

Wildlife Sanctuaries of Thautu and Ciriangtu

Location

Both sanctuaries situated in Thantlang Township in the western part of Chin State, Myanmar, near the adjacent to the border of India and Myanmar. Both are located near Thau village, the largest village in the surrounding areas. Both Thautu and Ciriangtu are about 12 miles from the border of India and Burma. Ciriangtu is south of the famous pass "Ruanfiangkuar" (Ruafiang pass) on the famous Saisihchuak Road, which is border's trade road between Myanmar and India.

Thautu Wildlife Sanctuary is situated in the border area of *Ruakhua* village and *Thau* village. The larger part is in *Ruakhua's* area. *Thautu* is connected with *Thautlang* (Thau-mountain) which is one of the highest peaks in the Chin State. It is about 7,100 feet above sea level (EST). Thautu is between *Thautlang* and *Hmanleknakbo*. The name "hmanleknakbo" became a name for a very beautiful and small peak near *Thatu* where the British army gave a military signal by using the light of a mirror to the British armies who lived in the Headquarter at Hakha camp.

Ciriangtu is situated in the bordering area of Thau, *Hriangkhan*, *Tikir* and *Sialam* villages. It is larger than Thautu. It is surrounded by high canyon in the north and south side. The eastern and western parts are very steep too.

The best time to visit the sanctuaries is from November to May. June to October is very wet. Jeep or motor cycles are available from Thantlang to Thau. Thatu is about 3 miles and Ciriangtu is about 3.5 miles away from Thau village. Motor cycles are available from Thau too.

Purposes

The purpose of creating these sanctuaries are: - to protect the wildlife especially the endanger species; to protect the forest by forbidding unregulated logging and slash-and-burn cultivation which cause deforestation; to forbid cutting trees for orchard (which is sold to China for medicines); to extend the areas of the wildlife areas. The wildlife, in the forests (*tu*), are in need of help unless they will be disappeared from the world in the near future.

Administration

These two sanctuaries are created and administered by the local people voluntarily. There is no a single professional wildlife expert in these areas. The Chin State government has not officially recognized those sanctuaries yet. The only organization that supports the creation of the new sanctuaries is the nonprofit organization the so-called the Chin Relief and Development Program (CRDP), which was founded on July 5, 2004 for rural development in the Chin State. CRDP has no fund to help the new sanctuaries but it will soon able to help the local people some finances. The author discussed with the secretary of CRDP about the need of creating the wildlife sanctuaries while he was visiting USA

in this year and he explained that CRDP also reserves these areas for wildlife sanctuaries and help some funds in the future.

There is no rule and regulation for the new sanctuaries yet. Therefore, the district legislators need to raise this issue to the Chin State government in order to establish permanent wildlife sanctuaries in these areas. It might not be successful without the direct support and involvement of the Chin State government because the wildlife sanctuary requires a lot of resources such as funds for the workers; systematical method of how to take care the wildlife; knowledge about forest, climate change and wildlife's population; it needs experts in wildlife and education how to maintain a healthy, prosper and save sanctuaries.

New Ideas for Sanctuaries

The second missionary to the Chin Hills wrote in 1910 that "It (Thau's area) is a beautiful country and woods on the south side of Thau mountains are full of Imperial Pigeons. They are very large and good to eat. They seem to be unafraid of man. I fear we violated their confidence, as I had several good meals from their numbers."¹ Here "Thau mountains" mean "Thau Tlang," which is connected with Thautu. "South sides of Thau mountains" is the forest of "Thau-tu." ("Thau" is a name of the village; "tu" is a forest. Thau-tu means the forest of Thau).

There are plenty of wildlife including birds and reptiles in Thautu and Ciriangtu. Today many species are reduced in number or extinct. The author, while working as the pastor of Thau Baptist Church, promoted the idea of the need of creating the wildlife sanctuary at Thautu, Ciriangtu and Tlangliam (Thau's area) in 1996-97, in order to protect wildlife and forest to pave the way for ecotourism in the future. The author wrote an article in 2003 in "Thau Diamond Jubilee Magazine" about the urgency of having the sanctuaries in those three places.² But it was never implemented.

Today Ruakhua villagers preserve all the forests and wildlife in Thautu. They must be credited for creating the wildlife. It is a history. They asked the surrounding villages such as Thau, Hmunlipi and Ruabuk villages to cooperate with them. Logging, hunting and cultivating are totally forbidden. This is a big step and milestone for the Chin people since there is no a single wildlife sanctuary in northern Chin State. The hope is that the Chin State will recognize it someday.

It is sad to say that there is only one wildlife reserve, Nat Ma Taung (Mt. Victoria) Wildlife Sanctuary, in the whole Chin State. It is connected with Mt. Victoria (10,018 ft above sea level), which is the highest peak in the Chin State. Recently The Hakha Post mentioned an article about creating a new sanctuary in "Zinghmuh Tlang" (8414 ft above sea level), near Hakha, the capital of the Chin State. It is about 7,000 acres big. The preliminary study is conducted by four government officers: U Ye Htun and U Kyi Soe Win from Nay Pyi Dawt (Capital of Myanmar); U Myint Hlaing (Kanpalet where Nat Ma Taung wildlife sanctuary is) and U Win Aung (Hakha, capital of the Chin State).³ This is good news for the animals and for the Chin people and their mother land.

Climate

Thautu is about 6700 feet (EST) above sea level. Ciriangtu is probably about 6700 feet (EST) above sea level. There is no official record about their elevation. The climate is temperate. The winter is from November to February and it is very cool. The water used to freeze during the winter time. Summer is from March to May and the weather is pleasant in that time. The mountain and forest is covered by "meithang" (a kind of smokes during the summer time because of wild fired etc.,) and the whole mountain and forest is so beautiful.

Monsoon season begins normally in the beginning of June and ends in September. Thautu and Ciriangtu are covered by the cloud during the rainy season. Both forests get rains almost every day because of cool climate and higher altitude. The ground is very wet. No one measure the rainfall but it would be pretty high. "Ruafiang" (the northern side of the Ciriangtu) get a lot of rain during the monsoon because of the condition of the land. Ruafiang is probably one of the wettest places in the entire Chin state. September and October are kind of fall season and the best season in these forests. The hunters normally go to hunting there in this season because some trees have fruits in this time for the wild animals especially for bear and wild boar. And groups of wild boars used to come to graze in these forests a lot in this season.

Flora of Thatu and Ciriangtu

Variety of plants and trees are found. No research is done yet in the areas how many kinds of trees and plants are grown and how many kinds of wildlife are found. The local people preserve much of its environment and ecosystem until today in Thautu and Ciriangtu. Ciriangtu is especially almost untouched because it is far from the villages and the path to the forest is very steep and difficult to carry things. So Ciriangtu forest is entirely virgin. One village was established on the top of the mountain a century ago but was deserted soon because of the cold weather that made sick people a lot.

People of Thau and Ruakhua produced timbers from Thautu. Slash-and-burn cultivation for corn, heavy and unregulated logging around 1977s seriously reduced forest areas and wildlife habitats in Thautu and Thau Tlang areas. In Thautu, many big trees have been cut down. There are some concerns for deforestation and endangering the species in the areas. There are many kinds of valuable orchids in the forests. Some orchids are taken, dried and sold to China. It was very profitable since 20 years ago. Many big trees had been cut down to take the orchids for business. This kind of unregulated and temporal business destroyed a lot of trees that contributed to deforestation around the sanctuaries.

Two decades ago, most of the streams, small forest (*hmawng*) and every spring were mostly covered by the so-called "hnahcang" (wild banana) and "tialbop" (both are eatable for curry) but today those plants are almost disappeared because people took them for foods for human being and for pig.

In the forests there are popular trees such as "**mual, hnahsau and hriangcher**" which are good for building. The color of "**mual and hnahsau**" trees are like teak, a popular trees in Myanmar. In the highland areas of Thau Tlang and Ciriang Tlang, there are white and red rhododendrons. There are some pine trees but most of them are already cut down and almost extinct. Some popular trees such as "mum, khiang, and mautang" are also grown. One tree, called "khiang-zo", is very poisonous for fish. If people put enough amount of "khiangzo's bark" in the stream or river that can killed all living things inside the water except crab for miles down the stream. It is now forbidden using that

Three kinds of bamboo family such as "rua-ngal, pharh and thek-the" cover many areas of the forest. These bamboos are widely used for construction of houses and huts. "Rua-ngal" is very useful for many household wares such as "**beng, khaw**, baskets and to tie things together." The leaf of "tum, thingthek, thung" are useful for the roof of the hut. These plants are similar to palm tree. There are many chengcher (wild cherry) trees in both forests. It is very pretty while they are blossom around November and December. This flower is a symbol of Christmas for the local people.

There are some wild fruits such as "**kethei, tanthei, dingzun, thur-tung and kumkual**" trees are also grown. Those fruits are mixed taste with sweet and sour and are very delicious. Vine fruits such as "**sarzuk, tarpa-titut, thur-thling**, many kinds of khuahmung (wild berry) are also grown. Hnahcang (wild bananas) and "tialbawp" are also grown in many areas which are good source for local curry. "**Thi-thet and hriphi**" vines are also grown here; they are very strong and useful for many things in the house or to construct vine bridges on the stream. The fruits are also delicious and good source of vitamin.

One of the most interesting things is that most of these trees and vines no longer produce good and healthy fruits as usual. No one is sure why? Perhaps it is due to global warming and changes of the local weather. Since around 1980, the growth rate of the bird dramatically went down in these forests. It is perhaps related with their diet. Fruit is the main food and nutrition for most birds in the forests. The birds have no abundant food (fruits) today as in the past because many trees do not produce fruits any more. More researches need to done about this issue that whether the grown rate of bird and animals are related with the food (fruits) and whether the fruit is related with global warming and changes of the local weather.

Fauna of Thatu and Ciriangtu

The land and forest is naturally good place for all kinds of wildlife in those two forests. All kinds of wildlife can be found and some are almost extinct. Some may be already extinct because no one saw them in a decade. All wildlife in these areas can be divided into four categories: carnivorous, herbivorous, omnivorous, reptiles and birds.

Carnivorous animals are tiger, leopard, **keite** (little tiger), **keivang**, **cinghngia**, **ashram**, **tlumpi**, **sahngar**, **sahal**, **sachia**, **saihrem**, **tihuat**, **hrangngawn**, **pangau** and **tangkau**. Most of them are very rare now. Formerly tiger were widespread in these areas but now reduced in number or extinct in these areas. Some big tigers came around the village many times and killed some cows in the late 1980's but they were lately seen. Killing tiger is very difficult. So far the author has seen only one tiger which was killed by the Thau villagers in 1991 around. Today the tiger population is almost distinct.

Herbivorous animals are *deer*, *sazuk* (female deer), *saza*, *sakhi* (musk deer) and *sathar* (mountain goat) are inhabited around the forests and the rocky mountains. A few years ago a male *fung* (wild bison) was shot near Ciriang Mountain. It is sad story and is a great loss and tragedy for the Chin people. No one is sure whether there are other female *fung* or other *fung* in that area today.

There are four kinds of monkey (*zawng*, *dawr*, *ngau*, *huho*) etc; omnivorous animals are *bear* and *wild boar*. Other wild animals such as *vawrvok* (a kind of boar that lives in a hole), *saphu* (a kind of *vawrvawk* too), *sakuh*, *sahniar* and *satang* are both omnivorous and insectivorous. Some reptiles are a group of rat families such as *leihang*, *thiahlei*, *cepa*, *zubui*, *zucu* (*copi* and *cote*), *cang-on* and *cangpin*. They are hibernating animals. There are ten kinds of snakes such as *lim* (*python*), *buvel*, *ruachawk* (*cobra*), *rulthiamtleng*, *vanzik*, *ruaha*, *hngawngsen*, *rulchia*, *pinger*" and other small snakes. *Vanzik* is a flying snake. It can fly many feet away from one tree to another.

There are over 100 kinds of known birds in Thautu and Ciriangtu. There might be unknown kinds of birds because of lack of doing research, documentation and lack of data. The following birds are recently found and well known but some are almost extinct.

There are large birds such as *vapual* (*hornbill*), *vanvuk*, *vakok*, *vanga*, *varit*, *artau* and *vavu* in the area. Hornbill is used as a national symbol for the Chin people. People mistakenly called it *vakok* but actually it is a hornbill. *Vanga* is one of the most beautiful birds in the Chin State but is rarely seen today. *Varit*, *artau* and *vaking* are the most delicious birds. In the spring and the fall, team of *vanvuk* used to fly back and forth between Thautu Tlang and Ciriang Tlang. The form of their flight was so beautiful formation.

There are smaller birds as follows: *chungkhurlut*, *fiakfairok*, *koktuk*, *tlenglur* (*cilio*), *tuklo*, *tlengleng*, *laichidit*, *vangi*, *thuro*, *thumum*, (*mumpi*, *mumlai* and *mumte*), *vahui*, *vauk*, *vasir*, *ciaplap*, *vakaithar*, *tikanuainuk* (*nawknawi*), *vangal-arpi*, *vangal-arte*, *thlar-hmuarngo*, *kuailokik*, *vangal-ngalreng*, *vangal-ngalchuan*, *vadumdil*, *thlazil*, *vazun*, *vanzuang*, *vanva*, *phehle*, *caleu*, *vacek*, *uihlaihli*, *chuanchawm*, *vamai*, *cinrang*, *mangva*, *ti-ar*, *theihlang*, *cereuh*, *lo-eng*, *thlamhngak*, *chiduh*, *zirziak*, *cakei-hrik-sum*, *buangro*, *rite*, *ritpi*, *tektek*, *thlaiberh*, *vaterun*, *vathiahhle*, *lambawk*, *pithlung*, *pasim*, *tuva*, *variakthla*, *thlawnthlawk*, *tawktawk*, *phaitawk*, *bawngte*, *bawngpi*, *laileng*, *varang*, *vaca*, *zikpi*, *ziklai*, *zikte*, *kawlva*, *tuzik* (*zikpi*, *ziklai*, *zikte*), *aitobawh*, *cerdawp*, *vasawp*, *tete-ut*, *riaklangva*, and *papalak* so on and so forth (Birds names are only written in the local names. The same bird may have other names in other parts of the Chin State).

Carnivorous birds like *mupi* (*hawk*), *mulai*, *mute*, *kaite*, *langak*, *thlanthla*, *nganchem* and *chinbu*. There are three kinds of "chinbu" (owls) such as *bupi*, *bulai* and *bute*. Some vultures arrived in the areas around 1979 but were not seen any more. Some birds like *thing-bumcu* (*cupi*, *culai*, *cute*) and *vachuangtur* are mostly insect eaters. Some birds like *pea*, *vaking*, *artau*, *valah*, *mimte*, *vangal* (*ngalpi*, *ngallai*, *ngalte*) and many small birds are mostly ground birds. All these birds were very plenty in the past in Thautu and Ciriangtu but most of them are very rare now. Some are almost extinct.

Some birds are believed to be birds of ill-omen such as *bawngpi* and *bawngte*. The local people believe that these birds are ominous and the Chin people avoid killing them. If *bawngpi* cries a lot

around the village, the people interpret it as a sign of bad thing that is going to happen in the village such as accidental death or a violent death so on and so forth.

Moreover, there are about 12 to 15 kinds of butterflies; around 15 to 20 kinds of beetles; there are many uncountable kinds of insects; some three kinds of lizards; many kinds of spiders. There are many flying insects at night but only a few have been known.

Ecotourism for the Chin State

These two forests are similar in color and appearance. They both are in the same altitude and weather. The trees and plants are the same kind. These two forests are very charming and fascinating. The trees are tall, dark and large. The shades are so dark. Even the summer sunlight cannot penetrate the ground. Winter time is terribly cool. Even in summer time, it is pretty cold inside the forest. Three decades ago, many areas the summer sunlight can't be seen from the ground because of the thick branches and leaves. The forests are like tropical rain forests in Amazon and Congo rivers. But deforestation is in alarming rate due to slash-and-burn and unregulated logging etc.

These two forests are connected with Thautlang (7007 above sea level est) and Ciriangtlang (around 7000 ft above sea level est), which are famous mountains since the past. Those two mountains are very popular because of their beauty and high altitude. There are about seven waterfalls in Ciriang Mountain in Thau Village's side. The Chin animist before Christianity believed that the spirits in these two mountains are so powerful and they worship and sacrificed for every year with "sia and vok" for protection from all dangers including fire, storm and famine and for blessings for their fields. Both mountains have many high steep rocks which will be very attractive for the tourists for rock climbing and propelling. No one has done that kind of risk game in those mountains yet.

Today there is no professional expert who would take care of the forests. There is no fund to maintain them and to protect the wildlife. Everything is volunteer work. The hope is that some ecotourists will visit these two forests in the near future since Burma is opening up its political system and economy. This ecotourism will help to protect not only the animals but also their environments. But government needs to set up a strict rule for ecotourists in order to protect the wildlife and their environment as much as possible. Some days, these two sanctuaries may become the destinations for ecotourism in the Chin State. And the sanctuary will make some funds to protect the forests and its wildlife. Unless the forests and the wildlife may disappear in the near future and that will be a great loss not only for the local people but also for the world.

Things Need To Be Done

The following important things must be done as soon as possible for the two sanctuaries: (1) the Chin government needs to investigate and study these two sanctuaries and recognize them officially and make funding; (2) the local people need to refrain killing all living things inside and around the sanctuaries; (3) unregulated slash-and-burn system of cultivation needs to be totally forbidden; (4) unregulated logging and cutting trees must be forbidden; (5) burning *phawng* (the grassland) near the sanctuaries for hunting, must be forbidden; (6) trees must be restored to protect deforestation around

the forests; (7) the forests must be extended for by planting new trees or protecting the natural trees around the forests; (8) to promote ecotourism in these two sanctuaries so on and so forth.

In order to accomplish this task, the Chin State government needs to involve and help the local people to protect the wildlife and their environment. They also need to promote and regulate the ecotourism not only in these areas but also in other parts of the Chin State so that they can make some profits for the government itself to maintain the forests. Unless we will lose both the wildlife and the forests in the near future and it will be a mistake and great loss not only for the Chin people but also for the world.

¹ C. Thang Za Tuan, *Burma Manuscript*, (Yangon: CLC, 1996), p.217

² Sang Awr, *Thau Baptist Krihfabu Diamond Jubilee* (February, 2003), page 79-80.

³ *The Hakha Post* Vol. I, No. 53 (October 31, 2012).