

## 19 baby Siamese crocs released in Laos

February 21 2013

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Members of the Village Crocodile Conservation Group prepare to release three of the 19 Siamese crocodiles. Credit: Alex McWilliam/WCS

The Wildlife Conservation Society announced today the successful release of 19 critically endangered baby Siamese crocodiles into a local wetland in Lao PDR, where they will be repatriated into the wild.

The 19-month-old hatchlings, approximately 70 cm (27 inches) in length, are part of a head-starting program where [crocodiles](#) are hatched at the Lao Zoo for eventual release into their [native habitat](#).

Conservationists estimate that less than 250 Siamese crocodiles remain in the wild due to overhunting and [habitat loss](#).

The release took place in the village of Than Soum in the Xe Champhone wetland complex in Savanakheth Province near where the eggs of the 19 crocodiles were found during wildlife surveys in 2011.

The hatchlings were transported from the Lao Zoo to a 'soft release' pen and will remain for several months to acclimate with the [local](#) area. Members of the Village Crocodile [Conservation Group](#) will guard the pen and provide supplementary feeding of the hatchlings to ensure their survival. Once the rainy season begins, the water level in the wetland will rise and allow the crocodiles to swim away, where they will be monitored periodically by [conservationists](#).

A public ceremony will take place on March 6th in Than Soum where local community members will celebrate this collaborative effort with WCS, Government of Lao PDR, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Minmetals Resources Limited, and the Lao Zoo.

WCS Lao PDR Program designed and implemented the release as part of the Community-based Crocodile Recovery and Livelihood Improvement Project. The goal of the program is the recovery of the local Siamese crocodile population and restoration of associated wetlands, linked by socio-[economic incentives](#) that improve local livelihoods.

"We are extremely pleased with the success of this collaborative program and believe it is an important step in contributing to the conservation of the species by involving local communities in long term wetland management," said Alex McWilliam a conservation biologist with WCS's Lao PDR Program. "The head starting component of this integrated WCS program represents a significant contribution to the

conservation of this magnificent animal in the wild."

Rick Watsford, General Manager, MMG Lane Xang Minerals Limited Sepon, said: "MMG is proud to support the work of the Government of Lao PDR and the WCS in relation to this program. This support demonstrates our company's commitment contributing positively to the communities in which we operate."

Joe Walston, WCS Executive Director for Asia Programs, said: "Successful conservation is about partnerships – whether it's at the global level with climate change and wildlife trade or the local level with tigers and crocs – the collective support of local communities, governments, and the private sector in Laos makes stories like this so encouraging."

Classified as Critically Endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the Siamese crocodile grows up to 10 feet in length. The species has been eliminated from much of its former range through Southeast Asia and parts of Indonesia by overhunting and habitat degradation and loss.

In 2014, the head-starting component of the program will be taken on by [local communities](#) in the Xe Champhone wetland complex. WCS has already conducted training for this transition and implemented a trial [program](#) of rearing young crocodiles at Than Soum village.

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

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