

CHINA

China, Laos unite to boost wildlife protection

Xishuangbanna in Yunnan working to safeguard Asian elephants with neighbor nation

By ZHANG YANGFEI and LI YINGQING in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan

Cross-border cooperation between the Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture in Yunnan province and northern Laos has helped create a solid ecological corridor for habitation by Asian elephants and other wildlife.

The Asian elephant is one of the most important species being protected along the border as it was hunted and killed as part of the illegal ivory trade in the past, posing a serious threat to its survival.

The Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve administration, the Yunnan Green Environment Development Foundation and the agriculture and forestry department of Laos' Phongsaly province launched a pilot project in 2019 to beef up protection efforts for Asian elephants and raise public awareness about the animal.

Xishuangbanna is also the original habitat of a herd of 15 wild Asian elephants whose long trek north has captured global attention since they left the reserve 15 months ago.

Vieng Sack Phommasy, an official from Phongsaly's agriculture and forestry department, said the Yunnan foundation introduced the project to his province because it wanted to enable Lao villagers to participate more in forest resource management, sustainable development and the protection of the Asian elephant and the Greater Mekong region's environment and biodiversity.

The province also aimed to further reduce timber consumption, wild animal poaching and the hurting and killing of wild elephants, as well as their interaction with humans.



Left: Forest ranger Wang Lifan (right) patrols the Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve in Yunnan province with a colleague earlier this month. Right: A mobile app sends an alert of elephant activities in the border areas of China and Laos. PHOTOS BY WANG JING / CHINA DAILY



scarcity, set up streetlights powered by solar energy and distribute wood-saving stoves to reduce their overreliance on natural resources.

In terms of wildlife protection, the Xishuangbanna reserve administration also provided training to villagers, who teamed up with a patrol force to monitor animals and plants in the surrounding mountains.

The project is now in its second phase in another village in Phongsaly. In March, local officials held a sharing session with villagers that provided an overview of the project, stressed the importance of increasing biodiversity conservation — especially related to the Asian elephant — and urged villagers to take care of facilities provided by China.

Zou Hengfang, secretary-general of the Yunnan Green Environment Development Foundation, said the pilot project was launched in Bakar because the village is in one of the

most important biodiversity hot spots in the Greater Mekong region. Asian elephants are quite active in the area, but nearby villages faced severe economic problems, leading to an urgent need to properly balance economic development and ecological conservation.

"The project aimed to improve the proactiveness of local residents so that they will further participate in ecosystem preservation and Asian elephant monitoring, and at the same time it strove to create opportunities for community development by improving basic living conditions," she said.

Phommasy said that since the project began, the destruction of the environment and biodiversity along the border has been decreasing.

"It not only helped reduce damage to the forest ecosystem, but also helped prevent the occurrence of forest fires," he said. "What is more gratifying is that the implementation of the project has significantly improved the biodiversity in the border areas and helped villagers understand relevant laws and regulations."

He said that since the project was implemented in the village, its resi-

dents have been grateful for the assistance China has provided in terms of development and helping them meet their material needs.

"Villagers have shown a strong willingness to strengthen cooperation in the protection of forest resources," he added.

Phommasy said the department will continue to work with China to protect elephants, crack down on illegal activities, carry out joint patrols to prevent forest fires and conduct training on biodiversity conservation.

The project is the latest joint endeavor to protect mutual biodiversity between Xishuangbanna and northern Laotian provinces, with cooperation between the two sides dating back to 2006. At that time, the illegal ivory trade was rampant along the border, said Wang Lifan, former head of the Shangyong reserve bureau in Yunnan.

To curb the situation, the bureau, a subsidiary of the Xishuangbanna administration, held a symposium with Laos' Luang Namtha province on Asian elephant protection that year, during which both sides reached a consensus on protecting biodiversity, marking the start of the joint efforts.

The two sides have since held annual meetings on the subject to share their experiences. In 2009, they outlined the first joint protected area and also signed an agreement listing specific tasks to be completed in the following three years.

In 2012, two more Lao provinces — Oudomxay and Phongsaly — joined the program, forming the green corridor that today extends for 220 kilometers along the border, covering around 200,000 hectares.

In 2017, Xishuangbanna signed a memorandum of cooperation with the three Laotian provinces that upgraded the cross-border joint conservation effort from department level to government level.

Wang said both sides have been very cooperative during joint patrols, a major form of cooperation. They have shared their experi-

ences and knowledge, including how to use infrared cameras to photograph wild animals as well as how to use a geographic information system to analyze data.

Villagers on both sides have a common culture and language, and they have also been very keen to participate in activities in which they can discuss concrete measures their local authorities have taken in terms of wildlife protection, he said.

"The cooperation has helped eliminate poaching and smuggling and has created a safer habitat for Asian elephants," Wang said.

Li Zhongyun, a villager who patrols a piece of the protected area bordering Luang Namtha, said he started the job around 2010 after being recruited by the Shangyong bureau. He said he had occasionally heard gun shots in the wild and once caught someone who was trying to plant cash crops in the forests, but he doesn't know of any such problems now.

Every month, Li spends at least 12 days patrolling the hills, sometimes walking more than 30 km a day. His responsibilities include observing and identifying tracks made by wild animals, monitoring and reporting invasive species, preventing forest fires and supervising human activities within his assigned patch.

He has participated in joint patrols, and before the COVID-19 pandemic, he visited Laotian villages quite frequently and forged close friendships with Lao people.

"The Lao side respects the mutual exchange very much and is fully aware of the importance of protecting flora and fauna," he said. "They're also very interested in Chinese conservation methods and measures."

Living near the border, Li said such cooperation really matters. "The national border is only half an hour's drive away," he said. "If any excessive logging or other illegal acts happen here, it would be a loss for both of us."

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From left: Shenzhen MSU-BIT University graduates take a group photo at their graduation ceremony. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Thousands of drones make up various images during a light show in Shenzhen on June 25, as part of the city's centenary celebrations for the founding of the Communist Party of China. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY UNLEASH, a global innovation lab for achieving the United Nations' sustainable development goals, attracts top talents from various countries to Shenzhen in 2019. LIU XUDONG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Top talent from across China chooses Shenzhen to launch careers

By YUAN SHENGGAO

A Hong Kong resident surnamed Liu, who is a senior student at the University of Birmingham, is doing an internship at Laipic. The animation and video software provider is located on the 36th floor of Shimao Qianhai Center in the southern city of Shenzhen, Guangdong province. The Hong Kong region can be seen from the building.

Shimao Qianhai Center is located in the Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industry Cooperation Zone, which is a commercial development in the city, also known as Qianhai New District.

"I plan to work in Shenzhen after graduation. So I have come to Laipic to do an internship first," Liu was quoted as saying by People's Daily.

"Shenzhen has many emerging industries and plenty of opportunities," he said. "It's a nice place to live and the people around me are all very friendly. The company has a flat organizational structure and offers tons of room for growth. There are also transport subsidies and housing subsidies for interns."

Thirty-three of the company's 120-strong Shenzhen team are Hong Kong residents, according to its website.

"Many young Hong Kong people working in the design industry are very willing to pursue a career in Shenzhen," Wei Bo, founder and CEO of Laipic, told People's Daily.



As one of the pioneers of China's reform and opening-up, Shenzhen, in Guangdong province, has grown into an international metropolis, attracting professionals from around the world to exchange ideas and realize dreams. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"We are looking to recruit more than 100 young people from Hong Kong and Macao through the Qianhai recruitment program this year, and we have received more than 800 resumes in the past three and a half months," Wei said.

The Qianhai recruitment program was launched by the district

authority to attract talent from China's Hong Kong and Macao, as well as foreign countries.

Another Hong Kong resident surnamed Cheung has also chosen to work in Shenzhen. "The slow pace of life here fascinates me. I can go for a walk along the seashore after work and enjoy delicious food in the

ancient town on weekends," she told People's Daily. Cheung works as a public servant in Shenzhen's Dapeng New District.

It's hard to imagine that only about four decades ago, Shenzhen was "a vast expanse of desolate land," recalled Duan Yabing. He was a member of the Infrastructure Con-

struction Division of the People's Liberation Army sent to Shenzhen to support its construction in 1979.

"But based on the central government's policies (for Shenzhen at that time), I believed this place would go somewhere," Duan was quoted as saying by China National Radio.

Shenzhen's development in later years proved Duan right. The city's GDP increased from 270 million yuan (\$41.7 million) in 1980 to nearly 2.77 trillion yuan in 2020, which was next only to Shanghai and Beijing.

Despite the COVID-19 outbreak last year, Shenzhen delivered a 3.1 percent increase in GDP over the previous year.

In February 2019, the Chinese government released a development blueprint for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. Shenzhen was listed as one of the four central cities to drive the development of the Bay Area.

In 2020, the Chinese government issued a plan to implement pilot reforms in Shenzhen to build the city into a demonstration area of socialism with Chinese characteristics over the next five years.

The per capita disposable income of Shenzhen residents has grown at an average annual rate of 7.8 percent over the last five years, reaching 64,900 yuan in 2020.

While achieving economic growth, Shenzhen's energy consumption per unit of GDP is also one of the lowest among large and medium-sized cities in China, Nanfang Daily reported.

"Shenzhen is working to gather more high-end resources, enterprises and talent to accelerate its progression to a higher position along the global value chain and become a powerful engine driving the growth of the Bay Area," said Wang Weizhong, Party secretary of the city.