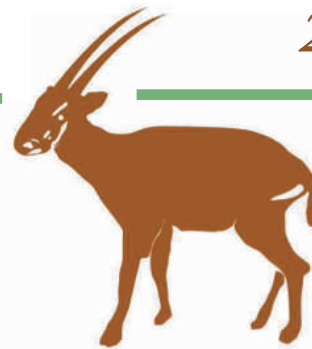




SAOLA WORKING GROUP



*2014 Annual Report*



Saola Working Group  
IUCN SSC Asian Wild Cattle Specialist Group



**GLOBAL  
WILDLIFE  
CONSERVATION**

# SAOLA WORKING GROUP

## 2014 ANNUAL REPORT



January 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.**

*The images on the cover represent the two countries the Saola Working Group supports, Vietnam and Laos, and the two time scales at which we work — urgent, short-term protection efforts on one hand, and both long-term research and mentoring of the next generation of Saola conservationists on the other. Left: Forest guards patrol team in the Hue Saola Nature Reserve, Thua Thien Hue Province (photo by Le Quoc Thien, WWF Vietnam); Right: MSc. student and youngest member of the Saola Working Group, Chanthasone Phommachanh, at his field camp in the Phou Si Thone Endangered Species Conservation Area, Bolikhamxay Province, Laos.*

# INTRODUCTION



## Mission Statement

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

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



The SWG works across five programmatic themes to advance Saola conservation both today and for the long-term:

**Protection *in-situ***

**Research**

**Mentoring**

**Conservation breeding**

**Building partnerships and raising awareness**

This past year was a full one, with progress in all five areas.

# PROTECTION IN-SITU

Protection of Saola in nature is the single most important immediate priority of the SWG to keep Saola from going extinct until long-term interventions can take hold. At present, most of the protection activities of SWG partners are focused on these three priority geographic areas:

## *Hue/Quang Nam Landscape*

During 2014, an SWG partner, the WWF Greater Mekong Programme, continued implementation of a Central Annamites conservation program across an 180,000 ha protected area landscape corridor that connects Vietnam and Laos in the Saola's range. This was accomplished mainly through its Carbon Sinks and Biodiversity Project. It included conservation interventions in four protected areas: Xe Sap National Protected Area (NPA) in Laos (133,500 ha); and Hue Saola Nature Reserve (SNR) (15,121 ha), Quang Nam Saola Nature Reserve (15,820 ha) and Bach Ma National Park Extension (15,460 ha) in Vietnam.

Law enforcement patrols, by teams of trained and supervised village 'forest guards,' were fielded in the three areas considered highest priority for Saola: Xe Sap NPA, Hue SNR and Quang Nam SNR.





'Forest guards' patrol team in Quang Nam Saola Nature Reserve

*photo: Le Quoc Thien, WWF Vietnam*

	Hue SNR	Quang Nam SNR	Xe Sap NPA	TOTALS
Patrols	147	132	23	302
Patrol days	5,190	4,842	1,296	11,328
Poachers' camps destroyed	101	82	141	324
Snares removed	13,226	3,080	2,277	18,583

**Table 1.** Hue/Quang Nam landscape *in-situ* protection efforts and results, 2014 (*data courtesy of WWF*)

In the two SNR's, forest guard patrols encountered 23 wild animals caught in wire snares (but no Saolas). Of these, 11 were found alive and well enough to be released.



Snared Serow, which was subsequently released, in the Quang Nam Saola Nature Reserve

*photo courtesy of WWF*

WWF completed construction of law enforcement facilities in the priority Saola areas in both Vietnam and Laos during 2014. At the Quang Nam SNR, two ranger stations and one remote outpost that is located within the protected area core zone were constructed and became operational. In eastern Xe Sap NPA, one ranger station and two remote outposts were added. These facilities will help extend the reach of the patrol teams in the forest.

In all of the three priority areas, independent field assessments were made of the effectiveness of protection efforts (see *Research* section, below).





A new ranger station in Quang Nam Saola Nature Reserve  
*photo courtesy of WWF*

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

Phou Si Thone (PST) is the site where villagers captured a Saola in 2010. 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 the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)). A livelihoods development team completed participatory rural appraisals in six villages in and around PST, and worked with them on various alternative livelihood initiatives. Three ranger teams, recruited mainly from local villages, collected 1,216 snares from the core area, and inspected 693 vehicles at road checkpoints. Furthermore, project teams finished placing signs around the entire boundary of the totally protected core zone.

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

NNT is the largest protected area in the Saola's range. To help invigorate patrolling there, in 2012 the Liz Claiborne Art Ortenberg Foundation funded the SWG so we could provide the advisory services of SWG member Dr. Chanthavy Vongkhamheng to the management team of the protected area, the Watershed Management and Protection Authority (WMPA).

Chanthavy's input brought major improvements, which continued under his guidance in 2014. The bottom line? WMPA patrol teams collected nearly 14,000 snares in Nakai-Nam Theun in 2014 — sadly, this total is also indicative of the extent of the problem.

In sum, at all the five sites (Hue SNR, Quang Nam SNR, Xe Sap NPA, Phou Si Thone and Nakai-Nam Theun NPA) where the SWG and its partners (WWF, WCS and WMPA) have focused on increasing the intensity of patrolling, more than 33,500 snares were collected and destroyed in 2014. The total number of such snares destroyed at these five sites since these initiatives began in 2011 is now over 90,000.

This is a lot of snares, yet the survival of Saola will be determined less by how many snares are removed, than by how many remain (or are put back) in the forest. While poachers continue to reset snares, we have evidence that patrol efforts are working, and the density of snares has declined. For example, Table 2 shows a general decrease in snare collection totals, despite annual increases in effort and efficiency, since the WCS supervised teams began patrols in Phou Si Thone four years ago.





WMPA patrolling coordinator, Mr. Phoukhaokham, with thousands of snares removed from Nakai-Nam Theun National Protected Area

In Vietnam, to keep snare densities suppressed, WWF has begun working with authorities to increase the frequency of arrests and prosecutions for poachers and wildlife traders.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	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

Table 2. Monthly and annual totals of snares collected in Phou Si Thone Endangered Species Conservation Area (data courtesy of WCS)



### *New areas*

In 2014, the SWG initiated a desk and partial field review of likely Saola sites in Laos and Vietnam, to prioritize them for new investment in conservation. Two of the top areas are Khoun Xe Nong Ma (KXNM) Provincial Protected Area in Khammouane Province, Laos, and forest blocks in eastern Bolikhamxay Province, Laos. We made some progress this past year toward initiating protection efforts in both.

Members of the SWG convened with government colleagues in Khammouane Province and agreed on a way forward for support in KXNM. We are now seeking funds to begin.



In September, the SWG and WCS co-hosted a planning meeting with provincial and district officials in Bolikhamxay Province, to explore with government officials the possibility of beginning Saola surveys and conservation activities in the eastern forest blocks.

Funding from the MacArthur Foundation, CEPF and Copenhagen Zoo enabled this to happen. About twenty government officials and leaders from villages near the areas were present, and the outcome was very good. There was general agreement that Saola conservation is both urgent and a high priority, the provincial and district governments gave permission for conservation activities to start, and participants selected the villages with which to begin. This will be the first focused wildlife conservation effort ever in this important area. This encouraging advance is thanks in large part to several years spent by WCS patiently building relationships in the province.



Participants of the Bolikhamxay Saola planning meeting, September 2014

## RESEARCH

**In 2014, the SWG focused its research efforts in two areas: assessing the effectiveness of protection efforts, and Saola detection.**

### *Independent assessments of protection effectiveness*

At our last meeting, 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 all times, the complete absence of snares, illegal guns, and hunting dogs. In 2014, we received a major grant (\$149,000) from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), in part to rapidly assess progress toward the zero threats goal at four sites. In partnership with WWF, assessments were completed in 2014 at three of the sites: Xe Sap NPA (by SWG member Andrew Tilker) and the Hue and Quang Nam SNRs (by SWG member Rob Timmins). In rapid field surveys, both noted the frequency of encounters with threats (e.g., snares, poachers' camps) and ungulate signs (as a proxy indicator of likely Saola status). The conclusion for all three areas is that significant progress in protection has been made, but Saola is probably not yet secure in any of the sites. Xe Sap seemed to be in the best shape (most ungulate signs), but is in urgent need of more anti-poaching patrols.

Under the same grant, we plan to conduct similar assessments in Nakai-Nam Theun National Protected Area (Laos) in 2015.





SWG member Andrew Tilker (*left*) and field team during assessment survey in Xe Sap National Protected Area

### *Saola detection*

In 2014, we continued to do research on methods to detect Saola in the wild. The SWG and our partner, Global Wildlife Conservation, 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. Leeches have now been collected from several sites in Laos and Vietnam, and are currently being analyzed by KIZ.

In August, the SWG helped to organize a 'leech summit,' in Berlin, hosted by the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (IZW). The objective was to bring lab and field people together to talk through issues and protocols surrounding the effort to use terrestrial leeches to detect Saola. Rob Timmins and Andrew Tilker attended on behalf of the SWG. Thanks to Dr. Andreas Wilting of IZW for pulling the meeting together, and providing most of the funding.

SWG members Dr. Sam Turvey, Dr. Cao Tien Trung and soon-to-be-Dr. Nicholas Wilkinson have finished a paper on village interview surveys for Saola, "Interview-based sighting histories can inform regional conservation prioritization for highly threatened cryptic species." The paper has been posted 'in press' online by the Journal of Applied Ecology:

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1365-2664.12382/full>

In 2014, Andrew Tilker commenced his Ph.D. research in Vietnam under the supervision of Andreas Wilting and IZW. His research focuses on a survey of the Annamite's ungulate community, using both camera traps and collections of leeches for analysis.



## MENTORING

One of the SWG's primary missions for long-term conservation of Saola is to encourage and mentor the young generation of Lao and Vietnamese conservation scientists. Several of them had significant achievements in 2014 ~~

**Santi Sayphanya** finished coursework and exams for his Ph.D. in conservation awareness at Cornell University, with scholarship support from the Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN). He returned to Laos to begin his dissertation field research, which he plans to complete in 2015. (SWG Coordinator Bill Robichaud's 17-year-old daughter, Alonda, helped him with his village awareness project in northern Laos in December, for an independent study project at her high school.)

**Chanthalaphone Nanthavong** (a.k.a. "King of the Jungle") completed his MSc. on his study of gibbons in Nakai-Nam Theun National Protected Area, with partial funding support from the SWG.

In 2014, **Akchousanh Rasphone** started her Ph.D. program in Wildlife Biology at Oxford University. As far as we know, when she finishes, she will be the first Lao to earn a Ph.D. from Oxbridge in any subject. Her research will focus on Clouded Leopards in Laos.



SWG member **Chanthasone Phommachanh** (*left*) and field team setting a camera trap and taking habitat measurements in Laos in Phou Si Thone Endangered Species Conservation Area

SWG member **Chanthasone Phommachanh**, with support from WCN, CEPF and the Los Angeles Zoo, began his field research for his MSc. His study is an intensive camera-trapping survey of the ungulates in Phou Si Thone Endangered Species Conservation Area.

*Congratulations to them all on their achievements.*



## CONSERVATION BREEDING

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

Progress in 2014 included ~~

Completion of an advanced draft of a Saola Conservation Breeding Action Plan (including a design for the center), by the SWG and the Intensive Management of Saola Advisory Group (IMSAG) of the European Association of Zoos & Aquaria (EAZA).

A visit by Lesley Dickie, Executive Director of EAZA and Terry Hornsey, IMSAG Chair to Laos and Vietnam, for meetings with SWG members and senior government officials in Laos and Vietnam, to discuss options for Saola conservation breeding.

IMSAG meeting in September (during EAZA's annual meeting in Budapest), to discuss the conservation breeding consortium and future management and funding of the program.

IMSAG-led contact and engagement with zoo staff with the appropriate exotic hoofstock expertise in the Australasia region.

Initiation of fund-raising for the program. This has been led, with the SWG's deep appreciation, by David Field of the Zoological Society of London.

Engaged the pro bono assistance of Zoo Design, Inc. to produce more detailed plans for the future conservation breeding center.

Much work lies ahead, and the endeavor is being abundantly aided technically by the IMSAG.



EAZA and SWG delegation (*right*) discuss Saola conservation breeding with Vice-Minister Ha Cong Tuan of Vietnam's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and his staff (*left*) in Hanoi.

## ***PARTNERSHIP BUILDING***

For the SWG, partnership building necessarily covers lots of ground — partnerships with villagers in the animal's range, with local government agencies in the range countries, then with other conservation organizations, and with international donors. Saving Saola from extinction won't be easy, but we know what success will require — broad collaboration.

Although our Saola is one of the most endangered large mammals in the world, and a conservation flagship for a globally significant ecosystem (the Annamite Mountains), recruiting collaborators, especially internationally, can seem sometimes to be pushing a string uphill since Saola is so little known. Thus we are triply grateful to the donors who have led from the front with their assistance.



Our institutional donors in 2014 were,  
in alphabetical order . . .

Association Beauval Nature  
Copenhagen Zoo  
Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund  
Fossil Rim Wildlife Center  
Friends of Zoo Boise  
Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association  
Houston Zoo  
Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens  
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation  
Sacramento Zoo  
Save Our Species  
Wildlife Conservation Network  
Zoological Society of East Anglia  
Zoological Society of London

. . . and our individual donors . . .

George Allez	Ishiwada Kenji
Keaton Anderson	Jessica Ocasio
Matt Ardaiole	Rebecca Patton
Frank Conidi	Jonathan E. Roth
Diane Dean	Susan Shepard
Lesley Dickie	Mike Tanguay
Elias Sadalla Filho	Michele Thompson
Florence and Steven Goldby	Hunter Tanquary
David Goxe	



To help to spread the Saola word, in 2014, SWG Coordinator Bill Robichaud gave presentations to the institutions and meetings that follow. Many of the hosts sponsored all or part of his travel, for which the SWG is deeply grateful ~~

**Copenhagen Zoo**

**European Association of Zoos and Aquaria  
Annual Conference (Budapest)**

**European Association of Zoos and Aquaria  
Conservation Forum (Leipzig)**

**Fossil Rim Wildlife Center (Glen Rose, Texas)**

**Houston Zoo**

**Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (Berlin)**

**Liberec Zoo (Czech Republic)**

**Ostrava Zoo (Czech Republic)**

**Prague Zoo**

**Southern Connecticut State University**

**University of Wisconsin**

**World Association of Zoos and Aquaria  
Annual Conference (New Delhi)**

**World Wide Fund for Nature (Gland, Switzerland)**

**Yale University**

The SWG continues to build relationships with conservation-oriented zoos around the world, as resources for both technical and financial support. In the last few years, we've partnered with zoos in the U.S. specifically to work together to reduce snaring in the Saola's range. For the past two years, Zoo Boise has raised more than \$1500 from snares sent to the zoo from SWG partner WWF-Vietnam. Zoo Boise youth volunteers ("Zooteens") use the snares to educate zoo visitors about the poaching crisis in Southeast Asia, and to ask for donations to help solve it. Fund-raising in this way simultaneously elevates the awareness of the teens, their families, zoo visitors and staff about the Asian poaching crisis and its impact on Saola — truly a marvelous, multi-dimensional initiative. The funds raised by the effort are returned to bolster the patrol efforts in Vietnam.

SWG member Dr. Chanthavy Vongkhamheng has been shipping snares collected by patrol teams in Nakai-Nam Theun National Protected area from Laos to Henry Vilas Zoo (HVZ) in Madison, Wisconsin. There, HVZ volunteers turn the snares into wonderful handicrafts — key chains, dream catchers, Christmas tree ornaments (HVZ received a Docents and Volunteers Small Zoo Education Grant from the U.S. Association of Zoos & Aquariums to jump-start the project). The snare crafts are sold to zoo visitors from special display tables that also serve as venues to educate the public about the wildlife poaching crisis in Southeast Asia. This effort is ongoing, but HVZ has already raised close to \$3,000, which will be used to bolster the protection efforts in Nakai-Nam Theun.





Henry Vilas Zoo volunteer Jessica Murphy selling snare handicrafts to raise funds for the removal of more snares in the Saola's range



The Copenhagen Zoo has been another steadfast partner of the SWG, and their support took an interesting turn in 2014. Prince Consort Henrik, the husband of the Queen, Margrethe II of Denmark, is of French origin, and was born and raised in the Vietnamese part of the former French Indochina. He retains strong connections with and affections for that part of the world, and so this year, to mark his 80th birthday, the Copenhagen Zoo presented His Royal Highness with an unusual gift: a donation to Saola conservation on HRH's behalf. On the Prince Consort's birthday, the zoo set aside part of every entrance fee for the Saola Working Group, and the initiative raised more than \$10,000. The gift was presented to the SWG at a ceremony with His Royal Highness at the zoo in October. We extend special thanks to Scientific Director Bengt Hoist for his support and friendship to the SWG.

Also, the Intensive Management of Saola Advisory Group, cobbled together by Terry Hornsey and comprising hoofstock husbandry experts from throughout the world, continued (and continues) to make pivotal contributions to the advancement of a Saola conservation breeding program.

Finally, 2014 saw the departure of Saola ally, Lesley Dickie, as Executive Director of EAZA (fortunately, her able successor, Myfanwy Griffith, shows no sign of letting up on EAZA's interest in Saola conservation). In her final year, Lesley reached new summits of support, literally, by making a sponsored, fund-raising climb of Mt. Kilimanjaro to benefit Saola and the SWG. At her request, the SWG will use the money she collected to establish a scholarship fund for Lao and Vietnamese women conservationists.

### ***NEXT UP, 2015***

- 4th meeting of the SWG, in Vietnam;
- Completion of prioritization of Saola sites for new investment;
- If recently submitted grant proposals are successful, commencement of a major research project to improve detection of Saola;
- Enforcement effectiveness assessment in Nakai-Nam Theun NPA;
- Initiation of protection activities in eastern Bolikhamxay, and possibly Khoun Xe Nong Ma;
- Detailed planning with the governments of Laos and Vietnam toward a joint Saola conservation breeding program.

### ***ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS***

The SWG expanded our membership in 2014, and again in early 2015 (before this report was finished), thereby deepening our collaboration. This is one of our essential strengths — we are less an NGO than we are a network of dedicated people and their institutions, working together. The following institutions are 'home' to the SWG's more than 30 members. The accomplishments in this report are essentially theirs. They are, with their associated SWG members —

Banham Zoo/Africa Alive!	<i>Terry Hornsey</i>
Dept. of Forest Resources Management (Laos)	<i>Bouaphanh Phanthavong, Outhai Vongsa</i>
Global Wildlife Conservation	<i>William Robichaud</i>
IUCN Vietnam Programme	<i>Nguyen Duc Tu</i>
Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources (Vietnam)	<i>Dr. Nguyen Xuan Dang</i>
King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (Thailand)	<i>Chanthasone Prommachanh</i>
Los Angeles Zoo	<i>Jeff Holland</i>
Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research	<i>Andrew Tilker</i>
Project Anoulak	<i>Dr. Camille Coudrat</i>
Royal Zoological Society of Scotland Highland Wildlife Park	<i>Douglas Richardson</i>
San Diego Safari Park	<i>Andy Blue</i>
Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute	<i>Dr. Pierre Comizzoli</i>
University of Cambridge	<i>Nicholas Wilkinson</i>
Viet Nature	<i>Le Trong Trai</i>
Vinh University	<i>Dr. Cao Tien Trung</i>
White Oak Conservation Center	<i>Steve Shurter</i>



Wildlife Conservation Association (Laos)	<i>Dr. Chanthavy Vongkhambeng</i>
Wildlife Conservation Society Asia Program	<i>Dr. Simon Hedges</i>
Wildlife Conservation Society / Bronx Zoo	<i>Dr. Pat Thomas</i>
Wildlife Conservation Society Cambodia Program	<i>Sarah Brook</i>
Wildlife Conservation Society Lao Program	<i>Alex McWilliam, Xaysompheng Sengkhamyong, Ben Swanepoel</i>
Wildlife Conservation Society Vietnam Program	<i>Scott Robertson</i>
WWF Greater Mekong Programme	<i>Crispian Barlow, Dr. Tom Gray</i>
WWF-US	<i>Dr. Barney Long</i>
WWF Vietnam Programme	<i>Nguyen Quang Hoa Anh</i>
Zoological Society of London	<i>Dr. Sam Turvey, Nick Lindsay</i>

Which is not to forget the SWG's 'unattached' freelance member, Rob Timmins.

In addition, none of the work described in this report would have been possible without the support of our donors and external technical partners (see *Partnership Building*). These achievements are also theirs, and for that we offer our sincere gratitude. Lesley Dickie, who stepped down in 2014 as Executive Director of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA), David Field, Zoological Director of the Zoological Society of London, and Terry Hornsey, Chair of the EAZA Cattle & Camelid Taxon Advisory Group (and a new SWG member) deserve special thanks and appreciation.

We are particularly indebted to our partner, Global Wildlife Conservation, which provides a wide variety of administrative, fund raising, financial management and planning support to the SWG, pro bono. CEO Dr. Wes Sechrest, Dr. James Lewis and Samantha Reza have been particularly supportive and helpful.

Thanks are also due to our parent institutions for their unwavering support: the IUCN Species Survival Commission (Dr. Simon Stuart, Chair) and the Asian Wild Cattle Specialist Group (Dr. James Burton, Chair).

These individuals generously gave their talents and energy in various ways to the SWG in 2014 ~~

Will Duckworth was ever ready, always thinking, and perpetually helpful in ways too numerous to tally.

Julia Hanuliakova, the CEO of Zoo Design, Inc., contributed design help for the Saola conservation breeding center.

Ann-Marie Holmes kept Saola newsletters coming.

Eric Losh once again designed and painted the SWG's gorgeous holiday card.

Michele Thompson kindly helped arrange talks at Yale and Southern Connecticut State University.

Finally, deep thanks to SWG's National Laos Saola Projects Manager, Anita Bousa, for working so hard, from the heart, for Saola and the SWG.

