

Regional Environmental Affairs Office

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REO Highlights

Mushrooms Save Wildlife!

The REO Team visited an organic mushroom farm that was created in 2009 as an alternative livelihood pilot program for poachers. The program is managed by FREELAND, an NGO that combats human and illegal wildlife trafficking and is intended to help the wildlife population rebound after years of poaching in the forests of central Thailand. The rural communities in the area rely on the forest in many ways, but the unsustainable practice of poaching is threatening the environment and is a dangerous profession. The pilot project was established in order to give ex-poachers and loggers from the Khao Yai National Park the requisite skills to perform work other than extracting wildlife and fauna from the surrounding forests.

The mushroom farm program allows the ex-poachers to start a new business with microcredit loans and to enjoy a legitimate, law-abiding career. Mushrooms were chosen as the crop for the pilot program as they are fairly easy to manage and there is a high demand for mushrooms in Thai cuisine. The types of mushrooms grown are oyster, shitake and yanangie. Shitake mushrooms yield the most money, but also require more care and a longer growth period than oyster or yanangie. Prior to receiving the microcredit loan, the ex-poachers go through two rounds of training -- a theory course and a practical skills development course. To date, 42 poachers have benefited from the program and maintain mushroom farms to support their families.

FREELAND's Khun Mukda took the REO team on a tour of the mushroom farm, demonstrating the complex cultivation process. The process starts by filling a plastic bag with sawdust and a mixture of sorghum and mushroom spores. Each bag yields about six harvests of mushrooms. After being sterilized with steam at 100 degree Celsius, the bags are ready to be placed in the mushroom barn. The mushroom barns cost about \$650 to build with the primary construction material being thatch to keep the barn cool and dark. The mushrooms are picked daily by the farmers at 5am and sent off to the markets for sale.

There have been numerous success stories that have come out of the pilot program. The ex-poachers are given a safe, legal and sustainable career with a steady income that they did not enjoy when poaching from the forests. Some of the new mushroom farmers have been so successful, they have reinvested their profits to open more barns yielding greater profits. This program not only gives these ex-poachers new skills, but it also ensures the safety of numerous animals in the forests that would otherwise be captured. This program provides a win-win situation for the surrounding community and the environment.

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Please visit our embassy webpage for more information at:

<http://bangkok.usembassy.gov/embassy/reo.htm>



Experts Try to Tackle Growing Consumption of Endangered Wildlife

In recent years, the illegal wildlife trade has boomed. The reasons for the boom are not entirely clear, but old traditions, rising incomes and a lack of alternative work options can all be attributed to some of the reasons for the spike. Conventional methods of reducing the illegal wildlife trade seem to have met their marginal utility, requiring experts to come together to try to tackle the problem with new approaches.

Last month, the first meeting kicked off when experts from across the region met in Bangkok for an emergency brainstorming session to look at new ways to curb Asia's growing consumption of endangered wildlife. The event brought together professionals with expertise in wildlife trafficking from several countries in Southeast Asia.

The brainstorming session spanned three days and allowed participants to

discuss the growing problem of wildlife trafficking in Asia and suggest unconventional methods to target the problem. The event was run by JWT Advertising firm and FREELAND. In order to better target the problem, four animals were the primary focus: tigers, pangolins, bears and elephants. These four animals are currently under serious pressure in the region. The overarching goal of the session was to progress towards a single formula to address shrinking wildlife numbers in Southeast Asia's forests.

After mulling over the results of the brainstorm session, JWT and FREELAND are now working to hatch some new concepts on demand reduction that will be reviewed and finalized in early 2012. Experts plan to meet

again to discuss the new concepts, however the location and the date of the next brainstorming session are still in the works. REO Bangkok will keep you posted on the developments.



Photo by FREELAND

REO Grantee Excels — Negotiating Sustainable Fishing Management Practices in Indawgyi Lake, Kachin State, Burma Project

Covering over 200 square kilometers, Indawgyi Lake in Kachin State in northern Burma is the largest closed lake in Mainland Southeast Asia. It is home to a wide diversity of fish species that are a major food source for the 45,000 people living around the lake. However, the lake's biodiversity is dwindling rapidly in the face of over-fishing and poor waste management.

Of the 13 villages around the lake, five have been settled by migrants who arrived in the 1990s. The indigenous people rely on agriculture and use traditional, low impact fishing techniques. But the newcomers depend totally on fishing and use electric fishing and other destructive practices. They fish during the breeding season and often abandon their

nets, which remain as "ghost" nets that continue to trap and kill fish. They place traps at the mouths of streams flowing into the lake to capture fish full of eggs, thereby reducing future yields.

The project's purpose is to empower local communities to design and implement a network of no-fishing zones across the lake to ensure the recovery of fish stocks and a sustainable future harvest. It achieves this goal through a program of outreach and training targeting community leaders and village chairmen and local government officials, and program of education targeting local school children.

Learn more at: <http://www.indomyanmar.org/index.html>



Above: Community meeting discussing fish stock recovery

Below: Villagers monitoring fish stocks



Photos courtesy of IUMC

"ICE SHIELD" EXPERIMENT AIMS TO COOL MONGOLIAN CITY

(BY MASON INMAN)

Mongolia hopes to beat global warming by growing an "ice shield" that would cool its capital city, Ulaanbaatar.

The shield would be an enhanced version of thick ice sheets that naturally form over rivers during win-

ter. These sheets, which can grow up to 23 feet (7 meters) thick, are known in Mongolia and Russia as *naleds*, and in Alaska and Scandinavia as *aufeis*—German for "ice on top."

The ice sheets form under certain conditions—very

cold temperatures and fast-flowing rivers—when water under the existing ice cover bursts through the cracks and freezes at the surface.

Read More: <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2011/11/111207-global-warming-geoengineering-mongolia-ice-science-environment/>



Photo by Jim Reibert, World Bank

OVERCOMING THE HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC

(WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION)

Thirty years after the first human case of infection with HIV/AIDS was reported, the disease burden is showing a decreasing trend in South-East Asia. With new treatment approaches, highlighting access to treatment as a basic human right,

the disease profile is also changing to a chronic one. However, key challenges remain in achieving universal access to HIV prevention, care and treatment services: continuing stigma and discrimination; limited capacity of health systems in

terms of trained personnel, equipment and drugs; high prices of antiretroviral drugs; and lack of sustained finances.

Read More: <http://www.searo.who.int/EN/Section10/Section18.htm>



From rice to shrimps and ginger - adapting to saltwater intrusion

HANOI, (IRIN) - Rising sea levels and saltwater intrusion in Vietnam's fertile Mekong Delta are forcing farmers and development agencies to rethink how livelihoods can be maintained, using methods such as agricultural genetics, changing crop varieties and simple farming fixes.



Read More: <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=94552>

'IT'S REALLY GOOD STUFF': UNDERCOVER AT A CHINESE TIGER BONE WINE AUCTION

(BY JOHATHAN WATTS)

Is China serious about ending the trade in tigers and other endangered animals? The question posed itself last Saturday as I sat at an auction in Beijing watching the hammer go down on cases of spirits and tonics fortified with tiger, rhino horn and pangolin.

Sales of such products are

forbidden by Chinese law and international convention, yet even though the event at the Kunlun hotel had been advertised the previous night on state television and flagged up by outraged conservation groups, uniformed police were initially conspicuous by

their absence.

Read More: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/blog/2011/dec/06/china-tiger-bone-wine-auction>

Photo by Sinopix/Rex Features



ELECTRICITY SPARKS NEW LIFE INTO INDONESIA'S CORALS

(BY LOIC VENNIN)

Pemuteran, Bali. Cyanide fishing and rising water temperatures had decimated corals off Bali until a diver inspired by a German scientist's pioneering work on organic architecture helped develop a project now replicated worldwide.

Based on "Biorock" technology, (<http://www.globalcoral.org>), it is implemented in 20 countries, mainly in Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific.

In the turquoise waters of Pemuteran off the north coast of Bali where the project was launched in 2000, a metal frame known as "the crab" is covered with huge corals in shimmering colors where hundreds of fish have made their homes.

Read more: <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/electricity-sparks-new-life-into-indonesias-corals/487064>



Photo By: AFP



GREEN tip!

An easy way to make your daily commute greener is to ride a bicycle instead of driving a car or taking public transportation. Like walking, riding a bicycle will help improve your health and make the community you live in a better place. Bicycles do not produce pollution and don't consume fossil fuels. Bicycle manufacturers are getting in on the green movement as well by making bicycles out of renewable materials such as bamboo. If you don't want to invest in a new bicycle there are second hand bicycles on the market and choosing one of these could keep it from going into the landfill.

For more information, visit:
<http://greenliving.lifetips.com/>

To subscribe, unsubscribe, comment or submit ideas, please email
REOBangkok@state.gov

2012 LAND FOR LIFE AWARD

Rewarding leadership for sustainable land management
 Applications for the 2012 Land for Life Award are now open

The award will go to inspiring initiatives, which secure the health and productivity of soil for the well-being of present and future generations. The prize will be awarded to those efforts which reduce land degradation through sustainable land management, or are outstanding examples of political leadership, policy, business, advocacy campaigns or scientific research.

The "Jury" particularly welcomes nominations of candidates whose work is: innovative, collaborative, achieved in partnership across sectors, supports free knowledge sharing and capacity building, empowers vulnerable and marginalized groups, and fosters gender equality, cultural diversity and social inclusion. Three awards will be granted in 2012 from a total prize fund of up to USD 100,000.

Nominations are welcome from:

- individuals
- institutions
- non-governmental organizations and civil society
- private sector
- academic and research organizations
- policy makers
- journalists and media

The deadline for applications is 29 February 2012

For more information, visit: <http://www.unccd.int/land4life/menu.php>



Upcoming Events

January 23-28: LMI GLOBE Train the Trainer Workshop—Chiang Rai, Thailand
 January 24-26: FAO, Water and Rural Livelihoods in Asia—Bangkok, Thailand

Upcoming Important Observance Days

February 2: World Wetlands Day
 February 4: World Cancer Day

WORLD WETLANDS DAY PHOTO CELEBRATION

To Participate, **JOIN** the "World Wetlands Day 2012 Photo Celebration" Flickr Group

POST your Photo to the Group from January 3-20, 2012. Make sure you list your country and specify which wetland and include a **TAG** for the category (see below).

TAG your best photo with one of the following categories (you may submit one photo per category) and upload it to the celebration page:

- "**WILDLIFE**" – Wildlife in wetlands, from frogs to fish to flamingoes, showcase the inhabitants of your favorite wetlands.
- "**LANDSCAPE**" – Beautiful sunsets, an undulating salt marsh, a vista of stately mangroves, take it all in.
- "**PLANTS**" – A close up of a flower or intricately woven lily-pad stalks, some of the most unique plants blur the lines between terrestrial and aquatic.
- "**TOURISTS**" –Whether slipping silently by in a canoe, bird watching, fishing or photographing, show us how YOU enjoy your wetlands.

"VOTE" on your favorite photo in each group, Wildlife, Landscape, Plants, and Tourists by marking as a "favorite" what you think are the best photos in each category. Invite your friends and family to vote as well! Voting closes on Jan. 22, 2012.

FOLLOW the celebration on Facebook at www.facebook.com/StateDepartment.OES. "LIKE" our page and look for updates, wetlands tips and trivia, and suggestions for getting more involved in wetlands conservation.

CELEBRATE! Top photos in each group will be announced on World Wetlands Day, Feb. 2, and featured with your name, country, and the location of the photo on the U.S. State Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ramsar Convention Secretariat websites and social media sites as well as those of the five Ramsar Convention International Organization Partners – Birdlife International, International Water Management Institute (IWMI), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Wetlands International, and World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

For more information, visit: <http://www.flickr.com/groups/WWD2012PhotoCelebration>