

CEPF SMALL GRANT FINAL PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT

Organization Legal Name:	Cleveland Zoological Society (CZS)/Cleveland Metroparks Zoo (CMZ) – Asian Turtle Program
Project Title:	An awareness and research conservation program for Swinhoe's soft-shell turtle in Vietnam
Date of Report:	29 th February 2012
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CEPF Region: Asia, Indo-Burma Hotspot

Strategic Direction:

1. Safeguard priority globally threatened species in Indochina by mitigating major threats

Grant Amount: \$20,000

Project Dates: 1st August 2009 – 31st July 2011

Implementation Partners for this Project (please explain the level of involvement for each partner):

Although we had no official project partners under the CEPF project there was a lot of collaboration with the Hanoi based NGO Education for Nature Vietnam (ENV) was a key local partner within this project. ENV provided training to ATP staff on environmental education with a focus on school program lesson plan design and community engagement. A week long training course was held from 1st to 6th January 2010. In additional technical support and advice was given by ENV on development of all awareness material developed by the ATP as part of this project. This included a high level of involvement in the Rafetus awareness signboards and poster which both went through multiple revisions.

Conservation Impacts

Please explain/describe how your project has contributed to the implementation of the CEPF ecosystem profile.

The research and awareness undertaken as part of our CEPF grant clearly contributes to the CEPF ecosystem profile objective to:

- i) Increase the currently knowledge on *Rafetus swinhoei*, a species identified as a priority with an over-riding need for improved information.

Through this project we have identified possible new river systems in Nghe An province where the species is likely to have occurred as well as possible range of the species into Laos from Thanh Hoa and Nghe An province. New information has been collected from previously surveyed lakes and wetlands in northern Vietnam and a new specimen for the species was found at Minh Quan Lake in Yen Bai province from an animal caught in 1985.

Observations by the field team and local counterpart at Dong Mo Lake, Ha Tay Hanoi have identified areas within the lake where the known Rafetus at this site surfaces and appears to be most active. Within a no hunting agreement with local fishermen it has been proposed that this section of lake is identified as a no fishing zone.

ii) Awareness and community activities have contributed to the conservation of the species as can be identified by some responses observed.

The agreement of local fishermen in Dong Mo Lake to follow a no hunting agreement for the large Rafetus at the site shows clear support for the species as does the participation of 10 schools in an art competition that received over 3,200 entries in 2011. In Yen Bai a Rafetus skull was voluntarily handed into the team who also have received phone calls from fishermen at a number of sites.

The focus of media on the site has resulted in a number of high profile articles on Dong Mo Lake and the need for protection of the dam at this site and support from the government in conservation of the species. While a focus on community participation in conservation with a special article on the local counterpart and coverage of boat races and art competitions has all help create a sense of pride in Dong Mo.

Please summarize the overall results/impact of your project against the expected results detailed in the approved proposal.

Component 1: *Priority habitat with the potential to maintain surviving Rafetus swinhoei will be identified.*

Expected results

Interview surveys: historical sites for the species where the species may still occur will be revisited along with new sites further south in Thanh Hoa and Nghe An province amongst others.

Actual results

Interview surveys were conducted in 79 districts of 11 provinces, which included 04 provinces previously never surveyed for Rafetus. In total 878 interviews were conducted during this time. Results identified 13 sites which are worthy of future monitoring activities and will be recommended to the relevant wildlife protection authorities in Vietnam. An additional skull of a Rafetus swinhoei hunted in 1985 was located.

Surveys also found important information on other tortoise and freshwater turtle species. Including possible locations for *Cuora zhoui* a species currently without known localities in the wild. Priority habitat for *Manouria impressa*, *Cuora galbinifrons*, *Sacalia quadriocellata*, *Platysternon megacephalum* were also identified.

Component 2: *Monitoring and protection of Dong Mo Lake to confirm number of Rafetus swinhoei present in the lake*

Expected result

Monitoring network: at the Dong Mo site a second smaller animal has been observed but has yet to be photographed. Continued monitoring is required at this large lake complex to determine the number of animals present. Similar monitoring will be required at additional sites if this elusive species is to be confirmed.

Actual Result

Monitoring Network:

-Dong Mo monitoring: During 3,284 hours of observations made from September 2009 to December 2011 the Dong Mo Rafetus observed 55 times, photographed on two occasions

including an observation of the turtle basking on a small island. The turtles appears to be most active between March and June which corresponds to warmer weather at the site.

The Fishfinder was used for 128 hours of searching and proved technical to use, especially for the local team. No observations were made of the Rafetus, only two sunken boats were located. No evidence could be found of a second smaller Rafetus in the lake which many local fishermen claim to have seen. With only the larger animal apparently observed by the ATP team it is questionable whether a second smaller animals exist in the lake.

From 2009 – 2011 FPD from Son Tay district visited Dong Mo lake monthly to join a patrol with the ATP team. This was done to increase the visible profile on the lake and develop an important relationship for future conservation. The monitoring network at Dong Mo continued to prove important with an intervention by FPD with turtle hunters on the lake following reporting by the network on the 15th July 2010. Two softshell turtle hunters were stopped by FPD after being observed by the monitoring team on Dong Mo lake, although they were targeting smaller Chinese Softshells (*Pelodiscus sinensis*). They were verbally warned before being asked to leave the lake which is also privately owned.

Expected Result

Local conservation teams: at principal sites teams will be established and trained to make observations and conduct patrols. Establishment of a permanent presence at the sites will raise awareness to the importance of the species with teams also conduct research activities and doubling as site wardens.

Actual Result

Additional site monitoring: Part time local counterparts have been established at two sites in northern Vietnam. Minh Quan Lake in Tran Yen district, Yen Bai province and De & Sen Lake in Yen Dinh & Tho Xuan districts, Thanh Hoa province, Vinh Quang Lake in Quan Hoa district, Thanh Hoa province. As a result of the new local monitoring networks a fragments of a 4kg softshell of unknown species has been handed to the team, reports of a 7kg turtle hunted and a skull of a Rafetus measuring 20cm in length from a 57kg turtle hunted in 1985 in Minh Quan Lake, Yen Bai province

Component 3: Community support gained for Rafetus conservation at Dong Mo Lake

Education initiatives:

Local community leaders will be engaged to raise public awareness and support for protection of the species and its habitat. The profile of the species will also be increased amongst government partner agencies at the provincial and national level through a range of activities.

Expected Result

Community meetings: will focus on developing local interest and pride in the species. Highlighting the relationship between the species which occurs locally and the legend of the animal in Hoan Kiem Lake.

Actual Result

Community meetings:

- *Meetings:* more than 203 participant, mostly fishermen, in Ha Tay, Yen Bai and Thanh Hoa provinces participated in community meetings designed to make communities aware of the importance of this species and its links to the famous Hoan Kiem Turtle in Hanoi of the same species.
- *Football matches:* were held around Dong Mo Lake in Kiem Son commune, Son Tay district where most fishermen on the lake live. Matches were held in 2010 and 2011 with four village teams playing with awareness t-shirts and presentation on the Rafetus species occurring in the lake. Over 100 spectators attended the matches.

- *Rafetus boat race*: in October 2010 a Rafetus Boat Race was held on Dong Mo Lake to raise awareness to the turtle. Over 32 local fishermen and women participated in the event rowing traditional boats with their feet. Over 100 spectators attend this event as did journalist from three newspapers.

Expected Result

School programs: focusing on turtles and specifically *Rafetus* have already been developed and piloted in schools around an existing *Rafetus* sites by the local partner organization, Education for Nature Vietnam (ENV). This program will be expanded to additional sites.

- **Educational resources:** a poster and short brochure will be produced for distribution to support awareness activities in local communities.
- **Signboards:** at key lake sites awareness sign boards will be produced and displayed.
- **Student projects:** through existing cooperation in research projects between national universities students will be encouraged to participate in surveys focused on *Rafetus swinhoei*.

Actual Result

School programs:

- As part of this CEPF a new module for schools and community meetings was developed in collaboration with ENV during ATP staff training in environmental education.
- The school program was undertaken in 10 schools for 2,155 pupils around important lake sites in Ha Tay, Thanh Hoa and Yen Bai provinces.
- In March 2011 a art competition was held in 10 school surrounding Dong Mo Lake for primary and secondary school pupils to draw pictures relating to the Dong Mo Rafetus in their community. Over 3,200 pieces of art were submitted, many focused on the rescue of the Hoan Kiem Turtle in Hanoi which was happening at the same time. An award ceremony was held on the 6th of May 2011 with two journalists attending.

Educational resources:

- **Awareness posters:** for *Rafetus swinhoei* were developed in collaboration with ENV, 5,000 copies were printed and most distributed to key communities around priority sites and local authorities including FPD, Environmental Police, People Committees, National Parks and Fisheries Departments in 23 provinces. The poster highlight the threats to this one of the worlds most endangered turtles and its links to the legendary Hoan Kiem Turtle in Hanoi.
- **Art competition:** held in schools was used to produce a awareness notebook 1,500 copies of which were printed and distributed in the 10 schools that participated in the competition.
- **Signboards:** In October 2011 two large awareness signboards carry information about the Rafetus in Dong Mo were placed around the lake, an additional 16 large poster boards were also presented to PC buildings and schools around the lake.
- **Boat painting:** In May 2010 the design of a swimming Rafetus was painted on the projects boat with the message "Lets protect the Dong Mo turtle". The boat is used regularly by the local counterpart for monitoring the lake and meeting with fishermen on the lake as they work. The boat was painted as a creative way to raise awareness on the lake
- **Student projects:** a new 15 minute module focused on *Rafetus swinhoei* and its critical importance in Vietnam was developed and presented by the Rafetus team. The week long Tortoises and Freshwater Turtle Field Skill Training Course was held in March 2010 and 2011 for 24 national university students. No specific student involvement was undertaken during the project.

Although not specifically focused on Dong Mo Lake other activities that will have increased awareness and support for conservation of Rafetus at Dong Mo and other potential sites locally and nationally are listed below.

- **Television coverage:** on the 30th March 2010 and 5th March 2011 VTV1 news covered stories on Dong Mo Lake about the Rafetus in the lake, and need for authorities to assist in protecting the animal.
- **Newspaper coverage:** over nine news articles have featured the *Rafetus swinhoei* in Dong Mo lake some with a focus on ATP activities such as lake monitoring, efforts to have the new dam on the lake turtle proofed by the authorities and awareness activities. New ATP website developed:
www.asianturtleprogram.org/working-on/project_page/projects.html

Please provide the following information where relevant:

Hectares Protected:
Species Conserved:
Corridors Created:

Describe the success or challenges of the project toward achieving its short-term and long-term impact objectives.

Long term impacts (3+ years)

Swinhoe's Soft-shell Turtle (*Rafetus swinhoei*) will be better protected in Vietnam through identification of remaining populations of the species and the presenting of this information on priority areas to wildlife protection authorities. While the attitudes of local communities at the site of the only wild population of the species will be improved through community engagement activities to ensure better protection of the species at this priority site.

Following the surveys for additional sites in northern Vietnam it is very questionable as to whether *Rafetus swinhoei* survives elsewhere in the country other than Dong Mo Lake. Two previously known sites, De/Sen Lake in Thanh Hoa provinces and Minh Quan Lake in Yen Bai province were again found to have some of the best possibility of maintain animals of the species, although information from these site was not as strong as previously reported from Dong Mo priority to the species being confirmed in 2007. One full time and two part time local counterparts are now employed at three sites and local communities are better aware of the importance of turtles at these sites through our activities. Wildlife protection authorities within the provinces are also aware of the importance of the species through meetings with ATP staff and will support intervention if required in the future.

The expansion of surveys south into Nghe An province proved worth while with the possibility of Rafetus in the Trang river where historic nest of large softshell was also reported.

At Dong Mo Lake, the only remaining habitat where the species is confirmed protection has been strengthened. Local fishermen have signed no hunting agreements for the species. National attention has been brought to the importance of the site and importantly community activates have been well received with the community clearly understanding the importance of the animal inhabiting their lake. As is always the case in Vietnam economic incentives to hunt remain strong and development of remaining habitat is a constant threat. The proximity of Dong Mo to Hanoi means the area has already undergone rapid development particularly for tourism, and this is something that is likely to continue in coming year. Integrating conservation of the species into these plans will become a challenge for the ATP in future projects.

Short term impacts (1-3 years)

Nationally knowledge on Swinhoe's soft-shell Turtle (*Rafetus swinhoei*) in Vietnam will be increased through interview surveys. These will provide the most comprehensive review of lakes and river systems in northern Vietnam to indicate areas where the species may still survive in the wild. Monitoring of the only known wild locality for the species at Dong Mo Lake will confirm if additional animals of the species also survive in the lake. While awareness of local communities and government agencies to the importance of the species will be increased through education resources produced and community programs conducted. A national *Rafetus* Field Officer will also receive training and experience required to continue conservation activities focused on the species in the future.

Surveys have increased the knowledge on the species but at most sites confirmed the species appears to have been extirpated. Of those sites visited for which some local information suggested the species still survives three sites in addition to Dong Mo warrant further monitoring by the ATP although it is felt the likelihood of confirm additional animals is still slim. Some of the most interesting findings are the possibility of the existence of the species in Nghe An province where historical nesting of large soft-shell's was reported. Also the possibility of the species range extending across into Laos from a number of river systems in Nghe An and Thanh Hoa province for which the species has been recorded in Vietnam.

A new specimen from a 57kg animal hunted in 1985 from Yen Bai province came to light and information was also collected on other tortoise and freshwater turtle species during the surveys with 103 specimens of 17 species seen. Importantly potential priority for other critically endangered species such as *Cuora galbinifrons* and possibly *Cuora zhoui* (zhoui currently has no known populations) were identified. Information from these surveys was used for another joint CEPF between the Centre for Natural Resources and Environmental Studies (CRES) and the ATP.

Monitoring of Dong Mo lake only found evidence of the single large individual already known, it is possible that local reports of a smaller animal or additional animals are the same animal.

Local, national and international knowledge were all significantly increased during the project period, with school programs, community meetings, posters, boat races and football matches at the local level. Media coverage on *Rafetus swinhoei* has been increased through television and newspaper coverage of activities at Dong Mo and the rescue of the sacred turtle in Hanoi's Hoan Kiem Lake. It is clear that the legend and cultural importance of the animal in Hanoi plays a significant factor in interest in the species. A quick Google of Hoan Kiem turtle Vietnam will reveal the phenomenal interest in this animal. This has undoubtedly benefit the national and international awareness to the importance of the species and the Dong Mo lake site.

Upon completion of the project we have a very competent *Rafetus* Field Officer who is capable of field research and environmental education amongst other skills essential for project management. He is working closely with a field assistant and three local counterparts. Throughout 2012 -14 a clear plan of require action has been set for both site based conservation activities including long term monitoring at two new sites and a continued focus on Dong Mo Lake. Surveys of new sites in Laos are also planned. The promotion of an international breeding loan program between the Dong Mo turtle and the two *Rafetus swinhoei* in China will also be pursued.

Were there any unexpected impacts (positive or negative)?

Positive:

During the high profile sickness in the sacred Hoan Kiem Turtle the ATP was approached for support and advice in development of the capture and treatment of the ancient turtle. As well as

providing assistance in coordinating advice from a team of international experts in turtle medicine, captive management and capture the ATP also had the opportunity at a number of high profile workshops to stress the need for broader conservation efforts focused on the species. Specifically the need to protect Dong Mo Lake and to develop a plan for a potential breeding loan program with the Chinese animals.

The local team member employed full time at Dong Mo remains a valuable member of the team in collecting and reporting activity from the lake. Although following the end of this project period in 24 January 2012 a special article in the Tien Phong newspaper lunar Dragon New Year special talked about his work and importance in saving the species in recent year. Such articles are very positive for local pride at the site as has been the television and newspaper coverage of Dong Mo.

Challenges:

Dam design and awareness too risk: following the breaking of the dam on Dong Mo Lake in 2008 the authorities have started and now completed the construction of a new, much larger dam. The new dam is designed to release water from the lake through four large doors which open from the bottom when the water level is high. Such a design is not turtle proof as the animals may be drawn to the flowing water and could leave the lake, once in the river which leads to the larger Red River protection of the species would be impossible and it capture likely. As was seen in November 2008 when the turtle escaped following the dam break.

The ATP has brought the concern up at two national workshops focused on the health of the Hanoi Hoan Kiem Rafetus and also met with Fisheries Department and media to stress the need for the construction of a permanent fence to prevent the turtle escaping. A temporary net has been put in place by the ATP which was stolen once and damaged a number of times. Despite having an engineer develop plans and estimates for a permanent fence there has been no interest in this activity. At present the dam on the lake is the biggest threat to the species at Dong Mo Lake, closely followed by accidental capture by the fishing teams.

Lessons Learned

Describe any lessons learned during the design and implementation of the project, as well as any related to organizational development and capacity building. Consider lessons that would inform projects designed or implemented by your organization or others, as well as lessons that might be considered by the global conservation community.

Project Design Process: (aspects of the project design that contributed to its success/shortcomings)

The initial project designed included considerably more survey time, with plans for 18 provinces which would have taken an estimated 151 days to complete, however limitations on the number of staff for this project meant we focused surveys on 11 provinces which required 96 days of field time. Three provinces which we did not include in surveys had previous been visited in 2006. The project of a relatively small budget already covered a great deal of activities and should have been expanded to allow additional field staff to support the project leader.

Providing training for staff in English language, GIS, environmental education and field skills at the outset of the project ensured the team were well equipped and confident to undertake the research and awareness activities and was a sensible investment as part of the project.

Project Implementation: (aspects of the project execution that contributed to its success/shortcomings)

The ATP remains a relatively small NGO with seven staff in Vietnam and only five based in Hanoi, as such most staff are required to multi task in roles varying from administration and finance to educators and researchers. Through expanding the program to provide key support staff such as financial officers, communications and office administrators it would provide important time and focus for research and conservation teams to focus on activities.

Creativity and adaptation through the project period enabled the team to develop new approaches to conservation awareness. Such as the community football matches, boat races and art competitions which all fell within the existing project budget. By allowing the team to deviate or improve upon the proposed activities “community meetings” and “school programs” it provided a more engaging, memorable and effective awareness outcome. A degree of flexibility within proposal can help prevent conservation activities stagnating into the standard outputs all too often seen.

Other lessons learned relevant to conservation community:

Probably not unfamiliar to many individuals and institutions working within the region, but additional time should always be allowed for unforeseen delays. This was particular found in the case of resource development such as the posters and signboards which went through numerous variations before final approval.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING

Provide details of any additional donors who supported this project and any funding secured for the project as a result of the CEPF grant or success of the project.

Donor	Type of Funding*	Amount	Notes
Turtle Conservation Fund	A	\$5,000	2010 - 2011
Columbus Zoo	A	\$4,752	2010 - 2011
Turtle Survival Alliance	A	\$2,000	2009 – 2010
Melbourne Zoo	A	\$3,000	2009 - 2010
Cleveland Metroparks Zoo	A In-kind	\$22,400	2009 – 2010 core program support
Education for Nature Vietnam	In-kind	\$6,000	2009 – 2010 technical support in resource development

***Additional funding should be reported using the following categories**

- A** Project co-financing (Other donors contribute to the direct costs of this CEPF project)

- B** Grantee and Partner leveraging (Other donors contribute to your organization or a partner organization as a direct result of successes with this CEPF project.)

- C** Regional/Portfolio leveraging (Other donors make large investments in a region because of CEPF investment or successes related to this project.)

Sustainability/Replicability

Summarize the success or challenge in achieving planned sustainability or replicability of project components or results.

Due to the project activities undertaken here the Rafetus project now has solid guidelines built from the research base on priority objectives and actions with which to continue working towards future conservation of the species. The annual quest for financial support will remain challenging but while the existing team remains in place we have a strong team with good local relations. The overshadowing concern is the apparent lack of additional animals in the wild which should be used to drive a more vocal discussion on options for the four remaining animals and primarily the need for an international breeding loan program.

Summarize any unplanned sustainability or replicability achieved.

The team have now reach a level of national recognition for their conservation work which resulted in a special article appeared in the lunar new year 2012 (February 2012), this focused on the achievements of Nguyen Van Trong at Dong Mo, Building of such local pride is important in long term sustainability of the project:

<http://www.tienphong.vn/Khoa-Giao/564798/Ve-noi-tung-la-vuong-quoc-rua-Hoan-Kiem-tp.html>

Safeguard Policy Assessment

Provide a summary of the implementation of any required action toward the environmental and social safeguard policies within the project.

Performance Tracking Report Addendum

CEPF Global Targets				
(Enter Grant Term)				
Provide a numerical amount and brief description of the results achieved by your grant. Please respond to only those questions that are relevant to your project.				
Project Results	Is this question relevant?	If yes, provide your numerical response for results achieved during the annual period.	Provide your numerical response for project from inception of CEPF support to date.	Describe the principal results achieved from July 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011. (Attach annexes if necessary)
1. Did your project strengthen management of a protected area guided by a sustainable management plan? Please indicate number of hectares improved.	N			Please also include name of the protected area(s). If more than one, please include the number of hectares strengthened for each one.
2. How many hectares of new and/or expanded protected areas did your project help establish through a legal declaration or community agreement?	N			Please also include name of the protected area. If more than one, please include the number of hectares strengthened for each one.
3. Did your project strengthen biodiversity conservation and/or natural resources management inside a key biodiversity area identified in the CEPF ecosystem profile? If so, please indicate how many hectares.	N			
4. Did your project effectively introduce or strengthen biodiversity conservation in management practices outside protected areas? If so, please indicate how many hectares.	N			
5. If your project promotes the sustainable use of natural resources, how many local communities accrued tangible socioeconomic benefits? Please complete Table 1 below.	N			

If you answered yes to question 5, please complete the following table.

Additional Comments/Recommendations

Information Sharing and CEPF Policy

CEPF is committed to transparent operations and to helping civil society groups share experiences, lessons learned, and results. Final project completion reports are made available on our Web site, www.ceph.net, and publicized in our newsletter and other communications.

Please include your full contact details below:

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