

Submissions to the *Natural History Bulletin* have been increasing recently, and the current volume is one of the largest ever printed. Most articles report on records and descriptions of new species and general surveys of fauna and flora, appropriate for a country whose biodiversity is as diverse, and as little known, as Thailand's.

Readers will note that a large number of articles of the current volume deal with the biota and environments of the Mekong River and adjacent areas. Environmental issues such as forest conservation along the banks, hunting, cross-border wildlife trade, migratory fish populations, riverine dolphins, dams and pollution have been discussed. This emphasis on the Mekong River basin has been inadvertant, but in some respects timely. With the opening of the borders, biologists have become increasingly interested in Laos and Cambodia. The still-rich biota of these countries will become increasingly threatened in their haste to become "developed". Long term conservation goals need to become incorporated into development plans, and the governments of Lao PDR and Cambodia are making some moves in that direction.

The Mekong River, more than 4000 kilometers long and flowing through seven countries on its way to the sea, is the single-most dominant feature of the Southeast Asian landscape. It binds these countries together in a common concern for the environment, because a change in the river or its watershed in one area will affect the resources of all countries lower down.

Rivers are very open 'flow-through' ecosystems. Any particular part of the river depends on inputs of materials and energy from above, and exports materials and energy downstream. All life in the river, and much of it on the banks, is adapted the seasonal pulses in the water and all its physical and biological features. Any attempts to change these flows by altering the main channel or those of its large tributaries will alter the physical and biological inputs of the ecosystems lower down, and will have generally negative effects on all populations. It will also affect the numerous populations of fishes which migrate upstream. There are nearly 1000 species of fishes in the Mekong River and its basin, and we have much to learn about their biology, including reproduction, feeding habits and migratory behavior.

While the Mekong is very rich biologically, it is also heavily used by humans, for transportation, subsistence fishing, agriculture, industries, waste removal and, as planned for the future, energy production. In general, large rivers everywhere are human multiple use areas subject to heavy pollution, and their biological resources are very poorly managed and conserved. Protected area conservation is almost synonymous with forest conservation. Every day we read in the papers about the value of trees and forests on watersheds. We seldom read about the value of river flows and their oxygen, sediments, dissolved nutrients and invertebrates. We don't see the natural environments in the bed of the river which make it possible for the riverine community to exist.

Conservation and natural resource planners need to study and solve the problems of managing riverine ecosystems while providing for their use by humans. We will probably hear a lot more about these problems in the pages of the *Natural History Bulletin*.

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