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Rare hog deer confirmed to thrive in Cambodia raising hope for conservation in Cambodia and the world

The 2022 hog deer (*Axis porcinus*) population report revealed 84 individuals roaming the grassland habitats in Prek Prasob Wildlife Sanctuary, Mekong Flooded Forest, Kratie province. The survey result showed the presence of multiple fawns, indicating a reproduction of the rare species is taking place in its natural habitats.

In Cambodia, the species was once considered extinct until its rediscovery in 2006 in Kratie, with their presence confirmed by camera-trapping.

Mr Eam Sam Un, biodiversity research and monitoring manager in Mekong Flooded Forest said, "It is the first ever hog deer population survey in Cambodia 16 years after its rediscovery, supporting the conservation of this rare species in the world."

Ungulate densities are traditionally estimated through direct observation and distance sampling techniques, but hog deer are secretive and elusive, and may switch to nocturnal activity in human-dominated landscapes. Camera traps were deployed in their habitat. The study was the collaboration by the Kratie Provincial Department of Environment of the Ministry of Environment, WWF, BINCO, and with the participation from community members and local authorities.

"The Ministry of Environment is delighted and proud that the natural environment in Cambodia provides a safe haven for the survival of globally significant species such as the hog deer, whose presence and reproduction have been confirmed in Prek Prasob Wildlife Sanctuary. Peace and political stability in Cambodia have created a favorable environment for the Ministry of Environment, communities, local authorities, and all development partners to work together to manage and conserve the natural resources, and as the result forests and wildlife are protected, while the number of some wildlife species have increased. It is critical that we continue strengthening our cooperation for protecting and conserving the biodiversity in our protected areas in support of building better local economies especially through the development of ecotourism and for the benefit of ecosystems in Cambodia and the world," said **His Excellency Neth Pheaktra, Secretary of State and Spokesman to the Ministry of Environment.**

He continued, "The Ministry of Environment, in partnership with WWF, has been continuing their joint efforts in protecting and conserving the hog deer population, through improving local livelihoods, educating and enforcing protected area and forestry laws to prevent forest land encroachment, eradicating all forms of poaching and the snaring in protected areas to ensure the survival of the hog deer and other wildlife of global significance in their natural habitat."

Hog deer is also found residing wild habitats in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Thailand. Scientists suggested that the hog deer is probably extinct in China, Laos and Vietnam.

Mrs. Eng Sokhorn, a member of at Chroy Banteay community patrolling team in Prek Prasob Wildlife Sanctuary expressed that she is thrilled that rare hog deer still thrives in the natural forest of Kratie province and that she had been involved in forest patrols to remove snares from the Prek Prasob Wildlife Sanctuary. She said: "Like other community patrol members, I am encouraged to participate in the forest conservation, especially through patrolling, to protect wildlife from snares, ensuring wildlife survival and protecting our precious natural resources for the next generation."

Hog deer is listed as globally endangered on the IUCN Red List and its survival are threatened by habitat loss, poaching and the snaring crisis, fuelled by the illegal wildlife trade.

Mr. Seng Teak, WWF-Cambodia Country Director, said, "the current findings not only place Cambodia's reputation on the global stage, it also highlights the global importance of the Mekong landscape as critical habitats for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife survival." He added, "WWF congratulates and appreciates the research effort by the team, and the law enforcement efforts by rangers, with the participation of local authorities, and all community members to safeguard the wildlife habitats for the benefit of people and nature."

Concerted actions are urgently needed to protect the last refuge of this rare hog deer species, ensure the zero-snaring in their wild habitats and stop the demand for wild meat and products, ensuring the populations of hog deer and other wildlife can recover for their future survival. The effort in recovering the high population and its habitat, while strengthening local livelihoods also constitute needed conservation measures.

H.E Neth Pheaktra said, "The Ministry of Environment encourages all people living around the protected areas to participate in natural resources and biodiversity conservation, stop poaching and snaring, cease selling/buying wildlife and bushmeat consumption, and in turn taking part in conserving rare wild animals such as the hog deer for the benefit of future generations and enhancing local livelihood development."

The wildlife researchers of Kratie Provincial Department of Environment, Ministry of Environment and WWF, local community and authority assisted by the Biodiversity Inventory for Conservation (BINCO) NPO team and Thermal DRONES GmbH, are carrying out a comprehensive hog deer survey using thermal drone technology to obtain accurate estimate of the species population size for the entire habitat landscape.

Prek Prasob Wildlife Sanctuary is under strong protection by rangers of the Ministry of Environment, with WWF support and the participation from the community patrol teams. Currently, the Ministry of Environment and conservation partners are implementin a Zero-Snaring campaign to save hog deer and other important global wildlife species in Cambodia from poaching and snaring, by eliminating all types of snares in protected areas and ending illegal wildlife trade. We thank for the funding and support from WWF-Belgium, Belgium Government (DGD), Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Binco.

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Links to visual & more insight of hog deer report

1. **Hog Deer Report (Photos and Video Package for Journalists)** (<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1VRuZ5BRntYsQOOB6Qi5YCqWYv0EcZEIT?usp=sharing>)
2. **Hog Deer Report in Khmer on Exposure (multimedia platform)** (<https://wwf-cambodia.exposure.co/d6a030e46d2854125775b92c6e5d1345>)
3. **Hog Deer Report in English on Exposure (multimedia platform)** (<https://wwf-cambodia.exposure.co/dd87e00e4a9be81ee7421c304e8523b7>)