

SAVE BIODIVERSITY IN MYANMAR



MERGUI ARCHIPELAGO RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Project to support long-term scientific field research on pressing environmental issues, to engage local actors in conservation of biodiversity and to start sustainable development processes with rural communities in island ecosystems of Myanmar.



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OVERVIEW

Burma/Myanmar is one of the least developed countries in the world. Poor rural population is particularly vulnerable to political and environmental shocks and crises as it is shown by the last dramatic catastrophe of Nargis cyclone.

Burma/Myanmar's economy relies largely on its rich natural resources but there is an unsustainable exploitation resulting in severe environmental degradation: unsustainable logging of forests, mining, agricultural and fishing practices are common and lead to soil erosion, land degradation, water and soil pollution, biodiversity loss. According to specialists, the loss of mangrove forests – and the protective cover they offered – probably exacerbated the cyclone's damages. The state maintains a monopoly on key export natural and agricultural commodities on which a significant illegal economy is also based. People whose livelihoods depend most on forest and natural resources find access to them restricted and environment increasingly degraded. Consequently rural communities are strongly affected by the effects of deforestation (floods, droughts and landslides), thus contributing to increasing poverty.



1Map of Myanmar and detail of Lampi Island in Mergui Archipelago

The **project in Mergui Archipelago** is part of a wider action aiming to reduce environmental degradation in Myanmar, especially logging and deforestation, by strengthening the capacity of civil society to engage in programmes focusing on sustainable environmental development and conservation of the most important forest and biodiversity areas.

The action, through a strategy of co-management of the project and transfer of information and experience, aims to strengthen technical, scientific and management capacity of the local NGO BANCA to manage environmental information, and to improve a coordination mechanism to strengthen and support civil society to take a leading role in conservation and development initiatives and to engage in decision making process.

The project aims to become an unique experience of successful conservation in one of most interesting and better preserved environments of South East Asia.

Mergui Archipelago Biodiversity Research Programme

The **Mergui Archipelago**, in southern Myanmar, has remained isolated from the rest of the world for the last 50 years, as a result of the precarious political climate which ultimately restricted access of all foreigners. Today the archipelago is under increasing threat from widespread logging and hunting. As human population increases in its immediate vicinity, the habitats and species of the archipelago will undoubtedly degrade within the next few years.

The **Mergui Archipelago Biodiversity Research Programme (MABR)** was launched in 1997 by ECoSwiss to investigate the biodiversity, environmental health and socio-economic aspects of the archipelago, employing local and foreign researchers in an initial project of 3 years of duration.

Due to the limited financial resources, the project has focused so far on a single site, **Lampi National Park**, one of the last remaining untouched environment of true wilderness left in the Mergui, its habitats are very much intact, and if measures are put into place soon, the representativeness and key attributes of this vast island ecosystem can be conserved at this site.

The project will carry out **scientific research** in the archipelago in order to gather the necessary information about the ecological importance of the archipelago's ecosystem. Parallel it will target the **local communities** and establish a collaboration in order to involve them in the process. Finally we will draft a **Management Plan** which will propose a way to follow in order to reach the sustainability in the Archipelago.



2 Cristal water on outer island



3 Redshanks on crocodile river at Lampi



4 Moken boat building

Scientific Research Programme

RESEARCH CRUISES

Scientific data collection and contacts with local people are possible only by means of the project catamaran. Several scientific field cruises of 10-12 days each on Lampi National Park and surrounding islands will be organised. Scientists from BANCA and OIKOS will participate in the research cruises and collect the baseline data according to the guidelines provided by the scientific coordinator.

INVENTORIES OF SPECIES & HABITATS

The preparation of an ecological baseline inventory will adopt a multi-disciplinary approach, incorporating ecological, social and economic aspects of the park and its resources. It will use relevant experts from Myanmar and elsewhere where required. The three main components of this baseline are:

- *Ecological* – identify and map out the ecology of Lampi terrestrial and marine ecosystems.
- *Social* – conduct demographic analyses on the population living in the Park and surrounding areas (numbers, ethnic groups, etc.) and on natural resources utilisation by local people.
- *Economic* – conduct analyses and document the park's current economic value and asset.

The baseline inventory will include:

- a description and first mapping of the park's ecosystems and habitats;
- an inventory (checklist) of the flora and fauna (terrestrial & marine) of the park;
- baseline information about the ecology, distribution and space use of some key species, such as (but not limited to): Hornbill species, including those that use the park at some period over their biological cycle, lying fox colony, Elephants, Sea turtles, Wild cats;
- specific recommendations for the conservation of key values of the park, such as endangered species and habitats.

These information will be gathered through primary data collection, review of the existing bibliography and interviews with the resident population.



5 Beach flower



6 Beach thick knee

Support to Local Communities

Project partners believe that involving local people in conservation and development process, empowering them with appropriate skills, knowledge and technical and financial assistance, is going to be a successful tool to reach sustainability in the archipelago. Therefore the project aims at strengthening the civil society actors involved in conservation and improving the living conditions of the local population, with particular attention to the Moken indigenous people.

CAPACITY BUILDING OF BANCA

The project will provide in-service training of Myanmar ecologists of BANCA on administration and financial management, proposal development, project implementation, data collection and management, communication and strategic planning through co-management of the project for all the technical, administrative, financial and logistic aspects, and specific seminars and conferences to facilitate exchange and transfer of information and knowledge on priorities issue.

Boat expeditions will offer training opportunities to Myanmar scientists in the use of technologies such as GPS use and data analyses.

MOKEN – SEA GYPSIES

Mergui Archipelago is traditionally populated by about 3.000 Moken, an indigenous population that used to move on dugout house-boats feeding with forest and sea products.

Rapid population increase, due to immigrants from mainland, is causing widespread logging, hunting, land clearing, dynamite fishing, etc. These activities create temporary jobs but are unable to develop a sustainable economic system. It is therefore of utmost importance to assess the status of resource use and to formulate effective and alternative site-based solutions.



7 Life on board the Sea Nomad



8 Burnt casuarina trees in Lampi



9 Moken couple fishing

Advocacy to Local Institutions



10 Bada mangrove forest

Due to the political climate of the country and the chronic lack of funds, efforts for biodiversity conservation in Myanmar have been lower than in anywhere else in South East Asia.

In 1993 the Ministry of Forestry has established 4 new protected areas including the Lampi Island proposed National Park. The remoteness of the park and the largely unknown nature of the archipelago is the reason why it has not received the attention it deserves to date. This has already changed with this project, having generated awareness of the park's (and the archipelago's) value within some sectors of the government. This success of the project is encouraging, and highlights the urgent need to focus on documenting and presenting the park's conservation values and needs to the government urgently.

In order to make the collaboration official within Myanmar and to get project acknowledgement at Ministry level, a cooperative agreement between Oikos, ECoSwiss and BANCA has been jointly developed in Yangon and signed.

On one hand, project actors will promote **baseline data information** collection to gather scientific information on the biodiversity and socio-economic aspect of the Mergui Archipelago. On the other hand, the project will support the organization of **workshops** for the development of guidelines and strategies for the sustainable development of Mergui Archipelago.

The final goal is to draft a **Management Plan** for the conservation and Sustainable Development of the archipelago with the involvement of the local communities to be submitted to local authorities

This is a very challenging task and a rare opportunity if we think that we can intervene before Myanmar opens up the archipelago to **mass-tourism** development with all possible devastating impacts on the ecosystem and local community that this implies. A management plan will be an important tool in ensuring that tourism is planned in an appropriate and sustainable fashion, thereby achieving both habitat conservation and economically sustainable use of its resource for tourism.

Project Management

PROJECT TEAM

The MABR Programme is a partnership between three organisations EcoSwiss (Switzerland), Istituto Oikos (Italy) and Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association (BANCA) (Myanmar).

ECoSwiss is present in the area since 1997. It operates from a base in nearby Thailand, and organizes research cruises in the Mergui Archipelago with its own Sea Nomad catamaran.

Istituto Oikos is an Italian NGO with experience in managing more than 100 projects in conservation and sustainable development sector in Italy, Africa, Asia and Latin America..

BANCA is the only independent environmental NGO in Myanmar, composed by scientists and university professors. Banca works in close collaboration with the Myanmar Ministry of Forestry.

Istituto Oikos and Banca are now managing an EU funded project for the strengthening of environmental NGOs in Myanmar

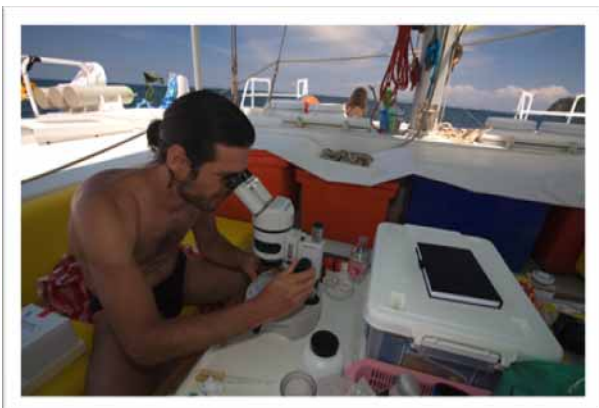
LOGISTICS

The **project office** has been set up in Kuraburi (Thailand), staffed with a Project Manager.

Kuraburi is considered an ideal location because it is provided with communication facilities (phone, internet, etc.), not available at present in Myanmar and it is close to the Myanmar border (1 hour drive or seven hours by sailing boat), to the airports of Ranong and Phuket. Furthermore it is an area surrounded by several Thai National Park and is therefore the base for IUCN and other NGOs and Institutions working with local communities in the field of biodiversity conservation and community development in similar coastal environments in the Thailand side. Therefore synergies and collaborations between this project and other projects can be searched.

The **project research catamaran** is anchored in Myanmar, right inside the Mergui research area.

The catamaran can accommodate around 10-11 people and offers the unique and invaluable opportunity to develop field research in a remote area, otherwise impossible to reach in terms of permits, accessibility and logistics.



Scientist on board

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Sea Nomad research catamaran

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How you can contribute

ECO-VOLUNTEERS

If you are passionate with nature, marine environments and sailing, you have the opportunity to participate in our research cruises aiming to understand pressing environmental issues and take action to create a sustainable environment. Various scientists, including botanists, marine biologists, ornithologists, entomologists, anthropologists or historian, take part in our expeditions. Eco-volunteers join our scientists as research assistants and share the costs of the project. Although volunteers don't necessarily need any experience in the field of ecology, their observations are a valuable contribution to the inventory of the archipelago and they bring different skills and knowledge to the project.

This model provides essential funding for long-term research and a workforce of committed volunteers. On request we organize charter research cruises for small groups of friends (max. 6 people).

DONATIONS

If you are a **private person**, you can contribute to our project with donations of money or equipment. We are always in need of funds to pay local scientists involved in the research and of technical equipment (such as GPS, binoculars, pc and accessories, canoe, boat and diving equipment etc.).

Your financial contribution is crucial to help us manage our research programme. We will inform you on how your money is spent for and send you the annual report with project results.

SPONSORSHIPS

If you are a **company or institution**, you can support the whole project or decide to fund specific researches (birds, reef, etc.) or humanitarian help to local Moken communities in form of food, health and education services. Please contact us and we will be happy to provide you with detailed information.

ECOSWISS Europe Conservation

Postal Account No. 69-1609-0
IBAN CH30 0900 0000 6900 1609 0
BIC POFICHBEXXX



13 Moken boats

Istituto Oikos, Onlus

Bank account c/c n° 6906/78
IBAN IT80R0569601602000006906X78
* In Italy all donations are tax deductible



14 Scientist studying mangroves

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