

Van Long Proposed Nature Reserve

Alternative site name(s)

None

Province(s)

Ninh Binh

Area

2,643 ha

Coordinates

20°21' - 20°25'N, 105°49' - 105°55'E

Agro-ecological zone

Red River Delta

Decreed by government

No

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

No

Tracking tool completed

No

Map available

Yes

Management history

Van Long is not listed on any government decision regarding the national Special-use Forests system. However, an official proposal to include Van Long on the national list of Special-use Forests was submitted to MARD by Ninh Binh Provincial People's Committee (Vu Van Dung and Nguyen Huy Thang 2000). Consequently, in 2000, MARD requested the Forest Inventory and Planning Institute to prepare an investment plan for the site (Nguyen Huy Thang 2000). This investment plan was approved by Ninh Binh Provincial People's Committee in 2001, after which, a management board was established, following Decision No. 2888/QĐ-UB of the provincial people's committee, dated 18 December 2001 (Dang Xuan Tai, Director of Van Long Nature Reserve *in litt.* 2003). The management board currently has nine members of permanent staff and 20 contracted staff, and is under the management of Ninh Binh Provincial FPD (Dang Xuan Tai, Director of Van Long Nature Reserve *in litt.* 2003). The management board also has responsibility for managing Hoa Lu proposed cultural and historical site (see Hoa Lu site card).

Van Long is included on a list of Special-use Forests to be established by the year 2010, prepared by the FPD of MARD, as a 2,643 ha nature reserve (FPD 2003); this list has not yet been approved by the government. Dang Xuan Tai, Director of Van Long Nature Reserve (*in litt.* 2003), however, gives the total

area of the proposed nature reserve current area as 3,000 ha, including a strict protection area of 1,866 ha and a forest rehabilitation area of 777 ha; the remaining area comprises wetlands.

Topography and hydrology

Van Long proposed nature reserve is located in Gia Van and Gia Hoa communes, Gia Vien district, Ninh Binh province. The proposed nature reserve is centred on a block of limestone karst that rises abruptly from the flat coastal plain of northern Vietnam. The limestone karst is surrounded by an area of wetland, which comprises rivers and a shallow lake with large amounts of submerged vegetation. Previously, there was a natural wetland at the site but the area of this wetland has increased significantly following the construction of a dyke for irrigation purposes.

Biodiversity values

The natural vegetation type at Van Long is limestone forest. However, the forest at Van Long has been severely degraded as a result of over-exploitation of forest products and grazing of goats, and large areas now support a low scrub vegetation where much of the rock is exposed. Despite the degradation, the site is still reported to support a number of plant species listed in the *Red Data Book of Vietnam* (Vu Van Dung and Nguyen Huy Thang 2000).

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Perhaps the most notable biodiversity value of Van Long proposed nature reserve is the occurrence of a significant population of Delacour's Leaf Monkey *Trachypithecus delacouri*. This species is globally critically endangered and endemic to Vietnam. The population at Van Long is one of the last potentially viable populations of this species in the world.

Although the wetlands at Van Long have not been comprehensively surveyed, the site is believed to be an important site for migratory waterbirds, including Common Coot *Fulicra atra* (Dang Xuan Tai, Director of Van Long Nature Reserve *in litt.* 2003). The occurrence of Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraetus fasciatus* at the site is of particular note, as, to date, Van Long proposed nature reserve is the only site in Vietnam where this species has been positively identified (Tordoff and Eames 2001).

Conservation issues

A total of 1,689 people live inside the boundary of Van Long proposed nature reserve, and a further 46,000 people inhabit the buffer zone, all of whom belong to the Kinh ethnic group (Dang Xuan Tai, Director of Van Long Nature Reserve *in litt.* 2003). The main economic activity of these people is wet rice agriculture.

Over-exploitation of timber and firewood is one of the major threats to biodiversity at the site, and has already led to extensive forest loss. Natural regeneration is inhibited by the large number of goats which graze on the limestone karst. Despite the poor quality of the habitat at Van Long, it seems to be sufficient to support a population of Delacour's Leaf Monkey. Thus, the biggest threat to this species comes not from habitat loss but from hunting. Local people report that Delacour's Leaf Monkey numbers declined significantly prior to the late 1990s, although they have reportedly stabilised in recent years due to controls on hunting. Given the small size of the remaining population, however, hunting retains the potential to rapidly eradicate this species from the site if allowed to resume.

The leaders of Gia Vien district and Gia Van commune have a good understanding of the importance of conserving the biodiversity of Van Long. They have already implemented several conservation measures,

including banning hunting at the site, and, in the future, they intend to remove the goats from the limestone karst. Prior to the establishment of the nature reserve, the Delacour's Leaf Monkey populations was protected by a small conservation team, comprising local villagers.

Other documented values

The limestone karst scenery at Van Long is very beautiful, and the site has already been developed for ecotourism, with visitors taking boat trips through the site and viewing Delacour's Leaf Monkey. However, any further ecotourism development at the site must mitigate against any potential negative environmental impacts, particularly disturbance to the Delacour's Leaf Monkeys. In particular, there should be no construction of tourism infrastructure within the proposed nature reserve.

Related projects

During 2000, Gia Van Commune Farmer's Union implemented a entitled *Conservation of Biodiversity at Van Long Nature Reserve*, with support from the UNDP/GEF Small Grant Scheme.

Conservation needs assessment

A conservation needs assessment has not been conducted for the site, although FFI plan to conduct one in the first half of 2004.

Operational management plan

An operational management plan has not been prepared for the site, although FFI plan to prepare one in the first half of 2004.

Eligibility against VCF criteria

Van Long is eligible for VCF support because it meets criteria A, B and C.

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Criterion	Eligibility
A _I	NA1 - Northern Indochina Limestone
A _{II}	
B _I	Proposed Special-use Forest
B _{II}	Nature Reserve
B _{III}	Under provincial management
C _I	Management board established
C _{II}	

Social screening requirements

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

Criterion	Eligibility
A	
B	
C	
D	

Literature sources

Nguyen Huy Thang (2000) Investment plan for Van Long Nature Reserve, Ninh Binh province]. Hanoi: Forest Inventory and Planning Institute. In Vietnamese.

Tordoff, A. W. and Eames, J. C. (2001) New additions to the list of birds of Vietnam. Oriental Bird Club Bulletin 33: 37-38.

Vu Van Dung and Nguyen Huy Thang (1999) [Proposal for a number of new nature reserves in limestone areas in Vietnam]. Pp 110-117 in: Le Sau ed. [Protection and sustainable development of forest and biodiversity in limestone areas of Vietnam] Hanoi: Forest Inventory and Planning Institute. In Vietnamese.