

T RAVEL IMPRESSIONS FROM THAILAND

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I had already enjoyed a fantastic tour through Thailand, when I was offered the opportunity to visit the island of Phuket, for a short holiday. I prepared, by reading a travel guide with the most interesting places to visit. In the guide a snakefarm was mentioned. There are a lot of snakefarms in the Asiatic countries but this one was mentioned in the guide. I was determined to visit that one for sure. For the rest of my holiday I could travel around on the touristic island. I was attracted to a small piece of rainforest, in the north of the island. This last piece of rainforest is situated around the Bang-pae waterfall

THE SNAKEFARM

As mentioned the snakefarm was visited first. This farm displays the local species to the tourists. Naturally there is a show, in this case with *Naja siamensis* but also *Elaphe radiata* and *Boiga dendrophila melanota* were used. As I am more interested in snakes than the average tourist, I asked the Thai, who spoke English badly, if he could show me some more.

The request was granted and it revealed a snakefarm with a mission. The goal of the people, is to protect the snakes of Phuket and educate the local people where necessary. At that moment, a *Python reticulatus* was brought in by a local farmer. He had caught and mistreated



The mistreated python. Photo by Chris Dekker





the animal. The farmer was paid, this is done in order to protect the snakes from being slaughtered by farmers. After treating the snake it was placed in a large cage. Now I could see for myself that the animals were well treated. The cost of treating and keeping the snakes are fully covered by the entrance fees and gifts provided for sale to visitors.

THE BANG-PAE WATERFALL

I also went to the Bang-pae waterfall where I visited the Gibbon rehabilitation project. This project was started by a Scottish biologist, who tries to bring all gibbons in bars and restaurants back to the wild, as this is an endangered species. After this visit I finally started to climb to the top of the waterfall. During my climb, several lizards crossed my path but there were no signs of any snakes on the way up. The habitat was typically snake-like though, rainforest and a creek nearby. On the way down, something moved, at the border of my eyesight. It was small and green and hurried away. I rushed after it, trying to take a picture. This was definitely not an easy task, in the wild. Trying to photograph something, that does not want its' picture taken. With some patience and a lot of luck, I managed to take a good shot of the animal. As it was a juvenile, determination turned out to be quiet easy. I recognised it as a *Rhabdophis nigrocinctus*. This species is known to be slightly venomous and it is best left alone. Several pictures were taken instead. As I encountered a juvenile *Varanus salvator* at the waterfall itself, the trip turned out to be very much worth the effort.



The very venomous Bungarus fasciatus. Photo by Cock Dekker

In conclusion, Thailand is a very attractive country for reptile lovers. Not only Phuket but also the rest of the country. I even saw a *Bungarus fasciatus* crossing a river several times. A recommended book for Thailand is: *Snakes and other reptiles of Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand*. ISBN 1-85368-438-4.

*Translated from Dutch by Henriëtte Bakker
Corrections by Mark Wootten*