



Rescue Report: Snared Bear - Luang Nam Tha

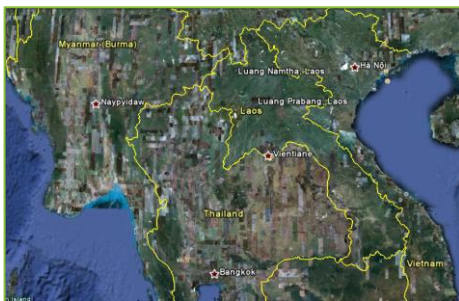
September 2011

LOCATION

Luang Namtha Province / Nam Ha National Protected Area National Conservation Biodiversity Area (NBCA)

Luang Namtha town, situated in mountainous Luang Namtha province in Northern Laos is bordered by Myanmar to the northwest and China to the North.

of significant national and regional conservation value on account of their rare status.



The Nam Ha National Protected Area NBCA lies within Luang Namtha province and was established in 1993 over an area of 64,000ha. In 1999 the protected area was expanded to 222,400ha, and is ranked as the third largest protected area in the country. Its eastern border begins approximately 5 kilometers south of Luang Namtha Town.

On 21st September a local villager discovered a bear trapped in a snare adjacent to corn plantations and rice paddies in the village of Ban Thong Khoua just outside Luang Namtha town.



The area covers some of the most significant wilderness areas in Laos and supports biodiversity of national importance. Its broad altitudinal range (560 – 2,094m) supports a wide variety of vegetation types and the mammal fauna is diverse with a total of at least 37 larger mammal species known to be present. At least 19 of these species are regarded to be

The local forestry office was immediately contacted and rangers placed on guard to prevent the bear from being hunted and killed. Mr Chanthone, The Deputy Director for Protected Wildlife Area Management Section within the Department for Forest Resource Conservation in Vientiane was alerted and he in turned requested assistance on the 22nd Sept from Free The Bears Laos Program based in Luang Prabang.

PREPARATION AND ARRIVAL IN LUANG NAMTHA

FTB immediately began preparations to assist and gathered all the necessary equipment, including a CO₂ powered Telineject Vario 3V rifle required to anaesthetise the bear. In these situations it is critical the bear is reached as quickly as possible and so a team consisting of FTB managers Jane Clegg and Jude Osborne and also Dr Bountom, a veterinarian from the Luang Prabang Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office, travelled to Luang Namtha on the morning of 23rd Sept.

The team arrived in Luang Namtha town late on the 23rd of September and met early the following day with Mr Chanthone, Mr Phimkeo the Deputy Director of the Luang Namtha Forestry Office, Mr Souksan the Head of the Nam Ha NBCA and Mr Sonsai the Director of Head of Office for Luang Namtha Forestry Office to discuss the situation. The team was informed that the snare location was approximately 7km from Luang Namtha town. The bear had reportedly been raiding cornfields and it is believed that the snares were planted by locals to protect the crops. The bear was described as strong and alert, around 60 kg and snared around the abdomen. A bear had been spotted one week earlier near the road a few kilometres from Luang Namtha town and is assumed to be the same bear found in the snare. It is reportedly very unusual for bears to be found within populated areas close to the town and that the villagers had not encountered conflict issues with bears previously in this area.

Discussions on the possibility of releasing the bear at its snared location highlighted concerns that there were many villages in close proximity and with no suitable forest nearby. Release in the same area was not approved by the authorities and it was decided that the best available option was to attempt to anaesthetise and translocate the bear to forest within the Nam Ha Protected Area NBCA. A search for a release site was initiated and an area of suitable primary forest within the Nam Ha protected area approximately 25km away from the village was subsequently selected. A local tradesman was contracted to construct a suitable transport cage and the additional materials needed for a translocation were sourced.

ARRIVAL AT SITE AND ASSESSMENT

The team and Forestry Office representatives arrived at the site on 25th Sept at around 11 a.m. and assessed the situation. The bear was a female Asiatic Black bear approximately 2 - 3 years of age and approximately 55 - 60kg. She appeared calm despite the large number of villagers present in the area and seemed in reasonable health chewing on bamboo.



A dart containing 400 mg of Zoletil (based on standard dosage of 5.5mg/kg) was prepared and the dart rifle was charged to a pressure of 1.8bar. The ranger with the greatest firearm skills was identified and trained in the use of the rifle to sedate the bear. Attempts to sedate the bear began at 11.20 a.m. and are outlined below:

Attempt	Dose	Outcome	Notes
1.	Zoletil 400mg	Target hit on the rump, bear removed dart immediately, needle appeared clogged and drug undelivered	Drug transferred to new dart.
2.	Zoletil 400mg	Target hit on the rump needle remained in place and delivery apparently successful. Bear later removed and bit dart.	Effect very rapid with complete sedation in around 5 minutes.

Given the presence of a large number of people it was decided to transport the bear with minimum delay and give further treatment away from the snare location. The bear was immediately placed in the transport cage and carried by locals through the rice paddies to the village approximately 2km away. Upon reaching the village around 12.10pm the bear was further examined by Dr Bounthom and an additional 250mg of zoletil was administered to ensure the bear remained anaesthetized during the 25 km journey by vehicle to the release area.



WOUND ASSESSED & BEAR RELEASED

The bear had sustained a large wound around the abdomen to groin on the left hip from the snare wire. Although the bear had obviously lost blood initially from the injury the wound seemed fairly dry with new skin already forming and little fresh blood apparent. Advice was sought from FTB vet(s) via Nev Broadis and the team was advised that as the injury was already a few days old the skin around it had degraded rendering it impossible to stitch. The best option for the bear was therefore to clean the area, treat with antibiotics and release as quickly as possible. With the exception of the wound to the hip the bear was in reasonable condition with a body score of 2-2.5 out of 5.

The bear was monitored during the journey and the team arrived at the release site at approximately 1.10pm. The wound was cleaned with alcohol and 10% betadine and the bear was injected intramuscularly with long acting Amoxicillin and Ivomec. At 1.30pm a further 125mg of zoletil was injected prior to transferring the bear to the forest location on a stretcher. The bear was then left to recover with about 4kg of papaya left beside her as an instant food source.

Despite the severity of the injury bears are known to be extremely resilient and resourceful and we feel that the young female bear has a reasonable chance of surviving. The left hind limb will probably be compromised and the bear may lose use of it, however recent camera trap photos of bears in Asia have shown healthy individuals which have survived serious snare injuries. It is our hope that with the snare removed, the bear can recover from this injury and learn to adapt to her new environment.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Free the Bears Fund would like to thank: the Government of Lao PDR and in particular the Ministry of Agriculture & Forestry for their dedication to protecting the remaining bear populations in the country; Government staff who assisted from the Department of Forest Resource Conservation, Luang Prabang Forestry Office, Luang Namtha Forestry Office and Nam Ha protected area for all their hard work and perseverance. This was an excellent collaboration and a successful outcome under difficult circumstances.

For more information on the rescue effort, please contact laosprogramme.ftb@gmail.com

The aim of Free the Bears Fund is to protect, preserve and enrich the lives of bears throughout the world