

Dear all,

Happy Fourth of July! Two more weeks have passed since I last wrote. I am still in Man'e Village. Yet I have finished my bird surveys for Green Rubber. I completed what I believe to be a thorough and representative survey of all the birds across ten transects around the village, totaling up 2,400 minutes of surveying over about twenty days. I have mostly mastered the bird calls in rubber plantations, save those species I only encountered once or twice. There were some detections I didn't identify, and perhaps if I come back next year, I will do a better job. However, I feel happy that I was able to show up in SE Asia and complete such a task with only about two weeks to teach myself the hundreds of bird songs and calls one encounters in the rubber plantations. I now may let myself indulge in the bird diversity found outside the plantations, where there are numerous songs and calls I still have to learn!

Green Rubber is a much bigger experiment than my bird surveys alone, of course. There are similar projects happening in Laos and Thailand using the same study design. The Chinese project has been delayed by its sheer scale and the fact that there are not enough people who consider it their primary responsibility. I am daily impressed by the persistence and optimism of Dossa, the person in charge of the Chinese portion of the experiment. He is still searching for enough saplings for planting. Planting was intended to begin at the beginning of the rainy season (May), but the contract with the farmers has not been signed yet. Currently the contract is my greatest priority. I printed off 16 copies of the contract and spent the last five days tracking down villagers. Finding people is difficult when every other person in the village is Ai Wenxiang or Ai Xiangwa, and when one person can have three separate names. Today I finished handing out copies of the contract, and now I need to help the village head organize a small meeting with all of the participants to ensure that every person—even those who can't read Chinese—have a thorough understanding of the document and that they are willing to sign it. Only then can Dossa fly down from Kunming to sign the contract with the farmers.

I have learned the difficulties of organizing so many people in a foreign culture and difficult communication environment. One villager told me that he wanted to cut down his trees and we needed to find a different place to do the intercropping. Two more told me the government will build a hospital on their plantations and that our experiment would just be bulldozed over (the government can do whatever it likes with villager's land in China—all land belongs to the government in the end). I discovered that two of the plots slated for intercropping belonged to people who had not yet been contacted regarding this experiment—their neighbors had volunteered their land for them, and we simply recorded their land as being part of the experiment. Luckily it seems these farmers will accept the experiment (we are paying them to give them extra high value crops that they can sell for their own profit), and another location can be found for the plots slated for development.

I am working on my personal wildlife exploitation project at the same time. Every day I interview people at breakfast. This isn't always easy—people are often too busy for me, even when they are simply eating noodles, and many people don't want to be interviewed. Many people in the village are uncomfortable with Mandarin, so my inability to interview in Dai is a huge part of the problem. Maintaining a good reputation is infinitely helpful. Therefore, I have to incorporate a lot more socializing into my day than I would do naturally. I have learned to play a

little basketball and badminton with the younger people and volleyball when the older people play. I have spent much time feeling full and slightly uncomfortable as I squatted on tiny stools around food-laden tables with people speaking in a language I can't understand. My role in the conversation seems to rarely progress past questions like, "how much does it cost to fly here from the US" and "what time is it in America?" I have begun to come up with a list of bird and bat hunters. Tracking them down again to do a more in-depth interview is much more difficult than I anticipated. I already have learned a lot, but it will take a couple more weeks to complete my study. I certainly have a lot to learn when it comes to interviewing people. But I feel that my circumstance in the village positions me perfectly to capture the story of wildlife use in this village, which may inform community-based wildlife conservation efforts in similar villages.

I have become more interested in the bug business. Over a period of 5 days between June 27th and July first, the villagers in Man'e alone caught 19,300 lightning bugs, making 9650 RMB total. The bugs go to a company from Jiangxi Province, which collects lightning bugs and butterflies from more than 30 villages in XSBN to ship to large cities across China where the insects are released live as decoration at big festive events. The villagers go out in force when the company alerts people it will come buy insects. Everybody brings their bugs to one or two households which sell them directly to the company and then distribute the profits accordingly to those who collected the insects. It's hard to imagine insects being depleted by overexploitation, but many people are noting that butterflies have started becoming fewer since this business started 3-4 years ago, and the sheer scale of lightning bug hunting makes me wonder if there really are enough lightning bugs out there to sustain this.

The tiny owl has ruled my life over the past two weeks. I will no longer be traveling to other places in Yunnan for a mini-vacation in early July as I originally planned, but instead I will wait for the bird to fly away. It is a Collared Scops Owl. Every day I must feed it many times, and I try to feed it primarily at night when it is active. This means an 8:00PM feeding and then a 10:30PM feeding, 6 hours in a cage so I can sleep, and then freedom and another feeding at 4:30AM. I am always out catching things to feed it. I have captured perhaps three hundred grasshoppers (hard to catch) and other insects, gone fishing many times, caught over sixty frogs with my host father, and snatched a few geckoes as well. A baby animal is like a bottomless pit. I have no idea where its body puts all of these poor creatures.

I want it to learn to catch food on its own. But I'm not sure how to teach it, since it clearly doesn't use its eyes to catch food, but rather must feel it with its beak or feet. Will my baby owl grow up to be an independent wild owl before I travel away at the end of the month? It has taken up much more than its fair share of my time and consideration—basically qualifying as another internship in itself—yet I feel that this experience may be important for me in ways I didn't initially anticipate. I am always interviewing people about their catching and killing of wild creatures, and now I am very much involved in this activity myself.

I hope all is well back home. As always, I love to hear about how things are going in your lives.

Cheers,

-Francis



The tiny owl rules my life.



Man Le, a nearby village where the government took villagers' land to build a new highway. The villagers used the government's compensation to build themselves rich new mansions. New houses mimic some aspects of Dai architecture, but they are not built on stilts, they use bricks rather than wood, and some have three stories.



This is a traditional Dai house. In this area, the most traditional homes are often the poorest. Traditions change as incomes increase, which of course is never a bad thing.



Each of these jars contains 300 lightning bugs



Collecting dried latex to sell to the processor. I wish you could smell the stench. This stuff is horribly disgusting. But the villagers put up with it. It is the smell of money.



The little two year old of our family sells fish.



Tapping rubber is hard work.



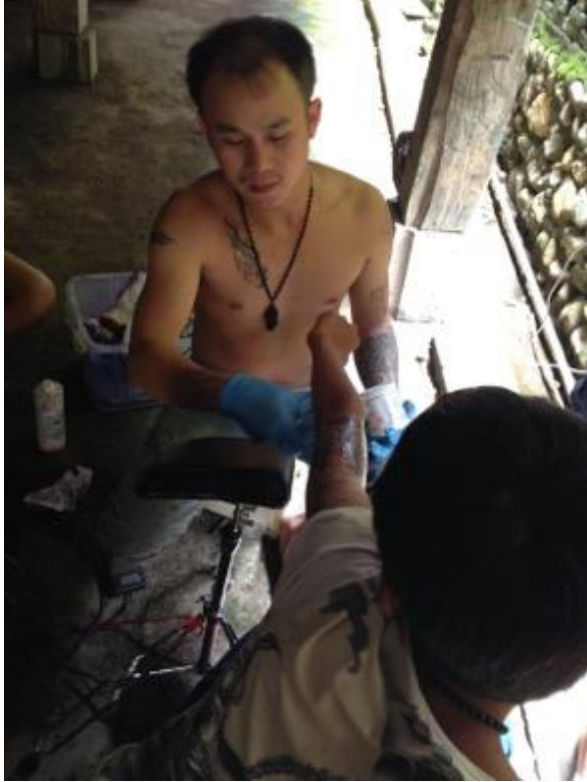
My friend is dutifully spraying herbicide all over his rubber farm to annihilate all plant life and therefore most biodiversity. Some villagers cut the glass with a knife because they know it's better for the environment. But these people are few.



Who are you??



Jack fruit is the best fruit known to man.



My friend Ai Han Bing is a skilled tattoo artist. Most men have tattoos. This kid is fifteen, and he is getting a tattoo that will last for life. 400RMB



It's a wild animal and caring for it can be really annoying. But I can't say that I'm not emotionally attached to it already.



During my last visit I noted that trash was piled high everywhere and the village was very dirty. The villagers noticed this, too, and they self-organized into teams that daily take turns going around the village and collecting people's trash. Finally Man'e has a trash service!! This is an inspirational example of what a community can accomplish when it works toward a common goal!



Sure, it's the tropics, but I'm not getting a tan. Much of the time it is really dark and foggy.



Butterflies to be shipped away to a faraway city



The villagers all bought new DVD players. Everybody ordered the same thing and it came as one huge shipment. This kind of purchasing explains why every house seems to have similar things.



Grasshopper harvest. The owl ate through forty minutes of work in half a day



They still print Dai language newspapers. This is the new version of written Dai. The older version is more complicated.