



## CITES/GRASP orang-utan technical missions

### Thailand and Cambodia

23-28 April 2007

#### Background

At its 13th meeting (Bangkok, 2004), the Conference of the Parties to CITES adopted Resolution Conf. 13.4 on Conservation of and trade in great apes. As part of the means identified in the Resolution to improve the conservation of great apes, the CITES Standing Committee was directed to "consider other measures such as technical missions, organized in cooperation with GRASP (Great Ape Survival Project) and other appropriate partnerships, followed by political missions if necessary". At its 53rd meeting (Geneva, June – July 2005), the Standing Committee instructed the Secretariat to liaise with the GRASP Secretariat with a view to conducting a technical mission to Southeast Asia regarding illicit trade in orang-utans.

The CITES Secretariat subsequently contacted the CITES Management Authorities of Indonesia and Malaysia, as these countries are orang-utan range States, and requested an invitation to conduct technical missions to both countries. Similar requests were made to Cambodia and Thailand, as these countries have been destinations for significant illegal trade in orang-utans.

A mission to Indonesia was conducted from 8 to 15 May 2006. The report of the mission is available on the CITES website at URL:

[http://www.cites.org/common/prog/ape/ID\\_mission06.pdf](http://www.cites.org/common/prog/ape/ID_mission06.pdf).

It is hoped that a mission to Malaysia will be conducted before the end of 2007.

#### Conduct of the mission

A mission to Thailand and Cambodia was conducted from 23 to 28 April 2007. The mission team was composed of Ms Melanie Virtue, Team Leader, GRASP, UNEP, and Mr John M. Sellar, Senior Officer, Anti-smuggling, Fraud and Organized Crime, CITES Secretariat.

The team is very grateful for the assistance it received from the authorities in these two countries, especially the CITES Management Authorities which handled the logistical arrangements. It also wishes to record its sincere appreciation for the support received from the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which provided funding for work on great ape issues.

The team visited Thailand on 23 and 24 April 2007. Thereafter, it was in Cambodia from 25 to 28 April 2007. In each country, the team visited facilities that had previously been identified as having been in possession of orang-utans that had apparently been illegally imported into these two countries. It also met with officials from agencies responsible for enforcement of the Convention and national law.

The primary aim of the missions was to study how each country had responded to such instances of illegal trade in orang-utans, in order to publicize lessons that might benefit the larger international community and also to obtain an insight into the dynamics of the illegal trade in orang-utans.

The two species of orang-utan occur naturally in only Indonesia and Malaysia on the islands of Sumatra and Borneo. There are only approximately 5,000-7,000 Sumatran and less than 45,000–69,000 Bornean orang-utans left in the wild. The species is listed in Appendix I of CITES and as critically endangered and endangered respectively on the IUCN Red List. While habitat destruction is the most significant threat to wild orang-utan populations, the illegal domestic and international trade in live animals is also significant.

#### Illegal import of orang-utans into Thailand

In 2004, a number of non-governmental organizations contacted the CITES Secretariat and expressed concern regarding the number of orang-utans that were being kept in the Safari World facility on the outskirts of Bangkok. Questions were raised as to whether such a large number of animals could be of legal origin. The Secretariat subsequently contacted the CITES Management Authority of Thailand on several occasions, encouraging the authorities in Thailand to investigate.

On 7 July 2004, the then Forest Police, since renamed the Natural Resources and Environmental Crime Division of the Royal Thai Police, initiated an investigation. On 10 September 2004, the CITES authorities in Thailand received 102 orang-utans that had been confiscated by the police from Safari World Public Co. Ltd.

The investigation revealed that 14 of the orang-utans had been imported to Thailand prior to 1992. This was the year in which Thailand enacted legislation implementing the Convention and, consequently, any specimens of CITES-listed species imported prior to that time were beyond the control of the authorities. DNA profiling showed that 31 of the 102 orang-utans were offspring of the 14 imported before 1992. They too were regarded as being beyond the legal powers of the authorities.

Safari World Public Co. Ltd admitted to possessing 57 orang-utans in contravention of the Thai Customs Act B.E. 2469 (1926). The company filed a petition to have the matter settled by surrendering the orang-utans to the authorities and this was accepted. The authorities accepted ownership of the animals in November 2005. Three of the animals had died during the course of the investigation and case settlement. The company was prosecuted in relation to other offences detected during the police investigation and the company manager received a suspended prison sentence.

Aside from using DNA profiling to establish relationships between the animals, the authorities also used such techniques to determine the origin of the animals, which was identified as being Indonesia. Using communication channels under the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN), Thailand and Indonesia discussed the repatriation of the orang-utans. In November 2006, 48 orang-utans were transported to Indonesia. A further five animals are to be repatriated to Indonesia in the near future and the mission team saw these animals at a rescue centre in Rachaburi Province where they are being prepared for return to their country of origin.

#### Safari World Public Co. Ltd.

The mission team visited this facility and met with its senior veterinary surgeon. The owner was not available to be interviewed by the team.

Safari World was established in 1985 and now houses over 45,000 specimens of some 250 different species. The staff are very proud of Safari World's record of captive-breeding, especially of parrot species. It is clear that they have also been successful in breeding orang-utans. The facility has the appearance of a zoological park but also has specimens that engage in public performances. It is clearly a major tourist attraction, is in the process of extending its facilities and appears to be a highly successful business.

The mission team attempted to learn details of how Safari World had acquired its orang-utans, especially those that had been identified as having been illegally imported to Thailand. Answers from the company representative were evasive and little of use was learned. The team wished to find out what price had

been paid for the animals but no details were given and, at one point during the meeting, it was suggested by a veterinarian that some of the orang-utans might have been exchanged for parrots. The team found it particularly odd that a veterinarian would claim not to know where animals had come from or anything about their background, especially as this type of basic information would seem essential from an animal health perspective.

The team watched a public performance involving a group of juvenile orang-utans. Such performances take place twice each day and seem to be a major attraction for visitors. The animals involved appeared to be highly trained and engaged in a number of activities, such as handling musical instruments and engaging in humorous routines with their trainers. The orang-utans were regularly 'rewarded' with food 'treats' during the performance. Many of the routines were clearly well-rehearsed with the animals showing a very developed sense of timing.

The performance ended with a staged 'Thai boxing' match, which climaxed with one orang-utan supposedly 'knocking out' its opponent. The mission team was aware that some individuals have expressed concern regarding the violence involved in these boxing matches. It wishes to emphasize, without wanting to comment on the appropriateness of such performances, that there was no violence involved in the event it saw. The team witnessed what was a staged routine and neither animal truly struck the other. However, the team is aware that the training of young orang-utans to perform has regularly been demonstrated to necessitate the use of violence, on the part of the handlers, to achieve a similar level of training as the team witnessed. This violence is the reason that many groups oppose the use of any orang-utans, or indeed any apes, in performances of this nature.

#### Enforcement-related matters – Thailand

Following the case of Safari World Public Co. Ltd., the authorities in Thailand conducted research at other zoological facilities with a view to identifying whether any other orang-utans had been illegally imported to the country. This resulted in a further 10 animals being detained.

Five of these were declared to the authorities by a zoo and it was claimed that the animals had been abandoned one night at the zoo by unknown persons. The authorities believe that this was probably prompted by the publicity surrounding the Safari World case.

The other five animals are currently the subject of a court case. The authorities wish to confiscate these orang-utans but this is being challenged in court.

The mission team met with a large number of officials from the CITES, Customs and police authorities. It was impressed by the coordination, collaboration and cooperation that were demonstrated and it appears that such officials are keen to enforce Thailand's domestic wildlife laws and CITES. It seems that the establishment of inter-agency activities has been helped considerably by the formation of ASEAN-WEN, the concept of which involves national committees and task forces to undertake wildlife law enforcement, aside from sub-regional networking.

It also appears, however, that such levels of cooperation and coordination probably did not exist in 2004 when the Safari World case emerged. The team was satisfied that Thailand is ready to ensure that such violations do not occur again and that wildlife crimes that may be discovered in future would be responded to more proficiently and speedily. New legislation is also being drafted to contribute to such a response.

#### Illegal import of orang-utans into Cambodia

In October 2004, the CITES Secretariat received information from the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation indicating that orang-utans appeared to have been illegally imported to Cambodia and were located in a facility called the Koh Kong Safari World. In early November 2004, the Secretariat asked the authorities in Cambodia to investigate this matter. It seems that it took them several months to do so. However, a multi-agency team subsequently visited Koh Kong Safari World and discovered that the company which operates the facility was in possession of 36 juvenile orang-utans. It confirmed that no CITES authorization had been applied for prior to their import. In any case, no import permit could have been granted, since the import would clearly have been for a primarily commercial purpose and contrary to Article III of the Convention.

As the authorities had, at the time of their visit, nowhere to re-house the animals they were left in the possession of the company.

On 15 June 2005, a report prepared by the CITES Management Authority of Cambodia was submitted to the country's Prime Minister, describing the situation. The report also contained recommendations that the company should be fined and that DNA profiling should be conducted. On 23 June, the Cabinet Office responded on behalf of the Prime Minister, who agreed to the recommendations and who also instructed that the Koh Kong Safari World owner should cooperate with the authorities.

It is important to note that, in June 2005, Cambodia had yet to enact national legislation to implement the Convention. Orang-utans, not being found in the wild in Cambodia, were not included in Cambodia's Forest Law, which was the legislation regulating wildlife matters. The powers of the authorities were, consequently, somewhat limited.

Nonetheless, the Forestry Administration (FA), which is responsible for enforcement of the Forest Law, used the existing legislation to calculate an appropriate fine to impose upon Koh Kong Safari World. On 15 July 2005, the FA served notice on the company that it was imposing a fine of KHR 226,984,680. At the currency exchange rate operating at the time of the mission, this was a sum equivalent to USD 56,746. The fine was paid within two days.

The authorities then debated what action should be taken next. With regard to DNA profiling, the team learned that this was first proposed with a view to determining whether the animals were from the wild or were captive-bred. The team noted that, unless parental stock could be identified (which seemed very unlikely), DNA profiling would not provide such a result. In any case, DNA profiling was not conducted.

The FA decided that it did not have the legislative authority to allow it to confiscate the animals. Consequently, on 22 July 2005, it recommended to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry that the matter should be placed before the Koh Kong Provincial Court and that the court should be asked to issue a confiscation order. This was agreed.

On 12 September 2005, the Koh Kong Provincial Court ruled that the fine imposed upon the company was sufficient penalty and it declined to order confiscation.

At the time of the mission team's visit to Cambodia this was how the matter rested, with Koh Kong Safari World remaining in possession of the animals.

### Koh Kong Safari World

Koh Kong Safari World is situated in a part of Cambodia that is presently difficult to access. It is 390 km west of the capital city, Phnom Penh, and the journey there by road takes at least five hours. This, however, is dependent upon a lack of traffic or ferry problems, since four stretches of water must be crossed by ferry boat. In practice, the journey to Koh Kong Province took the team 10 hours because of blocked access to one ferry crossing.

The road from Phnom Penh to Koh Kong is currently being improved and a tarmac surface is being laid. Bridges are also being built to eliminate the need for ferry boat river crossings. Once this construction is complete, the journey time will presumably be reduced considerably but it is still likely to be at least three hours.

Whilst Koh Kong may be difficult to reach from within central Cambodia, no such problems exist for those travelling from Thailand. The Cambodia/Thailand border, and a border, Customs and immigration post, is within 100 metres of the Koh Kong International Resort.

The Safari World complex has been built alongside a leisure and casino facility, named Koh Kong International Resort. This consists of gaming and slot machine rooms, a hotel and many apartments. The team was advised that there were 521 rooms available for guests at the time of its visit. It noted that construction work was underway to increase both the size of the casino and guest accommodation.

The team also noted literature in the hotel that quoted Koh Kong Safari World as having an address and telephone number in Cambodia but the Resort address and telephone number were quoted as being in

Thailand. Whether one was in Safari World or the Resort, all prices were quoted in the Bhat currency of Thailand. Although 'foreign' currency, such as United States dollars, pounds sterling or euros, seemed acceptable, Cambodian currency was not welcomed.

The team was told that gambling is banned in Thailand and, consequently, many persons from Thailand cross the border to visit the casino and stay in the Resort. However, the team entered the casino on the evening of its visit and found it to be occupied well below its capacity. The hotel and apartments also seemed to be relatively empty. Indeed, representatives of the Resort subsequently told the team that it has experienced a 10 % occupancy rate since opening in 2003.

Residents of Cambodia are apparently discouraged from using the casino. The team was unable to discover why, since gambling does not appear to be unlawful in the country and there is a casino in Phnom Penh. The team was told that guests from Thailand seldom visit the Safari World complex which, on average, apparently experiences approximately 20 visitors per day. When the team visited Safari World, there were certainly very few other persons present.

The team viewed the orang-utans in Safari World. There were 34 at the time of its visit. Thirty-two of these were in a walled yard adjoining the sleeping quarters. The yard was enclosed by high concrete walls and had rough grass on which most of the animals were seated. There were two small trees, apparently for the orang-utans to climb and exercise upon. That aside, there were absolutely no stimuli for the animals. Staff claimed that the orang-utans spent most daylight hours in this area but this did not seem credible, since even the limited grass and trees appeared too intact for 32 active juveniles using the area, eight hours per day every day. It was noted that such a facility, resembling a prison exercise yard, is entirely inappropriate for an arboreal species, which would never normally walk on the ground. The GRASP Secretariat has undertaken to supply technical advice to help enrich the animal's lives and aid animal husbandry at the complex.

The team visited the adjoining sleeping quarters and noted them to be spotlessly clean, almost unnaturally so given the number of orang-utans that were housed there. It was obvious that a comprehensive cleaning of the facility must have been conducted immediately prior to the team's arrival. There was no evidence that any behavioural enrichment material was ever provided. One larger cage between the 'exercise yard' and sleeping quarters, contained an adolescent male and a female orang-utan, which staff hoped were going to breed. Aside from these two animals, all the other orang-utans appeared to be juveniles, most of which were well below the age of sexual maturity.

The team observed that it would be some years before the existing individuals would be able to breed a significant number of young orang-utans. Meanwhile, the current crop of juveniles would all 'graduate' from performance. In the event that the performances continue, at some point in the near future, a deficit of suitably aged orang-utans will occur.

It was noted that the facilities, while technically suitable for compliant juveniles, would be totally unsuitable for the housing of less cooperative adults, as movement between the individual cages and either the exercise yard or the larger communal cage require the orang-utans to pass through unsecured areas. The mission team was at a loss to understand how this facility will manage its 32 rapidly maturing orang-utans in the next 5-10 years.

The team did not see a performance by the orang-utans at Koh Kong Safari World, as its visit did not coincide with the timing of the twice-a-day performances. The team doubts whether the visitor numbers on most days would justify the 'performances' or 'displays' by any species in Koh Kong Safari World.

Staff told the team that Safari World houses over 600 animals. This includes such species as bears, tigers and dolphins and a large number of birds. The dolphins in the complex have also been trained to 'perform'.

Staff stated that the majority of the specimens had been obtained from facilities such as 'zoos' situated in Cambodia and that it was primarily the orang-utans that had had to be sourced from abroad. The team regarded this as hardly credible, especially given the transportation difficulties that would be experienced in shipping specimens to Koh Kong from other areas of Cambodia. The team was told that the dolphins had been 'captured' from the waters surrounding the Koh Kong province of Cambodia. Whilst this may

be true, it appears that such harvesting took place without prior permission from the relevant authorities. That is not, however, a matter for CITES.

The team regarded the Safari World and Resort complexes as being an unusual commercial enterprise. The Resort accommodation occupancy rate and Safari World visitor numbers do not appear to justify what must have been, and what must continue to be, very considerable financial investment. It seems that the owner of the facilities is also contributing to the costs of the road and bridge construction between Phnom Penh and Koh Kong. A similar contribution was acknowledged to have been made to the bridge that links the Koh Kong Safari World and Resort complex, which is located on a peninsula, to the 'mainland' Koh Kong province.

Whilst the completion of the road and bridges between Phnom Penh and Koh Kong may lead to greater visitor and accommodation rates, the speculative financial expenditure that has taken place, and which continues, seems highly risky.

The team had been advised by government officials of Cambodia that the owner of the Safari World and Resort complexes was willing to meet with it. However, he did not do so and, instead, the team met with representatives of the resort's management and veterinarians from Safari World. The owner of the Koh Kong facilities has apparently been appointed a Senator of the parliament of Cambodia, although this is seemingly something of an honorary position in his case. It appears, therefore, that he must be held in considerable esteem in some quarters. The team is also aware, however, of media articles that allege that this person is a 'mafia boss', who controls a number of organized crime activities in Thailand and Cambodia. Since he declined to meet with the team, it was in no position to discuss with him his entrepreneurial activities associated with the Koh Kong complexes.

The team questioned Koh Kong Safari World and Resort representatives regarding the number of orang-utans that were present and pointed out that there seemed to be two less than when the authorities of Cambodia had visited the complex. It was told that two animals had died since the visit. When it asked about the cause of death, the team was told that it was 'lung disease'. Whilst the team cannot explain publicly why this is so, it has very good reason to believe that this explanation was not true.

The team asked who had been responsible for training the orang-utans and was told that this was conducted by someone from Thailand who had offered his services, having learned that Koh Kong Safari World was establishing public performance sessions involving this species. The team asked for the name of this person but was only given a first name of, "Joe". It was told where this person had apparently gained experience in training orang-utans, which was also where many of the animals were alleged to have come from. At the time of writing, the team is not making public the location, as the CITES Secretariat is asking the authorities in the relevant country (not Cambodia) to verify this information.

The company representatives claimed that the orang-utans had been obtained from a small number of traders based in Thailand and had been brought to the nearby border over a period of approximately two months in late 2002, often individually or in small numbers. Some animals had been rejected as being injured, ill or too young. The equivalent of USD 1,000 was an average price that the company had paid for each animal.

As with Bangkok Safari World, the team found the company representatives and veterinarians evasive in their answers to some questions.

The team spoke with an official who works at the Cambodia/Thailand border crossing point that adjoins the Koh Kong International Resort. This person explained that there is a regular and routine control upon goods, vehicles and human traffic that crosses the border. Indeed, there have been wildlife-related seizures, involving animals such as pangolins, made by border control officials. However, the official also said that 'company vehicles', i.e. those belonging to the Resort, are not subject to inspection. It was said that this is primarily because the Resort has been authorized to operate a 'duty-free' shop within the complex.

#### Enforcement-related matters – Cambodia

Although a two-week training course on CITES, attended by relevant agencies, had been held in Cambodia in early April 2006, knowledge of the Convention appears to be limited. The CITES Management Authority and Forest Administration appear to have very limited resources and capacity.

It seems that inter-agency cooperation is not as good as it might be and the team formed the impression that there is some rivalry between agencies, particularly with regard to who should take the lead on enforcement and CITES issues.

The team was aware that 'mobile units', staffed by Forestry Administration, military police and police officers, have conducted inspections at domestic markets and have undertaken a number of investigations and anti-smuggling operations, resulting in some significant seizures. Such units appear, however, to rely on financial and technical support from non-governmental organizations, particularly WildAid. Without such support, it seems that the FA would be hard-pressed to undertake much enforcement at its own initiative or using its own resources.

The team met with officials of the Cambodia Customs and Excise Department's international affairs division and with the Assistant Director of the Investigation and Anti-smuggling division. They showed great interest in the Convention and indicated willingness to play a greater role in implementing and enforcing CITES. They said, for example, that they would readily assist with investigations involving illegal import or export of specimens of CITES-listed species and would have done so in the case involving Koh Kong Safari World, had they been asked. They admitted, however, to having limited knowledge of the Convention and expressed a desire to have greater contact with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (the CITES Management Authority) on such matters.

Although Cambodia is a member of ASEAN-WEN, it has yet to establish a national inter-agency committee or task force to coordinate wildlife law enforcement. The mission team was told that this is partly due to a fear by some agencies that establishing such a mechanism would be expensive and that some agencies are under the impression that a national ASEAN-WEN team requires to be formed. This is not the mission team's understanding of the concept of the network and that all that is required is to use existing resources in a coordinated and collaborative fashion. The team suspects that inter-agency rivalry may also be playing a part here too.

Whilst the Koh Kong Provincial Court was not inclined to take further action in relation to the Safari World case, the team was pleased to learn that it seems to generally take wildlife crime matters seriously. For example, it heard of a case from 2006 where a poacher who was responsible for killing 20 tigers and seven elephants over a period of time was sentenced to seven years imprisonment by the Court.

Cambodia was one of the countries visited by the CITES Tiger Missions Technical Team in 1999. It found wildlife law enforcement to be relatively poor, with officials responsible being inadequately equipped and trained. The CITES/GRASP mission team formed the impression that although improvements had taken place, there remains a long way to go. Government officials in Cambodia seem very poorly paid. The present socio-economic situation in the country is obviously a breeding ground for corruption.

It is hoped that recent capacity-building initiatives will encourage a greater priority to be given to wildlife law enforcement and will build greater inter-agency cooperation. Cambodia's recent enactment of a Sub-Decree to implement the Convention is very welcome and it is also hoped that this will provide a clearer basis for enforcement and the penalization of offenders.

#### Other CITES-related matters – Cambodia

The team met briefly with a senior Department of Fisheries official, so that concerns regarding illicit trade in crocodiles could be raised by the CITES Secretariat. Several sources, including the IUCN SSG Crocodile Specialist Group, believe that such trade takes place, on occasions, at significant levels.

There are many crocodile farms spread around Cambodia. Six of the largest have been registered with the CITES Secretariat. Several years ago, there was considerable enthusiasm in relation to crocodile farming and it seems high expectations too. However, the quality of skins that were produced proved to

be generally poor and this, combined with an abundance of high-quality skins from elsewhere in the world, meant that Cambodia's crocodile farmers did not access markets in the way they had hoped. Consequently, hardly any exports have taken place in recent years.

It seems that some farmers turned to illicit trade and the team understands that it is not uncommon for skins and meat to be moved to neighbouring Viet Nam, either by smuggling or by corrupting border control officials.

The fishery official reported that it is hoped, before the end of 2007, to establish within the Department of Fisheries a division devoted to monitoring crocodile issues, including trade and conservation of the species. Such a division has been approved in principle and is intended to have a staff of 10 persons. Thirty crocodile farmers had recently attended a seminar organized by the Department and the Crocodile Specialist Group. At the end of 2006, 16 crocodiles, confiscated from poachers, were returned to the wild.

The CITES Secretariat's staff member had an opportunity to visit the zoo located outside Phnom Penh. In 1999, the CITES Tiger Missions Technical Team had expressed concern regarding the inadequate facilities and very limited educational information there. In 2007, the situation was greatly improved, mainly as a result of funding from NGOs, especially WildAid and the Free The Bear Fund of Australia.

#### Issues relating to the training and housing of orang-utans

Those who have studied the species note that orang-utans which are trained for 'entertainment' or 'performance' purposes can only engage in such activities for a limited period of their natural life. Such training is only effective in relation to juveniles. When orang-utans reach 'teenage years' they become too large and powerful to be handled or controlled for performance purposes and are thereafter totally unsuitable for such 'work'. Not only are orang-utans beyond adolescence unlikely to be cooperative during interactions with humans, but they may also be aggressive. The 'performance' lifespan of an orang-utan is probably limited to 4-10 years of their juvenile life.

Male orang-utans are especially recognized within the zoo, rescue centre and rehabilitation community as having a tendency towards 'unmanageable' aggression once they become sexually mature. Indeed, males will sometimes require to be housed on their own and separate from other orang-utans.

In general, adult orang-utans will require to be provided with large and complex enclosures in which to spend daylight hours and adjacent sleeping quarters, often consisting of large individual cages for every animal. The team noted that Bangkok Safari World appeared to have limited facilities for adult orang-utans and observed that Koh Kong Safari World had no such facilities. The team was unable to ascertain the condition in which the juvenile performing orang-utans in Bangkok were housed but noted that it was not on public display.

'Trained' orang-utans that have been used to performing, once they are 'retired', are likely to suffer withdrawal-like stress unless they are provided with sufficient stimuli to keep them occupied. Adult animals will, therefore, create significant logistical and resource demands. If a facility keeps orang-utans primarily for performance purposes, it has little use for adults, other than for breeding purposes and, in such cases, only a very limited number of males would be needed. The team could not help but wonder whether some animals are being 'retired' permanently by way of euthanasia.

It is also worthy of note that female orang-utans, in the wild, normally produce offspring approximately once every seven years. It seems reasonable to presume that such a relatively slow reproductive rate will not suit commercial use of orang-utans, especially since juveniles are needed for performance training and for generating revenue. It is, however, possible to accelerate reproduction by removing new-born orang-utans from their mothers and hand-rearing such babies. This will prompt mothers to be receptive to males and, thus, become pregnant again much sooner than would be expected if they were in the wild or nursing their previous infant. This approach seems to account for the high birth rate claimed by some facilities, such as the Bangkok Safari World.

## General comments

The mission team, in relation to the situations in Thailand and Cambodia, was particularly disappointed to note the apparent involvement of veterinary surgeons in illicit trade. In both countries, veterinarians appear to have been willing accomplices in the illegal trafficking of endangered species. The team is of the opinion that it is reprehensible that such 'professional' persons participated in a criminal scheme, which involved the repeated acquisition of animals over a lengthy period of time, and did nothing to stop it or bring it to the attention of the authorities.

Had a medical doctor played such a role in the trafficking of human beings, he or she could reasonably be expected to be 'struck off' from the register of medical practitioners. The team does not know whether Thailand and Cambodia have professional bodies for veterinary surgeons, but if they do, the veterinarians involved in these cases deserve to be reported to such associations with a view to disciplinary action.

During its meetings with officials of Bangkok Safari World and Koh Kong Safari World, no expressions of remorse were made by the representatives of either facility. The team was left with no alternative but to conclude that the companies involved had deliberately engaged in the unlawful acquisition of many orang-utans over an extended period and had done so in order to obtain specimens that would be suitable for use in public performances. This seemed solely for the generation of profit or other intangible benefits for the companies or individuals that owned the facilities. The team was unable to assess whether these persons or companies had deliberately exploited a lack of adequate CITES-implementing legislation in Thailand and Cambodia or if they had simply chosen to ignore domestic controls.

What is without question is that both facilities acquired orang-utans that were exported from their countries of origin in violation of the Convention. There seem to be no grounds to suggest that either facility did so by error, confusion or misunderstanding and in both cases, the criminal acquisition of orang-utans appears to have been deliberate.

Koh Kong Safari World appears to be purely a place of entertainment or public display of species. Bangkok Safari World, on the other hand, purports to be a place that engages in captive-breeding and seeks to educate the public about the need to conserve and protect wildlife. Consequently, its involvement in this illicit trade is all the more shameful.

It is extremely regrettable that Koh Kong Safari World seems likely to remain in possession of animals that were traded in violation of the Convention. There appears, however, to be no legal means of removing the animals.

The team believes it is highly likely that the two Safari World facilities will, over the course of time, find themselves with more adult orang-utans than they have use for, either with regard to captive-breeding or for display purposes. When such a time comes, the team believes it would be appropriate for the facilities to seek alternative long-term homes for such animals, either in zoos, rescue centres or in rehabilitation facilities. It does not believe such long-term homes need necessarily be in orang-utan range States.

The team also believes that the facilities should offer animals to suitable homes free of charge and should pay any costs associated with their re-housing and long-term care. This seems perfectly appropriate, given that both facilities have benefited, and continue to benefit, from animals that were acquired in violation of CITES. Whilst both facilities acquired orang-utans at a time when there was inadequate national legislation relating to the Convention, both Thailand and Cambodia were nonetheless party to the Convention then. Consequently, specimens of an Appendix-I species should not be used for a primarily commercial purpose. It would be good if the facilities demonstrated some commitment to the spirit of the Convention, even if they have previously chosen not to abide by the text of the Convention.

This requires careful consideration and handling, however, since the team wishes to avoid any suggestion that the facilities should be allowed to engage in the 're-cycling' of any animals that are no longer profitable. It is, however, very concerned about the long-term future of the orang-utans. It particularly has in mind the situation at Koh Kong Safari World, since its commercial viability, judged by current visitor numbers, must be questionable. The authorities in Cambodia should, therefore, have a contingency plan ready in case they have to take over responsibility for a large group of orang-utans from this complex. The team hopes that the international community, including non-governmental organizations

and zoological associations, might facilitate the long-term housing of such animals by identifying suitable locations in due course.

### Recommendations

The CITES/GRASP mission team makes the following recommendations to Thailand and Cambodia.

1. Each orang-utan in the Bangkok and Koh Kong Safari World facilities should be individually identified by the insertion of a microchip. A biological sample should also be taken from each animal and stored so that it may subsequently be used for DNA profiling, if necessary.
2. The authorities should regularly monitor the animals held in any facility that possesses orang-utans or other CITES Appendix-I species. This should involve *ad hoc* and unannounced inspections. Particular attention should be paid to the possible presence of newly acquired juveniles and their origin, legal or otherwise, should be ascertained.
3. The authorities should be advised of every birth and death of orang-utans that occurs. The facility should be visited following any birth or death. Each new-born animal should be micro-chipped. In the case of deaths, the cause should be established.
4. The authorities should liaise with the owners or managers with regard to the 'retirement' of animals that are no longer used in performances. Where appropriate and necessary, technical assistance should be sought from the international, non-governmental or zoological communities to identify suitable locations where such animals can be provided with alternative long-term housing and care.
5. Any facility that engages in illicit trade in orang-utans or any other CITES Appendix-I species, should have its authorization, licence or registration withdrawn.
6. The authorities of each country should visit every facility that is registered, authorized or licensed to act as a zoo or place of exhibition or entertainment using CITES Appendix-I species, to verify the legal origin of specimens in their possession. In the case of unlawful possession, every effort should be made to prosecute those responsible and to confiscate and re-house the specimens.

Further, Cambodia is urged to form a national ASEAN-WEN committee or task force, involving all relevant agencies, as a matter of urgency.

The team believes it is highly unlikely that Thailand and Cambodia are the only countries to which orang-utans have been smuggled. Indeed, it is aware that orang-utans from Indonesia have been illegally imported to Malaysia and that the authorities there have engaged in repatriations. The team suggests, therefore, that the international community, especially every CITES Management Authority, should assess whether illegally-acquired orang-utans or other CITES Appendix-I species might be found in their country.

The team sincerely hopes that the serious violations of the Convention that occurred in Thailand and Cambodia will act as a lesson to others that much greater attention needs to be paid to facilities or 'zoos' that keep animals for display, entertainment or performance purposes. These violations also demonstrate, like the illicit trade in gorillas from a zoo in Nigeria to a zoo in Malaysia, that there are people in the 'zoological' community who portray themselves as persons who care for wildlife and its conservation but who are actually criminal exploiters of rare and endangered species. Fortunately, such cases remain relatively infrequent.