



## Asian Turtle Program Indo - Myanmar Conservation



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The fishing team pulling the net to a new location on the lake.

Photo by: Hoang Van Ha – ATP/IMC

## Rafetus habitat in Vietnam being disturbed again

As you might still remember, in April 2018, we have made an announcement on the discovery of the second wild Swinhoe's Softshell Turtle (*Rafetus swinhoei*) in a small lake, Xuan Khanh lake, which is approximately 5km away from Dong Mo lake where the first wild animal of the species was located in 2007. In April intensive fishing activity was threatening the animal which is why we decided to make an announcement on the lakes importance despite the risks this might also hold for the species by bringing attention to this new location. Fortunately, the second wild *Rafetus* was not accidentally caught during this time. However, since the 18th of September 2018, the same fishing team has returned to Xuan Khanh with a plan to stay and carry out a one-month-long intensive fishing activities.

The technique being used is called “đánh chường” in Vietnamese, this basically means using multiple

layers of nets, fishing boats and noises to drive as many fishes as they can into a 14 x 7m funnel net. It has been proved to yield higher number of fish than other techniques on the lake. With presence of large fishing boats, and loud noises, it's believed that the turtle and its habitat is now being further disturbed and is undoubtedly at some risk of also being caught.

During this current fishing activity, the funnel trap has already been removed four times, with the fishing team catching nearly 11 tons of fish. The turtle has been seen inside the surrounding net but not yet in the funnel. Unfortunately, the lake is not protected and is managed as a commercial fishery. But the fishing team and relevant authorities are aware of the situation and the importance of this species and we will stay 24/7 at the lake to protect the turtle.

We would like to thank the Biodiversity Conservation Agency (BCA) of the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (MoNRE), Fisheries Department and Forest Protection Department (FPD), the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, Ohio, USA (CMZ), the Turtle Conservation Fund (TCF), IUCN, Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), British Chelonia Group (BCG), the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund (MBZ), Ocean Park Conservation Foundation (OPCF), as well as all individuals for their continuous supports to the Rafetus project.



*For further information please contact:*

**Asian Turtle Program - Indo-Myanmar Conservation**

Room 1806, C14 Bac Ha Building, To Huu road,

Nam Tu Liem Dist., Hanoi, Vietnam

PO Box 46

Tel: +84 (0) 24 7302 8389

Email: [info@asianturtleprogram.org](mailto:info@asianturtleprogram.org)

Website: [www.asianturtleprogram.org](http://www.asianturtleprogram.org)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/AsianTurtleProgram](https://www.facebook.com/AsianTurtleProgram)



Funnel net removal. This large funnel net is taken out after 2-3 days of corralling fish into the trap using drift nets. Photo by: Hoang Van Ha – ATP/IMC.



A total of nearly 11 tons of fishes has been caught so far. Photo by: Hoang Van Ha – ATP/IMC.



Bui Van Dien, our new local counterpart at Xuan Khanh lake always follows the fishing team closely to make sure turtle is well monitored and protected.

Photo by: Hoang Van Ha – ATP/IMC.