

Cambodia Otter Research and Conservation Project

Overview of first project focusing on otter research and conservation in Cambodia

Presenter: Sokrith Heng

Project Team

Mr. Sokrith Heng

Mr. Naven Hon

Ms. Navy Nop

Mr. Somanak Peov

Ms. Annette Olsson

Research Assistant-CI Cambodia, Ms student

Research Assistant-CI Cambodia

Project counterpart-Ministry of Environment, Ms student

Project counterpart-Forestry Administration

Project Advisor-CI Cambodia

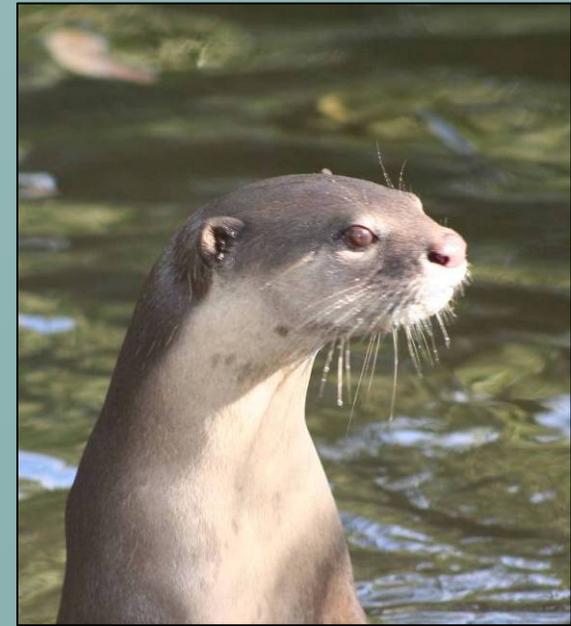


Project supported by Disney
Wildlife Conservation Fund and
Conservation International



Background

- Very little is known about otters and their conservation status in Cambodia, yet it is clear that Cambodia's otters, as well as many other wildlife species, are greatly threatened by human activities, specifically the increase in international wildlife trade.
- More information is needed in order to assess which species occur in Cambodia, to identify the best sites for conservation, and to put effective conservation measures in place.
- The Cambodia Otter Research and Conservation Project was initiated in August 2006.



Project Goal

To improve knowledge of the distribution and status of otters in Cambodia and to empower the Cambodian government to take necessary measures to conserve them.

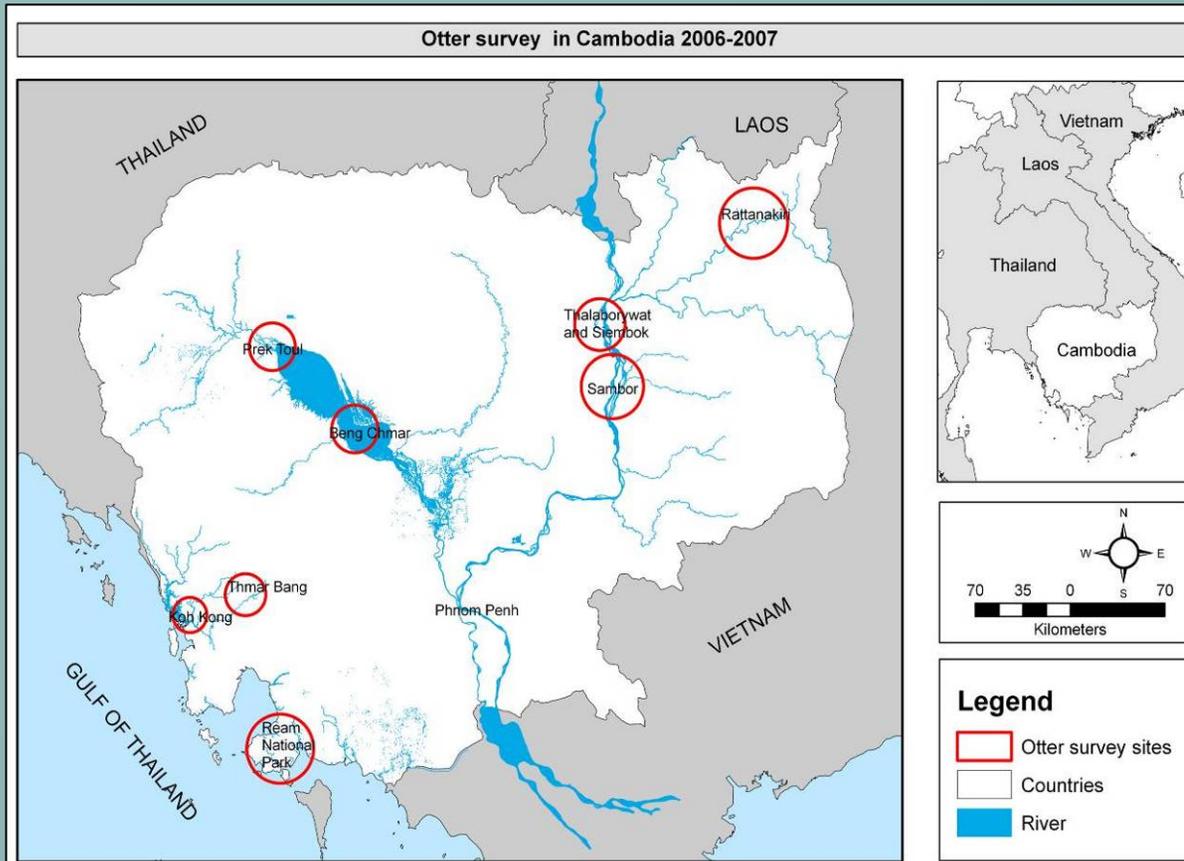
Project objectives

- a. To collect information on the distribution and status of each otter species in wetlands across Cambodia (with special focus on *L. sumatrana*), and to identify high priority conservation areas.
- b. Work with government to produce action plans for otter conservation in Cambodia.
- c. Raise awareness of otters and their conservation with local communities and relevant government departments. Train rangers at key sites in enforcement policies, national legislation, and appropriate conservation actions.
- d. Build the capacity of young Cambodian conservationists and government counterparts to manage a long-term otter research, conservation and adaptive monitoring program.

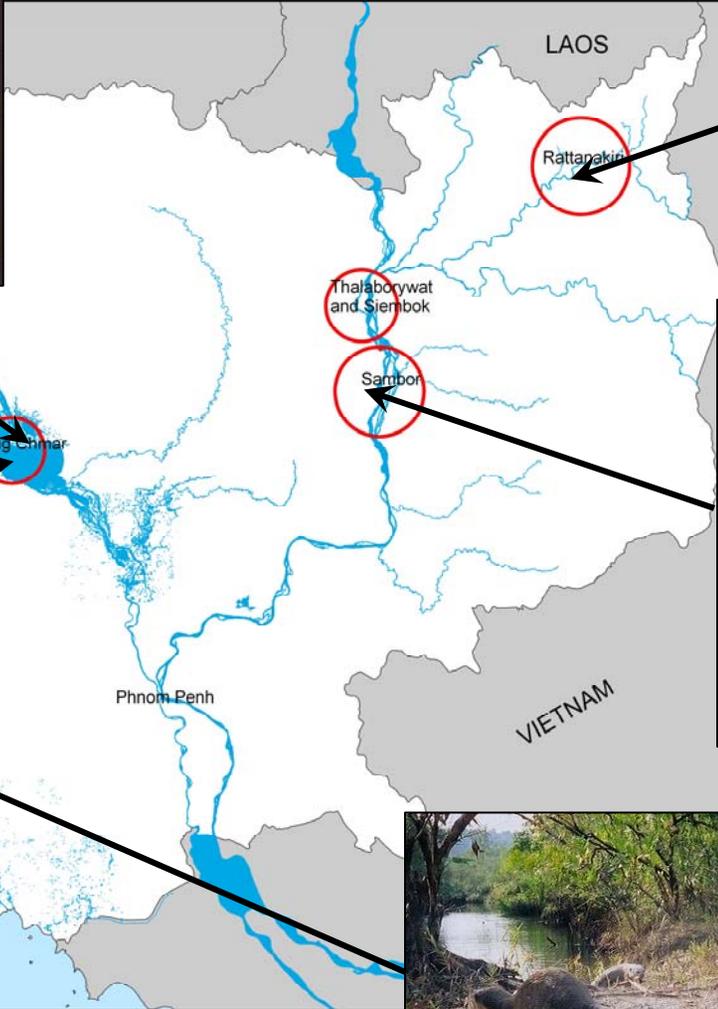
Methods

The first year of the project aimed to undertake surveys of wetlands throughout Cambodia to identify sites with otter populations

We used standardised methods including camera trapping, track and sign surveys, and structured interviews with local residents.



Results



Results

- Otters recorded at all surveyed sites
- Relatively large populations of otters at some sites
- Trade in pelts has escalated over the last two decades
- Small-scale local use of otter parts for traditional medicine
- Low awareness of otter conservation issues within government
- Hunted mostly with traps, but also with dogs, spears, nets and hooks
- Good opportunities for conservation as still large areas with good habitat



Review of *Lutra sumatrana* in Cambodia



Captive *L. sumatrana*, Tonle Sap Lake 1998. Photo by Long Kheng



Stuffed *L. sumatrana* at Phnom Tamau Zoo and Rescue Center 1999. Origin unknown. Specimen now disintegrated. Photo by Colin Poole.



L. sumatrana. Phnom Tamau 2005. This individual has since died. Origin of this confiscated individual is unknown. Photo by CI.



Camera trap of *L. sumatrana*? Tonle Sap Lake 2006. Photo by CI.



Camera trap photo of *L. sumatrana*? Cardamom Mountains 2007. Photo by FFI.



Skin of *L. sumatrana*. Tonle Sap Lake 2006. Photo by CI.



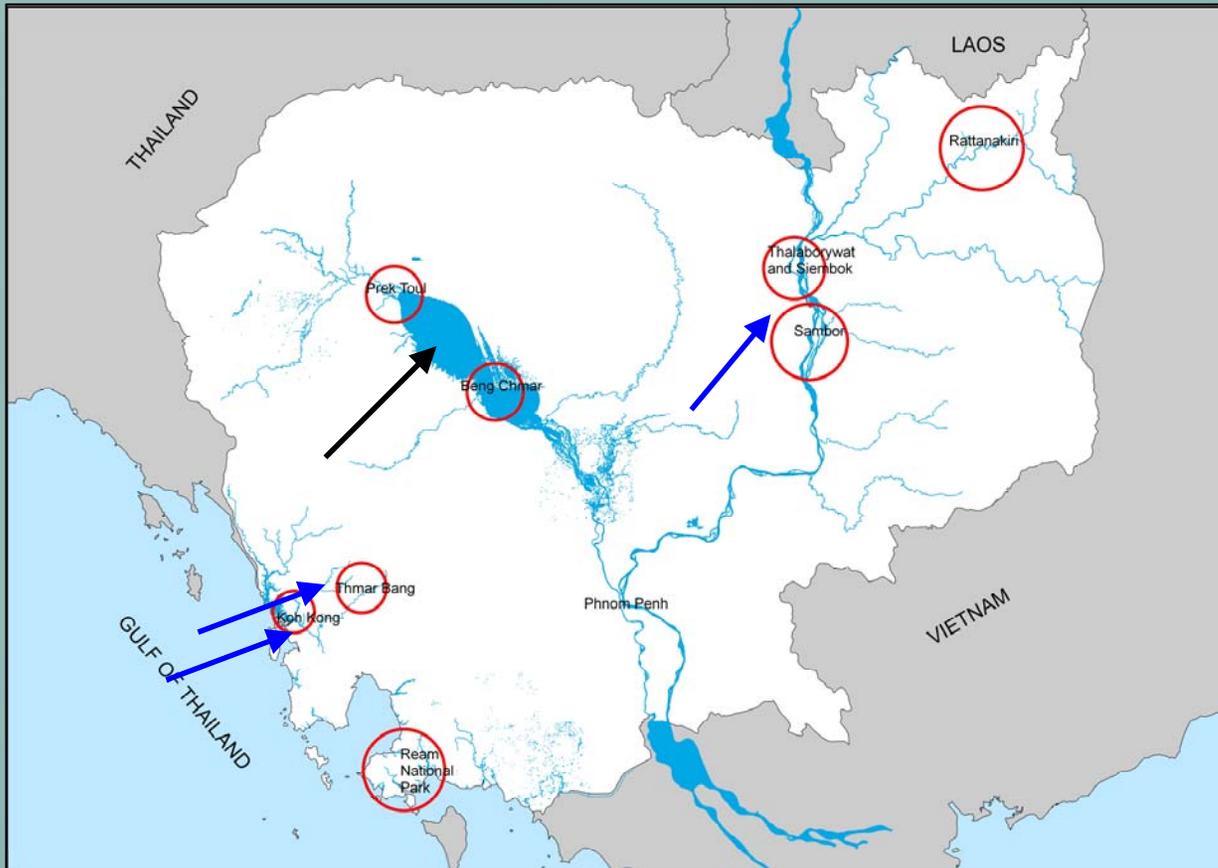
Skin of *L. sumatrana*. Tonle Sap Lake 2006. Photo by CI.



six *L. sumatrana* skins confiscated from Wildlife trader in Phnom Penh, January 2007. Origin unknown. Photo by CI.

L. sumatrana in Cambodia (cont.)

- One site (Tonle Sap Lake) with confirmed presence. Vast area of suitable habitat, so possibility of good population.
- Other sites with suspected presence – these are survey priorities for 2007 / 2008.



Understanding the politics of otter conservation in Cambodia

- Forestry Administration (FA) and Fishery Administration (FiA) share responsibility for wildlife legislation and protection.
- Until recently there was no national list of threatened species to accompany the forestry law, which made prosecution of offenders difficult. In **2007**, a species list was produced and put into law by the FA.
- Three categories in species list: Endangered, Rare, and Common species. The FA species list includes *Lutra sumatrana* and *L. lutra* as Rare.
- *Aonyx cinereus* and *Lutrogale perspicillata* were removed from the list and placed under FiA management. FiA has yet to produce a list of threatened species.
- The FA species list is new and there is not much focus on some species, including otters. There is therefore a need to inform and train government rangers and other relevant officers in how to protect these species and deal with cases of wildlife crime.

Forestry law (article 49) for rare and endangered species: **It is prohibited to harass or harm any species or its habitat; hunt, trap, possess, transport, trade and export any individuals.**

Rare Species: 'Species in the wild which has low population densities, are rarely seen or have rare population living in any specific habitat, which may be considered to be facing a risk of extinction in the wild.'



Further Activities

- Continue surveys throughout Cambodia to improve knowledge on distribution and status of otter species
- Conduct further ecological and behavioural research on *L. sumatrana*
- At key sites, provide environmental education to local communities to reduce threats, and train rangers to strengthen legal protection of otters
- Develop conservation and monitoring activities for *L. sumatrana* in the Tonle Sap Lake in collaboration with MoE and FiA
- Work with FiA to formally demarcate and co-manage a proposed otter sanctuary on the Tonle Sap Lake
- Produce national action plans for otter conservation and strengthen government capacity to manage otters in protected areas



THANK YOU!



Human-Related Factors Impacting on Otters at Three Sites in Cambodia

Master Program on Biodiversity Conservation

Royal University of Phnom Penh

Thesis Project

By Navy Nop

Research Aim

To find out how human activities in selected areas impact on otters, and make recommendations for solving these issues to contribute to otter conservation in Cambodia.

Research objectives

- To identify conflicts between humans and otters**
- To identify the uses of otters by local people**
- To develop ways for local people to help protect otters**

Research Methodology & Study Sites

Research Methodology

- Structured Interview (targeting fishermen and hunters)
- Focus group discussion (local communities and local authorities)

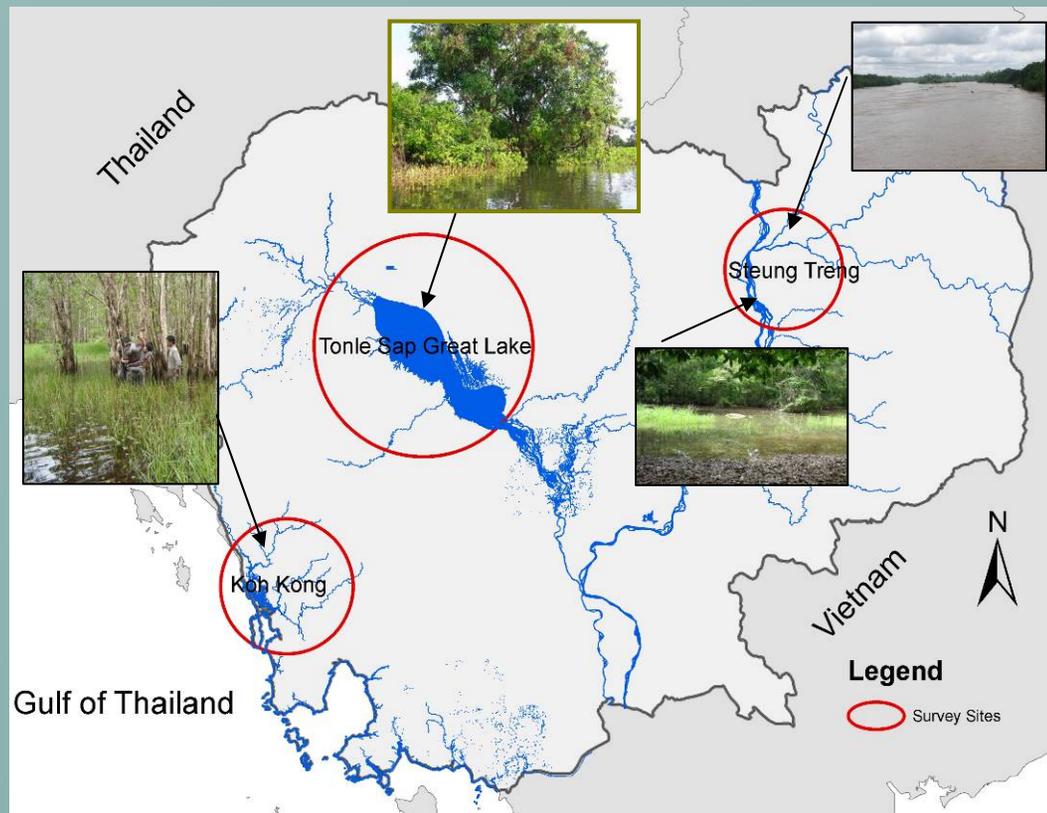
Survey Period

July - September 2007

Sample size

Total of 163 interviews

- Steung Treng: 72
- Tonle Sap: 73
- Koh Kong: 18



Tentative Results

Conflict issues

For otters: Habitat destruction, depletion of food sources, hunting, increasing human population (disturbance)

For people: Competition for fish, destruction of fishing nets

- Most caught otters are dead (due to trap injuries) and pelts will be sold
- Some otters caught alive, sold and kept as pets (especially young ones)



Local Perception

Tonle Sap people some are very poor and rely almost 100% on fishing. Tonle Sap people don't want otters there, they think otter is a pest species. Whereas at the other sites people don't have problems with otters.

Price of Pelts

In Tonle Sap interviewees report two different kind of otters; one large grey one with smooth skin (*Lutragale perspicillata*) get a high price, and one black kind with hairs covering the nose (*Lutra sumatrana*) which get a lower price.

Area	Price of Pelts in US\$	
	width>0.55m	width<0.55 m
Steung Treng	100-150	50-80
Tonle Sap	100-200	50-100
Koh Kong	80-100	50-80

Conclusion

- The hunting activities at the Tonle Sap Lake are higher than at the other two study sites, and this is a severe threat to *Lutra Sumatrana* which is confirmed from this site
- Local people at the Tonle Sap lake do not like otters because of competition for fish resources
- People living in forested areas are more willing to help protect otters as they don't have many conflicts with them

Recommendation

- Provide awareness to local people and local authorities
- Strengthen law enforcement for otter protection at key sites
- Establish an otter sanctuary
- Provide compensation to fishermen who have their fishing nets destroyed by otters
- Provide alternative livelihoods for people around the sanctuary, such as employment for research and monitoring, and eco-tourism projects



A brown otter is standing upright on its hind legs on a light-colored, stained concrete floor. The otter is facing left, looking slightly upwards. Its front paws are held up near its chest, and its long, dark tail extends to the right. The floor has various brown and tan stains and patches.

THANK YOU!