



# Painting the town green

BY PHILIP SEN

**L**ocal champions such as Nao Sok are planting the seeds of change. Based at the leafy Wat Botum compound, he and a growing band of students and monks are nurturing the shoots of an eco revolution.

Disturbed by Cambodia's rampant deforestation, Nao began gathering seedlings back in 2004. Since then, he estimates, he's helped plant 100,000 trees at communities across the nation. On September 26, he'll encourage more Phnom Penhers to do their bit by bringing a batch to Meta House's 'Green Night' eco-fair.

The Green Night has been running bi-monthly since 2009. This September's is the biggest yet, with both floors stacked with green-themed goodness from organic wine tasting to an 'audio-visual jungle installation'.

"Green Night is a space for Cambodian and international NGOs and social enterprises to network," explain Meta House bosses Nico Mesterharm and Johannes Kast. "We've also hosted talks, premiered environmental films and in 2010 we added the eco-fair."

A highlight this month is a large-scale model of an enviro-nerd's dream home. Each room in Smart Home Khmer's concept pad networks into a central system, running everything from aircon and water heaters to mood lights and multimedia. It shuts down the electrical equipment when sensors detect you've left the room; a smartphone app virtually slaps your wrist if you're spilling energy from open doors and windows. Overall, estimates Smart Home Khmer operations manager Yann Vary, the Smart Home could save up to 30 percent of your annual energy usage.

It comes at a price, of course: fitting a two-bedroom house tots up at several thousand dollars. But with Cambodia's first smart home already being kitted out in

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At the other end of the eco spectrum comes Senglim Suy's elegy to Cambodia's birdlife. Suy is working on a book documenting all 600 known bird species. He's photographed 400 so far and is likely the first Cambodian to have snapped certain species in the wild. He'll be showing off his favourites at Green Night. All the more remarkable considering that as a boy he hunted birds for kicks. "If everyone acted like I did, soon we'll have nothing left," he concedes. So he's made it his mission to inform Cambodia about its own fragile ecosystem.

For example, farmers often don't realise that killing barn owls (believed to signify evil spirits), means rats race in to eat their crops. Local communities have the most to lose, says Suy, whose passion is preservation through education. Teach people about birds in simple ways, he believes, and they learn to love their feathered friends.

"When I leave this world, I'll be leaving something behind for the next generation," says arboreal activist Nao Sok. "We can't change the whole world, but we can start with the small things."

Whether you're a white-shouldered ibis, a white-winged duck or a white-rumped vulture (white bits shoot you up the endangered list, apparently); a mighty forest or a tender twig, you've got mates at Meta House.

**WHO:** Self-confessed tree-huggers, NGO crusties, eco-warriors and their ilk

**WHAT:** Everything and everyone you need to save the world (with drinks too)

**WHERE:** Meta House, 37 Sothearos Blvd.

**WHEN:** 6pm September 26

**WHY:** Shake off your Birkenstocks to meet the real-life jungle heroes

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