

# Yok Don National Park

## Alternative site name(s)

Tieu Teo Easup

## Province(s)

Dak Lak

## Status

Decreed

## Management board established

Yes

## Latitude

12°47' - 13°00'N

## Longitude

107°29' - 107°50'E

## Bio-unit

10a - Central Indochina



## Conservation status

Although precise information about the origins of Yok Don National Park is not available, it appears that the site was first declared as a nature reserve in 1977 (Davis *et al.* eds. 1995). Subsequently, on 9 August 1986, Decision 194/CT of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers decreed the establishment of a 40,000 ha nature reserve called Tieu Teo Easup. Based on the government decision, it appears that this protected area was intended to have two sectors: a 20,000 ha sector in Chu Prong district, in what is now Gia Lai province, and a 20,000 ha sector in Easup district, Dak Lak province. However, protected areas were never established at either of these sites, and the decision to establish Tieu Teo Easup Nature Reserve was later used as the basis for establishing Yok Don Nature Reserve in Buon Don district, Dak Lak province (MARD 1997). By 1989, a management board had been established for Yok Don Nature Reserve, with a staff of 23 (MacKinnon *et al.* 1989).

Following the establishment of Yok Don Nature Reserve, an investment plan to upgrade the Yok Don to national park status was prepared. This investment plan was approved on 29 October 1991 by Decision No. 352/CT of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Anon. 1998). The area of the national park given in this decree was 58,200 ha (MARD 1997).

Since the establishment of Yok Don National Park, there have been several proposals to expand the national park in order to include contiguous areas of natural habitat and expand the conservation coverage for mammal and bird species of conservation concern. Based on the results of a survey of large mammals in Dak Lak province, Le Xuan Canh *et al.* (1997) proposed expanding the national park northwards to the border of Gia Lai province, thus incorporating a large area of Ea Sup district. This proposal was reiterated and additional ones were made by Brickle *et al.* (1998), following their study of the distribution and status of Green Peafowl *Pavo muticus* in Dak Lak province.

In 1998, FIPI prepared a revised investment plan for Yok Don National Park. This investment plan proposed expanding the national park by 57,345 ha, comprising a northward expansion of 54,563 ha, in Buon Don and Ea Sup districts, and a southward expansion of 2,782 ha, in Cu Jut district. Such an expansion would increase the total area of the national park to 115,545 ha (Anon. 1998). This investment plan has been approved by Dak Lak Provincial People's Committee, and it is expected that it will also be approved by MARD in early 2001 (Le Trong Trai pers. comm.).

## Topography and hydrology

Yok Don National Park is located in Buon Don district in western Dak Lak province. The national park is bordered by Cu Jut district to the south, Cambodia to the west and the Srepok river to the north and east. Yok Don is situated on the low plateau that covers northern Dak Lak and southern Gia Lai provinces in the Central Highlands. The topography of most of the site is flat, at an elevation of around 200 m. There are, however, two ranges of low hills within the national park, the highest point of the north-western range is Mount Yok Da at 474 m, while the highest point of the south-eastern range is the eponymous Mount Yok Don at 482 m.

Yok Don National Park lies in the catchment of the Srepok river, a major tributary of the Mekong River. The Srepok river is the only permanent flowing watercourse in the national park: during the dry season, the two largest streams at the site, the Dak Ken and Dak Na, are reduced to a series of interrupted pools. There are numerous waterholes at the national park, some of which contain water all year.

## Biodiversity value

According to FPD (1998), Yok Don National Park supports 56,192 ha of forest, equivalent to 97% of the total area. Remote sensing data indicate that the majority of the forest at Yok Don National Park is deciduous forest, with smaller areas of semi-deciduous and evergreen forest. The deciduous forest is dominated by tree species in the Dipterocarpaceae family, including *Dipterocarpus tuberculatus*, *D. obtusifolius* and *Shorea obtusa*. However, the Anacardiaceae, Combretaceae, Fabaceae and Myrtaceae families are also well represented. The canopy of this forest type is open, and most trees have thick, fire-resistant bark (Anon. 1998).

Unlike the deciduous forest, the semi-deciduous forest at the site has a closed canopy, and is stratified into five layers. This forest type is characterised by the presence of *Lagerstroemia calyculata*, *Shorea cochinchinensis* and *Anisoptera scaphula*. Evergreen forest has a limited distribution in the national park, being confined to higher elevations on the range of hills in the south-east of the site. This forest type is

dominated by tree species in the Fagaceae, Euphorbiaceae, Sapindaceae, Ebenaceae and Meliaceae families (Anon. 1998).

Because deciduous forest generally supports a lower floral diversity than evergreen forest, the diversity of plant species at Yok Don is lower than that at other national parks in Vietnam. To date, 474 vascular plant species have been recorded at the site, of which 28 are listed in the *Red Data Book of Vietnam*. (Anon. 1998). Yok Don is considered to be one of seven internationally important Centres of Plant Diversity in Vietnam (Davis *et al.* eds. 1995).

Yok Don National Park has a reputation as an important site for the conservation of large mammals. Indeed, Duckworth and Hedges (1998) consider the continued occurrence of Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus*, Gaur *Bos gaurus*, Banteng *B. javanicus* and Tiger *Panthera tigris* at Yok Don to be confirmed. However, they report that the populations of all four species at the national park have suffered major declines. Other mammal species of conservation concern for which there are recent, confirmed records from the national park include Silvered Leaf Monkey *Semnopithecus cristatus*, Dhole *Cuon alpinus* and Golden Jackal *Canis aureus* (Le Xuan Canh *et al.* 1997, Duckworth *et al.* 1998).

Several sources list the globally critically endangered Kouprey *Bos sauveli* as occurring at Yok Don National Park (e.g. MacKinnon *et al.* 1989, Davis *et al.* eds. 1995). During a large mammal survey in 1997, however, Le Xuan Canh *et al.* (1997) found no evidence of the continued occurrence of this species at the site.

According to Le Xuan Canh *et al.* (1997), Yok Don National Park supports several globally threatened and near-threatened bird species, including Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*, White-rumped Falcon *Polihierax insignis* and Rufous-winged Buzzard *Butastur liventer*. Significantly, Yok Don National Park is one of the few established protected areas in Vietnam to support a significant population of the globally threatened Green Peafowl *Pavo muticus*. Brickle *et al.* (1998), however, predicted that Yok Don only supports 11% of the peafowl population in Dak Lak province, and recommended that the national park

be extended in order to increase the conservation coverage of this species.

## Conservation issues

In 1989, a draft management plan for the then Yok Don Nature Reserve was prepared by MacKinnon *et al.* (1989). The authors of the draft management plan identified the main problems faced by the nature reserve management board as: poaching of animals, timber and resin; forest fires; security restrictions; lack of adequate personnel and training; lack of necessary equipment and funding; and lack of technical knowledge and data.

Currently, hunting is the greatest direct threat to biodiversity at Yok Don National Park. The survey by Le Xuan Canh *et al.* (1997) demonstrated that, despite the availability of significant areas of suitable habitat, population sizes of key mammal and bird species at Yok Don National Park have declined over recent years, indicating that current management actions are not stabilising populations of these species. Consequently, Le Xuan Canh *et al.* (1997) recommended that the focus of conservation effort at Yok Don move from surveys to institutional strengthening of the national park staff. Such activities form part of the PARC project currently being implemented by WWF and GTZ.

Migration into the area surrounding Yok Don National Park is leading to an increase in human pressure on natural resources, and threatens to undermine conservation activities at the national park. Between 1979 and 1989 Dak Lak had the highest immigration rate of any province in Vietnam. Similarly, in the five year period from 1990 to 1995, the population of Dak Lak province rose by 21%, from an estimated 1,026,000 people to 1,242,000 people (Brickle *et al.* 1998). Migration into Dak Lak province has had significant impacts on the forest ecosystems of the province, especially at Yok Don National Park. The increased demand for forest products, including timber and wild animals, contributes to biodiversity loss at Yok Don National Park, while forest clearance for arable land and land trading leads to forest loss in the surrounding area (Huynh Thu Ba 1998).

## Other documented values

Buon Don district is famous as a centre for elephant domestication, which is a long tradition among several ethnic groups in this part of the Central Highlands. Elephant riding is now growing in popularity as a tourist attraction, bringing increasing numbers of visitors and revenue to the area. Visitors to Yok Don are able to take elephant rides into the national park. The development of this particular form of ecotourism may, however, create an economic incentive to capture the few remaining wild elephants in western Dak Lak province. Fortunately, the potential to develop environmentally sensitive forms of tourism that provide benefits to both conservation and local communities is high at Yok Don National Park, and the development of such forms is currently being supported by the PARC project.

## Related projects

The largest conservation project currently being implemented at Yok Don National Park is entitled *Creating Protected Areas for Resource Conservation Using Landscape Ecology (PARC)*. The project document was signed on 20 November 1998, and the project began implementation in 1999. The PARC project is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and aims to employ a landscape ecology approach to conservation. At Yok Don National Park, project activities are grouped into ten areas: protected area infrastructure; protected area management; biological and social monitoring; land-use planning; environmental education and awareness; eco-tourism development; agricultural development; improved and alternative revenue generation; forestry; and development of an institutional framework for the national park and buffer zone. The PARC project is also working at Na Hang proposed nature reserve and Ba Be National Park, where it is being implemented by Scott Wilson Asia-Pacific Ltd.

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