From Hunters to Guardians: A Story of Hornbill Conservation Community from Southern Thailand
Dr. Anak PATTANAVIBOOL
(Thailand Country Program Director, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Thailand Program)

Pilai Poonswad¹, Anak Pattanavibool², Preeda Thiensongrusame¹, Siriwan Nakkuntod¹, Sukanya Chaisuriyanun¹, and Porntip Poolswat¹

¹Faculty of Science, Mahidol University, Bangkok 10400, Thailand
²Wildlife Conservation Society Thailand Program, 55/295 Muangthong Thani, Project 5, Chaengwattana Road, Pakkred, Nonthaburi, 11120, Thailand

Hornbills are among the largest and most obvious elements of Asian tropical forests, and this makes them an ideal flagship species. Budo Mountain, a small ever-green forest remnant of about 190 km², still supports six hornbill species. They ultimately depend on large trees for cavity. Before 1994, Budo experienced heavy poaching of hornbill chicks for the pet trade. After intensive campaign to change local people from poachers to nest guardians since 1994 there are currently about 40 villagers (former poachers/illegal loggers) from 13 villages around Budo Mountain participating in the research and conservation programs. The nest adoption programs have been a major income to members of the conservation campaign and their families. Sources of adoption come from Thai (42%) and foreign countries (58%) who have given financial support to the project. Up until 2009 152 hornbill nests have been adopted. The guarding of the nests has been done by 5 teams.

Since 1994 there are 500 hornbills fledged from the guarded nest. Besides nest guarding and data collection contributed by project members the hornbill project has provided other activities to keep the members occupied year round. Such activities include nest repair and improvement, artificial nest installation, and botanical inventory and phenology, and habitat restoration. Furthermore, the hornbill project has set up a hornbill conservation and education center in Budo. This center has involved local people and local students in hornbill ecology and biology and Budo conservation as a whole. Hornbill mobile unit also plays an important role in disseminating hornbill conservation messages for the schools around Budo. The survey has found that 90% of students are inspired to protect hornbills as a pride of Budo. In summary, this program has shown a significant success of a community program by using such an iconic species as hornbills with a long-term and strategic support from urban and international communities.