

ANNUAL REPORT



2025

Welcome to the Saola Foundation for Annamite Mountains Conservation



Steve Burns
Board Chair

We've come a long way and covered much ground – it's been over 5 years since the Saola Foundation set off on one of the most ambitious conservation challenges of our time.

And we have made significant tracks; growing awareness of our organization, building an unparalleled and pioneering Lao conservation team, progressing the urgent search for Saola and above all bringing much needed attention to the incredible and irreplaceable Annamite Mountains Bioregion and the effort to prevent irreversible biodiversity loss there.

2025 was not without challenge, but we made headway with the team spending many weeks in the field. We also shared our work at conservation events in Europe and Asia and significantly at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi – where we were the only organization to be invited to host a session on the Annamite Mountains Bioregion.

As we move into 2026, every day I am hopeful that we will find evidence of Saola and every day as I hear more inspiring stories of wildlife discoveries encountered by our team, I am convinced that our work is vital to the future of this special place. Thank you for your ongoing support as we venture further into the land of the unicorn, and work to protect one of the most wild places on our planet.

Lorraine Scotson | CEO

At last, what we had all been waiting for – January 2025 marked the official launch of the 2-year intensive search for Saola.

The year started with the signing of a historic partnership agreement with the Government of Lao PDR, jointly committing to bolster skills and capacity in conservation science in Lao, while scaling up the search for Saola to an unprecedented level.

Our Research and Conservation Team were soon deep in the forest, wading, walking, climbing, clambering and crawling across rivers and mountains, in their relentless search for one of the rarest mammals on earth, the Saola.

I would like to thank everyone involved for the part you played in our efforts.

Firstly, my thanks go to the Government of Lao, for forming this strong partnership and for all the support and encouragement you have shown.

My thanks to our partners who express their trust in us year after year.

And my deepest respect goes to our prolific and talented Annamite Mountains Research and Conservation Team, strong, brave and determined, who commit so much of themselves to create a future for Annamite biodiversity.

We are not only a team, but we are also a family who support each other through everything. In 2025 we saw five families within our team grow: our Animal Trackers, Bounchanh and Ger, and Logistics Assistant Maisom, welcomed new sons, while our Field Team Leader Hamnoy and I, both welcomed new daughters in early 2026.

The Saola is our emblem and flagship species, yet our work is so much more. In 2025 we launched our Strategic Plan, laying out our ambition for the years ahead into an achievable plan. Now a multiprogram organisation, we are taking the first steps into new initiatives with focal species that, like the Saola, are facing imminent global extinction, and which inhabit exceptionally biodiverse Annamite ecosystems. These habitats also host many other endemics under threat.

Working in this way, we can maximise the return of our resources; the time, expertise, heart, and soul that goes into these efforts and our hard-won conservation funding. No matter the outcome, Saola conservation cannot fail. With the first year of the two-year intensive search under our belts (or rather under our backpacks and leech socks), we look forward to the year ahead with fierce optimism.

This could be THE year – it's a nerve-racking time. Will we find Saola and reopen the door for a future where this incredible, elusive, and beautiful creature will once again grace the wilds of the Annamite Mountains Bioregion? We cannot know the answer yet. But we can be sure that we are in with a great chance.

And so, the search continues.

Warm regards,
Lorraine



Meet the Foundation

A diverse and skilled team of national conservationists and scientists who share one common goal: conservation of the Annamite Mountains' unique biodiversity. saolafoundation.org/team

Lead Technical Staff

- + Rob Timmins, Technical Director
- + Phonesouk Chanthavong, Field Team Leader
- + Vilayvone Sengmany, Deputy Field Team Leader
- + Vatsana Chanthavong, Scent Detection Dog Unit Administrative Leader
- + To Duangkhamxai, Scent Detection Dog Unit Technical Leader
- + Somsay Vonephilad, Logistics Unit Leader
- + Khamlar Souttisay, Deputy Logistic Unit Leader
- + Thongphan Phompatham, Deputy Logistic Unit Leader
- + Xaisavanh Khiewvongphachan, Data & GIS Manager and Analyst (New in 2025)

Technical Unit

- + Lien Phetlormeexay
- + Iew Inthisan
- + Phoulinthone Keopaseud
- + Saphanthong Keobounkham

Scent Detection Dog Unit

- + Bounthavy Khounthavy
- + Luangsoutha Phomchandy
- + Maikham Simasouk

Animal Tracking Unit

- + Bounchanh Xaibounmun
- + Onkeo Khamphavongsa
- + Sengchan Sypaseuth
- + Vanhxay Saikeo

Logistics Unit

- + Bounma Sayyasane (New in 2025)
- + Fue Yang
- + Khamlar Souttisay
- + Khunthong Phonehongkham
- + Maikham Sengmanath
- + Maion Keovongkham
- + Maisom Xaiyavong

- + Phoutsady Keoamphone (New in 2025)
- + Siva Oliyavong
- + Thongphan Phompatham

Executive and Core Staff

- + Dr. Lorraine Scotson, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and member of Board of Directors
- + Chanthasone Phommachanh, Lao Programs Director
- + Vanvay Chitpaseuth, Provincial Field Coordinator (new in 2025)
- + Bouaphan Phanthavong, Central Government Liaison
- + Georgie Bradbury, Fundraising and Communications Director (New in 2025)
- + Lulu Deng, Executive Assistant
- + Souksamlan Laladeth, Audio-Visual Lead
- + Manutnay Xavongxay, Office Manager
- + May Khampasong, Financial Manager (New in 2025)
- + Pouna Phimpachan, Lao Admin Assistant
- + Vilayphone Phommachanh, Lao Admin Assistant (New in 2025)
- + Sypaphai Launglath, House-keeping
- + Khamla Vongsuly, Driver
- + Khensouk Xayyavong, Security Guard
- + Kadam Chanthavyxay, Security Guard

Board of Directors

- + Steve Burns, Board Chair
- + Alessandro Badalotti (New in 2025)
- + Andrew Holman, Treasurer
- + Frank Hawkins
- + Inthy Deaunsawanh
- + Susie Offord-Woolley
- + Yin Hang (New in 2025)

Advisory Council

- + Dr. George Archibald, Co-Founder and Senior Conservationist, International Crane Foundation
- + Eric Bairrão Ruivo, Consultant in Conservation Biology
- + Troy Hansel, Conservation Planning and Monitoring Consultant, Lao
- + Nguyen Duc Tu, Biodiversity Coordinator, IUCN/CEPF National Coordinator, Vietnam
- + Steve Shurter, Executive Director, White Oak Conservation
- + Michele Thompson, Professor of Southeast Asia History, Southern Connecticut State University
- + Brooke Truesdale, Director of Development, Reef Check Foundation

Volunteers

- + Minh Nguyen, Doctoral candidate, Colorado State University, Research Associate
- + Corey Chimko, Digital Content Technician
- + Bill Leacock, Student Support
- + Eric Losh, Illustrator
- + Ellen Wiczorek, Social Media Coordinator
- + Luckphanomphone Sinuanphao, Community Ambassador
- + Pao Vue, Cultural Advisor

And many thanks to those who left the Saola Foundation in 2025, after contributing so much to our mission:

- + Daopphet Luangpanya
- + Damon Boughen
- + Ger Lor
- + Mai Thammanan
- + Saykham Thamthilath

Achievements

2025 marked a pivotal year for the Saola Foundation. We strengthened government partnerships, expanded field operations, advanced scientific innovation, and deepened institutional capacity, all while conducting the most intensive search for the Saola ever attempted.

Formalizing Government Partnerships

In January 2025, the Saola Foundation signed our first Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Lao Government. Witnessed by national, provincial, and district authorities, the MoU established the official operational framework for the Saola Search Program, aligned our work with national biodiversity priorities and strengthened credibility and cooperation across all administrative levels which is a critical foundation for long-term success.



Above: Representatives and guests from the Saola Foundation, the Department of Forestry and Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (previously the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry), the Provincial Office of Bolikhamxay Province, the Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office of Bolikhamxay, the District Agriculture and Forestry Offices of three districts covered by the MoU, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Defense, and other officials from the Government of Lao PDR.



Expanding our Reach

Despite no confirmed Saola detection (at the time of publication) – the scale, rigor, and ecological signals from our Saola Program work in the Nam Chouan – Nam Xang (NCNX) landscape strongly reinforces the probability that Saola persist within the Annamite Mountains (as detailed on pages 6-7).

Alongside our flagship Saola Program, we also initiated program development for conservation of Large-antlered Muntjac, and an undescribed species of leaf monkey (above) documented by our team in 2024, with parallel outreach to potential funders. These initiatives reflect our expansion towards multi-species, multi-year conservation programming, aligned to our Strategic Plan.

In support of regional conservation efforts, a small team from the Saola Foundation assisted WCS Lao by leading a biodiversity assessment of Laving-Laveun National Protected Area. Plus, a member of the Annamite Mountains Research and Conservation Team assisted with planning, training and deployment of camera traps for a Fauna and Flora International (FFI) and IUCN Lao biodiversity assessment project.



Above: Saola Foundation members celebrating the completion of the leadership training program with Katalyst.



Together, let's work towards supporting the sustainable conservation of the rich biodiversity in the Annamite Mountains Bioregion.

Vatsana Chanthavong | Scent Detection Dog Unit Administrative Leader



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Above: Transparency tracking of a small carnivore – perhaps a Mainland Leopard Cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis*) or civet.

Capacity Building

2025 marked substantial growth, especially in national expertise, as we invested in Lao leadership and technical training and skills development with targeted training and ongoing mentoring.

- + We held an Animal Tracker Training Workshop in Khao Yai National Park, Thailand, joined by 15 members of our team, led by expert tracker, Jonathan Shapiro, and funded by the Asian Species Action Partnership. This training builds key sign interpretation and tracking skills in an environment that closely resembles forest conditions in Lao.
- + 16 field team members were trained in Kobo Toolbox to streamline digital data collection in the forest.
- + Our Data and GIS Manager and Analyst completed 3 months of GIS specialization training.
- + Three technical assistants took part in R Project use training to

assist with data management and analysis.

- + Seven senior Lao staff completed 3 days of leadership training facilitated by Katalyst consultancy.
- + The majority of Lao staff received refresher training in basic first aid, and five logistics staff received advanced first aid training.
- + We developed a Gender Responsiveness Action Plan, striving for gender inclusiveness and diversity within our workforce.
- + Two new board members – Alessandro Badalotti and Yin Hang were brought onboard, along with our first Fundraising and Communications Director, Georgie Bradbury.
- + We established the Annamite Mountains Conservation Ltd.; a Lao-based not-for-profit social enterprise with shared vision and goals with the Saola Foundation.

Outreach & Global Engagement

- + During 2025, we conducted community outreach in multiple villages in Viengthong and Xaychamphone districts, including sharing our conservation work and forest law information.
- + Throughout the year we elevated our international profile and showcased our conservation work through active engaged participation in global events, including the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria Annual Conference, Pilsen *In Situ* Conservation Conference, CEPF Final Assessment Workshop and the IUCN World Conservation Congress (Asia Pavilion).



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- + In 2025 we hosted four student interns from the National University of Laos, boosting their field, technical, and admin skills; we funded tuition for two MSc students from the Department of Forestry; we supported Association Anoulak and Econox Laos 'Lao Youth on Mission' program, delivering materials to 26 budding young conservationists on aspects of applied conservation research, strategic planning and advocacy.

Annamite Mountains Bioregion — Saola Search Program

Saola Search at Unprecedented Scale

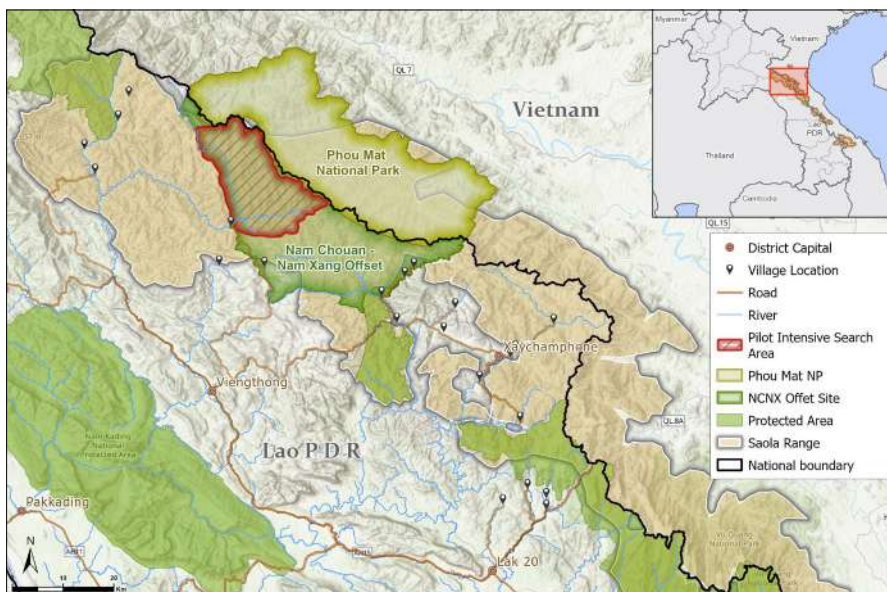
The Saola (*Pseudoryx nghetinhensis*) is now so rare that detection requires systematic, high-intensity methods. In 2025, we implemented the most intensive, focused and scientifically rigorous terrestrial mammal search ever conducted in mainland Southeast Asia.

2025 Survey Coverage:

- + 57 one-square-kilometre survey units covered
- + 46 units achieved >20% systematic coverage
- + 3,584 hectare subunits (35.84 km²) surveyed
- + 12% of the 2025–2026 pilot area surveyed

Fieldwork was conducted across three major survey periods (May–July, September, and November–December), ensuring seasonal representation and sustained effort.

Although none of the 261 dung samples collected tested positive for Saola DNA (from 2,008 ungulate dung piles recorded), several strong surrogate indicators suggest that if Saola are present, our design and intensity are sufficient to detect them.



Biodiversity Findings



Ungulates & Primates

High detection rates of key species indicate relatively intact mammal communities:

- + Muntjac: detected in up to 91% of surveyed units with more than 20% coverage
- + Western Serow: in 85%
- + Sambar: in 26%

We also recorded:

- + Detection of the Indochinese Grey Leaf Monkey in 50% of survey units (a globally significant population) and the Red-shanked Douc in 28% of survey units

Other noteworthy results included unexpectedly low pig detection rates (only 52% of surveyed units), possibly a consequence of the ongoing Asian Swine Fever Epidemic, and detection of Marbled Cat during opportunistic camera-trapping.

Hornbills & Other Species

Hornbill detections reinforce the ecological integrity of the landscape:

- + 72 Brown Hornbill detections
- + 11 Great Hornbill detections
- + 7 Rufous-necked Hornbill detections
- + 29 unidentified large hornbill detections

Additional notable records include:

- + 8 detections of the Endangered Impressed Tortoise (*Manouria impressa*)
- + Our team's first detection of *Cuora mouhotii*, a rare and poorly documented turtle



These results greatly strengthen our belief in the choice of the pilot intensive survey area, and the probability that small numbers of Saola still occur within it.

Threat Monitoring

The level of threats detected within our survey areas have been surprisingly low:

- + 65% of survey units showed no threat evidence
- + Hunting evidence: 16–17%
- + Fishing: 5–7%
- + Yellow vine harvest: 9–11%
- + Logging: 2%
- + Only one snare detection in 2025

This evidence of prolonged low hunting pressure, alongside high detection rates of commonly hunted species, are key positive indicators that Saola might still survive!

Integrated Search Methodology

In 2025 we expanded our survey coverage into new key areas, and demonstrated an unprecedented intensity standard for surveying cryptic, ungulates in remote tropical forest.

Our integrated survey model combines indigenous tracking knowledge, scent detection dogs, and portable DNA testing technology into a unified, scientifically rigorous system.

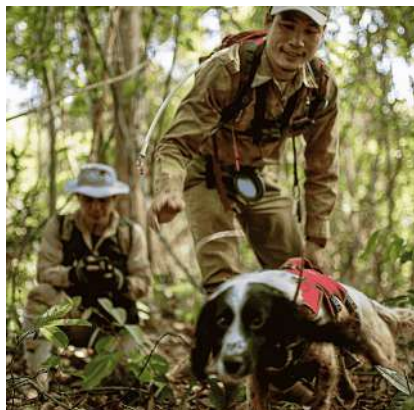
1. Indigenous Animal Tracking Unit

Our animal tracking unit, alongside our scent detection dogs, are the ones tirelessly, rain or shine, day after day searching for signs of Saolas. Their skills, knowledge and especially confidence has been consistently growing, supported by specialist international trackers from our partner organisation CyberTracker Conservation. A highlight of our long-term approach to mentoring and professional career development of the trackers was in 2025 a 10-day study

tour to Khao Yai National Park, Thailand, which gave our trackers the opportunity to research and learn about a rich diversity of large mammal species in a context unparalleled in Lao. This unit brings traditional forest knowledge into a modern scientific framework and is the first animal tracking unit on its way towards scientific accreditation in mainland Southeast Asia. Whilst focused on searching for evidence of Saola, our trackers also encounter and document other species of conservation interest, as well as threats to wildlife, thus increasing our conservation impact. Our trackers work closely together with our technical unit in the forest, the technical unit assisting with data and sample collection, freeing the trackers to focus on the search. Since we aren't certain what Saola signs actually look like, our trackers are ever vigilant for what could be an indication of Saola presence, always building up their knowledge of the subtle indicators that distinguish the signs of other ungulate species.

2. National Scent Detection Dog Unit

Our scent detection dog unit has made significant progress with support from Working Dogs for Conservation. Lacking Saola scents, we pioneered a 'generalist' approach, training the dogs to locate all ungulate dung. Despite initial uncertainty, the dogs consistently prove they can locate the dung of unfamiliar species.



This pioneering effort to establish the first scent detection dog unit for *in situ* biodiversity conservation in tropical mainland Southeast Asia faces challenges, particularly from the perspective of health. In 2025, both dogs overcame serious health issues that temporarily prevented their deployment in fieldwork. These experiences are helping us establish robust veterinary protocols both for us and potentially other regional programs. Despite their different search styles, both dogs are highly adept in the forest, even locating dung buried by beetles, and in terms of time spent searching more effective than the animal tracking unit at locating ungulate dung.



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3. In Situ DNA Testing

In partnership with the Wildlife Conservation Society's Molecular Diagnostics Laboratory at the Bronx Zoo, we successfully deployed our custom-made Saola DNA testing protocol, based on the Biomeme portable qPCR system, which is capable of analyzing dung samples and delivering reliable results within a few hours. Validation of the kit using samples derived from a Saola captured in 2010, and since preserved, demonstrated its field readiness. Our team collected and tested 261 dung samples in 2025; unfortunately none of them a positive match for Saola. The deployment of this DNA kit marks a major step forward in integrating molecular tools into the frontline of Saola conservation efforts, advancing our ability to carry out timely and adaptive field searches for Saola, allowing us to respond instantly should we detect a Saola.

Our Supporters

We are deeply grateful to all our supporters who had confidence in our mission in 2025. Your generosity continues to power our conservation work in the Annamite Mountains Bioregion. Thank you!

Saola Foundation 2025 Donors

Major Gifts of at least \$50,000:

- + Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund
- + Hans Wilsdorf Foundation
- + Liz Claiborne Art Ortenberg Foundation
- + Synchronicity Earth

Gifts of \$10,000 to \$49,999:

- + Asian Species Action Partnership (ASAP)
- + Fiona Guinness
- + Nashville Zoo
- + Ocean Park Conservation Foundation Hong Kong
- + Odense Zoo
- + Scentbird Inc.

Gifts of \$1,000 to \$9,999:

- + Andrew and Paula Holman
- + Beauval Nature Association
- + Bent Lindhardt
- + Birmingham Foundation
- + CERZA Conservation
- + David Posner
- + Dolores Holman
- + Drew Monaghan and David Dibley
- + Fresno Chaffee Zoo
- + Gillian Timmins
- + Givskud Zoo Zootopia
- + John Rudolf Family Fund
- + Mark and Sharon Morehart
- + Marty Talbot
- + Steve and Ann Burns
- + The Bryan Guinness Charitable Trust
- + Toronto Zoo AAZK Chapter
- + Zoo Ziln



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More Gifts:

- + Abe Lone
- + Adam Castellani
- + Adrian Ehrenbeck
- + Alessandro Badalotti
- + Amber Kruis
- + Amy Cookson
- + Anders Faaborg Poulsen
- + Andrew Moltz
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- + Halan Nguyen Dinh
- + Harald Rösche
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- + Jack Simidian
- + Jalen Jordan
- + Jeffery Bournes
- + Jennifer Jenness
- + Jeremy McCluskey
- + Jeremy Tuler
- + Jessica Thompson
- + Jesse Williams
- + John Weir
- + Joseph and Victoria Muscolino
- + Karen Mueller
- + Kimi Holsapple
- + Konstantin Yordanov
- + Lita Van Houten
- + Lucy Kelly
- + Martha Stevenson
- + Michael Hedemark and Arlyne Johnson
- + Michelle Wallick
- + Nadine Martin
- + Nancy Caporaso
- + Nancy Volk
- + Nathan Morehart
- + Nathan Tallar
- + Next Continent
- + Nhuan Pham
- + Nick Jones
- + Oldrich Rajchl
- + Patrick Zehr
- + Perri Black
- + Quy Le
- + Richard Spotts
- + Steven Lanum
- + Tia Service
- + Tiffany Chen
- + Yash Veer Bhatnagar



*Partners who have invested at least \$50,000 within one year
in the Saola Foundation's Saola search program*

Saola Gold Circle

The Saola Gold Circle is an exclusive program for our most generous supporters. Members of the Saola Gold Circle contribute at least US\$50,000 within one year, and this level of financial commitment is instrumental in propelling our research and conservation efforts forward.

In 2025, we hosted our third annual gathering of Saola Gold Circle membership online, during which we provided exclusive updates on the Saola Program with our members. Individuals or organizations who are interested in learning more about the benefits of membership of the Saola Gold Circle can contact our CEO, Lorraine Scotson (lorraine@saolafoundation.org). Your interest and support are pivotal in advancing our shared mission for Saola conservation.





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Looking ahead — 2026 Goals

With your support, we head into 2026 with renewed energy and determination to accelerate our mission and goals.

In 2026, our highest priorities are:

- + Continue the search for Saola, to answer the question 'can Saola be reliably detected in the wild and safely captured to make it a viable strategy to save Saola from extinction?'
- + Further build the capacity of our Annamite Mountains Research and Conservation Team, through recruitment, advanced training and mentoring, creating future leaders, educators, scientists, and conservation ambassadors for Lao.
- + Build on our valued partnerships with organizations dedicated to protecting biodiversity in the Annamite's and working closely with us to develop the skills and capacity within our team (currently CyberTracker Conservation, National University of Lao, WCS, Working Dogs for Conservation).
- + Initiate two new programs focused on the long-term conservation of Large-antlered Muntjac and on a yet to be described species of leaf monkey. Central to both programs are the conservation of landscapes with extraordinarily rich biodiversity, with many more cryptic and overlooked species facing global extinction.
- + Move forward on our conceptual plans for an Annamite Mountains Research and Conservation Centre, seeking long-term investors and completing a feasibility assessment.
- + Expand our visibility and networking internationally to promote the Saola Foundation's long-term strategic plan, especially our exciting new programs and help increase global awareness of the incredible biodiversity of the Annamite Bioregion and the profound challenges that it faces.
- + Strengthen, diversify and grow our fundraising capacity, especially towards more sustainable long-term financial income to reduce funding uncertainty and foster long-term consistency in conservation support, giving confidence to organisational growth for increasingly effective programs to minimise irrecoverable biodiversity loss in the Annamite Bioregion.

Financial Report

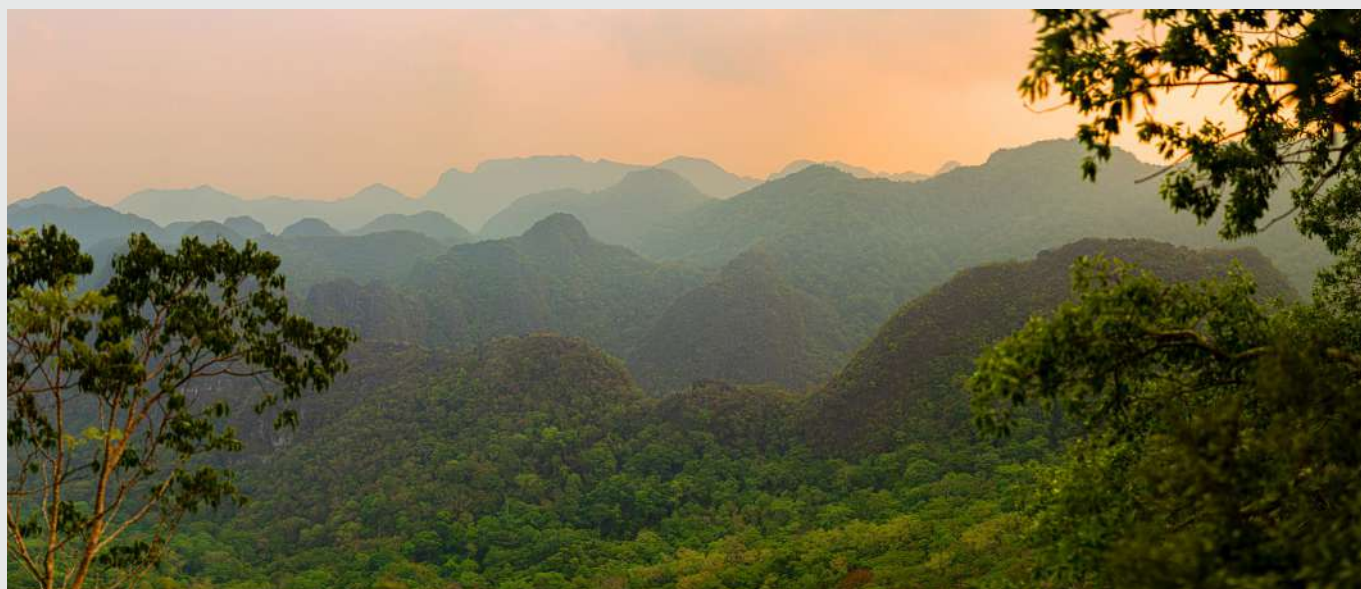
Saola Foundation Inc. Statement of Activity January – December 2025

Total (US\$)

Revenue	
Individual Contributions	\$27,430
Organization and Foundation Grants	\$913,525
Corporate Contributions	\$19,616
Other Revenue	\$32,039
Total Revenue	\$992,610

Expenses	
Personnel Costs	\$511,344
Project Field Costs	\$224,238
DNA Testing Expenses	\$21,940
Operating Expenses	\$142,846
Total Expenses	\$900,368

Financial Position	
Surplus/(Deficit)	\$92,242
Carryover Reserves at Year-End	\$501,923



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How to support the Saola Foundation

Join us in conserving the extraordinary and irreplaceable wildlife of the Annamite Mountains Bioregion. The Saola Foundation is dedicated to addressing gaps in conservation and saving overlooked species from global extinction, through direct interventions, applied research and priority setting, and by investing in the capability and capacity development of local citizens.

There are multiple ways you can support our work and join us in our mission.

Please contact Dr. Lorraine Scotson, CEO at lorraine@saolafoundation.org for more information.

Follow our adventures by signing up for our newsletter at www.saolafoundation.org/newsletter

Thank you!

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With high encounter rates for ungulates, hornbills, and primates in Viengthong district, Bolikhamxay, Lao PDR, the Saola Foundation is giving the Saola a real chance of being found while securing a future for the Annamites' rare endemics.

Dr. Thoumthone Vongvisouk | Deputy Director-General, Department of Forestry, Ministry of Agriculture and Environment



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