

## News

### Phnom Tamao Zoological Garden, Protected Forest and Botanical Garden established in Takeo, Cambodia, permanently protecting its forest and wildlife

In 1995, the Cambodian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) established the Phnom Tamao Zoological Park and Wildlife Rescue Centre (PTWRC) in Takeo Province under the management of the Forestry Administration (FA) (MAFF, 2022). FA partnered with Wildlife Alliance (WA) in 2001, a collaboration which led to significant improvements to “the quality of animal care and staff capacity” and successful breeding of many threatened native species (MAFF & WA, 2019). In the decades since, hundreds of rehabilitated wild animals have been released into the forest surrounding the PTWRC (WA & FA, unpubl. data, 2022).

In early 2022, areas of forest surrounding the PTWRC were re-allocated for development, igniting much public debate and concern. European Space Agency Sentinel Satellite images taken on 29 July showed no forest clearance, but on 3 August when the satellite next passed, 130 ha had been deforested (Keat, 2022), as shown in widely circulated images. Ultimately, 500+ ha of forest was cleared (Flynn & Vutha, 2022).

Citing “a lot of requests to the Royal Government to keep the forest around Phnom Tamao zoo,” the government wisely decided to conserve Phnom Tamao instead. On 7 August, Prime Minister H.E. Samdech Hun Sen declared in a popular Facebook post (with >230,000 likes) that all development permits for Phnom Tamao were cancelled, that companies involved in clearing must replant, and that the remaining forest should be protected (Hun, 2022). On 19 August, Cambodian King Norodom Sihamoni signed Royal Decree NS/RKT/0822/1008 creating the Phnom Tamao Zoological Garden, Protected Forest and Botanical Garden. According to this decree, the new protected area covers 2,025 ha which is divided

into three zones: 1) Protected Forest for Wildlife Rehabilitation for “enrichment and conservation of wildlife and sustainable development of natural resources” (1,021 ha); 2) Phnom Tamao Luxury Tree Botanical Garden zone for “tree sapling care and botanical garden development” (530 ha); 3) Phnom Tamao Zoological Garden for “wildlife care, rescue, education, and tourism” (474 ha) (RGC, 2022).

Elisabeth D. GISH, NETH Vibol & Nick MARX, Wildlife Alliance, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Email: gish@wildlifealliance.org

## References

- Flynn, G. & Vutha S. (2022) *Cambodian Government Cancels Development of Phnom Tamao Forest Among Outcry*. Mongabay, 11 August 2022. <https://news.mongabay.com/2022/08/cambodian-government-cancels-development-of-phnom-tamao-forest-amid-outcry/> [Accessed 9 September 2022].
- Hun S. (2022) *Samdech Hun Sen, Cambodian Prime Minister Facebook page*, 7 August 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/100044153903575/posts/pfbid02a4cUv48gWCS-jVYJZHhMDvat1wPaNGV4N4CaNTNhNx3PMaJyZm-2MeUBetHrXMDH56l/?sfnsn=mo> [Accessed 19 September 2022].
- Keat S. (2022) *Phnom Tamao forest: 130 Hectares Destroyed in Five Days*. Voice of Democracy, 4 August 2022. <https://vodenglish.news/phnom-tamao-forest-130-hectares-destroyed-in-five-days/> [Accessed 9 September 2022].
- [MAFF & WA] Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and Wildlife Alliance (2019) *Project Agreement between MAFF and WA for 2019–2021*. MAFF & WA, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
- [MAFF] Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (2022) Letter No. 4105/439 to Madame CEO of Wildlife Alliance; Subject: The case of Wildlife Alliance’s request for urgent intervention to stop request for 500 ha of private development inside Phnom Tamao forest, 6 May 2022. Cambodian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
- [RGC] Royal Government of Cambodia (2022) *Royal Decree NS/RKT/0822/1008 to establish “Phnom Tamao” Zoological Garden, Protected Forest and Botanical Garden*, 19 August 2022. Royal Government of Cambodia.
- [WA & FA] Wildlife Alliance & Forestry Administration. Unpublished data on Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre animal arrivals, births, deaths, and releases (digitized records for 2011–2022). WA & FA, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.