Rescue Report: Snared Bear

August 2011

Nam Et - Phou Louey NPA

LOCATION

Nam Et - Phou Louey National Protected Area is located in the north east of Lao PDR and is one of twenty NPAs declared in decree 164/PMO, 1993. With an area of 5,959 km2 it is one of the largest in Lao PDR and covers 7 districts and three provinces (Houaphan, Luang Prabang and Xieng Khouang provinces). The NPA is mostly hilly or mountainous and is the source of many rivers. Nam Et-Phou Louey NPA is located between latitudes of 19.85-20.05 degrees N and longitudes 103.20-103.85 degrees E. The terrain is mountainous with altitude ranging between 336 and 2257 meters above sea level (http://www.namet.org/about.html)

On 11th August 2011 a District Forestry Office ranger discovered a bear trapped in a snare attached to a bamboo clump. The ranger team was placed on guard close to the bear to prevent it being killed by hunters. They contacted Wildlife Conservation Society staff who in turn contacted Jane Clegg, Laos Programme Manager of Free the Bears, for assistance. Immediately, FTB began gathering the required equipment and organising staff to travel to the remote forest site. The following day on the 12th August, the final preparations were complete including sourcing a dart rifle from WCS in Vientiane (Telinject VARIO 3V Rifle, powered by a CO2), and securing the services of a veterinarian from the Luang Prabang Department of Agriculture & Forestry – Dr. Bounthom. The team, escorted throughout by WCS staff, departed for the village of Ban Sone Koua the last stop before the rescue location.

ARRIVAL & ASSESSMENT

After travelling approximately 1:15 hours by boat from the village the team arrived at the rescue site at around 15.00hrs on the 13th August and began to gather information. An Asiatic black bear, estimated to weigh between 80 and 100kg was trapped in a snare. There were a number of snares in the vicinity, rangers removed up to 57 wire snares whilst

FREE THE BEARS FUND INC.
PO Box 723
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

WEB
www.freethebears.org

awaiting the rescue team. During the time the bear was trapped a slightly larger Asiatic black bear visited the trapped bear on one occasion. Staff from WCS indicated that rangers and villagers in the area often saw bears. Following a brief run down on firing technique, one of the WCS rangers was chosen to remotely sedate the bear based on his skill with a gun. Darting attempts began at or around 15.30hrs on 13th August. The following table outlines the amount of drug and result of each attempt to dart the bear.

Attempt	Dose	Outcome	Notes
1.	Zoletil 300mg	Target hit on the rump, bear removed the dart making it unclear how much drug was delivered	Bear quieter but not sedate enough to approach
2.	Zoletil 200mg	Target hit on the rump but again the bear pulled out the dart immediately. Needle remained in place.	Bear only slightly sedate, wait for 15-20mins before attempt 3
3.	Zoletil 300mg	Target hit on the rump but dart plunger only half depressed	
4.	Zoletil 200mg	Target hit on the rump. Bear pulled out the dart but the needle remained in place	Bear still not sedate enough to approach safely
5.	Zoletil 250mg	Target hit on the rump, bear removed the dart making it unclear how much of the drug was delivered	
6.	Zoletil 250mg	Target hit on the rump, but again dart plunger seemed to not have depressed sufficiently	Retreat and reassess the situation

VETERINARY ASSISTANCE

Considering the number of failed attempts, the rescue team considered that the equipment could be at fault and opted to request the presence of the FTB regional veterinarian Sylvain David. Initially it was hoped that the team would be able to remove the snare in good time, with this not the case having a vet carry out the remote sedation also meant an assessment could be made of the wound. The vet arrived in Luang Prabang on Sunday 14th August and began preparing equipment for a possible field surgery given the time spent in a snare. The FTB team arrived back from the site late in the evening and decided to allow the driver to rest before leaving again the following morning. The second rescue effort began at around 15.00hrs on 15th August. The bear appeared quiet and in good health considering the traumatic events, seen chewing on bamboo. When the team approached, the bear became aggressive. The snare wound was clearly visible on the right forepaw with the snare still attached to a small tree. New darts were loaded and the sedation attempts are as follows:

Attempt	Dose	Outcome	Notes
7. 15.35hrs	Zoletil 500mg	Target hit on the rump	15.50hrs; bear appears sedate but stands as vet approaches
8. 15.55hrs	Zoletil 300mg	Target hit on left thigh	16.10hrs; bear still concious, nervous when vet approaches
9. 16.15hrs	Zoletil 300mg	Dart separated from the needle on impact, no drug delivered.	Pressure too high, adjusted to 2 bar and reattempt
10. 16.20hrs	Zoletil 400mg	Target hit on the rump	16.35hrs; bear still not sedate enough to approach safely
11. 16.40hrs	Zoletil 200mg	Target hit on the rump, no reaction	Vet approached safely and covered the head with cloth

WOUND ASSESSED & BEAR RELEASED

Once it was deemed safe to remove the bear from within the bamboo clump, the team moved quickly to remove the snare, assess the wound and the bear in general. The bear was a female Asiatic black bear, around 60-70kg. She was given a body score of 1.5-2 out of a possible 5. In addition to the snare wound on the wrist area of the right forepaw there was also a scar from a previous wound on her left ear. Numerous ticks were also noticed around both ears. The wound from the snare was treated with Betadine® 10% and a long-acting antibiotic, tulathromycin (Draxxin®) 4 mg/kg was injected intramuscularly. With the bear now free from the snare, the team, at 17.15hrs, evacuated the area in order to allow the bear to wake up quietly. Peanuts were left for her as an instant food source. It is highly likely that given the length of time this bear remained in the snare a full necrosis of the lower part of the forepaw will occur. The cleaning and long-acting antibiotic may help to prevent fatal development of the wound, and give the bear the best chance of survival. Recent camera trap photos of bears in Asia have shown healthy individuals which have survived snare injuries and their resulting amputated paws. It is our hope that with the snare removed, the bear can recover from this injury learning to live and survive with three limbs.

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; Wildlife Conservation Society without whom the fate of this bear would have been very different – their assistance and enthusiasm throughout the rescue was outstanding; and finally the members of both rescue parties for their hard work and perseverance.

NOTE

It was discovered later that the darts used for the rescue attempt were not suited to the dart rifle being used and was likely the reason for the increased number of attempts required to sedate the bear.

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