



## Update 17

31<sup>st</sup> October 2005

### **Lucy's Thoughts**

Bodhi is back and bouncing off the walls with energy after his two month break... and what has been so rewarding for me has been to watch how NATR's work carried on at full pace while he was away. Many NGOs suffer from 'Founder's syndrome' and when their founder is not around, the momentum is lost. This is often a result of the founder's unwillingness to trust those in the organization but, clearly, this is not the case at NATR - there is knowledge transfer, accountability, and most of all, absolute teamwork. Our open plan office and transparent planning tools mean that everyone knows what is going on with different projects and can always jump in to assist when staff members or volunteers are away, or move on.

With Bodhi back, and the hand over of my communications responsibilities to Jessica, I have been allowed the space to reflect on why NATR impresses its community members, supporters and donors. It is not that we have a magic formula - all organizations know that personal integrity, respect and trust build powerful teams and shared vision, but we challenge ourselves to keep to these values at all times. In staff meetings we set our personal and group intentions for the week ahead, and then reflect on whether we have been able to achieve them. Everyone is given an equal chance to speak and constructive criticism is as welcome as praise. As I say, this may not be a new concept - but it certainly works!

We are now in the process of documenting our successes and challenges in order to be able to replicate this approach to disaster response elsewhere. And it seems to me that the disaster can actually serve a community by shaking up traditional social hierarchies and allowing people, particularly marginalized groups, the opportunity to take control over their futures. Disaster relief can actually be the gateway to solid, long-term community development. I will be easing out of my daily commitments at NATR, but am excited to explore whether NATR's model could be used in similar situations elsewhere - with the support of everyone receiving this update, and other like-minded people across the world. We hold the old adage of 'Think Global, Act Local' as our guiding principle, and know that the little raindrops of people acting daily for the better welfare of others can slowly feed the monsoon of activism and social change!

### **Bodhi's Back...**

So, two months of vacation can be good for the soul. My 3,000 mile journey across the American West was filled with good friends, loving family, and very little worrying about what was going on back in Thailand. The work done in my absence shows that NATR is filled with people that have the vision and motivation to fulfill our commitments, regardless of who is at the helm.

A quick note on love - it seems to me that service and selflessness are motivated by love for others, but sustained by the love we receive from friends and family. So, many thanks to those who recharged my batteries - I'm back, and ready for another year of serving the North Andaman from disaster to development. Next update - NATR's plan for the future, so stay tuned.

## **Project Updates**

### **Community-Driven Tourism Training Programme**

October has seen the expansion of our English programme into the villages of Talae Nok and Pak Trium. Both these villages are looking to Community-based Tourism as a way of diversifying their economic development, and realise that English is a key factor in this.



The Environmental Education component of the Community Education programme was also kicked off with the model-making project. The NATR team initially made a model of Koh Phratong and then invited the community members of Tung Nang Dam and Pak Trium to make models of their own

villages. This has not only given them an even greater sense of pride and place, but will also be used as a resource for tourists who visit the villages.

With the Community Empowerment and Education components of our tourism programme well underway, we are now planning the steps to take for ACE Ranger training. We are looking to train young adults from the area in the skills they would need for Adventure, Community-driven and Ecotourism (ACE), so that they have marketable skills and can be leaders within their communities. This will clearly need a great investment of time and resources and we are seeking funding to complete this project.

### **The Princess' Visit**



Once again, we were honoured by an invitation from the District Governor to meet the Princess Sirindhorn. She came back to the region for the official opening of the new Bak Jok houses, based on the mainland near Kuraburi. Paew, one of the key members of the Bak Jok Hand-made Card group, made the presentation of gifts alongside Bodhi and the NATR team. We submitted to the Princess our Sense of Place booklet, some cards, a Moken basket and herbal soaps. There are about 200 houses in the new development, and the speed of construction since we last saw the area in

May is impressive. The community seemed very happy with the quality of the houses and will be moving in over the next few weeks.

### **IBAP Event**

NATR was invited to attend the International Business Association of Phuket's Trade Fair this month, and set up a stand at Central Festival shopping centre in Phuket. We were visited by the Governor of Phuket, were featured on Thai television and received a great deal of interest from Thai shoppers who wanted to find out more about the handicrafts made by the communities in which NATR works. As time goes on, NATR is being recognized and respected by the Thai government, which has validated our work and is allowing us to move confidently into longer-term development projects.



### **Bak Jok Children's Summer Camp**

During the October school holiday, NATR organised an activity camp for the children of Bak Jok as they have been living in a temporary shelter for the last 10 months. Sixteen teenagers from Bak Jok, many of whom are involved in our scholarship programme, joined NATR staff in Sri Phangnga National Park for two days of learning and laughter.



The children experienced camping for the first time and were challenged to learn about themselves and the environment in which they live. They took part in activities such as a physically challenging forest hike where they had to support each other, a scavenger hunt, swimming in the river, face painting with ochre from the rocks, art and singing. One memorable moment was

when a flock of thirteen hornbills flew by in formation, which the group took to symbolise the power of teamwork and the children's amazing opportunities for the future...

### **Educational Scholarships**

We have now finished all the meetings with the children in our scholarship programme, and briefed them and their families on their commitments to donors. The children are expected to produce their grades and write a letter (depending on age) to their donor each year, reporting on their progress and areas of interest. Each child has opened a bank account which is co-signed by the parent and child. Small amounts will be transferred each semester for the purchase of school books, uniforms etc. and the payment of tuition fees. By administering the scholarships in this way, we have learnt from the pitfalls that other organisations have experienced. Stories of misappropriation of funds are often associated with situations where a large lump

sum is deposited into a parent's bank account. In NATR's case, we have set up a seven year monitoring and interview system that will see the children through their high school years.

One of our donors visited the children at Bak Jok Community Centre and we had a wonderful day of games, music, and drawing. The donor explained that she had been on Koh Phratong during the tsunami and had therefore been keen to contribute to the area. The school that her children attend has raised enough money to fund scholarships for eighteen of the students in Bak Jok, for the next seven years.



### Construction Projects

In response to requests from the communities, we have committed to various construction projects. These take a great deal of time and the cost of building on islands is extremely high as all materials need to be transported by boat. Nevertheless, this month has seen some solid progress on the **Tung Nang Dam Bridge repair**. Plans have been finalised and the community members will be involved in the construction, supervised and assisted by a professional contractor. Similarly, the **Tung Dap Water Tower** committee in the village met and plans have been submitted to a contractor for quotations. We also had a productive meeting with the chief of Ban Talae Nok where we were able to clarify the final work to be done on the **Community Centre**. In addition to the help and support from generous donors, NATR has collaborated with Chulalongkorn University on this project and it should be completed during November. The building will then be used as a Childcare Centre, the Soap Workshop and also for Community Education and Tourism programmes.

### Hand-made Cards

We would like to thank everyone who ordered Christmas cards after the last Update. The response has been amazing and the group are now exceeding the income they used to make from their traditional livelihoods. It would now be great to hear from anyone who knows of fair-trade distributors or other ethical businesses who could stock our cards throughout the year.

### Selected Village Updates



#### Tung Dap

On our monthly visit with Tung Dap's primary donor, we were very excited to see people re-establishing their traditional livelihoods, now that they are back on the island, in their permanent housing. The women were repairing fish traps and the children were catching giant flying beetles for snacks. There was a real sense that the trauma of the tsunami was behind them, and they were moving forward to a better life. A Community shop has been set up in the village where they will sell fishing equipment and plough the profits back into the community. NATR donated squid trap equipment in order to support them.

#### Laem Naew

As many of you are aware, Laem Naew is a community which can only be accessed by a thirty minute boat ride from Tha Yang pier. It was, therefore, wonderful this month to be able to deliver two boats to the village. A long tail boat that we had purchased some months previously was repaired and repainted, and a smaller, faster boat was also donated to a family for crab fishing. The small boat is also being used to expedite our work in the village as we are now visiting weekly to carry out English, Tsunami and Environmental Education. It has also been rewarding to see the signboard that NATR erected being used by the community to advertise village events and activities, including the Education programme.



The five women that we have been supporting with further education successfully completed their first semester. One of the units they studied was on community development which has tied in well with our long-term programmes and we are able to seek their advice on village projects. In addition, the assistant school teacher who we have been supporting is keen to carry on studying and teaching in the school. On several occasions, she has thanked NATR for giving her the opportunity to expand her life's choices.

## Visitors and Volunteers

Antonis and Frosso Petropoulos from ECOCLUB and Jim Macbeth, a community development and tourism professor from Australia, visited us in Kuraburi after attending the International Institute for Peace through Tourism (IIPT) conference. They gave us useful feedback on the findings from the conference which we have been able to consider for our tourism Programme. Their trip also coincided with the Vegetarian Festival in the area so we were all able to attend the temple to take part in the celebrations and witness the amazing acts of strength and self mutilation. This festival takes place in Phuket and Phang Nga each year and is certainly something to include in a tourism calendar.

Annalise Blum arrived at the beginning of October and has capably taken over the coordination of our English programme as she has TESOL experience. She has been able to formalise the curriculum and methodology and is now looking at possibilities of certification.



From December, there will be a place for another volunteer with experience in curriculum design and English teaching. *Please email us if you are interested.*

Jessica Boucher will be taking on a variety of roles. She will be the name at the bottom of emails as NATR's new communications officer, as well as working in Tung Nang Dam and on our Environmental Education projects.

Left to Right: Annalise, Meth, Lak, Jessica, Peaw, Pa, Jo, Phylippa, Charlotte

Charlotte Johnston brings her extensive tourism industry experience to NATR and will move ahead with the EVT programme, focusing initially on the ACE Ranger training and then on both domestic and international tourism marketing. *Please get in touch with her if you are keen to visit the area.*

Jo Birrell and Meth Umsri returned to NATR and fitted straight back in, as if they had never been away! They will be working together in Laem Naew. In addition, Jo is filling the role of financial manager while Meth is coordinating the English programme.



Left to Right: Rob, Ben, Tom, Bodhi, Meth, Touch, Pa

It was very sad to say goodbye to Pa (Supitcha) Kiatprajak, who has been involved in NATR's work since early January. She leaves us to become a Programme Manager in Kanchanaburi, on an elephant conservation project. She was greatly loved by the community members as her dedication and sense of humour allowed her to work creatively around challenges. NATR has benefited enormously from her personality and experience, and she is excited to use the skills she has learnt here in her next position. Pa embodies the compassion and skill that has allowed NATR to help communities move from 'disaster to development'.

