

Drivers of wildlife loss

Remoteness from human settlements has provided partial protection to wildlife in Laos. But human population and development pressures are increasing. The main reasons for the loss of wildlife in Laos are primarily economic in nature, for example

- ⇐ over-hunting and over-fishing of small-bodied animals for subsistence contributes to the decline of unprotected species as important staple food;
- ⇐ illegal wildlife trade for medicinal, ornamental, spiritual, food, status and commercial reasons;
- ⇐ habitat destruction from the expansion of human settlements, agriculture, and mono-culture tree plantations;
- ⇐ forest land use conversion for large-scale development and infrastructure projects such as hydropower dams, roads, coal-fired power plants and mining operations

How is the Lao government engaged in wildlife conservation?

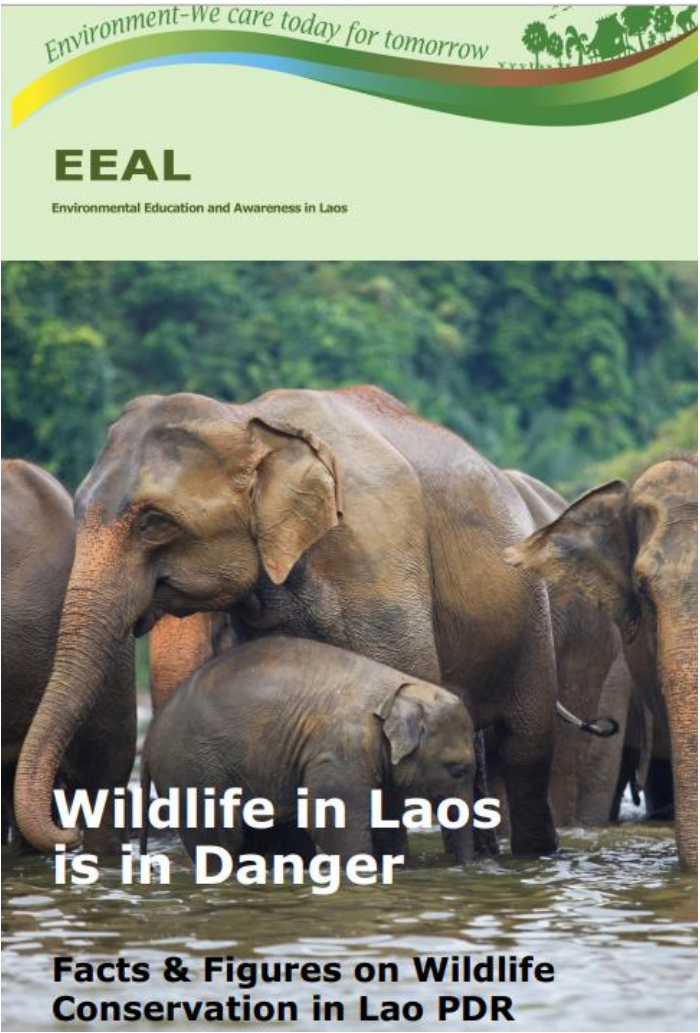
Laos has a legal framework in place to protect wildlife. Lao legislation allows for controlled hunting by villagers. But it is prohibited to hunt unsustainably in exchange for income by selling

- wildlife. This is to protect the livelihood of poor rural people.**
- ⇐ The Wildlife and Aquatic Law of 2007 and the Forestry Law of 2019 govern principles, regulations and management of wildlife and aquatic life to promote sustainable use and prevent any harmful impacts, e.g. illegal wildlife trade.
 - ⇐ Both state that without special permission the sale of wildlife is illegal.
 - ⇐ Protected Areas Decree No 134/2015 and the new National Parks Decree (in process) govern the zones to manage wildlife within protected areas and national parks.
 - ⇐ PM Order No. 05/2018 was issued to increase forest cover the and wildlife populations for the benefit of Lao citizens.

- ⇐ PM Decree No 164/1993 states that National Protected Areas (NPAs) are to protect biodiversity in forests, plants and wildlife, and sustain the use of forest resources by villagers. These pieces of legislation will only be effective if wildlife is managed sustainably based on full government and public support. The government encourages wildlife conservation through habitat protection.
- ⇐ NPAs and national parks provide sanctuaries for wildlife where hunting and harvesting is restricted or banned.
- ⇐ Linking these protected areas will allow animals to move between habitats and help maintain the diversity of species.
- ⇐ Law enforcement should be strengthened in protected areas and national parks to prevent the illegal extractive use of natural resources and wildlife.

What should Lao communities do to protect wildlife?

- Local communities need to be empowered to assist in the co- management of wildlife in general, and protected areas in particu-lar, to ensure they receive benefits from the legal use of wildlife and from services balanced and healthy ecosystems will provide. More specifically, there is a need for communities to
- ⇐ raise awareness and educate adults and youth on the values and benefits of protecting and conserving wildlife,
 - ⇐ change the attitudes and behavior of Lao youth regarding illegal hunting, trade and consumption of protected wildlife, and
 - ⇐ support the government’s efforts to enforce wildlife laws and regulations



What is wildlife conservation all about?

Wildlife means non-domesticated animals such as Domesticated animals, e.g. cows, buffalos or dogs, are not considered wildlife. If wild animals such as tigers and bears are put in cages or farms they are still considered wildlife.

Wildlife conservation is the practice of protecting animal species and their habitats. The goal of wildlife conservation is to ensure the survival of these species and to educate people on living sustainably with other species.

- Wildlife and wild land in Laos are managed by Lao people to benefit society for future sustainability and prosperity.
- To protect and conserve wildlife in Laos, the application of laws and science-based approaches by national professionals and local communities is required.
- Moreover, Laos has designated 24 national protection areas (NPAs) across the country in order to protect wildlife habitat

What is the situation of wildlife in Laos?

Laos has a rich wildlife heritage, with many of the mammal, bird, reptile, fish and amphibian species being of national or global covervation significance.

- Laos is home to 700 bird species, 247 species of mammals, and between 150 to 200 species of reptiles and amphibians
- The Mekong and its tributaries provide habitat for at least 500 endemic fish species.
- Some Lao wildlife can only be found in Lao and Vietnam, such as large-antlered muntjacs, goat-like saolas, Redshanked Languar and Laotian rock rats.

However, many wildlife species in Laos are in danger of extinction

- the IUCN Red List of 2012 indicates 165 species of animals in Lao PDR are critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable.
- once called the ‘Kingdom of One Million Elephants’, Laos has less than 400 wild elephants left today, and tigers and leopards have not been seen in years.

Why does wildlife conservation matter in Laos?

The loss of the country’s wildlife has impacts on Lao people’s wellbeing and livelihoods, the overall Lao economy, as well as the natural environment.

Most rural Lao households heavily depend upon the sustainable use of natural resources for their nutrition and livelihoods.

- About 67 percent of the Lao population are rural and depend on forests to support their livelihoods.
- As much as 90 percent of the over 1,400 species of wild animals are used as protein sources by local people.
- The loss of wildlife species has a direct impact on agricultural production. Insects and bats transfer pollen between plants and trees, and without them agricultural yields decrease.

Unsustainable hunting causes an imbalance within ecosystems.

Wildlife populations in Laos are seriously declining due to over-exploitation for subsistence and trade. The loss of species has agreat impact on balanced, functioning ecosystems.

- Wild animals are crucial for dispersing seeds away from parent plants, thus playing an important role for maintaining species diversity.
 - Wildlife plays an important role in balanced ecosystems that safeguard pest control and over-population of species.
 - The loss of small predators such as civets, hawks, and snakes cause their prey populations to grow, which causes major problems. For example, rats can pose a major threat to human health and eat up crops and stored grains.
- There is a link between wildlife conservation and tourism.**
- Eco-tourism generates income from urban Lao and international tourists who enjoy watching abundant wildlife, often in one of the country’s 24 NPAs.
 - The money tourists pay acts as an incentive for local people to protect endangered wildlife species and their habitat.

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Environmental Education and Awareness in Laos

Environmental Education and Awareness in Laos - EEAL, established in 2019, is an alliance of government and civil society organizations dedicated to sustainable development and environmental protection principles. To this end, EEAL uses a wide range of interactive and participatory environmental education, communication and awareness raising methods and tools.

The EEAL network is led by the Department of Environment (DoE) of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE) in concert with provincial and district environmental agencies (PONRE, DONRE), civil society organizations (CSO), National University of Laos faculty outreach units, as well as a number of social enterprises.

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