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Building up of keeping facilities and breeding projects for frogs, newts and lizards at the Me Linh Station for Biodiversity in northern Vietnam, including improvement of housing conditions for confiscated reptiles and primates



Aufbau von Haltungsanlagen und Nachzuchtprojekten für Frösche, Molche und Echsen in der Me Linh Biodiversitätsstation in Nordvietnam, einschließlich Haltungsverbesserungen für beschlagnahmte Reptilien und Primaten

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Abstract

The Me Linh Station for Biodiversity in northern Vietnam, which borders Tam Dao National Park, was established in 1999 by the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology for the purpose of rescuing, keeping, studying and breeding Vietnamese plant and wildlife species in an in-country ex situ facility. The Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources, which runs the station, has pleased the Cologne Zoo to improve existing facilities at the Me Linh Station and to develop new ones, in

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particular for amphibians and reptiles, for the keeping and breeding of confiscated, endangered and selected rare or poorly known species from Vietnam for studying husbandry parameters and natural history, to build up captive assurance populations for potential future release or restocking programs, and to improve services for environmental and conservation education for visitors, school children and students. This report summarizes our joint efforts at the Me Linh Station for Biodiversity from 2012 until today. Focus is laid on the construction of indoor and outdoor amphibian facilities, but we also report about the development and buildup of crocodile lizard, monitor lizard, python and turtle enclosures, as well as of primate facilities. We also built up offspring enclosures for amphibians and reptiles, a feeder animal breeding, and created a quarantine section. Preliminary recommendations for a veterinary management are provided. Furthermore we document our joint approaches in improving the station management, developing research programmes, and report about first public awareness measures. With this article we also aim to show how facilities, breeding programs and husbandry systems can be improved and built up in a tropical country within the framework of an international cooperation.

Keywords: Rescue; Husbandry; Natural history research; Zoo biology; Station management

Introduction

The Me Linh Station for Biodiversity was established in August 1999 by the Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology (VAST). The station (coordinates: 21°23'19" to 21°24'02"N, and 105°42'45" to 105°42'50"E) is about 50 km distant from Hanoi and is located nearby Dai Lai tourist site in Ngoc Thanh Commune, Phuc Yen District, Vinh Phuc Province, in northern Vietnam. It borders Tam Dao National Park in the West and is considered as a green buffer zone of the National Park. The Me Linh Station also contributes to watershed forest protection for Dai Lai Lake and Ngoc Thanh Commune. The total area of the station stretches from 100 to 500 m above sea level and comprises 170.3 ha, consisting of 69 ha of secondary forest, 30 ha of plantation forest, 68.3 ha of grassland, rocky streams and ponds, and 3 ha of administration area. The main focus of the Me Linh Station that is run by the Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources (IEBR), Hanoi, which also is the land owner, is to keep, study and breed Vietnamese plant and wildlife species in an in-country ex situ facility. Since 2000, several research and conservation programs have been implemented in this station, such as assessment of the fauna and flora of the area, forest protection, rehabilitation, reforestation, and forest fire control as well as building of rescue facilities for confiscated turtles and mammals. But facing research, conservation, and ex situ projects, the efforts at the station were limited due to the lack of investment and technical support for dealing with wildlife species in captivity and providing appropriate husbandry conditions. However, knowledge of the species' ecological requirements is crucial for proper conservation measures both in the wild and with respect to (conservation) breeding efforts. Vietnam's biodiversity and the natural history of many species is still sparsely understood and many populations, if not whole species, are facing extinction as a result of habitat loss and over-collecting for food consumption, trade and traditional medicine use (Nguyen, Dang, Pham, Nguyen & Ziegler, 2009; Nguyen & Ziegler, 2012). In particular in times of the global amphibian decline, e.g., caused by the hazardous amphibian chytrid fungi (Martel et al., 2013), the building up of rescue and breeding programs can play

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