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VEAS RAN'S JOURNEY FROM FARMER TO FOREST PROTECTOR
SCALE-UP 2 PROJECT
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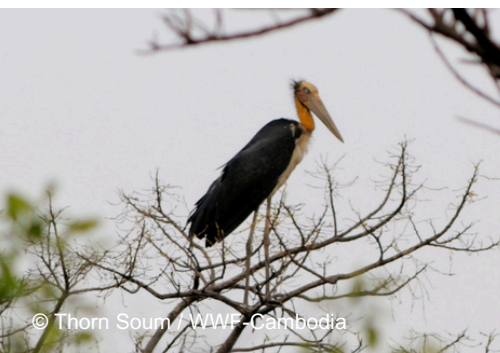
“NO FOREST, NO WILDLIFE”: HOW ONE FATHER BECAME A GUARDIAN OF HOPE IN SAMBO WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Every morning, long before the sun pierces through the misty canopy of Sambo Wildlife Sanctuary, Veas Ran sets out with a hammock, a packed lunch from his wife and a mission – one that has quietly changed the fate of endangered birds and the heart of a community.

Veas Ran, a 32-year-old father of two daughters, is a member of the Bunong ethnic minority group in Ou Kok village, Kratie province. Like many in his community, Ran grew up farming, selling household goods and relying on the forest for survival. But 13 years ago, he answered a call that would reshape his life.



“I heard an announcement in the village,” he recalls. “WWF-Cambodia was looking for people to guard bird nests. I had never thought of myself as someone who could protect wildlife, but the job was close to home, and the forest has always been part of my life.”



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“I used to see the forest as a place to take from,” he admits. “Now I see it as something to protect for my daughters, for the birds, and for the future.”

Through the SCALE-UP II Project, funded DGD via WWF-Belgium and implemented by WWF-Cambodia - with the support from local authorities and community engagement under the Sambo Wildlife Sanctuary initiative - Ran has grown into a quiet leader. His daughters ask to follow him into the forest. His neighbors listen as he shares his conservation work during outreach sessions. Local officials praise his example. His wife calls him a hero.

That year, Ran became a bird nest guardian, monitoring the vulnerable nests of the endangered lesser adjutant and white-shouldered ibis. Since then, he has protected nearly 200 nests, walking several kilometres each day during nesting season to keep predators and poachers at bay. At first, he valued the job merely for the additional income – earning around \$875 a year, the funds were a meaningful supplement to his family’s modest livelihood. But over time, it became something more.

“It might not be much,” he says. “But I am proud that my job helps protect something bigger than me.”

The transformation is visible, not just in the bird population, but in the community mindset. More villagers now understand the importance of preserving the forest. Women, youth and even people with disabilities are participating in conservation-related livelihoods, from ecotourism to sustainable agriculture.

“Conservation is not just about animals,” Ran says. “It’s about people too. When we protect the forest, we protect our future.”

As Cambodia strives to safeguard its natural heritage, stories like Veas Ran’s show that real change begins at the grassroots – with people who are willing to stand guard, even when no one is watching.



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