

# Impact Spotlight

Southern Cardamom REDD+ Project  
Q3 2021

**EVER  
LAND**



**WILDLIFE ALLIANCE**

*Direct Protection to Forests & Wildlife*



## Protecting the last unfragmented rainforest in Southeast Asia with unique boots-on-the-ground enforcement

Wildlife Alliance has been active across the Cardamom Rainforest Landscape since 2001, working with local governments and communities both prior to and since the inception of the Southern Cardamom REDD+ Project in 2015. The foundation of the project's conservation work is its unique boots-on-the-ground enforcement, which is critical for effective protected area management in this extremely threatened landscape.



The project directly manages more than 150 government law enforcement rangers who operate 24/7 out of 11 fully-equipped ranger stations and patrol across more than 5,000-km<sup>2</sup> of the landscape. The project's unique model focuses on training, supervising, equipping and mentoring law enforcement rangers with an effective field level partnership between staff from the project, the Ministry of Environment, and the Military Police.





# Meet the Rangers

## Mr. Moeurn Veasna



Mr. Moeurn Veasna is a Judicial Police Officer Ranger from the Ministry of Environment. He has been working with Wildlife Alliance as a ranger for 13 years to preserve the Cardamom forest. He is currently based at Roveang Patrol Station located in the northern part of the Great Cardamoms, Pursat Province.

*"The Cardamom Forest Protection Program has been greatly and actively helping the Royal Government to keep natural resources protected, alleviate poverty amongst local communities as well as to keep a good image of the Royal Government to international communities in terms of climate control and fighting against global warming".*

With a background as a forester, Veasna chose to be part of the Cardamom Forest Protection Program patrol unit which, he believes, will be able to keep the Cardamom forest standing for perpetuity.

*"As long as I am physically fit, I will always be happy to go on patrol in these forests to prevent crimes and apply the Law on Protected Areas. I am now sharing my long years of experiences on legal procedures with my young and dynamic colleagues and I am also raising community awareness on the importance of forest and wildlife besides building crime cases to send to court" added Veasna.*

## Mr. Morn Chan Eang



Mr. Morn Chan Eang was amongst recruited gendarmes who volunteered to join the Cardamom Forest Protection Program in 2010.

*"Being a forest ranger was my lifelong dream. I love forests and I wanted to keep them protected. Now that I am given a chance to join the Cardamom Forest Protection Program Patrol Units,*

*I am using the best of my ability, mentally, physically and spiritually to protect them because nature needs to be restored from destruction from the past. My heart is in the Cardamoms. I have been married to a farmer's daughter in Chi Phat so I am deeply rooted here." said Sok Eang.*

*"I remembered one day, right in the middle of a dry season, our Patrol Unit from Stung Proat encountered a red muntjac which got caught in a snare. The animal was so small and so scared when our unit rescued him. However the wound on its front left leg was just minor. So our unit removed a big metal rope from the leg and left the muntjac back to its freedom. Three minutes or so after having run away from our team, the animal stopped for about 15 seconds, turned back its head toward our team, blinked their eyes before completely disappearing into the woods. I remember vividly the happy look of that muntjac. He must have said thank you to us and this memory strongly motivates me to keep patrolling this forest and removing more snares. I keep thinking about the fate of the poor muntjac if we did not arrive on that day." added Sok Eang.*



# Meet the Rangers



## Mr. Sowath Rethy

Mr. Sowath Rethy is currently a Station Advisor to Trapeang Rung Patrol Station. Rethy joined the Cardamom Forest Protection Program in 2014. He started as an Assistant to Station Advisor. Due to his commitment and outstanding performance, he was promoted to become the Station Advisor for the past three years.

*"As a Cambodian national, I am so proud of being part of Wildlife Alliance's strong teams, fighting for the good cause of protecting and preserving our natural resources. I choose to participate in the fight because this last remaining forest and wildlife need protection."*

*The most dangerous lethal weapons for animals are snares. Snares are indiscriminately catching wildlife regardless of their species, family or size ranging from civets, pangolins all the way to bears and elephants.*

*I commit to myself that I will keep this forest as intact as possible against all poachers, loggers and land grabbers and I believe that our people and our country see the value of what we are doing for our nature and our future."*





## Key activities

Instead of a traditional hands-off “business as usual” conservation approach, Wildlife Alliance directly supervises and manages all law enforcement at the project. Rangers are well paid and receive life insurance and full health benefits, have the capacity and equipment to work effectively and safely, and are led and motivated by inspirational supervisors. This is critical to the success of the project, where a culture of excellence in conservation, zero tolerance for corruption and achieving high performance has been cultivated.

Key law enforcement activities include:

- ✓ routine patrols,
- ✓ conducting day and night ambushes,
- ✓ setting up informant networks,
- ✓ confiscation of illegal evidence,
- ✓ removing snares,
- ✓ destroying land grabbing signboards/posts,
- ✓ detaining offenders,
- ✓ arresting and submission of legal cases to the court,
- ✓ obtaining search warrants,
- ✓ removing illegal huts,
- ✓ and installing demarcation posts.

These activities are important for the protection of carbon stock and biodiversity. It is also important to the 64 IUCN Threatened (Critically Endangered, Endangered, Vulnerable) species of birds, mammals, and reptiles, and to the 2,973 villages in 7 provinces who are benefiting from the watershed of the Cardamom Landscape.





# Milestones

During 2021, 5,189 patrols covered 193,651-km and confiscated 1,720 illegal chainsaws, more than 1,800-m<sup>3</sup> of high value timber from threatened tree species, and 5,714 additional logs. A total of 115 court cases were submitted against forest and wildlife offenders.



- ✓ Encountering illegal large-scale sawmill (producing 100m<sup>3</sup>/week).
- ✓ Cracking down on 8 logging trucks transporting timbers from Biodiversity Conservation Coordinator and Phnom Samkos Wildlife Sanctuary.
- ✓ O'som patrol unit discovered a killed gaur in Central Cardamoms and southern serow in Phnom Samkos Wildlife Sanctuary.
- ✓ Fully finished construction of Tiger Patrol Station. The Patrol Station has been furnished and equipped and now operational. It is designated to keep the Tiger Release Station next door absolutely snare free.
- ✓ Built 160m stronger concrete fence around Prek Taok Patrol Station. The fence makes the station a safer place for storing confiscated evidence.

## The important difference this program has made:

- ✓ Unfragmented forest of the Cardamom Rainforest Landscape
- ✓ Zero elephant killings
- ✓ The Cardamom Rainforest Landscape has been chosen as the site for the Tiger Recovery Program in Cambodia by the Royal Government of Cambodia



## Current news

The deforestation in the Cardamoms is now increasingly driven by the massive recent Chinese investment in Cambodia which is part of China's national Belt and Road Initiative (Ascencao et al., 2018). This investment has been associated with land-grabbing and speculation, currently the most significant drivers of deforestation in Cambodia, as well as increased demand for illegal wildlife and timber products. The newly developed coastal Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone, approximately 70-km from the Cardamom Rainforest Landscape, has over 100 Chinese enterprises and companies with a total investment of more than 3 billion US dollars. This Chinese investment both increases the value of land, thus promoting land speculation and illegal deforestation, whilst also stimulating demand for illegal wildlife and forest products.

As a result of these threats, and increasing land prices due to heavy Chinese investment in Cambodia, speculative deforestation across the Cardamom Rainforest Landscape has spiked.





# The Future: Tiger Recovery Program

Tigers have not been seen in Cambodia since 2007, largely due to poaching of tigers and tiger prey for the illegal wildlife trade. The Wildlife Alliance has an ambitious recovery plan in partnership with the Royal Cambodian Government to reintroduce tigers, which if successful will be the first time this has been done in Cambodia.

The Project's track record of effective law enforcement and protected area management puts it in a strong position to effectively reintroduce tigers in the Cardamom Rainforest Landscape. The project has recently received official approval from the Ministry of Environment to launch the program and has built a tiger enclosure facility to help acclimate tigers before releasing them into the wild.

To ensure all pre-conditions of tiger reintroduction are met including that local communities will benefit from the reintroduction and are safeguarded from Human-Wildlife Conflict, the project has employed a three pillar vision:

1. **Protected Area Management:** Tiger prey recovers and habitat is secured within the Southern Cardamom National Park for tiger reintroduction due to effective and supervised Law Enforcement and Protected Area Management in partnership with the Royal Government of Cambodia.
2. **Community Support:** local communities surrounding the Southern Cardamom National Park embrace tiger recovery and reintroduction due to benefits from sustainable ecotourism and are safeguarded through robust systems to prevent Human Wildlife Conflict.
3. **Tiger sourcing and translocation:** the Royal Government of Cambodia develops a bilateral agreement for tiger recovery and tiger sourcing with an appropriate source country government. Global best practices for animal translocation, including disease prevention and management, will be developed following endorsement by the IUCN and the World Organisation for Animal Health.

