

Van Long Proposed Nature Reserve

Alternative site name(s)

None

Province(s)

Ninh Binh

Status

Proposed

Management board established

No

Latitude

20°21' - 20°25'N

Longitude

105°49' - 105°55'E

Bio-unit

05c - North Annam



Conservation status

Van Long is not listed on any government decision regarding the Special-use Forests system. However, an official proposal to include Van Long on the national list of Special-use Forests has been submitted to MARD by Ninh Binh Provincial People's Committee (Vu Van Dung and Nguyen Huy Thang 2000), and a proposal to establish a 3,500 ha nature reserve at the site is included on the 2010 list (FPD 1998). This proposal was reiterated by Vu Van Dung and Nguyen Huy Thang (2000), who recommended that the nature reserve be zoned into a strict protection area of 2,000 ha, a forest rehabilitation area of 1,000 ha and an administration and services area of 500 ha.

In 2000, an investment plan for the site was prepared by FIPI (Nguyen Huy Thang 2000). To date, however, this investment plan has not been approved by either the provincial people's committee or MARD, nor has a nature reserve management board been formed (Hoa Lu Cultural and Historical Site Management Board 2000). Hoa Lu Cultural and Historical Site Management Board (2000) give the current area of the site as 3,100 ha. Van Long is currently managed at the commune level.

Topography and hydrology

Van Long proposed nature reserve is located in Gia Van and Gia Hoa communes, Gia Vien district. The proposed nature reserve is centred on a block of limestone karst that rises abruptly from the flat coastal plain of northern Vietnam. The limestone karst is surrounded by an area of wetland, which comprises rivers and a shallow lake with large amounts of submerged vegetation. Previously, there was a natural wetland at the site but the area of this wetland was increased significantly following the construction of a dyke for irrigation purposes.

Biodiversity value

The natural vegetation type at Van Long is limestone forest. However, the forest at Van Long has been severely degraded as a result of over-exploitation of forest products, and large areas now support a low scrub vegetation where much of the rock is exposed. Despite the degradation, the site is still reported to support a number of plant species listed in the *Red Data Book of Vietnam* (Vu Van Dung and Nguyen Huy Thang 2000).

Perhaps the most important feature of Van Long proposed nature reserve with regard to conservation is the occurrence of a population of Delacour's Leaf

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Monkey *Semnopithecus francoisi delacouri*, numbering at least 30 individuals (A. Tordoff pers. comm.). This species is globally critically endangered and endemic to Vietnam. The population at Van Long is possibly one of the last viable populations of this species in the world.

Although the wetland at Van Long has not been comprehensively surveyed, the site could be an important site for migratory waterbirds. The occurrence of Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraetus fasciatus* is of particular note. To date, Van Long proposed nature reserve is the only site in Vietnam where this species has been positively identified (A. Tordoff pers. comm.).

Conservation issues

Although very few people live inside the boundary of Van Long proposed nature reserve, 46,257 people inhabit the buffer zone, all of whom belong to the Kinh ethnic group. The main economic activity of these people is wet rice agriculture (Hoa Lu Cultural and Historical Site Management Board 2000).

Over-exploitation of timber and firewood is one of the major threats to biodiversity at the site, and has already led to extensive forest loss. Natural regeneration is inhibited by the large number of goats which graze on the limestone karst. Despite the poor quality of the habitat at Van Long, it seems to be sufficient to support a population of Delacour's Leaf Monkey. Thus, the biggest threat to this species comes not from habitat loss but from hunting. Local people report that Delacour's Leaf Monkey numbers declined significantly prior to the late 1990s, although they have reportedly stabilised in recent years due to controls on hunting. Given the small size of the remaining population, however, hunting retains the potential to rapidly eradicate this species from the site if allowed to resume.

The leaders of Gia Van commune have a good understanding of the importance of conserving the biodiversity of Van Long. They have already implemented several conservation measures, including banning hunting at the site, and, in the future, they intend to remove the goats from the limestone karst. The commune employs a small conservation team to

enforce management regulations and act as guides for visitors to the site (A. Tordoff pers. comm.).

Other documented values

The limestone karst scenery at Van Long is very beautiful, and the site has already been developed for tourism, with visitors taking boat trips through the site. The site also has great potential to be developed as a site for eco-tourism, as access to the site is good, and it is the only site in Vietnam where visitors can easily see Delacour's Leaf Monkey. However, any further tourism development at the site must mitigate against any potential negative environmental impacts, particularly disturbance to the Delacour's Leaf Monkeys (A. Tordoff pers. comm.).

Related projects

During 2000, Gia Van Commune Farmer's Union implemented a small-scale Global Environment Facility (GEF) project entitled *Conservation of Biodiversity at Van Long Nature Reserve*. The budget for this project was VND 225 million, equivalent to US\$16,000 (Hoa Lu Cultural and Historical Site Management Board 2000).

Literature sources

Hoa Lu Cultural and Historical Site Management Board (2000) [FPD questionnaire]. Ninh Binh: Hoa Lu Cultural and Historical Site Management Board. In Vietnamese.

Nguyen Huy Thang (2000) Investment plan for Van Long Nature Reserve, Ninh Binh province]. Hanoi: Forest Inventory and Planning Institute. In Vietnamese.

Vu Van Dung and Nguyen Huy Thang (1999) [Proposal for a number of new nature reserves in limestone areas in Vietnam]. Pp 110-117 in: Le Sau ed. [Protection and sustainable development of forest and biodiversity in limestone areas of Vietnam] Hanoi: Forest Inventory and Planning Institute. In Vietnamese.