

Thailand's treasured bloom faces grim future

By Bodhi Garrett

The Nakha Water Lily, (*Crinum Thaianum*) known locally as 'Yah Chong', is in critical danger of extinction. The lily is found only in the rivers of northern Phang-Nga and lower Ranong provinces.

This water lily's exceptionally long leaves are an important habitat for young shrimp and fish species, therefore making it an instrumental part of the area's ecosystem, and one that desperately needs to be preserved.

Recent surveys have confirmed a 70 percent decline in the flower's population in just one year and, in four out of five of the region's rivers, the water lily has disappeared completely.

The fate of this species now depends on a small section of Klong Nakha in Ranong and without swift action at the highest levels, the Nakha Water Lily will disappear forever.

In the last decade, commercial collection of the Nakha Water Lily for aquariums has caused a sharp decline in population and habitat range.

In 2009, an even more serious threat to its survival emerged when provincial authorities commenced mass-scale river dredging, changing the flow patterns in many rivers with disastrous consequences to nearby habitats.

Advocacy for this threatened flower is badly needed. On the national level, key Thai government institutions, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, need to be made aware of the present practices which are ushering this flower into extinction.

A number of non-governmental and community-based organizations are now



lobbying provincial councils to halt river dredging and protect the remaining Nakha Water Lilies. However, these groups urgently require high-level support to influence local government agencies and commercial plantation owners.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) recommends the following measures to be instituted immediately in order to prevent further habitat destruction, ergo the species demise:

If dredging activities in the Phang-Nga and lower Ranong provinces were overseen by the government, further destruction of fragile ecosystems could be avoided.

Communication between the local residents, who have collected large numbers of the flowers for commercial use, and officials from the Ministry of Agriculture could also help to form a long-term management plan to curtail over harvesting.



TOP: A young boy stands amid the endangered Nakha Water Lilies in full bloom. BOTTOM LEFT: The lily's elongated leaves and root systems provide an essential habitat for aquatic life. BOTTOM RIGHT: Mass dredging in the Phang Nga and lower Ranong provinces has had a detrimental effects on the flower and the area's ecosystem.

In the future, the Klong Na Ca river region could be established as an excellent teaching resource where local leaders, international conservationists and eco-educators could come together to discuss global conservancy and

species protection. Phuket's community support is vital in the conservation efforts to protect the remaining water lilies in Southern Thailand.

In saving the Nakha Water Lily, we preserve a special part of unique natural heritage.

Bodhi Garrett founded North Andaman Tsunami Relief, a grassroots disaster relief organization and Andaman Discoveries tours. For more information on the Nakha Water Lily contact Bodhi Garrett. T:081-7877 344. E:bodhi.garrett@gmail.com or Somsak Soonthornnawaphat T: 081-754454. E:somsak@iucnt.org.

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