



Joint Press Release

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First-ever record of breeding of the extremely rare Siamese crocodile in Srepok area in over a decade raises hopes for global conservation

Srepok Wildlife Sanctuary, Mondulkiri – It is with great excitement that the Ministry of Environment’s and WWF’s wildlife research team confirmed on September 9th, 2021 they discovered eight hatchlings of the critically endangered Siamese crocodile (*Crocodylus siamensis*) following their regular field survey in the Srepok wilderness during the nesting and hatching seasons. The survey is part of a Siamese crocodile research program under the Ministry of Environment-led CAMPAS project funded by GEF-5/UNEP, and with the additional funding from WWF-Belgium.

It was under challenging weather conditions and with high-level of patience, that the discovery was made at one of the search sites where Siamese crocodile dung and footprints had been collected during the dry season this year. The reptile hatchlings currently remain safe in their wild habitat under strict protection by the rangers of the Srepok Wildlife Sanctuary of Mondulkiri Province.

“During this hatching season, the research team carries out regular field monitoring, and for this particular trip we spent 4 nights scouting the crocodile habitat locations, from 7:00pm until past midnight around 2:00am to observe the animal,” said **Mr. Sothea Bun**, one of the research team members. “Then, the exciting moment came when one of our team first spotted the eye-shine of crocodile hatchlings,” **Sothea** put a big smile on his face as he continued.

The discovery constitutes the first photographic evidence of a Siamese crocodile breeding population after more than a decade of research efforts in the Srepok Wildlife Sanctuary, a protected area situated within the Eastern Plains Landscape under the management of the Ministry of Environment and WWF’s support.

“It is such a rewarding news for the conservation cooperation between the Ministry of Environment of the Royal Government, WWF, NGO partners, especially all members of the ministry’s and WWF’s research team, whose efforts are finally paid off with this first formal confirmation of the Srepok’s breeding population,” said **His Excellency Say Samal, Minister of Environment**, adding that the discovery highlights the importance of the Srepok wilderness area as a global hotspot of high potential for reversing biodiversity loss and for the restoration of globally significant wildlife.

“This exciting news also demonstrates the importance of the kingdom of Cambodia for the conservation of this extremely rare crocodile and other important species. Cambodia is home to unique natural resources, representing a true source of national pride for all Cambodians. Thanks to full peace in Cambodia, we, the Royal Government and development partners from all sectors, have the space for focus and exploring possible solutions in natural resources management and conservation with the hope to restore the country’s biodiversity and ecosystems to their former potential,” he continued.

According to **Ms. Milou Groenberg**, WWF’s Biodiversity Research & Monitoring Manager, this development is considered a breakthrough in the study of the species in Srepok as former reports of breeding consisted of unconfirmed reports from many years ago and never before was photographic evidence of hatchlings collected.



“We were previously not certain if the resident population still contained breeding pairs to date, nor if any nests existed and if clutches successfully hatched,” she said.

“The Srepok discovery indeed raises hope for Siamese crocodile conservation and survival in the wild, and is a significant finding for the species in Cambodia and globally,” she added.

The freshwater Siamese crocodile was once widespread across Southeast Asia, but disappeared from much of its range by the early 1990s. Cambodia is a global stronghold for the species, with an estimates 200-400 individuals remaining in the wild. The total global population does not exceed 1,000 mature individuals.

The key threats the Siamese crocodile faces are habitat loss and degradation, poaching fueled by the illegal wildlife trade and formerly to supply crocodile farms, hybridization with other crocodile species, hydropower dams, and destructive illegal fishing methods.

The survival and protection of the young crocodile hatchlings and their habitat are secured thanks to the strict law enforcement efforts in the landscape, as well as the community engagement and livelihoods support in surrounding villages, both conducted as part of a strategic and long-term partnership between the Ministry of Environment and WWF.

“I congratulate the research and law enforcement rangers on the ground for this extraordinary discovery. This result would not be possible without their strong and ongoing commitment,” said **Mr. Seng Teak**, WWF Country Director.

Conservation efforts must be strengthened with the need for appropriate and innovative solutions to protected area management and wildlife protection, while calling for better ways of managing, using and sharing natural resources.

“The discovery proves that Rewilding the Eastern Plains Landscape is possible when we work together to enable all necessary conditions: habitat protection, naturally-supplied food and water favorable for the Siamese crocodile and other animal species that roam the wilderness landscape,” he added.

The Ministry of Environment and WWF will continue to monitor the Srepok population and protect the habitat from encroachment and illegal activities through regular boat and foot patrols inside and outside of the protected area.

“I would like to urge all stakeholders involved to take more collective and urgent actions needed to protect the Siamese crocodile from extinction and ensure its number can recover for future survival,” **His Excellency Say Samal** said. “The Ministry of Environment stands ready to work with all international non-governmental organizations, community groups and other partners to protect and preserve Cambodia’s natural forests and wildlife heritage for the long-term social and economic benefits of current and future generations.”

With the funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Union (EU), German Government (BMZ), Belgium Government (DGD), UN Environment, GEF, Swedish Government (Sida), IKEA, Welthungerhilfe (WHH), Humanscale and WWF Networks (WWF-Belgium, WWF-Germany, WWF-Sweden, WWF-Switzerland, WWF-US), natural resource management in the Srepok and Phnom Prich Wildlife Sanctuaries are protected through the focus on the biodiversity monitoring and research, the capacity building for law enforcement, the fight against illegal wildlife hunting, trade and illegal logging, and the prevention of illegal land encroachment, the local community engagement in livelihoods improvements and sustainable natural resource management.

Notes to the editor:



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- Copy and paste this link to a web browser for media resources: <https://bit.ly/3AjepNP>
 - The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has been on the forefront of Siamese crocodile conservation since the species was first re-discovered in the year 2000. A consortium of government and conservation NGOs, including the Ministry of Environment and WWF, are working tirelessly to conserve and protect these beautiful creatures. Some key achievements of the RGC and partners were the establishment of the first conservation breeding program for the species in the country, and the development of the National Siamese Crocodile Reintroduction and Reinforcement Action Plan (2012-2031), as well as the release of more than 100 crocodiles to the wild.
 - The Ministry of Environment and WWF are working closely with local communities, and partners on developing intensive conservation measures to reduce poaching, and strengthen law enforcement. The Ministry of Environment and WWF are currently studying the possibilities for the implementation of a comprehensive wildlife recovery program, urgently required to reverse the declining population trends, while tackling the root cause of wildlife trade.

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