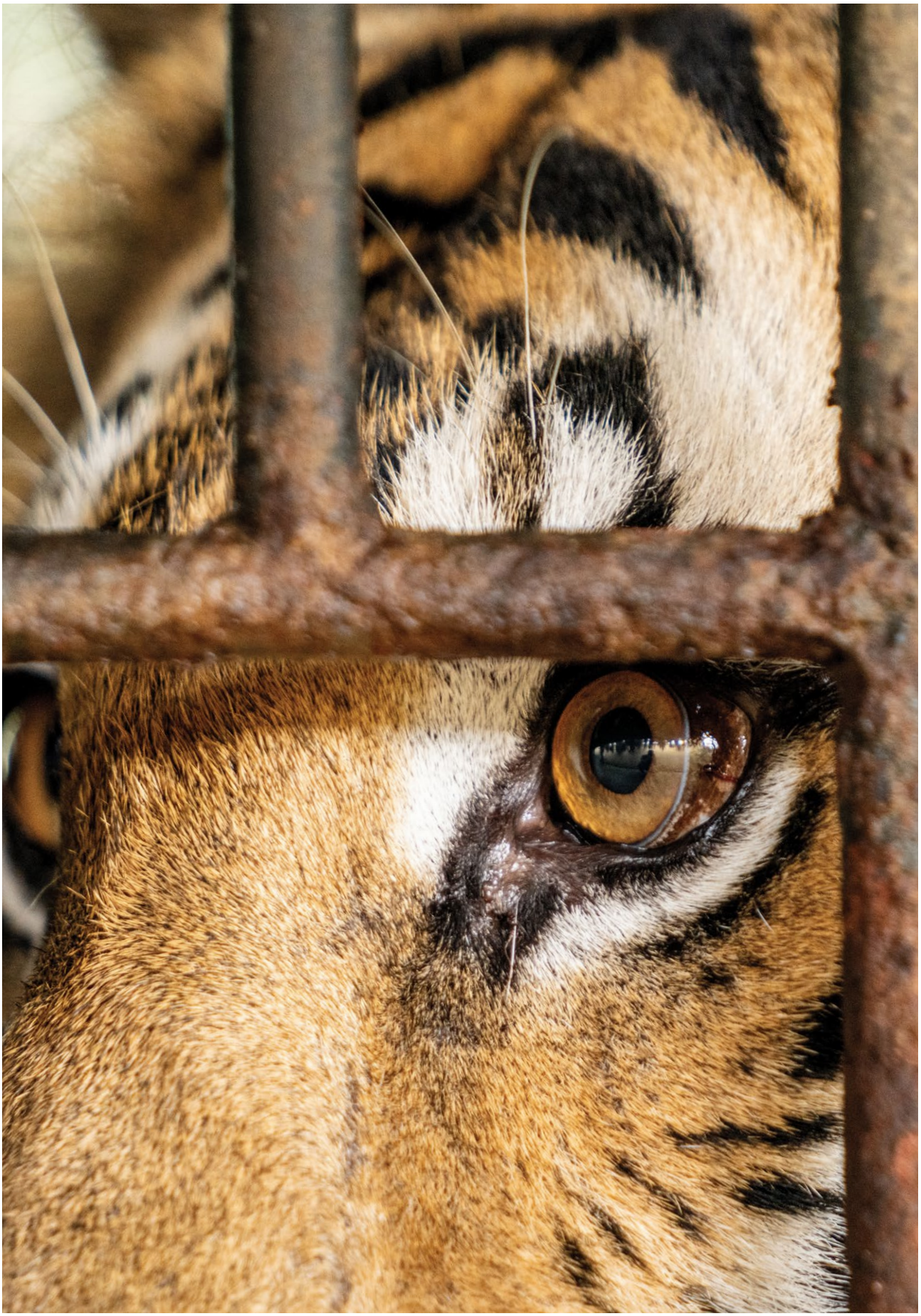
Community patrol teams: guardians of the forest

As wildlife trafficking is at an all-time high, WWF-Viet Nam supports the nation's ethnic minorities to be environmental defenders of the Central Annamites. Between 2011 and 2022, community forest guards, under CarBi project support, removed 146,000 snares in Quang Nam and Thua Thien Hue Saola Nature Reserve. From 2022 to 2024, 44 Community Patrol Teams, under the BCA project, patrolled across 18 protected areas spanning eight provinces, resulting in dismantling 373 illegal hunting camps, removing 46,266 snares, and saving thousands of animals from being trapped. The result of this enforcement today is an increase of biodiversity and some species are now recovering.

The involvement of local communities has proven instrumental in empowering those intimately familiar with the forests, enhancing enforcement capabilities, and cultivating a sense of ownership among community members, crucial for the long-term success of making lasting impacts on Viet Nam's natural heritage.

(RIGHT)

A COMMUNITY PATROL TEAM IS REMOVING SNARES IN TAY GIANG PROTECTION FOREST. © USAID BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION (VFBC) / WWF-VIET NAM



03

Stemming the flow of illegal wildlife trafficking in Viet Nam

By Sandy Ong for World Wildlife Magazine, Summer 2024 issue

(LEFT)

INDOCHINA TIGER CONFISCATED FROM THE ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE AT THE HA NOI WILDLIFE RESCUE CENTER IN SOC SON, HA NOI. © WWF-US / JUSTIN MOTT

ON A MARCH MORNING IN 2023, customs officials at Hai Phong Port in Da Nang, Viet Nam, opened a container from Angola. Acting on concerns raised by the container's route, the inspectors discovered seven tonnes of ivory, equivalent to the tusks of over 700 elephants. The seizure, the port's largest, came after the Saving Threatened Wildlife (STW) project held a workshop with customs officers on maritime cargo inspection and screening procedures to control and detect wildlife trafficking.

Viet Nam has long been exploited by organised crime syndicates as a strategically located transport hub for the global illegal wildlife trade. "Wildlife is taken illegally from Viet Nam's wildlife areas, it is brought into and through the country by traffickers, and it is purchased in-country for domestic use," says Dechen Dorji, WWF's senior director, Asian wildlife. Every year, pangolin scales, rhino horns, tiger bones, and other animal parts pass through its ports.

“ Every one of these actions is so important [...] ”

MICHELLE OWEN,
STW PROJECT’S CHIEF OF PARTY

(RIGHT)
INDOCHINA TIGER CONFISCATED FROM THE ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE AT THE HA NOI WILDLIFE RESCUE CENTER IN SOC SON, HA NOI. © WWF-US / JUSTIN MOTT

The Saving Threatened Wildlife project was launched in 2021 with the aim of strengthening Viet Nam’s leadership in tackling wildlife trafficking. In cooperation with the Viet Nam government and alongside TRAFFIC, Education for Nature Viet Nam, other NGOs, and private-sector partners, WWF is implementing the five-year programme.

Stemming the trade is imperative, says Michelle Owen, WWF’s Chief of Party for the project. “Look what happened with pangolins,” she says. Demand for the mammals’ meat (prized as a delicacy) and scales (used in a range of traditional remedies) has driven all eight pangolin species to the brink of extinction. “That could quite easily happen for other species as the demand for wild animals as products and pets continues,” she says.

The project addresses the trafficking of species at multiple levels: targeting the demand for wildlife products purchased by tourists or used in traditional medicine; addressing the processes that support this demand, including transport systems and online trade; and engaging with political leaders and policy-makers to ensure adherence to international commitments.

“Every one of these actions is so important,” says Owen. “Viet Nam’s government has taken strong steps toward preventing the illegal trade and laundering of wildlife in the country,” she adds, “and we are proud to be their partners in that work.”

The illegal trafficking of wildlife through, to, and from Viet Nam is a long-standing issue, but impressive strides to curb the problem have been made in recent years. WWF joins hands with various partners including corporates who play such an important role in this fight.

Combating Wildlife Trafficking in the Logistics Sector

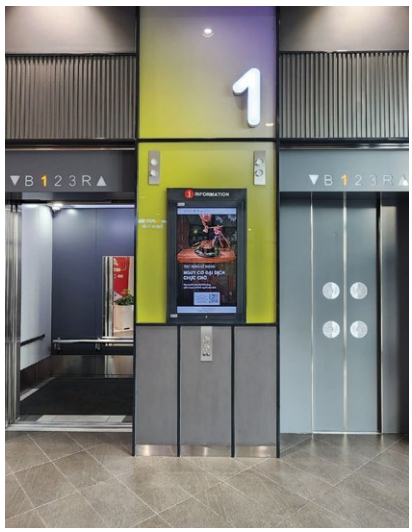
The illegal wildlife trade is estimated to be worth up to USD $20 billion a year, and WWF is fighting back against the criminal network. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Duc Viet Cargoteam, a global freight forwarder, refused a surge of requests for transporting illicit products, like pangolin scales and ivory. In 2023, WWF trained Duc Viet Cargoteam on illegal wildlife trafficking transportation and prevention, organised by the Saving Threatened Wildlife project and VCCI-HCMC. Duc Viet Cargoteam has pledged to counter the illicit trade.

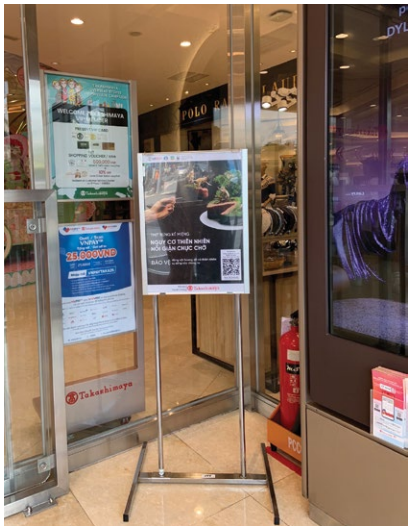
WWF-Viet Nam is also teaming up with corporates to tackle illegal wildlife consumption. Since 2020, 17 businesses from retail, food and beverage services, tourism, IT, the creative sector and other industries have collaborated with us in five campaigns to raise awareness about wildlife protection.

At the 30th Annual General Meeting organised by Link Global (an international network of forwarders) in Kenya, Ms Dang Thu Lien from Duc Viet Cargoteam inspired over 30 firms to pledge to abstain from transporting or consuming wildlife products and educate stakeholders.

“ [...]Awareness-raising and behaviour change education are necessary to reduce demand for wildlife products. ”

NGUYEN VAN TRI TIN,
BIODIVERSITY PROGRAMME LEAD
WWF-VIET NAM





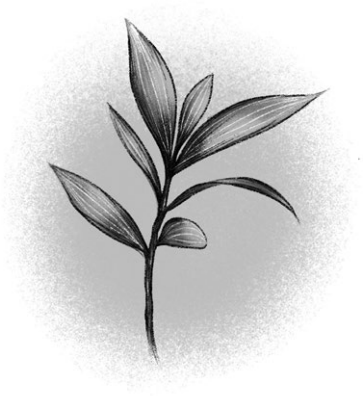
(ABOVE)

PHOTOS OF THE “ONCE WILD MEAT IS ON THE DINING TABLE, THE RISKS ARE EXPOSED” DISPLAY HAS APPEARED IN SEVERAL PLACES TO REDUCE DEMAND AND CHANGE BEHAVIOUR.

- 7 BUSINESS PARTNERS
- 25 STORES AND MALLS IN MAJOR CITIES INCLUDING HA NOI, HO CHI MINH CITY, AND BINH DUONG SHOWED THE CAMPAIGN’S MESSAGES
- MESSAGES WERE POSTED ON 12 FACEBOOK FAN PAGES WITH 4.1 MILLION FOLLOWERS

04

Transforming a major plantation forest sector towards a sustainable path



IN LATE 1990S, LE BIEN HOA, A VETERAN IN GIO LINH, Quang Tri was given 10 hectares of land by the Viet Nam government to grow mostly acacias and eucalyptus trees. Large-scale monoculture plantations dominate the landscape, borne from a government response to reforest land decimated by war. The reforestation has come at a price.

(LEFT)

MR HOA, A SMALLHOLDER IN ACACIA PLANTATION IN QUANG TRI PROVINCE, VIET NAM. © WWF-GREATER MEKONG / FGS PRODUCTION

Hoa, like many farmers, earned an income from caring for the forest. Hoa admitted he had limited knowledge of forest plantation but after a Malaysia study tour, organised by WWF, he learnt about Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification.

In 2007, WWF supported smallholders in Quang Tri to pursue FSC certification for their forest. At that time, only big companies had the resources and finances for FSC. It was initially beyond the reach of thousands of farmers like Hoa across Viet Nam, who traditionally planted acacias that degraded biodiversity, affected the quality of timber, and contaminated waterways.

The FSC-certification journey

Hoa's enthusiasm and credibility gave rise to him becoming the first FSC Smallholder Group leader in Quang Tri and Viet Nam, with 60 householders joining.

The group followed new criteria, some of which they found especially challenging, including stopping burning vegetation after harvesting or recording the progress. Also these criteria focus on social and environmental benefits which are different to most other standards that Hoa knew.

Training by WWF gave them new insights into protecting the forest while supporting their livelihoods. "We could do it because WWF was always with us and showed us how to do things," Hoa shares, "What we appreciated the most is they [WWF] connected us with the buyer to secure our timber sales."

It was a long road. Out of 60 households, only 20 could obtain FSC certification three years later, with a total of 316 hectares of acacia forest certified. WWF was the certificate holder at that time as Hoa's group was not yet legitimised to have it. However, the farmers began enjoying the fruits of their labour. Their better-quality timber was sold US$10 higher than the market price, nearly doubling Hoa's income.

"Since natural logging has been banned in Viet Nam, forest plantation, especially acacia, is one of the main sources of income for local people," explains Le Viet Tam, Forest Programme Lead of WWF-Viet Nam. "Acacias are in demand for the country's wood industry," Tam adds, "but these expanding monoculture plantations cannot counter climate change, pests and diseases, contributing to biodiversity loss."

"WWF has transformed acacia forest plantations to be more climate resilient and boost biodiversity by diversifying with native tree species. WWF has supported smallholder plantations in accessing the global deforestation-free supply chain while promoting sustainable forest management and certification."

Hoa then decided to turn all his 30 hectares of land into a FSC-certified forest.

Becoming certified and independent

In 2012, Quang Tri Forestry Department bought-in the initiative and agreed to take WWF's role as the FSC certificate holder for the Groups in Quang Tri. Three years later, in 2015, a game-changing moment arrived when Quang Tri's Smallholder Forest Certification Groups, in which Hoa's Group is a member, formed and registered as an entity, with support of WWF. This allowed them to be the certificate holders for their own FSC certified forests and be an independent organization.

Now certified, their expertise and respect from their community has grown. Hoa and his fellow farmers train those who want to replicate the model and share their successful stories across numerous platforms.

Recently, they received funding from a university in Italy to expand the FSC-certified areas for plantation and natural forest.

(ABOVE / LEFT)

ACACIA PLANTATION SMALLHOLDERS IN QUANG TRI PROVINCE, VIET NAM GATHER TO CELEBRATE THEIR ACHIEVEMENT OF FSC CERTIFICATION.
© WWF-GREATER MEKONG / FGS PRODUCTION

(ABOVE / RIGHT)

AERIAL VIEW OF ACACIA PLANTATIONS, QUANG TRI PROVINCE, VIET NAM.
© WWF-GREATER MEKONG / FGS PRODUCTION

> “ We know we’ve planted a good seed when we see these groups and association continue to grow after the project ended [...] ”

LE VIET TAM, FOREST PROGRAMME LEAD
WWF-VIET NAM

(RIGHT)
MR. HOA PLACED HIS HAND ON THE TRUNK OF AN ACACIA TREE
© WWF-GREATER MEKONG / FGS PRODUCTION

Replicating the model in the Central Annamites

Following the model’s proven success, WWF expanded it to Thua Thien Hue and Quang Nam province. In 2016, Thua Thien Hue Forest Owners Sustainable Development Association (FOSDA) was established with 14 small household groups.

“We know we’ve planted a good seed when we see these groups and association continue to grow after the project ended,” says Le Viet Tam, Forest Programme Lead of WWF-Viet Nam. “Now they are doing what we were doing, by multiplying the models with their own expertise.”

By 2024, over 17 years, 3,180 households joined this initiative. More than 21,000 hectares of plantations secured sustainable certifications, covering 11 per cent of nationwide FSC-certified forest, thanks to WWF and its partners.

“We’re building on sustainable forest management, certification, sustainable supply chains, climate resilience for forest landscape, biodiversity and smallholders’ livelihoods,” Tam adds. “Scaling up best conservation practices across Viet Nam and beyond alongside our partners is another key priority.”

05

Innovative Vietnamese couple bring local, green coffee to the world

IN THE HILLS OF CENTRAL VIET NAM, pioneering couple Luong Thi Ngoc Tram and her husband invested their life savings into producing a globally renowned sustainable coffee blend while reforesting war-scarred land.

Viet Nam is the second largest coffee producer after Brazil, with its coffee exports surpassing US$3 billion in the first six months of 2024. Coffee was introduced nationally by the French in 1857, with production later surging ahead under the government's Doi Moi's economic reforms. Viet Nam is the world's largest Robusta producer; crops mushrooming in the Central Highlands are mass-produced and cheap. Arabica makes up five per cent of the country's coffee production.

Coffee runs in the veins of Tram and her husband. Five years ago, Tram left behind a stable finance career in Ho Chi Minh City before moving to build a temporary house, processing area, and coffee garden in Khe Sanh town, Quang Tri, on the Viet Nam-Laos border. They knew no one but held fast to their vision.

"We wanted to produce clean coffee, repositioning it as fruit and a specialty, with our target to make Khe Sanh coffee known to the market," says Tram.

Calling it Pun Coffee after the ethnic language, Tram set about building on a legacy of sustainable arabica coffee trees with their long historical ties to the 20th century, to the world. She ordered farmers to carefully handpick only ripe coffee, not strip harvesting as usual.

(LEFT)
COFFEE BLOSSOMS IN FULL BLOOM.
© PHUONG HA / WWF-VIET NAM

High global demand for sustainable coffee

With the global coffee market expected to be worth around US$108 billion dollars in 2029, demand for ethically produced coffee increases with consumer behaviour. Yet, Viet Nam's worst drought in a decade and climate change add pressures, forcing coffee growers and Pun to adapt.

Pun's innovativeness saw it ranked first for Vietnamese specialty coffee at a competition in Buon Ma Thuot in 2021, catalysing their path forward. Its exposure increased, with foreign customers shaping Tram's understanding of the longevity of ethically produced coffee beans. Intercropping the beans with large native trees builds coffee gardens, which are valuable for carbon credits.

Developing the first native seedling nursery to freely give to people in the area is one way Pun supports smallholder families to regenerate their mono-coffee gardens. The first species, fragrant rosewood, wasn't successful but strengthened the couple's resolve to succeed.

Two WWF officers passed by Tram's nursery in 2021, and impressed by Pun's vision, they offered help. With WWF's support, a forestry expert has guided Pun in developing a layered, multi-canopy coffee garden.

"WWF supports businesses to make transformative, sustainable impacts in their landscapes while improving local livelihoods and climate resilience," says Ton That Minh Khanh, the Landscape Resilient Fund Project Manager at WWF-Viet Nam. "We'll create a pool of successful models to share or find resources to replicate in the Central Annamites or wider Viet Nam."

Working with the Van Kieu ethnic community, the couple is gradually turning monoculture coffee gardens into biodiversity forests and helping farmers generate an income.

> “WWF supports businesses to make transformative, sustainable impacts in their landscapes while improving local livelihoods and climate resilience [...]”

TON THAT MINH KHANH
LANDSCAPE RESILIENT FUND PROJECT MANAGER
WWF-VIET NAM

(LEFT)

TRAM (PUN COFFEE) SHOW FARMERS HOW TO PLANT NATIVE TREES IN THEIR COFFEE PLANTATION. © PUN COFFEE

“As demand for sustainable coffee grows, we have to build clean coffee material areas,” Tram explains. “Since we don’t own coffee gardens ourselves, the best way is to work with local people to help change their traditional practices. It is challenging but whatever makes our business carbon neutral, we will do it.”

After three years, Pun has worked with 195 households and converted 225 coffee farms, covering 305 hectares. Additionally, 25,000 native trees have been distributed to local coffee households.

“I have planted 300 trees of different species and persuaded 11 other households in the village to do the same. I will continue to call others to follow,” says Mr. Ho Van Chinh, head of village Xa Ry, Huong Phung commune, who is building a biodiversity garden with the help of Pun.

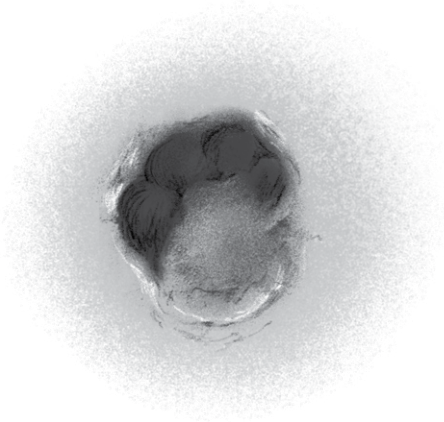
WWF will support Pun in promoting its products to international and domestic markets.

(BELOW)

HO VAN CHINH, LEADER OF HOUSEHOLD GROUP THAT PARTNERS WITH PUN COFFEE, IS AT PUN COFFEE’S COFFEE DRYING AREA. © WWF-VIET NAM / THANH NGUYEN

06

Saving wild elephants in Yok Don National Park—our work in the Central Highland



(LEFT)

JUNE — A RESCUED BABY ELEPHANT IN YOK DON NATIONAL PARK IN 2015. © KAYLEIGH GHIOT / WWF-VIET NAM

CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY is being deployed by WWF-Viet Nam to save the country's last wild elephants on the verge of extinction.

Innovative technology for better conservation planning

Racing against time, WWF, Yok Don National Park (YNDP) and Elephant Conservation Center (ECC) are advancing faecal DNA analysis and GPS collaring to monitor Viet Nam's last remaining 60–78 wild elephants in Dak Lak province. These critical insights will guide future strategic elephant conservation and management interventions.

(ABOVE)

SITE VISIT FOR GPS COLLARING PLAN DEVELOPMENT. © WWF-VIET NAM

(RIGHT)

FOOTPRINT OF AN ELEPHANT WHICH WAS TAKEN BY A COMMUNITY-BASED ELEPHANT CONSERVATION TEAM IN DRANG PHOK VILLAGE. © DRANG PHOK ELEPHANT CONSERVATION GROUP

"Unlike traditional footprint tracking, which is often inaccurate, faecal DNA analysis offers insights into elephant population size, viability and their cross-border movements," says Mr Le Van Thua, Head of Science and International Cooperation at YNDP.

YNDP and ECC staff, with technical guidance of WWF, follow the elephants' footprints for miles to extract DNA from cells within the species' dung. In 2019-2020, at least 75 elephant faecal samples from 28 elephants were analysed, finding most of the species stay in YNDP during the rainy season and travel to Cambodia in the dry months. Added to this effort, in 2025, GPS collars will be rolled out to track the species' movements, habitats, and threats to protect their migration routes.

"We urgently need information on the elephants' movement patterns across the Cambodia - Viet Nam border and in Dak Lak province, which we believe are transboundary in nature, but no data exists," says Thien Le Quoc, WWF-Viet Nam's Elephant Programme Manager. "With scientific data, a conservation plan would be more effective and cost-saving."

Viet Nam's elephant numbers have plummeted over the last few decades due to human-elephant conflict (HEC); habitat loss and degradation; small population. From thousands across the country down to over 100 individuals in the wild, elephants are now listed as critically endangered in the Viet Nam Red Book and on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

> “When elephants were sighted, we collaborated with key staff of YDNP and ECC to monitor the situation on the ground, alert villagers, and ensure their safety by keeping them away from affected areas [...] ”

MR. Y TE, LEADER OF HEC GROUP IN DRANG PHOK VILLAGE

Addressing human and elephant conflict with technology

Human-elephant conflicts drive shrinking habitats. In Dak Lak province, the species caused significant damage to crops, infrastructure and equipment, angering the community who then killed some of them in retaliation. To address this, WWF has trained and established a community-based group in Drang Phok village, Buon Don district who now advises farmers to plant crops and use early warning systems with solar lights to effectively deter elephants.

“When elephants were sighted, we collaborated with key staff of YDNP and ECC to monitor the situation on the ground, alert villagers, and ensure their safety by keeping them away from affected areas,” said Mr. Y Te, leader of HEC group in Drang Phok village.

There have been no recorded incidents of wild elephants being killed due to human activities in the last decade. WWF has also supported Dak Lak province in developing a five-year strategy to manage HEC alongside the SMART tool and community workshops.

Regional initiative for elephants

But technology alone won’t prevent the elephants from disappearing forever and that’s why we’re simultaneously pursuing effective conservation strategies and policies. To reverse the species’ massive decline, the Viet Nam government has been collaborating with local and international NGOs and other stakeholders on developing the Viet Nam Elephant Conservation Action Plan (VECAP) with a vision to 2050, alongside WWF’s regional Elly Allies initiative.

(ABOVE)

CLOSE-UP OF AN ELEPHANT'S EYE.
© EKATERINA SID / SHUTTERSTOCK / WWF-VIET NAM

The initiative, focused on Southeast Asia and China, strives to reverse the downward trajectory of elephant populations and promotes a future in which key populations of elephants are thriving, habitat loss and fragmentation are reduced, and people and elephants live side by side.

As a part of the initiative, WWF-Viet Nam is developing an action plan on wild elephant conservation in the country that follows both the priorities of the Elly Allies initiative and closely aligns with the national VECAP. Dak Lak province, sharing the border with Cambodia, has been identified as WWF-Viet Nam's top priority elephant area in the next decade. Through a transboundary conservation programme, the future of elephants here could be secured.

CHAPTER 2

The Mekong Delta— A Landscape of Resilience and Promise

The Mekong Delta

SPANNING OVER 40,000 SQUARE KILOMETRES, the Mekong Delta's fertile lands, vibrant waters, and lush ecosystems have sustained millions of livelihoods and contributed significantly to global food security. Home to 450 fish species, as well as globally significant wetlands, mangroves, and peatlands, the Mekong Delta is both an ecological treasure and an economic powerhouse.

For decades, WWF-Viet Nam has worked tirelessly to protect and restore this vital landscape, drawing on best practices from resilient delta programmes across the WWF network. The Mekong Delta's future depends on solutions that work with nature rather than against it, and WWF's efforts are showing how this can be achieved.

At Tram Chim National Park, the restoration of natural wetland habitats, guided by the rhythms of the river pulse, has rejuvenated the Ramsar site and laid a strong foundation for the conservation of the Sarus crane. Expanding these principles to the Upper Delta, WWF and its partners are making "room for the river." By restoring floodplains previously converted for intensive agriculture, native wetland habitats will come back to life. This restoration will not only recharge groundwater, restore biodiversity, and increase carbon sequestration but also promise sustainable, flood-based livelihoods for local communities.

Along the coast, where rising sea levels pose an imminent threat, WWF is incentivising communities and private sector leaders to restore mangroves. These mangroves serve as natural buffers against the sea, reducing coastal erosion while providing sustainable livelihoods. Integrated farming systems, such as shrimp-rice and mangrove-shrimp models championed by leading private sector partners, have

(ABOVE)

FARMERS HARVESTING CO BANG (LEPIRONIA ARTICULATA) IN THE MEKONG DELTA. © DONG NHAT HUY / SHUTTERSTOCK / WWF-VIET NAM

become thriving examples of how communities can coexist sustainably with nature. WWF is also working closely with provinces to ensure the sustainable management of river sand and sediment, addressing the alarming shrinking of the delta. A key innovation in this effort is WWF's world-first delta sand budget, a groundbreaking tool designed to address sediment loss—one of the delta's most pressing challenges. By tackling the root causes of sand and sediment depletion, this initiative is paving the way for the Mekong Delta's long-term survival.

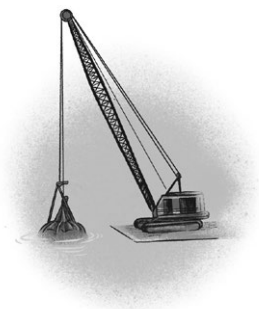
WWF's work in the Mekong Delta underscores the importance of a collaborative, basin-wide approach. Engaging upstream countries, strengthening domestic policies, and scaling up nature-based solutions are critical steps in balancing economic growth with ecological preservation.

Building resilience in the Mekong is key. Considered among the world's five most vulnerable deltas, one-fifth of its fish species face extinction.

Many natural habitats such as reedbeds, Melaleuca forests, mangroves and other wetlands have been lost in recent decades and converted to farmlands. Viet Nam's Mekong Delta may run out of sand by 2035 (WWF-Viet Nam 2023), emphasising the need to save it before it's lost forever. Upstream hydropower dams, sand mining, groundwater extraction, habitat conversion and climate change seriously threaten the delta's future. Sustainable actions we take today are towards preserving the delta now and for future generations. We will never lose hope.

01

At the heart of the delta: the battle to save its sand



(LEFT)

MEKONG RIVER AT AN BINH ISLET, VINH LONG CITY, VINH LONG PROVINCE.
© WWF-VIET NAM / CHAM TEAM

Is sand just a common raw building material?

THE MEKONG DELTA IS A LIFE SOURCE for around 60 million people and a staggering amount of biodiversity. The river is a haven to at least 1,100 freshwater species, with around 25 per cent found nowhere else on earth. Not only does water shape the delta - but its sediments play a crucial role. As the Mekong river flows through China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and finally Viet Nam, it collects sediments like gravel, sand, silt, and organic matter. Near its end, these river sediments settle, gradually forming the Mekong, the world's third-largest river delta.

The delta is a vast network of rivers, wetlands, island ecosystems and thriving agricultural communities sustained by the river's sediments, which supplements the natural land subsidence and reduces saltwater intrusion.

Critically, rapidly declining sand in the delta due to overexploitation and upstream dams is starving it of sediments.

"A delta without sediments is a dead delta," said Huynh Quoc Tinh, WWF-Viet Nam's Food Lead whose nature-based solution projects in the delta depend on the flow of sediments.

Sand, in high demand for construction, is unsustainably extracted from the delta and other riverbeds globally. Until 2020, sand was still seen as an unlimited resource, categorised as a common building material in the Mineral Law 2010. Experts warn about the impacts of sand overexploitation in the Mekong, but a lack of data exists on the level of over-extraction.

(RIGHT)

SAND GATHERING YARD, MINING SHIPS AND SAND TRANSPORT SHIPS ON TIEN RIVER, CAI LAY DISTRICT, TIEN GIANG.

World-first delta sand budget in the Viet Nam Mekong Delta

In May 2023, WWF and the Viet Nam Dyke and Natural Disaster Management Authority (VNDDMA) introduced the first-ever delta-wide sand budget, using data and field measurements to track sand movement and extraction.

The sand budget revealed that sand is extracted at the equivalent weight of 100-150 Empire State Buildings, meaning 35-55 million cubic metres annually. This far exceeds the river's replenishment rate and the delta may run out of sand by 2035. Alarmingly, the delta could disappear completely by the end of the century if degradation continues at its current pace. This research is expected to initiate evidence-based actions towards sustainable land management across the region.

Boosting sustainability

With data provided from the sand budget, Can Tho City and Dong Thap provinces, large mining and consumer areas, have been formulating their river stability plans. The goal is to ensure that sand is extracted within the river's replenishment capacity and protect highly vulnerable areas.

At the Central level, WWF's recommendations on river sand extraction were included in the draft of a new Geology and Mineral Law, which will be submitted to the National Assembly in 2024. If passed, this would be the first national law to include provisions on river sand, setting a national precedent for sustainable management.

These vital efforts are a good sign of political commitment and cross-provincial cooperation. Looking ahead, Ha Huy Anh, the national project manager of WWF-Viet Nam's Sustainable Sand Management Project shared that WWF would aim for a transboundary approach that extends beyond Viet Nam. The goal is to ensure that development in the entire basin contributes to the well-being of the delta.

But the success of this initiative relies on political commitment and regional cooperation. Without coordinated action, the future of the Mekong Delta remains at serious existential risk.

> "A delta without sediments is a dead delta [...]"

HUYNH QUOC TINH,
FOOD PROGRAMME LEAD
WWF-VIET NAM


BÊ TÔNG
RƯỢU TÁ

02

Reforming Viet Nam's shrimp industry

(LEFT)

WHITE-LEG SHRIMP FARMED IN THE VIET NAM MEKONG DELTA.
© WWF-VIET NAM / NGO MINH HANG

IF YOU LIVE IN THE US OR EU AND EAT SHRIMPS, chances are they were farmed in the Mekong Delta, the largest seafood-producing region in Viet Nam. Pham Van Mung from Van Hiep, Soc Trang province is one of thousands of shrimp farmers who contributed to that figure. Viet Nam's shrimp exports are worth US$3.4 billion in 2023 (VASEP, 2024).

Mung continues a family tradition that began when the shrimp farming industry started in the province in the 1990s, as Viet Nam wanted to increase aquaculture input to contribute to economic growth. Intensive farming increased in the Delta since 2012 and any production mass volume raises concerns about environmental impacts and its sustainability.

For shrimp, it is about water and land contamination including degraded soils from excessive use of chemicals, antibiotics, groundwater extraction and untreated waste. These not only pose big threats to species and places that WWF seeks to protect in the Delta but also increase the risks of disease outbreaks.

In 2016, Mung lost 2-3 crops due to white spot disease and nearly went bankrupt. He even thought about quitting.

(ABOVE)

PHAM VAN MUNG USES A TEST KIT TO CHECK THE WATER QUALITY OF HIS SHRIMP POND.
© WWF-VIET NAM

Going sustainable

In 2009, WWF co-founded the ASC with the Dutch Sustainable Trade Initiative to set global standards and certification programmes for seafood farming.

ASC enabled farmers like Mung to bring their sustainable products to the global market while decreasing the pressure their production is putting on the environment. In 2016, WWF engaged with Mung and other members at the Toan Thang Seafood Cooperative through technical workshops and personal exchanges.

"Training about ASC has helped us understand what we did was wrong," Mung said.

He began to change his farming practice starting with using one out of 12 dyked ponds in his farm for storing and treating waste discharge.

"People will not start until they see others have been successful. So when my income increased 30%, more of my Cooperate's members started to follow ASC too," shared Mung.

To date, there are 16 members of Toan Thang Cooperative who became ASC certified for their shrimp, 29.6 ha with 150-200 tonnes of shrimp certified every year.

(ABOVE)

PHAM VAN MUNG USES A TEST KIT TO CHECK THE WATER QUALITY OF HIS SHRIMP POND.
© WWF-VIET NAM

> “People will not start until they see others have been successful. [...]”

PHAM VAN MUNG, SHRIMP FARMER
IN VAN HIEP, SOC TRANG PROVINCE

(ABOVE)

MS. NGUYEN THI PHUONG HOANG – HEAD OF THE QUALITY CONTROL DEPARTMENT FROM UTXI. © WWF-VIET NAM

Extending exporting market

About 80% of exported shrimp come from small households like Mung, who would have little chance to get ASC as the cost for assessments is too high an effort.

Meanwhile, processing companies like Utxi Aquatic Products Processing Corporation are getting more requests from buyers to have sustainable and traceable farmed products. It has become urgent for them to extend and secure sustainable raw material areas.

Parallel with technical support for Toan Thang's members to transform their farming practice, WWF connected them with Utxi who has not only agreed to buy all their shrimps but also provides 100 million dong (almost $4,000) each year to support the re-evaluation and ASC certification, allowing them to continue their production according to the global standard.

"Having ASC-certified products has helped us extend our markets and improve our brand image. Now we know how to replicate the model when there is more demand from the market," said Ms. Nguyen Thi Phuong Hoang – Head of the Quality Control Department from Utxi.

Toan Thang and Utxi have demonstrated an effective and resilient partnership through the years, especially during the COVID pandemic when both sides voluntarily shared the loss. This inspired WWF to initiate similar models with a focus on nature-based solutions in other provinces in the Mekong Delta such as shrimp-rice or shrimp-mangrove models in Ca Mau, Bac Lieu, Soc Trang, etc.

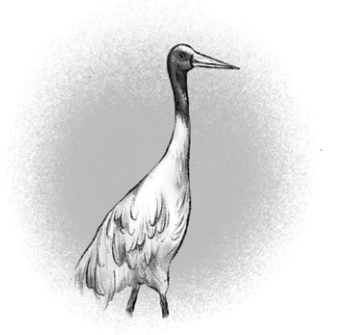
As a member of the Seafood Task Force, a global trade association, WWF advocates for improved codes of conduct among major retailers and leading seafood brands. These members are encouraged to commit to purchasing only sustainably farmed products. In recent years, markets that require ASC certification are not only limited in Europe but in the US, Japan, Korea, Australia, etc.

(ABOVE)

PROCESSING SHRIMPS AT UT XI SEAFOOD COMPANY, TAI VAN COMMUNE, TRAN DE DISTRICT, SOC TRANG PROVINCE. © WWF-VIET NAM

03

Wings of conservation: saving the Sarus crane



(LEFT)

A SARUS CRANE WITH ITS NEWLY HATCHED CHICK.
© YASH EARTH / SHUTTERSTOCK / WWF-VIET NAM

"SHH, DON'T SAY A WORD – we don't want to scare the birds away," whispers Nguyen Thi Nga, the wetland biodiversity officer at Tram Chim National Park. With a quiet reverence, she guides her small boat through the waters, steering toward a favourite feeding zone of the park's feathered inhabitants. She loves going there, for she is known as Nga Birdie because of her eponymous passion.

Tram Chim National Park in Dong Thap province attracts many visitors because of its spectacular wetland biodiversity, home to about 180 types of birds or 1/4 of Viet Nam's bird species, among many other living creatures. But the park was created to especially protect one particular species in 1991 - the world's tallest flying bird, the endangered Sarus cranes.

However, the crane is threatened to become a relic of the past as the bird's population has rapidly declined. While over 1,000 Sarus cranes were recorded in 1988, none were found in 2020. Loss of habitat is the primary cause of this decline.

The fear that destroys the habitats

In Viet Nam, forest fires are an existential danger that all national parks in Viet Nam must legally extinguish. For Tram Chim, high water levels are maintained to avoid this risk.

However, this method conflicts with the ecological needs of the key habitats, even Melaleuca trees, one of the main species in the park, which require alternating dry and wet seasons. Prolonged, deep flooding also destroys the development of *Eleocharis orchrostachys*, a spike rush that the cranes love to eat. Without sufficient food and a sleeping area, Sarus cranes skip Tram Chim on their migration route.

Years of advocating for a more natural fire-water management approach

Since 2007, WWF has carried out studies to understand the problems that threaten the natural habitat in the park. In 2008, after a year of piloting a new water management model, 2,700 hectares of wetland were restored, increasing the number of cranes returning that year to 126 individuals, compared to 41 in 2005.

Other initiatives to reduce the direct and indirect threats to the park and wildlife include raising awareness, improving local livelihoods, reducing the impacts of tourism, and piloting sustainable harvesting in the park's core zone. In 2012, with support from WWF, Tram Chim became the 2000th Ramsar site – a globally important wetland.

Throughout the year, WWF and scientists continue to advocate for changing the way water is regulated inside the park. However, water is still stored all year round to prevent fires, leading to no return of the cranes in 2020, 2021 and 2023.

With the determination to bring back the bird, in 2022, again, WWF and the park applied a new water management plan to restore 25 hectares of wetland to the closest natural condition in its core zone. This method follows natural seasonal floods and dry periods instead of keeping the water level high and flooding the park year-round. Thanks to this, grassland with Eleocharis plants has flourished again.

In March 2024, four Sarus cranes fluttered their wings towards the park.

"We all screamed "crane, crane, crane coming back" with joy and excitement," Nga recalled. "It's a hopeful sign that we are doing something right on the ground."

(BELOW)

A FIELD OF VIBRANT HOANG DAU AN (*XYRIS INDICA*) FLOWERS IN TRAM CHIM NATIONAL PARK. © WWF-VIET NAM / PHUONG HA

> “ [...] It [the crane coming back] is a hopeful sign that we are doing something right on the ground. ”

NGUYEN THI NGA,
WETLAND BIODIVERSITY OFFICER
TRAM CHIM NATIONAL PARK

(RIGHT)
AERIAL VIEW OF A SWAMP INSIDE THE TRAM CHIM NATIONAL PARK.
© THOMAS CRISTOFOLETTI / WWF-US

A determination to bring back the icon

The return of the species gave the park management confidence to continue expanding the model. By December 2024, another 330 ha of habitat was restored, with the target of 735 ha, the park’s total area, in the coming years.

That decision also is backed up by the strong will of the province to bring back the iconic species through a reintroduction programme from 2022-2032. Among many other interventions for this purpose, restoring habitat is one of the keys.

“The research that WWF has conducted since 2007 provided us with credible data and recommendations for us to adjust our management plan for the park,” said Mr. Tran Hao Hiep, Director of the Conservation Center of Tram Chim National Park.

According to the park’s officials, what started as a pilot in 2007 with WWF has become an inspirational example for other national parks to follow, through the sharing of Tram Chim NP staff. Especially for parks and wetlands with similar conditions to those in Tra Su and Lang Sen.

“For nearly 20 years, WWF has been collaborating with local partners and communities to restore Tram Chim wetlands, a crucial habitat, through different approaches,” says Hoang Viet, the Freshwater Lead of WWF-Viet Nam. “The knowledge and lessons learnt from Tram Chim have been applied to other similar wetlands in the region to create a continuous habitat network that strengthens ecological integrity and the sustainable relationship between people and nature.”

04

Forest's riches are our riches

(LEFT)

A YOUNG MANGROVE TREE AT MUI CA MAU NATIONAL PARK. © WWF-VIET NAM

IN ANY GIVEN AREA, 1.5 million people is a significant population. That's the case for Ca Mau, the southernmost province of Viet Nam.

Amidst these residents stands an ancient and towering presence: the trees. Millions of them have silently witnessed the military resistance during the American War and have welcomed waves of migrants who arrived in the forest following the country's reunification in 1975.

61-year-old Tran Van Huong, a veteran from the northern town of Nam Dinh is one of them. In 1993, he travelled all the way to Đat Mui commune in Ca Mau and joined a community living under the canopy, who sustained themselves by harvesting sea creatures.

In 2003, the forest officially became Ca Mau National Park, proudly hosting Viet Nam's largest mangrove forest spanning nearly 42,000 hectares.

The park, which provides a nutrient-rich environment for shellfish, sea fish and many other creatures, has suffered from an ordeal, namely commercial practices. Over the years, many residents in Ca Mau have converted large swaths of forest into dyked ponds for shrimp farming, catering to global markets.

"Back then, I saw smoke everywhere around me," Huong said, referring to forest burning.

This shift has stripped away life. The shade that once sheltered every living creature under its canopy has gradually vanished.

The formal recognition of the park's status marked the beginning of a new era, as authorities work to protect the forest's resources while helping residents find sustainable livelihoods that don't put the forest at risk. The park authorities have teamed up with WWF to accomplish these two critical missions.

(ABOVE)

TRAN VAN HOA, HUONG'S SON, IS FISHING IN HIS FAMILY'S POND TO PREPARE A MEAL FOR TOURISTS. © WWF-VIET NAM

Ecotourism—a solution for livelihood improvement

The first intervention started in 2012 when WWF worked with four households to pilot an ecotourism model that takes the park's natural beauty as one of the main selling points.

Huong was one of the four pioneers.

He acquired hospitality skills from WWF experts and with seed money from the organization, he built a homestay with facilities inviting visitors to return.

WWF also collaborated with the park to establish six tourism routes through the mangroves to help visitors understand the importance of the wetland ecosystem. The business runs so well that now Huong's son's family joins him, and five other households follow his example. Huong calls his enterprise a "showcase model of the province and WWF," possibly inspiring others to follow suit.

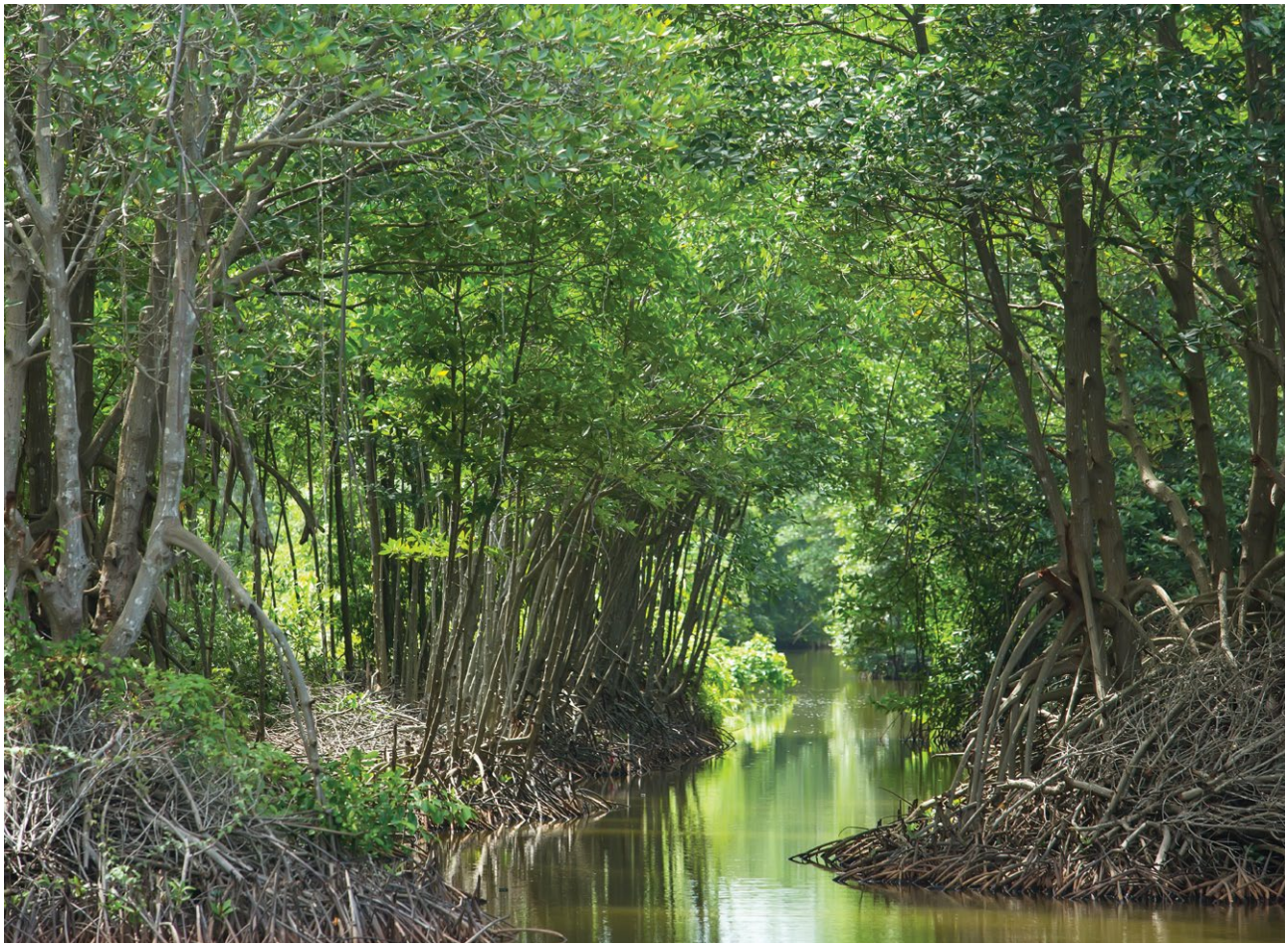
Growing walking forests

The second clue to this partnership is on Google Maps.

If you look up the alluvial plain of Dat Mui, signs of a quiet but significant transformation unfold. Since 2019, WWF has supported the rehabilitation of 150 hectares of mangrove forest to fortify nature's best defences against storms, provide food and protect families like Huong's in Ca Mau Cape.

When a group of WWF staff visited the site in mid-2024, vibrant saplings stood proudly alongside older trees, anchoring themselves with robust roots. Many seeds had taken root independently, forming disorderly lines of trees near and along the fences, creating what one staff member described as a "walking forest."

Once these mangroves mature, they are expected to absorb at least 20,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually,



(ABOVE)

THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE AROUND HUONG'S HOUSE, DAT MUI COMMUNE, NGOC HIEN DISTRICT, CA MAU PROVINCE. © WWF-VIET NAM

protecting more than 10,000 households from flooding and could provide the fishery spawning ground up to 350 - 390 tonnes of seafood a year. They will also safeguard the geographical integrity of the park from erosion and uphold Viet Nam's sovereignty over its land, which is one of the primary missions the Park was tasked with when it was established.

The community joined the park to protect the forest—their livelihood source

Implementing ecotourism, people like Huong understand very well the direct benefits of restoring the mangrove forest.

The national park is home to 93 bird species, forming part of its breathtakingly biodiverse ecosystem. "Wherever there are birds, tourism can flourish," he said.

This fuels his and his fellow residents' motivation to sustainably protect the forest's resources as their own. They work together to plant new seedlings in the park, and act as its guards, alerting the authorities whenever they see illegal loggers or hunters.

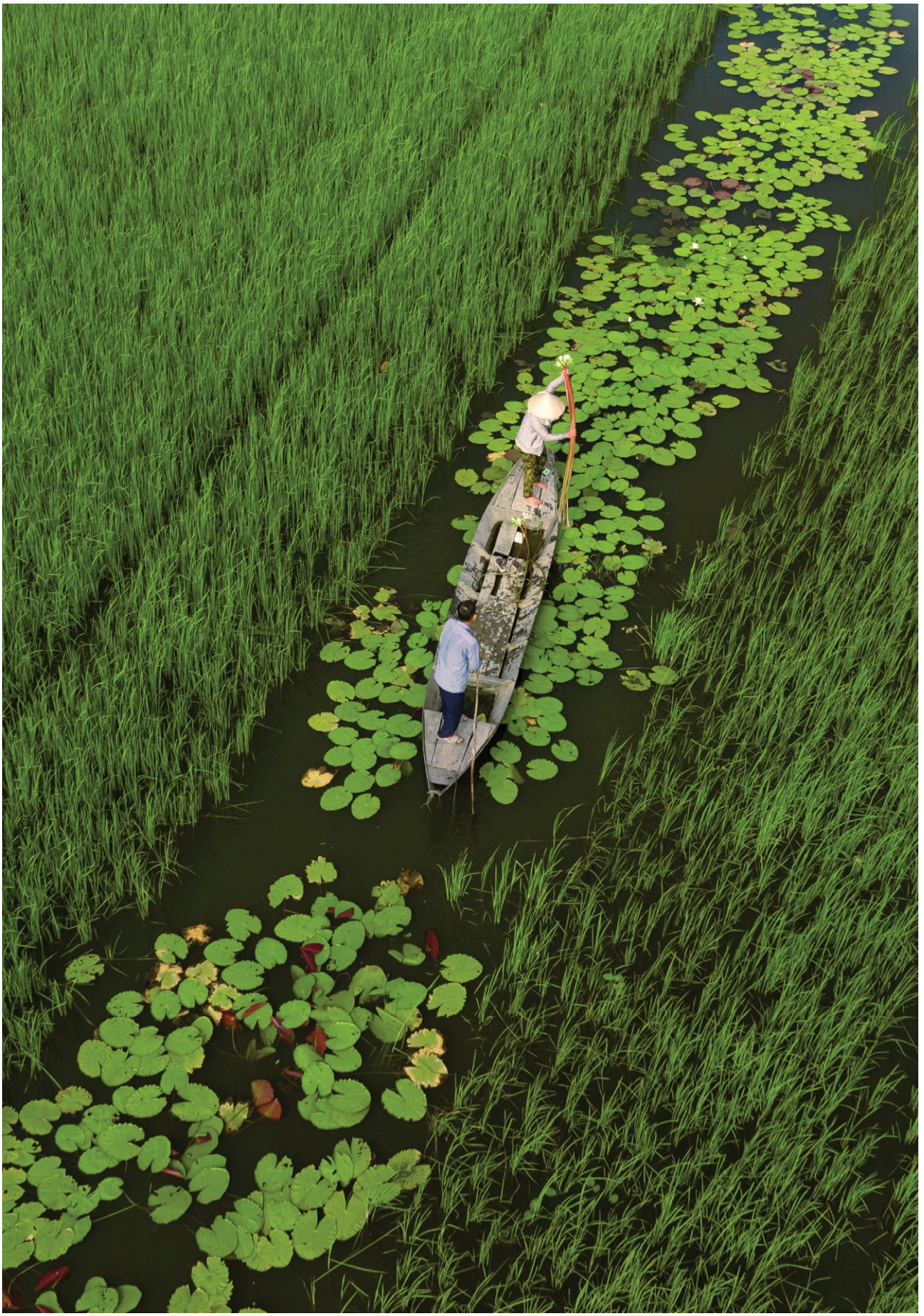
They protect the forest not for anyone else but for their livelihood, and their own family wellbeing.

"That's our ultimate goal when introducing the ecotourism model. We want to showcase to the residents here how nature is connected to their necessity of life, to build a strong bond between people and nature", shared Hoang Viet, Freshwater Programme Lead at WWF-Viet Nam.

“ [...] We want to showcase to the residents here how nature is connected to their necessity of life, to build a strong bond between people and nature. ”

HOANG VIET,
FRESHWATER PROGRAMME LEAD
WWF-VIET NAM

(RIGHT)
A CLIMBING PERCH (*ANABAS TESTUDINEUS*) IS MOVING ACROSS THE MUD.
© BISWAPHOTOGRAPHY / SHUTTERSTOCK / WWF-VIET NAM



05

Floating rice, a flooding season solution

(LEFT)

FARMERS FROM THE DICH VU LUA MUA NOI COOPERATIVE NAVIGATE BY BOAT THROUGH THE FLOATING RICE FIELDS DURING THE FLOOD SEASON IN VINH DAI COMMUNE, TAN HUNG DISTRICT, LONG AN PROVINCE. © WWF-VIET NAM / CHAM TEAM

THE MEKONG DELTA'S RICE FIELDS are delicious treats for the eyes. Vast, lush green expanses that stretch to the horizon in Long An province are divided into neat, rectangular plots, often with no apparent signs of ownership or prominent kinds of rice being grown, creating an illusion of homogeneity to untrained eyes.

Nguyen Thi Be zigzags through the maze and picks up a rice plant in her plot that appears longer and has extensive foliage compared to other rice plants nearby. That is floating rice, an ancient variety that adapts to changing water levels without requiring chemically stimulated growth, such as heavy fertilisers, like other crops.

"My parents grew this when I was little, and then they stopped in 1978 and switched to the high-yield rice [I'm also growing] today," Be said.

Over the decades, high-yield rice has become a commercial success thanks to Viet Nam's intensified rice export policy to compete with regional players like Thailand and India.

(LEFT)

FARMERS IN VINH DAI COMMUNE TRANSFER FLOATING RICE TO SHIPS FOR DRYING BEFORE DELIVERY. © WWF-VIET NAM

(ABOVE)

FARMERS IN VINH DAI COMMUNE. © WWF-VIET NAM / CHAM TEAM

There are only two seasons in the delta: dry and wet. While the flooding season replenishes land with rich sediments and flushes out harmful residues, not every crop, including the high-yield rice, is resistant to the inundation, especially as the flooding season is becoming more erratic due to climate change.

Be farms two commercial rice crops yearly, leaving the land flooded during the flood season. She used to catch snails as an extra, though precarious, income. Other locals often resort to short-term labour or illegal fishing and hunting to earn a living during this time.

This is why WWF is working with local farmers to cultivate floating rice sustainably. Due to its ability to thrive in high water levels, floating rice is one of the key nature-based solutions that WWF is implementing in the Mekong Delta. It allows people in seasonally flooded areas to improve their livelihoods and climate resilience in the flood-prone upstream provinces of the Mekong Delta.

Since 2022, Be and 32 farmers in the Dich Vu Lua Mua Noi Cooperative have partnered with WWF to revive floating rice crops. This is especially in line with the Vietnamese government's Resolution 120 in 2017, which promotes agroecological practices that support natural processes, including flood cycles.

Floating rice is less labour-intensive and requires no chemicals. Although its yield is lower than commercial rice, the selling price is nearly double, significantly improving their family's income.

Beyond a better income, floating rice has prompted the farmers to reconsider commercial, intensive farming, which depletes the land and the sediments it thrives on. Farming floating rice enhances soil health because 2.5-3 times as much sediment accumulates during flood-based farming compared to farming conventional crops. This means the delta's soils benefit, as well as native fish which can once again move between the river and the fields, not to mention the large amounts of water stored and released slowly, reducing the downstream flood risk.

(ABOVE)

NGUYEN THI BE, A MEMBER OF DICH VU MUA LUA NOI COOPERATIVE, AT HER RICE FIELD, WHICH CULTIVATES FLOATING RICE IN THE FLOOD SEASON. WWF-VIET NAM / NGUYEN TRAM ANH

Be takes pride in her cooperative's floating rice, the story of which greatly inspires their buyer, Khai Nam. This partnership, facilitated by WWF, ensures a market for the cooperative's harvests, resulting in value-added products like instant phở targeted at Southeast Asian and European markets. With the market's green light, WWF, in collaboration with local authorities and the community, aims to scale up floating rice farming, with plans to increase it to 300 hectares by 2026, threefold the 2024 amount.

In addition to floating rice, WWF plans to implement a new livelihood model integrating lotuses and fish farming in the Long An and Dong Thap wetland provinces. Lessons learnt from implementing these models enabled WWF to advise the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) on upgrading agricultural infrastructure in the Mekong Delta. This ensures that Vietnamese food is produced in a way that nurtures the environment in which it is grown. The Minister of MARD has publicly endorsed nature-based solutions and supported WWF in continuing them.

As farmers face unpredictable environmental challenges, initiatives like WWF help them adapt and revive the art of floating rice cultivation. By improving productivity and establishing market-driven value chains, WWF aims to revitalise seasonal flooding, enhance wetland habitats, and foster community sustainability, positioning floating rice as a beacon of hope for the region's ecological and economic future.

WWF aims to revitalise seasonal flooding, enhance wetland habitats, and foster community sustainability

06

Shrimp-rice rotation model builds resilience in Viet Nam's Mekong Delta

(LEFT)

FARMERS WORKING ON A BOAT AT THE SHRIMP-RICE FARMING AREA IN CA MAU.
© WWF-VIET NAM / CHAM TEAM

THE MEKONG DELTA IS SEVERELY AFFECTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE, facing increasingly extreme droughts, saltwater intrusion, and land subsidence. The shrimp-rice rotation model is a climate-adaptive production system for coastal provinces like Ca Mau, affected by saline water in the dry season and fresh water in the rainy season. However, traditional farming methods that use many chemicals go against the natural process, leading to unstable productivity and negative impacts on the environment and people's health.

Tri Luc became the first shrimp-rice model in Viet Nam and the world to achieve Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) group certification.

"The traditional shrimp farming method in our locality, everyone wants to farm continuously to make more money," says Mr Chung Minh Oai, a member of the Tri Luc Cooperative. "Overusing the land leads to a depletion of natural food sources, resulting in a high risk of shrimp death."

Tri Luc Commune, Thoi Binh is one of the first three localities to pilot the sustainable shrimp-rice rotation model under the WWF initiative, aiming to develop nature-based livelihood solutions in the Mekong Delta, funded by the Dutch Fund for Climate and Development (DFCD).

In the first shrimp-rice season, Ms Truong Thi Kieu Diem and her husband sold three barrels of shrimp at the market, earning enough to buy a television worth over a million dong. Over 25 years later, the old TV remains a memento of the first days they brought shrimp to the fields. After that beginner's luck, shrimp farming became unpredictable, with frequent losses because of a lack of technical knowledge and improper practices.

After a year of nature-based farming, local incomes nearly tripled. Tri Luc became the first shrimp-rice model in Viet Nam and the world to achieve Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) group certification. With WWF-Viet Nam's technical consultation, the responsible shrimp-rice rotation model, led by Minh Phu Social Enterprise, adheres to ASC shrimp and organic rice standards, ensuring the purchase of output products for locals.

Following a successful three-year pilot, the integrated Shrimp-Rice model has proven to be a viable and effective nature-based solution for the Mekong Delta. Minh Phu expanded the model from 110 hectares to nearly 6,000 hectares, with potential scaling to 30,000 hectares through green finance from the DFCD. Both shrimp and rice production

(ABOVE)

BLACK TIGER SHRIMPS FROM THE SHRIMP-RICE MODEL IN TRI LUC COOPERATIVE. © WWF-VIET NAM / PHUONG NGAN

increased significantly, with yields reaching 410 kg/ha and 4.5 tonnes/ha, respectively, resulting in a threefold profit of EUR 3,900/ha/year compared to non-project production.

From a conservation standpoint, this model compensates for 20-40% of land subsidence, eliminates groundwater extraction and chemical use, and enhances the delta's food system and resilience to natural forces.

The project also supports women's participation in nature-based solutions. Technical training sessions have been well-attended by locals, especially women. "In the past, women were not allowed to go down to the shrimp ponds, for fear of bad luck. Now, with knowledge, we are confident to speak up and discuss with our husbands to achieve the best efficiency," Ms. Diem proudly shares. Eyeing the future, Ms. Diem hopes the model will expand, involve more families, and diversify Tri Luc products for nationwide distribution.

CHAPTER 3

Seascape—
Blue Forest

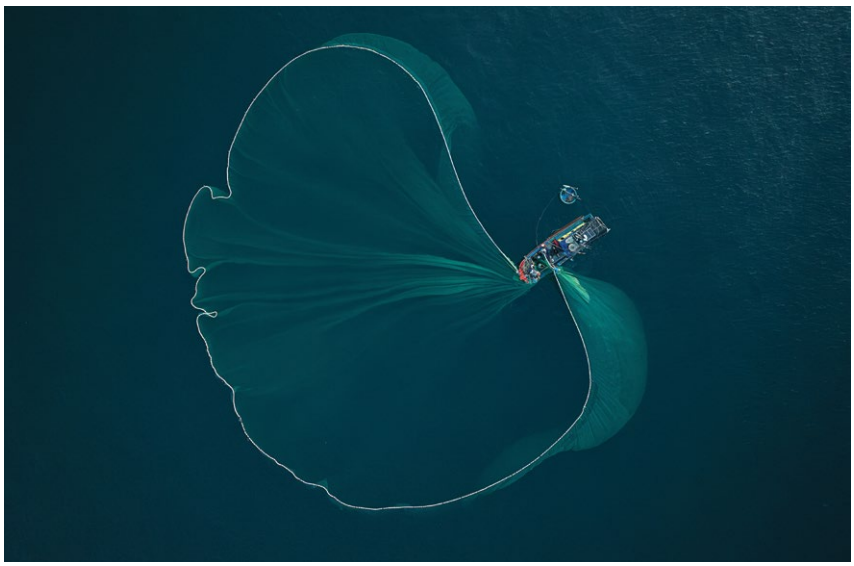
Seascape

VIET NAM'S OCEANS ARE A LIFELINE FOR BOTH PEOPLE AND NATURE. From the rich waters of Phu Quoc, Cu Lao Cham, and Con Dao, to high-value fisheries, these marine areas are vital for biodiversity, livelihoods, and resilience against climate change. They store carbon, protect coastlines, and sustain countless communities. Yet, these ecosystems are under growing pressure from climate change, pollution, and unsustainable practices.

Since the early 1990s, WWF-Viet Nam has been a pioneer in turtle conservation, launching national programmes to protect these endangered species. Over the years, we have been taking ambitious action in its marine conservation work to protect biodiversity in the face of climate change and other environmental challenges.

Our main focus areas have been protecting key habitats, increasing the number of sustainable fisheries and cutting marine plastic debris. Viet Nam aims to become a high-income country by 2045, but growth and urbanisation exacerbate the plastic waste crisis, threatening marine life.

WWF-Viet Nam is responding to preserve marine biodiversity affected by these growing issues. We are among the first to establish turtle conservation nationally, lead awareness-raising with fishermen on bycatch endangered species, and support a plastic smart city in Hue, alongside ten other cities. Steps towards a greener future, including supporting the Viet Nam government in advocating for



(ABOVE)

SEINE FISHING IN PHU YEN PROVINCE.
© LONG / ADOBE STOCK / WWF-VIET NAM

and developing a global treaty on managing ocean plastic pollution. Furthermore, helping the Ben Tre clam fishery in Viet Nam receive Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification in 2009, demonstrates the power of sustainable actions. From there, the fishery has maintained its MSC status, alongside thriving livelihoods and a large mangrove forest. A win for the environment and a model we hope spreads across Asia.

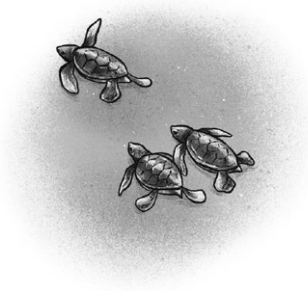
Our new strategic vision will expand its interventions in the marine realm and define a seascape programme. The seascape ambitions will be to (1) Protect & Resilient Ocean habitats, (2) Reduced impacts on species/ Reverse species decline via sustainable use of seascapes, (3) Continue mitigating plastic pollution threats, and (4) Leverage sustainable financing solutions. The health of our ecosystems directly impacts wellbeing, the bedrock of a functioning society. Protecting the ocean and its biodiversity is critical in the fight against climate change and preventing irreversible damage.

"We are proud of our efforts as the lead conservation organiszation to directly address the ocean plastic issue in Viet Nam, an emerging threat in marine conservation, but understand we have a long road ahead," says Thuy Nguyen Thi Dieu, WWF-Viet Nam's Ocean Programme Lead.

"Our marine conservation actions will work in tandem with policies and future investment, needed to bring about lasting change."

01

The return of turtles: a beacon of hope for the once-rich turtle island



(LEFT)

A BABY GREEN SEA TURTLE (*CHELONIA MYDAS*) SWIMMING IN THE OCEAN.
© NICOLAS JOB

IT IS ESTIMATED THAT OUT OF 1000 BABY TURTLES, just one survives to adulthood. Interestingly, these surviving female turtles, after reaching sexual maturity at the age of 20-30, always return to where they were born to lay eggs.

"Therefore, seeing the number of female and baby turtles in Con Dao increasing yearly makes me happy, knowing that our work is efficient," says Mr Tran Manh Hung, the Head of the Bay Canh Island Ranger station, part of the Con Dao National Park.

Each day, Mr Hung and his staff survey the coast to protect critically endangered sea turtles returning to their sanctuary at Con Dao island, demonstrating the power of a strong conservation foundation set by WWF-Viet Nam and the park authorities to save the threatened species.

(LEFT)

INSTALL A SATELLITE CHIP TO MONITOR TURTLE TRAVELLING ROUTE, CON DAO NATIONAL PARK 2007. © WWF-VIET NAM / NGUYEN THI DIEU THUY

From zero to the most successful conservation sea turtle programme in Viet Nam

In the late 1980s, there was no marine protection system in Viet Nam, despite having a long, rich coastline and large offshore archipelago of islands. That makes the WWF's 1992 assessment of marine ecosystems throughout the country a crucial foundation for mapping marine protected areas in Viet Nam and contributed to establishing Con Dao National Park in 1993.

Favoured with rich natural inland forest and marine life, Con Dao is home to five critically endangered sea turtle species; however, the most often seen are the Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) and the Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). It is Viet Nam's first and most successful sea turtle breeding area. In recent years, officials have recorded over 1,000 sea turtle nests annually and released over 150,000 hatchlings into the sea.

It is a far cry from the time before conservation efforts on Con Dao. Sea turtle numbers plummeted due to habitat disruption from natural conditions and human development, pollution, an unsustainable fishery, and illegal poaching and trading. When the park was first established, little experience and no funding were allocated to protect the species.

In 1995, WWF began its first project to support the park in turtle conservation. It started by improving park staff's scientific knowledge of the species by training them with international experts and organising study tours in other countries. Park staff like Hung learnt to conserve sea turtles from scratch, monitor breeding sites, incubate eggs, control hatch conditions, release baby turtles, etc.

Numerous activities were carried out to ensure sustainable conservation results, from environmental education for school children and awareness raising for the local communities to habitat restoration, especially plastic waste management in recent years, and bycatch reduction programmes. The most up-to-date technology was also used to monitor the turtle's travel route for better conservation planning.

Now, Con Dao has 16 turtle nesting grounds, and the hatching rate has increased to 87% from 27% in 1993. During peak season, some beaches on Bay Canh island and Tre Lon island, parts of Con Dao National Park, record 20 mother turtles nesting each night. There are records of many mother turtles with tags from other Southeast Asian countries have come here to lay eggs.

While WWF-Viet Nam's direct turtle conservation work on the island ended in 2012, its legacy remains strong. Since then, the Con Dao National Park has successfully secured an annual governmental budget to continue the turtle programme's success. In the true spirit of replicating conservation efforts, Con Dao National Park officials have also shared their training and valuable experience with colleagues from Nui Chua National Park, Bai Tu Long National Park, Cu Lao Cham, and Hon Cau Marine protected areas.

"It is fair to say WWF has initiated the turtle conservation programme not only in Con Dao but in Viet Nam," said Hung, who has been releasing thousands of baby turtles to the sea since he started working here 30 years ago.

> “It is fair to say WWF has initiated the turtle conservation programme not only in Con Dao but in Viet Nam [...]”

MR TRAN MANH HUNG,
HEAD OF THE BAY CANH ISLAND RANGER STATION
CON DAO NATIONAL PARK

(RIGHT)
A MOTHER TURTLE (*CHELONIA MYDAS*) LAYS EGGS IN CON DAO NATIONAL PARK.
© WWF-VIET NAM / NGUYEN THI DIEU THUY

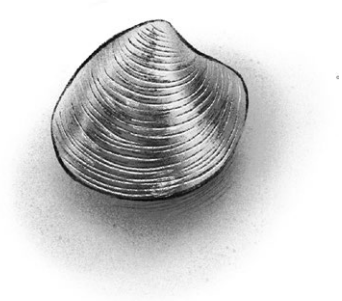
Con Dao—a key global site for turtle conservation

In 2022, Con Dao was listed as an ASEAN Heritage Park. It is the most important sea turtle nesting site in Viet Nam, well-known as a feeding ground for dugongs and many other marine mammal species. More than 66 marine species found here are listed in the IUCN Red List and Viet Nam Data Red Book. Its pristine forests are home to many species of terrestrial flora and fauna.

With this rich biodiversity, Con Dao is always on the priority conservation list of WWF-Viet Nam. Since 2020, WWF-Viet Nam has intensively supported Con Dao in the fight against marine plastic pollution. “WWF will continue working with the park and other stakeholders to implement a variety of approaches, from policy recommendation, public awareness raising, to direct intervention on the ground to protect the Viet Nam sea turtle population, restoring marine ecosystem to allow future generations to see the wildlife in their natural habitats instead of in museums,” shared Nguyen Thi Dieu Thuy, Ocean Programme Lead of WWF-Viet Nam.

02

The strong will of a woman who brought Ben Tre's sustainable clam to the global stage



(LEFT)

CLAM HARVESTING IN BINH DAI DISTRICT, BEN TRE PROVINCE.
© RANG DONG COOPERATIVE

ON THE SHORE OF BINH DAI, Ben Tre province, thousands of white hard clams are lurking beneath the muddy sand. At sunrise, members of the Rang Dong Cooperative will come to rake up the clams and collect them in mesh sacks. Instead of heavy machines, Rang Dong Cooperative and the ten clam cooperatives of Ben Tre harvest by hand to protect the delicate ecosystem along the 65-kilometre coastline of Ben Tre. These cooperatives were the first fishery in Southeast Asia to qualify for the Marine Stewardship Certification (MSC) in 2009, with support from WWF.

From her office, Tran Thi Thu Nga, the former Director of the Ben Tre Fishery Department, recalls how she led the effort to obtain MSC certification for the Ben Tre clam fishery.

In 1999, two years into her role as Deputy Director of the Ben Tre Fishery Department, Nga found her Department being sued by local communities. The lawsuit resulted from her advocacy for a ban on harvesting parent clams. Her major move was to fight against the over-exploitation under her watch, yet she could do nothing because of a lack of necessary authority.

Nga had to contact science institutes to prove her points. The scientific evidence saved her from a lawsuit and helped her convince the people that this was the right approach. However, she and the community still struggled to change to a more sustainable practice.

Becoming Viet Nam's first eco-certified clam industry

In 2005, Nga first learned about MSC certification in a workshop organised by WWF-Viet Nam. At that time, WWF was working with communities and partners to support the fishery sector's transformation toward sustainability. Convinced by Nga's strong will to make the Ben Tre Clam last and thrive, WWF-Viet Nam started supporting Nga and the province in meeting the high requirements of MSC, a certificate that proves a product was produced or harvested sustainably.

The Ben Tre clams are now travelling worldwide to over 100 countries. "I met them in Argentina. Can you believe it?" Nga joyfully shared about her pleasant encounter. In May 2024, the Ben Tre clam fishery achieved MSC certification for the third time, marking a significant triumph for the Mekong Delta's fishing community.

The certified clams can double the regular price, and most importantly, encourage sustainable fishery practices in Ben Tre. The practices now widely practised by the cooperative members include preserving mangrove forests and beaches to provide safe means of growing areas for the clams, protecting clam broodstock and their habitat and sustainable exploitation to ensure future regeneration. Moreover, the certification has provided job stability and a steady income for thousands of people, predominantly women. It has also enhanced the economic situation of households and improved the living conditions and education opportunities of the clam-fishing communities in Ben Tre.

(BELOW)

CLAM HARVESTING IN BINH DAI DISTRICT, BEN TRE PROVINCE.
© RANG DONG COOPERATIVE

> “ [...] WWF will continue to stand side by side with coastal communities and authorities at all levels to preserve the precious marine ecosystem and resources for Viet Nam biodiversity richness and for future generations. ”

NGUYEN THI DIEU THUY,
OCEAN PROGRAMME LEAD
WWF-VIET NAM

(RIGHT)
CLAM HARVESTING IN BINH DAI DISTRICT, BEN TRE PROVINCE.
© RANG DONG COOPERATIVE

“I thank WWF for enabling the MSC in Ben Tre. Such a model like Ben Tre clam is a good lesson for the fishery in Viet Nam. For an initiative to last long and be sustainable, it needs to be consistent with the community’s will, aligned with available or potential legal frameworks, and based on scientific facts and market demands,” Nga added.

The local clam industry’s green turnaround shores up its long-term viability. Receiving the very first MSC certification in Southeast Asia opened the Viet Nam fishery to more international markets in Europe and beyond.

“The Ben Tre clam fishery demonstrates how a sustainability scheme like MSC certification can bring numerous benefits for the surrounding environment, people’s livelihoods, and the economy, balancing nature and human wellbeing,” says Thuy Nguyen Thi Dieu. “With the mission and vision of a nature conservation organization, WWF will continue to stand side by side with coastal communities and authorities at all levels to preserve the precious marine ecosystem and resources for Viet Nam biodiversity richness and for future generations.”


HUE PLOGGING

03

Hue—a Plastic Smart City in Central Viet Nam

(LEFT)

CLEANING A POLLUTION HOTSPOT AT THUAN AN BEACH IN HUE PLOGGING EVENT 2024. © WWF-VIET NAM

WWF-VIET NAM LEADS CONSERVATION efforts nationally, including helping tackle plastic pollution in Viet Nam, with more than 8,000 tonnes of plastic waste generated per day (WWF-Viet Nam, 2021). Hue City has become a symbol of progress in combating plastic pollution. The city's journey towards becoming a Plastic Smart City reflects our core mission of restoring harmony between human development and nature.

Hue, renowned for its five UNESCO World Heritage sites and vibrant Huong River, is steeped in cultural and natural heritage. However, rapid urbanisation has increased heat stress, floods and solid waste pollution levels. The city's proximity to the Central Annamite forests provides a unique opportunity to blend economic growth with sustainable, nature-based solutions.

WWF's bold innovation to prevent plastic waste from ending up in landfills, choking waterways and damaging ecosystems, led Hue to become a Plastic Smart City in 2021.

WWF's Plastic Smart Cities (PSC) initiative promotes no plastic in nature by 2030, encouraging communities to act now to cut waste. With good take up, Hue's people are resilient and dedicated to becoming a plastic-free city.

(ABOVE)

WATER REFILL STATION AT GIA LONG TOMB. © WWF-VIET NAM

Since 2018, besides Hue, WWF has supported these areas to become greener: Phu Yen province, Phu Quoc city, Rach Gia city, Thanh Khe district (Da Nang city), Tan An city, Ha Tinh city, Dong Hoi city, A Luoi district, and Con Dao island. With our support, these cities developed City Action Plans to reduce plastic waste leakage into the environment by 30 per cent.

Our approach integrates plastic reduction into the broader solid waste management system, emphasising our collective responsibility to create healthier environments. The State plays a crucial role by increasing investment, promoting socialisation, and fostering collaboration among various stakeholders. Innovative technology has also been used and promoted in waste management throughout collection, transportation and treatment to prevent leakage.

Plastic reduction and recycling rates in Hue have been boosted through a refined waste sorting programme. Training and behaviour change communication activities,

(ABOVE)

HANDLING TRASH CONTAINERS TO HUE CITY. © WWF-VIET NAM

plastic waste reduction measures at schools and markets, promotion of plastic-free tourist destinations, and community plastic-waste reduction events were also conducted.

Efforts to increase collection rates included expanding coverage areas, gathering plastic waste from the agricultural and fisheries sectors, removing plastic hotspots, and improving collection processes through compactor trucks and performance training standards. Additionally, initiatives to improve livelihoods for informal collectors and enhance health, safety, and environmental conditions for the facilities significantly boosted the recycling rate.

These combined approaches have led to Hue achieving its goal of reducing plastic waste leakage by 30% by the end of 2023. It equates to nearly 400 tonnes of plastic leakage reduced and over 300 tonnes of mismanaged plastic waste collected. A significant milestone, reinforcing Hue's commitment to a greener, cleaner, waste-free future.

04

Viet Nam's coastal communities fight wave of plastic pollution

IN VIET NAM'S COASTAL COMMUNITIES, a groundswell of residents is united in fighting plastic waste through innovative, community-driven solutions supported by WWF-Viet Nam. Some examples are:

- A material recovery facility is revolutionising waste management in Bai Ong village in Cu Lao Cham. Families now diligently separate waste, converting organic materials into valuable resources like fertiliser. Waste output is significantly reduced, with local farmers benefiting from minimised chemical use and enhanced agricultural productivity.

- Amid an estimated 3.1 million metric tonnes of plastic waste discharged on land in Viet Nam annually (World Bank, 2022), Phu Quoc Island residents have undertaken training to take ownership of waste management. Through education and community engagement, locals embrace recycling, resulting in cleaner neighbourhoods and less plastic in local ecosystems.

- Dong Hoi City fishermen have become champions of environmental stewardship through the Raising Community Awareness initiative. Now actively collecting waste during fishing expeditions, they contribute to cleaner waters and recycling efforts to improve the environment for all.

- Da Nang students are reducing plastic consumption and promoting composting practices through our Plastic Waste Free School initiative. Like a ripple effect, the sustainable measures spread to their families and communities.

- The Green Offering Basket regulation is applied by Con Dao district every Saturday, starting from July 6, 2024. This offering basket only uses environmentally-friendly products and contains no single-use plastic products such as foam, plastic bags, and plastic bottles.

- From an area seriously affected by plastic waste, mainly plastic bags thrown away after feeding fish and shrimp, Vung Ro Bay, Phu Yen has become more beautiful and cleaner thanks to the joint efforts of the government and fishermen to clean up and preserve the environment, not littering indiscriminately.

The success of these community-driven solutions to combat plastic pollution lies in equipping members to be agents of change in safeguarding natural resources while shaping a resilient future. Small steps for a large, positive ecological footprint.

Looking ahead, the lessons learned from Cu Lao Cham, Phu Quoc, Con Dao island, Dong Hoi city, and Da Nang city provide valuable insights for scaling up similar measures across Viet Nam and beyond for a greener future.

CHAPTER 4

National Level

National level

WWF-VIET NAM WORKS CLOSELY WITH THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT to develop a shared vision for conservation. Our efforts focus on supporting the country in achieving its national conservation goals and fulfilling international commitments. We aim to serve as a strategic partner by introducing innovative technologies and initiatives, mobilising resources, and attracting investments from both domestic and international sources. Through these actions, we assist the government in achieving its ambitious environmental objectives. WWF-Viet Nam collaborates with development partners, international and local NGOs, and research institutions to effectively implement our strategy and align with the Vietnamese government's priorities.

(ABOVE)

AERIAL VIEW OF RICE FIELDS WITH WIND TURBINES IN NINH THUAN PROVINCE.
© HIEN PHUNG THU / SHUTTERSTOCK / WWF-VIET NAM

01

A 30-year journey standing side by side with the government for big conservation change

OVER THE PAST 30 YEARS, WWF-Viet Nam has closely collaborated with the government on policies and global conservation commitments for a sustainable future. Our strong ties with the Viet Nam government and partnering on effective conservation policies are crucial to preserving the country's boundless biodiversity.

During the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA 74) in September 2019, WWF and other organizations called for a New Deal for Nature and People, focusing on securing the future of humanity. Former Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc and global leaders voiced support for this agreement, affirming the government's commitment to a green, circular economy. Their priorities are climate change response, resource management, and environmental protection in resolutions and development strategies.

(LEFT)

AERIAL VIEW OF HON YEN ISLAND, PHU YEN PROVINCE. © LEMARET PIERRICK / SHUTTERSTOCK / WWF-VIET NAM

At UNGA75 in 2020, WWF-Viet Nam supported the government's endorsement of the Leaders' Pledge for Nature (LPFN), resulting in Resolution No. 05/NQ-CP on January 15, 2021. This marked a significant step, showcasing Viet Nam as an active part of a global network committed to protecting nature and biodiversity. The resolution laid a solid foundation for implementing domestic conservation policies and promoting international cooperation.

In 2022, at the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15 CBD) in Montreal, Canada, with WWF-Viet Nam's active efforts, led to the Vietnamese government endorsing the "30x30" commitment. This initiative aims to protect at least 30% of the world's land and marine areas by 2030, demonstrating Viet Nam's determination to safeguard critical ecosystems and contribute to global conservation goals.

Building on the successes of COP15 in Montreal, WWF-Viet Nam actively connected the government with international partners at COP28 UNFCCC in 2023 in Dubai. These partners included donors, development organizations, NGOs, private sector stakeholders, and research institutions. These efforts aimed to mobilise participation and resources for the energy transition, contributing to the implementation of Viet Nam's Net Zero commitments made at COP26 UNFCCC.

These achievements are not only a result of WWF-Viet Nam's relentless efforts but also a testament to the equal commitment of the government and the community in protecting and sustainably developing the environment. Moving forward, WWF-Viet Nam will continue supporting the government to earnestly fulfil its commitments to the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), 30x30, and the Leaders' Pledge for Nature.

This 30-year journey highlights the power of collaborative policy engagement and unified efforts in creating a sustainable future for nature and people.

(ABOVE / LEFT)

SIGNING MOU WITH MARD.© WWF-VIET NAM

(ABOVE / RIGHT)

WWF DIRECTOR GENERAL KIRSTEN SCHUIJT IN A MEETING WITH VIET NAM'S DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER TRAN HONG HA IN MARCH 2023. © WWF-VIET NAM


VINPEARL
NAM A BANK
Window Light

02

One Planet City Challenge inspiring green cities around the world

(LEFT)

CAN THO CITY FROM ABOVE.
© LOC HUYNH / SHUTTERSTOCK /
WWF-VIET NAM

SCALING UP SUSTAINABLE CITIES to withstand the climate crisis is paramount. Our One Planet City Challenge (OPCC) is a friendly competition urging visionary urban pioneers to design climate-resilient, liveable cities where communities and nature thrive. These cities inspire a global movement towards a greener future.

To date, 900 cities in over 70 countries have taken on the challenge. Participating in OPCC, cities will prepare a comprehensive climate dossier that will be evaluated by WWF to identify those with the most ambitious goals and prompt actions. Additionally, municipalities can join other cities in a global public engagement campaign "We Love Cities" where with WWF's support, they can increase public awareness and actively participate in combating climate change. Training is also provided on Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emission inventory, climate policies and low-carbon solutions.

One Planet City Challenge began its journey in Hue city, Viet Nam, in 2015. It was one of the earliest campaigns connecting Viet Nam with 900 global cities to combat climate change. By 2024, Hue, Da Nang and Can Tho City have been awarded as the National Winners with ambitious targets and effective action plans to respond to climate change.

By promoting these three National Winners and eight recruited subnations so far, OPCC has demonstrated its important role in increasing contribution from communities to reducing GHG emissions in line with Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) of Viet Nam for pathways to Net-Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 2050.

All 63 provinces and municipalities have been revising their provincial climate change action plans. OPCC is continually expanding its mission to decision-makers and communities in enhancing climate targets, ambitions, and responses.

03

Greening Viet Nam's textile sector

(LEFT)

SPOOLS OF SILK THREADS IN A PRODUCTION FACILITY.
© GODONGPHOTO / SHUTTERSTOCK / WWF-VIET NAM

TRAN NHU TUNG, the Board Chairman of Thanh Cong Textile Investment Trading Joint Stock Company (TCM), became increasingly troubled by the growing pressure from clients to adopt more sustainable practices.

The textile industry notoriously uses massive amounts of water and energy, spurring many of Tung's environmentally conscious international clients to demand the company become more eco-friendly.

"Greening the textile production is expensive, but it's a must," Tung said.

TCM's sustainability shift started with a WWF partnership, where we audited the energy and water usage of its dyeing factory in Ho Chi Minh City in 2021, and then greenhouse gas emissions at its fabric weaving plant in Trang Bang, Tay Ninh.

> "Greening the textile production is expensive, but it's a must [...]"
>
> TRAN NHU TUNG,
> THE BOARD CHAIRMAN OF TCM

(ABOVE)

THANH CONG FACTORY USES SOLAR PANELS.
© WWF-VIET NAM

Soon after, WWF proposed effective solutions for TMC's water-energy resource management. From 2019 to 2022, WWF experts trained staff from TCM and 150 other factories on the latest practices in water and energy conservation, wastewater treatment, and dyeing techniques.

After three years of working with WWF, TMC's dyeing factory has had impressive results. Their water recovery rate in the dyeing process increased from 20% to 30%, saving around 120,000 cubic metres of water annually. They also cut their energy use by 2%, saving around 8 million megajoules annually.

On several fronts, it's a transformation benefiting the environment and allowing TMC to reinvest saved money into sustainable practices, like building more wastewater treatment facilities.

"Going green is expensive but in the long run it helps save costs and enhances the company's brand value," Mr. Tung concluded.

Promisingly, Thanh Cong is among 20 companies joining WWF to green Viet Nam's textile sector, serving as a powerful inspiration for emerging textile businesses nationally. By helping companies reduce their environmental impact, WWF plays a vital role in safeguarding the region's water quality and public health.

In 2024, WWF is expanding its impact by working with industrialised zones specialised in textile and seafood production in southern Viet Nam, particularly those whose supply chains are within the biologically diverse Dong Nai River and Mekong Delta.

The textile industry currently accounts for 15 per cent of the country's total exports and is valued at over US$40 billion as of 2023. But its intensive water and energy use, also generating highly polluted wastewater from chemical dyeing, is detrimental to the environment.

Under WWF's water stewardship initiative, Tung and other industry leaders are involved in creating Viet Nam's first association of industrial zones to collectively scale up energy efficiency and other low-carbon solutions.

"I highly value WWF. Let's see what we can do together next," Tung said.

(ABOVE)

RECYCLED PRODUCTS.
© WWF-VIET NAM

> “ Going green is expensive but in the long run it helps save costs and enhances the company’s brand value [...] ”

TRAN NHU TUNG,
THE BOARD CHAIRMAN OF TCM

Abbreviation	*Word & Phrase*
ASC	Aquaculture Stewardship Council
BCA	Biodiversity Conservation Component
CAL	Central Annamites Landscape
CC	Climate Change
CFM	Community Forest Management
DFCD	Dutch Fund for Climate and Development
ECC	Elephant Conservation Center
EH	Earth Hour
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
EPR	Extended Producer Responsibility
F&B	Food and Beverage
FOSDA	Forest Owners Sustainable Development Association
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)
GPS	Global Positioning System
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GRPD	Gross Regional Domestic Product
HEC	Human and Elephant Conflict
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LRF	Landscape Resilience Fund
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
METT	Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool
MPAs	Marine Protected Areas
MDL	Mekong Delta Landscape
MOIT	Ministry of Industry and Trade
MONRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment

Abbreviation	*Word & Phrase*
MSC	Marine Stewardship Council
MRC	Mekong River Commission
NbS	Nature-based Solutions
NbS OP	Nature-Based Solutions Origination Platform
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NR	Nature Reserve
NTFPs	Non-Timber Forest Products
OECMs	Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures
PAs	Protected Areas
PF	Protected Forest
PCA	Protected and Conserved Areas
PSC	Plastic Smart City
PES	Payment for Ecosystem Services
R-METT	Ramsar Site Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool
STW	Saving Threatened Wildlife
SMART	Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool
TRAFFIC	Trade Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YDNP	Yok Don National Park
VASEP	Viet Nam Association of Seafood Exporters and Producers
VCCI	Viet Nam Chamber of Commerce and Industry
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

Thank you for being a part of
our journey. We could not pursue our vital conservation work without your ongoing support, sharing in our vision of a sustainable future where people and nature peacefully coexist. We look forward to achieving more with you to protect our world-renowned species and habitats.

Working to sustain the natural world for the benefit of people and wildlife.

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