



for a living planet

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Press release

For immediate release

The Mekong population of River Tern has doubled in the past five years, raising hope for the species' conservation

WWF's research team came into close encounter with a total of 68 River Terns during their initial bird surveys, conducted in early February 2021 along the Mekong landscape between Kratie, Stung Treng provinces and the Laos border.

The researchers observed the presence of these magnificent River Terns as they were using rapids as their permanent perch for catching fish, while other birds were roaming the natural sandbar habitat, for mating. The River Tern's breeding season has begun.

"The River Tern is a medium-sized bird with a forked tail, a black cap and a white belly and is more visible during its breeding season, starting from January until May," said **Mr Eam Sam Un, Biodiversity Research and Monitoring Manager** with WWF, adding that the current count is slightly higher than that from the past year when only 64 individuals were recorded.

Mr Sam Un described that all members of the research team were particularly excited with the currently high record, resulted from just their first surveys, funded by the Government of Belgium (DGD) and WWF-Belgium.

A comparison of all records of the River Tern in the Mekong landscape showed the population has doubled over the past five years, from only 31 birds in 2016 to 68 individuals in early 2021.

"This is such a rewarding news for Cambodia and the region," said **Mr Seng Teak, WWF Country Director**, adding that the concerted conservation actions have bended the curve of species decline and the increased and consistent efforts have enabled an increasing trend that bring hope for a recovery of the species in Cambodia and the region.

"I would like to commend the tireless efforts in protected area management, law enforcement and community engagement by the provincial and local government, especially the Provincial Departments of Agricultural, Forestry and Fisheries, Environment, all involved partners and WWF, as well as the participation from the local communities in the habitat areas," he said.

River Tern is one of the rarest bird species in South East Asia. In Cambodia, River Terns have decreased by 80% in the past 20 years, with the nation-wide population was estimated between 54 and 62 individuals in 2018. The main threats to the species include habitat disturbance by human activities, nest flooding, hunting for their eggs, predation by domestic cattle and other wildlife.



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For this reason, the IUCN has recently reclassified the bird status to a higher category, from “Near Threatened” to “Vulnerable” in their Red List.

In addition to the protected area management effort, the conservation strategy implemented WWF in cooperation with all the Government institutions and partners actively engaged members of the local communities living in the habitat areas to implement the community based bird nest protection program, while providing alternative livelihoods options for household income generation. Last year, a total of 47 nests of River Tern were guarded by the local communities along the Mekong habitat landscape.

Link to photos: <https://bit.ly/37hNdCL>

Link to video clips: <https://bit.ly/3rGOISr>

For more information, please contact:

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