

Thai scientists catch bats to trace virus origins

August 13 2020, by Sakchai Lalit



A researcher removes a bat from a trapping net inside a cave at Sai Yok National Park in Kanchanaburi province, west of Bangkok, Thailand, Saturday, Aug. 1, 2020. Researchers in Thailand have been trekking through the countryside to catch bats in their caves in an effort to trace the murky origins of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)

Researchers in Thailand have been trekking through the countryside to catch bats in their caves in an effort to trace the murky origins of the coronavirus.

Initial research has already pointed to bats as the source of the virus that has afflicted more than 20.5 million people and caused the deaths of over 748,000 worldwide, according to Johns Hopkins University data. The closest match to the coronavirus has been found in [horseshoe bats](#) in Yunnan in southern China.

Thailand has 19 species of horseshoe bats but researchers said they have not yet been tested for the new coronavirus.

Thai researchers hiked up a hill in Sai Yok National Park in the western province of Kanchanaburi to set up nets to trap some 200 bats from three different caves.

The team from the Thai Red Cross Emerging Infectious Diseases-Health Science Center took saliva, blood and stool samples from the bats before releasing them. They worked through the night and into the next day, taking samples not only from horseshoe bats but also from other bat species they caught in order to better understand pathogens carried by the animals.

The team was headed by Supaporn Wacharapluesadee, the center's deputy chief, who has studied bats and diseases associated with them for more than 20 years. He was part of the group that helped Thailand confirm the first COVID-19 case outside China in January.



A researcher puts a bat into a bag inside a cave at Sai Yok National Park in Kanchanaburi province, west of Bangkok, Thailand, Saturday, Aug. 1, 2020. Researchers in Thailand have been trekking through the countryside to catch bats in their caves in an effort to trace the murky origins of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



Researchers carry equipment for catching bats in a cave at Sai Yok National Park in Kanchanaburi province, west of Bangkok, Thailand, Friday, July 31, 2020. Researchers in Thailand have been trekking through the countryside to catch bats in their caves in an effort to trace the murky origins of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



Researchers set up equipment for catching bats in front of a cave at Sai Yok National Park in Kanchanaburi province, west of Bangkok, Thailand, Friday, July 31, 2020. Thai researchers are collecting samples from bats to test if they could also carry a novel coronavirus, similar to what bats in China are found to have. The result could help answer the question everyone is asking – what's the origin of the COVID-19 virus? (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



Researchers set up equipment for catching bats in front of a cave at Sai Yok National Park in Kanchanaburi province, west of Bangkok, Thailand, Friday, July 31, 2020. Researchers in Thailand have been trekking through the countryside to catch bats in their caves in an effort to trace the murky origins of the coronavirus.(AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



Researchers set up equipment for catching bats in front of a cave at Sai Yok National Park in Kanchanaburi province, west of Bangkok, Thailand, Friday, July 31, 2020. Researchers in Thailand have been trekking through the countryside to catch bats in their caves in an effort to trace the murky origins of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



A researcher measures a bat inside a cave at Sai Yok National Park in Kanchanaburi province, west of Bangkok, Thailand, Friday, July 31, 2020. Researchers in Thailand have been trekking through the countryside to catch bats in their caves in an effort to trace the murky origins of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



Researchers put on PPE suits and stand in front of a cave entrance as they prepare to catch bats at Sai Yok National Park in Kanchanaburi province, west of Bangkok, Thailand, Friday, July 31, 2020. Researchers in Thailand have been trekking through the countryside to catch bats in their caves in an effort to trace the murky origins of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



Researchers catch bats in front of a cave inside Sai Yok National Park in Kanchanaburi province, west of Bangkok, Thailand, Friday, July 31, 2020. Researchers in Thailand have been trekking through the countryside to catch bats in their caves in an effort to trace the murky origins of the coronavirus.(AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



Professor from Kasetsart University Prateep Duengkae arranges bats to take blood samples and swab samples inside a cave at Sai Yok National Park in Kanchanaburi province, west of Bangkok, Thailand, Friday, July 31, 2020. Researchers in Thailand have been trekking through the countryside to catch bats in their caves in an effort to trace the murky origins of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



A researcher measures a bat inside a cave at Sai Yok National Park in Kanchanaburi province, west of Bangkok, Thailand, Friday, July 31, 2020. Researchers in Thailand have been trekking through the countryside to catch bats in their caves in an effort to trace the murky origins of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



Researchers take samples from a bat's mouth inside Sai Yok National Park in Kanchanaburi province, west of Bangkok, Thailand, Friday, July 31, 2020. Researchers in Thailand have been trekking through the countryside to catch bats in their caves in an effort to trace the murky origins of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



A researcher swabs a bat's mouth to take samples at Sai Yok National Park in Kanchanaburi province, west of Bangkok, Thailand, Friday, July 31, 2020. Researchers in Thailand have been trekking through the countryside to catch bats in their caves in an effort to trace the murky origins of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



A researcher releases a bat after taking blood sample bat inside Sai Yok National Park in Kanchanaburi province, west of Bangkok, Thailand, Saturday, Aug. 1, 2020. Researchers in Thailand have been trekking through the countryside to catch bats in their caves in an effort to trace the murky origins of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



A researcher with a bat in a bag walks out from a cave at Sai Yok National Park in Kanchanaburi province, west of Bangkok, Thailand, Saturday, Aug. 1, 2020. Researchers in Thailand have been trekking through the countryside to catch bats in their caves in an effort to trace the murky origins of the coronavirus. (AP photo/Sakchai Lalit)

She believes it is likely they will find in Thailand's bats the same virus that causes COVID-19.

"The pandemic is borderless," she said. "The disease can travel with [bats](#). It could go anywhere."

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