

7. Khao Yai National Park

7.1 Nature of National Park

National Park is an area that contains natural resource of ecological importance or unique beauty such as beautiful scenery, waterfall, caves, and mountains, or flora and fauna of special importance. National Parks of Thailand offer the visitors tremendous variety of attractions, in addition, they consists of ecologically, economically and scientifically valuable plants and animals. Most of Thailand National Parks are blessed with natural beauty and historical importance. The geology, landscape and natural beauty of the parks were recognized by visitor, both locally and internationally. Their appearances are self-interpretive. National Parks, in the sense of protected areas, play significant roles in maintaining ecological stability and preserving biological diversity. These protected areas also are excellent places for recreation and education. Up to now, the National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department (NPD) has established 103 national parks. According to the necessity and importance of conservation of biological and ecological diversity of nature and resource, pushed the NPD to establish many national parks covering every part of country, from the highest peak of mountain in the Doi Inthanon National Park to the lowest area of river and sea such as Krabi National Park continuously covering sea coast and mid-sea of the Surin Islands National Park. Regarding the diversity of species and genetics, actually the Thai academic knowledge of plant and animal species is very limited and consequently sometime is the cause of pitfall of nature and resource management. However, the conservation of natural habitats of these species and genetics in the national park boundaries throughout the country could make a confidence to our children that some varieties of wild species would be conserved at some degree. In addition, some academic research promotion is parallely proceeded and hoped that one day Thailand would be ready and able to efficiently use this nature and biological resources diversity. Another valued nature and resource of Thai national parks is the natural-born things which are very unique in the world or so called the natural and resource uniqueness of geological form, for example the 75 million years of shell cemetery of the Nhopharat-Thara-Phi Phi Islands National Park,

the James Bond Island of the Phang Nga National Park, the exotic stalactite cave of the Jalermwatanakosin National Park, Hin Ngam beach of Taru Tao National Park, the button rock terrace and cracked rock terrace of Phu Hin Rongra National Park, the cliff rock of Rom Sak Cliff and the right place of the 3-leaf pine tree on the cliff of Phu Kradeung National Park.

These prominent of nature and resources, if be destroyed, none could not recreate them by a big money at all and also our proudest possession of these nature and resources would be gone forever. The other side of these valued nature and resources which there do not have much in the Thai national parks are the natural and resource culture of original communities. For example Chaw Le of Surin Islands National Park, Taru Tao National Park and Lanta Islands National Park, Sa Kai Wild Negrito of Taleban National Park , or the mountain tribe community which the traditional of living style and culture of these communities would gradually dilute, so the left communities are the incomparable valued thing that everyone must conserve.

And the last thing is the historical nature and resources which exists here since the age of prior historical record, such as color paint picture at Pha Tam National Park or evidence and dinosaur fossil at Phu Wiang National Park or even some historical evidence which is very important for our nation appearing on many national parks, for example Khuha Khareuhash Throne at Khaow Sam Roi Yod National Park, Phra Nang Raue Lom at Priow Waterfall National Park and the political jail at Taru Tao National Park. Therefore, these nature and resources conserving for our children in Thai national parks are very difficult for us to evaluate them as a value of money.

7.2 Khao Yai National Park

Khao Yai is Thailand's oldest National Park, September 1962. In 1982 it was enlisted as an ASEAN heritage site due to its variety of flora and fauna, and is now world - famous. Khao Yai had been nominated as a World Heritage Site since 14 July 2005. It is Thailand's third largest Nation Park, covering an area of 2,165.55

sq.km. and its highest peak, Khao Rom, reaches an elevation of 1,351 m. above sea level. Khao Yai is part of the Dongrak Range, which forms a mountainous wall fencing the northeast plateau from the central plain of Thailand. The Khao Yai National Park imagery map by LANDSAT- 5 TM was shown on Figure 10. Park headquarters are situated roughly 200 km northeast of Bangkok. The park extends across four provinces: Saraburi, Nakhon Nayok, Nakhon Ratchasima and Prachin Buri. Khao Yai has many attractions, including waterfalls, a rich diversity of plants [approx. 2,000 species], plentiful wildlife and an interesting cultural history. It is easy to understand why Khao Yai is Thailand's most popular National Park.

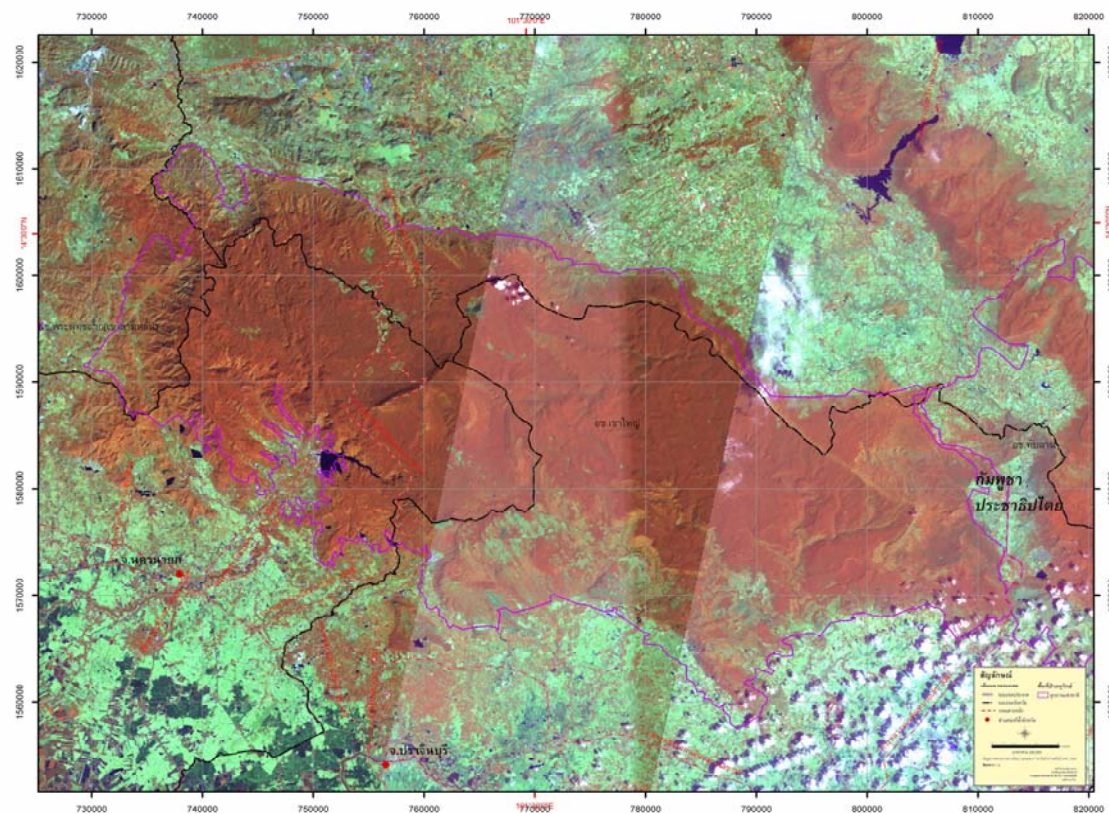


Figure 10 Khao Yai National Park imagery map by LANDSAT- 5 TM.

Source: National Park, Wildlife, and Plant Conservation Department (2002)

Khao Yai National Park is one of six related areas under the management of National Parks, Wildlife and plant Conservation Department, which together constitute Queen Sirikit's Dong Phrayayen – Khao Yai Forest Complex, in recognition

of Her Majesty the Queen's 72nd birthday anniversary. The other five areas are Pangsida National Park; Ta Phraya National Park; Thap Lan National Park; Phraputtachai National Park; Phraputtachai National Park and Dongyai Wildlife Sanctuary. See the relevant brochures for more information on each area.

7.3 Cultural Interest:

Khao Yai National Park retains evidence of a recent human history which stretches back at least 100 years. In 1902, 30 families from the nakhon Nayok Province moved to the Khao Yai hills. Here, they farmed rice, hunted and collected forest products for sale. Due to lack of transport and road access, the village became a hideout for bandits and criminals in the early 1950s, including political criminals. By the end of 1961, The government dissolved the village, forcing the villagers to return to the lowlands.

Look for evidence of the villages and farms, which survive today, in the form of grasslands that can be seen along the road near the park headquarters.

For much generation, Khao Yai has been a part of life for the villages surrounding the park. Today, the Khao Yai area is still home to many people, and the communities living within and near the national park have a fundamental role in determining the future of this important ecosystem and world famous national park. These communities are also important in conserving the area's history through their stories of, and past experience within the area.

7.4 Topography

Khao Yai National Park consists of complicated mountains such as Khao Rom, the highest about 1,351 meters, Khao Lam about 1,326 meters, Khao Keaw about 1,292 meters, Khao Sam Yod about 1,142 meters, Khao Far Pha about 1,078 meters, Khao Kampang about 875 meters, Khao Samor Poon about 805 meters and Khao Kaew about 802 meters above mean sea level. Moreover, the area has vastly

grassy field alternating with productive forest. The north and the east part are smoothly sloping down, while the south and the west part are rising up. The area is the source of five main rivers as follows.

- 1) Prachin Buri River
- 2) Nakhon Nayok River situated in the south part and important for local agriculture and economy, meet each other in Chachoengsao District to become Bangpakong River go to the Gulf of Thailand.
- 3) Lam Ta Kong River
- 4) Praplerng River, in the north part, go to maintain the agriculture of Korat Plateau and meet Moon River, the main river of Southern Isan that goes to Khong River.
- 5) Muag Lek Stream, located in the northwest part and going to Pasak River in Muag Lek District, is valuable for local agriculture and cattle, and has water all the year round.

7.5 Climate

Khao Yai has three main seasons, with an annual mean temperature of 23 ° C, though this varies greatly with the seasons.

Rainy Season: May-October. During this season, it rains most days, resulting in stunning waterfalls. The atmosphere is humid, with average daytime temperatures of 27° C, In the humidity, flora and fauna flourish, whilst after the rain there is clean air and clear visibility (great for photograph!).

Cold season: November- February. This is the most popular time to visit Khao Yai, as clear, sunny and cool weather are ideal for hiking and nice sunsets are common. The days average around 22° C, while the nights can drop to 10° C.

Hot Season: March-April Even in the hot season, Khao Yai does not experience of heat felt elsewhere in the country. Daytime temperatures reach between a high 30° C, to a low 20° C, During this season it is dry and often windy. Waterfalls can be dry by April.

7.6 Flora and Fauna

Tropical moist evergreen forest covers the central area of Khao Yai National Park. The rich diversity of plants (about 2,000 species) astound the newcomer. Towering trees draped in mosses, climbers and epiphytes, tangled trunks of the strangling figs, drooping lianas and spiny rattan palms, delicate ferns, multicoloured lichens and an ever-changing array of fungi. There is always something new to discover in the forest. The park has a diverse plant community, comprised of five main vegetation types:

Dry Evergreen Forests: These forests cover the lower slopes of Khao Yai. There are a number of important plant species found within this type of forest, including Dipterocarps and Hopia. Bamboo is also often found in drier forests.

Dry Deciduous Forests: These forests also cover the lower slopes of Khao Yai. The most important plant species found within Deciduous Forests include Afzelia, Xylia and Lagerstroemia.

Tropical Moist Evergreen Forest: Tropical Moist Evergreen Forest covers around 70% of the park, including its central area. Dipterocarps are important species found within these forests.

Hill Evergreen Forests: This forest type grows above 1,000 m. In Hill Evergreen Forests, the trees are smaller and ferns, mosses and epiphytes abound. Lithocarps and Castanopsis are amongst the most important species found here.

Grasslands: These areas are a unique habitat, and provide a grazing area year – round for some of the park animals. Grassland provides a welcome relief to all the forest . The park manage (burn annually) the grassland to prevent trees from invading and to provide year round grazing for deer, elephants and guar. Wildlife is plentiful (70 mammal species, at least 74 species of herptile and thousands of invertebrates) but often hard to see. Sambar (large, gray-brown, often in groups) and barking deer (smaller, red-brown, usually in pairs or alone) are frequently seen in the grasslands or on spotlighting tours. Khao Yai’s forests are teeming with wildlife and birds. Look up and down and from side, tread softly, and listen carefully to discover the real movers and shakers in the forest. Gibbons provide an excellent morning wake-up call with their mournful hoots. Quiet, patient walkers may catch a glimpse of these tree-living apes. Macaques are often seen on the roadsides. Elephants are sometimes spotted at salt-licks or on the road in the evenings and lucky tourists may spot a tiger in the grasslands during the evenings.

Civets, squirrels, porcupines, and wild pigs add a bit of variety. Snakes and lizards usually make their presence known by a rustle in the undergrowth as you are walking. If you see a snake, treat it as dangerous unless you know otherwise!! Geckos are frequently seen catching insects on building walls and ceilings. Cicadas never stop their scratchy hum. Look up and down and from side to side to spot the real movers and shakers in the forest - the insects and invertebrates.

Birds: There had got lots - over 320 species have been recorded. To the non-expert, birds are often just mysterious whistles, trills and calls, or a flutter of wings and a glimpse of colour. Patience is needed, good binoculars and a bird guide help. Roadsides, the old golf course, grasslands and the watching towers are good places to start . Hornbills are quite easy to spot, and hear the "gak gak gak" laugh of the Indian Pied (often seen in big flocks near Nong Pak Chi Tower in the evenings), or the deep resonant "gok...gok" of the Great Hornbill (usually seen in pairs or alone, the biggest of Khao Yai's hornbills)

Bats: Nearly one million insect eating bats live in a cave on the edge of the Park. Drive about 3 km to the north of the Park Chong entrance gate and take a small track on the left-hand side just past a temple. A few hundred meters up here take a right-hand turn and follow the track to the end. You can climb the hill to the cave. Please do not enter the cave - you will disturb the bats. Allow them to come out for about 3 minutes before taking any flash photography.