

Bulgarian Zoologist in Laos

Petar BERON

In January-February 2016 an International Speleological Expedition “Laos 2016” took place in the karstic hills of Central Laos (the provinces Khmmouane and Bolikhamxay). As member of this expedition and the first Bulgarian zoologist in Laos I collected also in the more southern province Savannakhet. The idea was to study some caves in the area mostly of the village Nam Na, ca. 25 km East of Thakek. Laos is a country having immense biodiversity and, as its forests disappear very fast and the population is increasing, it seems important for the zoologists to intensify their efforts to assess the inventory of the fauna and flora of Laos and thus to contribute to their preservation. Actually, even in the so called National Protected areas the local population does not seem very impressed by the global efforts to preserve the biodiversity. Many large animals (rhinos, elephants, tigers, crocodiles) have disappeared or are very threatened, many others disappear with the forest even undescribed, including large newly found ungulates like saola (*Pseudoryx nghetinhensis*) or the sensational relict *Laonastes*, the only surviving member of a family which became fossil 11 million years ago.

The expedition worked mainly in the big cave system Tham Kai Nau (already more than 22 km long), some other caves in the same massive and in two caves (Tham Nam Lod I and II), 65 km from Thakek, which are very rich in troglobitic cave fauna. Attempts have been made to explore the upper part of a plateau Pha Hông, but no caves have been found without Lao speakers.

The conditions in most caves were not favorable for cave fauna. The caves are dry, with rivers crossing the hills, but no clay or proper substrate for troglobites. Almost all caves were with two or more entrances, what is also important for the microclimate. Meanwhile I collected, despite of the dry season, some isopods, insects, scorpions, amphibians and other members of a fauna not represented in NMNH – Sofia so far. This material is now under study. Two new species of Diplopoda have been already described.

Bulgarian Zoologist again in Kenya

Petar BERON

After unsuccessful attempt to enter Ethiopia, I arrived on the 4th of October 2016 in Nairobi. Together with my colleague Vladimir Beshkov we have crossed once Kenya on our way to Elgon and Ruwenzori (1993). This time the idea was to study the high altitude fauna on Mount Kenya National Park. Mount Kenya is the second highest mountain in Africa (5199 m). The last 200 m on the vertical walls of Batian and Nelion are accessible only to well equipped alpinists (our colleague Boyan Petrov did this climbing earlier). I was satisfied to reach 4985 m (Point Lenana) above the Austrian Hut. My whole trip was done in 6 days, accompanied by a compulsory guide. The itinerary was: Naro Moru Gate (2400 m) – Naro Moru River Lodge (3038 m) – Teleki Lodge (4300 m) – Top Hut and Austrian Lodge (4790 m) – Shipton's Camp (4200 m) – Old Moses Camp (3300 m) – Sirimon Gate (2650 m). Most of the collecting was done in the orophyte zone of the mountain, under stones between the afroalpine plants (*Carduus keniensis*, *Senecio keniensis*, *S. johnstonii*, *Helichrysum formosissimum*, *Lobelia telekii*, *Protea kilimandscharica* and others). The usual inhabitants of the hypolithon were beetles (mostly Carabidae and Staphylinidae), spiders, mites (Trombidiidae s. l., Erythraeidae, Rhagidiidae), some Diplopoda, Chilopoda (Lithobiidae) and Symphyla, gastropods, Nematoda, Collembola, in the lower stations also Dermaptera, Blattodea, Isopoda terr., and others.

In the Park can be seen many different mammals, which have disappeared or are endangered outside the national parks – elephants, buffalos, elands, leopards, monkeys, rock hyraxes, and many others.

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