

# Yok Don National Park

## Alternative site name(s)

Tieu Teo Easup

## Province(s)

Dak Lak

## Area

115,545 ha

## Coordinates

12<sup>o</sup>47' - 13<sup>o</sup>00'N, 107<sup>o</sup>29' - 107<sup>o</sup>50'E

## Agro-ecological zone

Central Highlands

## Decreed by government

Yes

## Management board established

Yes

## Investment plan prepared

Yes

## VCF eligibility criteria met

A, B, C

## Social screening criteria met

None

## Conservation needs assessment prepared

No

## Operational management plan prepared

Yes - 2003

## Tracking tool completed

No

## Map available

Yes

## Management history

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.* 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 this decision, it appears that the 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 (MacKinnon *et al.* 1989).

Following the establishment of Yok Don Nature Reserve, an investment plan to revise the Special-use Forest category of the site from nature reserve to national park 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).

After the establishment of Yok Don National Park, several proposals were formulated 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 part 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, the Forest Inventory and Planning Institute 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 (Anon. 1998). This investment plan was approved by Dak Lak Provincial People's Committee and MARD. Subsequently, the expansion of Yok Don National Park was approved by Decision No. 39/TTg of the Prime Minister, dated 18 March 2002. According to the Prime Minister's decision, the total area of the national park is 115,545 ha, comprising a strict protection area of 80,947 ha, a forest rehabilitation area of 30,426 ha, and

an administration and services area of 4,172 ha. In addition, a buffer zone of 133,890 ha was defined.

The management board of Yok Don National Park currently has 120 members of staff, based at the headquarters and seven guard stations (Yok Don National Park Management Board verbally 2003). The national park is under the management of MARD.

Yok Don is included on a list of Special-use Forests to be established by the year 2010, prepared by the FPD of MARD, as a 115,545 ha national park (FPD 2003); this list has not yet been approved by the government.

## Topography and hydrology

Yok Don National Park is located in Ea Bung and Chu M'Lanh communes, Ea Sup district, Krong Na commune, Buon Don district, and Ea Po commune, Cu Jut district, in western Dak Lak province. The national park is situated on the flat plain that extends from eastern Cambodia into northern Dak Lak and southern Gia Lai provinces in Vietnam. The topography of most of the site is flat, at an elevation of c.200 m. There are, however, several ranges of low hills within the national park, the highest point of which is the eponymous Mount Yok Don at 482 m in the south-eastern range.

Yok Don National Park is bisected by the Srepok river, one of the major tributaries 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 also numerous waterholes at the national park, some of which contain water all year.

## Biodiversity values

The vegetation at Yok Don National Park is dominated by a mosaic of deciduous forest and semi-evergreen (mixed deciduous) forest, with smaller areas of evergreen forest, particularly on hills and along watercourses. The deciduous forest is dominated by members of 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-evergreen 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 denser, and is dominated by members of 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. According to Anon (1998), 474 vascular plant species have been recorded at the national park, of which 28 are listed in the *Red Data Book of Vietnam*. Yok Don is considered to be one of seven internationally important Centres of Plant Diversity in Vietnam (Davis *et al.* 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. In addition, evidence from recent trophies and first-hand reports indicates that the national park may still support small numbers of the globally vulnerable Eld's Deer *Cervus eldii* (Le Trong Trai and Eames 2003). Furthermore, two globally threatened primate species also occur at the national park: Black-shanked Douc *Pygathrix nigripes* and Yellow-cheeked Crested Gibbon *Hylobates gabriellae*.

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.* 1995). However, neither Le Xuan Canh *et al.* (1997) nor surveys by the *Creating Protected Areas for Resource Conservation Using Landscape Ecology (PARC)* Project found any evidence of the continued occurrence of this species at the site.

A number of globally threatened bird species have been recorded at Yok Don National Park, in particular several large and medium-sized waterbirds, including White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata*, Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personata* and Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* (Tordoff 2002, Le Trong Trai and Eames 2003). Of particular note, Yok Don is the only site in Vietnam from where there are recent confirmed records of the globally critically endangered Giant Ibis *Thaumatibis gigantea* (Le Trong Trai and Eames 2003). Moreover, Yok Don National Park is one of the few established protected areas in Vietnam to support a significant population of the globally vulnerable Green Peafowl. A recent study estimated that the national park may support around 1,200 individuals (Le Trong Trai and Eames 2003). Yok Don National Park contains two Important Bird Areas: Yok Don and Chu M'Lanh (Tordoff 2002).

## 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 extraction; 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 on-going PARC Project.

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).

Another major conservation issue at Yok Don is construction of infrastructure within the national park. For example, a dam was recently built on the Dak Ken stream and a surfaced road to the base of Mount Yok Don is planned (Eames and Nguyen Duc Tu 2002). Furthermore, there exists a plan to upgrade the road along the international border with Cambodia, which runs through the west of the national park, into a provincial highway. As well as their direct impacts on biodiversity in terms of habitat loss, such infrastructure developments, particularly road developments, may facilitate access to the national park for illegal exploitation of natural resources or, potentially, act as foci for settlement of in-migrants.

In addition to infrastructure development, the national park management board has prepared plans for a number of activities in and around the national park that are incompatible with biodiversity conservation. These include damming seasonal streams to create ribbon lakes, dredging lakes and artificial waterholes, dredging sand along the Srepok river, and establishing an ostrich farm inside the national park. Such activities reflect a management focus on misguided 'habitat improvement' and revenue generation at the expense of biodiversity conservation.

## 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.

## Related projects

The largest conservation project currently being implemented at Yok Don National Park is the PARC Project. The project document was signed on 20 November 1998, and the project began implementation in 1999. The principal source of funding for this project is the Global Environment Facility, with counterpart funding from UNDP and the government of Vietnam. The PARC Project aims to employ a landscape ecology approach to conservation. At Yok Don National Park, project activities are grouped into 10 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 being implemented at Na Hang proposed nature reserve and Ba Be National Park.

## Conservation needs assessment

A conservation needs assessment has not been conducted for the site.

## Operational management plan

An operational management plan was prepared for Yok Don National Park in 2003, with the support of the PARC Project.

## Eligibility against VCF criteria

Yok Don meets eligibility criteria A, B and C. However, as a centrally managed Special-use Forest, it will only be eligible for VCF support if the Investment Plan and Operational Management Plan demonstrate a high proportion of government support directed towards conservation activities. At present, government funding is directed otherwise.

Criterion	Eligibility
A <sub>I</sub>	DF4 - Eastern Plains Dry Forests
A <sub>II</sub>	VN044 - Yok Don; VN050 - Chu M'Lanh
B <sub>I</sub>	Decision No. 39/TTg, dated 18/03/02
B <sub>II</sub>	National Park
B <sub>III</sub>	Under central management
C <sub>I</sub>	Management board established
C <sub>II</sub>	

## Social screening requirements

A social screening report has not been prepared for the site.

Criterion	Eligibility
A	
B	
C	
D	

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