

Observation of *Varanus salvator* from Koh Tao Island in the Gulf of Thailand

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At 1430 h on 28 July 2008, a juvenile Water Monitor *Varanus salvator* (total length ca. 45 cm; Figure 1.) was observed as it was standing on the edge of shallow water beside a road (ca. 10° 05' 05" N ; 99° 50' 59" E and ca. 300 m from seashore) in Koh Tao Island (Surat Thani Province, southern Thailand; Figure 2.). It slowly walked and later stopped on a dead log for few minutes. Then it started walking and regularly flicking its tongue to the dense vegetation.

Distribution of *Varanus salvator* in Thailand is previously known from the mainland and adjacent islands (i.e. Taylor, 1963; Luxmoore and Groombride, 1990; Cox et al., 1998; Nabhitabhata et al., 2000; Lauprasert and Thirakhupt, 2001; Nabhitabhata and Chan-ard, 2005). This observation is the first for Koh



Figure 1. A young *Varanus salvator* from Koh Tao island.

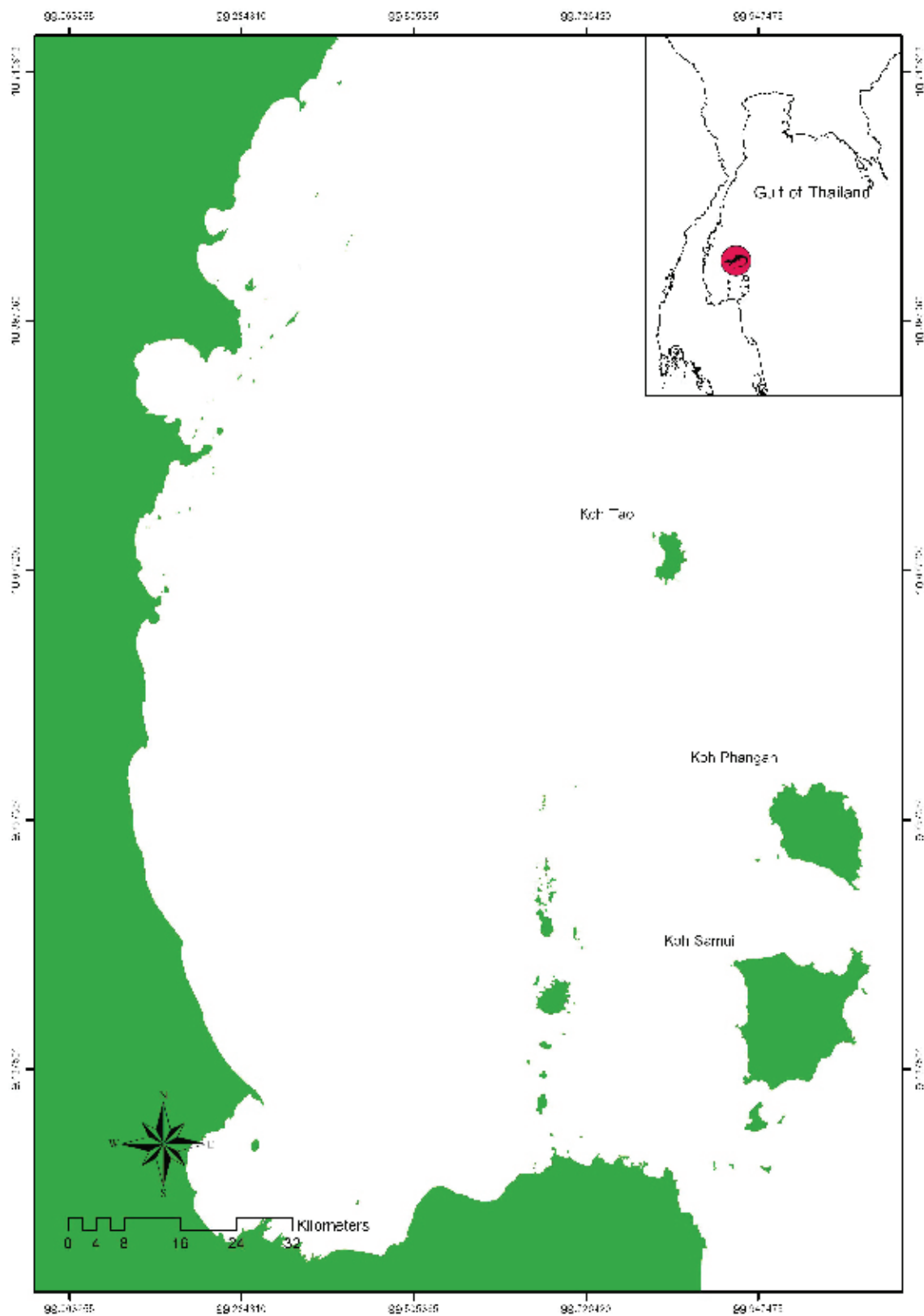


Figure 2. Map of Koh Tao and adjacent islands

Tao Island (ca. 21 km² in area, ca. 70 km out from the mainland) of the Gulf of Thailand, and expands the previously known distribution of this species. Borden (2007) observed this species swimming between two small islands (ca. 2.4 km out from the coast of Railay, Krabi Province) in the Andaman Sea. This observation indicated that the Water Monitor is a very strong swimmer and the individual observed was probably traveling to an island, rather than swimming out in the open water for some other purpose.

Similar to three congeneric species (*V. bengalensis*, *V. dumerilii* and *V. rudicollis*), *V. salvator* is protected under the Wild Animal Reservation and Protection Act of 1992. However, illegal hunting of this species for various purposes such as for meat or the skin trade still occurs throughout the country (Luxmoore and Groombridge, 1990; Lauprasert and Thirakhupt, 2001) and directly threatens the species' populations in their natural habitats (Nutphan, 1982). Further conservation efforts including research and law enforcement are needed.

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