

Plan for the Conservation of Nature in Vietnam¹

by

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SUMMARY

Vietnam with its variety of climate, and topography offers great opportunities for the systematist and the ecologist. A list of proposed national parks and reserves in both low and high altitudes is given. The author makes a plea for regional co-operation in establishing parks in order to obtain maximum efficiency.

INTRODUCTION

Owing to its location at the crossroads of several regions and to the variety of its climate and topography, Vietnam offers numerous possibilities to scientists in the study of ecology, flora, and fauna. Consequently, the conservation of nature in this country is of great interest both to the systematist and the ecologist.

Since 1958, thanks to the efforts of IUCN, the public authorities have been interested in and concerned with the safeguarding of natural resources. The study of the principal sites to be protected was undertaken at the request of the government, thanks to the assistance of Dr. Ruhle, National Park Service of the U.S.A., in 1961. The National Conservation Committee was founded in 1965, consisting of representatives from the Ministries of Education, Agriculture, and Public Works. The National Park at Trang-bom, created in 1958, will be put on a continuing basis; the national parks of Bach-Mã and Hai-Van are awaiting ratification.

It is with this encouraging prospect that we propose today the following suggestions.

CONSERVATION OF ANIMALS THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION

The existing laws are ineffective in protecting some rare animals (rhinoceros, tapir, kouprey and gaur, etc.), and we should also draw attention to the necessity of protecting some habitats used by migratory birds. Among the interesting sites some, such as Iles Paracels, Iles des Pecheurs, and Iles des Deux-Frères, could be easily converted into reserves. Among other sites, those which are in mangrove forests deserve special attention. In fact, exploitation and management of mangrove forests will bring as yet little known but certainly harmful changes to bird life. Therefore, an urgent need is a study of migratory birds, in their habitat, their egg-laying site at present, etc. Vietnam lacks ornithologists. Help from the IUCN would be very useful particularly as the latter might co-ordinate research in several countries at once.

THE CONSERVATION OF FLORA

The ground flora is relatively better known than the fauna although some regions are better explored than others. The preservation of the former, of course, goes together with that of the ecological sites. Protection is absolutely necessary for these areas which serve as type localities for many endemic species, comprising ten to twenty per cent out of a total of about 7,000 species. The regions of Bach-Mã, Vong-Phu, Hòn-Bà, Dalat, and Châu-dộc can be mentioned.

¹ Original in French.

The conservation of two important ecological factors, namely climate and water, should be a concern of primary importance, not only for the technically advanced countries, but also for developing ones. In effect, for many countries in the latter category, the ratio of forests to the cultivated areas is already close to the optimum, beneath which there is a great risk of harmful and hardly remediable change of climate. In Vietnam as in most countries of South East Asia prevention of over-exploitation of forests, fire fighting and plans for the decrease of shifting cultivation are insufficient. The alteration of the climate is sometimes perceptible in one generation.

In this connection, we wish to point out that the project for the installation of an oil refinery at Nhatrang is not advisable; the residues of this industry would surely change, not only the hygienic conditions of the best seaside resort in Vietnam, but also the ecological conditions for marine fauna and flora, which are amongst the best known of the China Sea.

PROTECTED SITES

In connection with the sites to be protected, we propose the following:

Regions of Low Altitudes

The regions of low altitudes are those that are adjacent to the populated areas. They are the most threatened and moreover, difficult to protect.

The Con-Son Island (Poulo-Condor) located at the mouth of the Mekong River has a rich vegetation, unspoiled and relatively well explored. Its flora is interesting because it represents the most southern flora conserved in Vietnam.

The Châu-dốc mountains, among which is the Nui-Cam (716 meters), are also interesting. Besides a few endemic and rare species found there, its vegetation gives an idea of the original vegetation of the country. We hope that the Nui-Cam, which is at the moment a forest reserve, could be usefully made into a completely protected reserve.

The Col de Blao and the Cap Varella are already on the list of reserves to be created in the 1961 project submitted to the government. The Col de Blao, uninteresting from the economic point of view, contains a fauna and flora ranging from the plain level to the sub-montane level (1,000 meters). The Cap Varella represents one of the rare localities where the tropical forest descends to the sea level.

Regions of High Altitude

Besides the region of Bach-Mâ-Hai-Van, already studied and protected and the Langbian region, which is mentioned in the aforesaid project of the Ministry of Agriculture, we wish to draw attention to two other regions:

The Region of Hôn-Bà, south of Nhatrang, reaching its highest point at 366 meters, the flora of which has been well studied.

The Chu-Yan-Sin, the highest point in Vietnam (2,405 meters), economically is not very interesting but biologically important.

In short the system of reserves and national parks, which we are going to present to our national committee, has been selected so as to obtain a variety from the ecological point of view and to protect the interesting fauna and flora.

THE NEED FOR REGIONAL CO-OPERATION

To be realistic, one must accept the fact that the creation of numerous parks and reserves necessary for the conservation of the flora, fauna and ecological heritage will be difficult in South East Asia for quite a long time.

Therefore, it would be desirable to co-ordinate the efforts of the various states in order to obtain maximum efficiency.

For the very close neighbouring countries where the biotypes are very similar (like the geographical Indochina) it would be useless to create reserves which are ecologically similar, but there is urgent need to establish together a system of diversified

reserves. Therefore, it would be desirable that people responsible for the conservation program of a country are knowledgeable about reserves and parks of neighboring countries in order to create in their own country a complementary system. Later on, when circumstances will allow, every country will, of course, be able to have its own complete system of biological reserves.