

From Russia to the forests of Mondulkiri, with love

Written by Sarah Whyte

WEDNESDAY, 18 FEBRUARY 2009

Maggie, fresh from the freezing cold of the Russian winter, will help local officials track endangered Indochinese tigers.

WITH Valentine's Day 2009 already a distant memory, single men in Cambodia might be interested in meeting Maggie: an intelligent Russian female, a quick learner with a fantastic nose, who is known by those who meet her as being a very loyal companion.

A German Wirehaired Pointer, Maggie has undergone a training program to help her track endangered Indochinese tigers at Mondulkiri province's Seima Biodiversity Conservation Area, a site managed jointly by the Forestry Administration and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS).

With experience tracking tigers in Russia and training from Linda Kerley, a Russian consultant to WCS, Maggie will be expected to sniff up to 3,000 square kilometres of nature reserve for droppings of the endangered cat, which has not been spotted in the area since 2007.

"Maggie was used for scent training in Russia and will be able to match the scent of the scats with the Indochinese tiger," said Hannah O'Kelly, a WCS wildlife monitoring advisor.

"The droppings found by Maggie will be sent away for analysis, which will indicate how many tigers there are in the province. The analysis will provide the number of tigers and their health and habits just by collecting the scats."

The "tiger detection dog" project is funded by WCS and Panthera, a global wild cat



Photo by: **PHOTO SUPPLI**
Maggie, a German Wirehaired Pointer, recently arrived in Cambodia to track tigers.

conservation group, as part of the regional "Tigers Forever" initiative, which has invested US\$30,000 to bring Maggie and another pooch to work in Cambodia for a year.

But having just arrived from Russia's frosty climate, Maggie is still struggling with Cambodia's humid weather.

"We have been trying to get Maggie acclimatised to the heat," O'Kelly said.

"We previously conducted some research to ensure she would be comfortable ... but we definitely don't want to rush her into the work."

O'Kelly said most of the work would be restricted to the dry season, and that they were hopeful of confirming local sightings of the animal.

"We'll be working right up to the wet season and then continuing on until the end of next year's dry season," she said.

"We're hopeful of finding some traces of these tigers. We wouldn't be doing this if we weren't at least hopeful."

Close Window