

## Save the saola: Breeding center for rare mammal to open in Vietnam

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The saola, one of the world's rarest large mammals, was first discovered in Vietnam in 1992, and since then scientists and biologists have been trying their best to track and protect them.



In the latest attempt to save the saola, which is found only in the Annamite Range that crosses Vietnam and Laos, Vietnam is planning to open the world's first breeding center for the animal.

The center is expected to open in Bach Ma National Park in the central province of Thua Thien-Hue early next year as part of a joint project between the Saola Working Group under the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Vietnam's agriculture ministry.

But the hardest part of the project is finding a living saola, let alone a potentially breeding pair.

In the 25 years since the saola was discovered, only 10 photos have captured them in the wild, taken by camera-traps, locals and photographers from the World Wildlife Fund.

Around ten of the animals have been captured alive by locals or rangers in Vietnam and Laos. Some were returned to the forests while others died before biologists could reach them.

The last saola known to be captured alive was in 2010 in a village in Laos. It died a week later.

The most recent camera trap photos of a saola were taken in 2013 in central Vietnam, the first in more than 15 years.

There are no official records on the number of saola in the wild and conservationists are worried that there could be just a few dozen left, putting them in critical danger from hunting due to their rarity.

"Time is running out for the saola," said William Robichaud, coordinator of the Saola Conservation Program.

"With the support and expertise of some of the world's premier field conservation organizations, leading conservation-oriented zoos and the governments of both countries, we are well-positioned to make a difference before it's too late," he said.

Two saola nature reserves were established in Thua Thien-Hue and Quang Nam in 2010 and 2011 in an effort to save the rare species.