



Saola Working Group

IUCN SSC Asian Wild Cattle Specialist Group

ANNUAL REPORT 2015



The Saola Working Group was founded in 2006, and is part of the Asian Wild Cattle Specialist Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission.

FIND OUT MORE:

**[www.savethesaola.org](http://www.savethesaola.org)**

CONTACT:

**[saolawg@gmail.com](mailto:saolawg@gmail.com)**

#### ON THE COVER:

LEFT: Mr. Nguyen Huu Hoa, a village forest guard in the Hue Saola Nature Reserve, Vietnam, with wire snares collected by his team during a patrol in November 2015 (Photo by W. Robichaud)

RIGHT: Biennial meeting of the Saola Working Group, in Hanoi, November 2015 (Photo courtesy of WWF-Vietnam)

Back row, left to right: Douglas Richardson, Crispian Barlow, Pierre Comizzoli, Tom Gray, Simon Hedges, Andrew Tilker, Alex McWilliam, Hannah O'Kelly.

Front row, left to right: Nguyen Quang Hoa Anh, Pat Thomas, Nguyen Xuan Dang, Rob Timmins, Chanthavy Vongkhamheng, Bill Robichaud, Van Ngoc Thinh, Barney Long, Nicholas Wilkinson, Sarah Brook and Terry Hornsey.

Present for the meeting but not the photo: Cao Tien Trung, Nguyen Duc Tu, Radoslaw Ratajszczak, Jack Tordoff, James Tallant and Ben Rawson.

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## THE SAOLA

The Saola is one of the rarest large animals on earth. Variouslly described as “beautiful”, “enigmatic” and “inspiring”, *Pseudoryx nghetinhensis* is a bovid in its own genus, and has been known to science only since 1992.

Found only in the Annamite Mountains of Laos and Vietnam, it has declined to a status of Critically Endangered. Few animals are as phylogenetically distinctive and so threatened with extinction, yet have so little conservation attention.

## THE SAOLA WORKING GROUP

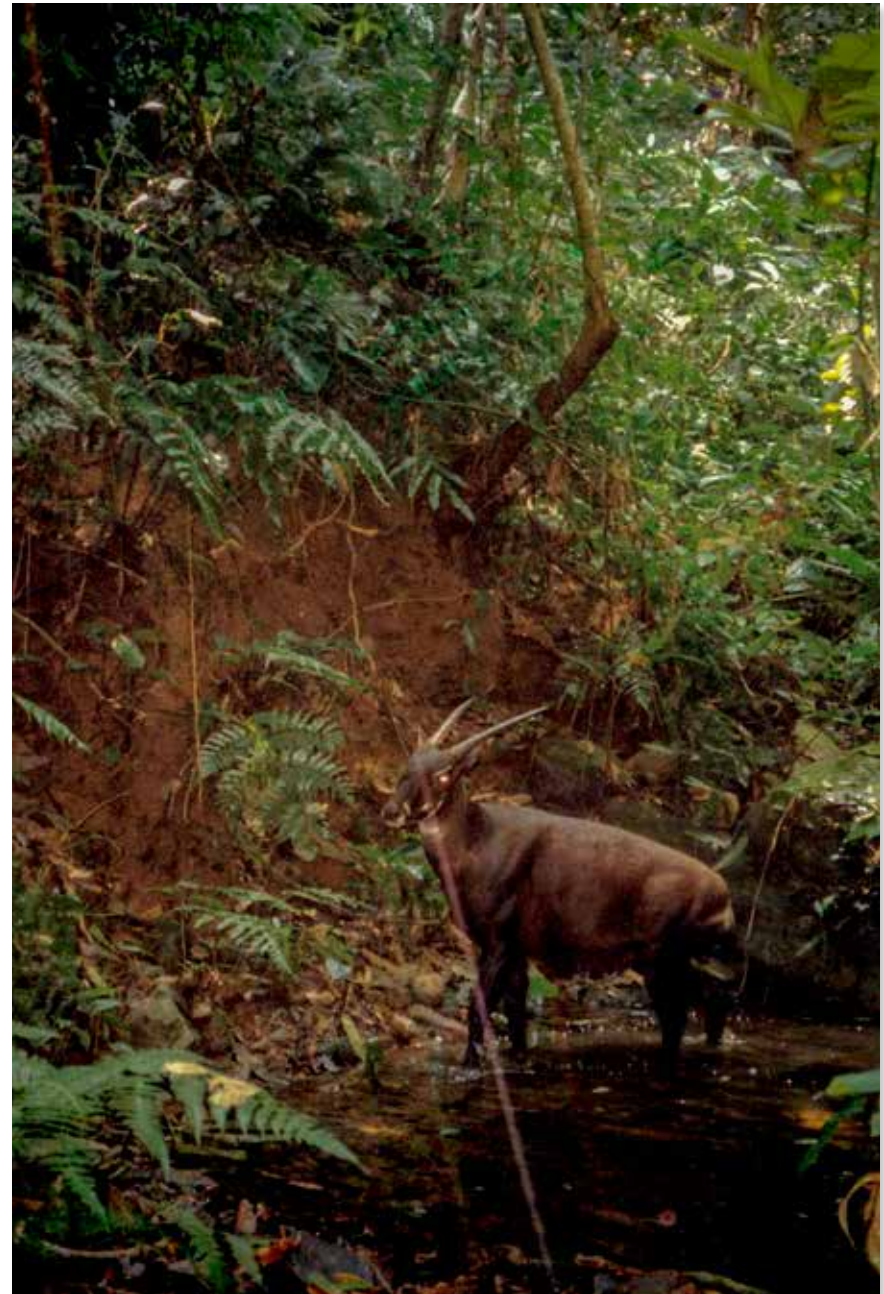
Mission statement:

The Saola Working Group works collaboratively to conserve Saola in nature, and to leverage Saola as a flagship for conservation of the bio-cultural diversity of the Annamite Mountains as a whole.

The Saola Working Group is part of the Asian Wild Cattle Specialist Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission. The SWG was formed in 2006 in recognition of the need for urgent, focused and coordinated action to save Saola from extinction. In 2009, we held our first in-person meeting and commenced coordinated action.

Collaboration is central to the SWG’s work. We are less a stand-alone institution than a network of conservation organizations and range government partners, working cooperatively. This cross-institutional ‘joining of hands’ is a central strength of the SWG. Together, we identify the highest priority Saola conservation actions, and work collaboratively to implement them.

At the end of 2015, the SWG had thirty-five members. They are among the most experienced conservation biologists in Southeast Asia, along with some of the world’s most skilled managers of wild ungulates in captivity.





## OUR APPROACH

In 2015, the SWG continued to embrace the “One Plan” approach to the conservation of Saola. According to the IUCN Species Survival Commission:

*The One Plan approach to species conservation is the development of management strategies and conservation actions by all responsible parties for all populations of a species, whether inside or outside their natural range (Conservation Breeding Specialist Group, <http://www.cbsg.org/our-approach/one-plan-approach-conservation>).*

In other words, the One Plan approach is the full integration of what formerly were often separate conservation tracks – captive breeding of animals as a guard against extinction and for future re-introduction, and conservation of animals in the wild.

Although captive breeding (aka, conservation breeding) is an option of last resort, for a highly threatened species like the Saola, it is imperative to begin conservation breeding while there is still time for it to be successful, and supportive of the species’ survival.

The membership of the SWG has evolved to reflect the emphasis we now place on the One Plan approach – as of this writing, the expertise of ten of our members lies predominantly in the husbandry and conservation breeding and of wild ungulates.

The SWG implements four programs in application of the One Plan approach, and to advance Saola conservation both immediately and in the long-term:

- » Protection of Saola in nature
- » Conservation breeding
- » Mentoring and capacity building
- » Partnership building

With the support of some generous donors and technical partners, we achieved significant progress in all four areas in 2015, which is summarized in the sections that follow.

## PROTECTION OF SAOLA IN NATURE

### PRIORITY AREAS

Since 2011, the SWG and its partners have focused Saola protection efforts in five key protected areas: three in Laos and two in Vietnam. At each area, in cooperation with local government agencies, SWG partners have developed teams of well-trained and supervised patrol rangers, recruited from local villages. In 2015, the teams at reached a significant milestone, with the collection of their 100,000th snare since the start of the program. Every snare collected not only reduces the risk to Saola, it supports the conservation of many other species of threatened wildlife in the same forests.

The following pages detail activities in the priority areas in 2015.

BELOW: WWF staff and SWG member Mr. Nguyen Quang Hoa Anh (l) and forest guard team leader, Mr. Nguyen Huu Hoa, plan a patrol in the Hue Saola Nature Reserve (November 2015).





### Hue Saola Nature Reserve and Quang Nam Saola Nature Reserve, Vietnam, and Xe Sap National Protected Area, Laos

These three protected areas comprise one interconnected ‘Saola landscape’, which receives technical and financial support from the WWF Greater Mekong Programme, under its Carbon and Biodiversity Project (“CarBi”).

Teams of “forest guards”, recruited from local villages, patrolled the Hue and Quang Nam Saola Nature Reserves monthly without interruption. Patrolling in Xe Sap was halted after April 2015, with the termination of funding. Wildlife Reserves Singapore then crucially stepped in to provide additional funding, and some patrols resumed in November. See Table 1 for a summary of patrol results from these three areas.

The results in terms of poachers’ camps destroyed and snares removed remained roughly the same as the preceding year. This emphasizes the need for continual patrolling vigilance and effort. Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of patrolling is a priority for the CarBi project in 2016. This will be pursued through initiatives to increase:

- » **motivation for protection**, through progressive conservation awareness programs in local communities, including education about wildlife protection laws;
- » **deterrence of poaching**, through improved application of the law in the field; following arrests through conclusion in the courts; and continued expansion of an informant network.

Naturally, the highest numbers came in the first two years of the program, 2011 and 2012. Part of the first collections included old, ‘forgotten’ snares, and the introduction of patrols also certainly had an inhibitory affect, leading to significantly reduced pressure in subsequent years.

There is also, of course, a correlation with effort. The modest ‘rebound’ in snare collection after 2013 is due mainly to the addition of another patrol team and a new patrolling substation, to expand the area covered.

>> RIGHT, ABOVE: Mr. Hoa, team leader of the Hue Saola Nature Reserve Forest Guards, removes a snare set for a pangolin at the hollow base of a tree (November 2015).



TABLE 1: Patrol results from the Hue and Quang Nam Saola Nature Reserves, Vietnam and Xe Sap National Protected Area, Laos. (Data courtesy of the WWF Greater Mekong Programme)

	HUE SNR*		QUANG NAM SNR*		XE SAP NPA**	
	Total	Ave/month	Total	Ave/month	Total	Ave/month
Patrols	134	11	126	11	8	1.3
Patrol days	4,314	360	4,410	368	518	86
Poacher camps destroyed	96	8	85	7	58	9.7
Snares removed	18,971	1,581	4,212	351	1,758	293

\* The data for Hue and Quang Nam SNRs cover 12 months of patrolling

\*\* Patrolling in Xe Sap NPA was Jan-Apr and resumed in Nov 21015. The figures reflect 6 months of patrolling.

### Nakai-Nam Theun National Protected Area, Laos

At 4,000 km<sup>2</sup>, NNT NPA is the largest protected area in the Saola's range. Since 2012, SWG member Dr. Chanthavy Vongkhamheng has advised NNT's management team, the Watershed Management and Protection Authority (WMPA), on initiatives to improve patrolling.

In 2015, WMPA patrol teams, which are comprised mostly of villagers who live in the protected area, and are supervised by WMPA staff Mr. Phoukhaokham, removed 11,308 snares from NNT.

### Phou Si Thone Endangered Species Conservation Area, Laos

Phou Si Thone (PST) is the site where villagers captured a Saola in 2010 (already exhausted by days in a snare when it was found, the animal died shortly after).

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and Bolikhamxay Province continue to pursue various conservation activities there, through their joint Integrated Ecosystem and Wildlife Management Project (with funding from the Save Our Species fund and CEPF).

A central component of the program is vigorous patrolling and snare collection, with well-trained teams recruited from local villages. Table 2, below, shows the results of patrolling in PST in 2015, and preceding years.

>> RIGHT: Snares removed from Nakai-Nam Theun NPA

TABLE 2: Monthly and annual totals of snares collected in Phou Si Thone Endangered Species Conservation Area. (Data courtesy of the WCS Lao Program)

YEAR	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	TOTALS
2011	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	250	2977	664	3,891
2012	811	0	0	0	0	0	216	1560	850	0	0	0	3,437
2013	0	55	0	0	0	0	275	136	2	8	0	0	476
2014	7	0	0	0	30	0	0	64	464	127	186	338	1,216
<b>2015</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>299</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>932</b>

In summary, thanks to the support of our donors, at the five areas where the SWG and its partners (WWF, WCS and WMPA) focus their protection efforts, more than 37,000 wire snares were collected and destroyed in 2015. The total number of snares destroyed at these five sites since these initiatives began in 2011 is now more than 127,000.

This is a major achievement and a crucial step in the effort to save the Saola, as well as being beneficial to a much wider constituency of wildlife. But it is still short of the protection needed to ensure the survival of Saola in the wild. Our goal is to reach a point where the same patrols are finding no snares. *See next section.*







## ASSESSMENT OF PROTECTION EFFECTIVENESS

A chain of four things needs to happen to save Saola in the wild:

**1. More funding and capacity need to flow to the priority areas;**



**2. More funding and capacity need to result in more protection and awareness effort**



**3. More effort needs to result in fewer threats; and**



**4. Fewer threats need to result in more Saolas (or, at least, arrest of further decline).**

In 2013, the SWG established a ‘zero threats’ goal for the highest priority saola areas. That is, our protection goal in these areas is, at any time, the presence of zero snares, zero illegal guns, and zero hunting dogs. In 2014, we received a major grant (\$149,000) from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), in part to assess progress toward the zero threats goal at four of the five priority areas.

To verify progress along the protection sequence, an independent assessment of patrol effectiveness is essential. The SWG designed assessment surveys that put a capable biologist, not employed by any partner implementing the patrol programs, in the field to conduct both a threat assessment (e.g., frequency of encounters with snares and hunters), and a biological assessment (frequency of encounter with large wildlife and their signs, as a proxy for Saola, which are nearly impossible to detect in the course of a short-term survey).

The SWG completed the effectiveness assessments at three of the priority sites in 2014. In 2015, SWG member Rob Timmins led the most extensive assessment, of Nakai-Nam Theun NPA.

Over a period of 40 days in August and September, Rob and a team of village guides and staff from WMPA (NNT’s management body) surveyed deep in the forest along

NNT’s border with Vietnam, far from the villages in the more accessible areas of NNT (SWG member Dr. Camille Coudrat joined the team for the first ten days of the survey).

The results were not surprising, but were still not welcome – due mainly to intense hunting and snaring by professional poachers crossing over from Vietnam (a phenomenon that has been underway for more than 20 years), larger wildlife is now nearly gone from the approximately 5-10 km wide swath of forest along NNT’s long border with Vietnam. This band of high quality habitat is now a prototypical “empty forest”, with few larger animals remaining (at least species that move on the ground, susceptible to snares).

Other areas in Nakai-Nam Theun that may hold Saola, more distant from the border, are probably in better shape, thanks in part to the efforts of WMPA and its patrol teams and awareness programs with villagers. But these areas are also under severe threat, and urgently need better protection. The SWG and WMPA are quickly planning a workshop to use the results of Rob’s survey to strategize better protection in Nakai-Nam Theun.

BELOW: Rob Timmins (rear) and team members cross a rain-swollen stream in the Nakai-Nam Theun National Protected Area. (Photo courtesy Simeuang Phitsanoukan and WMPA)





## PROTECTION OF NEW AREAS

In 2015, a major, seven-year landscape conservation program commenced in Laos, known as the Integrated Conservation of Biodiversity and Forests (ICBF). This is a cooperative project between the Government of Lao PDR and the Federal Government of Germany, with multi-million dollar funding from the German development bank, KfW.

During the project development phase, the ICBF project sought two landscapes of high conservation value for its focus, one in northern Laos and one in central Laos. Due substantially to information provided by the SWG (and former SWG member Troy Hansel), ICBF selected for the central site Khoun Xe Nong Ma Provincial Protected Area (KXNM PPA), in Khammouane Province. The SWG had identified it as perhaps the highest priority site in the Saola's range for new investment in conservation.

This is outstandingly good news. In December, SWG members Bill Robichaud and Alex McWilliam met in Vientiane with ICBF's chief technical advisors, to discuss how the SWG could support ICBF's success in protecting this important area. The meeting was very productive, and collaborative ways forward were identified.

Also in Laos, progress continued toward the establishment by Bolikhamxay Province of a new protected area in the Saola's range in the eastern part of the province, near Vietnam's Pu Mat National Park. Advocacy for this initiative has been provided by the Asian Development Bank and the Nam Ngiep 1 Hydropower Project, with significant input from SWG member Dr. Chanthavy Vongkhamheng. The coming year, 2016, will be pivotal for decisions on this proposal.

## SAOLA DETECTION

Across its patchy distribution, knowing where Saola are is vital to knowing where to focus protection resources and effort. In 2015, we continued to research methods to detect Saola in the wild. The SWG and our partner, GWC, signed a memorandum of understanding with the Kunming Institute of Zoology (KIZ), with funding from CEPF and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, to conduct genetic analyses of leeches collected by SWG members, to search them for Saola DNA. Thousands of leeches have been collected in the Saola's range, but some technical hurdles to laboratory analysis still need to be overcome.

## CONSERVATION BREEDING

In 2013, SWG members agreed unanimously to move forward as quickly as possible to establish a Saola conservation breeding program at a center to be developed in Laos or Vietnam.

Some significant progress was achieved in 2015:

- » The SWG produced and distributed a brief, Saola Conservation Breeding – Principles For Success, which formed the basis for discussions with partners in the effort, including the governments of Vietnam and Laos.
- » Zoo Design, Inc. of Seattle, Washington, developed and donated a 2nd draft of the architectural design for the breeding centre.
- » Tuan Bendixsen, Country Director for Animals Asia in Vietnam, agreed to be the SWG's in-country adviser with regards to the setting up the breeding centre.
- » Poland's excellent Wroclaw Zoo agreed to assume long-term responsibility for day-to-day management of the Saola conservation breeding centre.
- » With the assistance of the Zoological Society of London, additional funding for the conservation breeding program was secured, principally from conservation-oriented zoos in Europe and the USA.
- » In September, during the annual meeting of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria, in Wroclaw, members of the SWG's conservation breeding team, and supporters and funders, met to strategize next steps.
- » In November, members of the SWG conservation breeding team met in Hanoi with Vietnamese government colleagues from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), to strategize the path forward to construction of a Saola conservation breeding centre in Vietnam.





ABOVE: Members of the SWG meet in Hanoi with representatives of Vietnam's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to identify next steps in a Saola conservation breeding program (November 2015).

## MENTORING & CAPACITY BUILDING

One of the SWG's core missions for long-term conservation of Saola is to encourage and mentor the young generation of Lao and Vietnamese conservation scientists. In this effort, we have received outstanding support from the Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN), through WCN's scholarship program. Highlights in 2015 included:

**Santi Sayphanya**, who is studying for his PhD in wildlife conservation awareness at Cornell University, USA, with scholarship support from WCN, completed most of his dissertation fieldwork in Laos.

SWG member **Chanthasone Phommachanh**, with support from WCN, CEPF and the Los Angeles Zoo, completed the fieldwork for his MSc thesis. We are particularly indebted to his academic supervisor at Thailand's King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Dr. George Gale, and several SWG donors who contributed additional funds in 2015 for his studies.

In 2015, **Anita Bousa** stepped down as the SWG's Lao Saola projects manager, to begin studies in Australia for her own MSc., also with a merit scholarship from WCN.

With funding support from some generous SWG donors, **Chanthalaphone Nanthavong** completed his MSc. in 2014, with field research in Nakai-Nam Theun National Protected Area. In 2015, he became Project Coordinator and Field Station Manager for the conservation organization Project Anoulak, founded by SWG member Dr. Camille Coudrat (see next section).

**Pao Vue** is a Hmong-American PhD student in the Department of Geography at the University of Wisconsin. In 2015, with partial funding support from the SWG, he completed 16 months of field work in Laos. For his research, he lived with Hmong of his own clan in the saola's range, near Nakai-Nam Theun NPA, gaining an understanding of their patterns of hunting and other natural resource use, and their knowledge of saola, in particular the animal's local status. The SWG will work with Pao to use his findings to engage Hmong in the area in saola conservation.

Congratulations to all of them on their achievements!

BELOW: Left to right, SWG member Rob Timmins, new SWG Steering Committee member Dr. Will Duckworth and Chanthasone Phommachanh discuss analysis of Chanthasone's data for his Master's thesis (Vientiane, January 2015).





# PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

## DONORS

Even though Saola is one of the most endangered large mammals in the world, and the conservation flagship for a global biodiversity hotspot (Annamite Mountains), cultivating support for Saola conservation can be challenging, since the species is not well-known. Consequently, we are particularly grateful to our enlightened donors for their support.

Our generous institutional donors/partners in Saola conservation in 2015 were (in alphabetical order):

- » American Association of Zoo Keepers - Southern Ontario Chapter
- » Association Beauval Nature
- » Association of Zoos and Aquariums – Ungulate Taxonomic Advisory Group
- » Brevard Zoo
- » Copenhagen Zoo
- » Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
- » Fossil Rim Wildlife Center
- » Friends of Zoo Boise
- » Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association
- » Henry Vilas Zoo
- » Houston Zoo
- » Huntington-Oyster Bay Audubon Society
- » John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
- » Leipzig Zoo
- » The Maue Kay Foundation
- » Minnesota Zoo
- » Prague Zoo
- » Save Our Species
- » Synchronicity Earth
- » Wildlife Conservation Network
- » Wildlife Reserves Singapore
- » Wroclaw Zoo
- » Zoological Society of East Anglia
- » Zoological Society of London

Our stupendous individual donors in 2015 (in addition to several anonymous contributors) were:

- » Matt Ardaiole
- » Lisa Baffi
- » Ryan Bailey
- » Ann Beutel
- » Samantha Bradshaw
- » Eleanor Briggs
- » Lesley Brown
- » Steven and Karin Chase
- » Madeleine & Jerry Cohen
- » Lesley Dickie
- » Cheryl Feng
- » Dr. Elias Sandalla Filho
- » Marriah Fisher
- » Taieen Gasti
- » Steven & Florence Goldby
- » Dr. Holly Haeefele
- » Adrienne Haberl
- » Troy Hansel
- » Andrew Holman
- » Terry Hornsey
- » Brent Huffman
- » Caroline Hultberg & Dean Holmes
- » Charlie Hyde
- » Kenji Ishiwada
- » K. Karnos
- » Patric & Bo Kearns
- » Louis J. Maher
- » Gloria & Kent Marshall
- » Carolyn Makovi
- » Margaret McCarthy & Bob Worth
- » Karla Michelson
- » Ariel Neill
- » Howard Olson
- » Bill Odle
- » Jeannie Parker
- » Andrew Peterson
- » Torrey Pillsbury
- » Matthew Reetz
- » Bill Robichaud
- » Harald Rosch
- » Shelley Sanderman
- » Christina Seely
- » Linda Tabor-Beck
- » Lee & Marty Talbot
- » Susan Tall
- » Pat Thomas
- » C. Michele Thompson
- » Erica von Studnitz
- » Clayton Williams
- » Douglas Yu



## MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES

To cultivate support for Saola conservation (both financial and technical) SWG Coordinator Bill Robichaud represented the SWG at the following institutions and conferences in 2015.

At two of these, he was joined by SWG member Dr. Cao Tien Trung, on Dr. Trung's first visit to the United States:

- » Jacksonville Zoo, Florida, USA (presentation)
- » White Oak Conservation Center, Florida, USA (presentation)
- » Madison Audubon Society, Wisconsin, USA (presentation)
- » Wildlife Conservation Network's Wildlife Expo, San Francisco, California, USA; with Dr. Trung (presentation; see <https://youtu.be/sSYQIzQgE-A>)
- » Zoos and Aquariums Committing to Conservation, Denver, Colorado, USA; with Dr. Trung (presentation with Erin Flynn of Henry Vilas Zoo; panel discussion)
- » Association of Zoos and Aquaria, Mid-Year Meeting, Columbia, South Carolina, USA (presentation).
- » Conference on "Standardised mammal surveys in support of law enforcement and measuring conservation success; an example from the Central Annamites", hosted by the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research, and WWF; Hue, Vietnam
- » IUCN SSC quadrennial meeting, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
- » CEPF Indo-Burma mid-term assessment conference, Siem Reap, Cambodia
- » MacArthur Foundation Greater Mekong grantees workshop, Siem Reap, Cambodia

>> RIGHT: SWG member Dr. Nguyen Xuan Dang shows off his new purchase of a snare key ring made by Henry Vilas Zoo (Hanoi, November 2015).

## HENRY VILAS ZOO'S "CATCHING HOPE" CAMPAIGN

In 2015, members of the SWG continued to send wire snares collected in the Saola's range in Laos and Vietnam to the Education Department of the Henry Vilas Zoo, in Madison, Wisconsin, USA.

Volunteers organized by the zoo convert the snares into wonderful handcrafts – key chains, dream catchers, and Christmas tree ornaments. The zoo sells the handcrafts to visitors, and the proceeds are returned to the SWG to invest in more snare collection. This partnership has now raised several thousand dollars for Saola conservation. We owe a great debt of thanks to the zoo's Director of Education, Dr. Erin Flynn, for shepherding the project to such success.



## PROJECT ANOULAK

A few years ago, SWG member Dr. Camille Coudrat founded a non-profit association (registered in France) dedicated to the long-term conservation and study of wildlife in Nakai-Nam Theun National Protected Area in Laos (see <http://www.conservationlaos.com/>). Given the importance of Nakai-Nam Theun, Project Anoulak is a key partner for the SWG.

In 2015, Project Anoulak achieved a milestone. With financial support from CEPF, Camille and her team built a field research station in the heart of Nakai-Nam Theun. It will act as the principal base for their activities, and can host national and international field researchers. This is the first long-term biological field station established anywhere in Laos. Congratulations!



ABOVE The Project Anoulak field research station in the forest of Nakai-Nam Theun (*Photo courtesy of Project Anoulak*).

<< LEFT: SWG member Dr. Camille Coudrat (kneeling) and Chanthaphone Nanthavong (right) with the Project Anoulak team at their new field station in Nakai-Nam National Protected Area, Laos (*Photo courtesy of Project Anoulak*).



## OTHER NEWS

### SWG MEETING

With generous support from CEPF and Copenhagen Zoo, in November the SWG held our 4th biennial meeting in Hanoi, hosted by the office of the WWF Vietnam Programme. We met for four days, and covered much ground.

Other participants included Jack Tordoff and James Tallant of CEPF; Radosław Ratajszczak, Director of Poland's Wrocław Zoo; Dr. Ben Rawson, Vietnam Country Director for Fauna & Flora International; and Dr. Van Ngoc Thinh, Vietnam Country Director for WWF. See cover photo.

BELOW: SWG member Dr. Chanthavy Vongkhamheng leads a session of the SWG's biennial meeting (Hanoi, November 2015).



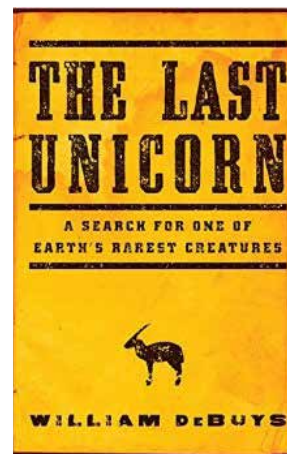
### NEW SWG GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

A major outcome of the SWG meeting in Hanoi was the establishment and election of an inaugural SWG Steering Committee, and several task teams, in response to continued expansion of our work under the One Plan approach, and concomitant growth in the SWG's membership roll.

The members of the new SWG Steering Committee are:

- » Sarah Brook, WCS-Cambodia
- » Dr. James Burton, Chair, IUCN SSC Asian Wild Cattle Specialist Group
- » Dr. Cao Tien Trung, Vinh University (Vietnam)
- » Dr. Will Duckworth
- » Dr. Barney Long, WWF-US
- » Douglas Richardson, Royal Zoological Society of Scotland
- » Bill Robichaud, SWG Coordinator
- » Dr. Weston Sechrest, Global Wildlife Conservation
- » Dr. Chanthavy Vongkhamheng, Lao Wildlife Conservation Association

### SAOLA IN PRINT



In March 2015, the first book written about Saola and its conservation, *The Last Unicorn – A Search for one of Earth's Rarest Creatures*, was published in the United States.

The book, by environmental writer William deBuys, received uniformly excellent reviews from the likes of the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, *Science*, *Orion*, *Huffington Post* and the *Christian Science Monitor*.

## RECOGNITION

In September, the IUCN Species Survival Commission honored SWG Coordinator Bill Robichaud and SWG founding member Dr. Simon Hedges.

Bill was awarded IUCN's Harry Messel Award for Conservation Leadership, "in recognition of his extraordinary leadership in raising global attention for the conservation of the Saola through the SSC Saola Working Group, and building a dedicated network of scientists and practitioners in Laos and Vietnam focused on saving this iconic species."

Simon was presented with an IUCN SSC Chair's Citation of Excellence, "in recognition of his huge contributions to SSC's work on Asian large mammals, especially through the Asian Elephant Specialist Group and the Asian Wild Cattle Specialist Group."

BELOW: Dr. Simon Stuart, Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission (left) presents the Harry Messel Award for Conservation Leadership to SWG Coordinator Bill Robichaud (as a real oryx looks on; Abu Dhabi, September 2015. *Photo courtesy of Jean-Christophe Vie*)

>> BELOW RIGHT: SWG member Dr. Simon Hedges (right) receives the IUCN SSC Chair's Citation of Excellence, from Dr. Simon Stuart of IUCN (Abu Dhabi, September 2015. *Photo courtesy of Jean-Christophe Vie*)



## NEXT UP, 2016

Some priorities ahead for 2016 include:

- » Early in the year, the SWG and our new task teams will revise our strategy for Saola conservation, to more fully reflect and embrace the One Plan approach.
- » As we work to intensify protection in some of the five priority sites, we will look to introduce protection to at least two new sites.
- » We will develop concrete management and protection standards for all areas in which we are engaged in the protection of Saola.
- » The conservation breeding program will continue to advance, starting with a mission of some SWG members and MARD staff to visit and assess several potential sites in Vietnam for construction of the first Saola conservation breeding center.
- » We will commence field research on ways to effectively locate and safely capture wild Saolas, for the eventual conservation breeding program (note: this will be research only - no actual captures of Saola will yet be attempted).
- » We hope to replace Anita Bousa with a new Lao saola projects coordinator, and add more paid positions to more quickly advance the urgent work of Saola conservation.
- » We will launch a re-designed SWG website, in parallel with a new communications strategy.

It looks to be a full, pivotal year, and we hope our dedicated supporters will continue to be there with us.







## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following institutions are 'home' to the SWG's more than 30 members. The accomplishments described in this annual report are substantially theirs. Which is not to forget the SWG's freelance members, Rob Timmins and Dr. Hannah O'Kelly. In alphabetical order (with their associated SWG members):

BANHAM ZOO / AFRICA ALIVE!	Terry Hornsey
DEPARTMENT OF FOREST RESOURCES MANAGEMENT (LAO PDR)	Bouaphanh Phanthavong, Outhai Vongsa
GLOBAL WILDLIFE CONSERVATION	William Robichaud
IUCN VIETNAM PROGRAMME	Nguyen Duc Tu
INSTITUTE OF ECOLOGY AND BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES (VIETNAM)	Dr. Nguyen Xuan Dang
KING MONGKUT'S UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY THONBURI (THAILAND)	Chanhasone Phommachanh
LOS ANGELES ZOO	Jeff Holland
LEIBNIZ INSTITUTE FOR ZOO AND WILDLIFE RESEARCH	Andrew Tilker
PROJECT ANOULAK	Dr. Camille Coudrat
ROYAL ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND	Douglas Richardson
SAN DIEGO SAFARI PARK	Andy Blue
SMITHSONIAN CONSERVATION BIOLOGY INSTITUTE	Dr. Pierre Comizzoli
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE	Nicholas Wilkinson
VIET NATURE	Le Trong Trai
VINH UNIVERSITY	Dr. Cao Tien Trung
WHITE OAK CONSERVATION CENTER	Steve Shurter
WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION (LAOS)	Dr. Chanthavy Vongkhamheng
WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY ASIA PROGRAM	Dr. Simon Hedges
WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY / BRONX ZOO	Dr. Pat Thomas
WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY CAMBODIA PROGRAM	Sarah Brook
WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY LAO PROGRAM	Alex McWilliam, Xaysompheng Sengkhamyong, Ben Swanepoel,
WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY VIETNAM PROGRAM	Dr. Scott Robertson
WWF GREATER MEKONG PROGRAMME	Dr. Tom Gray, Crispian Barlow,
WWF-US	Dr. Barney Long
WWF VIETNAM PROGRAMME	Nguyen Quang Hoa Anh
ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON	Dr. Sam Turvey, Nick Lindsay
ZOOPARC DE BEAUVAL	Eric Bairrão Ruivo



In addition, none of the work described in this report would have been possible without the support of our donors and technical partners (details can be found in the section on Partnership Building). These achievements are also theirs, and for that we extend deep gratitude.

We are particularly indebted to our main partner, Global Wildlife Conservation, which provides various types of administrative, fund-raising, financial management and planning support pro bono. CEO Dr. Wes Sechrest, Dr. James Lewis and financial officer Samantha Reza have been particularly supportive and helpful.

Thanks are due to the SWG's parent institutions, for their unwavering support:

- » IUCN Species Survival Commission (Dr. Simon Stuart, Chair), and
- » Asian Wild Cattle Specialist Group (Dr. James Burton, Chair).

The following individuals also generously gave their talents and energies in various ways to the SWG and Saola conservation in 2015:

**Nguyen Manh Hiep**, of Vietnam's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, gave strong support and assistance in many ways for application of the One Plan approach to conservation of Saola in Vietnam.

**David Field**, Zoological Director of the Zoological Society of London, continued his efforts on the SWG's behalf to garner international financial support for Saola conservation.

**Van Ngoc Thinh** generously made available the office of the WWF Vietnam Programme, and the assistance of his WWF staff, for the SWG's 4th meeting, in Hanoi in November.

**Huong Long Viet** continued to do an excellent job leading and coordinating the WWF forest guard teams in the Hue and Quang Nam Saola Nature Reserves.

**Tuan Bendixen**, Vietnam Director for Animals Asia, has been a key and generous advisor and ally for our work in Vietnam.

**William deBuys**, author of *The Last Unicorn*, not only wrote and published the book, he donated copies of the work and his time in various ways to support conservation of its subject matter.

**Ann-Marie Holmes** ably and patiently kept the "Saola Update" newsletters coming.

**Julia Hanuliakova**, CEO of Zoo Design, Inc., generously donated architectural designs for a Saola conservation breeding center.

**Dominique le Roux** of Moonshine Media gave spectacular, prompt, skilled and free help with the redesign of our website.

**Will Duckworth** was, again, helpful and encouraging across many fronts.

**Anita Bousa**, as she has for years now, continued to assist the SWG in several ways in Laos.

**Troy Hansel** was a key advocate in steering conservation resources to a priority Saola area in central Laos.

**George Allez** adroitly edited and designed last year's annual report.

**Eric Losh** once again contributed his creativity, time and talent to produce the SWG's gorgeous holiday card.





Saola Working Group  
IUCN SSC Asian Wild Cattle Specialist Group

[www.savethesaola.org](http://www.savethesaola.org)