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## Gratitude: Saola Update, May 2013

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Dear Friends of Saola,

Greetings from Dong Hoi, in Quang Binh Province of central Vietnam. It's a relatively quiet place, as Vietnamese cities go. But people have been here for a long time - evidence of human habitation at the city site goes back 5,000 years. The evidence includes artifacts from the Dong Son culture, famous for its large cast-bronze drums. Intriguingly, one of these drums (found elsewhere in Vietnam), is etched with images of saola.

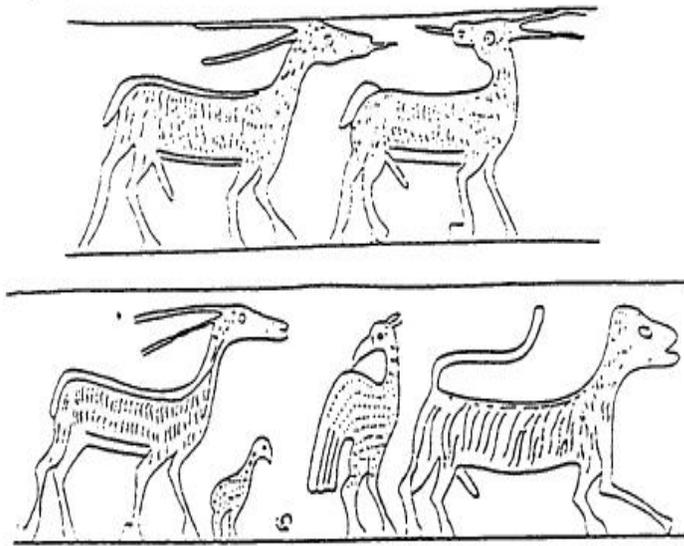


Figure 7 Representations, probably of *Pseudoryx nghéinhensis*, on a bronze drum from Da Do, Dong Son Culture.

(from Reinecke, A. 1996. Bi-cephalous animal-shaped ear pendants from Vietnam. *Bead Study Group Newsletter*, 28).

One theory of the use of these magnificent drums is that they were offerings, returned to the earth (they have sometimes been found buried, with no other artifacts) in gratitude for minerals (copper, gold) Dong Son people removed from the earth.

And so this seems an appropriate place to pause and express gratitude to some recent donors to saola conservation, particularly institutions. We have made some good progress in saola conservation in recent years, and of course none of it would have been possible without the support of these donors. Recent institutional supporters are:

**Save Our Species (SOS):** SOS is a new, global coalition initiated by IUCN, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the World Bank, founded to build a large fund for the conservation of threatened species around the globe. In their last funding round, in recognition of the critical status of saola, SOS gave not one but two grants to saola conservation: One to WWF to strengthen protection and awareness at key saola sites in central Vietnam, and one to WCS for similar work in the vital province of Bolikhamxay, Laos. This is a fantastic advance for saola conservation, and we owe a particular 'bronze drum' of gratitude to Jean-Christophe Vie of SOS.

**Liz Claiborne Art Ortenberg Foundation (LCAOF):** LCAOF have been a dream donor to work with. Directed by wildlife people, and very efficient. LCAOF continues to support SWG initiatives to strengthen protection in Nakai-Nam Theun, the largest protected area in Indochina. Jim Murtaugh and LCAOF board member Bill deBuys in particular have been exceptionally helpful partners for saola.

**John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation:** A MacArthur Foundation grant

to the SWG and our partner Global Wildlife Conservation, will be implemented in partnership with WCS and province of Bolikhamxay. The project will focus on trialing novel ways to engage Lao villagers in the saola's range in the work of saola conservation, particularly detecting and surveying saola. With thanks to Chris Holtz of MacArthur for his assistance and support.

**Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF):** CEPF has been the SWG's most consistent, tireless supporter since our beginning. Our first SWG meeting (in 2009) was funded by CEPF, at a time when only one other donor supported saola conservation. In its most recent funding round CEPF gave a grant to Vinh University (and SWG member Dr. Trung) to trial different methods of detecting saola in Vietnam's Pu Mat National Park; to the Lao Wildlife Conservation Association (through SWG member Dr. Chanthavy) for saola surveys in Xieng Khouang Province, Laos; and a small grant to the SWG to develop relationships with conservation-oriented zoos in the US, and approach potential donors in the Middle East. All of this builds on larger grants CEPF previously made to WCS and WWF for saola conservation work in Laos and Vietnam, respectively. Both Jonathan Eames and Nguyen Hoang Long of BirdLife International (which administers CEPF grants in Indochina) and Jack Tordoff of CEPF have been staunch supporters of the SWG from the start. Three bronze drums.

**Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN):** In April, the SWG signed an agreement with this innovative organization, for several forms of WCN professional support to the SWG this year (e.g., assistance with strategic planning; fund-raising strategy; grant writing support). The entire WCN 'family' have been keen supporters of saola and the SWG, but we owe particular thanks to the recent labors of Jean-Gael Collomb and Joyce Wang on the SWG's behalf.

**KfWBankengruppe:** The German development bank has provided major, multi-year funding to WWF for transboundary conservation in the central Annamites, including strengthening protection in Vietnam's new Hue Saola Nature Reserve and Quang Binh Saola Nature Reserve. This is currently the largest wildlife conservation project in the saola's range. Other supporters to this important undertaking include **WWF-Germany**, **WWF-Austria**, and **WWF-France**.

**Theun Hinboun Hydropower Company:** The company supported WCS to conduct an extensive saola conservation awareness campaign in about 20 villages in Bolikhamxay. THPC also helps fund a full-time WCS conservation technical advisor to Bolikhamxay Province.

In the past year, with funding support from CEPF, the SWG has had success in engaging several conservation-oriented zoos in the work of saola conservation:

**ZooParc de Beauval, and Association Beauval Conservation et Recherche (ABCR):** This French zoo and its conservation association made a grant this year to the SWG to support the salary of our new National Lao Saola Coordinator, Ms. Anita Bousa (who is doing an excellent job, by the way). This is a great step forward for saola conservation in Laos, and it happened due to the advocacy of Beauval's Science and Conservation Director, Eric Bairrão Ruivo.

**The European Association of Zoos and Aquaria** helped organize a commitment of 30,000 euros to a 'saola emergency fund' from the **London Zoo, Chester Zoo** (UK), and **Fota Zoo** (Ireland). The funds are available to provide immediate, professional care to any saola encountered in captivity in Laos or Vietnam (such as the one Lao villagers caught in 2010, which died soon after). Another bronze drum to EAZA's director Lesley Dickie for pulling this together. Ocean Park Conservation Foundation (Hong Kong). Last year, Ocean Park funded SWG members Dr. Sam Turvey (Zoological Society of London), Nicholas Wilkinson, and Dr. Cao Tien Trung (Vinh University) to conduct village interview surveys for saola in Laos and Vietnam.

Finally, some US zoos that are particularly committed to conservation in the wild have started coming together in a coalition to provide core support to the work of the SWG. So far, they are **Los Angeles Zoo, San Diego Zoo, and Houston Zoo**.

The SWG and our members and partners owe much gratitude to these institutions for their investment and partnership. While this represents good progress, several regions of the saola's patchy range have little or no support (e.g., Quang Binh Province, Vietnam, and other areas of Bolikhamxay Province, Laos). Given the critical and precarious status of saola, every sub-population is important. We will be working to fill these gaps in support in the months and years ahead.

In other news, the next Saola Working Group meeting will be held in Vientiane, Laos in early June. This year's local hosts are the Lao Department of Forest Resources Conservation and the WCS Lao Program. The meeting will be larger than normal, with experts in large mammal conservation from other parts of the world joining to assist us (meeting participants will come from ten countries). Obviously, the meeting's funding need is also larger than normal(!), and several donors have stepped up to help, and I'll mention them in the next, post-meeting update.

Until then,

Bill Robichaud

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