

Save the Sangai

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The Sangai deer is found only in Manipur and at the last count there were only 162 left in the Keibul Lamjao National Park.



An animal found only in Manipur is the Sangai. Its common English name is Manipur Brow-antlered Deer and the scientific name, *Cervus eldi eldi McClelland*. It lives in the marshy wetland in Keibul Lamjao. Its habitat is located in the southern parts of the Loktak Lake, which is the largest freshwater lake in Eastern India. It is also one of the seven Ramsar sites of international importance. The habitat of the Sangai is now protected as the Keibul Lamjao National Park.

The Sangai is the State animal of Manipur, and is projected as the social and the cultural identity of the State. In order to protect the animal from poachers, people living around the Keibul Lamjao National Park have formed local clubs and non-governmental organisations and together they form a collective body known as the Environmental Social Reformation and Sangai Protection Forum, in short called as ESRSPF. Units of the ESRSPF are spread out all across the lake area.

The Sangai Forum was formed to protect the Sangai and other wildlife like hog deer, wild boar, Indian otter, civet cat, box turtle, and migratory water birds who have their home in the National Park. Although banned by law, hunting of the Sangai and other wildlife continues. Then again people hunt the deer for its meat. The Loktak Hydroelectric Power Project too has become a threat to the Sangai habitat. A constant high water level is maintained in the lake and this has led to many changes, one of which is the rise in the water level in the Keibul Lamjao National Park during the rainy season.

Manipur experiences heavy rains during the monsoon season. So, the Sangai's home is constantly threatened. What happens during the rainy season is that the deer seeks shelter in isolated dry patches in the National Park and poachers lie in wait for such opportunity. Many times the deer drown.

One of the duties of the Sangai Forum volunteers is to keep a watch for signs of danger. They organise search parties to locate deer that are in trouble inside the park. They also keep a lookout for the poachers and organise awareness campaigns in villages, stressing on the importance of the Sangai and the need to save it. The villagers are requested to report to the nearest Sangai Forum unit if they have any news of the deer in danger. Forum volunteers also work with Forest officers and forest guards to protect the deer.

In January 2003, Sangai Forum volunteers caught two poachers who had killed a Sangai. The poachers were handed over to the Moirang Police Station and a criminal case was filed against them.

It is reported that there are only around 162 Sangai deer left in Keibul Lamjao National Park — their last safe home in the wild. If the Sangais are not saved, they will soon be extinct.