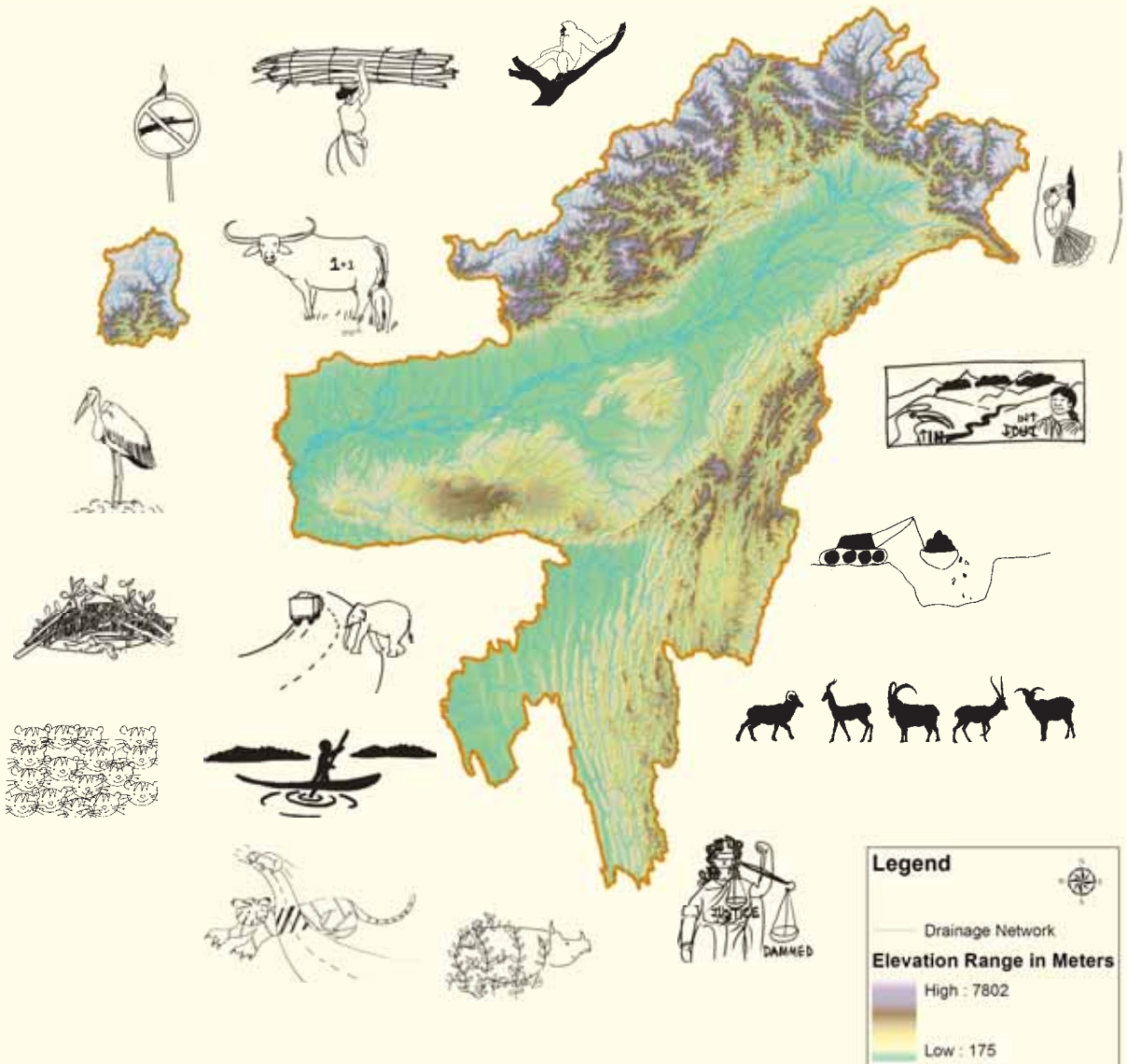


# THE STATE OF WILDLIFE IN NORTH-EAST INDIA 1996-2011

*A Compilation of News from the Protected Area Update*

Edited by PANKAJ SEKHSARIA





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A compilation of news from the Protected Area Update

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# COMMON ACRONYMS USED

<b>ER</b>	: Elephant Reserve
<b>FD</b>	: Forest Department
<b>IUCN</b>	: International Union for Conservation of Nature
<b>MoEF</b>	: Ministry of Environment and Forests
<b>NE</b>	: North-East
<b>NH</b>	: National Highway
<b>NP</b>	: National Park
<b>PA</b>	: Protected Area
<b>RF</b>	: Reserve Forest
<b>TR</b>	: Tiger Reserve
<b>WLPA</b>	: Wild Life Protection Act
<b>WLS</b>	: Wildlife Sanctuary
<b>WTI</b>	: Wildlife Trust of India
<b>WWF-India</b>	: World Wide Fund for Nature – India

**Note:** Maps in the document are representational and not to scale.

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# Editor's Note

For 17 years and still running, the Protected Area Update (PAU) has religiously presented a consolidated account of India's wildlife and protected area (PA) network. Published six times a year, it carries in a tightly edited format, news and information of what is happening in, to and around these national parks and sanctuaries that have been at the core of India's wildlife conservation strategy. It is based almost entirely on what the English media in India reports on wildlife and is perhaps, the most comprehensive account of its kind of the developments in the PA system for the last decade and a half. With nearly 4000 stories and news reports carried over the period of its existence, it is evident that the PAU is a huge and valuable database. Thus far, however, the newsletter has appeared in a fixed, standardized format: it appears every two months, the reporting is organized state wise and the primary unit of the information is the protected area.

## Changing the structure

What would happen if the format was to be changed a bit; if this huge set of information was to be reorganized to get a picture with a different starting point? What if the focus was not the entire PA network over a two month period, but a single PA or even a state over the entire period of 15 years? What if the focus was not a particular protected area but an ecosystem or a particular species? What might be made visible if the news was organized based on the source it came from – in this case a particular newspaper? The possibilities are as varied as they are exciting and the publication in your hand is the first attempt at doing precisely this.

In some senses what is presented here is an historical account of developments in the PA network in the eight states that constitute what is known as India's north-east. The exercise we have carried out is a rather simple one – cut, re-organise and paste. While the primary unit of reporting still remains the individual protected area, the time line has changed from two months of one issue of the PAU to 15 years, almost the entire life span of the publication. This sleight of hand, actually that of the computer mouse, allows us a glimpse into the contemporary history of a place (many places) marked on the map as a protected area. In following one news item after another of this one particular place we see what happened month after month, year after year; what developments recurred at what periodicity; what were the issues that were important and what was done about them, if anything needed to be done or was done at all. It's an exciting proposition and something that parts of this compilation bring out very strongly.

There is also the question of the relevance of a publication such as this. Why do it at all? This can be answered in many ways and the one that I find most productive is to do with the fact that the media is the most important interface that exists with various sections of society. What we know about wildlife, conservation and protected areas or for that matter most other things is what our newspapers and other media channels tell us. If a larger constituency for conservation has to be built the media has a vital role to play. For that we have to first understand what the media can and cannot do. A good place to begin is to get a sense of what it is already doing and this is

precisely what this compilation is trying to understand.

### **An account from the English press**

There are however, more than a few things to keep in mind at the very outset. Any history, whatever the claim about its comprehensive nature, is a limited one. It is limited in its content and it is limited in the perspectives it offers. The sources matter as much as what the sources are reporting about. There is the issue of accessibility for the Update itself. We might be able to easily access what is reported in the major publications and news outlets located in the better connected cities such as Delhi, Guwahati or Kolkata, but do we know what lesser known or more local newspapers based in smaller cities such as Imphal, Shillong or Dimapur are talking about?

In that sense the PAU is extremely limited because it relies, as mentioned, almost entirely on what a dominant section of India's English media sees, thinks and then reports about these PAs. This is at the very outset an English media history of PAs in the north-east and a doubly limited one at that. There is a 'double gate-keeping' that happens and all gate-keeping, as we know, has issues about it. The handicap is a serious one, but one that offers significant opportunities if acknowledged and accepted. The PAU, then, is not just an important account of what is happening on the ground (which we believe it is), it is also a reflection and a statement on India's English media. What is this section of the media saying about the PAs in the north-east? What is being included and more importantly, what is being left out? Which regions and PAs are not being covered at all? Why? What changes take place in the reports and the reporting when the publication is based in Delhi, as compared to when it is based Kolkata and Guwahati or Imphal and Dimapur?

### **A north-east explored unevenly**

Even a cursory look at this compilation starkly underlines these and many other questions. It might be a North East compilation but it might as well be called an Assam centred one. Nearly two-third of the stories are from the state of Assam alone. The others in the region seem to exist only on the margins. Even in Assam, about 50% of the stories are about only one PA, the Kaziranga National Park. Why is this the case? What explains this fascination with Kaziranga? Is it really that much more important than anything else in the region? Don't other parks have a lot that Kaziranga does not? Is it about what is actually happening on the ground, about what the world thinks of Kaziranga or some dynamics of editorial desks and newspaper newsrooms?

This is not to say that Kaziranga should not be reported about, but it is striking that Kaziranga is so important. Having said that, it would be interesting to understand what is the Kaziranga story itself that emerges. Looked at from one lens it could well be called the 3R story – the road, river and rifle story with the rhino being the fourth overarching 'R'. Tourism too shows up prominently in any Kaziranga account and it could well be argued that this is one of the key factors that demands and allows so much focus on this one PA. But what else is there to this large, multi-character, multi-personality landscape by the banks of the mighty Brahmaputra that might be worth knowing about? What can we learn from here that might be useful elsewhere? Is there something critical missing that Kaziranga itself needs to focus on?

### **What about the rest?**

We don't have the answers and attempting them has not been the purpose of putting together this compilation either. The possibilities and the potential, however, are evident.



An obvious kind of conclusion emerges, for instance, if we look at the reporting from the states other than Assam. The protected area network as it exists is not only limited in its physical coverage, it might actually not be effective for conservation considering the specific ecological and social characteristics of the region. It points pertinently to the need for considering other paradigms of conservation. In a region where a majority of land and forests are under the direct control of the communities that also have strong traditional institutions, it would be paramount to make communities a central part of the conservation enterprise.

This is what takes us to the 2nd section of this publication. As a complement to be bare bones of news reporting, we present here a series of analysis and perspective by some individuals with well established expertise in their fields of work. While Mehak Siddiqui and C Rajesh Reddi present an insightful 'media' analysis of the reporting itself, Sonali Ghosh, a forest officer currently studying for a PhD recounts her experiences of wild animal rescue and rehabilitation in Western Assam. Anwaruddin Choudhury takes us into the little explored region of Karbi Anglong; Yash Veer Bhatnagar explores the remote snow leopard habitats in Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutan; Nimesh Ved takes us along into the forests of the Garo Hills along the Bangladesh border and Neeraj Vaghlikar highlights the diversity and magnitude of threats wildlife and wild habitats in the region face from the large-scale dam construction enterprise. We conclude the section with a comprehensive overview account of the need, the potential and the framework for community participation and initiatives in conservation in the north-east by Neema Pathak.

We obviously, don't cover everything, but the attempt has been to give a flavour of what the

north-east is all about. We hope you find this compilation interesting and are able to use it in ways that you find useful and relevant.

The last section of this publication includes an overview of the protected area network of the country in general and the north-east in particular. We also include the full issue of the October 2012 issue of the Protected Area Update, the latest at the time of going to press, to give you an idea of what this newsletter actually looks like and what coverage it gives to other issues and other parts of the country.

### **In conclusion**

There are number of people and organizations that need to be thanked for making this compilation possible – none more important than Kalpavriksh, the organization that I have been part of many years and that has in different ways ensured that the world out there has the Protected Area Update to read every two months for all these years. Only 2nd to Kalpavriksh has been the Foundation for Ecological Security, that has not only published this particular compilation, but has supported Kalpavriksh for over a decade in the regular publishing of the PAU itself. We also hope that this first compilation that focuses on the north-east will not end up being the only of its kind and that we will produce many more such compilations that are based on other ideas and similar sleights of the computer mouse, but offer perspectives and insights that are different, wide ranging and challenging.

Pankaj Sekhsaria  
Editor, Protected Area Update  
October 31, 2012



# SECTION 1

News & Information

## **NORTH-EAST INDIA REGIONAL NEWS**

### **2001**

#### **Mizoram, Tripura to create inter-state biosphere reserves**

The Governments of Mizoram and Tripura have decided to create biosphere reserves in 2,000 acres each on either side of the inter-state border. This was decided in a meeting here between the Mizoram Environment and Forest Minister, Mr. Rualchhina and his Tripura counterpart, Mr. Narayan Rupini, in June 2000. The two ministers decided to jointly approach the North Eastern Council (NEC) for funds to implement the project and said that the reserve would go a long way in the preservation of flora and fauna along the border areas and would be useful for eco-tourism here.

Joint verification was to be conducted on both the sides of the border, between Kahmun and Tuipuibari in Mizoram and in the Phuldungsei area in Tripura. The two ministers also exchanged views on how to formulate better ways of protection of forest resources and wildlife in the border areas by ending smuggling of forest produce to Bangladesh.

Source: 'Mizoram, Tripura to create biosphere reserves', *The Assam Tribune*, 01/07/2001.

### **2002**

#### **WWF project for elephant conservation in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh**

The World Wide Fund for Nature

(WWF) – India, is working out a long-term conservation action plan for the Asian elephant on the north bank of the River Brahmaputra, covering the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The 'Elephant conservation in North Bank Landscape' is a project under WWF International's Asian Rhino and Elephant Action Strategy (AREAS) program. It is based on extensive fieldwork, remote sensing, data provided by the Global Positioning System (GPS), the Geographical Information System (GIS) and official records.

The study covered an area of approximately 83,978 hectares, stretching from Barnadi in East Kamrup in Assam to the Dibang River in Arunachal Pradesh. An estimated 2300 elephants live in this area. 18,664 hectares of this area is in Assam of which 12% is notified as reserve forests, proposed reserve forests, wildlife sanctuaries and NPs. The study has reported that large-scale destruction of forests caused by encroachment and other human and development activities especially along the Assam belt has exposed the elephant habitats to maximum risks. However, this North Bank Landscape (NBL) still constitutes prime elephant habitat in the region, taking into consideration the number of elephants, their food availability and pattern of movement.

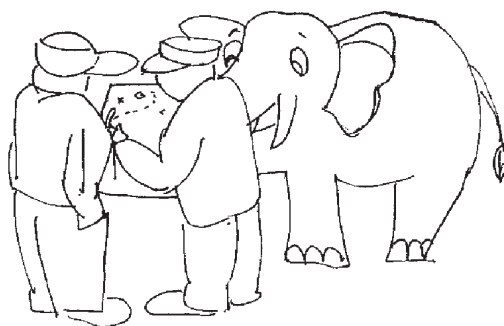
The study has stressed that habitat protection is vital, and that human-animal conflict can be substantially reduced by protecting forests and migration routes of the elephants and where possible, regenerating lost forests. The study has also listed ten important elephant movement corridors. These include the Pakke-Doimara corridor, the Pakke-Papum corridor, the Drupong-Doimukh corridor and the Subansiri-Dulung corridor. Charduar, Balipara and Bihali in Sonitpur district have been prioritised as conflict areas based on human and elephant casualty records from 1996 to 2002.

The project which was initiated in May 2001 is expected to be completed in December 2002, following which the final report will be released.

Source: Sivasish Thakur. 'WWF action plan to conserve elephants in Assam, Arunachal', *The Assam Tribune*, 29/10/2002.

## 2003

### North East India Elephant Specialist Group



A North-East India Elephant Specialist Group (NEESG) comprising of representatives from the government and NGOs has recently been formed to work on issues related to elephant conservation in this part of the country. The members of the group are Dr Bibhab Talukdar, Dr KK Sarma, Dr Rathin Barman, C Loma, Bijoyananda Choudhury, CCS Maunglong, Bhupen Talukdar, and HK Choudhury. A formal committee of the NEESG will be formed in December. Till then the group will be convened by Dr Bibhab Talukdar and Bhupen Talukdar.

The group was formed after participation in the International Symposium on human-elephant conflict that was recently held in Sri Lanka.

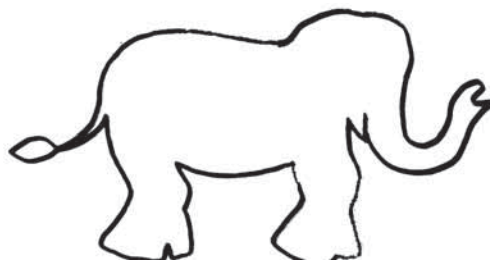
The goal of the NEESG is to promote conservation welfare of the Asian elephant in

North-East (NE) India. Its objectives include advocacy for the cause of the elephant in every possible forum, formulation of a regional approach for elephant conservation in NE India, promoting traditional means of elephant keeping, mass awareness campaign for elephant conservation and its habitats in NE India, encouraging research work and capacity building of young researchers from NE India, and compliment all other government and non-government agencies with regards to elephant conservation.

Source: Body formed to tackle Man-elephant conflict, *The Assam Tribune*, 27/09/2003.

## 2004

### Course on health care and management of Asian elephants



A week-long refresher course on health care and management of Asian elephants for field veterinarians was held in Assam in the month of March. The course was conducted at the College of Veterinary Science, Khanapara, and was sponsored by Project Elephant, and the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF).

A total of 20 selected field veterinarians participated. This included eight from Assam, three from Meghalaya, two each from Arunachal Pradesh and West Bengal and one each from Nagaland and Orissa. Two vets working with the WTI (at Kaziranga

NP and Dibru-Saikhowa NP in Assam) and one from Centre for Bear Rehabilitation and Conservation, Wild Rescue, Pakke TR, Arunachal Pradesh also participated.

Sixteen faculty members and three senior forest officials of the Government of Assam acted as resource persons, during the course. Dr Dennis Schimdtt from Missouri University and Ms Heidi Riddle of the International Elephant Foundation (IEF), USA, also participated as resource persons from abroad. Others who spoke on the occasion included Dr Dharmeswar Das, Course Director cum Dean, Faculty of Veterinary Science; and Mr SS Bist, Inspector General, Forests and Director, Project Elephant.

Dr Schmidt delivered a lecture on the technique of ultrasound for the diagnosis of pregnancy and reproduction in elephant and subsequently the technique was demonstrated in the elephants of Assam State Zoo with a pregnant elephant of Pabitora WLS.

Source: 'Refresher course on health care and management of Asian elephants', *The Assam Tribune*, 14/03/2004.

### **Study identifies NE India as one of six important (eco) tourism destinations**

A study conducted by AF Ferguson & Co. for the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) has identified the country's north-eastern region as one of the six important circuits for eco-tourism. Another survey done by YES Bank, also for FICCI, has revealed immense investment opportunities for this region in the field of eco-tourism.

The Assam State Government is also reported to be preparing a tourism master plan and policy and would invite joint ventures in ropeway projects, floating hotels and restaurants on the Brahmaputra, hovercraft and speed boat services, resorts and tourist accommodation, convention

centres and star hotels, recreational parks, hot-air ballooning, transport and golf courses upgradation. The specific areas that have been identified include the NPs of Kaziranga, Manas, Nameri, Orang and Dibru-Saikhowa as also the forests at Joypur, Dihing-Patkai and Bhalukpong.

The Mizoram Government too has identified a number of possibilities for tourism promotion and these include many of the state's wildlife sanctuaries and NPs.

Source: Ashok Sharma. 'Blue Mountain Trails: No, Not The Nilgiris, It's The North-East That Promises Adventure Minus Militants' <http://www.financialexpress.com>, 05/09/2004.

2005

**Statewise encroachment on Forest Lands and their eviction since May 2002, as on 31/03/04**

State	Upto May 02	Evicted since May 02	On 31/03/04
Assam	371450	71740	299710
Arunachal	4038	150	3888
Manipur	536	3	533
Meghalaya	6584	0	6584
Mizoram	18760	0	18760
Nagaland	0	0	0
Sikkim	3550	50	3500
Tripura	59336	0	59336

- All figures rounded up in hectares
- Excerpted from data presented in Parliament on August 8, 2005

Source: <http://pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=39212>

**2006**

**Details of Funds Released under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme “Project Tiger” 2002-2006**

(Rs. In lakhs)

State/UT	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
Arunachal	35.875	68.75	35.00	172.418
Assam	65.70	79.95	-	86.4896
Mizoram	98.32	67.56	94.34	65.156
Tripura	-	-	-	0.50
<b>Total</b>	<b>199.895</b>	<b>216.26</b>	<b>129.34</b>	<b>324.5636</b>



**2008**

**2007–08 Funds allocation for different conservation related work in the North Eastern States**

(Rs. in lakhs)

State	NP/WLS	Project Elephant	Project Tiger
Arunachal Pradesh	125.05	54.50	110.25
Assam	81.775	144.00	95.61
Manipur	105.89	0	0
Meghalaya	64.88	68.39	0
Mizoram	169.46	1.33	82.90
Nagaland	19.11	26.60	0
Sikkim	159.22	0	0
Tripura	36.00	12.00	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>761.385</b>	<b>306.82</b>	<b>288.76</b>

Source: ‘NPs and Sanctuaries in North East’, Press Information Bureau, Govt. of India, Press Release, 24/04/2008

**Forest occupancy and population estimates of tiger in the North East Hills and Brahmaputra Flood Plains as per the refined methodology (2008)**

State	Tiger Area km <sup>2</sup>	Tiger Nos.	Lower/Upper limit
Assam*	1164	70	60/80
Arunachal Pradesh*	1685	14	12/18
Mizoram*	785	6	4/8
N.E. Hills & Brahmaputra	4230	100	84/118
<b>Total Tiger Population</b>	<b>7864</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>160/224</b>

\* Population estimates are based on possible density of tiger occupied landscape in the area, not assessed by double sampling.

## **Dr Aparajita Datta selected for the 2009 Women of Discovery Award**

Indian wildlife scientist Dr. Aparajita Datta of the Nature Conservation Foundation has been selected for the 2009 Women of Discovery Award for her contribution to wildlife conservation in North-East India with the help of local communities.

The other awardees are American acoustical geophysicist, Maya Tolstoy; Brazilian volcanologist, Rosaly Lopes; Mongolian paleontologist, Bolortsetseg Minjin; and Egyptian wildlife biologist, Leela Hazzah.

The awards acknowledge excellence in fields related to international exploration and bring to light the research, adventures, and pioneering discoveries of women that have led to global and scientific advancement. The awards will be presented in New York in April 2009.

Source: 'Award for Indian wildlife scientist', <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com, 20/11/2008>.

## **Ecotone – New newsletter on wildlife and conservation in North East India**

Guwahati based Environ and Imphal based North East Centre for Environmental Education and Research (NECEER) have jointly launched a new newsletter on wildlife and conservation in North East India. Titled Ecotone the newsletter will be published every two months.

The newsletter is edited by Kripaljyoti Mazumdar, while the Managing Editor is Khurajam Jibankumar Singh.

## **2009**

### **CEE plans Hoolock gibbon conservation programme in NE**

The Centre for Environment Education (CEE), North East is planning a 'Site Specific Conservation Education Programme' (SSCEP) in selected Hoolock gibbon sanctuaries of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura. The program will be executed by forming clusters, each of which will involve 20-25 schools and a local NGO partner.

The programme will involve development of gibbon educational packages in the context of the north-east to support classroom teaching-learning; orientation workshop series for NGOs and teachers; year-long school cluster activities, evaluation information and attitudinal changes brought about by the project; thorough pre- and post-project knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) surveys.

Great Ape Campaigns will be organized at select places with support from the local FD. Campaigns will also emphasize on community participation and local protected area management.

Inputs and partnerships will be sought from a number of organizations that include the Primate Research Centre, the Gibbon Conservation Centre, Wildlife Areas Development Trust, of Assam, WTI, Zoo Outreach Organization, local NGOs, institutions and allied departments.

Source: 'Hoolock gibbon conservation programme', *The Assam Tribune*, 03/08/2009.



## 2010

### **Expert committee for protected areas assessment in the north-east**

A three-member expert committee has been constituted to assess whether the chosen approaches in PA management in the north-east are apt and adequate. The committee has been constituted under the Wildlife Institute of India's program for 'Management Effectiveness Evaluation of Protected Area Network in India'. It comprises Mr MC Malakar, former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Assam, and wildlife experts Dr PC Bhattacharjee and Dr Gautam Narayan. The evaluation has been initiated following a directive from the Prime Minister's office to conduct an independent evaluation of all PAs in the country.

The PAs to be evaluated include the Pangolakha WLS in Sikkim, the Balpakram NP in Meghalaya, the Dibru-Saikhowa NP in Assam, Ngengpui WLS in Mizoram, the Trishna WLS in Tripura and the Dibang WLS in Assam.

The initiative seeks to assess the chosen management approaches and to evaluate whether the funds allocated are used effectively. It will ascertain whether the values of the site and threats to them are well documented, assessed and monitored. Further, it is expected to examine the adequacy or the constraints in PA legislation and policy, administrative structures and procedures, and design in relation to management effectiveness.

The report of each regional committee is to be submitted to the central monitoring and co-ordination committee of the MoEF each year following which it will be consolidated and presented to parliament.

Source: 'Experts assess six protected areas', *The Telegraph*, 06/10/2010.

### **CBI probe into wildlife contraband haul at Guwahati airport**

A Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe has been ordered into the seizure of 20 kg of tiger parts and bones worth Rs 5 crore from Guwahati airport in the month of June. 555 kilograms of pangolin scales were also part of the seizure. There were a total of four seizures in the span of five days from the airport and railway station in Guwahati. This is considered indicative of the fact that Guwahati is becoming a major hub for smugglers transporting wildlife products to neighbouring countries.

The recently seized consignment came from Dimapur in Nagaland and officials suspect that the tigers may have been poached in the Kaziranga NP. The sender and the addressee were the same in all the cases. They were coming from Nagaland and destined for Manipur's Imphal West district. Officials said that such consignments go directly from Dimapur to Manipur and then to Myanmar. The 68 day Manipur blockade had forced them to be sent through Guwahati this time.

Source: 'Wildlife seizure in Assam, again', *The Times of India*, 21/06/2010.

### **CEE to implement gibbon conservation programme in five North-Eastern states**

The Centre for Environment Education will implement a Gibbon Conservation Program in eight clusters in five states in North-East India. These are Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura. A total of 130-150 schools will be covered under the program.

The project is being implemented as a follow up to the United States Fish and Wildlife Services grant to the Government of India in 2009 for gibbon conservation under its Great Ape Conservation Fund.

Source: Akankshya Chaliha, 'Project to protect gibbons', *The Telegraph*, 20/10/2010.



# ARUNACHAL PRADESH

NO.	NAME OF THE PA	AREA (SQ KM)
1	Mouling NP	483
2	Namdapha NP	1807.82
3	D'ering Memorial (Lali) WLS	190
4	Dibang WLS	4149
5	Eaglenest WLS	217
6	Itanagar WLS	140.3
7	Kamlang WLS	783
8	Kane WLS	55
9	Mehao WLS	281.5
10	Pakhui/Pakke WLS	861.95
11	Sessa Orchid WLS	100
12	Tale Valley WLS	337
13	Yordi-Rabe Supse WLS	491.62
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9897.19</b>



**T**rapping – This is practised only in small streams and where the flow is fast and torrential. The trap is spindle-shaped in appearance and is made of strong bamboo splinters. The splinters are tied in such a way that the two ends are open and a constriction is made at the centre. One open end is placed in between the boulders facing the water current. Fishes are caught at the constriction and remain alive because of the stream of water flowing out through the other end. *Pseudecheneis sulcatus* was caught by one such trap.

In some places, instead of the spindle cage remaining open at both ends, the splinters are cut in such a way that they are separate only for about 3/4ths of the length of the bamboo. The basal portion remains intact and hollow, serving as a receptacle for fish.

Shooting with bow and arrow – Some tribals use sharpened bamboo splinters as arrows and shoot fish. This is practised only at shallow portions of the river, and where the water is clear. They are fairly accurate shots though the quantity of fish obtained is small. The arrow heads are not poisoned.

*KC Jayaram and N Majumdar*

‘On a collection of Fish from the Kameng Frontier Division, N.E.F.A’.  
Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society 61(2), August 1964

# STATE NEWS

## 2001

### **Army men involved in hunting, wildlife souvenir collection**

It has been reported that the army is widely involved in wildlife souvenir collection and hunting in Arunachal Pradesh. The collections include those of skins and horns of different mammalian species. Usually a few rupees are paid for the trophy, but the army men also acquire them from the locals by giving away a few discarded goods like old jackets, boots and blankets.

The army men who are mostly from other parts of the country, where such items are not very common, are known to be the ones most interested and fascinated by these souvenirs. Hunting too is rampant, mainly by the non commissioned ranks of soldiers like the Gorkha and those from the north-east. Officers are usually not involved in this.

Source: Asif Ahmed Hazarika. Letter to Kalpavriksh, dated 12/07/2001.

## 2002

### **State to initiate various steps for wildlife protection**

The Arunachal Pradesh FD is initiating a number of steps for wildlife protection in the state. The communication network has been improved through installation of very high frequency (VHF) sets to strengthen anti-poaching activities and the wildlife headquarters at Itanagar are to be connected with all divisional headquarters by the end of the financial year

The proposal of the FD for the procurement of arms and ammunition has been approved by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) and a final approval from the Defence Ministry for the same is awaited. Field staff has also been deputed to the Police Training Centre at Banderdewa for training in the use of the arms.

Additionally, the FD has formulated a proposal for the creation of a mobile protection force to prevent poaching, trafficking and illegal wildlife trade. It has proposed to set up three mobile protection circles for the entire state - western, eastern and central circles. Some ecodevelopment schemes have also been contemplated and proposed.

Source: 'Arunachal steps against poachers', *The Sentinel*, 16/06/2002.

## 2007

### **WWF, Army for conservation of Arunachal Pradesh wildlife and forests**

The Indian Army has recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) – India to prepare a joint action plan for conservation of forests and wildlife in western Arunachal Pradesh.

The MoU was signed by Maj. Gen. D. S. Sidhu, GOC 5 Mountain Division, and Sejal Worah, programme director of WWF-India, at a function at Tenga in Arunachal Pradesh in September.

Source: 'Wildlife protection', [www.telegraphindia.com](http://www.telegraphindia.com)

**2008**

**Conservation Initiative for high altitude wetlands in state**



A high-altitude wetlands conservation project titled ‘Saving Wetlands Sky High’ is being launched in Arunachal Pradesh by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) – India in conjunction with some Buddhist monasteries and the Indian Army.

The Tawang monastery will be involved in the project to conserve the Bangajan Wetland Complex, which comprises 12 lakes. The Nagula Wetland Complex, which is made up of about 100 small lakes will be looked after by the army.

The initial mapping of the Nagula Bangajan Wetland Complexes has already been completed, and the state government has also identified the two for designation as Ramsar sites.

Source: ‘Caretakers for Arunachal wetlands’, *The Telegraph*, 21/08/2008.

**DALLAI-DITCHU WLS**

**2006**

**Proposal for Dallai-Ditchu WLS**

Wild Survey North East, an NGO working in the states of the north-east has suggested the creation of the Dallai-Ditchu WLS in

Arunachal Pradesh. The FD had shown initial interest when the proposal had first been made in 2004, but since then there has been no development. The proposal is for the creation of a 3700 sq. kms protected area comprising Ditchu reserve forest, Dallai proposed reserve forest, the Langwanti Village reserve forest and some adjoining areas in the northern part of the Anjaw district.

The forests here are home to a wide range of rare species of fauna including the Red panda, Clouded leopard, Snow leopard, Mishmi takin, Red goral, tiger, leopard, Himalayan black bear and the Hoolock gibbon. The human population here is also said to be limited and there are large areas of contiguous forests that are uninhabited.

Source: ‘Proposal to declare Dallai-Ditchu as sanctuary gathering dust’, *The Assam Tribune*, 10/10/06.

**EAGLENEST WLS**

**2006**

**‘Vacations for Conservation’ program in Eaglenest WLS**

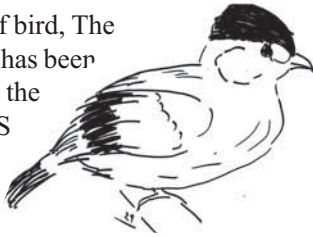
A ‘Vacations for Conservation’ program is being initiated in the Eaglenest WLS in March 2006. The core idea is to encourage amateur naturalists to spend their vacations in Arunachal Pradesh and contribute to biodiversity documentation in a systematic manner and have a good experience at the same time. It is hoped that this will also help local people earn a sustainable livelihood from their forests.

The work that the participants will undertake includes spotting herpetofauna, photographing butterflies, fungi and orchids making bird lists, conducting a census

of specific red list species, investigating breeding biology of birds and recording bird song. Initially the program is limited to Indian citizens only.

### **New bird species discovered in Eaglenest WLS**

A new species of bird, The Bugun liocichla has been discovered in the Eaglenest WLS by Dr Ramana Athreya in partnership with Mr Indi Glow of the Bugun tribe that lives on the periphery of the sanctuary.



A series of observations in 2005 and 2006 confirmed its taxonomic status as a species new to science. The last new species discovered in mainland India was in 1948, also in Arunachal Pradesh. It was Rusty-throated “Mishmi” Wren-Babbler.

It is estimated that 43,000 trees near the sanctuary are to be chopped for the project. The project had received environmental clearance in February last year. The forest clearance for the project is, however, pending. The forest advisory committee of the MoEF had referred the project to NBWL last year.

The project will also impact at least two downstream Important Bird Areas due to drastic flow pattern alterations – the Chapories of the Lohit river in Arunachal Pradesh and Dibru-Saikhowa NP in Assam. A two-member team comprising Dr Asad Rahmani, Director of the Bombay Natural History Society, and Pratap Singh, CCF (Wildlife) of Arunachal Pradesh, will visit the site before a final decision is taken.

Source: Minutes of the 23rd meeting of the NBWL held on October 14, 2011. MoEF website.

## **KAMLANG WLS**

2011

### **NBWL sub-committee to study impact of Demwe Lower on Kamlang WLS**

The Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife has put on hold the 1750MW Demwe Lower project in the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh. The decision was taken in a meeting of the NBWL on October 14. The 1,750 MW project is being executed jointly by Athena Demwe Power Ltd, India-based Athena Energy Ventures Pvt Ltd, and the Government of Arunachal Pradesh. The dam site is about 8.5 km from the Kamlang WLS while the reservoir is only about 50 metres from the boundary.

## **NAMDAPHA NP**

1999

### **Poaching on the rise in Namdapha**

Poaching in the core of the Namdapha TR is on the rise. In February 1999 forest officials seized a number of animals including a dead sambar and Barking deer from a camp within the park.

Lisu tribals have migrated into India from Myanmar and settled in and around the core area of Namdapha. Although initially helpful to wildlife officials, they now appear to have turned to poaching under the influence and support of traffickers from across the Myanmar border.

Source: ‘Poaching on the rise’, *Tigerlink*, Vol. 5, No. 2, June 1999. ‘Namdapha NP’, *Nature’s Beckon News*, Vol. C/No. 1, June 1999.

## **Threats to Namdapha**

Nature's Beckon, an environmental activists' group of the North-East has taken initiative for the conservation of the Namdapha NP under the mission Agenda Namdapha. It has reported that illegal immigrants of the Lisu tribe from Myanmar were posing a threat to the park due to encroachments and poaching. A number of attacks by the Lisu tribals on the forest staff have also been reported in the last one year.

The group has also asked that the construction of the road from Miao to Vijaynagar which mostly passes through the NP should be handed over to the management of the park, instead of the Arunachal Pradesh Public Works Department. They have also opposed the construction of a bridge at Deban on the Noadihing River inside the park because of the disturbance that it will cause to the wildlife in the area.

Source: 'Myanmar immigrants posing threat to Namdapha NP', *The Sentinel*, 13/12/1999.

## **2000**

### **Project for biodiversity management in Namdapha**

The MacArthur Foundation funded multidisciplinary, multi-institutional research project on 'People Centred Biodiversity Management in Namdapha NP' was revised last year, with an emphasis on natural resource management centered on jhum (shifting cultivation).

The West Kameng area has also now been included in the project. A planning meeting for the project was held at the State Forestry Institute in October 2000. The other partners in the project are the North-Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology, GB Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment &

Development, Almora, and the Department of Geography, Arunachal University.

Source: 'Arunachal Project', *UNESCO Newsletter*, December 2000.

## **2002**

### **NGO expresses concern over status of Namdapha**

Early Birds, an NGO based in Guwahati has recently written a letter to the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh expressing concerns over the status and future of the Namdapha NP. The issues that they have raised include the shortage of forest staff for the patrolling and protection of the park.

They have also pointed out that members of the organisation while participating in the recent tiger census in the park noticed that poisoned food items were being used to poison and kill wild animals along the banks of the Naodihing River. Additionally, they also found a number of poisoned arrows and field tripping devices that are allegedly installed by the Lisu tribals here.

The letter also states that the tribals are occupying 25 hectares of pristine land within the park and this needs to be vacated immediately and that the active role of the Indian army should be sought in the protection of this park.

Source: Moloy Baruah. Letter to the CM of Arunachal Pradesh. 31/01/2002.

## **2004**

### **52 Lisu families to be relocated from Namdapha**

The Arunachal FD has taken a decision to move out all the 52 Lisu families who are said



to have encroached on the forests of the Namdapha NP in Changlang district.

Steps were being taken to remove all the people settled at Burma Nallah area along the Miao-Vijaynagar Road and suitable land for their relocation was being identified in the Vijaynagar area. These decisions were taken at a recent meeting of the State Wildlife Board and the Changlang DC had been issued orders to complete the proceedings.

The work for the relocation could not be started, first, due to parliamentary elections and then because road communication was disrupted following flash floods in the area. It has been pointed out that the 'encroachers' had moved into this area from across the international border before 1972 and were now also in possession of citizenship certificates.

In another development nearly 500 Chakma families have shifted to reserved forest areas of Manabhun, Tengapani and Diyun Anchal, following the recent floods in areas inhabited by them. The FD has expressed concern over this development and said that notices would be served for the land to be vacated. If that did not work, they have added, they would go in for an eviction drive.

Source: 'Arunachal Forest Dept. to evict NNP encroachers', *The Sentinel*, 05/09/2004.



## 2005

### Now Namdapha loses all tigers

The Namdapha NP and TR has reportedly lost its entire population of tigers that had been put at 61 in the last census conducted in 2001-02. Wildlife officials said that, at best, one tiger survived in the park that is spread over nearly 2000 sq. kms. This animal too is said to have been spotted by Chakma villagers and not the staff of the FD.

The Field Director of the park said that a clear picture and the real count would be available only after the census was conducted in December. He blamed poor infrastructure and limited frontline staff for the difficulty in the upkeep of the reserve. Each person on frontline duty in Namdapha needs to cover an area of 65-70 sq km in comparison to the national average of 15-20 sq km.

The main reason behind the loss of tigers here is said to be the people of the Lisu tribe, who have settled in the reserve and hunt in the forests here. Originally from Myanmar, official records show that they migrated and set up base inside the TR in 1987. At present, there are 66 families in three different locations in and around Gandhigram, a village bordering Myanmar. The Arunachal government is said to be in the process of finding their exact numbers and working towards re-settling them outside the reserve.

Source: Yudhajit Shankar. 'Namdapha stripped of striped cats', *The Statesman*, 27/11/05.

## **PAKHUI/PAKKE WLS**

**2008**

### **Villagers for protection of Pakhui TR**

Heads of 16 villages bordering the Pakhui TR have formed a committee that will work jointly with the FD for protection of the reserve. The committee, locally called the Ghora Aabhe, recently passed a resolution listing penalties for hunting of 17 different wild species ranging from Rs 200 to Rs 30,000.

Following the initiative that is also being supported by the WTI, about 32 illegal locally made guns were seized from poachers, who have also now promised to work for the protection of the reserve. The committee would also work to strengthen intelligence networks, enforcement activities and create awareness for conservation among local the people.

Source: 'Villagers join hands to protect Pakhui TR in Arunachal Pradesh', *The Hindustan Times*.

**2010**

### **Tiger density goes up in Pakke TR**

The Pakke Tiger Reserve has recorded a density of 1.9 tigers per 100 sq km. This is higher than the density of 1.15 tigers per 100 sq km recorded in 2006.

The census was carried out by WWF-India in collaboration with the Arunachal Pradesh FD. Automated cameras were used to capture the photographs of wild animals. The effectively sampled area for camera trapping was 261.81 sq km of the reserve's total area of 862 sq km. The camera traps

were laid at 30 locations in both, the Sijusa and Tipi ranges. The census was carried out from February 4 to March 30 this year.

Large areas of the park were not covered due to their inaccessibility.

Source: Roopak Goswami. 'Big cats hit a low in Pakke sanctuary – Clouded leopard on camera in tiger reserve for first time', *The Telegraph*, 30/07/2010.

## **TALE VALLEY WLS**

**2009**

### **Conditions diluted for project that submerges part of Tale Valley WLS**

The 2000 MW Lower Subansiri hydroelectric project coming up on the Arunachal Pradesh – Assam border is to submerge a part of the Tale Valley WLS and had therefore required a clearance from the Standing Committee (StC) of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL). In 2002-03 the Supreme Court (SC) had observed that the project would impact important wildlife habitats and species well beyond the Tale Valley WLS in both the upstream and downstream areas.

Despite opposition of non-governmental members the project was granted clearance, but with the imposition of stringent conditions. These included the declaration of the RFS in the catchment area of the dam as a sanctuary or NP and imposed a restriction on construction of dams in the upstream stretches of the Subansiri river. These were also then reiterated by the SC in April 2004.

Dam proponents raised no objection till construction on the project reached a point where it could not now be cancelled. With this fait accompli in hand, in May 2005, they asked the SC for a review of the conditions

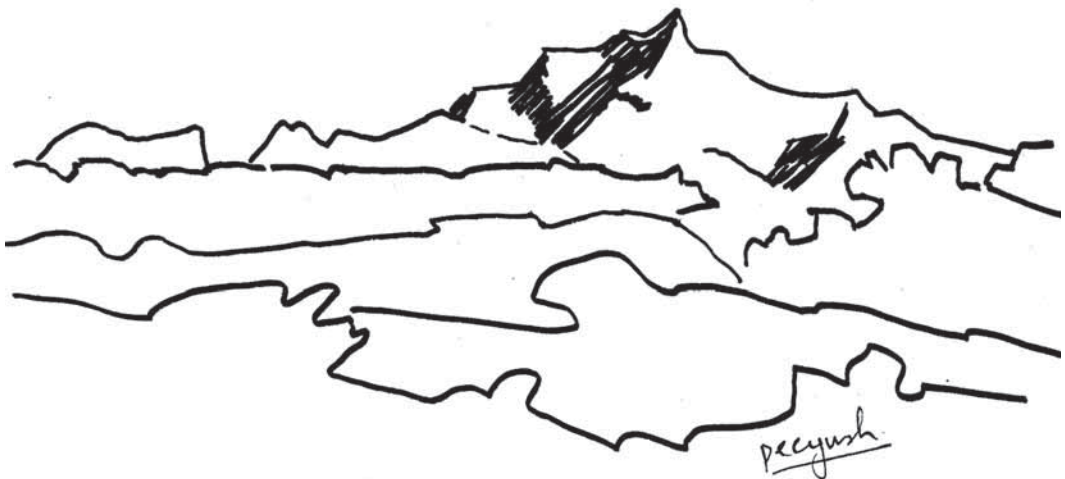
which were the very basis of granting of the original clearance. The SC had referred the matter back to the StC and in a meeting held in December 2008 the StC agreed to dilute the two conditions imposed by it while granting clearance to the project in May 2003.

The committee has diluted the 'no dams upstream' condition and said it would consider upstream projects on a-case-to case basis. This decision ignored the opinion of non-governmental members in the committee as well as civil society groups in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh which asked for a cumulative impact assessment of upstream projects and a carrying capacity study of the Subansiri river basin before deciding whether to dilute this condition. The protected area condition has also been changed so that the

Arunachal Pradesh government now needs to declare a smaller area of 168 sq km as a sanctuary and only "make serious efforts" to bring an additional 332 sq km of RF under the category of Conservation Reserve (CR) in consultation with the MoEF.

The diluted conditions will now be placed before the SC for passing final orders. Conservationists have argued that granting conditional clearance to mega dams in ecologically sensitive areas and then diluting these conditions after construction work has begun is a mockery of environmental governance procedures.

Source: Neeraj Vagholikar. Email dated 18/03/2009.





# ASSAM

NO.	NAME OF THE PA	AREA (SQ KM)
1	Dibru-Saikhowa NP	340
2	Kaziranga NP	858.98
3	Manas NP	500
4	Nameri NP	200
5	Orang NP	78.81
6	Amchang WLS	78.64
7	Barail WLS	326.25
8	Barnadi WLS	26.22
9	Bherjan-Borajan-Podumoni WLS	7.22
10	Burachapori WLS	44.06
11	Chakrashila WLS	45.56
12	Dihing Patkai WLS	111.19
13	East Karbi Anglong WLS	221.81

NO.	NAME OF THE PA	AREA (SQ KM)
14	Garampani WLS	6.05
15	Gibbon WLS	20.98
16	North Karbi Anglong WLS	96
17	Laokhowa WLS	70.13
18	Marat Longri WLS	451
19	Nambor WLS	37
20	Nambor Doigrung WLS	97.15
21	Pabitora WLS	38.81
22	Pani-Dihing Bird Sanctuary	33.93
23	Sonai-Rupai WLS	220
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>3909.79</b>



The 26-square-mile Laokhowa Reserved Forest was constituted as such about 1929, but has been recognized as a 'multiple-use' area since 1958 and was proposed as a Wild Life Reserve in 1965. Approximately 70% of the reserve consists of open areas, including grasslands, cultivation, bils, etc., and the remaining 30% consists of forests, primarily of plantation or pure natural stands of simul (*Bombax ceiba*) or mixed open forests of simul and koroï (*Albizzia procera*). Members of the staff estimated that there were between 30 and 40 rhino in the reserve and it was claimed that 37 were counted in 1965. They further stated that rhino were restricted primarily to the eastern and central parts of the reserve. However, the largest bil (Khalihamari) which has the most suitable habitat is located in the north-western corner. Other wild animals include: wild buffalo, a few wild pig, hog deer, and swamp deer. Besides the apparent lack of sufficient forage to maintain animals the size of rhino, cover also appeared to be almost non-existent. Based upon my limited observations and the degree of habitat abuse presently being practised in the Laokhowa Reserve, I doubt that its rhino population will be able to increase or even maintain its present status.

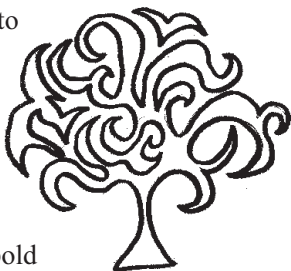
*J Juan Spiliett*  
'Laokhowa and other Rhino Areas in Asam',  
Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society 63(3), December 1966

# STATE NEWS

## 1996

### State government takes steps towards forest and wildlife conservation

According to reports, the newly appointed State Forest Minister for Assam, Nagen Sharma, has proposed a series of bold measures to conserve the state's forest resources and wildlife. These include:



1. A total ban on tree felling in reserved forests in Assam forthwith; requirements of existing permit holders to be met from stocks in FD timber depots.
2. FD to provide a detailed report on causes of destruction of forests in the state.
3. A vigilance cell headed by a Chief Conservator of Forests established, to check illegal activities in forest areas.
4. An enquiry into reinstatement by the previous government, of suspended FD officers.
5. In Kaziranga NP
  - i. Income from tourism to be used for emergency work in the park.
  - ii. Foreign tourists visiting the park to be charged entry fees in foreign currency.
  - iii. A proposal to increase the area of Kaziranga NP by 400 sq km. Financial resources to facilitate the expansion of area have already been deposited with the Revenue department.
6. For Manas TR, a committee to recommend improvements in management.

7. A Wildlife Trust established to help the field staff posted in remote parts of PAs and RFs. A part of regular salaries will be donated at the following rates: Minister of State - 1 month's salary; all FD officers upto DFO - 7 days; Rangers - 3 days; all other staff - 1 day. The Trust has set itself a target of raising Rs.10 lakhs annually.

Source: *The Pioneer*, 01/06/1996.

### Tiger Crisis Cell team appraises Kaziranga and Manas

A four-person team from the Tiger Crisis Cell comprising of S. Deb Roy, Valmik Thapar, Bittu Sahgal and Dr Ullas Karanth, visited Manas and Kaziranga TRs in April. According to the team poaching and encroachment are two of the major problems in the area. In Manas, rhinos are reported to be nearly extinct, swamp deer and hog deer have decreased while elephants with tusker are being regularly shot.

The situation with the FD is also reported to be grim. Morale is extremely low among staff and some forest guards have not been paid wages for three months. Kaziranga TR is especially threatened by rampant use of pesticides, including DDT, by the several tea estates in the surrounding area.

Source: *TigerLink News*, June 1996.

## 1998

### Floods devastate many sanctuaries in Assam

While the devastation caused in the Kaziranga NP due to the recent floods received worldwide coverage and financial assistance, many smaller sanctuaries that were also ravaged went unnoticed. 14 other

protected areas, including Pobitara, Orang, Dibru-Saikhowa and Burha-Chapori, were badly affected, with many roads, bridges and forest camps within the sanctuaries washed away. Senior wildlife officials have said that financial aid for these sanctuaries is being made available.

Source: Email from Nalim M dated 25/10/1998 quoting a report from *The Indian Express*.

### **Assam's shrinking grasslands**

The floodplains of the main rivers in the Barak Valley, North Cachar Hills, Southern Nagaon and Hamren Valley were once the home of rich elephant grassland. The main grasslands at Bagori, Burapahar-Deochur (part of Kaziranga), Laokhowa, Burachapori and Kochmora harbour at least 50 species of mammals and 150 species of birds over the year. Globally endangered species found in the area include the Indian rhino, Water buffalo, tiger, Bengal florican, Asian elephant, Swamp partridge, and the Lesser adjutant stork.

A report completed for the Biodiversity Conservation Prioritization Project (BCPP) of WWF-India, notes that today grasslands cover less than two percent of the area. Dr. Anwaruddin Choudhury, principal investigator, has cited population explosion and consumerism as the main causes for the dwindling grasslands. He has suggested that NGOs could motivate villagers by educating them in population control, improved methods of agriculture for higher productivity and understanding the importance of conservation.

Dr. Choudhary has also suggested that Laokhowa and Burachapori Sanctuaries be amalgamated and some remaining grasslands be added to form a single protected area. He stressed the need for strong and effective management of the area along the lines of

Kaziranga NP besides recommending a rhino reintroduction programme from the densely populated Pobitara area.

Source: 'Shrinking Grasslands Hit Assam's Biodiversity', *The Times of India*, 20/04/1998.

## **1999**

### **New NPs in Assam**

The Assam Government has decided to convert the Dibru-Saikhowa WLS in the Tinsukia district and Orang WLS in the Darrang district into NPs. Forest Minister Nagen Sharma said that the Dibru-Saikhowa NP would be provided protection and maintenance in the style of the Kaziranga NP.

Source: Jagdish Krishnaswamy on email dated 29/01/1999.

### **Successful Pygmy hog conservation project**

A project for the breeding the endangered Pygmy hog in captivity has been very successful. The number of hogs in the breeding centre on the outskirts of Guwahati has increased from six to fifty one in just three years.

The programme had been embroiled in a major controversy when the scientists involved in the project were accused of smuggling blood samples and rare biodiversity out of the country for cloning and genetic breeding. A public-interest-litigation was also filed in the matter before the Guwahati High Court. Recently, however, the court dismissed the petition, saying it found nothing wrong in the activities of the centre and additionally, it commended the good work that was being done.

The centre had been set up under the



Pygmy Hog Conservation Programme (PHCP) in 1995, after the animal, which was believed to be extinct, was sighted in the Manas NP. According to Dr Gautam Narayan, the director of the project, the only viable population of the species now exists in this park.

Now there are proposals to release the captive bred hogs into the wild and one of the areas suggested for this is the Nameri NP.

Source: 'Fresh lease of life for pygmy hog', *The Hindu*, 06/03/1999.

### Satellite mapping of elephant areas

The Assam Remote Sensing Application Centre (ARSAC) has mapped four elephant areas Manas-Buxa-Jaldapara, Dibru-Deomali, Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong-Itanki and Kameng-Sonitpur using satellite imagery and limited ground truthing.

The report reveals large scale dwindling of elephant habitat as a result of massive deforestation. Additionally, the report suggests that vital corridors such as that between Buxa in West Bengal and Manas in Assam, both TRs, have been snapped and are no longer being used by elephants.

Source: 'Diminishing forest cover', *TigerLink*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 12/1999.

## 2000

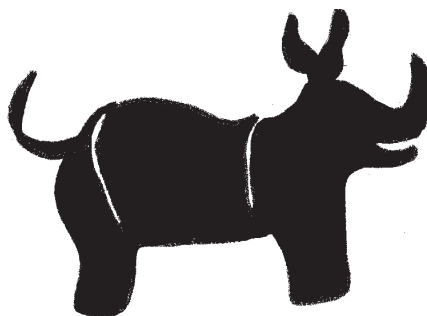
### Course in Wildlife Management conducted

The Smithsonian Institution, USA and the Aaranyak Nature Club, Assam, jointly organised an International Conservation Biology and Wildlife Management (CBWM) course in Assam from Nov. 24 to Dec. 22, 1999. The programme was held under the

Wildlife Conservation and Management Training Programme of the Smithsonian Institution and was attended by 19 participants from nine countries. Field exercises were conducted in Kaziranga NP, Nameri NP and Pobitara Sanctuary.

## 2001

### 485 rhinos killed in Assam since 1985



It has been reported that 485 rhinos have been killed in Assam since 1985. The police has said that they have found evidence in a number of cases of direct and indirect involvement of militant organisations like the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB).

Three poachers (including one surrendered NDFB militant), who were arrested recently admitted that they were being supplied arms by the militants. It has also been pointed out that the poachers operate in areas that are dominated by the NDFB and yet, they have never been attacked. At the same time, however, woodcutters here are frequently attacked by the NDFB.

The police have also indicated that militants belonging to the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) may be involved with poachers operating in Kaziranga NP and wildlife sanctuaries in Laokhowa and Pobitara. It is suspected that the militants give their old and outdated weapons to the poachers.

Superintendants of Police in the districts with protected areas have been asked to pay special attention to anti-poaching initiatives in areas under their jurisdiction.

Source: R Dutta Choudhury. 'Poachers kill 485 rhinos in state since 1985', *The Assam Tribune*, 12/09/2001.

### **Bid to boost wildlife tourism in Assam**

The Assam government is reported to have taken many steps to boost tourism in the state, particularly in wildlife sanctuaries and NPs. Starting from October 2001, many of the Assam Tourism Development Lodges including those at Kaziranga have been renovated. Lodges in other places like Bhalukpong, Orang, Hajo and Barpeta Road have been leased out to a group called Purbanchal Banijya Vikash with the agreement that the lodges will be run as per the guidelines set by the government.

Source: Bijay Sankar Bora. 'Bid to boost tourism drive in state', *The Assam Tribune*, 14/10/2001.

### **Proposal for first sanctuary in Barak Valley**

The Assam FD has proposed the creation of a WLS over an area of 34,000 bighas in the Katigorah area of Cachar district along the Indo-Bangladesh border. If notified, this will become the first protected area in the Barak Valley in Assam.

The forests support large populations of the Slow loris, Stump tailed macaque, Pig-tailed macaque, Assamese macaque, Rhesus macaque and the Capped langur. The area is also reported to be rich in other endangered fauna like the White-winged wood duck and different species of hornbills. The FD has launched a 'Monkey Preservation Project' and a committee has also been constituted for

this. This area suffers from severe conflicts between the primates and human populations as the former stray into human habitat in search of food. The FD has launched a massive plantation drive of fruit trees like banana, guava and mango to deal with the problem and it is hoped that the creation of the sanctuary will help in this direction as well.

The proposal for the sanctuary is based on a study conducted in mid 80's by Dr. Anwaruddin Choudhury, a noted wildlife expert based in the region.

Source: 'Maiden WLS on cards in Barak valley', *The Assam Tribune*, 25/12/2001.

## **2002**

### **River dolphin population declines alarmingly**

The 2002 River Dolphin census carried out in Assam by the Dolphin Conservation Society (DCS) with the help of the World Wide Fund (WWF) for Nature - India has revealed a sharp decline in their numbers. 198 dolphins were recorded in the Brahmaputra River, with 89 adults, 60 adolescents and 49 calves. The previous census in 1997 had counted 218 dolphins. In the Kulsu River there were 25 dolphins in 1993 but the number has now fallen to only 11.

The fall in the numbers of the dolphin has been mainly attributed to large-scale poaching for its oil and accidental killings through entanglement in under-water gill nets. Dolphin oil has several uses, the most important being its use as fish bait. Habitat loss and large-scale silt deposition due to erosion in the upper reaches of the rivers also adversely affect the dolphins, as does large scale fishing.

Fear has also been expressed that the large scale dam construction proposals on the

rivers in the north-east will badly impact the dolphins through population fragmentation and obstruction in the main drainage channels of the rivers.

Sand extraction is one of the major areas of concern in the Kulsi river bed and the DCS has appealed to the state government to declare a 'Dolphin Sanctuary' here. It has also been suggested that a 'Project Dolphin' needs to be started on the lines of 'Project Tiger' to ensure the protection of these endangered creatures.

Source: 'Dolphin population declining alarmingly', *The Assam Tribune*, 22/04/2002.

### **Assam may have eco-battalions, private forests**

The Assam Forest Minister has proposed a number of steps to deal with the fast depleting forest cover of the state and heavy encroachment over the years. The proposals include a) raising two eco-battalions, one each for lower and upper Assam, with the responsibility to plant trees and regenerate forests; b) coming up with a comprehensive eviction policy and to regenerate the areas cleared from encroachers and c) examine the possibility of leasing out forest lands to private parties to grow trees and sell the timber on payment of royalty to the state government.

The process is at a very nascent stage and the minister is reported to be engaging in consultations regarding these suggestions with NGOs and serving and former forest officials.

Source: 'And now, Assam may have pvt. Forests, eco-battalion', *The Sentinel*, 14/06/2002.

### **Elephant survey conducted in Assam**

A recent survey conducted by the Assam FD has put the total population of elephants in the state at 5246. This includes 1048 elephants in Kaziranga, 500 in Manas, 113 in Nameri, 324 in Dibru-Saikhowa, 156 in Sonai-Rupai and 220 in East Karbi Anglong. The survey that was conducted in all the forest divisions and protected areas in the state was completed in seven days.

Source: 'Elephant population goes up', *The Assam Tribune*, 08/08/2002.

### **Chirang-Ripu Reserve Forests proposed for inclusion under Project Elephant**

The Director, Project Elephant, has recommended the inclusion of the Chirang-Ripu Reserve Forests in the Kokrajhar district of Assam under Project Elephant. These forests form an important corridor along the Indo-Bhutan border and as a migration route between Buxa and Manas TRs.

The forests are also home to populations of rare animals like the Golden langur, Pygmy hog, tiger, the Leopard cat and a number of bird and butterfly species. They also reportedly support the only viable population of the Spotted deer within the entire north-eastern region.

The Green Hearts Nature Club based in Kokrajhar has been conducting surveys in this forest and has welcomed and appreciated the efforts of Project Elephant authorities to have these forests included under Project Elephant.

Source: 'Chirang-Ripu reserve forest to elephant reserve', *The Assam Tribune*, 28/09/2002.

### **Central funds to state for Project Elephant and Project Tiger**

The Centre has recently released Rs. 95 lakhs to Assam for schemes under Project Elephant and Project Tiger. The Assam Government had submitted a proposal under Project Elephant to the Centre for a total amount of Rs. 1.65 crore, of which Rs. 1.08 crore was sanctioned.

The funds are to be utilised on four inter-state ERs - Manas-Baska-Joltapara, Kameng-Sonitpur, Dibru-Deomali and Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong-Ingthanhi. Rs. 70 lakh of the sanctioned amount for Project Elephant has already been released to the state.

Another proposal for Rs. 59.30 lakh had been submitted for the Nameri TR under Project Tiger. Rs. 25 lakh have been released by the Centre for this project as well.

Source: Surajit Khound. 'Rs. 95 lakh released for wildlife projects', *The Assam Tribune*, 11/09/2002.

### **Thrust on tourism in PAs**

The Assam Apex Tourism Development Cooperative Society Ltd, TOURFED, has drawn up extensive plans for the promotion of tourism in the state. New segments that are proposed for development include train safaris, river cruises, wildlife adventure and cultural tours.

The rail tourism plan includes running a steam train with three renovated coaches from Guwahati to Bhalukpong, with two stopovers in Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP and the Nameri NP, respectively. The project will be jointly financed by TOURFED, Tourism Finance Corporation of India (TFCI), North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd (NEDFi), and the National Cooperative Development Corporation Ltd. TOURFED has already submitted the proposal to the Railway Board for its approval.

TOURFED has also proposed the development of tourist resorts at Pobitara, Orang, Jatinga, Kaziranga, Manas, Nameri, Chandubi, Dudhnoi and Sri Surya Pahar. Many of these are to be managed and looked after by the primary cooperative societies that will be formed by local people under TOURFED.

Proposals for these various projects, amounting to a total of nearly Rs. 580 lakh have been submitted by TOURFED to the TFCI, which has expressed willingness to clear any viable projects in the north-east without much formality. The Central Government is giving a special thrust to boost tourism in the north-east and a total amount of Rs. 300 crores has been allotted for this sector under the 10th plan.

Source: Sivasish Thakur. 'Steps afoot to promote tourism co-operatives', *The Assam Tribune*, 16/09/2002.

### **Proposal for butterfly sanctuary in Garbhanga**

Dr. Jatin Kalita of the Zoology Department, Guwahati University has suggested that the Garbhanga Reserve Forest in Guwahati be declared a butterfly sanctuary.

A team of three researchers including Dr. Kalita have been working on three research projects on butterflies in the state. They recently discovered 30 species of globally endangered butterflies in this reserve forest. Dr. Kalita has said that the forest has all the potential to be declared a sanctuary and its ideal location will also make it an attractive tourist destination, in addition to the fact that it can help to monitor the quality of Guwahati's environment.

Source: Ajit Patowary. 'Garbhanga unique site for butterfly sanctuary', *The Assam Tribune*, 09/11/2002.

## NGOs call for declaring reserve forest within Guwahati as a WLS



Environmental and wildlife NGOs in Assam have suggested that a WLS be declared to protect the forests of the Kamrup district that lie within the Greater Guwahati region. These include the 5318 hectares of Amseng Hills Reserve Forest, 1550 hectares of the Amseng South Reserve Forest and the 996 hectares of the Khanapara Reserve Forest - a total of 7864 hectares.

These forests are rich in wildlife and support a number of rare and endangered species that include the Asian elephant, and the Hoolock gibbon. The NGOs that include Early Birds and Rhino Foundation have pointed out that there is large-scale encroachment in these forests and that there is an urgent need to protect them.

Source: 'Destruction of city forest starts, authorities unmoved', *The Sentinel*, 07/12/2002.  
Sivasish Thakur. 'Exotic wildlife of Guwahati remains unexplored', *The Assam Tribune*, 15/12/2002.

## Honorary wildlife wardens appointed

The Governor of Assam recently appointed honorary wildlife wardens (HWLW) in all the 23 districts of the state for a period of two years in exercise of the powers conferred under Section 4 (1)(b) (bb) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

The primary responsibility of these wardens will be to assist the district administration in all aspects relating to wildlife in their respective district. They will, in particular, assist the Divisional Forest

Officer on matters such as enforcement of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, creating awareness among the local people on wildlife matters, and issues relating to the inter-face between wildlife and people, especially in respect of NPs and sanctuaries.

The appointed wildlife wardens are Achinta Rup Basumatary (Kokrajhar), Bhargav Kumar Das (Darrang), Karuna Dutta Choudhury (Barpeta), Aloke Goswami (Nagaon), Dipak Kathar (Morigaon), Shanta Sharma (Jorhat), Rishi Das (Tinsukia), Girban Biswas (Cachar), Dayananda Bharali (Sivasagar), Bhola Baruah (Golaghat), Dr Bijoy Kumar Deb (Karimganj), Satananda Bhattacharjee (Hailakandi), RN Sonowal (Dibrugarh), Gautam Terang (Karbi Anglong), AK Padmapati (Sonitpur), Soumyadip Dutta (Dhubri), Parimal Das (Bongaigaon), Dipak Kalita (Nalbari), Progress Medok (Dhemaji), Bikul Goswami (Lakhimpur), Bhaba Kalita (Kamrup), Tridip Narayan Choudhury (Goalpara) and Dwizen Khersa (NC Hills).

Source: 'Honorary wildlife wardens appointed', *The Assam Tribune*, 24/12/2002.

## Rs. 1.19 crores for sanctuaries in state

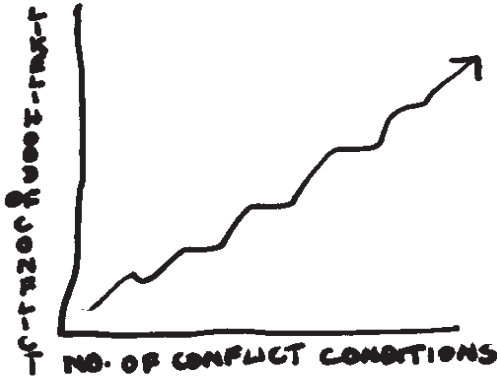
The Central Government has released Rs. 1.19 crore to the Assam FD for wildlife sanctuaries and NPs. Rs. 54 lakh have been made available for the maintenance and development of protected areas (PAs). The first three PAs selected are Panidihing and Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuaries and the Kaziranga NP.

Rs. 69.70 lakhs has also been released to the state government under Project Elephant, for dealing with the human-elephant conflict.

Source: 'Rs. 1.19 cr. for state's wildlife sanctuaries', *The Assam Tribune*, 20/12/2002.

## 2003

### Efforts to deal with human-elephant conflict



The Assam State Forest Minister has said that the only method of dealing with the increased human-elephant conflict in the region was to sensitise the people about the need to cohabit with the pachyderms that are straying out of the dwindling forest areas.

He was replying to a question in the state assembly and said that a long-term strategy for this was being drawn up. Efforts were being made along with NGOs for increasing awareness among the affected human populations, with a particular focus on Sonitpur district which was among the areas that was worst affected.

The minister also informed that the government was in touch with a few insurance companies with a proposal to provide crop insurance cover to farmers having paddy fields on the fringes of the forest areas inhabited by elephants. The scheme would be aimed at ensuring adequate compensation for the loss of paddy caused by the straying elephants.

Source: 'Strategy to tackle man-elephant conflict drawn up: Bordoloi', *The Assam Tribune*, 14/03/2003.

### Rhino is now state animal of Assam

The One-horned rhino has recently been declared the state animal of Assam. The state government has also declared the White-winged wood duck as the state bird, the Fox-tailed orchid as the state flower and the Hollong as the state tree.

Source: 'Rhino gets official recognition in Assam', *The Asian Age*, 06/04/2003.

### Draft Assam Forest Policy submitted to CM

The draft Assam Forest Policy 2002 was recently submitted to the CM of the state Mr Tarun Gogoi and the State Forest Minister by the expert committee that had been constituted for its formulation. Constituted in September 2002, the committee was headed by Anil Goswami and had six other members - Anwaruddin Choudhury, Bibhab Talukdar, Padmeshwar Gogoi, SK Sen, PC Bhattacharjee and Probin Kotoky.

The objectives of the policy include the maintenance of environmental stability through preservation and restoration of ecological balance, checking the degradation of the forests and soil erosion in catchment areas, mitigating floods and droughts, and increasing forest cover in forest deficient areas like chars and chapories through community participation.

A special emphasis was laid on the issue of encroachment. The committee reported that encroachment was the main cause of forest destruction in the state and that it resulted mainly from inter-state boundary disputes, settlement of flood and erosion affected people in forest areas and the high growth of population.

As a solution it has suggested demarcation of forest boundaries, the erection of permanent boundary pillars and the preparation of economic



rehabilitation packages by settling these people outside reserved forest land and allowing them to take up forestry activity on degraded lands.

The committee has suggested that these areas should then be considered as people protected areas (PPAs). These would create community assets of forests along with the services derived for their livelihoods. It also recommended the conversion of forest villages to revenue villages as per the instructions of the Central Government and that no regularisation should be done of encroachments after October 24, 1980.

Source: 'Assam to protect its forests through people's participation', *The Assam Tribune*, 28/04/2003.

### **Assam Forest Protection Force to be better equipped**

Efforts are being made to better equip the Assam Forest Protection Force (AFPF) to increase its efficiency in dealing with issues related to reserve forests and protected areas. The AFPF, with a strength of 770 personnel, faces challenges of dealing with poachers, extremists and wildlife smugglers. The force is presently deployed at 60 places throughout the state, of which 15% are in wildlife areas and the rest in territorial ranges.

The scheme prepared by the state government envisages the modernisation of the AFPF, making available sophisticated arms and equipment and also bringing in some operational changes. A proposal for Rs. 12 crore for the same was recently submitted by the state to the Central Government. Rs. 5 crore, for equipment, training facilities and refresher training courses, have reportedly been agreed to. A proposal has also been submitted to the centre, appealing for an additional battalion for the purpose of forest

protection. This, too, is reported to have been approved.

Source: 'Forest force to be equipped to combat poachers, smugglers', *The Sentinel*, 21/05/2003.

### **State submits Rs. 150 cr schemes for forests, PAs**

The Assam FD has submitted 15 schemes worth Rs. 150 crore to the Central Government, related to forests and wildlife conservation. These include the setting up



a genetics library, tree plantation through Forest Development Agencies (FDA), strengthening of the Assam Forest Protection Force, and improvement of the conditions in the Kaziranga and Manas NPs.

The FD has said that already 780 joint forest management committees and 28 FDAs had been set up and that these were to be used to involve people in forest fringe areas for conservation related work.

A scheme for Rs. 8 crores has been submitted for the genetic library, a Rs. 15 crore scheme for Manas NP, and a Rs. 25 crore management action plan proposal has been submitted for Deepor Beel WLS.

Source: 'Rs. 150 cr schemes to develop state forests', *The Assam Tribune*, 25/07/2003.

### **State to declare four new sanctuaries**

The Assam Forest Minister recently announced that four new wildlife sanctuaries would be created in the state. The announcement was made at a function during Wildlife Week. He however did not mention

the specific forest areas which are to be made into sanctuaries. The minister pointed out that there was pressure to declare more areas as sanctuaries, but the state FD was not in a financial position to do so.

Additionally, the State Government has also created five ERs and 28 Forest Development Agencies with about 1,000 Joint Forest Management Committees under them. These have been formed to involve the people in the conservation of the forests and the wildlife and an amount of Rs. 3 crores has been received from the Central Government for seven such agencies.

Source: 'WLS status likely for more forest areas', *The Assam Tribune*, 08/10/2003.

## 2004

### **Three new sanctuaries in Assam**

The Assam Government has recently notified three new wildlife sanctuaries. These are the Amchang WLS (79 sq km), Dihing-Patkai WLS (111 sq km) and Barail WLS (326 sq km)

The Dihang-Patkai WLS has been formed out of the famed rain forests of Upper Dihing, Dirak and Joypur reserved forests (RFs) along the Arunachal border in the Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts and there is the possibility that the area of the sanctuary may be increased in the near future. Amchang WLS is situated on the outskirts of Guwahati city and covers the three reserve forests of Amchang, South Amchang and Khanapara. The Barail WLS, meanwhile is located in the Barak Valley districts of North Cachar Hills and Cachar.

The Assam Forest Minister, Mr. Pradyut Bordoloi, while announcing the three new sanctuaries, also pointed out that each of the new sanctuaries would impose an additional burden of 30 per cent on the FD. He further

said that a major part of the required manpower for the new protected areas would be met from the excess staff in the territorial and social forestry divisions of the department. There has been no recruitment of frontline guards since 1992 and at the moment the vacancy stands at 750.

Source: '3 new wildlife sanctuaries notified in state', *The Assam Tribune*, 24/06/2004.

### **Rs. 16 crore proposal for restoration of flood affected PAs**

The Assam State Government has submitted a Rs. 16-crore scheme to the central government for the restoration and reconstruction of the infrastructure inside protected areas that were damaged in the recent floods. These include Orang, Pabitora, Dibru-Saikhowa, and Manas in addition to the Kaziranga NP. The State Forest Minister, Mr Pradyut Bordoloi also said that the state government would try and release some funds for immediate restoration work.

Source: 'Rs. 16 cr. forest scheme for NPs', *The Assam Tribune*, 24/08/2004.

### **Elephants from Ripu-Chirang ER raid neighbouring villages**

The recent floods in Assam inundated large areas of the forests comprising the Ripu-Chirang ER in the Kokrajhar district. Consequently, a number of elephants in these forests moved into neighbouring areas and raided crops in several villages including Khalashi and Jharbari Genduguri under the Jharbari range of Haltugaon division.

For the villagers, who were themselves suffering from the impacts of the severe floods, these raids by the elephants created additional problems. Not only were the fields raided, but houses were also destroyed and there were reports of loss of human life as



well. The villagers have expressed their inability to tackle this menace and urged the concerned authority and Green Heart Nature Club, the conservation NGO working here, to suggest suitable measures to deal with these problems.

Source: 'Elephants raid flood hit reserve forests',  
*The Assam Tribune*, 28/09/2004.

### **State to set up elephant task force**

The Assam Government has proposed the setting up of a taskforce to suggest ways to preserve elephant habitat and reduce conflict. The decision was taken at a recent meeting of the state wildlife advisory board that was chaired by Chief Minister Mr Tarun Gogoi.

The CM said the taskforce would survey the elephants in the wild and suggest measures on translocating them to areas which are sparsely populated. He also said that the state government would seek the permission of the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests to capture wild elephants and send them outside the state. Assam, reportedly, already has permission from the centre for the capture of 25 elephants from the wild.

Assam, presently, has over 5,500 wild elephants and about 1,200 domestic elephants. The meeting which was attended by wildlife experts, conservationists and senior forest officials from the state government and the centre, concluded that the shrinking elephant habitat should be viewed seriously and encroachment of the areas should be avoided to prevent loss of lives.

Source: 'Gogoi mulls taskforce for elephants',  
*The Telegraph*, 26/11/2004.

## **2005**

### **Community participation and initiatives for Golden Langur conservation in Shankarghola**

A public meeting on "Community Participation in Conservation of Golden Langur" was organized by Aaranyak at Shankarghola, about 35 km southwest from Bongaigaon town in Assam in November 2004.

The meeting was presided over by Mr. Ramani Kanta Rabha, Gaonburha of Shankarghola. It was attended by a number of people from nearby villages viz. Pallirtal, Balapara, Ganakghuli, Manikjhora, Barjuli, Majipara, Karaiguri, Ghilaguri and by teachers and students of the Birjhora Mahavidyalaya, Bongaigaon and Abhayapuri College, Abhayapuri. Others who took part in the meeting included members of Aaranyak; Director of the Manas NP, Mr. Abhijit Rabha and Mr. Bob Horwich, Community Conservation, USA.

Shankarghola is part of the Bhairabchura proposed reserve forest and is an abode of endangered Golden Langur. Local people of the area have been protecting a small patch of the forest of their own. As a result there is good forest cover here that also houses a number of the endangered golden langurs.

Later, in December 2004, a three day workshop for in situ conservation of the langur was also held at Shankarghola. Those participating included educated village youth from Shankarghola and adjacent villages, 13 students of the local Birjhora Mahavidyalay and Abhayapuri College, and two students from the Department of Wildlife & Conservation Biology, North Orissa University.

The survey conducted revealed that the forests here that have been protected by the local community have at least 35 golden

langurs spread over five troops. Additionally the survey also collected scats of leopard, wild boar, porcupine and barking deer and documented the presence of 35 species of resident as well as migratory birds.

Mr. Mrigendra Kalita, Deputy Commissioner, Bongaigaon, distributed the certificates at the concluding ceremony on January 1, 2005.

### **Call for new WLS comprising Rani and Garbhanga reserve forests**

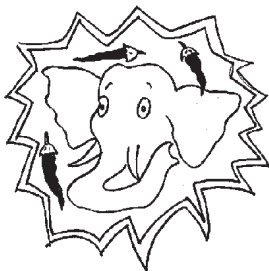
The NGO, Early Birds, has urged the central and Assam state governments to consider a new WLS that will include the Rani and Garbhanga reserve forests located near the city of Guwahati.

The twin reserve forests constitute around 180 sq km of forests and are home to a wide range of wild animals including the leopard, Slow loris, Assamese macaque and elephants. The reserve forests are close to the Meghalaya border on one side and Deepor Beel WLS on the other, providing about 70 km of a natural corridor between the two forests for the movement of animals.

Source: 'Demand for new urban WLS near Guwahati', *The Assam Tribune*, 08/05/2005.

### **Tripwires & red chilli bombs to scare away elephants**

Tripwires and red chilli smoke bombs are being used in parts of the north-east to prevent herds of wild elephants from destroying crops and attacking homes. The system involves battery-operated tripwires fixed a few hundred meters from a house. These trigger



a warning bell when marauding elephants approach a village, giving the villagers adequate lead-time to prepare for warding off the elephants and obviating the need to keep sleepless night vigils. Trials carried out over the past eight months are said to have been successful and full-scale installation of these devices is now being done in five villages in Assam as part of the Assam Haathi Project.

The tolerance level of elephants to some pungent variety of chillies has also been tested and use of chilli smoke 'bombs' and chilli-smear ropes is also proposed to keep elephants away. Similar techniques are said to have been successfully used in Africa and South East Asia.

The problem of elephant-human conflict in the north-eastern region of the country has reached alarming proportions with reduction in elephant habitat being one of the main reasons for this. Wild elephants here have killed more than 600 people in the past 15 years, while 19 elephants were poisoned by angry villagers in Sonitpur district in the year 2001.

Source: Rajeev Roy/Sanjeev Ahuja. 'Tripwires and red chilli bombs to scare away elephants in NE', *The Pioneer*, 08/06/2005.

### **Manas, Laokhowa, Orang and Dibru-Saikhowa identified for rhino translocation**

The rhino translocation task force of the Assam government has identified Manas NP, the Laokhowa WLS, Orang NP and the Dibru-Saikhowa NP as areas where rhinos could be translocated from the Pabitora WLS and Kaziranga NP.

The task force will chalk out an operational plan and decide on the safeguards and measures to be taken during the experiment. A minimum three-year period was decided upon for the translocation to

take place. The decision was taken a meeting of the task force that was held in Guwahati in the month of July. It was attended by officials of the Assam government, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the WTI.

For the project to go ahead the government will have to formulate a rhino translocation protocol in line with that of the World Conservation Union (IUCN). A number of committees have been set up to look into various aspects of the relocation programme. A committee has been constituted for studying the security aspect of the habitats, while another will look into issues related to food and habitat.

Source: 'Rhino project moves ahead', *The Telegraph*, 09/07/2005.  
Sushanta Talukdar. 'Task force mantra for rhino translocation', *The Hindu*, 11/07/2005.

### **Proposal for bird sanctuaries at Missamari and Sengamari**

The Assam FD is said to be working on a proposal to create bird sanctuaries at Missamari and Sengamari, two large water bodies in the Jorhat district. The suggestion that the water bodies are important hosts for migratory waterfowl and that some kind of protection should be given to them is said to have come from the Bombay Natural History Society. A survey conducted last year had counted over 1000 Bar-headed geese, 1300 Brahmini ducks and nearly 1000 pelicans in the area.

The FD is also said to be dredging the two water bodies that have become narrow and shallow over the years due to siltation caused by the flooding of the River Brahmaputra. Two NGOs, Prakritee and Keteki have been working with the FD in this process.

Source: 'Govt steps to promote bird sanctuaries in State', *The Sentinel*, 26/08/2005.

### **River dolphin population in Assam – 240**

A 10-month survey supported by British Petroleum has revealed that the River dolphin population in Assam is about 240.

The survey was carried out by five monitoring groups of 15-20 members each that worked in the major dolphin habitats in the states - Saikhowa and Guijan in Tinsukia district, Janjimukh and Dikhowmukh in Sivasagar district and Neematighat in Jorhat district. The study was initiated at Tengapanighat near the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border and ended on the Indo-Bangladesh border. While dolphins are killed for meat and fat, bi-catch was found to be the major threat faced.

Source: Ripunjoy Das. 'Dolphin statistics scream extinction', *The Telegraph*, 07/09/2005.

### **FD eco-tourism resorts near three PAs**

The Assam FD has taken up a project called 'Amar Atithi' (Our Guest) for promotion of eco-tourism in three PAs - Kaziranga NP, Manas NP and the Pabitora WLS. The project involves setting up of eco-tourism resorts to be owned and managed by local communities.

The concept involves the setting up of five units comprising 10 cottages each, adjacent to the protected areas with high tourist inflow for six months. The cottages with attached toilets, power supply and other modern amenities would have a common restaurant, a grocery shop and a souvenir shop. The persons manning the resorts would be from the local community and would be trained for the purpose. Two units each have been earmarked for Kaziranga and Manas, while there will be one in Pabitora.

Each unit, inclusive of cottages, restaurants and souvenir shops would cost about Rs. 36.5 lakh to build. The FD has already sent the project details to the State

Tourism Commissioner with the request that it be passed on to the Union Ministry of Tourism for funding support.

Source: Prabal Kr Das. 'Forest dept. to set up eco-tourism resorts', *The Assam Tribune*, 07/11/2005.

## 2006

### Gibbon conservation day observed



The third Gibbon Conservation Day was observed on August 30. It was organized at the NaCachari College in Jorhat by the Education Forum of NaCachari College with the support of US Fish and Wildlife Service, Aaranyak, Hoolongapar Nature Society, Primate Research Centre, the Zoology Department of Guwahati University, Gibbon Conservation Centre and the Assam FD.

The first Gibbon Conservation Day had been observed at the Gibbon WLS in Jorhat in the year 2004.

Source: 'Gibbon Conservation Day observed', *The Assam Tribune*, 12/09/2006.

### Call to declare Behali forest a WLS

A team of geographers from Guwahati University (GU), that recently carried out a survey in the Behali reserved forest (RF), has suggested that the reserved forest should be declared a WLS. The Behali RF

in Sonitpur district is located on the north bank of the River Brahmaputra and is close to the Arunachal Pradesh border. Increasing anthropogenic pressure is considered to be one of the biggest threats faced by forests in this region.

Till recently, most parts of this 140 sq. km forest had good tree cover and provided good habitat for wildlife including elephants, macaques and a large variety of woodland birds.

The GU team expressed satisfaction that unlike most parts of the northern zone of Sonitpur district, the Behali RF still had its original forest cover. They also pointed out, however, that if immediate steps were not taken for its protection this forest too would be soon lost.

Source: 'Declare Behali forest as WLS', *The Assam Tribune*, 05/04/2006.

### Project for the Gangetic dolphin in Assam

The Guwahati-based Centre for North-East Studies and Policy Research has initiated a project titled 'Saving the Gangetic Dolphins, Eco-tourism and Livelihoods'. Funded by the Ford Foundation it will be implemented over a three-year period and cover Dhubri district, Kulsi in Kamrup district and Guijan in Tinsukia district.

The main objective of the project is to stabilise the dolphin population in the area by analysing the threats to the mammals and reducing them. As part of this project an awareness camp on dolphins was organised in the last week of May in collaboration with Gramya Arthanitik Bikas Kendra, a local NGO, in Kukurmara in Kamrup district.

Source: 'New project to save dolphins', *The Statesman*, 30/05/2006.

## Guwahati Wildlife Division not fully operational yet

The newly formed Guwahati Wildlife Division (GWD) has not been able to begin work fully as some of the areas allotted to it, like the Amchang WLS have not yet been transferred from the territorial division.

The GWD that was constituted in January earlier this year has Pabitora and Deepor Beel Wildlife Sanctuaries under its jurisdiction. The transfer of staff from the territorial division too has not been completed and the division, therefore, has not been able to prepare the management plans.

Source: 'Wildlife unit in area, staff quandaries', *The Statesman*, 27/06/2006.

## 18,640 hectares encroached in PAs in state

Statistics with the FD in Assam indicate that a total of 18,640 hectares of forests in protected areas in the state are presently under encroachment. The details are as follows:

Name of PA	Total Area of PA (ha)	Area under encroachment (ha)
Burachapori	4406	2850
Laokhowa	7013	400
Sonai-Rupai	22000	1900
Nameri	21000	2100
Additions to Kaziranga	42900	7790
Manas	50000	1700
Barnadi	2622	600
Dibru-Saikhowa	34000	300
Orang	7881	800
Pabitora	3880	200

Source: Prabal Das. 'Illegal encroachment on 18,640 hectares', *The Assam Tribune*, 16/09/2006.

## Spurt in human-wild cat conflict in Upper Assam

Surveys conducted by Asif Ahmed Hazarika under the initiative of the Wild Survey North-East in the seven districts of Upper Assam has revealed a significant spurt in the number of cases of conflict between humans and wild cats, both leopards and tigers.

The survey that was conducted across the districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, North Lakhimpur and Sonitpur reported 22 such incidents in the three-month period from November 2005 to January 2006.

15 of the 22 incidents involved leopards and a maximum of eight of these were from the Sivasagar district, including one in the Rajmai –Khoraghat Tea Estate near the Panidihing Bird Sanctuary. Of the others, three were reported from Dibrugarh district while there were two incidents in Jorhat district, including one on the Sonowal Tea Estate in the vicinity of the Gibbon WLS.

The conflicts resulted in four leopard deaths – one was knocked down by a speeding vehicle at Kohora just outside the Kaziranga NP, another was crushed to death under a train at Mautgaon, a third one was poisoned at Bonkumarpathar while a fourth was killed by villagers at Karunasagar Pathar. One person was killed at Khoraghat Tea Estate and humans were injured in four other incidents.

Seven incidents of tigers straying and resultant conflict were also reported as part of the survey. Four such incidents took place in Tinsukia district, two were reported from Sonitpur and one from North Lakhimpur. The incidents in Sonitpur were reported from the outskirts of the Dibru-Saikhowa NP. One of the major reasons for increased conflict is said to be habitat shrinkage.

Source: Sivashish Thakur. 'Spurt in man-animal conflict in state', *The Assam Tribune*, 22/07/2006.

## **Butterfly Conservation Initiative**

A Butterfly Conservation Initiative has been launched in Assam by a group of young and enthusiastic naturalists. Supported by Horizon International, a USA-based NGO, the group has planned a number of activities to ensure their objective of butterfly conservation.

This includes holding workshops in colleges and regular monitoring of butterflies in protected areas like the Kaziranga, Orang and Nameri NPs. The project will also include statewide fieldwork to gather baseline data and to identify threats to butterfly populations, to conduct research and documentation of different species, their habitats and taxonomy and to create a photo database to help people identify and distinguish one specimen from another.

Institutions like Bajali College, Pathshala and Margherita College have already created butterfly study groups as part of the endeavour.

Source: Roopak Goswami. 'Crusade to save butterflies takes wing', *The Telegraph*, 04/12/2006.



degradation being experienced in Assam.

The memorandum pointed out that the lump-sum amount of Rs. 23 lakh granted to Assam by the central government was not commensurate with the extent of damage. As a result it was only possible to make an ex-gratia grant of Rs. 40,000 per death and Rs. 1000 for a fully damaged house. There was no money, therefore, for crop damage.

It was also pointed out that Assam alone possesses 5,500 out of the 10,000 wild elephants in the North Eastern Region (NER). Every year 50 to 60 lives are lost due to attacks by wild elephants and the state government is unable to provide adequate funds from its resources due to its inherent financial problem. The MPs also requested the centre to equalize the amount of the ex-gratia grant amounting to a minimum of Rs. 2 lakh granted to the families of persons killed by extremists.

The memorandum further pleaded for enhancing the total area of elephant habitat with the marking of elephant corridors and to make Project Elephant effective and friendly to the people. It also urged for special permission to the Assam Government for capturing a few elephants every year to deal with the problem of elephant-human conflict.

The centre is reported to have agreed to many of the demands. The minimum ex-gratia payment of Rs. 1 lakh has been approved for the families of those killed by wild elephants. The compensation amount for damage to houses and crops would also be increased subject to the Assam Government submitting a detailed report specifying the extent of such damages.

The centre has also suggested that the Government of Assam take up the matter of providing houses to the victims of elephant damage under the Indira Awas Yojana with the Rural Development Ministry for allocation of additional houses from the quota available at the discretion of Union Minister of Rural Development. It is not clear whether

## **2007**

### **Centre agrees to Assam plea for increase in compensation for elephant depredation**

20 Members of Parliament (MPs) recently submitted a memorandum to the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) in the matter of the large-scale elephant



the changes, when implemented, will apply to other parts of the country as well or will be restricted to the state of Assam.

Source: 'Centre to raise elephant depredation compensation', *The Assam Tribune*, 06/01/2007.

### **Call to declare the Khabalu-Ghagarmukh stretch of River Subansiri in Lakhimpur as a river dolphin sanctuary**

The NGO Green Heritage has suggested that the Khabalu-Ghagarmukh stretch of the River Subansiri in Lakhimpur district be declared a River Dolphin Sanctuary. This followed a two-day survey in January when 20 dolphins were spotted in this stretch of the river.

The survey that was carried out with the support of the Assam Science Technology and Environment Council (ASTEC) spotted the dolphins in six different places along a hundred-km stretch of the river. The survey counted six adults and three young dolphins at Khabalu, four at Ghagarmukh, two at Jamugurighat and one each at Dhunaguri and Solmarie.

The NGO also conducted an awareness campaign among the riverside dwellers by distributing pamphlets entitled, 'Sishu Sanranshan Karu Ahok - 'Let's conserve river dolphins'.

Source: Sazzad Hussain. 'NGO detects 20 Gangetic dolphins in Subansiri', *The Indian Express*, 12/02/2007.

### **CAG report reveals bungling of Project Tiger Funds in Nameri and Manas**

The latest report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India that was recently submitted to the Assam State Assembly has pointed out a number of irregularities in the use of funds under Project Tiger.

The report says that the authorities started by allocating a very small part of the originally proposed sum. The fund allocated was used in an ad-hoc manner, the tiger census were not carried out properly (for 2001-02), little was done to remove encroachers, the authorities failed to keep count of the arms, ammunition and wireless sets provided for tackling poaching and even the State Board for Wildlife that is headed by the Chief Minister himself did not meet to monitor and evaluate the implementation.

The CAG noted that of the proposed outlay of Rs. 20.97 crore for 2001-06 for the Manas and Nameri NPs, the Centre approved only Rs. 10.59 crore and further that only Rs. 3.30 crore (only 16% of the original amount) was finally released.

The report pointed out that as per directions of the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) funds released by the Centre for wildlife should reach the field level within six weeks of release and that the Supreme Court had ordered in 2005 that the money should in fact reach the field in 15 days time. Yet, in the case of Assam the period varied from 76 to as many as 253 days. The sums that were released by the state government were also towards the end of the financial year, leading to accumulation of huge balances.

The centre then considered the unspent money as savings at the end of 2003-04 and thus released no funds for the subsequent years for the two parks.

The report has also noted that 37 firearms out of a total of 116 in the two parks were missing. As many as 48 arms used by the authorities had become 'illegal' as their licenses had not been renewed. While the reason cited for the missing arms was that miscreants had snatched them, the CAG found out that there were no details such as date and place of snatching, FIR numbers or police investigations to prove the claim. The accounts related to arms and ammunition

maintained by the Field Director of Manas NP too were found to be incomplete and improper.

Source: Samudra Gupta Kashyap. 'Assam: CAG report reveals bungling of Project Tiger Funds', *The Indian Express*, 17/03/2007.

### **The India Rhino Vision 2020 relocation program to take off soon**

The India Rhino Vision 2020 programme, which aims to attain a population of 3,000 rhinos in the wild in Assam, is likely to begin by end of 2007. Under this programme, the rhino population will be distributed over seven protected areas by 2020.

The programme would involve translocating rhinos from two source populations (Kaziranga NP and Pabitora Wildlife WLS) to Manas, Laokhowa-Buracharpori-Kochumora, Dibru-Saikhowa and possibly Orang.

The infrastructure at Manas NP is expected to be ready by October, following which at least 20 rhinos will be moved here from Kaziranga. A total of 13 new camps will be set up and 50 volunteers would be brought in for the programme to help provide a safe and secure site for the rhinos in Manas.

The Indian Rhino Vision 2020 project is being implemented by the Department of Environment and Forests of the Assam Government and is being supported by a number of other organizations including WWF- India and the International Rhino Foundation (IRF).

Source: 'Succour for rhinos at last', *The Telegraph*, 10/08/2007.

### **FD for sanctuary status for Urapad Beel**

The Assam FD has proposed to declare the Urapad Beel in the Goalpara district as a bird sanctuary. Thousands of migratory

waterfowl annually visit the wetland that was recently listed as an Important Bird Area by the Bombay Natural History Society. The FD is reported to have just completed a comprehensive study on the waterbody following which the proposal was mooted.

The beel, covering an area of six sq km, is in Agia, about 10 km from Goalpara town along NH 37. The FD says that declaring the beel a sanctuary would also help in the conservation of crocodiles that are found here.



Source: 'More protection for lake's winged guests', <http://www.telegraphindia.com>, 11/10/2007.

### **Call to declare Sareswar Beel a sanctuary**

The Dhubri based NGO, Nature's Friend has asked for the Sareswar Beel to be declared a WLS. The beel that has been listed as a site of global importance in the Directory of Asian Wetlands, plays host to thousands of birds every year and is considered one of the best wintering sites in the region for migratory waterfowl.

The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) too is reported to have supported the move and has promised to put up infrastructure like watch-towers and a guest house to encourage visitors to the place. Nature's Friend has also pointed out that the government has recently decided to allot land on the periphery of the wetland for commercial activities and that this would be detrimental for the ecology of the place. The NGO has said that it will soon take up the matter with the Chief Minister of Assam.

Source: 'Sanctuary dream spreads wings', <http://www.telegraphindia.com>, 26/10/2007.



## Domestic elephants to deal with wild elephant depredation

The Assam FD is creating a special force of 150 specially trained mahouts and a few kunkis (leader elephants) to help combat the growing depredation of wild elephants by driving them away from human habitats. A special training module has been used to build the new force. A two-week training course for the last batch of 25 mahouts was conducted in October 2007.

Domestic elephants have been used to drive away wild elephants in the past but the lack of success of the operations was attributed to the fact that neither the elephants nor the mahouts had the right kind of training. It is hoped that this situation will be corrected with the training that was provided by the well known elephant expert, Parbati Baruah.

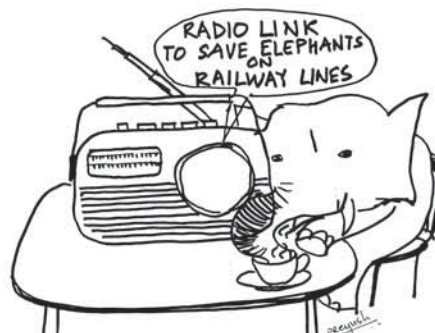
It has also been pointed out in this context that most of these domestic elephants were earlier engaged in the timber extraction industry and were left with no work following Supreme Court orders for prohibition of felling and transportation of timber here. Many of these elephants were deserted by their owners on account of the huge cost incurred in feeding them.

Critics of the present program have questioned its potential for success. They point out that most of the domestic elephants were sold off in Bihar and in South India and that it would be a tough task to find healthy elephants for the new force.

Source: 'Jumbo power tapped', *The Telegraph*, 18/10/2007.

## 2008

### Radio link between forest and railway officials to save elephants



The Assam FD is likely to implement a project that connects forest guards and train drivers through walkie-talkies so as to prevent train accidents involving elephants in forested regions. The idea has been mooted by the WTI after the successful implementation of such an initiative in the Rajaji NP in Uttarakhand, where, post-project, accidents involving elephants came down to zero.

Railway officials said that train drivers already carry walkie-talkies. All that would now need to be done is to synchronise these with the walkie-talkies carried by forest staff. FD officials said that they have been in touch with the Railway Board on the matter; and that vulnerable spots had been identified with a request to the railways to regulate train speed on these particular stretches of the routes.

Source: Pullock Dutta. 'Radio link to save jumbos from train hits', *The Telegraph*, 08/05/2008.

### CBI to probe rhino poaching cases in Assam

The Assam State Government has decided to hand over to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the cases related to

the poaching of rhinos in the Kaziranga and Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NPs. 16 rhinos were poached in Kaziranga in 2007 while a number of cases have also been reported in the first few months of 2008. These include six from Kaziranga and at least five in Orang.

Source: Aarti Dhar and Sushanta Talukdar. 'CBI to probe rising rhino poaching cases in Assam', *The Hindu*, 04/05/2008.

### **WLS proposed near Jatinga**

The North Cachar Hills Autonomous District Council has proposed the creation of a WLS near the famous site of Jatinga where birds come in large numbers to supposedly commit suicide.

The sanctuary will cover an area of a little over 43 sq km and extend over parts of the Hatikhali, Panimur and Borail hills. The boundary of the proposed sanctuary is yet to be decided.

Tourism forms part of the rationale behind the sanctuary proposal - it is feared that the number of tourists visiting Jatinga might fall on account of the fact that the phenomenon of bird suicides is no more considered to be a supernatural event. Researchers have pointed out that the birds are simply distracted by bonfires lit by the tribals here and then get caught. Local authorities hope that the creation of a sanctuary will help keep tourist interest alive in the region.

Source: 'WLS planned near Jatinga', *The Telegraph*, 29/04/2008.

### **Two elephants found dead within 24 hours**

Poachers killed an elephant and sawed off its trunk in Raimona-Maktegaon forest in Assam's Kokrajhar district along the Indo-Bhutan border in the month of June. Forest officials said that though the elephant was

probably poisoned, the cause of death could be ascertained only after a post-mortem examination.

Less than 24 hours before this incident, the carcass of an adult elephant was found on the banks of the River Sankosh in Assam. The radio collar on the elephant's neck identified it as one of the six tuskers from Manas NP that had been under observation by the FDs of both West Bengal and Assam. While the cause of the death could not be immediately ascertained, it was suggested that the animal may have died of an infection.

Forest officials and a team from the WTI that had radio-collared the elephants were looking into the matter.

Source: 'Elephant killed in Kokrajhar', *The Telegraph*, 13/06/2008.  
'Tusker dies in Assam', *The Telegraph*, 14/06/2008.

### **Assam seeks tougher punishments for rhino poachers; army to help too**

The Assam government has proposed tougher punishments for those involved in rhino poaching. The State Forest Minister has said that amendments to the Wildlife Protection Act (WLPA) 1972 are being contemplated for an increase in the prison term for poachers from three to ten years, and for doubling the quantum of the fine to Rs. 50,000. Life imprisonment is being sought for those poachers who are caught repeating the crime. The amendments also want poachers to be tried by a senior court.

The moves are a response to the spate of rhino killings that have occurred in Assam in general and Kaziranga NP in particular in the last few months. 18 rhinos were killed in Kaziranga alone in the year 2007.

Source: 'Assam wants life terms for rhino poachers', *DNA*, 04/06/2008.  
'Army to fight poachers in Kaziranga', *The Assam Tribune*, 25/06/2008.

## Workshop on wildlife management

A six-day field-techniques workshop on wildlife monitoring and management was held at Kachugaon Forest Inspection Bungalow. The workshop was supported by the Primate Research Centre NE India, Guwahati, the Kachugaon NGO Green Forest Conservation and the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

The training programme was mainly for the 250 volunteers of Bodoland Forest Protection Force (BFPF), which has been engaged for protection and conservation of forests and wildlife in the BTC area. The BTC has been incurring an annual expenditure of Rs. 74 lakh on stipends and other support to the BFPF.

Resource persons from different fields imparted training to the volunteers on diverse aspects of wildlife management, including the use of basic field survey equipment like maps, compasses and GPS tools; making field observations and taking relevant notes for bird and butterfly surveys; report writing; census techniques involving wild animals like langur, buffalo, tiger and elephant; wildlife tracking, monitoring and priority setting; plant identification; community ecotourism; field patrolling; legal orientation on smuggling; wildlife rescue and captive care.

The BFPF volunteers were provided field kits that included rucksacks, sleeping bags and torches. 25 bicycles were also distributed, and all volunteers were awarded certificates in honour of their work.

Source: 'Workshop on wildlife *monitoring, management held*', *The Assam Tribune*, 10/09/2008.

## Seismic survey in Brahmaputra riverbed opposed; impact on Gangetic dolphin feared

Protests have been raised over the allocation of 170 km of the Brahmaputra riverbed (between Sadiya and Nimatighat) in upper Assam to Oil India Limited (OIL) for conducting a seismic survey and later drill for oil in this prime Gangetic dolphin habitat.

The Assam Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) has asked the central government, OIL and the MoEF's Multi-Disciplinary Advisory Group (MDAG) to clarify their stand on the issue of the proposed seismic survey.

AJYCP has accused all three parties involved of an attempt to deceive the people of Assam by deliberately obfuscating the issue. The student body pointed out that though the MDAG had recently claimed that no permission had been granted to OIL so far, the company had nonetheless attempted to undertake a seismic survey in Dibru-Saikhowa NP on December 21. This attempt had been met with resistance by the local people.

In response, OIL has clarified that it was not conducting a seismic survey in Dibru-Saikhowa as that was forbidden by a Supreme Court (SC) directive. The company instead was attempting to deploy gravity-and-magnetic methods to acquire geological data from the area. OIL said that it had received permission from the MoEF and the SC to conduct this non-destructive type of survey in the area. They further said that the method is completely eco-friendly since it doesn't generate any type of pollution and would not disturb the area's fauna and flora in any way.

The MDAG, set up in this connection, too, had pointed out earlier that OIL will not receive permission to conduct any seismic surveys till an impact-assessment study has been conducted. The study would determine the possible effects of the proposed survey

on the dolphin habitats, populations and behavioral patterns in the earmarked area. It would cover water channels as well as dry aquatic beds; and would also look into the distribution of fish, herpetofauna and other aquatic life in the river. Local groups, experts from different states, organizations and even international agencies would be engaged in conducting the studies.

The impact assessment would take six months to complete and OIL would be permitted to begin working here, earliest by November, if the impact assessment results indicate that the seismic survey would not harm the ecological system of the Brahmaputra in any manner.

Meanwhile, some experts predict that the seismic survey could seriously affect the small population of the river's 212 Gangetic dolphins. The survival of this rare and protected creature is already threatened by gill net entanglements, over-fishing, habitat degradation, poaching for dolphin oil, and lately, by the proposed hydro projects in the tributaries upstream.

40 dolphin habitats have been identified across the Brahmaputra by the Gangetic Dolphin Conservation and Research Programme of the conservation group Aaranyak in collaboration with the state FD. These habitats are being monitored through the programme's Dolphin Conservation Network, in which trained community youth work in association with the FD to protect the species.

Source: 'OIL yet to get nod for seismic survey', *The Assam Tribune*, 16/12/2008.  
'OIL denies seismic survey inside NP', *The Assam Tribune*, 23/12/2008.  
'Make stand clear on seismic survey: AJYCP', *The Assam Tribune*, 23/12/2008.  
'Seismic survey may spell doom for river dolphins', *The Assam Tribune*, 25/12/2008.

## 2009

### **Habitat protection vital to save Gangetic dolphin in the Brahmaputra**

A study carried out under an IUCN Sir Peter Scott Fund project has expressed the need to protect the habitat of the Ganges dolphin to save the species from extinction.

According to the study, the total population of dolphin is around 2000, and of these between 240 to 300 can be found in the Brahmaputra river system. This study was conducted in the 1,044-km stretch of the Brahmaputra River system, primarily in Assam. A similar study carried out in 2005 had estimated the dolphin population to be 250.

Oil India Limited (OIL) has proposed to start prospecting for oil along the bed of the Brahmaputra River using air guns and explosives; hence the need was felt for the study – to get an estimate of the population here.

The research has identified eight river sections as potential protected areas and suggested that community-based dolphin conservation is the best strategy to save the dolphins. The project also carried out 32 awareness campaigns along the Brahmaputra valley, focusing on fishing communities. Research has also shown that accidental killing through fisheries by-catch, poaching for oil, dam building and the proposed seismic survey in the Brahmaputra River are the major threats to the dolphins.

Source: 'Ganges River Dolphin in dire straits', [http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/brahmaputra\\_river\\_dolphins\\_psf\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/brahmaputra_river_dolphins_psf_final_report.pdf), 20/07/2009

## **Study on implications of the Forest Rights Act around Nameri NP and Sonai-Rupai WLSs**

Kalpavriksh recently conducted a short exploratory study on the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 in the areas around Nameri NP and Sonai-Rupai WLS. The objective was to gauge the status of implementation of the act, understand people's perceptions and also the possible implications for, both, the biodiversity and forest-dependent communities of the area.

Given the historical context of this area, the findings of the study suggest that some modifications are needed to the law and certain conservation safeguards should be integrated before the Act is implemented here.

Some of the possible resolution measures suggested for this particular context include the need for:

- (a) an amendment of the cut-off date of the Act from 2005 to 1980
- (b) steps to highlight conservation aspects of the Act, such as community forest rights provisions
- (c) steps to prevent ethnic conflict resulting from varying eligibility of claimants under the Act
- (d) steps to actively involve communities in conservation efforts
- (e) steps to prevent fresh encroachments
- (f) steps to regenerate forest areas on which claims have been rejected
- (g) steps to expeditiously recognize the rights of eligible claimants.

## **Opposition to proposal of gifting rhino horns**

The Assam government has proposed to gift rhino horns to visiting dignitaries and museums all over the world in a move to get rid of the large number of horns that are now

lying with it. The state is reported to have also approached the central government for help as the proposal will need diplomatic communication with various countries. The FD intends to present these horns in order to preserve them and many forest officials are reported to have welcomed the move.

The Indian Army too is said to have requested the FD to provide them with rhino horns so that these could be displayed in various army museums across the country.

Environmental activists and organisations including Aaranyak and People for Animals have, however, expressed their opposition to this move. They have warned that such a decision may legitimize poaching to a certain extent and could fan the aphrodisiac myth about the rhino horn.

A number of rhino horns that were seized from poachers or retrieved from dead rhinos are now decaying due to lack of proper preservation. The largest number of such horns is believed to be in the possession of the Golaghat district treasury, since the Kaziranga NP is under its jurisdiction. The state government has also constituted a committee headed by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests for the purpose of gathering data on the number of horns it has in its treasuries.

Source: Rahul Karmarkar. 'Greens see red over Assam rhino horn gift plan', *Hindustan Times*, 08/06/2009.

'A home for rhino assets - Assam may send rotting horns to world museums', *The Telegraph*, 04/06/2009.

## **More severe punishment for poaching in Assam**

The Assam State Assembly recently passed the Wildlife (Protection) (Assam Amendment) Bill-2009, incorporating more stringent provisions to check wildlife crimes, including a life term for poaching.



The bill (now an act) has made first-time poaching an offence punishable with imprisonment from seven to ten years, in place of the earlier provisions of three to seven years. For a second offence, the quantum of punishment will extend from ten years to life imprisonment.

The bill had been drafted after pursuing the matter with the centre, besides having discussions with wildlife experts, NGOs and members of the judiciary.

Source: 'Assam makes Wildlife Protection Act more stringent', *The Assam Tribune*, 17/07/2009.

### **Human-elephant conflict takes heavy toll along Assam-Bhutan border**

Human-elephant conflict is reported to have escalated seriously in the Udalgiri district on the Assam - Bhutan border. Six elephants and eight humans have been



killed in the past one year with the month of September alone witnessing the death of three elephants. Herds of elephants looking for food are inflicting heavy damage on standing crops and are being killed in retaliation by villagers, either by poisoning or by electrocution.

At least two elephants were killed in the last week of September, allegedly, by high voltage power lines laid out by villages to keep the elephants away from their paddy fields. The first death was that of a young tusker in a paddy field at Satghoria village, followed a few days later by that of a pregnant female at Number 2 Athgora Village located only about a kilometer away from the earlier site.

Three persons were arrested following the first incident and the FD personnel that arrived after the 2nd death had to face the wrath of the villagers who complained that the FD was not doing anything to protect their paddy fields. The forest personnel had to take the help of police to reach the site of the incident.

Forest officials said that they could not find the cables that had been laid by the villagers to kill the elephant, but that preliminary investigations suggested that the elephant had died due to electrocution. The Bhutan border is about 6 km from the site of the elephant deaths.

The root of the problem is said to lie in the growing depletion of elephant habitat and destruction of their migratory corridors. Forests in the area form part of the Ripu-Chirang ER besides constituting a buffer zone of the Manas TR.

FD officials have said that constraints of infrastructure and manpower, coupled with the difficult terrain, have limited their efforts in tackling the problem. Further, the delayed release of funds has been affecting payment of compensation for elephant-induced death or damage, besides hampering routine activities of forest staff.

Another peculiar habit with the elephants which has added to the woes of the forest staff is that the original big herd scatters into a number of smaller groups while descending on cropland. This was not seen in earlier years and has made monitoring difficult.

The elephants involved in the conflict are said to belong to a herd with a population of 248 as per the latest census.

Source: 'Elephant electrocuted in Udalgiri district, again', *The Telegraph*, 30/09/2009.  
'Man-elephant conflict intensifies along Bhutan border', *The Assam Tribune*, 06/10/2009.

### Awards given to Assam FD personnel

In a move to motivate and support staff involved in forest and wildlife protection in Assam, the state government recently announced that it would give Rs. 3 lakh to the family of any FD employee who dies on duty. The incentive will be in addition to the normal benefits given to government employees. The forest employees will also be awarded medals for outstanding services.

Chief minister Tarun Gogoi made the announcements in Guwahati on the occasion of Wildlife Week. He gave awards to 31 personnel, including an Assam Rifles official, for their contribution towards conservation of wildlife in the state last year. While most of the award-winners are state FD staff members working in protected areas, two are from the police department and three are members of eco-development committees formed near NPs.

As many as 13 forest guards have died in attacks by wild animals or drowned during floods in the past decade in Kaziranga NP alone. Over 50 forest guards have become physically handicapped.

Source: 'Dispur announces cash reward for diligent forest staff', *The Telegraph*, 07/10/2009.

### Joint committees to monitor transmission lines for elephant safety

The Assam government has set up joint co-ordination committees in every district for monitoring the maintenance of the transmission lines to prevent electrocution of elephants. The committees set up recently in the wake of a rise in such incidents across the state will ascertain whether the guidelines issued by the MoEF and the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) have been followed.

Each committee will comprise the district deputy commissioner, executive

engineer of the Assam State Electricity Board, representative of a local NGO and the divisional forest officer either from the wildlife or territorial division.

The CEA has stated in one of its guidelines, for instance, that before designing or construction of any line, a proper survey of the route over which the line is to pass has to be conducted. The line should avoid rough and difficult countryside, forest areas and orchards. Similarly, in forest areas inhabited by animals, the routing of distribution lines should ensure that the number of trees required to be felled is minimal. The line route should also have the approval from competent authorities including the FD and should be finalised only after incorporating changes, if any are suggested.

The CEA guidelines also say that there should be a joint inspection of every power distribution line by officials of the electricity department and the FD twice a year, preferably before and after the monsoon. The FD is expected to inform the power supplier concerned, should any accident involving animals take place in an around the forest area, and the power supplier is then expected to submit a report

The most recent incident took place on the night of October 10. A male elephant had strayed into a garden in the Saghunbahi tea estate in Nagaon district and was electrocuted after it came in contact with a power line.

Source: 'Joint panel vigil for elephant safety', *The Telegraph*, 19/10/2009.

### Database of all rhinos in Assam

Taking a cue from Kenya's Masai Mara NP, the Assam FD has decided to prepare a



database of rhinos in all the state's protected areas. The database will include date of birth, body structure, behaviour and the area of movement of each rhino. The Geographical Information System (GIS) and Global Positioning System (GPS) will be used to monitor the rhinos on a day-to-day basis.

It has been suggested that having such a database will give the FD an idea of the density of rhinos in the existing areas. The information will also be useful to plan for relocation of the animals if a need for the same arises.

Source: Pullock Dutta. 'Assam to build rhino database – Conservation efforts based on Masai Mara NP in Kenya', *The Telegraph*, 28/11/2009.

### **Increased human-elephant conflict in Assam**

Following the deaths of five tea plantation workers in different incidents involving wild elephants, the Assam Tea Tribes Students' Association (ATTSA) had threatened to cease work. The ATTSA has demanded measures from Assam's wildlife authorities to keep elephant herds from entering plantation areas and has warned that they would have to take the path of agitation if the government fails to protect people.

Four wild elephants have also been reportedly poisoned in the months of October and November. Locals allegedly mixed poisonous substances in country liquor, jackfruit, sugarcane and other eatables as a retaliatory measure.

A report by the wildlife department states that wild elephants have killed about 260 people in Assam since 2001. 280 elephants have also died during the period, many of them victims of retaliation by angry humans. Satellite imagery shows that villagers have encroached on about 280,000 hectares of thick forests

in Assam. Villagers in the past drove away marauding herds by beating drums or bursting firecrackers. Now they poison the animals.

The last elephant census carried out by wildlife authorities had recorded about 5,500 elephants in Assam.

Source: 'Elephant depredations may force shutdown of Assam tea plantations', <http://www.news.calcuttatube.com> 25/11/2009.

### **Ramsar tag proposed for Dhir Beel, Son Beel, Kaziranga Beel and Dordoibam Beel**

The Assam government has proposed the inclusion of four wetlands in the state in the list of Ramsar sites. The wetlands are Dhir Beel, Son Beel, Kaziranga Beel and Bordoibam Beel. Deepor Beel is the only Ramsar site in the state at the present.

The state government has also said that it will take all necessary steps to protect and develop the 3513 wetlands in the state that cover an area of over one lakh hectares. The government has assigned the Assam Science Technology and Environment Council with the task of preparing maps and compiling data of all the wetlands in the state. The government has said that it is also in touch with international funding agencies to avail itself of funds for conserving the wetlands.

Source: 'Assam push for Ramsar tags – State FD zeroes in on four wetlands', *The Telegraph*, 09/12/2009.

### **Two senior Nagaland officials suspect in rhino poaching**

The rhino horn trail has led the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau to two senior Nagaland state government officials. One of them is a senior education department official and the other is a medical officer. Both are based in Dimapur.

Their telephone numbers were found on the cell phone of Harmuj Ali, the alleged



poacher who had died in an encounter with forest guards at the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP on the night of October 17.

Officials have said that a number of calls were exchanged between these numbers and that of Ali on the 17th of October. There were also several missed calls on Ali's cell phone from these numbers after he died in the encounter. The calls kept coming till late in the morning the day after the encounter.

It was also found that the SIM card recovered from Ali's mobile had been stolen from an employee of a Guwahati-based construction company. The police had arrested the owner of the SIM card. He was subsequently released following information that he had lodged a complaint with the police that the SIM card had been stolen.

Source: '2 Nagaland officials suspect –Wildlife crime bureau tracks 4 calls on poacher's cell phone', *The Telegraph*, 07/11/2009.

## 2010

### Majuli Island to be declared eco-sensitive zone



Majuli Island located in the channel of the River Brahmaputra and considered to be the biggest riverine island in the world is soon to be declared an eco-sensitive zone. An announcement to this effect was made recently by the Union Minister for Environment and Forests, Mr Jairam Ramesh. The island is recognised as an unique natural and cultural heritage and there have been demands in the past to declare it a World Heritage site.

The minister said that he had already asked the Assam Government to put up a proposal for schemes to protect the island from erosion and other ecological problems. The Bombay Natural History Society is also to be asked to do a comprehensive study for protecting the birds, fish and river dolphins found in the island and its surroundings.

Source: 'Jairam promises to declare Majuli eco-sensitive zone', *The Indian Express*, 07/04/2010.

### Assam plans Kaziranga-Manas tourism circuit

The Assam government has proposed the creation of a consolidated tourist circuit comprising the Kaziranga and Manas NPs at a cost of Rs 50 crore. The centre has reportedly agreed to the proposal.

Tourists in this new circuit would be provided with food, lodging and easy transportation facilities. At present tourists find it difficult to include the two PAs in their itinerary as the distance between the two is 350 km.

Source: 'Assam plans to create Kaziranga-Manas tourist circuit', PTI & www.wildlifewatch.in, 23/03/2010.

### FD to compensate 300 families affected by elephant depredation in Jorhat district

The Assam FD is providing compensation to nearly 300 families in the Jorhat district that have been impacted by elephant depredation. An amount of nearly Rs 14 lakh was distributed among 282 families recently, and another 26 families are to be compensated shortly.

According to the FD the most affected areas of the Jorhat district include Dhekiakhowa, Balisapori, Melleng Lohkorgaon, Rongdoi, 8 No. Spur, Laliti,

Bahphola, Upper Deuri, Nam Deuri, Neul Gaon, Melleng Jotokia, Katonibari, Velguri, and a number of chaporis namely Kartik Chapor, Bebijan, Dorbar Chapor, Kumolia Chapor and Mithai Chapor. In addition to that, wild elephants have affected a big area of Mariani comprising more than three tea gardens.

Conflict had taken a serious turn in Kartik Chapor where hundreds of families were affected and more than three persons were killed in attacks by elephants.

Source: 'Elephant depredation affects 300 families', *The Sentinel*, 29/04/2010.

### **River islands of Assam are new corridors for wildlife**

A study by the NGO Aaranyak, has found that tigers, rhinos and elephants are using the Brahmaputra river islands as corridors and habitats while migrating and to establish new territories. The river islands dotting the 185 km stretch of the Brahmaputra from Kaziranga to the Orang NP – which is being called the Kaziranga-Orang riverine landscape (KORL) – have been found to be a major corridor for animals migrating between the protected areas in the Brahmaputra floodplains.

In addition to Kaziranga and Orang this landscape also includes the Laokhowa and Burachapor WLSs and a few RFs. The FD is reportedly keen to connect the meta-population of tigers in these areas by declaring it a single tiger conservation unit. The study covering an area of 1100 sq km was undertaken in collaboration with the Assam FD and WWF – India in order to assess the potential of the Brahmaputra river islands to support dispersing tigers within Central Assam. Some river islands that were included in the study were Cibe Tapu, Lahoroni Chapor 1 and 2, Kartikay, and Maj Chapor.

Of the 78 small and large river islands

(ranging from three to 37 sq km in area) in the landscape, 52 were sampled for the presence of tigers, prey, habitat suitability, human beings and livestock. Direct presence of tigers was found in six of them and indirect evidence in five others. Remote sensing data has revealed that most of these islands are riverine grasslands and only one-fifth are used for agriculture. This indicates that these can be good habitats and corridors for tigers and other animals as they move across the landscape.

The recent citing of tigers in Koliabor, Naltali and Dhakuakhana, about 10 to 40 km from Kaziranga, has also confirmed that the animals are dispersing over considerable areas. The riverine stretch is also important for the Gangetic dolphin.

The report has suggested that a detailed study should also be made to understand the socio-economics, land holding and land use by the communities settled on some of the river islands and that the communities should be taken into confidence for their long-term conservation and management. It was pointed out that as some of the khuti owners might be completely dependent on the livestock raised on the river islands, this aspect needed to be investigated thoroughly while preparing strategies for their planned rehabilitation.

A co-management approach for the riverine areas has also been suggested as a section of local villagers are dependent on fishing for their livelihoods.

Source: 'River islands find favour with tigers - NGO study reveals new corridors', *The Telegraph*, 13/08/2010.  
'Contiguous riverine stretch mooted', *The Assam Tribune*, 23/08/2010.

### **FD officials to be allowed use of firearms**

The Assam government has authorized the use of firearms by forest staff to ensure better protection of forests and wildlife. The order

that was issued by the governor's office on July 14 allows all forest officers, from front-line staff to the senior-most members of the department, to use firearms. The order also provides immunity to forest officials from prosecution without prior sanction in case of firing incidents. A magisterial enquiry will, however, be conducted in the firing cases and criminal proceedings can be initiated against erring officials if the use of firearms is proven unnecessary, unwarranted or excessive.

The FD is reported to be checking with the police if they have spare weapons that FD can now use. The FD had said it will take a decision about buying new weapons based on the availability of funds.

Wildlife NGOs have welcomed the decision saying that the under-equipped front-line staff was in a disadvantaged position when fighting organised poaching gangs.

Source: 'Assam allows forest officials to use firearms', [www.thaindian.com](http://www.thaindian.com), 06/08/2010.

### **Railway advisory to restrain elephant deaths in Assam**



The Railway Board has issued advisories to prevent train accidents that have been frequently killing elephants in Assam.

The matter was discussed in a meeting in May held between officials of the Northeast Frontier (NF) Railway and the state FD. The FD expressed concern over the increasing cases of elephant deaths in train accidents in Assam. The Chief Wildlife Warden informed the railway authorities of the February 28 incident where, despite information being passed on to the railway station master at Azara on the movement of elephants in the area, nothing was done. A female elephant had died in the incident after being hit by a train at Deepor Beel.

Responding to the FD's concern, the NF Railway said the Railway Board had issued advisories aimed at preventing accidents. These involve the suggested engagement of elephant trackers equipped with mobile phone/walkie-talkies to receive/pass on information regarding presence of elephant herds around tracks. Separate wireless communication facility would be provided at the stations falling within the vulnerable areas identified.

The FD would also inform the railways about the locations where speed restrictions are required in the state. There are eight locations which have been identified as vulnerable so far. Of these, two sites are in Guwahati, two in Karbi Anglong and one each in Digboi, Goalpara, Nagaon areas and in the Gibbon WLS. The Railways have, however, requested for a review on this issue as such curbs might affect train movement.

It has also been decided that the zonal railways, in consultation with the FD, will identify the vulnerable areas and arrange need-based cleaning of vegetation on either side of tracks. Pantry car staff will also be advised not to throw edible waste in the vulnerable areas as it might attract elephants and increase chances of accidents. Announcements are also to be made at stations near vulnerable locations, advising passengers not to throw such waste. The train drivers, guards and station masters would be

sensitised on wildlife conservation during periodical refresher courses at nominated zonal railway training centres.

About 37% of the total cases of elephant mortality owing to train hits in the country is in Assam alone. This is the highest in the country followed by West Bengal, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand. Seven elephants have been killed already by trains in Assam this year.

Source: Roopak Goswami. 'Rail advisory to curb jumbo deaths', *The Telegraph*, 17/05/2010.

### **Women take up frontline jobs of protection in PAs, other forest areas**

As many as 21 women foresters and 35 women forest guards have recently started working in different wildlife divisions in Assam, thanks to the FD's move to recruit 30% women in all posts. The total strength of the FD in the state is 6000 personnel.

These women have been appointed in a number of areas that include the Kaziranga and Dibru-Saikhowa NPs and the Pabitora WLS.

Women who join the FD are being trained by experts from the Assam Forest Protection Force, National Security Guard, Assam Police and the Assam Olympic Association in areas like physical fitness, arms bearing, yoga and martial arts. This is in addition to rigorous classroom training in wildlife management, forest engineering and social forestry.

In the Kaziranga NP, authorities have got the women involved in eco development committees (EDC). 110 villages have been identified for the EDC programme and 55 EDCs have been formed since 2008. The idea is to involve 50% of the village women and generate livelihood opportunities through self-help groups and it is hoped that the female staff will help initiate livelihood

opportunities for the village women. Presence of women staff is also expected to help in anti-poaching activities, particularly while conducting search or raid operations and when female relatives of poachers act as accomplices.

Source: 'Jungle belles – Assam reinforces its frontline forest protection force with trained women guards', *The Hindu Business Line*, 06/08/2010.

### **Tiger conservation education program in schools adjoining PAs**

The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) along with WTI has initiated a program in schools in Assam to increase awareness about tiger conservation. The program is directed particularly at schools located in areas adjoining NPs and wildlife sanctuaries. The theme for the campaign is 'Born to be Wild: Saving the Majestic Tiger'.

The selected schools will be given free activity packs, including a documentary film, and information booklets that describe the world of tigers, threats faced by them and conservation initiatives being undertaken. Painting and essay competitions will also be held among the students of these schools.

Source: Pullock Dutta. 'Schools to the aid of tiger conservation – Children living near NPs to boost preservation efforts in Assam', *The Telegraph*, 06/10/2010.

### **Centre releases Rs. 573 lakhs for Kaziranga, Manas and Nameri TRs**

The centre has recently released the first installment of funds sanctioned for three tiger reserves in Assam with the condition that the money should be utilized according to the agreement signed last year. The centre has released Rs 573.08 lakh for the current fiscal, of which Rs 272.72 lakh will go to Kaziranga TR, Rs 237.50 lakh to Manas TR and Rs

63.58 lakh to Nameri TR. The total amount sanctioned under Project Tiger for the three reserves for this fiscal is Rs 903.55 lakh, of which the lion's share will go to Kaziranga (Rs 448.15 lakh), followed by Manas (Rs 356.08 lakh) and Nameri (Rs 99.32 lakh).

The release order for the money stated that the money should be made available to the tiger reserves within two weeks of its receipt. It would require regular furnishing in its monthly report, both in physical and financial terms, the implementation of work as mentioned in the sanction letter. A performance-cum-achievement report would have to be submitted on or before March 31, 2011.

The Centre has also stressed that the funds be utilised as per the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between the National Tiger Conservation Authority, the field directors of the three tiger reserves and the state government for implementing tiger conservation initiatives as proposed in the annual plan of preparations. The MoU includes the drawing up of a security plan in accordance with the reserves' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and to ensure intelligence-based protection for tigers and other wild animals as well as the habitat.

As part of the facilities being provided, Manas has been given a deep freezer for preservation of tiger carcasses as some time would be required for investigation of the death of a tiger by experts. Kaziranga has been given a sanction for procurement of GPS sets, standard type night vision devices, solar lighting systems, life jackets and reward to informers and staff, among other things. Nameri has been sanctioned money for the purchase of a projector for public awareness and meetings.

The Centre has also categorised Manas as a 'poor' tiger reserve as it has a low tiger density. The estimated number of tigers in Manas is 15-18. Kaziranga, which

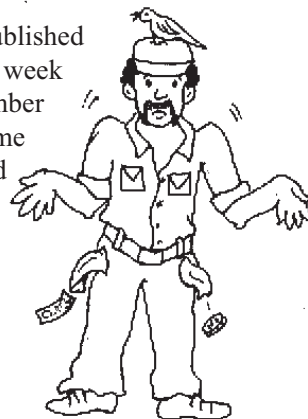
recently claimed to have the highest density of tigers in the world, has been categorised as 'good' while Nameri has been given the 'satisfactory' tag.

Source: 'Funds for Assam tiger reserves - Delhi releases first installment, seeks use according to agreement', *The Telegraph*, 01/10/2010.

## 2011

### Home guards, casual workers protecting PAs not paid for seven months; quitting posts

News reports published in the last week of September noted that home guards and casual workers responsible for protection of PAs in the state were leaving because they had not been paid for nearly



seven months. PAs that were affected included the Kaziranga, Rajiv Gandhi (Orang), Dibru-Saikhowa, and Nameri NPs and the Pabitora WLS. There was no clarity on the exact number of those who had left.

The festive season is particularly important because poachers are known to make additional efforts to kill rhinos to make quick money. A number of incidents of exchange of fire between poachers and forest staff were reported in the earlier part of September. Park managers said that they had reported the situation to their seniors but money had still not been released.

In Orang, for instance, at least 25 home guards did not join duty after they went on



leave during Durga Puja. The total forest security strength here is about 200 persons. They were engaged in 40 different anti-poaching camps along with the permanent and casual forest staff. 40 casual staff of the NP had also not been paid their dues. In the case of the 80 permanent staff at the park, staff members alleged that the monthly amount of Rs. 500 against ration had also not been released.

A home guard gets Rs. 4,500 per month, while a casual worker gets Rs. 114 per day.

Source: Pullock Dutta. 'Guards leave Assam parks - Home guards, casual workers quit because of non-payment of 7 months' salary', *The Telegraph*, 29/09/2011.  
'Wildlife in Orang NP under threat', *The Assam Tribune*, 22/10/2011.  
'Kaziranga bows to tourist pressure, opens early', *The Telegraph*, 29/10/2011.

## **AMCHANG WLS**

### **2004**

#### **Wild elephant problem in Army cantonment in Narangi**

There have been regular reports of depredation by elephants in the army cantonment at 51 Sub Area at Narangi. The pachyderms are reported to regularly visit the cantonment's ration godown in search of food. Most of the time they come in twos and threes, but occasionally they come in herds of 20-25. Army sources say that on an average, food worth more than Rs. 10,000 is lost on every visit by the elephants, and that this has been happening for the last 10-12 years. The elephants have also killed 17 persons, including army jawans, in this period.

The main reason for the problem is that parts of the cantonment area actually lie in an elephant movement corridor between Amchang and South Amchang RFs. The state government has, in fact, recently declared these forests, along with the Khanapara Reserve Forest, as the Amchang WLS. Army authorities have asked the FD to find a solution to the problem. Some of the options being considered include engaging kunkis (trained elephants) to chase away the wild herds or erecting electric fences around the godown.

The FD has however expressed concern that some of these preventive measures, and denying the animals access to the food that they have become accustomed to, could result in the animals retaliating or turning violent and giving vent to their anger in the nearby villages. In any case the army authorities were not too keen to take the help of kunkis to end their predicament because of the cost factor involved.

Source: Sivasish Thakur. 'Wild tuskers creating havoc in Army cantt', *The Assam Tribune*, 01/07/2004.

### **2005**

#### **Elephants from Amchang WLS cause serious damage in Panikhaiti area**

Elephants coming out of the Amchang WLS have destroyed a large number of houses in and around Panikhaiti on the outskirts of the city of Guwahati. The depredation was reported to have gone on for more than two weeks starting early November.

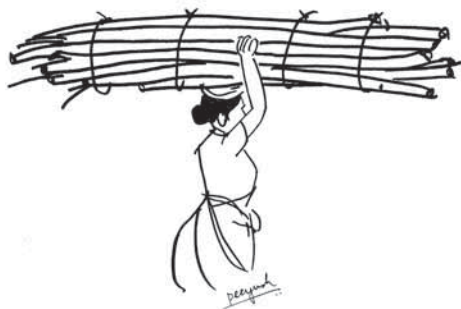
The majority of those affected were subsistence farmers and wage earners and people who lost their houses and crop fields. Those whose houses have been destroyed were forced to take shelter in homes of relatives or neighbours. Their situation was

also made worse because of the setting in of the cold of winter.

According to residents of the area, though the elephants visit the area regularly, the damage caused this time was unprecedented

Source: 'Depredation by elephants in Panikhaiti area', *The Assam Tribune*, 19/11/2005.

### Pressures mounting on Amchang WLS



Flora and fauna of the recently formed Amchang WLS are reportedly under severe pressure from poachers and others extracting resources from the forests here. About 150 to 200 cycle-loads of green fodder and 80 shoulder-loads of firewood are extracted from the Amchang side of the sanctuary every day. Each cycle-load of green fodder is worth Rs. 40 to Rs. 50 whereas each bundle of firewood fetches Rs. 25.

The situation is said to be more serious on the northern side of the sanctuary in areas like Birkuchi and Panikhaiti. The timber smugglers prefer this side of the sanctuary because of the location of the Panikhaiti Railway Station. Timber and charcoal are the main items loaded onto the railway wagons there.

The location of the Narangi Army Cantonment has, however, come as a deterrent to smugglers on the southern side of the sanctuary. Sources in the FD have said that sometimes even the vehicles of the paramilitary forces are used for smuggling.

There has been a demand for increasing the forest posts inside the park to ensure better protection.

Source: Ajit Patowary. 'Amchang facing threat from poachers', *The Assam Tribune*, 22/11/2005.

## 2008

### Seven hectares of Amchang WLS for NH-37 under east west corridor project

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is to acquire 7.021 hectares of land from the Amchang WLS for the four-laning of NH-37 under the East-West Corridor project. The forest land is needed to widen a 3.6 km stretch of the highway skirting the sanctuary.



The NHAI has said that they have no alternative, as the highway is bound by the WLS on one side and by deep gorges on the other. The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) and a central committee constituted by the Supreme Court have approved the proposal.

Nearly 4000 trees will be cut for the widening project. Highway authorities have said that they will take up afforestation on 14 hectares in the WLS to compensate for this loss.

The NHAI will also construct a noise attenuation wall separating the sanctuary from the highway to ensure that vehicular traffic on the highway does not disturb the animals. Crash barriers are to be constructed on the roadsides and rumblers and warning signs will be put up along the entire 3.6-km stretch of the highway adjoining the sanctuary. The

NHAI will also take up slope stabilisation work and construct retaining walls to tackle the erosion problem. The authorities have further stated that no construction would be carried out during the night and only well-maintained equipment would be used to minimise noise.

Source: Pankaj Sarma. 'Highway to be upgraded with sanctuary land', *The Telegraph*, 28/03/2008.

## **BARAIL WLS**

**2006**

### **Highway realigned to protect Barail WLS; no decision yet on section through Kaziranga NP**

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), which is building the 678 km four-lane expressway from Silchar to Srirampur, has decided to realign the Udarband - Harangajo section to avoid damage to the Barail WLS.

The work contracts for the other 27 sections on the East-West Corridor in the state were awarded late last year. NHAI officials said the tenders for the Udarband-Harangajo section, on NH-54, are now likely to be invited in January 2007 after finalisation of the detailed project report (DPR). This section is 31 km long.

In Assam the East-West Corridor originates in Silchar and will pass through Maibong, Lumding, Daboka, Nagaon, Sonapur, Guwahati, Nalbari and Bijni before ending at Srirampur on the Assam -West Bengal border.

The NHAI has already got court clearance to cut a total of 1,36,547 trees along the way. The state FD is the agency entrusted

with the task of cutting down the trees after paying the necessary compensation funded by NHAI. The NHAI is also paying the FD for afforestation programmes to compensate for the cut trees.

Four-laning work from Km 22 to 60.5 on NH-54 has not yet been taken up due to non-issuance of forest clearance. In this stretch, there are three locations where elephants cross the highway. The state CCF (Wildlife) has recommended that only a two-lane road be built on the 25 km stretch here. A meeting was held on September 11 last between the CCF (Wildlife) and NHAI officials where it was agreed that the NHAI might acquire land up to 33 metres wide in this stretch. NHAI is making a proposal, which will be reviewed by the CCF (Wildlife).

Meanwhile, the NHAI proposal to widen the 315 km highway between Nagaon and Dibrugarh into a four-lane one has also run into a hurdle because of the concerns regarding its impact on the Kaziranga NP. The highway is to be four-laned under the Special Accelerated Road Development Programme for the North East (SARDP-NE). The DPR is expected to be ready in six months' time.

Source: Anujata Talukdar. 'Realignment to protect Barail Sanctuary', *The Assam Tribune*, 05/10/2006.

### **Villagers in Khalingduar Reserve Forest, adjoining Barnadi WLS perform Ganesh Puja to keep jumbos at bay**

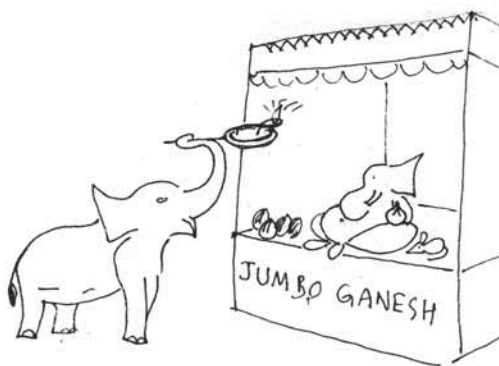
The NGO Aaranyak has undertaken a project 'Diversity and Distribution of Herpetofauna and Evaluation of Conservation Status in Barail Hill Range'. The project has been funded by the Rufford Foundation and logistical support is being provided by the Assam FD and villages on the fringes of the Barail WLS.

The study has covered the lower



elevation of the Barail WLS, fringe villages and tea gardens of the northern-most areas of Cachar and has recorded 57 species of reptiles and amphibians in the area. This included 19 species of snakes, 15 species of lizards, 20 species of frogs and three species of turtles and tortoises.

The survey found two species enlisted in IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species – the Asian giant tortoise (*Manouria emys*) and the Keeled box turtle (*Pyxidea mouhotii*). More species of reptiles, including the Four keeled skink, which was spotted here for the first time in 1905, are expected to be found when the survey covers new ranges.



Source: 'Rediscovery of skink after a century', <http://www.telegraphindia.com>, 31/10/2007.

## BARNADI WLS

2011

Villagers living in the fringe areas of Khalingduar RF in Udalguri, adjoining the Barnadi WLS recently organized a puja to appease the elephant god, Ganesha, for relief from the terror unleashed by elephants in the area.

It is believed that large scale deforestation, including that is carried out for tea estates in this region, in the last few years has led to the escalation of human-elephant conflict here. In 2011 alone, five elephants and seven people were killed in the conflict. The worst month was July when four elephants and five villagers were killed. The elephant deaths were mostly due to electrocution and poisoning.

Source: 'Ganesh puja to keep jumbos at bay', *The Times of India*, 03/10/2011.

## BURACHAPORI WLS

2001

### Rhinos to be relocated to Burachapori WLS

The Assam FD is planning to shift some rhinos from the Kaziranga NP and the Pabitora WLS to the Burachapori WLS which is spread over an area of 44 sq. kms in the Sonitpur district. The Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of the Tezpur division has said that the inaccessibility and fewer incidences of poaching reported here would make the sanctuary a good place for the relocation of the rhino.

A five-member veterinary team recently visited the villages of Dhanias, Siswati and Jhauni which are located on the periphery of the sanctuary to vaccinate cattle here against the diseases, Haemmohaegis Septicemia (HS) and Black Quarter (BQ). The program was conducted under the aegis of Early Birds, a NGO that works in the region. Two more such veterinary camps were also held here in March and April, 2001 respectively. Financial

support for these camps was provided by the Western Assam Wildlife Division.

Source: 'Increase in rhino population at Kaziranga, Pabitora', *The Assam Tribune*, 04/02/2001.  
Moloy Baruah. Letter dated 05/03/2001.

## 2006

### **Burachapori WLS placed under the Nagaon district**

The Burachapori WLS has been put under the authority of the Nagaon district administration. Earlier it was under the jurisdiction of Sonitpur district authorities. The decision was taken recently by the FD at the initiative of Forest and Tourism Minister, Mr Rockybul Hussain, for the better management of the Laokhowa WLS which is also in the Nagaon district.

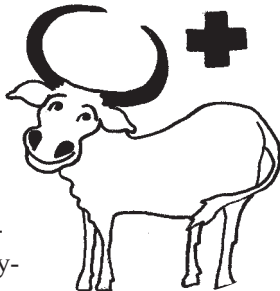
It is hoped that the change will help deal with poachers from Sonitpur district who come to Laokhowa by crossing the Brahmaputra through Burachapori for their poaching activities.

Source: 'Burachapori GS to come under Nagaon dist.', *The Sentinel*, 15/08/2006.

## 2008

### **Veterinary Camp at Burachapori WLS**

Early Birds, in collaboration with Aaranyak, the Assam FD and the Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation, conducted a three-day free veterinary-



cum-awareness camp at Burachapori WLS in the month of March. 1180 cattle were vaccinated against HS + BQ and de-worming was also conducted at the villages of Dhania, Bhagamukh and Jhauni on 6th & 7th. Pl. check against original! This was the 8th veterinary camp organized here since 2001.

Early Bird has also demanded that the buffalo khutties inside the sanctuary be removed in the interests of the wildlife here.

Source: Press Release by *Early Birds*. 19/03/2008.

## **CHAKRASHILA WLS**

### **Local communities assist in protection of Chakrashila Sanctuary**

Nature's Beckon, an NGO which was instrumental in the declaration of the Chakrashila WLS, has reported that villagers are contributing significantly in the protection of the area. The Sanctuary harbours a population of the endangered Golden langur.

In 1994 the NGO had facilitated a meeting between the FD and local communities to work out the principles of Community Forest Management (CFM). Initial efforts at CFM have been undertaken in the forests of Salkocha Range. In January 1995 the villagers are reported to have apprehended four tiger poachers in the Sanctuary, and later that year in June, timber smugglers were also caught by them.

The organisation has organised awareness and education programmes in and around several other protected areas in Assam including Manas TR, Kaziranga NP, and Dibru-Saikhowa, Pabitora, and Rajiv Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuaries. Education material like booklets, folders and posters have also been developed in local languages. The group brings out a newsletter highlighting its various activities.

## 2003

### **Illegal tree felling reported from Chakrashila WLS**

Nature's Beckon, an NGO working on environmental issues in Assam has expressed serious concern over large-scale tree felling inside the Chakrashila WLS. A team from the organisation recently visited the sanctuary and found a lot of evidence of the same, including those of hand sawing operations in 13 saw-pits. A complaint has been lodged with the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests. No action is reported to have been taken yet.

Source: 'Chakrashila sanctuary turning barren', *The Sentinel*, 08/06/2003.

## 2004

### **Training workshop held on survey and census of Golden langur**

A three-day training workshop on survey and census of primates, with special reference to the Golden langur, was held in February earlier this year in the Chakrashila WLS. It was held under the aegis of Manas Biosphere Conservation Forum (MBCF), and was jointly conducted by conservation NGOs, Green Heart and New Horizon.

The main components of the training included habitat, social behaviour, threats, conservation prospects and scientific methodology for survey and census. Focus was also laid on the role of NGOs as well as the co-ordination and support from government departments and agencies concerned.

The participants emphasized the need for the revival of fragmented corridors and the restoration of degraded forests. Stress was also laid on the need to create awareness and for involving the local communities

for sustainable uses of natural resources and wildlife conservation and especially providing space to the Golden langur.

The field demonstration and practical training was carried out at Chakrashila WLS and at locations around Nardangiri hills covering a rubber garden in Kokrajhar district. Participants included representatives of the NGOs that form the MBCF: Green Heart, New Horizon, Natures Foster, Green Forest Conservation and Aaranyak.

Source: 'Training on survey and census of golden langur', *The Assam Tribune*, 01/03/2004.

## 2008

### **Tourism festival at Chakrashila WLS**

A three-day Chakrashila Conservation Tourism Festival was planned for the first week of April earlier this year. 12 houses in the area were selected for tourist home-stays based on criteria like the availability of clean toilets, a guest room, running water and accessibility.

Homes for tourist stays were selected at Jornagra (Rabha village), Siljan-Khagrikhola (Garo village), Ultapani (Nepali/Bodo village), Jharbari (Bodo/Nepali village) and Amguri (Santhal/Adivasi village).

The FD agreed to pay an amount of Rs. 200-300 to the villagers for the home-stays, whereas the cost of food and travel was to be borne by the visitors.

Source: 'Add-ons to eco-tourism', *The Telegraph*, 21/03/2008.

### **Chakrashila staff receive training at Corbett**

A team of frontline staff from the Chakrashila WLS received training in PA management at

the Corbett NP in an all-expenses-paid trip sponsored by WWF-India, the Conservation Initiative for Asian Elephant, USA and the Guwahati-based environmental group, Aaranyak.

The seven-day session was held in October at the Kalagarh Training Centre at Corbett. Forest guards from Chakrashila studied the various anti-poaching measures as well as the eco-tourism and community-tourism initiatives implemented at Corbett. They also visited the high-altitude zoo in Nainital.

Aaranyak has said that if the Chakrashila-Corbett training model turned out to be successful, similar training-cum-exposure trips would be organised for other frontline staff serving in the PAs of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

Source: 'Anti-poaching course for Chakrashila staff', *The Assam Tribune*, 16/10/2008.

## DEEPOR BEEL WLS

2001

**Involve traditional fishermen for protection of Deepor Beel: Expert**



Prof PC Bhattacharjee of the Zoology Department of Guwahati University (GU) has called for the involvement of the local fishermen in the conservation and

management of the Deepor Beel WLS. He has suggested that the wetland should be developed as a biosphere reserve area with greater participation and involvement of the people living around the beel for better management, maintenance and protection of the unique biodiversity of the area.

Deepor Beel is the first Ramsar site in the state and plays host to a large number of resident and migratory waterfowl. Recently there was a move for the denotification of this protected area, but it has been stalled.

Source: Ajit Patowary. 'Local people firm on protecting Deepor Beel', *The Assam Tribune*, 05/02/2001.

### **Veterinary camps around Nameri, Deepor Beel**

Free veterinary camps were organised recently for villagers around Nameri NP and the Deepor Beel WLS by Early Birds, an NGO that is working for nature care in the NE.

The camp around Nameri was organised from April 27 – 29, 2001 with the support of the Western Assam Wildlife Division. A total of 1400 cattle including 200 buffaloes were inoculated on the occasion.

A one-day camp was organised around Deepor Beel on June 16. Villagers from Deochotal, Chakrdo, Nepalichuburi and Kalitapara were the main beneficiaries.

Source: Moley Baruah. Letters to Kalpavriksh dated 01/05/2001 and 18/06/2001.

2002

### **Apathy, encroachments threaten Deepor Beel**

Extensive encroachments and unplanned growth of the city of Guwahati has greatly

threatened Deepor Beel WLS, located just outside the city. The area's natural drainage has also been damaged.

In 1989 the Assam Erosion and Drainage Department has assessed the area of the lake to be 55 sq km, with 4.14 sq km of the core area being declared a WLS. Experts now say the area of the lake has shrunk to only about 10 sq km.

The main offenders include the Guwahati–Jogighopa broad gauge railway track that has been routed through the water body, brick kilns and industrial units that have mushroomed in recent times, the Azara railway station, a part of the Airport Authorities of India's staff housing complex and a nursing home.

Source: 'Apathy endangers wetland', *The Statesman*, 30/03/2002.

### **Proposal to scrap Deepor Beel Sanctuary dropped**

The Assam FD recently issued a notification (dated May 29, 2002) to scrap the 1989 draft notification declaring Deepor Beel as a WLS. The justification for this was the fact that a large number of people who were dependant on the Beel for their survival were opposed to the sanctuary.

The May 2002 notification was prompted by a January 1994 report of the Deputy Commissioner, Kamrup, who, in his capacity as the District Collector, had examined the prevailing conditions in and around the wetland. He had concluded that the sanctuary would affect the 400 fisher families who live in and around the beel and that their livelihoods could not be summarily done away with without making alternative arrangements.

The notification for scrapping of the sanctuary, however, evoked strong responses from other sections, including a large number of environmental and wildlife groups in the

state. These included Aaranyak, Nature's Beckon, Assam Science, Technology and Environment Council (ASTEC) and Nature's Bonyapran.

Taking cognizance of these protests the State Forest Minister has said that the status quo regarding Deepor Beel will be maintained for the time being and there was a need for a coordinated and comprehensive approach to resolve the matter. The Kamrup Deputy Commissioner, Absar Hazarika has now been entrusted the job of preparing a feasibility study for declaring the Deepor Beel as a WLS.

Source: 'Deepor Beel proposal dropped', *The Assam Tribune*, 30/07/2002.  
'Govt. for status quo on Deepor Beel', *The Assam Tribune*, 05/08/2002.

### **Meet held to oppose sanctuary at Deepor Beel**

The Deepor Beel Paspara Mas Maria Samabai Samity (DBPMMSS) organised a public meeting on September 8, where a decision was taken to oppose the government move to declare Deepor Beel as a WLS.

Mr. Hemanta Talukdar, MLA and Chief Guest, stated that the beel was not fit to be declared a sanctuary because of the chaotic situation and the pollution in the area. He also alleged that the State Forest Minister had no idea of beels. He further said that until each of the 1000 fishermen was allotted at least 10 bighas of land for agriculture, the decision to create a sanctuary would be opposed.

Others who addressed the meeting included the President of the Dakshin Kamrup Grahak Suraksha Samity, President of the All Assam Scheduled Caste Association, members of the district council, presidents of some village panchayats and some social workers. They were also of the opinion that the existence of the broad gauge railway line, the International Airport and the proposed

national highway near the beel, meant that the area was not fit to be declared a sanctuary.

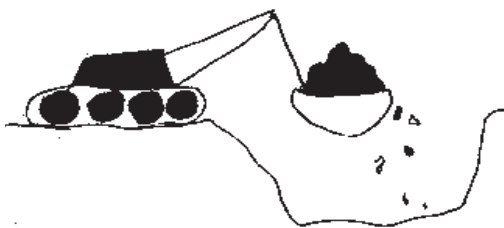
The meeting was attended by about 1000 fisherfolk of the area and representatives of panchayats and taluk committees of Azara, Dharapur, Garal, Majirgaon, Kahikuchi, Rani, and Mirzapur. It was also decided to form a Deepor Beel Suraksha Samity to fight for the rights of the fisherfolk to fish in the water body.

Later, in October, a memorandum was sent to the Kamrup DC demanding development of the beel for fishery and not as a WLS. It has been suggested that if fisheries development is allowed here, the fish demands of the entire north-eastern region could be met from this water body. Copies of the memorandum have also been sent to the State Chief Minister, the Forest Minister, Fishery Minister, the local MLA, local and other MPs and the chairman of the Kamrup Zila Parishad.

Source: 'Fishermen oppose bird sanctuary at Deepor beel', *The Assam Tribune*, 13/09/2002.  
'Develop Deepor Beel as a fishery: Azara fishermen', *The Assam Tribune*, 11/10/2002.

## 2003

### Illegal earth-cutting in Deepor Beel WLS



Illegal earth-cutting has reportedly been going on in Deepor Beel WLS for the last few months. The earth is being supplied at Rs. 200-300 per truck to the brick kilns

located in nearby areas like Dharapur, Azara, Khanamukh and Lankeshwar. It has been alleged that police stations at Azara and Jalukbari have not taken any action in this regard inspite of being aware of the situation.

Source: 'Illegal earth-cutting at Deepor Beel', *The Assam Tribune*, 04/03/2003.

### Deepor Beel to be the venue for water sports during National Games 2005

The Kamrup (Metro) DC and the president of the Rowing Association, AK Absar Hazarika recently said that the developmental works for promoting adventure and water sports in the state are being taken up soon. As part of this, it has also been decided that Deepor Beel, which is a WLS, has been finalized as the venue for rowing, kayaking and canoeing for the National Games - 2005, that are being held in Assam. Further details are not known.

Source: 'Deepor beel venue for games, water sports', *The Sentinel*, 16/07/2003.

### Rs. 15 crore Central aid for Deepor Beel

The Central Government has agreed to sanction an amount of Rs. 15 crore for the 'development' of the Deepor Beel, which is also a WLS. The details of what has been proposed are not fully known but steps are to be taken for the revival of the entire water body, to deal with problems related to discharge of effluents in the water here and also for tree plantation around the beel.

The initial proposal submitted by the Assam Government was for an amount of Rs 25 crore. The money is to be spent over a period of five years and will be implemented by the Assam Science Technology and Environment Council.

Source: 'Rs. 15 cr. Central aid for Deepor Beel Development', *The Assam Tribune*, 24/08/2003.



## 2006

### Guwahati solid waste for Deepor Beel



The move of the Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC) to dump the city's municipal solid waste in the Deepor Beel WLS has drawn protests from a wide range of individuals and groups.

The decision of the GMC was made in response of a Guwahati High Court order directing the GMC to shift its dumping site from Sasal by July 7, following a controversy there. The new site now chosen is Boragaon, which is an integral part of the wetland, and dumping began here in early July .

The dumping site at Boragaon is also very close to the sites of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Science and Technology (IASST) and the proposed sites of the Assam Institute of Management (AIM) and the ARTFED Working Women's Hostel.

Source: 'GMC's new site to hit Deepor Beel', *The Assam Tribune*, 09/07/2006.

## 2007

### Train kills two elephants near Deepor Beel

Two elephants were killed after a goods train knocked them down near the Deepor Beel WLS in August. The calf and an adult were part of a herd that was crossing the track at night when the accident occurred.

Forest officials have pointed out that the train was moving at a speed of 40 kmph. The driver of the train is reported to have said that the accident occurred about three kms away from the earmarked speed restriction zone where the speed limit is 25kmph. Additionally, the engine headlight could not illuminate the herd as the train was negotiating a curve and it was too late by the time the driver applied the brakes.

The forest authorities are seeking permission to arrest the railway driver while railways officials have said that this was not a solution as the driver was only discharging his responsibility of running the train. They have insisted, instead, that the FD should keep them posted regularly on elephant movement so that timely action could be taken to lower the speed and avoid such accidents. Three elephants had similarly been knocked down by a goods train on the same stretch in 2004.

Source: Sushanta Talukdar. 'Freight train kills two elephants', *The Hindu*, 11/08/2007.

## 2008

### Digital bank for Deepor Beel

The Kaziranga Wildlife Society has taken up a project to develop a digital data bank of the flora and fauna of Deepor Beel, the state's lone Ramsar Site. The study will also cover the adjacent hill areas, and hopes to serve as an archive of the rich bio-diversity of the wetland located on the outskirts of Guwahati. The society also plans to set up a mini museum at the beel showcasing its diverse flora and fauna.

Source: 'Digital bank for Deepor Beel', *The Telegraph*, 11/08/2008.



## 2009

### **Earth cutting continues at Deepor Beel WLS**

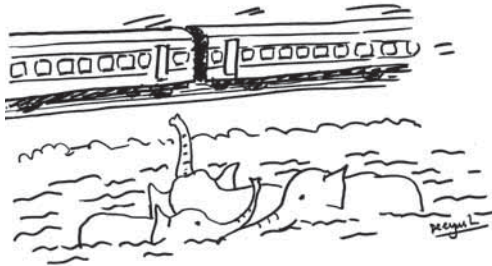
Despite government prohibition, local traders continue to cut and transport soil from the Deepor Beel WLS.

Trucks, reportedly, run day and night to cart away soil from Azara and the Assam Engineering College. This soil is then sold in nearby areas at high rates.

Source: 'Earth cutting on the rise at Deepor Beel', *The Assam Tribune*, 29/01/2009.

## 2011

### **Train-elephant collision averted in Deepor Beel**



Quick thinking and prompt action by members of the joint patrolling team deployed to prevent train-elephant collisions along the critical Deepor Beel railway stretch near Guwahati, recently averted an accident, saving a herd of about 15 wild elephants.

Initiated in November 2008, the patrolling along railway tracks in Assam has successfully prevented more than 80 accidents till date. It is jointly implemented by the Assam FD, the Northeast Frontier Railways and WTI with support from the UK-based charity Elephant Family (EF), under the Train Hits Mitigation Project. 23 accident-prone sections in eight forest

divisions in Assam have been identified, and patrolling is now carried out in seven of these 23 sites.

Each joint patrolling team comprises six members, two each supported by the FD, the Railways and WTI-EF. The teams walk along the tracks at night, keeping watch for elephants among other animals. On sighting, the information is conveyed to the drivers of approaching trains through the nearby railway control rooms. The alerted drivers of the approaching trains reduce their speed and warn the animals of their arrival by sounding the whistle.

Elephants from Rani-Garbhangha RF move to the Deepor Beel WLS for water, crossing the track between Azara and Kamakhya Railway Stations. According to forest officials, the efforts of the patrolling team have ensured that elephant mortality in this stretch has been reduced to zero in the last one year, with 35 potential accidents averted.

Assam is among the states with the highest elephant mortality due to train hits, with about 65 elephants killed in train accidents since 1987. The frequency of accidents saw a steep increase in the late 1990s and early 2000.

Source: 'Train-elephant collision averted in Deepor Beel, Assam', [www.wildlifetrustofindia.org](http://www.wildlifetrustofindia.org), 04/05/2011.

## **DIBRU-SAIKHOWA NP**

## 1998

### **Tragedy in Dibru-Saikhowa WLS**

Narayan Sharma, the Range Officer of Guijan Forest Range of the Dibru-Saikhowa

WLS, was trampled to death by an elephant at the Nalani Forest Reserve near Pangeri, in Tinsukia district.

The accident happened on 2nd November 1998. A wild elephant in the area had terrorised people, killing some persons. Mr. Sharma was accompanying the expert who was to tranquilise the elephant prior to its capture. The tranquiliser, however, was not effective and the elephant became alert and trampled Mr Sharma. The death of Mr. Sharma has been mourned by many in the field of environment and wildlife conservation. He was, in particular, very keen on gaining the support of local communities for conservation, and was helping them with various inputs.

Source: E-mail from Krys Kazmierczak, 02/12/1998.

## 2000

### **Brahmaputra threatens Dibru-Saikhowa NP; tea gardens in upper Assam**

Unabated erosion by the River Brahmaputra and its tributaries has severely threatened the Dibru-Saikhowa NP and a number of tea estates in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts of upper Assam. Some of the severely-affected tea gardens include Digulturrung, Nalini, Baghjan, Rungagora, Baljan, Dinjan, Thanai, Greenwood, and Maijan. Additionally, a number of villages, the Indian Army base at Dinjan, and the Mohanbari airport in Dibrugarh district are also threatened. The erosion-hit tea gardens have lost over 1500 hectares of land in the last few years in addition to executive bungalows, staff quarters, garden healthcare units and even tea factories. Sources in the tea industry informed that damage caused by river erosion here during the period 1992-99 was calculated at over Rs. 5.40 billion.

The Indian Tea Association (ITA) has constituted a Flood Damage and Soil Erosion Sub-Committee and has approached both, the state and central government, seeking emergency measures to mitigate the grave threat of erosion. Memoranda have been submitted to the Prime Minister, the Union Water Resources Minister, the Chief Minister of Assam and the Flood Control Minister. A memorandum was also submitted to the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission seeking release of adequate funds to the state government to take up steps to mitigate the problem. The plan panel has, however, advised that the matter must be moved by the state government and proposals for fund should be forwarded to the commission by the state.

Meanwhile the Pune-based Central Water and Power Research Station (CWPRS) has stated in an interim report that to arrest floods and erosion in the Upper Assam districts, the river Debang will have to be brought to its old course and the Ananta Nalla blocked at its offtake point near Hatighuli in Tinsukia district. Other experts have also suggested that a check dam should be constructed to close the offshoot of the Ananta Nalla at Saikhowa. Additionally, it has been suggested that temporary protection works at eroded patches can save agricultural lands at Hatighuli, Nepalibasti, Daisajan gaon, Katiagaon, Kaliapani, Motapong, Natungaon, Guijan and Rohmaria and that the construction of semi-permeable spurs can save tea estates located along the Brahmaputra.

Source: Bijay Shankar Bora. 'Tea gardens facing extinction threat', *The Assam Tribune*, 19/10/2000.  
'Mighty Brahmaputra threatens Assam's tea heartland', *The Indian Express*, 31/10/2000.  
'Pune based body moots plan to tackle floods', *The Assam Tribune*, 05/08/2000.

## 2001

### **Rs 28.5 lakh grant for Dibru-Saikhowa misappropriated**

Nature's Beckon, an NGO working in the North Eastern regions of India, has alleged that the Tinsukia Wildlife Division has misappropriated a sum of Rs. 28.5 lakhs that had been granted for work in the Dibru-Saikhowa Biosphere Reserve.

The money that came under the Man and Biosphere (MAB) program was meant for the welfare of the forest villages of Laika and Dodhia here, which together cover an area of 1.138 hectares and have a population of about 4000. The money was to be used for the 'upliftment' of the socio-economic status of the forest villagers and their 'capacity building' for the protection of the forest and its biodiversity.

Instead, the Tinsukia Wildlife Division's staff took advantage of the gullibility of the villagers, obtained their signatures and then showed that the requisite programs had been undertaken and the money spent.

The Assam gazette notification no. J-22016/17/94- BR dated July 28, 1997 had specifically mentioned that the biosphere reserve fund would be spent for the development of Laika and Dodhia through a committee constituted with representatives from these two forest villages. Neither was this committee constituted, nor was the money spent for the purpose it was meant for. Nature's Beckon has demanded a thorough, impartial and official probe into the entire matter.

(Ed's note: The Assam Tribune news report had stated that the money that had been appropriated had come from UNESCO's MAB program. However the MAB program of UNESCO has clarified that UNESCO has never provided funds for Dibru-Saikhowa

NP and the money in question was that of the Government of India)

Source: 'Misuse of wildlife conservation fund', *The Northeast Daily*, 10/04/2001.  
Ron Duarah. 'Rs 28.5 lakh grant for Dibru-Saikhowa misappropriated', *The Assam Tribune*, 17/04/2001.

## 2002

### **Government denies army charge that PAs are infested with rebels**

The Assam Government has denied the charge of the army that the RFs and PAs in the state had become safe havens for separatists. An army statement issued recently had said that militants of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) were using PAs, particularly Dibru-Saikhowa NP and reserve forests as hideouts and that this was also adversely affecting the eco-tourism industry.

The Assam Forest Minister, Pradyut Bordoloi in his statement took objection to this generalisation by the army. He agreed that there were stray incidents of rebels taking shelter in the forests, but to say that tourist flow was affected was not correct. He said that the Assam FD was doing its best to protect the forests and that, in fact, tourist flows to the state had increased.

Source: 'Pradyut: Assam reserves not infested with rebels', *The Sentinel*, 14/12/2002.

## 2003

### **Large scale timber trafficking in Tinsukia; source of timber suspected to be Dibru-Saikhowa NP**

A large consignment of timber including sawn timber, planks and about 600 logs was seized recently at Kaliapani Ghat in Natun

Gaon of Tinsukia district that lies on the Assam Arunachal Pradesh border. The logs were discovered when the Superintendent of Police was visiting the Kaliapani Ghat on Dibru River in some other connection. No one came forward to claim the logs when enquiries were made. The police also seized some equipment for hand sawing of the logs and seven unregistered country boats in the ghat. It is suspected that these were used for the transportation of the timber. The owner of the boats too could not be found.

The Dibru-Saikhowa NP is located on the other side of the river and according to some, the locals here, who are flood affected people, fell the trees in the NP. They transport the logs to the other side of the river by boats and thus eke out their livelihood.

According to another version the timber is brought to this area in rafts from Arunachal Pradesh via the Na-Dehing, Brahmaputra and Dibru rivers through Ananta Nullah. The logs are then transported to the illegal bench saw mills that have been set up in large numbers in Tinsukia. A large number of local rural people are employed in these operations. They are lured with money, while protection for these illegal operations comes from influential businessmen. Government officials and politically influenced persons too are alleged to be involved.

The Assam Minister for Forests has said that the logs found in Tinsukia were definitely from Arunachal Pradesh and that their number was 150, not 600. He however could not provide an answer when asked how these logs were being rafted about 60 km within the territory of Assam and then lying for months by the river without being noticed by the personnel of the FD.

Source: 'Illegal timber trafficking continues in Tinsukia', *The Assam Tribune*, 10/09/2003.

## 2004

### Army busts ULFA camp in Dibru-Saikhowa NP

The army is reported to have destroyed an advanced headquarters of the banned United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) located in the Ajukha area of the Dibru-Saikhowa NP. The army special operations were launched after intelligence sources confirmed the presence of the camp and 40 members of the organisation inside the park.

The rebels, however, managed to flee and relocate to the outfit's 28 battalion in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh. The army found a generator set, some camp materials and documents at the deserted camp. It is believed that the blast on Independence Day in Dhemaji, which killed 13 people, was co-ordinated from this camp inside the park.

Source: Ripunjoy Das. 'Army busts ULFA camp at NP', *The Telegraph*, 14/09/2004.

### Rhinos to be relocated to Dibru-Saikhowa NP

The Assam FD is reported to be considering a proposal for the relocation of rhinos from the Kaziranga NP and the Pobitara WLS to the Dibru-Saikhowa NP in Tinsukia district.

The proposal was mooted after Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) MC Malakar and Kaziranga NP Director NK Vasu recently visited Dibru-Saikhowa and reported that there was good habitat for the rhino here.

Forest officials have said that rhino relocation will not be possible till the staff strength in the park is increased from the present 44 personnel and the two villages in the park are relocated. A Rs 5 crore relocation package has been proposed for the relocation

and rehabilitation of these two villages but the process has not yet been initiated.

Source: Ripunjoy Das. 'A new home for the rhino - Plan to shift some Kaziranga denizens to Dibru-Saikhowa', *The Telegraph*, 25/09/2004.

## 2005

### **Concern over army offensive in and around Dibru-Saikhowa NP in September**

Serious concern has been expressed by a group of distinguished citizens over the recent offensive of the Indian Army against ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) militants taking shelter in and around the forests of the Dibru-Saikhowa NP. The offensive, which was conducted in September, is said to have caused immense hardships to the local people of the region. Total curbs were imposed on people's movements, resulting in hunger, starvation and disease. The district administration, too, was not allowed to visit the affected areas.

The army had taken control of the park on August 31 and put the two main forest villages, Laika and Dodhia, with a population of about 10,000, under siege. Their main modes of transport, the country boats, were also seized. The army had occupied four anti-poaching camps of Lolomi, Kahtalbam, Raidung and Kundaghat of Guijan Range of the park and was also maintaining a vigil at the Guijan and Laikia Ghats.

The army moved in to take control of the park after issuing a notice to the Divisional Forest Officer-in-Charge of the park on the plea that a counter-insurgency operation would be launched there. The army said they had definite information of the presence of a strong contingent of ULFA militants inside the park.

At the initial stage of the operation, the army claimed to have discovered two abandoned camps of the ULFA, but then there was no more definite information about what actually was happening in the park. ULFA claimed that 12 of its cadres were killed inside the NP and the bodies were thrown into the river.

According to army authorities, however, only four militants including a woman were killed during the operations. This also included Achinta Saikia, the finance secretary of the 28th battalion of the ULFA. The army also alleged that huge amounts of money were recovered from the possession of Achinta as it is believed that the ULFA had collected huge amounts of money recently from the area.

The army also asked the forest personnel to vacate their posts and accordingly the FD withdrew its staff on September 14. Even the members of the People's Consultative Group, constituted by the ULFA to hold talks with the Government of India, were debarred from entering the NP. The entire episode had irked the people of the area and a dharna was staged in front of the office of the Tinsukia Deputy Commissioner on September 22.

The citizens meeting in Guwahati called for intervention by the President and the Prime Minister. They pointed out that since the recent peace initiative from the ULFA had drawn a positive response even from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), it was not understood why the army had been allowed to start the offensive.

The media had widely covered the plight of the local people in light of the army offensive. The Assam Human Rights Commission (AHRC) also took cognisance of the reports as a serious issue of human rights violation and called for reports from the deputy commissioner and the superintendent of police of Tinsukia district.

Those attending the meeting included eminent critic and litterateur Dr Hiren



Gohain, All Assam Students' Union (AASU) adviser and president of North East Students' Organisation (NESO), Dr Samujjal Bhattacharya, Nalinidhar Bhattacharya, Keshab Mahanta, Nitya Bora, Debabrata Das, and Ranoj Pegu. A few persons from the affected villages in Dibru-Saikhowa also narrated their plight during the ongoing army operations.

Subsequent reports indicated that the army had called off its operation on September 27, but the DC of Tinsukia was not able to confirm it immediately.

Source: 'Citizens' meet seeks President, PM's intervention', *The Assam Tribune*, 26/09/2005  
 SC Pathak. 'Common people hit hard by army action', *The Assam Tribune*, 26/09/2005.  
 SC Pathak. 'Tension in Dibru-Saikhowa; Army holds fire', *The Assam Tribune*, 29/09/2005.

### **Villages demand proper arrangements for relocation from Dibru-Saikhowa NP**

Residents of the two villages of Laika and Dadhia located inside the Dibru-Saikhowa NP staged a sit-in demonstration in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office in November, seeking proper arrangements for their shifting and rehabilitation from within the park.

The Laika Dadhia Mukti Sangram Samity has also submitted a memorandum to the Governor, the Chief Minister and the Forest Minister of Assam through the Tinsukia district administration.

Source: Anamika Das. 'Rehabilitation of villagers in Laika and Dadhia sought', *The Assam Tribune*, 20/11/2005.

## **2006**

### **Army commandos air-dropped in Dibru-Saikhowa to fight ULFA**

Army helicopters air-dropped commandos in the Dibru-Saikhowa NP in the first week of October in an effort to flush out militants of the 28th battalion of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA).

The operations have been launched by troops of the 2nd Mountain Division inside the park and also in Arunachal Pradesh. An army cordon was also thrown around the park as part of the operations.

The forests here have been an important hideout for the ULFA. They had moved out temporarily in 2005, but then re-entered in 2006, taking advantage of the unilateral truce declared by the Centre.

The Army had called off its operations inside the park last year following pressures by the ULFA-appointed People's Consultative Group (PCG).

Source: Sushanta Talukdar. 'Commandos air-dropped', *The Hindu*, 07/10/2006.

## **2011**

### **Dam projects to impact Dibru-Saikhowa NP; public hearing postponed indefinitely**

Public hearings scheduled for the 2700 MW Lower Siang project and 3000 MW Dibang Multipurpose project in Arunachal Pradesh scheduled in October 2011 have been postponed until further notice.

As part of the environment impact assessment (EIA) studies of the Lower Siang project, project authorities were asked to evaluate the cumulative downstream impacts due to simultaneous operation of hydropower projects proposed in the lower reaches of the Siang, Dibang and Lohit rivers in Arunachal

on the Dibru-Saikhowa NP which is located at the tri-junction of these three rivers in downstream Assam.

It has been estimated that the present relatively uniform flow of approximately 1920 cubic metres per second (cumecs) in the month of January will fluctuate drastically fluctuate between 663 cumecs and 7610 cumecs on a daily basis, depending on power generation patterns once the projects are commissioned. This will cause unnatural three to four metre (10 – 13 feet) high-tide low-tide like impacts in various parts of the park on a daily basis, seriously impacting the winter ecology.

Source: EIA report of the 2700 MW Lower Siang project, [http://apspcb.org.in/lower\\_siang\\_hydroelectric\\_project.htm](http://apspcb.org.in/lower_siang_hydroelectric_project.htm); 'Are Big Dams Leaving India High and Dry?', *Sanctuary Asia*, April 2011.

### **NGOs express concern over illegal activities in Dibru-Saikhowa NP**

Wildlife and environment NGOs have expressed concern that poaching of wild animals and illegal tree felling has led to the rapid shrinking of forest cover in the Dibru-Saikhowa NP.

The Dibru-Saikhowa Conservation Committee has claimed that the forest resources of the NP were depleting because of encroachment on land and illegal cutting of trees. *Salix tetrasperma*, for instance, is one of the many rare and valuable trees found here, that is in demand for making furniture and cricket bats for sale in the national as well as international markets. It is reported that more than 1000 trees, mostly of this particular species, have been felled in just a couple of weeks in the month May.

Poachers too are reported to have access to interior areas of the park and animals like wild boar, deer, wild buffaloes and elephants are being poached regularly. In March,

elephants were killed by poachers near the Paulami camp of the park.

Source: 'Concern over 'threat' to wildlife and natural resources at Dibru-Saikhowa NP', *The Sentinel*, 13/05/2011.

## **DEHING PATKAI ER**

### **2010**

#### **Road proposed through reserved forests, Dehing-Patkai Elephant Reserve**

A road, NH-38 to bypass Digboi Town is being laid through the Upper Dehing (East) RF that is an extremely important elephant habitat. Upper Dehing (East) RF, is a part of the Digboi Forest Division and also the Dehing-Patkai ER in Tinsukia district and hosts what is considered the most viable elephant population at the extreme north-eastern end of India.

The forests here also have habitat for many other critically endangered species such as the White-winged wood duck, tiger, Marbled cat, Hoolock gibbon and the Clouded leopard. The Upper Dehing (East & West) RFs hold the largest known population of the White-winged wood duck, and also the second largest population of Hoolock gibbon.

The habitat has, however, been seriously fragmented over the years due a host of activities that includes oil drilling stations, tea gardens, encroachments and coal mining. Human elephant conflict too is severe and the proposed road will only worsen the situation. Researchers have reported that vegetation (about 20-25 feet wide and about six km long) to mark the route for the bypass within the Upper Dehing (East) RF had already been cleared in violation of both, the Forest (Conservation) Act and the WLPA.



In another development the Assam Oil Division of IOC is reported to have purchased a large tract of land here for construction of an oil terminal in the middle of a corridor used regularly by elephants.

Source: Email from A Christy Williams.

## GARAMPANI WLS

2001

### Veterinary camp in Nambor, Garampani and Pobitora WLSs

Early Birds, the NGO, organised a three day Veterinary-cum-awareness camp from November 3-5, 2001 on the fringes of the Nambor and Garampani WLSs. 981 cattle including buffaloes were inoculated against HS + BQ in the villages of Tingbasti, Ahatguri, Purni Silonijan, Panikabasti, Chardeka Ingti, Tisubasti and Dihingiagaon.

The forests here are reported to be rapidly decreasing due to human and industrial activity, particularly the Numaligarh Refinery, which is located only 45 kms from the sanctuaries.

Another similar camp was also organised around the Pabitora WLS from November 24 – 25, 2001. The villages around Pabitora that were covered included Rajamayong, Hatimuriah and Morabari.

Source: Moloy Baruah. Letter to Kalpavriksh dated 06/11/2001.

## GIBBON WLS

2000

### US NGO to fund program to save elephant habitat in state; Gibbon WLS

The United States based Asian Elephant Conservation Fund (AECF) and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have shown interest in funding programs for elephant habitats in the state. The funding would come in under their 'Project Elephant' scheme. The Assam FD has suggested the names of the Gibbon WLS and the Gejera Chapori of Majuli as sites where elephant depredation is rampant and hence fit for funding under this programme.

The Gibbon WLS, with a core area of only 19 sq km is home to a herd of over 30 elephants. As a result there is a lot of conflict here. Similarly, the Gejera Chapori is a relatively new sand bar formed by siltation of the Brahmaputra. Formed over the last 10 years, the sand bar is approximately 5 km wide and 50 km long. Recently, in July 2000, a herd of 20 elephants had taken refuge here causing serious panic among the human settlements in the area.

Source: 'US-based NGOs keen to save elephant habitat in state', *The Assam Tribune*, 07/07/2000.

2002

### Central funds for Gibbon WLS

The Central Government has recently approved a five year plan submitted by the Assam FD for the Gibbon WLS. The plan includes infrastructural development like construction of internal roads, facilities for

tourists and ‘beautification of the sanctuary’. The Rajya Sabha MP from the region Mr BK Handique is also contributing funds from the MP’s fund.

Source: ‘Central Govt. Funds Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary’, *The Sentinel*, 08/05/2002.

## 2003

### **Depredation by elephants from Gibbon WLS; bridge for gibbons proposed over rail line**

Wild elephants from the Gibbon WLS have been causing a lot of damage in surrounding areas. These including the adjoining tea estates and Ward No. 1 and 2 in Mariani where 45 persons have been killed by elephants since 1982.

The sanctuary is spread over an area of only about 20 sq. km with very small areas of grasslands. Deforestation and grazing here have also aggravated the problem. Additionally, an old railway line running through the sanctuary has also added to the problem, with the railway workers constantly being under threat.

There is also a proposal now for the construction of a bridge across this railway track within the sanctuary to facilitate the movement of primates like the Hoolock gibbon that are found here. The ideas being discussed include the construction, either of an artificial bridge or one that is made naturally with the help of tall trees that will overhang the railway track. The track divides the forest and has drastically reduced interaction between the gibbon troops living on either side.

Source: ‘Tusker depredation haunts Mariani’, *The Assam Tribune*, 08/12/2003.

## 2004

### **356 hectares of Gibbon WLS handed over to army**

There has been widespread concern over the decision of the FD to permanently hand over 356 hectares of land of the Gibbon WLS to the army. Individuals and organisations like the Hologapar Nature’s Society have urged the Chief Minister to intervene in the matter.

The land in question was given to the army’s 2nd Mount Brigade of the Eastern Command on lease in 1965. The army constructed a residential colony and other necessary infrastructure at a cost of Rs 3 crore. The lease expired recently and the FD agreed to the army’s request to permanently hand over the land to them.

The Hologapar RF, with a total area of 2,098 hectares, was declared the Gibbon WLS in 1997. The area will now be about 1700 hectares.

Source: ‘Forest Dept’s lack of foresight ruined Gibbon Sanctuary’, *The Sentinel*, 11/01/2004.

### **Census in Gibbon WLS**

The first-ever census of primates was conducted in the Gibbon WLS in the month of May. Following are the census figures: 63 Hoolock gibbons in 17 families, 65 Capped langurs in eight groups, 45 Pig-tailed macaques in two groups, 151 Stump-tailed macaque in three groups, 58 Assamese macaque in three groups and 116 Rhesus macaque in three groups.

Source: ‘First-ever gibbon census concludes’, *The Assam Tribune*, 16/05/2004.

## US NGO offers to help Gibbon WLS

The Wildlife Service International Affairs (WSIA), a US-based non-government organisation, has offered to fund projects for the protection of the endangered Hoolock gibbon in the Gibbon WLS. The NGO has asked the Assam FD to develop a project keeping in mind the eco-development and protection of the natural habitat of the gibbon. The offer came after the head of the NGO, Fred M. Bagleigh, visited the sanctuary recently.

The WSIA has been funding several projects in Assam for the past four years for the protection of the rhino, tiger and elephant. This is the first time that the NGO has shown interest in protecting the gibbon. The Gibbon WLS is the only one in India where seven species of primates are found.

Source: 'US group extends help to gibbons', *The Telegraph*, 25/09/2004.

## Large number of leopard deaths near Gibbon WLS

13 leopards have been found dead in the vicinity of the Gibbon WLS in the last three years. The deaths have occurred mostly in Kakojan, Meleng and Kathalguri areas.

It has been suggested that many of the deaths have been caused by poison used by the labourers who work in tea gardens that surround the WLS. There have also been reports of leopards attacking domestic cattle and the tea garden labour in the region.

In August 2004, the carcass of a full-grown leopard was recovered from Chenijan Tea Estate on the outskirts of Jorhat town. In 2003, three leopard carcasses were recovered within 10 days in the Kakojan area alone. The most recent death was reported in early December 2004.

Source: 'Big cat deaths raise concern', *The Telegraph*, 10/12/2004.

## 2007

### Hollock Gibbon Conservation Training

The Fourth Hoolock Gibbon Conservation Training session was held from September 8, 2007 at the Gibbon Conservation Centre at the Gibbon WLS in Jorhat district. 62 participants from different Forest Divisions of Assam have participated in the training during the preceding three sessions. The workshop was inaugurated by MC Malakar, PCCF, Govt. of Assam.

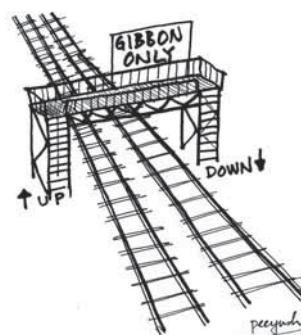
The Gibbon Conservation Center was established in 2004 with a mission of carrying out research, training and conservation activities in Northeast India with the Hoolock Gibbon as the flagship species. So far the center has organized a series of five training programs for foresters from gibbon habitats in Assam. The workshops have been organized in collaboration with the Primate Research Center, School of Desert Science, Aaranyak and Assam FD and with financial support from the US Fish and Wildlife Services (Great Ape Conservation Fund).

## 2008

### Bridge over rail line in Gibbon WLS

The Northeast Frontier Railways had decided to build two bridges over an 800-metre stretch of railway line inside the Gibbon WLS. The idea is to connect the gibbons that have been separated on account of the railway line.

The bridges, the first of their kind in the country, would



be made of steel and designed to look like trees. The railway authorities have said that the exact sites for the bridges have been identified and a proposal will soon be submitted to the FD for clearance. Work would start as soon as the FD pays the deposit fund.

Source: Pullock Dutta. 'Railways to put gibbons back on track', *The Telegraph*, 04/01/2008.

### **Workshop on Primate Census Techniques at Gibbon WLS**

The Bangalore based National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), in collaboration with Jorhat Forest Division and Gibbon Conservation Centre, organised a two-day training-cum-workshop on Primate Census Techniques at the Gibbon Conservation Centre recently. A total of fifteen forest personnel and local youth from the village of Meleng Lakhipur on the fringe of the Gibbon WLS attended the programme.

Participants were taken to the adjacent sanctuary for field exposure in the implementation of various census techniques and in data collection of the various aspects of primate ecology.

Source: 'Workshop on Primate Census Techniques', *The Assam Tribune*, 25/07/2008.

## **2009**

### **Gibbons in Gibbon WLS not crossing over the railway line**

Hoolock gibbons in the Gibbon WLS have refused to use the temporary arrangements made for them to cross over the railway line that runs through the forests here. A Rs 15 lakh bridge proposal to facilitate the movement of the gibbons was mooted in

2008 and recently a huge wire was hung across on an experimental basis to see if the idea would work.

Since this has not worked, the FD is now planning to connect both the sides with pipes that will be covered with artificial creepers. In another move, the FD has decided to construct a two km gravel road inside the sanctuary to facilitate the movement of tourists in the dense forests and allow them an opportunity to see the wildlife in the sanctuary, including the endangered gibbons.

Source: 'Forest project on gibbons in sanctuary goes awry', *The Assam Tribune*, 06/05/2009.

## **JOYDEHING WLS**

### **2000**

#### **Delay in sanctuary status for Joydehing**

The Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests, Mr. Babulal Marandi (now the CM of the new state of Jharkhand) said in October last year that the Centre had been waiting for a recommendation from the Assam Government to declare the proposed Joydehing WLS.

Several environmental groups have been lobbying for the Joydehing WLS as this would facilitate preservation of one of the last remaining forests in the region as well as protecting an important elephant corridor. The MoEF has sought a report from the Assam government, but the Dibrugarh territorial DFO was still to respond. This was proving to be the major hurdle in the declaration of the sanctuary.

Source: 'Centre awaiting State report on Joydehing sanctuary: Marandi', *The Assam Tribune*, 03/10/2000.

2002

### Setback for proposed Joydehing sanctuary

The proposed Joydehing WLS that is yet to be notified in spite of assurances from the government for the last couple of years now faces another hurdle. The state government wants the Upper Dehing RF removed from the purview of the proposed sanctuary. Upper Dehing is one of the three contiguous RFs that were to be included in the sanctuary, the others being Dirak and Joyepur.

It has been reported that the FD wants Upper Dehing out of the sanctuary for future commercial exploitation by government agencies. Upper Dehing is also the only forest area among those mentioned above, where illegal tree felling is still taking place. It is felt that the decision to leave out the area from the sanctuary will lead to the increased plundering of these forests by the timber smugglers who are alleged to be in connivance with politicians.

Several NGOs including Nature's Beckon, which had initiated the campaign for the declaration of a sanctuary here, have expressed concern at the delay in the notification and say they will unitedly oppose any move to reduce the size of the proposed sanctuary.

Source: Ron Duarah. 'Setback to proposed Joydehing sanctuary', *The Assam Tribune*, 22/12/2002.

## KAKOIJANA WLS

1999

### Demand for new protected area

The Kakoijana RF in Bongaigaon district of Lower Assam is under threat from indiscriminate tree felling, stone quarrying and poaching of wild animals. The RF spread over an area of 2000 hectares is home to a number of species such as the Golden langur, binturong, pangolin, python, wild pig, Civet cat and the Barking deer.

A local NGO, Appropriate Technology Mission, Assam (ATMA), is mobilising people in the 21 villages in and around Kakoijana to save the forest. It has also approached the government to declare the RF a WLS under the WLPA.

Source: Samudra Gupta Kashyap. 'Poaching threatens reserve in Assam', *The Indian Express*, 02/01/1999.

2000

### Joint management to protect Kakoijana

The initiative of an NGO, the Appropriate Technology Mission, Assam (ATMA), is helping protect the Kakoijana RF with the help and involvement of the local people. The Kakoijana forest covers an area of 17 sq. kms which is located along the Indo-Bhutan border and is home to several rare and endangered species like the Golden langur, binturong, leopard, and Lesser adjutant stork.

Forest Protection Committees formed with local people are making efforts to check illegal felling and protect the fragmented groups of the highly endangered Golden langur. Plantation programmes have also

been taken up with the involvement of local villagers, NGOs and the FD. ATMA had also appealed for the Kakoiijana forests to be declared a WLS.

The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) has reportedly directed the Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF)-Wildlife to take the necessary steps to declare Kakoiijana as a sanctuary. The matter is pending with the State FD.

Source: 'Joint forest management brings hope for threatened species', *The Assam Tribune*, 05/03/2000.  
'NGO fights to save forest in Assam', *The Indian Express*, 20/03/2000.  
'Kakoiijana seeks WLS status', *The Observer of Business and Politics*, 24/03/2000.

### **Kakoiijana to be declared a sanctuary**

The Chief Minister of Assam has announced that the Kakoiijana RF is to be immediately declared a WLS. Various people and NGOs, particularly the Appropriate Technology Mission, Assam (ATMA) have been demanding for a long time for the declaration of the forests as a sanctuary.

The forest is home to a large number of rare species including the highly endangered Golden langur.

Source: 'Kakoiijana reserve to get sanctuary status: CM', *The Assam Tribune*, 08/06/2000.

### **Kakoiijana yet to get sanctuary status**

Despite a public declaration by the Chief Minister and requests from prominent persons, the state government has failed to issue the notification to declare the Kakoiijana RF in Bongaigaon district as a WLS. Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, addressing a public meeting at Abhayapuri on May

31 last year had announced the decision to declare Kakoiijana as a WLS.

The Appropriate Technology Mission, Assam (ATMA) has been spearheading the movement for WLS status for the Kakoiijana forests which are home to a large population of the rare Golden langur and other endangered animals. The total area of the reserve forest is 17.2 sq km and there is a potential to increase it by another three sq kms.

Source: 'Kakoiijana yet to get sanctuary status', *The Assam Tribune*, 29/09/2000.

## **KARBI ANGLONG WLS**

### **2000**

#### **New sanctuary in Karbi Anglong forests**

The East Karbi Anglong RF has been officially declared a WLS. Surrounded by rivers Dikru, Kalyani and Barpung, the sanctuary is spread over an area of 221 sq kms. It is home to a wide diversity of flora and fauna and supports populations of endangered animals like the tiger, elephant, Barking deer, mongoose, and the Himalayan black bear.

Source: 'Karbi Anglong forest declared as sanctuary', *The Assam Tribune*, 30/08/2000.



# KAZIRANGA NP

## 1998

### Floods cause huge damage in Kaziranga

Manju Barua, a member of the Indian Board for Wildlife, and the NGO Aaranyak Nature Club, have reported that the worst flood in recent history in the Brahmaputra river valley has taken a terrible toll of wildlife in Kaziranga NP.

The entire protected area has been swamped with water and rhinos and elephants have moved to high ground in thickly inhabited human areas including into cow-sheds and tea estates. The Government of Assam simply does not have the infrastructure to deal with a crisis of this proportion. And what little facilities they have are understandably diverted for thinly distributed relief of human communities.

The floods hit Kaziranga in three waves, in May, June and September. Normally the flood waters recede in three to seven days, but this year, allegedly because of severe deforestation of upstream catchments in the Brahmaputra Valley, the flood has lasted for weeks on end.

As a result, serious damage has been caused to the food sources of animals such as rhinos, elephants, deer and wild pigs. The crops of the neighbouring villages have also been destroyed by the flood waters.

Hundreds of deer and wild pigs have been drowned, and a large number that escaped drowning are reportedly being slaughtered by poachers. According to Aaranyak, the casualties so far reported are as follows: 500 deer drowned, 200 killed by people, 32 rhinos drowned, 2 killed by people. The population of 500 swamp deer are also believed to have been badly affected. 60% of the rhinos are anticipated to have left the park

and poaching gangs have moved in on them. Forest guards are hopelessly outnumbered by these poachers.

Meanwhile, the Chief of Army Staff at a meeting in Bombay, has also offered to help by getting his jawans to take up rehabilitation or other work; however, he needs to first be formally requested by the Assam Government.

Source: Emails from Bittu Sahgal, through August-September 1998.  
Email from Bibhab K. Talukdar, Aaranyak, 17/9/1998.

## 1999

### Tourism development plan for Kaziranga NP

The Assam government has planned for the promotion of tourism in the Kaziranga NP as part of a larger tourism development plan for the state. The plans for Kaziranga include the construction of a swimming pool and a children's park and the procurement of 10 more elephants to cater to the tourists. It is not known if an environmental impact assessment has been carried out of these proposals.

Source: 'Ropeway in city, swimming pool in KNP mooted as tourism schemes', *The Sentinel*, 03/01/1999.

### Army to the rescue of Kaziranga; ecodevelopment plan for Kaziranga

An Indian Army project in Kaziranga NP is expected to help marooned animals during the floods. In less than three months after the devastating floods here last year, army engineers had constructed 10 highlands that will serve as a refuge for animals from the flood waters of the Brahmaputra.



The entire cost of Rs. 2 crore, for constructing the highlands, was met by the army. Some of the old forest camps are being replaced by permanent concrete ones and some educational and awareness activity is also to be undertaken under an UNESCO assisted scheme.

According to another report, the park authorities have also chalked out an ecodevelopment programme for the villages located on the fringes of the park. A plan of Rs 73 lakh has already been submitted to the central government for this.

According to the park director, BS Bonal, development of fisheries, roads, sericulture, school buildings, and installation of tube wells are some of the activities that have been proposed.

The villagers living around the park had played a major role in saving animals during the floods last season and the park authorities had paid an amount of Rs. 100 per deer rescued as an incentive to the villagers.

The director also said that the park area was to be increased and six extension areas would be added in phases, nearly doubling the area of the park from the present 430 sq km. This year too reports of flooding of the Brahmaputra are beginning to come in, but it is yet to be seen if Kaziranga is also affected.

Source: C Shekhar Nambiar. 'Army to the rescue of Kaziranga', *Newstime*, 04/02/1999.  
R Dutta Choudhary. 'Bid to involve villagers in wildlife conservation', *The Assam Tribune*, 17/02/1999.  
Nirmalya Banerjee. 'Kaziranga animals to get flood protection', *The Times of India*, 13/04/1999.

### **Eviction drive stopped in Kaziranga NP**

A massive eviction drive in Kaziranga NP in the Sonitpur district in July had to be stopped midway after resistance by local people who were allegedly being supported

by politicians trying to gain mileage for the present elections.

The eviction drive was being conducted by the police and district authorities of Sonitpur along with officials of Kaziranga NP in response to the Guwahati High Court order dated 29/06/99 and the Supreme Court interim orders dated 22/08/97 and 17/07/99. MLAs in the state had also appealed to the Chief Minister of the state to stop the eviction drive.

Source: Bibhab Talukdar. 'The Current Status of Eviction in the Kaziranga NP: A report', received by email in 08/1999.

### **Tea gardens pose threat to Kaziranga**

Wildlife experts and forest officials have warned tea gardens in the vicinity of Kaziranga NP against using pesticides harmful to flora and fauna.

A preliminary study has revealed that waterbodies in the area contain a high percentage of organophosphates and other harmful chemicals, which are detrimental to the ecosystem of the park. It has been recommended that as a first step, the tea gardens should be directed not to use pesticides with organophosphates as the active chemical.

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) Dehradun, has already shown willingness to conduct research on the harmful effects of pesticides on flora and fauna in Kaziranga NP, which is also under threat from effluents of the Numaligarh Refinery in Golaghat district.

Source: Anirban Roy. 'Tea garden effluents pose threat to Kaziranga', *The Telegraph*, 24/11/1999.

## 2000

### Medical Camp at Kaziranga

Early Birds, an NGO working in the North East, conducted a four-day human and veterinary medical camp in and around Kaziranga NP in the first half of May 2000. Financial assistance for the camp was offered by WWF-I, Tiger Conservation Programme (TCP). Elephants of the FD and cattle from surrounding villages were vaccinated during the camp.

Villagers and FD staff from various parts of the park were also checked on the occasion. Early Birds has been working in the protected areas of Assam for the last eight years and the Kaziranga camp was organised for the seventh consecutive year.

### IAS officer caught for poaching in Kaziranga

B Lai Sekhach, a senior IAS officer, also Secretary, Art and Culture, Govt. of Nagaland, was remanded to 14 days judicial custody along with five associates for the killing of Schedule I animals in Kaziranga NP. Volunteers of the organisation 'People for Animals' helped in the arrests by blocking the roads and preventing the offenders from driving away.

Phuleshwar Saikia, Officer in Charge, Bokakhat Police Station, and PS Das, Divisional Forest Officer of the Eastern Assam Wildlife Division played an important role in the arrest and detention of the offenders inspite of severe pressure from top officials of Assam and Nagaland.

Source: 'IAS officer, associates remanded for killing Kaziranga animals', *The Indian Express*, 15/02/2000.

### Plan for wetlands inside Kaziranga

The authorities of the Kaziranga NP have prepared a project for the preservation of the 200 odd wetland areas inside the park.

The park director pointed out that the depth of the wetlands here is gradually reducing due to the flood silt that gets deposited every year. There is a need now to go in for massive desilting, but the park authorities are presently not equipped to do it.

The project proposal has been submitted to the central government for funding and equipment like a dredger to carry out the desilting work on a regular basis.

According to another report, the park is faced with a severe financial crunch because the state government has not yet released the funds for the year 1999–2000. The park director has said that the reconstruction and development work has been severely hampered because of this.

Source: 'Plan to protect wetland areas', *The Assam Tribune*, 14/04/2000.  
'Financial crunch hits Kaziranga park', *The Hindu*, 04/07/2000.

### Funds crunch affects Kaziranga

According to officials of the Kaziranga NP, a severe funds crunch is impeding the anti-poaching operations and adversely affecting the park's upkeep. It is estimated that more than 200 rhinos have been poached and 60 poachers have been killed here in the last decade. With better facilities and funds, the officials say, the protection of the park can be improved further.

However, for the last few years, the Assam state government has been releasing less than half of the annual budget allocated for the park. Consequently, few of the patrol vehicles are in running condition, boats have not been repaired for long and the

elephants with the FD often go half fed with private contractors refusing to supply feed as outstanding bills are increasing every year. The 350 odd forest guards in the park are ill-equipped and have no sophisticated weapons, while poachers enter the park armed with sophisticated carbines fitted with silencers and night vision devices. The park authorities were recently also forced to retrench 160 casual forest guards because of lack of funds.

Source: 'Rhinos could become extinct as funds crunch hits Kaziranga', *The Sentinel*, 09/06/2000.

### **Elephants on rampage around Kaziranga**

There have been reports of large herds of elephants going on rampage in areas in and around Kaziranga NP. Earlier in June this year, more than 15 people were killed by elephants in the Golaghat district of Assam.

Numaligarh here is the location of a new oil refinery and according to experts this has been one of the major reasons of increased intensity of the conflicts. Local villagers say that elephants here are no longer scared of traditional methods – like torch flames and drum beating – which are used to scare away the animals from human habitations.

It has been estimated that at least 300 people have been killed by rampaging elephants in Assam in the last three years. Assam wildlife authorities have urged the central government to allow them to capture the wild elephants to minimise damage.

Source: 'Rampaging elephants kill more than 50 in Assam', *The Observer of Business & Politics*, 12/07/2000.

### **Magisterial probe ordered in torture case in Kaziranga**

Residents of No. 1 Sildubi village, Sunil Das, his wife and brother, were allegedly tortured

by forest personnel of the Kaziranga NP. The forest officials claim that Mr Das, who is the President of Kaziranga Gana Adhikar Suraksha Samiti (KGASS) allowed the 'Solmarajan' beel to be used for commercial purposes in violation of a High Court order. The FD has proposed to include the beel in the NP, but the high court had ordered to maintain status quo after a public petition was filed against its inclusion. The Bokakhat SDO (C), in the meanwhile, has ordered a magisterial inquiry into the torture allegation.

Source: 'Magisterial probe ordered', *The Assam Tribune*, 03/10/2000.

## **2001**

### **48 rhinos killed in Kaziranga in 2000**

A total of 48 rhinos were reportedly killed inside the Kaziranga NP in the year 2000. 36 horns were recovered by the forest guards during the year that also saw the arrest of 30



poachers and the killing of one poacher who was a Bhutanese national. One forest guard, Niren Saikia, was also killed.

Source: '48 rhinos killed in Kaziranga last year', *The Assam Tribune*, 04/01/2001.

### **Retrenchment of staff from Kaziranga resented**

Early Birds, an organization for nature care in the north-eastern region of the country, has resented the recent move by the state government to retrench nearly 160 wildlife

department casual staff from the Kaziranga NP. The organisation has said that this would create a huge vacuum in guarding the vulnerable areas and has further demanded that the government regularise those retrenched people who have been working as casual workers in the division for up to 15 years.

Source: 'Retrenchment of wildlife staff resented', *The Assam Tribune*, 09/04/2001.

### Mimosa weed creating problems for Kaziranga

The spread of the 'mimosa' weed over 120 hectares of the Kaziranga NP is posing a threat to the grasslands here. It is not eaten by herbivores like the rhino and the deer and is said to be spreading rapidly.

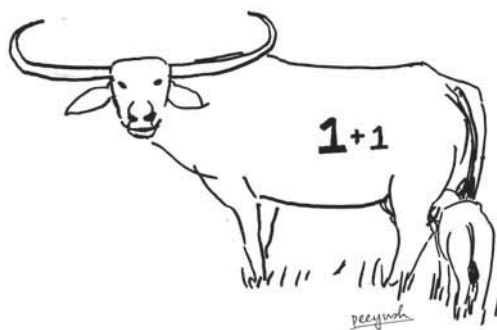


The park officials are of the opinion that the weed spread to the park from the neighbouring tea estates, which used to grow the plant for 'soil stabilisation'. All but one of the tea estates around Kaziranga have put an end to their practice of growing Mimosa in response to the request made by the park authorities.

Meanwhile efforts are being made to remove the weed by the conventional method of ploughing. The park authorities had asked for some money from the Central Government for the deweeding operation. Although the money has been sanctioned it was yet to be handed over. The park authorities have also approached the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), an international NGO, for help to procure a tractor to expedite the ploughing of Mimosa.

Source: Bijay Sankar Bora. 'Mimosa weeds posing threat to Kaziranga Park', *The Assam Tribune*, 11/04/2001.

### Wild buffalo census in Kaziranga



For the first time, in March 2001, a census (visual count in open grassland) of wild buffaloes was conducted in Kaziranga NP. A total of 1666 buffaloes were counted, making it the largest concentration of the species anywhere in the world. The population of the wild buffalo in Manas NP is reported to be less than 500 animals now.

Source: 'Wild buffalo census in Kaziranga', The Rhino Foundation for Nature in NE India, Newsletter No. 3, 06/2001.

### Pollution threat to Kaziranga wetlands

A study commissioned by the Assam Science Technology and Environment Council (ASTEC) has expressed concern on the pollution of the River Brahmaputra and its tributaries like the Diphalu and Dhansiri by increased industrial activities and the adverse impacts this will have on the wetlands of the Kaziranga NP.

The three year study that began in 1993 was conducted by a team of three researchers from the Dergaon Kamal Dowerah College. It looked at five beel systems inside the NP: Daflong, Kathpura and Arimora (in Kohora range), Sohola (in Agartoli range) and Donga (in Bagori range).

The study has called for appropriate measures to prevent siltation of the beels and for a study for the commercial use of water

hyacinth, the growth and spread of which is accelerating the process of siltation here.

Source: Ajit Patowary. 'Pollution poses serious threat to Kaziranga NP', *The Assam Tribune*, 18/10/2001.

### **Brahamatputra eroding Kaziranga**

A paper recently presented at the Fifth International Conference on Geomorphology in Japan has pointed out that the Kaziranga NP is losing 0.7 sq km every year to erosion by the Brahmaputra. The paper was jointly authored by Mr Pabitora Mahanta of the Dergaon Kamal Dowerah College, Dergaon and Mr AK Bora of the Department of Geography, Guwahati University.

They have pointed out that the park has lost around 37 sq km between 1967 and 1999 to erosion and that the present area of the park is only around 350 sq km. These figures are based on 'multi dated satellite imagery' obtained from the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO). The most severe bank erosion takes place along the eastern boundary of the park, a little downstream of the Dhansiri confluence.

The paper points out that 'maintenance of the longitudinal profile of the bottom of the Brahmaputra river-bed at its upstream, starting from Pachighat is needed so save the park'.

It has also been pointed out that the NH-37, which runs along the southern boundary of the park should either be diverted or a part of it (around two kms) should be made into an underground tunnel, to avoid knocking down of animals crossing the NH during floods. The authors have also asked for the removal of all encroachers from the park area.

Source: Ajit Patowary. 'Maintenance of Brahmaputra bed at upstream stressed', *The Assam Tribune*, 23/10/2001.

### **UNESCO support for Kaziranga and Keoladeo**

Two natural heritage sites in the country, the Keoladeo Ghana NP in Rajasthan and the Kaziranga NP in Assam are to receive a combined funding support of US \$ 46,000 from UNESCO. This was decided at a meeting held in November 2001 in Bharatpur that was attended by representatives from organisations like the UNESCO, IUCN, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Nature Conservancy, UK, and the University of Queensland, Australia. The meeting was organised by the WII.

As part of the strategy that was worked out, the WII will enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Rajasthan and Assam Governments for the maintenance and upkeep of the parks. Site implementation groups have also been set up with the park authorities, experts from the WII, honorary wildlife wardens, NGOs and global organisations. In the 1st year an initial assessment of the status of the parks will be done, while the final assessment will be carried out at the end of four years. The draft initial reports are expected to be ready by April 2002.

The plan for Keoladeo NP will be coordinated by the Director of the Park, Mr B Praveen. The special invitees for this group will be Dr VS Vijayan of Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON), Mr VN Saxena, former Chief Conservator of Forests and Mr Harsh Vardhan.

Source: 'A new deal for two NPs', *The Hindu*, 14/12/2001.



## 2002

### Poachers kill two rhinos in Kaziranga

Poachers killed two rhinos in Kaziranga in the month of November. The first carcass was found on November 8 in the Panbari beat in Kohora range, while the other one was found shot on November 24 near the Arimora beat also in the same range.

Both the incidents happened near the northern boundary of park and it has been suggested that the poachers had probably crossed the Brahmaputra and escaped. These were the first cases of poaching of rhinos in the Kaziranga NP in 2002.

Source: <http://www.wti.org.in>

### Kaziranga officials plan using weedicide

The authorities of the Kaziranga NP are contemplating the use of a weedicide to control the growth of the mimosa weed locally known as lazuki baan. The weed has grown in over 60 hectares of land under the Bagori Range and has affected grazing of the animals.

Agricultural experts from the Assam Agricultural University have suggested a particular composition to spray in the areas as a long-term way to check the problem but authorities are yet to take the final decision. Apprehension is being expressed regarding the killing of other plants in the process.

Last year the authorities had ploughed the affected areas with tractors and had uprooted the weed which had grown and even flowered in the grazing land. This however does not seem to have helped as a long term solution to the problem.

Source: 'KNP officials plan using weedicide', *The Sentinel*, 05/01/2002.

### Wildlife rescue centre at Kaziranga

The WTI is setting up the first wildlife rehabilitation centre in the north-eastern region, in the Kaziranga NP. The centre is being set up under the Wild Rescue Programme of the WTI. It will be involved in the rescue of temporarily disadvantaged wild animals which have been injured, maimed, orphaned, sick or have strayed, in addition to those that have been confiscated from animal traders.

The centre is a collaborative project with the State FD and is also being supported by the Central Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Other institutions and organisations that are expected to be part of the project include the Central Zoo Authority (CZA), the MoEF and the Guwahati University.

Source: 'Wildlife rehabilitation centre at KNP soon', *The Assam Tribune*, 22/01/2002.

### NGOs call to save Kaziranga from encroachments

Several NGOs in Assam including Aaranyak and Nature's Beckon have appealed to the state and central governments to take steps to protect Kaziranga NP from encroachments. It has been alleged that large encroachments by suspected foreign nationals are being systematically encouraged and that this is compromising the integrity of the park.

The NGOs have asked for a number of steps, that include the immediate deployment of the the Central Reserve Police Force in the park and the Nambor RF, the need for a judicial inquiry and the resettlement of people of the villages there.

Source: 'Save Kaziranga from encroachment by immigrants: NGOs', *The Assam Tribune*, 05/02/2002.



## **Team studies feasibility to translocate Kaziranga rhinos**

An international team of experts conducted a 15-day tour of Assam's protected areas in February this year to study the feasibility of translocating rhinos from Kaziranga to other parts of the state. The team comprised a biologist from the US Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS), a member of the International Rhino Foundation, Netherlands, a member of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) – Nepal, and a research officer of the Assam FD.

The experts were of the opinion that Kaziranga is now overpopulated with rhinos (1552 rhinos were counted here in 1999). The areas being considered for receiving the rhinos include the protected areas of Laokhowa, Dibru-Saikhowa, Orang and Pabitora.

Source: Gitanjali Hazarika. 'Translocate KNP rhinos: foreign experts', *The Sentinel*, 16/02/2002.

## **Kaziranga to seek Project Tiger status**



The Director of the Kaziranga NP, Mr NK Vasu, has said that Project Tiger status has been sought for the park. The park has the highest density of tigers in the country at 16.8 tigers per 100 sq km. The total number of tigers in Kaziranga excluding cubs is said to be 85. If cubs are also included the density is much higher at 22.4 tigers per 100 sq km.

It is hoped that once the park is included into Project Tiger it would help in greater fund flows and in boosting tourism. The tourist arrivals to KNP have in any case been high this year, with 45,000 domestic and 2000 foreign tourists arriving here till March 2002. Till that date the park had already earned Rs. 33.12 lakh from tourists, as compared to the Rs 32 lakh earned in the previous season.

Source: PP Singh. 'Kaziranga park roars with tigers', *The Times of India*, 29/04/2002. Barun Das Gupta. 'More tigers in Kaziranga', *The Hindu*, 16/06/2002.

## **Rumble strips on NH 37 to protect animals fleeing from Kaziranga**

The central government is reported to have allowed rumble strips on NH-37 to regulate speed of traffic and protect animals from the Kaziranga NP being killed by speeding vehicles.

NH-37 runs along the southern boundary of the NP and cuts important corridors between the park and its extensions in the foothills of the Karbi Anglong hills. This becomes particularly important in the monsoons, when flooding of the low lying regions of the park forces animals to cross NH-37 in search of higher ground.

This year, too, a large number of animals including a tigress, a leopard and several deer have been killed by speeding vehicles while crossing the highway. Through a recent notification, the central government has directed the state public works department (PWD) to ensure 15-20 strips - to be marked with thermoplastic paint- on suitable locations on the highway near Kaziranga. This would be supplemented with limiting the speed to 20 kmph in the section and with cautioning signboards in adequate numbers.

Wildlife experts have suggested the installation of the rumble strips in three places - the eight km Burapahar - Kanchanjuri

corridor, the two km Haldibari corridor and the four km Panbari corridor.

Source: 'KNP animals slowly migrating before floods, speed limit clamped', *The Sentinel*, 20/06/2002.  
Shankhadeep Choudhury. 'Rumble strips to check animal killings in Kaziranga park', *The Times of India*, 17/07/2002.  
Prabin Kalita. 'Floods driving animals to death under wheels', *Hindustan Times*, 26/07/2002.

### **Kaziranga, Manas to be made model PAs**

There is a proposal to declare four World Heritage sites in the country as model protected areas for wildlife protection. These include Kaziranga and Manas NPs in Assam, Nandadevi NP in Uttaranchal and Keoladeo Ghana NP in Rajasthan.

The Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment-Eastern Himalaya Program (ATREE-EHP) will be conducting a detailed study on the conservation aspects of the two NPs in Assam for the purpose. The report will be submitted to UNESCO for its approval and funding. The project will be coordinated by the MoEF.

ATREE recently organised a workshop each, in Manas and Kaziranga, that were attended by forest officials, wildlife staff, NGOs working in the field and scientists from research and conservation institutions in the country. The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) will be conducting a similar kind of process for the other two PAs.

Source: Bijay Sankar Bora. 'Kaziranga, Manas to be models for wildlife protection', *The Assam Tribune*, 27/09/2002.

### **Indian army nabs poachers in Kaziranga**

The Indian army recently nabbed three poachers in Assam and recovered wildlife

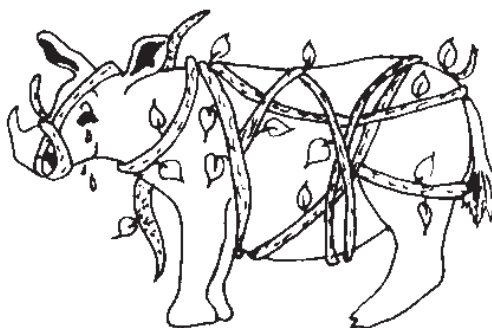
parts, valued at about Rs. 2 million in the international market. Troops disguised as wildlife traders caught the poachers near Kaziranga NP and recovered 3 kg of tiger bones, 2 kg of elephant tusks and bear gall bladder.

The animals had been shot using firearms, speared, poisoned, electrocuted or trapped in pits. Poachers are believed to have killed at least 86 rhinos in the park in the last four years. This is the first time that the army has played a role in nabbing poachers within the park.

Source: 'Indian army nabs poachers in Kaziranga', [www.sanctuaryasia.com](http://www.sanctuaryasia.com), 27/10/2002.

### **Project to eradicate weed mimosa from Kaziranga**

The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and the WTI have announced plans to remove the invasive weed, mimosa, from the Kaziranga NP. The weed has been choking the grasslands and an estimated 120 hectares of the park have been affected by it.



The plant, which is a native of South East Asia, was introduced into the tea estates in Assam in the 1960s as an organic nitrogen fixer. The plants soon 'escaped' and have established themselves in the fertile grasslands of the NP. The thorny shrub has now created an impenetrable mat over three ranges of the park, choking edible grasses. It

also releases a toxin called mimosin, which is said to be particularly harmful to rhinos and other herbivores like deer.

Earlier, there was a plan for the use of a weedicide to control the growth of this weed, but the realisation now is that the best way to deal with the problem is to physically uproot the plant. IFAW has committed US \$ 15,000 for this purpose and work along with the WTI and the Assam FD has already started.

Source: 'Saving the rhino from other enemy', *The Statesman*, 23/11/2002.

### **Seven doves found dead in Arimora area of Kaziranga NP**

Wildlife staff manning the Arimora camp inside the Kaziranga NP recovered carcasses of seven doves in a short span of time in November, causing concern over the possible causes.

The director of the park has however said that there was nothing alarming over these deaths which might have been caused by some infection. He also ruled out poisoning as the cause of death. The veterinary officer of the park was assigned the task of finding the reason behind the death of the doves and his report is awaited.

A few years ago, several pelicans were found dead in the park and the emissions from the brick kilns located at the periphery of the park were held responsible for that.

Source: Bijay Sankar Bora. 'No clue yet to doves' death at KNP', *The Assam Tribune*, 24/11/2002.

### **Attempts to guide elephant herd back to Kaziranga not successful**

The Assam FD had in late November launched 'Operation Gajraj' to guide back

to the Kaziranga NP a herd of about 50 elephants that had lost its way. The FD was using 10 domestic elephants and several phandis (elephant catchers) since November 23 to drive away the herd that had strayed to the outskirts of Guwahati city. According to latest reports no success had been achieved in this.

The problem had arisen because of the crossing of the herd from the river island of Majuli in the River Brahmaputra to the highly populated area of Neemati. The FD was trying to direct the herd back to Kaziranga (about 100 kms away) by crossing the river and taking the route back through Majuli.

Source: 'Assam grapples with elephantine problem', *Hindu Business Line*, 28/11/2002.

### **Kaziranga employees remain neglected**

There are reports that the employees of the Kaziranga NP are being neglected by the park authorities. Each forest camp, most of which are in a dilapidated condition, is manned by only two or three forest guards, who have to deal with poachers and also wild animals like elephants and rhinos.

Casual employees, numbering 160, had been appointed on a daily wage of Rs. 30 each and these too had been discharged in 1998. As a result of this, the permanent staff has to now take on additional tasks and responsibilities. 42 of the temporary employees even filed cases in the High Court to ensure their regularisation.

There have also been allegations that employees who are injured, or families of those who are killed either by poachers or the wild animals are not receiving adequate help and support from the park authorities. NGOs and the local people have appealed to the state government to regularise the services of the temporary employees and

also to ensure other help and support to them.

Source: 'Kaziranga NP accused of neglecting employees' problems', *The Assam Tribune*, 17/12/2002.

## 2003

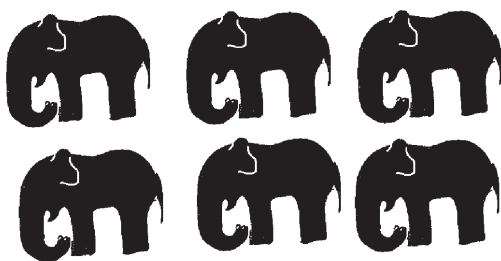
### Extremist support for wildlife around Kaziranga

The United People's Democratic Solidarity, a rebel group in Assam, has threatened to execute poachers and timber smugglers in the state. Villagers found indulging in activities like destroying forests or killing rhinos, elephants and other animals would be flogged publicly and fined Rs. 5,000-10,000.

HE Kathar, the group's general secretary, has said that his group has already started patrolling the fringes of the Kaziranga NP. With this newly expressed interest in preserving flora and fauna, the group has, however, not abandoned its main goal of winning greater autonomy for the Karbi tribe.

Source: 'Extremist support for wildlife', [www.sanctuaryasia.com](http://www.sanctuaryasia.com), 08/01/2003.

### Elephant festival at Kaziranga



Air India, in association with the Assam Government organised a two-day elephant festival in Kaziranga NP. Held on January 11 & 12, 2003, the festival aimed at projecting

the culture and heritage of the north-eastern region in general and Assam in particular.

275 elephants of the FD participated in the festival. One of the aims of the festival was to highlight the need to protect wildlife in general and in particular, to resolve the growing elephant-human conflict here.

Two well known personalities, expert mahout and elephant catcher, Parbati Barua, and documentary film maker, Robin Banerjee, were also honoured during the festival. The north-eastern region is embarking on a major drive for the promotion of tourism here and this is one step in that direction.

Source: 'Elephant fest at Kaziranga', *The Hindu Business Line*, 19/12/2002.

Barun Das Gupta. 'Elephant festival in Assam', *The Hindu*, 13/01/2003.

### Elephants from Kaziranga extension kill four people

Wild elephants from the Panpur RF (the 6th addition of the Kaziranga NP) have caused a lot of damage in the southern part of the Jamugari area which includes the revenue villages of Amdara, Hokoma, Panpur, Puraniveti, Nepali Panchgaon Mohmorapar, Erabari and Borbhagiagaon under Naduar revenue circle (NRC), within the East Sonitpur Forest Division of Sonitpur district.

The problem has been going on since 1999. Seven people were killed in the southern most part of Jamugari in February 2002. The Government of Assam had included 6095 hectares of the Panpur RF under the 6th addition to the KNP in 1985. It has been alleged that no steps were however made to protect these forests from encroachers, illegal poaching and fishing. This is said to be have contributed to the increased conflict.

The final handing over of the forest area to the park authorities happened only in 1999. Consequently, staff of the territorial wing of the FD that was employed here, was

removed, but wildlife staff has still not been appointed.

Source: 'Wild elephants kill 4 persons in Jamuguri', *The Assam Tribune*, 20/02/2003.

### **Forest Development Agency, eco-development committees mooted for Kaziranga NP**

Authorities of the Kaziranga NP have initiated the process of creation of a number of eco-development committees (EDCs) in villages located on the fringes of the park. A proposal for the creation of a Forest Development Agency (FDA) has also been submitted to the government.

It has been proposed that the EDCs will together constitute the FDA, which will be headed by the park director. The main objective of the initiative is to motivate and involve the concerned villagers in executing welfare works through employment-generating self-help schemes. The state government had in February taken a decision to create 35 FDAs in different parts of the state.

Source: Sanjoy Barkataki. 'Plan to involve locals for Kaziranga development', *The Assam Tribune*, 17/04/2003.

### **Army says that militants are involved in wildlife trafficking in the north east**

The army has said that separatist groups in the north-eastern region are directly dealing in illegal wildlife contraband. This is being used as a means of generating revenue that is then exchanged for buying arms and explosives from neighbouring countries.

The animals said to be the primary targets include the rhino for its horn, elephants for ivory and tigers for bones and skin. No specific group has been named by the

army, but the one hinted at is the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN), particularly in the context of the Kaziranga NP in Assam.

A statement issued by the army said that, "Nepal's open border with India and the lack of proper legislation and coordination between the concerned authorities continue to hinder the task of combating illegal trade in endangered species". Huge amounts of wildlife products are reported to be sent from India through Nepal to China, which is one of the biggest consumers of these products. The statement has also said that Assam has become the gateway for illegal wildlife trade in South Asia.

The Indian Army, apart from counter-insurgency operations in Assam, has now launched a crackdown on poaching syndicates in the state - deploying soldiers and activating its intelligence agencies along the Kaziranga NP. The operation has been codenamed "Save Kaziranga".

Troops of a mountain division posted along Kaziranga recently recovered three kg of tiger bones and two kg of elephant tusks, besides a gall bladder of a bear from the poachers. Troops, disguised as traders in animal organs, trapped the poachers near the Kaziranga NP and recovered the booty which is worth about Rs. 2 million in the international market.

Source: 'N-E militants involved in wildlife trafficking: Army', *The Navhind Times*, 24/05/2003.

### **Meet held to protect Kaziranga animals during floods**

A meeting was held in the month of May to discuss steps needed to protect animals of the Kaziranga NP during the floods. The meeting was held at Kohora and presided over by Mr N Vasu, director of the park. Those attending included government officials, gaon burahs,

veterinary doctors, tea garden officers and NGO representatives.

A number of measures were suggested to deal with the situation. These included awareness programmes in namghars, youth organisations and among local people. The need for patrolling NH- 37 and the imposition of Section 144 along the Bokakhat-Burapahar stretch of the highway, to control speeding vehicles, was also highlighted. Speeding vehicles often collide with animals crossing the highway to escape the floods.

There was a further suggestion, that forest officials should be equipped with boats for the rescue of animals that might be marooned because of the rising waters.

Source: 'Meet to protect animals during floods', *The Sentinel*, 29/05/2003.

### **Floods affect Kaziranga**

Rising waters of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries in the first week of July inundated large parts of Assam, including the Kaziranga NP. 60-70% of the park had been submerged and animals were forced to take shelter on the high ground platforms that have been created in various parts of the park to deal with such a situation.

Animals such as the rhino and deer were also reported to be moving to higher grounds in the Karbi Anglong Hills on the southern side of the park. At least six animals, including a rhino, a buffalo calf, two hog deer and sambar were drowned in the park.

Elephants and rhinos fleeing the park to higher ground in the Karbi Anglong hills are reported to have fallen victim to poachers. There were other reports of speeding vehicles on the NH-37, that runs along the southern boundary of the park, running over a few animals as they tried to cross to escape the rising waters.

In another incident, two elephants were electrocuted in the adjoining state of

Meghalaya after the herd strayed away from a reserve forest in western Assam following the floods. The 70-80 strong herd was moving towards a forest in Meghalaya from Assam when two animals got trapped in an area where a high-tension electric cable had fallen on the ground, probably in the heavy storm.

The Director of the Kaziranga NP Mr. NK Vasu, while acknowledging the seriousness of the problem caused by floods, has also said that the floodwaters were important for the park as they nourished the grasslands with the silt and also benefitted fisheries.

Source: 'Over four lakh affected in Assam floods', *The Hindu*, 02/07/2003.  
'Rhinos, elephants perish in Assam floods', [www.hindustantimes.com](http://www.hindustantimes.com), 09/07/2003,  
Daulat Rahman. 'Floods a boon for Kaziranga park', *The Times of India*, 12/07/2003.

### **Tunnels, overhead passages proposed to protect wildlife fleeing from floods in Kaziranga**



The Assam State Government has proposed the construction of tunnels and overhead passages to protect rhinos and other wildlife when fleeing the floods in the Kaziranga NP. The animals have to cross the NH- 37 to reach the higher grounds in the Karbi Anglong Hills on the southern edge of the park. Many of them are killed by speeding vehicles and poachers.

This proposal was one among the 27 that the state has recently made to the MoEF. The MoEF has agreed to provide the funds



to conduct a feasibility study on this project. Union Minister, Mr TR Baalu also said they will talk to other ministries for the sanctioning of the project. This information was provided by the Minister recently during a question hour discussion in the Rajya Sabha.

Source: 'Tunnels in Kaziranga to protect rhinos', *The Assam Tribune*, 26/07/2003.

### **WPSI petition before CEC regarding encroachments in six additions to Kaziranga NP**

The Wildlife Protection Society of India has filed a petition before the Supreme Court appointed Central Empowered Committee (CEC) in the matter of encroachments in the six additions made to the Kaziranga NP.

The additions that have been made to the park to offset the loss of land due to riverbank erosion, provide vital habitats and corridors that act as escape routes to higher ground for Kaziranga's wildlife during the Brahmaputra's annual flooding. These have however been the subject of persistent litigation in the Guwahati High Court by the encroachers.

The matter was heard by the CEC on August 19. The CEC has issued notices to all the respondents, including the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Secretary of Assam. In recognition of Kaziranga's status as a UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site, Mr ADN Rao, counsel for the MoEF, agreed to formulate a legal strategy for the settlement of claims in the Guwahati High Court.

Source: 'CEC Hears WPSI's Kaziranga Petition', [www.sanctuaryasia.com](http://www.sanctuaryasia.com), 20/08/2003.

### **Rhino habitat in Kaziranga decreasing**

A study of satellite images taken during the last thirty years has revealed that 27% of

the total area of Kaziranga NP has become unsuitable for the rhino due to the lack of water bodies and short grass. There has been considerable siltation and fragmentation of the water bodies in the park and invasion by the exotic 'mimosa' plant too has made vast stretches unsuitable for rhinos and other animals as well.

Additionally, the Brahmaputra too has been eroding land along the northern boundary of the park, particularly in the Agartoli and Bagori ranges, resulting in further loss of areas under beels and short grasses. A total of 22 sq km of the park has been lost in this manner along the eastern boundary of the park alone.

It has also been found that the total wetland area in the park including the Jiya and Mora Diphlu rivers has decreased in the last three decades from 8.5% in 1967-68 to 6.7% in 1997.

Source: Daulat Rahman. 'Battle to save rhino habitat', *The Times of India*, 23/08/2003.

### **Kaziranga to open for tourists in October**

The Kaziranga NP is to be opened up from October 1 for tourists. Initially tourists will be allowed to visit only the Bagori and Kohora ranges because other areas of the park are still under water, following floods in July and August.

The lodges and tourist bungalows under the state tourist and forest departments have been given a facelift and private operators too are reported to have geared themselves up for the oncoming season.

The authorities have also planned a three-day elephant festival from January 30 to February 1, 2004 and about 100 elephants from different parts of the state will arrive here for this.

Spurred by the popularity of the park among national and international tourists, a five-member team of the World Bank

headed by its Country Director visited the park recently. Their main aim was to assess the facilities and explore the possibilities of funding projects for the further development and protection of the wildlife here.

Source: 'Kaziranga Park to open for tourists from Oct.', *The Hindu Business Line*, 09/09/2003.

## 2004

### High level meeting held on issue of over-bridges across NH-37 for animals of Kaziranga NP



Mr BS Bonal, Former Director, Kaziranga NP and Dr Prasanta Choudhury were recently sent by the central government to the Kaziranga NP to investigate the demand of the state government to construct over-bridges in the animal corridors on the NH-37. With the flooding of the Kaziranga every monsoon, a large number of animals are killed while attempting to cross the national highway.

After visiting the relevant spots, they held a discussion at Kohora, which was attended by the Assam Forest Minister; the Director of the park; the DFO; Chairman, Tourism, Assam and the SDO(C), Bokakhat.

Source: 'High-level meet on construction of over-bridges at KNP', *The Sentinel*, 02/01/2004.

### Pre-monsoon rains raise fear of floods in Kaziranga

Heavy pre-monsoon rains reported in the month of May had raised fears of flooding and the impacts on the Kaziranga NP. The authorities in the park were said to have readied themselves to deal with the situation. Boats had been readied and small streams were cleared of debris, rotting foliage and broken branches to facilitate the free movement of water and boats. Rainfall was also being monitored on a daily basis.

There was also concern regarding the heavy erosion caused by the Brahmaputra in the northern part of the park. Last year, a forest camp in this part had to be shifted due to erosion. This year, two camps, Baneswar and Debeswari, were in readiness to be shifted if required. The annual floods take a heavy toll of the denizens of the park every year. In 2002, the annual floods had occurred in June and in 2003 in July.

Source: 'Erosion by Brahmaputra now a serious threat; KNP authorities on alert to counter floods', *The Assam Tribune*, 20/05/2004.

### Kaziranga NP to celebrate 100 years

A series of activities have been proposed for early 2005 when the Kaziranga NP completes 100 years of existence. The celebrations will be held from February 11-17, 2005. The focus of the centennial bash will be to project the NP as the site of one of the 'greatest conservation success stories of the last century'.

Wildlife experts and conservation activists will be invited when the celebrations will be kicked off with the annual elephant festival held in the park. Author Mark Shand has agreed to be the international brand ambassador for the park.

Chief Minister of Assam, Mr Tarun Gogoi recently launched the website [www.kaziranga100.com](http://www.kaziranga100.com) as a prelude to the centenary celebrations.

Source: 'Rhino abode Kaziranga to celebrate 100 years', *The Statesman*, 11/06/2004.  
'Kaziranga website launched', *The Assam Tribune*, 27/08/2004.

### **Flood impacts PAs in Assam – Kaziranga**

Reports in the first half of July said that nearly 80% of the Kaziranga NP was inundated by the waters of the swollen Brahmaputra. 79 out of over 100 camps in the park were severely hit, while 13 were completely submerged and had to be evacuated. The range office at Agartoli, the eastern range of the park, too, was submerged and had to be abandoned.

The animals in the park were seen taking shelter on Burapahar hill and the artificial highlands within the park. A large number were seen fleeing to the Karbi Anglong hills across NH-37 towards the south of the park. Like in previous years, speeding vehicles on the highway caused a number of animal casualties, with initial reports suggesting that at least five hog deer and two pythons were killed in accidents.

The park authorities and NGOs have made repeated appeals to drivers to curb the speed of vehicles while on the stretch of the highway passing through the forest. Drivers have however continued to remain callous. Seven barricades were installed in the area to keep an eye on the speeding vehicles but were not much of a deterrent.

The flooding has also resulted in heavy erosion in parts of the park. The strategically important Debeswari camp has already been completely eroded. A similar fate awaits Lohoroni and Arimora where erosion was unabated. Looking at the gravity of the flood situation in the park, additional staff was also

deputed to augment the existing staff strength of around 400 in the park.

The third wave of flooding around the 20th of July totally cut off road traffic from Guwahati to the park. At Nagaon, the road was under 10 feet of water and an alternate route through Tezpur was also similarly affected. This level of flooding was supposed to be the highest recorded in the last 20 years.

An initiative was taken by the Wild Aid Program of the WTI to vaccinate over 1800 heads of livestock that were susceptible to Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) because of the floods. The two-day vaccination camp was organized by veterinarians and volunteers from the Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC) at Panbari on 30 and 31 July. The camp targeted livestock from the flood-affected Panbari Ideal village, Panbari Missing Gaon 1, Panbari Missing Gaon 2 and Bokakhat in the district of Golaghat.

The Assam Forest Minister, Mr Pradyut Bordoloi, also pointed out that at least 30 wooden bridges were either washed away or extensively damaged in the park. Additionally, nearly 26 sq km of the park is said to have been eroded and the embankment at Dhansirimukh had been substantially weakened, posing a threat to the future of the park.

Source: Sivasish Thakur. 'Kaziranga in grip of flood', *The Assam Tribune*, 14/07/2004.  
'Floods cut off Kaziranga National Park', <http://www.wildlifetrustofindia.org>.  
'Vaccination camp for livestock in Panbari, Assam', <http://www.wildlifetrustofindia.org>.  
'Rs. 16 cr. forest scheme for national parks', *The Assam Tribune*, 24/08/2004.

### **Guerrilla training school in Kaziranga**

The Indian Army proposes to raise a guerrilla training school in the Kaziranga NP for

imparting special jungle warfare training and anti-terrorist operation skills to junior and middle-level officers. The army also intends to impart capsule courses for senior officers who are already in counter-insurgency operations or expecting tenure in Jammu & Kashmir and the north-east.

The training school is likely to hire foreign experts to teach new technologies in communications and logistics, besides warfare expertise. The school will start functioning from 2007 and the Ministry of Defence is reported to have consulted the finance ministry for special fund allocations for the school.

This will be the second such school in North-East India after the Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School at Vairengte in Mizoram, which was established in 1970.

Source: 'New anti-terror school in Kaziranga', *The Northeast Tribune*, 14/10/2004.

### **Kaziranga centenary celebrations to be part of the 'Incredible India' campaign**

The Kaziranga NP centenary celebrations will now be part of the Union Tourism Ministry's 'Incredible India' campaign. The decision was taken after a series of meetings held recently between the Assam Forest Minister Mr Pradyut Bordoloi and officials of the Union Tourism Ministry.

'Incredible India' is New Delhi's global campaign to market India as one of the best tourist destinations. The ministry spent around Rs. 50 crore on the campaign last year. This year the budgetary allocation has gone up to Rs. 90 crore. Some resources will also become available to the Assam FD to publicise the Kaziranga centenary celebrations.

In another development, the WTI, in collaboration with the Assam FD, is preparing a programme that will see international

experts participate in a workshop on wildlife rehabilitation.

Source: 'Delhi philip to Kaziranga', *The Telegraph*, 17/10/2004.

### **International Guwahati Trade Fair to promote Kaziranga**

The Industries and Trade Fair Association of Assam (ITFAA) has announced that the 12th International Guwahati Trade Fair will be held from Feb. 20 to Mar. 4, 2005 with the theme to promote the Kaziranga NP on the occasion of its centenary.

The FD too has promised full support to the forthcoming trade fair which would be held immediately after the conclusion of the KNP centenary celebrations on February 17, 2005.

Dignitaries from the UK, US, Australia, Thailand, Malaysia and African countries are expected to take part in the centenary celebrations of the park and to formulate a comprehensive plan to address problems such as floods and poaching at the world heritage site.

Source: 'Kaziranga to be theme of city trade fair', *The Sentinel*, 12/11/2004.

### **Pit-poaching of rhinos in Kaziranga**



There are reports that poachers in and around Kaziranga NP are now using the pit-poaching method for trapping rhinos as opposed to gun shots and electrocution. The method,

which involves the making of a hole/pit for trapping the rhinos, is being used at places like Bagori, Khutori, Baghmori and Harmoti. An elephant calf recently fell into such a trap and sustained injuries.

Source: 'Rhino poachers resort to pit-poaching', *The Assam Tribune*, 16/12/2004.

### **MoEF asked to tackle problem of encroachments in Kaziranga additions**

Responding to a petition filed by the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) in 2003, the Central Empowered Committee has asked the MoEF to look into encroachments in the six additions to Kaziranga NP. The directions were passed in December 2004.

The government has, over the years, notified six additions to the park, partly to compensate for loss of parts of the park to erosion, and also to serve animals as corridors to higher ground during the annual floods. The future of the additions is uncertain due to continuous litigation in the Guwahati High Court by cattle grazers and settlers.

Mr ADN Rao, counsel for the MoEF stated that he had received permission from the MoEF to proceed with the filing of Special Leave Petitions to settle the issue. These will be filed in the first week of January 2005.

Source: 'MoEF to Tackle Encroachments in Additions to Kaziranga', Email by WPSI dated 22/12/04.

## **2005**

### **Friends of Kaziranga Forum formed**

A large number of well known people from India and abroad have come together to form the Friends of Kaziranga Forum to ensure preservation and promotion of this well-known habitat of the one-horned rhino. The

forum was formed on the concluding day of the Kaziranga Centenary Celebration on February 17 and presently has 149 members.

Members of the forum include prominent Indian businessmen like Mukesh Ambani, Adi Godrej and Peter Mukherjea, Maharani Gayatri Devi, Don Brown of the US Embassy, African rhino specialist Richard H Emsile, and VB Mathur of Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun.

The forum resolved to maintain and enhance the ecological integrity of the existing protected area network of the north-eastern region of the country, as well as to draw national and international attention to the inextricable link between the preservation and ecological viability of Kaziranga.

Experts on the rhino and bio-diversity resolved to ensure exchange of traditional and scientific knowledge and technological innovations for conservation and sustainable development of Kaziranga. The resolution also promised to mobilize support for seeking an alternative route to the proposed highway by expansion of the existing NH-37 passing across Kaziranga, to ensure safe movement of wildlife here.

Additionally, the members have planned necessary steps to support creation of a data bank on the bio-diversity and ecological parameters of Kaziranga and apply this knowledge for stepping up vigil and awareness on environmental impacts of economic development projects in the region.

Source: 'Friends of Kaziranga Forum formed', *The Sentinel*, 28/02/2005.

### **Increase in elephant population in Kaziranga; rhino census postponed**

A recent elephant census at the Kaziranga NP has revealed an increase in the population of the animal here. 1,194 elephants were spotted in the NP and 52 were seen on the periphery



of the park. The 2002 census report had pegged elephant population here at 1,048.

Forest officials have, however, pointed out that a final picture will emerge only after receiving the complete set of results. The outcome of the census in other elephant habitats such as Karbi Anglong, Garampani (Golaghat division) and Nagaon was awaited.

About 50 teams of three persons each had begun the census on April 3. A sample count of 30 per cent of the identified habitats was completed the very next day.

FD officials are now also said to be working on the modalities for the tiger and rhino census that is to be held next year. The rhino census was to be conducted after the elephant count but had to be postponed because of the early onset of the monsoon.

Rains started in the middle of March itself, preventing burning of the grasses to make the counting of rhinos easier. Smaller water bodies in the grasslands in the park also filled up as a result of which the rhinos don't need to come to the larger ones outside, making the search and count of the rhinos a risky task.

A rhino census is a massive exercise where census teams headed by senior forest officials count rhino heads from the back of at least 60 trained elephants. The rhino habitat, spread over 430 sq km, is divided into 44 compartments for the purpose of the census and the exercise is usually completed on a single day to get the correct figure. The 1999 count had revealed a population of 1,552 rhinos here.

Source: Bijoy Shankar Bora. 'Rains play spoilsport in Rhino census', *The Statesman*, 01/04/2005.  
Nishit Dholabhai. 'Census boost to Kaziranga image', *The Telegraph*, 12/04/2005.

## **Task force to look into stone quarrying in Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong ER**

Following complaints about the stone quarrying operations within the Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong ER, the state government has asked the Elephant Task Force to look into the matter and submit a report. It is possible that the Assam Government might suggest an alternative site to railways for the quarrying.

The Chief Wildlife Warden of the state has however said that the Task Force will find out if the decibel level is really affecting the elephants. He also said that it would have to be verified whether the disturbance was being caused by the blasting itself or by the people working in the quarries.

The Task Force that is comprised of Dr Anil Goswami (Chairman), Parbati Barua, Dinesh Choudhary, Dr Padmeshwar Gogoi and Bhupen Talukdar visited the area in the first week of August.

Source: Sushanta Talukdar. 'Task force looking into quarrying in elephant corridor', *The Hindu*, 24/07/2005.  
'Elephant Task Force visits Numaligarh stone quarry', *The Sentinel*, 07/08/2005.

## **Efforts on to eradicate mimosa from Kaziranga**

The WTI, with the support of the International Fund for Animal Welfare and in collaboration with the Assam FD, has launched a program for the eradication of the mimosa weed from the grasslands of the Kaziranga NP.

It has been estimated that in 2002-03, the weed covered about 2.13 sq km of the park. All the four ranges of the park – Agaratuli, Kohora, Bagori and Burapahar – were said to be infested in varying degrees.

As part of the eradication program about 130 hectares (ha) were cleared of mimosa in 2004 followed by 72 ha in the first phase of 2005.



The WTI has also recently released a report titled 'Silent Stranglers' that documents the threats posed to the park by this weed.

Source: 'Mimosa weed posing threat to Kaziranga', *The Assam Tribune*, 21/09/2005.

### **Alternative route for traffic through Kaziranga**

The Assam Minister of State for Forests, Pradyut Bordoloi recently suggested that efforts would be made to divert traffic from the NH-37, which runs through the Kaziranga NP. Increased traffic on NH-37 and development along the highway has created serious problems for wildlife in the park in recent years. There have also been many instances of animal deaths due to accidents, particularly during the monsoons, when the animals try to reach higher grounds on other side of the road.

The proposal is to divert the vehicular traffic from Jakhlabandha to Bokakhat via the NH-52, which links Jakhlabandha to Gohpur. Jakhlabandha is the last town west of the NP and Bokakhat is the first town east of it. Given this, the Bhomoraguri Bridge and a proposed bridge at Gohpur, both across the Brahmaputra, would have to be widened to accommodate four lanes. This would add 58 km to the journey from Jakhlabandha to Bokakhat, but the minister pointed out that this was important for the long-term well being of the NP.

He added that in order to streamline traffic further, another route from Nagaon to Numaligarh via Doboka, Dilai and Dimapur was also being considered. The idea is said to have already received the green signal from the Chief Minister and would soon be placed before the Union Cabinet.

Source: 'Bordoloi unveils KNP preservation concept', *The Sentinel*, 08/10/2005.

### **Program for dealing with human-elephant conflict in Manas and Kaziranga**

Two new projects for dealing with the issue of human-elephant conflict in and around Manas and Kaziranga NPs have been launched recently. The projects are being funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Services and will be implemented by field zoologists of Aaranyak under the guidance of senior technical authorities.

The project to be implemented in Manas NP will stratify the entire park according to the habitat strata of elephant, using remote sensing and GIS techniques. It would seek to understand seasonal variation in habitat utilization by elephants in the park, through regular monitoring of known elephant herds. Besides this, it would also help develop elephant-deterrent alternative cash crops in affected villages on an experimental basis.

The goals of the project to be carried out in Golaghat include surveying the current status of the elephant – their approximate numbers, movement, distribution and major threats in Golaghat and adjoining areas of Karbi Anglong districts.

The project also aims to motivate affected villagers to change the existing crop pattern with some high yielding elephant repellent crops on an experimental basis, besides exploring diversified livelihood options. It is also proposed to establish Crop Protection Committees (Sashya Suraksha Samitis) to check crop raids, property damage by elephants, and to monitor movement of elephants in those areas.

Source: 'US Consul General launches projects to fight elephant menace', *The Assam Tribune*, 10/11/2005.

## **No plan to divert National Highway presently passing through Kaziranga NP**

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has denied the possibility of diverting traffic on the national highway passing through the Kaziranga NP. The Minister of State for Road Transport and Highways, KH Muniyappa, recently clarified this while answering a question in parliament. He said that presently there was no proposal for diverting traffic or for controlling speed by putting up speed sensors or speed guns.

The issue of the NH-37 passing through Kaziranga has continuously been in the news, particularly for wild animal deaths in road accidents during the monsoons.

Source: 'No plan to divert NH and KNP', *The Assam Tribune*, 14/12/2005.

## **Biswanathghat – Kaziranga NP river cruise**

A river cruise program from Biswanathghat near Biswanath Chairali to the Kaziranga NP was inaugurated on December 20, 2005. The initiative was part of the Biswanath Utsav 2006, and will allow residents on the North Bank of the Brahmaputra an easier opportunity of visiting the NP. Earlier they could come to Kaziranga by road through Tezpur which was a long and expensive journey.

The two-tier 40-seater mechanised boat would leave Biswanathghat to Kaziranga NP at 6 am and at 10 am. In this river cruise 'package tour' the rate per adult on the upper deck was fixed at Rs 400 and on the lower deck at Rs 350, while children below 12 years would be charged Rs 350 and Rs 300 each for upper and lower decks respectively. The package tour included travel to and from the park, lunch and entry tickets.

Source: 'Biswanathghat – KNP river cruise from today', *The Assam Tribune*, 20/12/2005.

## **2006**

### **Assam assembly employment review panel visits Kaziranga**

The 13-member Employment Review Samity (ERS) of the Assam State Assembly recently visited the Kaziranga NP and held a meeting at the Kohora convention hall. The problems of unemployment were reviewed here in light of the appeal by the director of the park for the reinstatement of 160 forest workers who had been discharged from service.

The meeting was chaired by M. Paniram Rabha who is the Chairman of the ERS. Others attending the meeting included Jatindra Basumatary, MLA, Chidly; R Phukan; P Das; JC Paul, Joint Director, DRDA; and CM Malakar, Chief Conservator of Forests, Wildlife, Assam. Mr. Rabha also inaugurated a mela of self-help groups at Kaziranga where the DRDA, Golaghat district, had arranged different types of Assamese local dresses, food and handicrafts.

Source: 'Assam assembly employment review panel team visits Kaziranga', *The Assam Tribune*, 01/01/2006.

### **Tourists throng Kaziranga on New Year's Day**

An estimated 6000 tourists are said to have visited the Kohora and Bagori Ranges of the Kaziranga NP on January 1 to celebrate the start of the new year. Most of the visitors were from the Jorhat, Golaghat and Nagaon districts. The visitors arranged picnics at different spots inside the park.

It was found, however, that visitors in such large numbers were causing an adverse impact on the forests and the wild animals in the park. Disposable dishes and glasses too were left behind in substantial quantities.

It has been pointed out that though the number of tourists visiting Kaziranga

have increased, there has been no corresponding increase in tourist facilities. Many visitors are not able to get accommodation and many are also unable to enjoy the elephant safaris.

A total of 38,140 locals and 2,102 foreigners visited the park from April to December 2005. The total revenue collected was a little over Rs. 33 lakh. This has grown from a figure of a little over Rs 30 lakh that was collected in 2004. The visitor numbers for 2004 were 29,879 local visitors and 2672 foreigners.

Source: Sanjoy Hazarika. 'Thousands throng Madan Kamdev, KNP', *The Assam Tribune*, 03/01/2006.

### **Stone quarry proposed at Mikir Chang near Kaziranga NP**

The Assam FD is reported to have invited tenders to start a stone quarry at Mikir Chang, not far from the Kaziranga NP. The new quarry would see the extraction of 10,000 cubic metres of stone to be used primarily in the Bogibeel project.

The site where the 2.5 km-long quarry is proposed is an important migratory corridor for elephants moving between Kaziranga NP and Nambor Doigrung WLS, and between Nambor WLS and the Garampani WLS. Other endangered species of wildlife, including the tiger, leopard, Clouded leopard, Himayalan black bear, Hoolock gibbon, Capped langur, Slow loris, Greater pied hornbill, and the White-winged wood duck have also been reported in the area where the quarry will be started.

The move has been opposed by wildlife researchers and environmentalists who say that this will have a very negative impact on the wildlife in this region. Those who have voiced their concern and opposition include Padmeswar Gogoi, Member, Elephant Task Force, Assam; Arup Goswami, Honorary

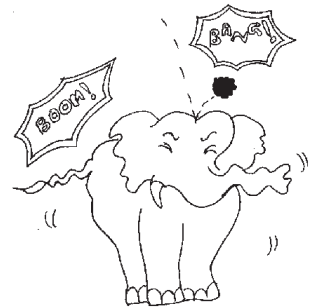
Wildlife Warden and Dr. Bibhab Talukdar of the wildlife NGO, Aaranyak.

This quarrying proposal is different from the earlier one that has also been suggested for extraction of stones for the Bogibeel project.

Source: Prabal Kr Das. 'Concern over move to open quarry near Kaziranga', *The Assam Tribune*, 07/01/2006.

### **MoEF opposes quarrying at Mikir Chang near Kaziranga**

The MoEF has written to the Assam State Government that no quarrying activity could be permitted at Mikir Chang near Kaziranga NP as that area



was a "no development zone". The Ministry letter quotes a notification issued on July 5, 1996, under which a 'no development zone' has been created within a radius of 15 km around Kaziranga NP. (The aerial distance from Mikir Chang stone quarry to the NP is 9 km). It also says that the state needs to submit a proposal to the ministry for vetting the mining activity as per the criteria under the Environment Protection Act.

The FD had invited tenders for quarrying here a couple of months ago and this had been opposed by a number of wildlife groups who feared that it would adversely affect elephant migratory routes and other wildlife as well.

Source: 'Delhi brakes on quarry in Kaziranga', *The Telegraph*, 24/01/2006.

## **Proposal for eco-sensitive zone around Kaziranga**

A proposal is being formulated for declaring a 10-km-circumference area around the Kaziranga NP as an eco-sensitive zone (ESZ). The director of the park has said that various inputs like existing land use, earmarking of the industrial estates, area development plans for places with a population of more than 5000 people and a tourism development plan for the area will be needed for the formulation of the proposal that will then be sent to the centre.

Sites of unique natural heritage in the zone will also be identified and plans for their conservation will be developed for inclusion into the zonal development plan. Strict guidelines will be drawn up by the state government to discourage construction at or near these sites. Buildings of distinct historical or architectural importance will also be identified and plans for their conservation, particularly their exteriors, will be incorporated in the zonal development plan.

The director also pointed out that the cooperation of the Karbi Anglong district administration would be needed for the successful creation of the ESZ.

It is hoped that the creation of this zone would prevent industrial activity from coming up around the park and also put a stop to the mining and quarrying activity that has increased significantly in this region in recent times.

Source: 'Eco zone in Kaziranga to block industry move to protect park', *The Statesman*, 10/02/2006.

## **1855 rhinos in Kaziranga**

The 2006 census that was recently conducted in Kaziranga NP has recorded 1855 rhinos here. This number includes 405 mothers and

405 calves. This means that even though the park lost 80 rhinos due to various reasons in the last year, the effective increase in number is about 120 animals.

It has been estimated that in the coming ten years, the park will have another 1000 rhinos and additional land will have to be included within the boundaries of the park to accommodate them. The 1999 census had put the number of rhinos in Kaziranga at 1552.

Source: '2006 rhino census', *The Sentinel*, 05/04/2006.

## **Kaziranga casual worker's widow gets insurance money**

The widow of Babul Baruah, a casual worker at the Kaziranga NP, was recently handed over his insurance claim of Rs. 1 lakh by the park director, Mr NK Vasu. Baruah had been trampled by a captive elephant in 'musth', while he was collecting grass for the animal's feed.

His widow became the fourth recipient, in the last three years, of the insurance claim that is part of a program initiated by the WTI and supported by the Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation. As part of the program, about 17,000 forest staff have been insured nationally. Of these, 1,579 are from Assam. The WTI maintains a protected area staff status (PASS) database based on inputs from the FD. This is forwarded to the insurance company every month.

The policy stipulates that the claim should be registered within 15 days from the date of accident. A death certificate supported by a post mortem report giving cause of death, first information report (FIR) of the police and death certificate by a competent authority are required as supporting documents. All employees on field patrol duty of the rank of range forest officer and below are eligible.

The policy-holder can claim the insured amount in case of permanent, partial or

permanent and total disability. In the case of death, the nominee can claim a sum of rupees one lakh.

Source: 'Insurance money bails out widow's family', *Survival*, WTI E-newsletter, 19/04/2006.

### **Over 81,000 visit Kaziranga in 2005-06**

A record number of 81,758 tourists visited Kaziranga NP in the year 2005-06, bringing in a total revenue of over Rs 76 lakh. A little over 77,000 of the visitors were domestic tourists. FD officials pointed out that this year's figure was an increase of 8885 tourists and Rs 10 lakh in revenue as compared to 2004-05. The number of foreign tourists however saw a fall of 443 over the last year.

For 2005-06 the highest revenue was collected from the Kohara range, which was Rs 55,95,167 from 44,233 tourists. On the other hand, in Agartali range, Rs 2,82,487 were collected from 2,478 tourists while in the Bagori range Rs 17,06,459 were collected from 29,664 tourists. The figure for the Burapahar range was Rs 30,656 from 651 visitors.

An attempt is now being made to ensure a more equal distribution of visitors over all the ranges of the park. Accordingly, a plan for development of the infrastructure of Agartali and Burapahar ranges has been submitted to the North Eastern Council. Some preliminary work in the Burapahar range has already been initiated by the park authorities.

Source: Sanjoy Hazarika. 'Revenue collection up in Kaziranga NP', *The Assam Tribune*, 20/04/2006.

### **Blasting resumed in Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong elephant corridor**

Blasting in the stone quarries located in the Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong elephant corridor

was reported to have resumed in the month of June. As a result, depredation by the wild elephants started here again. A herd of wild elephants, numbering around 40, attacked several houses at Rong Bong Gaon No. 4 under the Numaligarh outpost in Golaghat district recently. One school student was also killed.

Strong protests earlier had forced the state government to stop the blastings at Bihara. An Elephant Task Force was also formed to enquire into the matter. Their report is still awaited and meanwhile permissions for blasting were given again.

Source: 'Resumed blastings cause surge in elephant depredation', *The Assam Tribune*, 15/05/2006.

### **Proposal for airport near Kaziranga**

Bangkok Airways is reported to have expressed interest in setting up an airport near the Kaziranga NP. The Bangkok based airlines made the suggestion for the airport and other infrastructure for tourists during Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi's recent visit to Thailand.

The airline has also indicated that it might be interested in linking Kaziranga with other NPs in the state and the north-east region to promote the tour circuit as the 'Assam Safari'. The CM has said that the Assam Government was ready to provide land near Kaziranga for the airport if a formal proposal was received from the airline as it would help boost tourism in the state.

In a subsequent development, Assam Forest and Tourism Minister, Mr Rockybul Hussain presented a memorandum in the first week of July to Union Tourism Minister, Ms Ambika Soni, during her visit to Guwahati. It included a request for the construction of an airstrip near Kaziranga and a helipad at Majuli. The memorandum also requests an allotment of Rs 5 crore for renovation and



modernization of more than a hundred forest inspection bungalows (IB) in the state so that they could be used for tourism purposes.

Source: 'Bangkok Airways keen to set up airport near Kaziranga', <http://www.hindustantimes.com>  
'Soni announces steps to boost NE tourism', *The Assam Tribune*, 05/07/2006.

### Centre contradicts State claim of airport proposal near Kaziranga



The Union Civil Aviation Minister, Mr Praful Patel has contradicted the proposal of the Assam State Government for the construction of an international airport near Kaziranga. The Assam CM and Forest and Tourism Minister had announced earlier that a Thai International Airline was keen to build the airport to promote tourism in the region.

Mr Patel said that the central government had not heard of the international air operator's plan to set up an airport in the state and his ministry had not been approached so far. He was responding to a question raised in the matter in the Rajya Sabha by the Congress MP, Syeda Anowara Taimur.

Source: 'Centre contradicts state govt. claim', *The Assam Tribune*, 02/08/2006.

### Workshop to inform Kaziranga fringe villages of compensation schemes

The NGO Nature's Beckon organized a workshop in the month of July to inform those in the fringe villages of the Kaziranga NP of the government scheme for compensation to be paid for human tragedies caused by wild animals.

The state government had issued a circular in early 2004 (No. FRW.63/2003/10 of January 19, 2004) which provides the details. None of the villagers in the vicinity of Kaziranga however have benefited though there have been a number of cases of injury and loss of life.

Wild buffaloes, for instance, have maimed scores of people in villages like Sildubi, Kohora No. 2, Baghmari, Inglepathar, Haldhiguri, Moudhua, Dagaon, Bezgaon, Gukhanibor, Panbari, Bamungaon, Dhua-ati, and Sarugaon. There are also many cases of domestic livestock being attacked and killed by leopards and tigers.

It has been suggested that the prompt payment of compensation will ensure that villagers continue to remain tolerant to depredation by wildlife. The compensation money comes from the centrally-sponsored Project Elephant program.

Source: 'Kaziranga fringe villagers live in fright of animals', *The Assam Tribune*, 03/08/2006.

### Fears over impact of drought on Kaziranga

Fears have been expressed that the drought-like situation in Assam could lead to a food crisis for wild animals in the Kaziranga NP. Animals could be forced out of the park in search of fodder making them susceptible to a range of threats and also an increase in human-animal conflict.



Park authorities are reported to have sought advice from the Assam government to find a way to avert the possible crisis. Measures being thought of include artificial irrigation to help the growth of short grass and clearing of the ponds that now have only dirty stagnant water and have also been choked by water hyacinth.

The Assam Government recently issued a notification declaring 22 of the state's 27 districts as undergoing a drought-like situation. The region has received only 787.5 mm of rain between June 1 and Aug 23 this year as against the expected average rainfall of 1,172.2 mm – a deficit of about 33%.

Source: Syed Zarir Hussain. 'Kaziranga animals in danger due to drought', <http://www.dailyindia.com>, 29/08/2006.

### **Encroachment fears around Kaziranga**

There are reports of encroachments, by suspected illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, on government lands bordering the Kaziranga NP. The issue has been taken up by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) who recently staged demonstrations demanding immediate eviction.

FD and the park authorities maintain that the 430 sq km NP, together with the three subsequent additions (where settlement procedures have been completed), is free from encroachments. They have, however, expressed concern that population of unauthorized settlers of suspected origin is indeed growing in the proximity of the park. Occasionally these people have been caught fishing and collecting firewood inside the NP's precincts. They are also known to harbour poachers.

Officials have said that they were often unwilling to take 'tough action' even when they encountered the encroachers inside the NP because of the fear of reprisal, as they were a hostile and well-organized lot.

The KNP has so far had six additions to its original area of 430 sq km. However, only in the first addition (43.79 sq km – notification on May 28, 1997), the fourth addition (0.89 sq km – notification on January 1, 1985), and the sixth addition (3.76 sq km – notification on August 7, 1999) has the land settlement procedure been completed.

The other three additions – the second addition (6.47 sq km – notification on July 10, 1985), the third addition (0.69 sq km – notification on May 31, 1985) and the fifth addition (1.15 sq km – notification on June 13, 1985) – continue to be dogged by pending court cases with the result that people have settled down in some of these areas.

Source: Sivasish Thakur. 'Kaziranga encroachment creates concern', *The Assam Tribune*, 04/09/06.

### **More tourism schemes for Kaziranga NP**

The Assam Minister of Forests and Tourism, Rockybul Hussain, has said that the Kaziranga NP would have a Rs. 1 crore worth of tourism schemes under the Agartoli Range in the near future. He was speaking during a function of the 52nd Wildlife Week held at the Kohora Convention Centre of the park. He also suggested the development of the neighbouring areas like Bokakhat for tourist promotion. The meeting was attended by Ajanta Neog, Minister, Social Welfare; Jiten Gogoi, MLA, Bokakhat; the PCCF and CCF, Govt. of Assam and other high-level government officials

Source: 'More tourism schemes for KNP promised', *The Assam Tribune*, 10/10/2006.

### **Rs 67.60 lakh for checking erosion in Kaziranga**

The Assam State Government has earmarked Rs 67.60 lakh for dealing with the problem

of erosion of the Kaziranga NP. Erosion protection measures will be undertaken along the Arimora stretch from Agartoli to Burapahar.

Additionally, a proposal of Rs 8.35 crore has also been prepared for the protection of Bonkual from erosion. Bonkual and Kuruabahi are the worst affected areas in the Bokakhat sub-division. A number of families here have been displaced and have become landless during the last few years. An amount of Rs 45 lakh has also been sanctioned for the protection of Singadoria Gaon from river erosion.

Source: 'Rs. 67.60 lakh for checking erosion at Kaziranga', *The Assam Tribune*, 09/11/2006.

### **PA managements facing serious funds crunch**

Protected area managers in Assam are facing a serious funds crunch with the finance department not having released funds for many months now. These include, among others, the Kaziranga NP, the Manas NP and the Pabitora WLS.

Kaziranga, for instance has not received any funds for wages and for fuel for six months now. Consequently, the petrol pumps in the area have stopped giving fuel to the park vehicles as the credit limit of Rs. 1.2 lakh has been crossed. It has been pointed out that this present state of affairs is in violation of Supreme Court directives that central funds received by the state governments should be released by the state within 15 days.

Source: Bibhab Talukdar. Email dated 10/11/2006. 'Source of funds hinders forest patrols', *The Telegraph*, 10/11/2006.

### **Demand for adequate compensation for victims of elephant depredation around Kaziranga**

Two organizations – the Kaziranga Surakhya Aru Unnayan Samiti (KSAUS) and the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) of Golaghat district submitted one memorandum each in December to the Bokakhat SDO (C), demanding payment of adequate compensation to the families that have lost their family members in attacks by elephants straying from the Kaziranga NP, and also to those whose properties have been destroyed.

Members of the Golaghat district unit of the KMSS organized a bicycle rally on NH-37 to make their protests heard. They also held a dharna in front of the SDO's office. The organizations have threatened that if their demands were not met they would not cooperate with the organizers for the Kaziranga Festival 2007.

It was pointed out that cases of elephants straying into areas of human habitation in the region were on the rise and a number of people had been killed. Not a single rupee in compensation has yet been paid. The total compensation amount to be paid here by the centre from the fund under Project Elephant is said to have touched Rs. 8 lakh.

The organizations also expressed concern that initiatives were not being taken to protect the park from erosion by the River Brahmaputra. The matter of providing health and medical facilities for the people of the villages surrounding the park was also brought up.

Source: 'Two organizations against Kaziranga Elephant festival', *The Indian Express*, 19/12/2006.

## 2007

### **58 rhino deaths in Kaziranga NP in 2006**

The Kaziranga NP lost a total of 58 rhinos in the year 2006. Of these five were killed by poachers and 53 died due to natural causes. The park also lost 14 elephants and four tigers in 2006, while the FD arrested 27 poachers with rifles, live cartridges and wires in the same period. Figures for rhino deaths in Kaziranga for the earlier years are as follows: 43 in 2001, 66 in 2002 and 2003, 104 in 2004 and 80 in 2005.

Source: '58 KNP rhinos die in 2006', *The Sentinel*, 04/01/2007.

### **Meeting held for Kaziranga protection**

A public awareness camp for the protection of wildlife in Kaziranga NP was held recently at the office campus of DAGROB, an NGO of Dhansirimukh, a Mising dominated area adjacent to the park on the eastern fringe. The meeting was organized by the WWF – India with the co-operation of the forest wing, Kaziranga, and another NGO, Bhumi.

200 local people also participated in the meeting. They assured the park authorities of extending full support in the matter of protection of wild animals. They however urged the FD to create a highland in the area for distressed animals. They also asked the FD to initiate steps for vaccinating the cattle of the neighbouring people, to allow the poor people to take temporary shelter on the embankment adjacent to the park in times of need, to allow them to collect wood for making farm tools and to provide compensation for damage done to crops by the wild animals of the park.

Source: 'KNP wildlife protection awareness meet', *The Sentinel*, 23/07/2007.

### **Kaziranga TR boundaries notified**

The demarcation of the boundaries of the Kaziranga TR was announced in a notification issued in the first week of August. It will cover an area of 1,030 sq km of which 482 sq km will be the core area.

The core area comprises Kaziranga NP and the first, second, third and fifth addition areas while the buffer zone comprises the fourth and sixth addition areas, the Kukurakata RF, the Panbari RF, the Bagser RF, and the Laokhowa and Burachapori WLSs.

Source: 'TR status for Kaziranga NP', *The Telegraph*, 13/08/2007.

### **Project to showcase Karbi culture bordering Kaziranga NP**

As part of a project funded by the central government and implemented by the Karbi Anglong district administration, efforts are being made to set up a Karbi village to enable visitors to Kaziranga to sample the way of life of this local community here. The village will be named after the Karbi mythological heroine, Kajir Ranghangpi.

A sum of Rs. 2 crore has already been released for the first phase of the project, which involves the setting up of more than a dozen hamtuns (Karbi homes), an amphitheatre where the traditional culture of the community would be displayed, a restaurant where the emphasis would be on traditional cuisine, a centre where an outsider would be shown how the community uses herbs for treatment as well as fashion shows. A team of trained youths will also guide tourists in tracking and exploring the adjoining hills.

Source: Sarat Sarma. 'Glimpses of Kajir's realm', *The Telegraph*, 25/09/2007.

## Metal detectors for Kaziranga by year end



The Guwahati based NGO, Aaranyak, has decided to gift metal detectors to the Kaziranga NP to help deal with the poaching problem. It is hoped that metal detectors will help forest guards locate guns and rifles hidden in the park by poachers. 17 rhinos have already been poached this year, 10 of which were shot inside the park.

The NGO is looking for different models of metal detectors in various countries and the one best suited for the situation in Kaziranga will then be procured. This is being tried as a pilot project and if successful similar detectors will be made available in other PAs as well.

Source: Pullock Dutta. 'Hunt for rhino calf after poachers kill mother', *The Telegraph*, 17/09/2007.  
 Roopak Goswami. 'Metal detectors to outwit poachers', *The Telegraph*, 25/09/2007.

## Rs 1 crore sought for Kaziranga NP

The Assam FD has approached the Supreme Court for Rs. 1crore for development of the Kaziranga NP and to deal with the huge losses suffered in the recent floods. The money had been deposited more than a year

ago by Oil India Limited (OIL) as funding for compensatory afforestation for installing an optical fibre link between Upper and Lower Assam that runs through the park.

The FD had put forward a proposal for the company to provide 8,000 liters of petrol and diesel a year for vehicles used in patrolling the park. In response to the plea of the company that this was too much, the Supreme Court has asked them to pay an amount of Rs. 5 lakhs to the department for the purpose.

Source: 'Rs 1cr sought for park,' <http://www.telegraphindia.com, 10/11/2007>.  
 Padmaparna Ghosh. 'OIL to help monitor Kaziranga', <http://www.livemint.com, 07/11/2007>.

## Watchtowers constructed to warn of elephant raids near Kaziranga

Three watchtowers have been constructed in Lokhowjan, Rajabari and Borsapori to help the local farmers ward off raids by the wild elephants from the nearby Kaziranga NP. Frequent raids by elephants have angered the villagers who have resorted to attacking these elephants with spears and crude arms. Lack of compensation for the damage to their crops and property has further aggravated the problem. Nearly 174 hectares of agricultural land (yielding about 42 tons of crops) were damaged in Lokhowjan, Rajabari and Borsapori in 2006.

The watchtowers have been constructed by the WTI with the help of the Assam FD as part of an initiative under WTI's Rapid Action Project (RAP).

Source: 'Watchtowers constructed to warn of elephant raid near Kaziranga', <http://www.wildlifetrustofindia.org, 09/10/2007>.

## 18 rhinos killed in and around Kaziranga in 2007

Date	Range	Poaching method
07.01.07	Burapahar	Gun Shot
04.03.07	Kohara	Gun Shot
09.03.07	Burapahar	Gun Shot
15.03.07	Burapahar	Gun Shot
06.04.07	Agartoli	Gun Shot
13.04.07	Agartoli	Gun Shot
20.05.07	Burapahar	Gun Shot
03.07.07	Burapahar	Gun Shot
17.07.07	Bagori	Gun Shot
20.07.07	Agartoli	Pit poaching
24.09.07	Agartoli	Gun Shot
23.10.07	Bagori	Gun Shot

## Rhino deaths outside the Park area in 2007

26.01.07	Lakhimpur	Accidental
16.03.07	BhaktaChapori	Gun Shot
16.05.07	Golaghat	Accidental
06.08.07	Bonkowal	Gun Shot
06.08.07	NKAWLS	Gun Shot
15.09.07	Hatikuli T.E	Gun Shot

Source: <http://www.wildlifetrustofindia.org>

## Increase in Swamp Deer population in Kaziranga

A recently conducted census in Kaziranga NP has counted 681 Swamp Deer here; a significant increase from the 468 deer that were reported in the last census in the year 2000. The figure, however, was 58 short of the population during the first Swamp Deer census conducted in 1998. The first census conducted in 1966, which was carried out

along with the rhino census, had found 213 swamp deer.

Of the 681 swamp deer this time, 189 were male, 384 female and 108 yearlings. The park was divided into 14 compartments for the purpose of the count. The Burapahar Range which had never reported any Swamp Deer earlier had 22 animals this time.

Source: 'Swamp deer population jumps in Kaziranga', <http://www.wildlifewatch.in>, 14/12/2007.

## 2008

### Tiger death in tea estate bordering Kaziranga; management proposes acquiring part of estate

One tiger cub was found dead and another was found in a semi-conscious state in the Rongagora division of the Tata Tea-owned Hathikuli Tea Estate bordering the Kaziranga NP. Other wild animal carcasses are also reported to have been found here in recent months. Wild animals often stray into the tea estate, which forms part of a corridor from Kaziranga to the Karbi Anglong hills on the other side of NH-37.

Forest officials have said the recent incident happened because the tiger cubs consumed carcasses of cattle laced with a strong pesticide. Samples of the cattle flesh have been sent to State Forensic Laboratory in Guwahati and the FD has said that legal action would be initiated against the tea estate if pesticide presence was confirmed. They have also proposed to acquire the Rongagora Division of the tea estate to prevent such incidents in future.

The Tea Estate Management has, however, said that the company was aware of its responsibilities and that a decision had been taken to convert the 470 hectares estate into an organic plantation. 160 hectares are

reported to have already been made organic and the rest would also be converted in three years time. They have also not ruled out the possibility of one of their workers spraying pesticide on the cattle carcass to avenge for the loss he may have faced on its killing by the tiger, but have argued that they cannot be held responsible for the actions of one of their employees.

The FD in turn has argued that a bottle containing pesticides was found at the site and even if done by a worker it was proof that the tea estate management was using pesticides in the plantation.

In related subsequent developments the TE management has formed an eco-development committee to convince the FD of its commitment to wildlife protection. Space has also been provided to the FD to set up camp in the plantation area and a plea was also made to the plantation workers to help the park authorities to protect wildlife, particularly those animals that entered the area.

Source: Pullock Dutta. 'Kaziranga management counters tea pesticide threat', *The Telegraph*, 02/01/2008.  
'Tata in save-wildlife pledge', *The Telegraph*, 08/01/2008.

### **Protest against rhino poaching in Kaziranga**

Artistes, litterateurs and personalities from different fields staged a one-day sit-in demonstration at Latasil in the last week of January in protest against the spurt in rhino poaching in the state, and the Kaziranga NP in particular.

The demonstration that was organized by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the Assam Unnati Sabha also expressed concern over the rapidly shrinking forest cover in the state.

The agitators included Ramen Baruah,

Pulak Banerjee, JP Das, Dhiren Baruah, Dharmeswar Bora, Khanindra Chandra Das and Bijan Mahajan, among others, besides AASU adviser Dr Samujjal Bhattacharya, president Sankar Prasad Ray and general secretary Tapan Gogoi.

Nearly 20 rhinos were killed in and around Kaziranga NP in 2007 and as many as five have already been poached in the first three months of 2008.

Source: 'Demo against rhino poaching', [www.assamtribune.com](http://www.assamtribune.com), 28/01/2008.

### **Flood parts of KNP; anti-erosion project on the cards**

Large parts of the Kaziranga NP were submerged in the rising waters of the Brahmaputra in late July and again in early September.

A number of animals including deer, rhinos and elephants were seen moving to higher ground across NH-37. Reports in September indicated that at least seven hog deer were killed by speeding vehicles on the road. Three rhino calves and a swamp deer were also reported to have died, though not in road accidents. Authorities initiated special measures on the national highway to limit animal casualties. These included strict enforcement of speed limits, barricading and night patrolling.

In a related development, a Rs 7.49 crore proposal has been finalized to check erosion by the river at the Arimora and Agartoli ranges of the park. The proposal is an outcome of a joint survey carried out in August 2006 by the Forest and Water Resources departments of the state government to assess the problem of erosion here.

The work is to start in December this year with funds from the flood management programme of the Central task force constituted in 1998. The anti-erosion project will entail the construction of various



structures including bullheads and bars to protect the erosion-vulnerable areas of KNP. The project may also channelize the river for wildlife protection purposes, specifically for the passage of the animals across the NH-37 during the annual floods.

Source: 'Flood waters submerge Kaziranga Park areas', *The Assam Tribune*, 28/07/2008. 'Anti-erosion project to protect Arimora, Agartoli ranges at KNP', *The Assam Tribune*, 30/07/2008.

Susanta Talukdar. '60% of Kaziranga park submerged', *The Hindu*, 02/09/2008.

Susanta Talukdar. 'Kaziranga park begins search for animal carcasses', *The Hindu*, 08/09/2008.

### **No expansion of NH-37 running through Kaziranga NP**

The central government has decided to call off the proposed expansion of an 80-km stretch of NH-37 running through the Kaziranga NP to a four-lane expressway. The state government had earlier opposed the move, holding that the resultant manifold increase in the volume and speed of traffic would imperil the wildlife of the World Heritage Site.

The stretch that connects Jakhlabandha and Bokakhat cuts through the Kaziranga NP and speeding vehicles on this road kill about 55 animals every year. Apart from exacerbating this high incidence of road accident mortality in the area, the proposed expansion would also have seriously hindered the large-scale animal migration to the highlands across the highway that takes place in the park annually during the floods.

The state government had earlier come up with an alternative proposal for diversion of traffic of heavy and commercial vehicles through NH-52 on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, according to which heavy and commercial vehicles would be diverted

from Koliabor (Kolia Bhomora bridge) to the north bank, and pass Jamuguri and Gohpur before joining NH-37 at Numaligarh through a new bridge.

The UNESCO World Heritage Committee too had expressed serious concern over the proposed expansion, noting in its 32nd report that "upgrading the national highway will transform the already problematic road crossing into an impossible barrier for the wildlife of the property."

Source: 'Reprieve for Kaziranga: Expansion of NH-37 halted', *The Assam Tribune*, 19/08/2008.

### **Call to include Kaziranga portion in NH-37**

The NH-37 Conversion Demand Committee has urged the National Highways Authority of India to overturn the decision to exempt the Kaziranga portion (Kaliabor to Bokakhat) from expanding of the highway. The centre had called off the proposed expansion following pressure from the state FD and conservation organizations on the grounds that the resultant manifold increase in the volume and speed of traffic would seriously disturb the wildlife of the famed park.

The committee supporting the highway expansion has argued that the move would adversely impact the four lakh people living in the stretch between Kaliabor to Numaligarh by keeping them outside the purview of development. It said that instead of abandoning the NH-37 expansion on the Kaziranga stretch, the authorities could consider constructing elevated roads, tunnels and flyovers as corridors for facilitating animal movement.

The committee deemed untenable the argument of environmental NGO's that the park would be affected by the air pollution that would inevitably accompany the increase in vehicular traffic on the completion of

4-laning. It said that Kaziranga faced more serious problems like poaching, erosion by the Brahmaputra and lack of manpower, and these needed to be first addressed by the authorities.

Meanwhile, conservation bodies have expressed concern over the continued demands of the conversion committee. They have argued that the only viable alternative to ensure long-term security for the animals would be to divert the four-lane highway to the north bank.

Source: 'NH upgrade through Kaziranga opposed', *The Assam Tribune*, 15/10/2008.  
'Call to include Kaziranga portion in NH-37 expansion', *The Assam Tribune*, 21/10/2008.

### **Militants lay siege on anti-poaching camp in Kaziranga NP**

In a first-of-its-kind incident, a group of six armed Karbi militants climbed onto a camp-on-stilts in Kaziranga NP, held three guards hostage, ate their dinner and left early the next morning with a service rifle. The incident occurred in the month of November at the Paharline Camp under the Kohora range in the foothills of the Karbi Anglong Hills near the Hathikhuli Tea Estate. Though militants are known to use the NP as a hideout, this is the first time that any group has laid siege on an anti-poaching camp in this manner.

While six militants climbed onto the camp-on-stilts, several others stood on guard below. One spoke in Assamese while the rest used a tribal dialect. Though the guards had walkie-talkies, the rebels ensured that they were not used.

Karbi rebels have also reportedly served extortion notices to a few businessmen with establishments along the highway between Kaliabor and Numaligarh. Two unidentified rebels had been killed in October by security

personnel at Panbari RF, which is a part of the NP.

Park authorities have expressed concern that if the militant movement here is not checked, Kaziranga itself could be in danger. An appeal has also been made to the state government to set up a police picket to patrol the Karbi Anglong foothills frequented by militants.

Source: 'Militants lay siege on Kaziranga camp', *The Telegraph*, 26/11/2008.

### **Over 100 rhino deaths in Kaziranga in 2008**

Over a hundred rhinos have died in 2008 in Kaziranga NP. 10 of these were killed by poachers while the remaining deaths have been ascribed to natural causes, which include killings by tigers and deaths due to old age and in floods.

According to local residents the absence of a forest camp at Kemari means that poachers are often on the prowl here, lying in wait for straying rhinos. Meanwhile, the two forest camps at Moriahola and Bonkual lie idle as rhinos do not cross the thickly populated areas. While the FD plans to put up a new camp at Alami-Langlengia to guard the Lohere, Borbali and Shiyal chapories, forest officials say that apart from arms and equipment, the existing forest camps also need connectivity. A wireless tower, for instance, would help enhance communication among forest personnel.

Source: 'Rhino toll at KNP 100 in current year', *The Assam Tribune*, 11/12/2008.  
'Poachers kill 10 rhinos this year', *The Assam Tribune*, 31/12/2008.

### **Winter apparel donated to Kaziranga staff**

The Balipara Tract and Frontier Foundation, the Wildlife Conservation Trust and the Wild Grass Resort recently donated 700 sets of winter apparel to the staff of Kaziranga NP, with the support of the Assam FD. Frontline personnel, home-guards, casual workers and Assam Forest Protection Force members received apparel sets consisting of a jacket, a pair of boots and two pairs of warm socks. The sets were given in three separate lots in the central, western and eastern ranges by members of the foundation, accompanied by the park director and other FD officials.

Source: 'Winter apparel donated to KNP staff', *The Assam Tribune*, 13/12/2008.

### **Kaziranga elephants on rampage in Kaliabor area**

A herd of 100–140 wild elephants from Kaziranga NP caused considerable damage in the Kaliabor subdivision in December. The herd had been passing through Burapahar in the Karbi Anglong Hills. The affected areas included Dalgaon, Garikuri, Bharaligaon, Sakmothi, Oporchatial, Dolpukhuri, Majgaon Bamuni and Jaukata.

Another herd of eight – ten pachyderms was also on the rampage in the same region, particularly in Sonarigaon, Kamakhya, Silghat, Madhatari, Samdhara, Porabheti, Bagharchook and Sukanekhathi.

The elephants have destroyed standing crops and have also damaged rice storehouses, shops, kitchens and other property. Human casualties were also reported and the Kaliabor residents' efforts to chase away the herds using fire torches remained unsuccessful.

Locals say that despite a demand voiced at a September meeting held in the SDO (C) Kaliabor office, neither the wildlife department nor the civil administration had

taken adequate measures to address the problem. Residents said that the FD failed to post forest guards in Dalgaon and Garikuri and neither did it provide the people with necessities like fire crackers to drive away the animals.

Source: 'Tuskers on rampage in Kaliabor areas', *The Assam Tribune*, 15/12/2008.

## **2009**

### **Kaziranga rhino poachers bribed police official, villagers**

Two poachers who were arrested from Aphala village near Kaziranga NP for killing a rhino in December 2008 said that they had bribed a police official and a few villagers to allow them to continue their activities in the area. The village of Aphala is located 25 km from Kaziranga and is under the jurisdiction of the Kamargaon Police Station in Golaghat district.

The duo said that Rs. 1 lakh was paid through a middleman to an officer of the Assam Police Battalion who was in Charge of the Kamargaon Police Station. He, in turn was supposed to hand over the money to his senior. The poachers said that they had fired three bullets to kill the rhino and then sawed off its horn, nails and the tail before burying it in the backyard of a resident of Aphala.

The carcass of the killed rhino was dug out in the last week of December and the owner of the house was taken into custody. The poacher duo that was arrested in January confessed to being part of an 11 member gang, the rest of whom had managed to escape arrest. They also revealed that the rhino horn had been sold for Rs. 12 lakh to a buyer at Pisola in Sonitpur district.

The Golaghat Superintendent of Police subsequently directed the Sub-Divisional

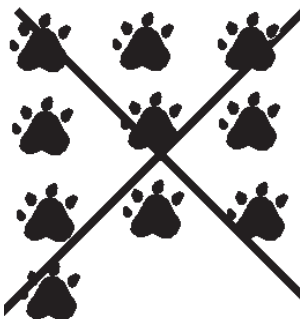
Police Officer of Bokakhat, Nobin Singh, to conduct an inquiry into the matter

Kaziranga has seen a spate of rhino poachings in recent months, with poachers killing 10 animals in 2008 alone. The All Assam Students Union (AASU) that has been protesting against the poaching of the rhinos has said that their claim of police involvement in the killings has now been proved.

Source: 'Poachers claim nexus with cop- Gang sells rhino horn for Rs. 12 lakh', *The Telegraph*, 22/01/2009.  
'Probe into bribery slur', *The Telegraph*, 23/01/2009.

### Nine tiger deaths in Kaziranga NP in three months

Authorities at Kaziranga NP have admitted to the deaths of nine tigers in the three-month period from November 2008 to January 2009.



This is the biggest casualty of tigers ever in Kaziranga over such a brief period.

While the park director has said that the reasons for the deaths ranged from poisoning by villagers to infighting and old age, others have said that several deaths had occurred due to poaching. They have also alleged that the actual number of deaths was higher and that forest officers were deliberately quoting a lower figure to avert a full-blown investigation.

Source: Naresh Mitra. '9 tiger deaths in Kaziranga in 3 months', *The Times of India*, 06/02/2009.

### Kaziranga receives funds from Project Tiger

The Kaziranga NP has received nearly Rs. 1 crore as funds from Project Tiger. The money was recently released by the state government to the park authorities. The central government has said it could release more funds depending on how this first installment is utilized.

A senior FD official, however, pointed out that the amount released to KNP was less than that given to the state by the centre. Moreover, even though Delhi had duly assigned the funds in time to Assam, the state's finance department had delayed passing on the funds to the park.

The park director has said that the money will be used mainly for work involving non-recurring expenditure, like infrastructure development. Repair work for roads and bridges would also be undertaken as their dilapidated state was seriously hindering park management. New anti-poaching camps may be built in strategic areas and the funds would also be used for acquiring arms and ammunition for anti-poaching and frontline personnel.

Additionally, the funds would help train field personnel in tiger-conservation skills through orientation camps and trips to well-managed Project Tiger sites. The need for training has gained added urgency with nine tiger deaths reported from the park within the last three months (see story above).

Source: 'Funds for Kaziranga tiger project', *The Assam Tribune*, 11/02/2009.

### Kaziranga NP estimated to have 16 tigers per 100 sq kms

An ongoing survey being undertaken by the conservation group Aaranyak has suggested the presence of 16 tigers per 100 sq km in the Kaziranga NP. This is being considered as a

population that is both, healthy and stable.

Camera traps installed in 50 locations in the Kohora and Bagori ranges have so far recorded more than 400 images. The final estimate from the survey would be ready by the end of April and it would lay the foundation for the final census to be conducted later this year. The endeavour is supported by the David Shepherd Foundation, Rufford Small Grants and the Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation.

Source: Prabal Kr Das. 'KNP has healthy tiger population, says survey', *The Hindu*, 15/02/2009.

### **MLAs enter Kaziranga NP illegally; attack forest staff**

Two Members of the Legislative Assembly of Assam, Mr. Jiten Gogoi, MLA from Bokakhat and Mr. Kushal Duori, MLA from Thowra, illegally entered Kaziranga NP on March 17 with automatic weapons including AK47s for fishing in the central range of the park.

Mr. Gogoi, reportedly, also attacked the Range Officer Mr. Dharani Dhar Boro when he and his staff tried to stop the MLAs. The duo then left the park in their vehicles and broke the Mihimukh forest gate as they drove through it. They then also damaged the Divisional Forest Office of the Eastern Assam Wildlife Division at Bokakhat.

This is not the first time that the two have been involved in illegal fishing in Kaziranga. Local NGOs and conservationists have protested against this criminal behaviour of the MLAs and have written to the Prime Minister to ensure that the state government takes suitable action.

Source: Bibhab Talukdar. Email dated 18/03/2009.

### **Rise in rhino population in Kaziranga NP**

A two-day census conducted in the Kaziranga NP in April has counted 2048 rhinos here. This is considerably more than the figure of 1855 rhinos from the earlier census of 2006. Some of those who participated in the survey have also suggested that the number could be higher than 2048 because grass burning was not perfect this year and therefore visibility was limited.

The highest number of nearly 700 rhinos was spotted in the Bagori range of the park and it has been estimated that mothers and calves now constitute about 39% of the total rhino population in Kaziranga.

The count this year was conducted by members of several conservation groups, local residents, and journalists apart from FD personnel including two former park directors.

Source: 'Rhino population rises in Kaziranga', *The Assam Tribune*, 18/04/2009.

### **Kaziranga Tiger Foundation not formed yet; reserve deprived of central funds**

The Assam government is yet to constitute the Kaziranga Tiger Foundation as a result of which the tiger reserve has been deprived of direct funds from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). The reserve is also yet to create its full-fledged tiger conservation plan (TCP).

The state is required to set up the foundation in accordance with the memorandum of understanding it signed with the NTCA. Of the total of Rs 4.22 crore sanctioned by the NTCA for the Kaziranga TR for 2008-09, the central assistance promised was Rs 3.06 crore, while the balance of Rs 1.16 crore was to be provided by the state.

Without the creation of the foundation the raising of a dedicated tiger protection



force, procurement of weapons and ammunitions, setting up of anti-poaching camps and undertaking other protection and conservation work have also been delayed.

The NTCA had also released Rs 1.5 crore as the first installment to the Kaziranga NP authorities, currently managing the tiger reserve. The money was to be spent before the end of the financial year with the unutilized amount to be returned to the Centre.

Source: 'Kaziranga tiger reserve deprived of direct flow of Central funds', *The Hindu*, 10/06/2009.

### **Hydroelectric projects in the North East may pose threat to KNP: Researchers**

A recent research paper: 'Probable impact of flushing and sluicing of sediment from dam reservoirs in the North Eastern India' has expressed concern that the Ranganadi Hydro Electric Project (RHEP) and the Lower Subansiri Hydro Electric Project may pose serious threats to the Kaziranga NP. This, the paper argues, is in addition to destroying the habitat of the endangered Gangetic dolphin in the Subansiri River.

The report says that the practice of frequent flushing and sluicing sediment and debris by the projects will create a natural sediment dam at the confluence of the Ranganadi and Subansiri rivers with the Brahmaputra. This may compel the Brahmaputra to change its morphology for maintaining the river continuum process, resulting in more inundation and erosion and this in turn could pose a threat to the Kaziranga NP.

The research project was carried out by a team led by Dr Debojit Baruah of the Botany Department of Lakhimpur Girls' College and is part of a major Union Grants Commission (UGC) project on the pre-impact assessment of the Lower Subansiri hydel project on its

downstream areas. The team conducted a study in the down stream areas of the 405-MW Ranganadi Hydroelectric Project (RHEP) which had been affected by flash floods on June 14, 2008 due to the, alleged, sudden release of water by the RHEP authorities.

It has been argued that during the last six years of its operation, RHEP has caused lots of negative changes to the Ranganadi river morphology downstream of its dam, besides affecting the river ecology and status of groundwater level and people's livelihood in the riparian areas. The most significant of all these changes is the gradual deposition of sediment from 2003, which attained its peak in 2008 due to sediment sluicing throughout the monsoon. The intensity of sediment deposition was such that residential houses in far-away Lakhimpur town, situated at a distance of 6 km from the river course and 50 km from the dam site, recorded deposits of 1.02 cm of sediment.

Source: 'Hydroelectric projects may pose threat to KNP: research team', *The Assam Tribune*, 12/06/2009.

### **Rhino count in Kaziranga now 2048**

The rhino count in the Kaziranga NP is now 2048, substantially higher than the number of 1855 from the last census in 2006.

As per the detailed findings of the 2009 rhino census, Kaziranga has 404 female rhinos with calves. The total number of calves is as follows: 100 calves (0-1 year), 221 calves (1-3 years), 83 calves (over 3 years). The rest of the population is made up of 597 adult males, 306 adult females, 165 adults of unidentified sex, 54 sub-adult males, 80 sub-adult females, 35 sub-adults of unidentified sex and three abandoned calves.

Source: Bijay Sankar Bora. 'Rhino count goes up at Kaziranga', *The Tribune*, 15/06/2009.



## **Opposition to eviction for expansion of the Kaziranga NP**

Takam Mising Porin Kebang (TMPK), the student body of the Mising indigenous community, has strongly opposed the eviction of their community in the name of the sixth expansion of the Kaziranga NP. The body has alleged that the state government was planning to settle the suspected Bangladesh nationals in parts of the NP between Jakhalabandha and Bagori along the national highway and it was to facilitate this settlement that eviction notices had been served on the indigenous people of 18 villages under Bakoridoloni Gaon Panchayat, Bartamuly Gaon Panchayat and Rawnamukh Gaon Panchayat in Sonitpur district.

It has also pointed out that the government was turning a blind eye to the rapid encroachment in the Orang NP, the Pobitara WLS and the Laokhowa WLS. Yet, about 10,000 Mising people who have been living in the areas around Kaziranga for a long time and have been paying land revenue since 1947, have been asked to vacate about 15,000 hectares of land for the expansion of the park.

According to other reports, hundreds of unidentified people (suspected to be Bangladeshis) have, over the last six months, occupied the tapus, chars and chaporis of the Brahmaputra in the southern side of Sootea, Jamugurihat and Tezpur in Sonitpur district. The places so occupied include Labtapu, Dhakaltapu, Longketapu, Piajtapu, Kalibhomora, and Burhachapari. The new arrivals are reported to have constructed innumerable small huts and even started cultivation on the land by challenging the local people as they are numerically larger than the locals. They have also started fishing in big beels like Kathdhora, Bowalmari, Chenidhora, Gajalimora, Lathimari, Nangkhawasuti and Jaranipuri.

It has also been alleged these new settlers lend a helping hand to the poachers in fishing and killing wild and endangered animals of the sixth addition of Kaziranga NP. The local administration, forest and police departments, it has been pointed out, have also not taken any action, though the situation has been brought to their notice a number of times.

The Mising student's body has said that the focus of the government should be on evicting these encroachers of doubtful origin and also to protect the park's land area from the erosion by the Brahmaputra.

Source: 'Encroachers posing threat to Kaziranga, local inhabitants', The Assam Tribune, 27/08/2009.  
'Mising body raps Govt over move to evict locals', The Assam Tribune, 11/09/2009.

## **Spate of wildlife deaths in and around Kaziranga NP**

A tiger, a rhino and an elephant were found dead on the same day in September in different parts of the Kaziranga NP. A tiger was found dead outside the Kohora range of the park but poaching was ruled out as the cause of the death in this case. It has been suggested that the killing may have been an act of revenge by neighbouring villages after reports of cattle lifting here. Other forest officials said that the tiger may have died after being seriously injured in a fight with a rhino.

A rhino was also killed by poachers on the same day and its body, with the horn chopped off, was found at the Burapahar Forest Range. In another incident, the same day, poachers gunned down an elephant and chopped off its tusks and trunk in the Karbi Anglong District in the area that lies between Panbari RF and the Dalamara Forest Range. The injury marks showed that a rifle was used to kill the elephant and that the trunk

had been cut off using a machete. This is the first case of elephant poaching in this area in the last two years.

Till recently, elephants used to pass through the Panbari RF in Golaghat to Karbi Anglong and Nagaland without any disturbance. But the situation is no more the same. The entire route, which traditionally covered areas like Panjir Pahar, Kakokchang, Deothar, and went up to Nambor-Garampani and Lengrapahar, is now marked with encroachments and relentless deforestation. The Panbari area too has seen stone excavation and tree-felling at a hectic pace in recent times.

The FD reported five days later that the poachers, who had allegedly been involved in poaching the rhino in Burapahar had been arrested in Nagaon district. The trio - two Paites from Manipur and a Guite from Karbi Anglong district's Manja area - were nabbed by foresters from Nagaon district's Salna area while they were looking for an exit route through the hilly Karbi terrain. They were later handed over to the police.

After killing the rhino, the poachers' gang had been ambushed by armed Kaziranga guards twice, once at the hilly Bagse RF and then at Rhinoland park. Despite a volley of gunfire, the poachers had managed to escape, but had been eventually captured.

The first week of October also witnessed the death of another rhino. While some suggested that it was case of poaching, other forest officials said that the animal had died of old age. The carcass of the female rhino with a missing horn was recovered near the western part of Dimoli Forest Camp under the park's Bagori Range. The carcass of another big cat was also found near the Mikirjam Forest Camp under the Kohora Range. Some reports suggested that it was a leopard and others said that the dead animal was a tiger. Preliminary reports suggested that the death had occurred due to poisoning.

In another incident that occurred a few days later, there was exchange of gunfire between forest officials and armed poachers after a rhino and a female tiger were found dead within the park. The exchange followed the detection by forest officials of the attempt by a gang of 10-12 poachers to enter the park through the northern fringe facing the River Brahmaputra. The exchange of gunfire took place outside Kaziranga at Bhokte Chapori, an island in the Brahmaputra located between Kaziranga and Golaghat Wildlife Division. It lasted for around 20 minutes.

The FD is also reported to have initiated a move to further equip the staff to deal with increasing incidents of poaching. Revolvers are to be provided to the range offices of different NPs in the state and an initial decision of giving 10 revolvers has also been taken. The FD will, additionally, raise an armed forest battalion of at least 600 personnel. The armed battalion will be trained at Bagmari near Kaziranga, which will also be the headquarters of the battalion.

12 tigers have died in and around Kaziranga since November 2008 and the rhino death toll for this year has already reached six.

Source: Naresh Mitra. 'Tigers found dead outside Kaziranga', *The Times of India*, 19/09/2009.  
 'Three rhino poachers held in Assam', *Times News Network*, 25/09/2009.  
 'Poachers gun down elephant near Kaziranga', *The Times of India*, 19/09/2009.  
[http://www.ptinews.com/news/318731\\_Poachers-kill-rhino-leopard-in-Kaziranga](http://www.ptinews.com/news/318731_Poachers-kill-rhino-leopard-in-Kaziranga)  
 Naresh Mitra. 'Gun battle rages in Kaziranga after Rhino, tiger deaths', *Times News Network*.  
 'Shootout in Kaziranga NP', [http://www.ptinews.com/news/321337\\_Shootout-in-Kaziranga-National-Park](http://www.ptinews.com/news/321337_Shootout-in-Kaziranga-National-Park)

### **Over one lakh people visited Kaziranga NP in 2008-09**

Over one lakh people visited the Kaziranga NP (KNP), during the year 2008-09. This included 1,00,284 domestic tourists and 5767 foreign visitors. This is twice the number as compared to the previous year. The revenue earned from tourism for 2008-09 was Rs 1.12 crore.

Source: 'Over one lakh people visited Kaziranga NP in 2008-09', [www.wildlifewatch.in](http://www.wildlifewatch.in) 03/11/2009.

### **PWD study for diverting traffic from NH 37 section through Kaziranga NP**

The Assam Public Works Department (PWD) is undertaking a feasibility study for diverting traffic from the 100 km stretch of the NH-37 which passes through the Kaziranga NP. The study comes after the centre shelved plans for four-laning of the portion of the highway following opposition from conservationists fearing the threat to wildlife here. Tens of animals are killed every year in road accidents when crossing the highway. This occurs mainly during the monsoons when the floods force animals to flee the low-lying grasslands to the higher grounds of the Karbi Anglong.

The feasibility study will take about 18 months to be completed and will be considering the construction of a new 115 km route with two bridges over the Brahmaputra. One of the bridges has been proposed to be constructed parallel to the existing 3.2-km Bhumuraguri bridge near Tezpur in order to make the route four-lane. The second bridge over the Brahmaputra has been proposed between Gohpur and Bokakhat. The main idea is to divert the traffic from Nagaon to Tezpur and then via Biswanath Chariali and Gohpur to rejoin the road with the south bank of the Brahmaputra through the second

bridge near Bokakhat.

The report of the feasibility study will be submitted to the Ministry of Surface Transport and work on the detailed project report would be taken up only after receiving a nod from the ministry.

Source: 'Two bridges over Brahmaputra, four-lane road by pass Kaziranga', *DNA*, 11/11/2009.

### **14 rhinos poached in Kaziranga NP in 2009**

A total of 14 rhinos have been poached in the Kaziranga NP in year 2009. The two latest deaths were reported on December 22 from within the park. They were killed with the help of automatic weapons at separate locations and their horns had been cut off. FD officials have suggested that the same gang of poachers was involved in both the killings. The spurt in rhino killings has the forest officials and conservationists worried. 18 rhinos were killed by poachers in Kaziranga in 2008, the first time in a decade that the number had reached double digits. Between 1980 and 1997 some 550 rhinos were killed by poachers in Kaziranga – the highest being 48 in 1992.

Source: 'Poachers kill two rhinos in Kaziranga; 2009 toll rises to 14', [www.wildlifewatch.in](http://www.wildlifewatch.in), 27/12/2009.

## **2010**

### **BSF to help protect Kaziranga NP**

The Assam government has joined hands with the Border Security Force (BSF) for providing manpower and intelligence assistance in protecting the Kaziranga NP. Though the park has about 500 guards, forest officials occasionally take help of

other agencies. Now, the BSF unit based at Panbari, close to Kaziranga, has agreed to extend help in checking poaching and other wildlife crimes.

The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Assam, is reported to have said that the BSF would provide manpower for patrolling both within and outside the NP, and its dog squad located at Panbari will also be used to help track down poachers.

An unified combat team consisting of personnel from the BSF, police, FD and representatives of the district administration has also been formed to keep a check on poaching in the park.

Source: 'BSF to help Kaziranga park check poaching', [www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com), 01/03/2010.  
'Unified team to check KNP poaching', *The Assam Tribune*, 26/02/2010.

### **FD elephant injures tourists in Kaziranga; visitors did not heed mahout's instructions**

A FD elephant attacked a vehicle and seriously injured four people including three tourists in the Kaziranga NP in the month of March.

The three tourists, a couple and a child hailing from Kolkata, had entered the Kohora range of the park for the evening jeep safari when they spotted the elephant coming with fodder on its back. One of them began taking photographs of the elephant and did not heed the mahout's instruction not to do so.

The elephant, named Rudra, attacked the vehicle which hit a tree and overturned, seriously injuring the tourists and the driver and severely damaging the vehicle.

Source: 'Elephant injures tourists in Kaziranga', [www.wildlifewatch.in](http://www.wildlifewatch.in), 16/03/2010.

### **Kaziranga NP gets record number of tourists**

The Kaziranga NP was visited by a record 1,12,844 tourists in 2009-10. This included nearly 6000 foreign visitors. Tourism revenue collected during the year was nearly Rs 122 lakh.

The park had recorded 73,716 tourists in 2006-07, 59,746 tourists in 2007-08 and 1,06,051 tourists in 2008-09.

Source: 'Tourist record at KNP this year', *The Sentinel*, 01/05/2010.

### **Locals protest killing of a youth by Kaziranga NP staff**

People of Silveta area under Bokakhat subdivision of Golaghat district have demanded a high level inquiry into the killing of Rahul Kutum by the Kaziranga NP forest guards. He was shot dead in the Bogpur area of the park on May 21.

Local people have claimed that Kutum was fraudulently declared a poacher. They have alleged that one Hariprasad Dolley of Agartoli area had helped the park officials in planning the killing.

Following a complaint from the family members of Rahul Kutum, the Bokakhat police arrested Dolley under section 302 of the Indian Penal Code. He was produced in court that then sent him to jail.

Source: 'Poacher killing: protest in Kaziranga NP', *The Sentinel*, 01/06/2010.

### **Speed restriction on NH-37 through Kaziranga NP**

The Assam government has ordered a speed limit of 40 kmph on vehicles using NH-37 through the Kaziranga NP. The move is aimed at ensuring the safety of the animals that are forced to move to higher

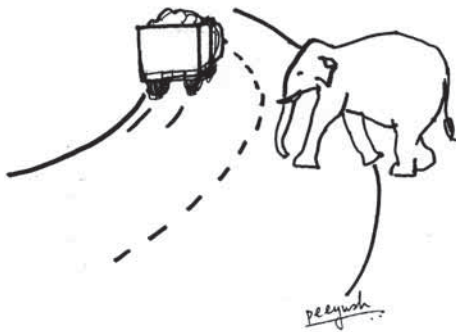
ground in the Karbi Anglong hills during the floods.

The government has also prohibited carrying of fire-arms, bows, arrows and other weapons. Stopping heavy vehicles in front of eating joints and blowing of horn in the areas close to the park will also not be allowed.

Recent flooding and subsequent inundation of the Kaziranga NP has, as in previous years, forced animals to cross the NH-37 to reach the dry highlands in Karbi Anglong hills.

Source: 'Speed limits set for vehicles in KNP', [www.sentinelassam.com](http://www.sentinelassam.com), 21/06/2010.

### **Elephant killed in road accident on NH-37 in Kaziranga NP**



An elephant was knocked down by a speeding truck on NH-37 in Kaziranga NP in the month of July. It was hit on the head by the truck while it was crossing the road in the Amguri area under Burapahar forest range of the park early in the morning. A week before that, about three deer were run over by vehicles on the highway.

There was significant movement of animals on the highway in that period following inundation of several parts of Kaziranga. During floods, animals from Kaziranga cross over the highway to reach higher grounds in Karbi Anglong district. Soon after floods engulfed the park in June, park authorities started issuing time cards to vehicles taking the highway between

Amguri and Kohora. It is a distance of 37 km which they have to cover in not less than 51 minutes.

The guards deployed at the two ends slap a fine on the driver if a vehicle was found to have reached in less than the prescribed time. Also, forest guards man all the posts along the highway between Amguri and Kohora from evening to early morning for restricting vehicular speed. However, in this case the animal was said to have been knocked down at a time when the guards were not at their posts.

Source: 'Speeding truck knocks down jumbo at Kaziranga', <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>, 18/07/2010.

### **Investigation demanded into forest official involvement in Kaziranga NP rhino poaching**

The Bokakhat subdivision units of the Assam Tea Tribes Students' Association (ATTSA) and the Assam Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) have demanded an immediate inquiry into the alleged involvement of the anti-poaching staff in incidents of killing rhinos in the Kaziranga NP.

Seven persons had been arrested by the Numaligarh police in the Labanghat area on May 17 in a rhino horn recovery case in Kaziranga NP. The prime accused, Tarun Ganak, had escaped then, but he surrendered at the Numaligarh police station in the last week of July. After his surrender, Ganak had alleged, in his confessional statement, that a number of forest officials employed in the Kaziranga NP were also involved in rhino poaching. Though Ganak refused to divulge the names of the officials involved to the media, he alleged that he had been threatened by forest officials to hush up the matter after the rhino horn was recovered by the police on May 17.



ATTSA submitted a memorandum to the Bokakhat Sub Divisional Officer demanding an immediate magistrate-level inquiry. The AJYCP also submitted a similar memorandum to the Kohora range officer on July 30. The organizations criticized the indifferent attitude of the state FD which they said, had led to an increase in poaching in the park.

The Numaligarh police out-post in-charge is reported to have said that the police would soon conduct an investigation into the matter.

Source: 'Forest officials involved in rhino poaching', *The Sentinel*, 31/07/2010.  
'ATTSA demands probe into rhino poaching case; AJYCP gives ultimatum of seven days', *The Sentinel*, 03/08/2010.

### Locals help to restore Kaziranga NP corridors

In a novel initiative, the local tribal community has joined hands with the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, WWF-India and the FD, for restoration of degraded animal corridors linking Kaziranga NP with the Karbi Anglong hills. The drive seeks to secure lost habitat comprising degraded forests through afforestation. The Panbari-Dolamora corridor critical to elephant movement from Kaziranga has been taken up for restoration under the project.

As part of the first phase of the initiative, the Karbi community undertook a tree plantation drive at Longdili-Bijuli, a degraded hill of five hectares owned by them. The plantation sites are located at the south-eastern end of the Panbari-Dolamara corridor on the Karbi Anglong foothills covering jhum (slash-and-burn agriculture) fallow land that need restoration.

Source: Sivasish Thakur. 'Locals help to restore KNP's animal corridors', *The Assam Tribune*, 22/10/2010.

### ONGC to support swamp deer conservation in Kaziranga NP

The Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) Ltd, in collaboration with the WTI, recently launched a conservation programme for the swamp deer in the Kaziranga NP. The main aim is to assist the Assam FD with a financial assistance of Rs 85 lakh.

Initially the project will be for a period of three years and if successful, it will be extended in other protected areas.

Source: 'Swamp deer conservation programme at KNP', *The Assam Tribune*, 17/11/2010.

### Confirmation that pesticides killed Kaziranga NP elephants

Forensic analysis of the viscera of the two elephant calves which died of suspected poisoning at Diffloo Tea Estate near Kaziranga NP (NP) has confirmed of organochloride pesticides as the cause of death. Although the post mortem report of the two carcasses specified poisoning as the cause of death, the viscera had been sent to the state Forensic Science Laboratory in Guwahati for confirmation.

The carcasses of the two calves were recovered from two separate drains inside the tea estate on October 6. Preliminary investigations found signs of poisoning on both the carcasses. The Diffloo TE authorities, however, denied a role in the deaths, saying they use chemicals used by all other tea gardens in the state, and elephants visit the garden regularly. A case was registered against the tea estate authorities.

The state FD had ordered an inquiry into the death of the two calves after Minister of Environment and Forests, Mr Jairam Ramesh, issued directions to conduct an inquiry and take stringent action against the guilty. A





one-man committee, headed by the Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF) – Wildlife, has been probing the incident. The CCF is also probing the death of two more elephants, both female, the carcasses of whom were recovered from different locations near Kaziranga NP a week after the recovery of the carcasses of the two calves.

This is not the first time that chemicals used in tea estates around Kaziranga have caused the death of wild animals. Two years ago, a tiger cub had died of poisoning at Rongagorah division of Hatikhuli Tea Estate, while another cub had been found in the tea estate in a semi-conscious state.

Source: Pullock Dutta. 'Pesticide poisoning behind death of elephants', *The Telegraph*, 04/12/2010.

### **Two poachers killed in Kaziranga NP**

Two poachers were killed in a gunfight with wildlife staff at the Kaziranga NP in December after a gang entered the area and killed a rhino.

A group of about four to six alleged poachers entered the park and shot dead an adult female rhino at the Turturoni camp near the Agartoli range and extracted its horn. On hearing the gunshots a team of forest guards gave the poachers a chase. The ensuing encounter lasted about 30 minutes during which two poachers were killed. The others managed to escape.

A .22 pistol, a .303 rifle, three bullets and live cartridges and a horn were recovered from the possession of the slain poachers. The Range Officer, Agartoli Range, is reported to have said that the poachers were most probably local people and the horn recovered was recently cut from the body of the rhino. The body of poached animal was still to be found.

Source: 'Two poachers killed in Kaziranga', *The Sentinel*, 14/12/2010.

## **2011**

### **71 rhino deaths in Kaziranga NP in 2010**

Figures given by officials of the Assam FD indicate that there were 71 rhino deaths in Kaziranga NP in the calendar year 2010. 45 rhinos are said to have died of old-age, one was killed by another rhino and 20 were killed by tigers. Five rhinos were also killed by poachers in the Agrotoli and Kohora ranges of the park. The same period also saw the death of 11 elephants and five tigers.

The FD staff killed nine poachers, arrested 11 and also recovered a large number of arms and ammunitions from the poachers. A total of 17 attempts of poaching were foiled by the forest personnel.

Source: 'KNP saw 68 rhino deaths in 2010', [www.assamtribune.com](http://www.assamtribune.com), 27/02/2011.

### **Threat from *Mimosa diplotricha* to Kaziranga NP**

A GIS-aided mapping project of *Mimosa diplotricha* at Kaziranga NP has suggested that anywhere between one and four percent of the park has been covered by this weed. *Mimosa diplotricha* is related to the common touch-me-not plant *Mimosa pudica* and is believed to have spread in the park from nearby tea gardens where it is used for the nitrogen fixation capability of its roots to enhance soil fertility.

The mapping project is being carried out by the Rain Forest Research Institute at Lahdoigarh by using images provided by the National Remote Sensing Centre, Hyderabad. The project has been going on since 2008-09 and has been completed for the Bagori range of the park.

Forest officials say that spread of the weed is only 2nd to poaching as a threat posed to the park. The three-year project under the state FD envisages complete eradication of

this plant which affects the growth of the tall elephant grass, food of the five herbivores of Kaziranga — elephant, rhino, deer, wild buffalo and sambar.

As the project envisages complete eradication, scientists will take up laboratory examination of the plant after the mapping is completed. The scientists have said they cannot use chemical or biological methods to deal with the plant and are trying to identify other means that would kill the weed but not affect the other flora and fauna of the park.

Source: 'Experts ring alarm bells on mimosa', *The Telegraph*, 03/03/2011.

### **Elephants' count decreases in Kaziranga**

According to the 2011 elephant census, there are 1165 elephants in the Kaziranga NP. This is 128 elephants less than those counted in the 2008 census. Of 1165 elephants counted, 297 were male, 460 were female and 226 are calves. Sexes of another 182 elephants could not be identified. The census was conducted over a week-long exercise starting February 20 and the park was divided into 81 parts for the purpose.

Reduction in the number of animals within the park has been attributed to natural deaths, poaching and the fact that the animals often move to adjacent forests in search of food.

Source: 'Slump in Kaziranga jumbo count: Census', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 08/03/2011.

### **Three forest staff killed in animal attacks in Kaziranga NP since January**

Three foresters have been killed in animal attacks in Kaziranga NP since the last week of January 2011. The most recent incident occurred in the first week of April near the Kartik forest camp under Kohora forest range. Bharat Das, a B-category forest guard died on the spot when a rhino attacked him.

He received critical injuries on the head, legs and chest leading to his death. On February 6, a forest guard had been attacked and killed by a rhino at the Mohkhuti forest camp in the Agartoli range. The deceased was identified as Nitul Dutta, a home guard who had been temporarily engaged as a forest guard for wildlife duty.

The first of the three incidents occurred on January 23, when a forest guard was killed in an attack by a wild buffalo near the Amkathoni forest camp under Bagori forest range.

Source: 'Another forest guard killed in Kaziranga rhino attack', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 08/04/2011.

### **Two Malinois (Belgian shepherd dogs) for anti-poaching operations at Kaziranga NP**

Two dogs of the Malinois breed, also known at the Belgian Shepherd, are being imported from Slovakia for anti-poaching operations in the Kaziranga NP. Jorba, a male, has been financed by the London-based David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation and brought to Assam by Aaranyak, while Czarina, the female, has been financed by Kaushik Barua, a wildlife lover. The breed is famed for its ability to sniff out explosives and enemy warriors and have been successfully deployed as military dogs by the US and European forces. This is the first time they will be used in wildlife crime detection in Asia.

A Malinois is said to have been part of the US Navy Seals team that raided Osama Bin Laden's residence in Abbottabad, Pakistan and killed him. There are reports that the breed will also be deployed by the security forces in the Maoist zones of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.

Source: Roopak Goswami. 'Osama raid dogs to hunt poachers', *The Telegraph*, 14/10/2011.

## **Kaziranga NP opens to tourists four days before schedule**

The Kaziranga NP was opened for tourism on October 28, four days ahead of schedule. The main reason was the pressure from tourists. The Jeep Safari Association had also requested the authorities to open the park early this year, as tourists had begun visiting since Durga Puja itself.

The park was opened by State Forest Minister, Mr Rockybul Hussain. 12 elephants and about 20 jeeps ferried tourists to the park on the first day in the Kohora Range. Elephant rides at the other ranges of the park are to begin shortly. 16 elephants would be introduced at the Bagori range while three elephants would be engaged at Burapahar range to ferry tourists.

The opening of the park was however held amidst protests by home guards who have not received their salary for the past several months. Some of them gathered at Mihimukh in the Kohora range and shouted slogans demanding their salaries. The minister is reported to have assured them that the salaries would be paid within a week.

Source: 'Plea to open park before November 1', *The Telegraph*, 20/10/2011.  
'Kaziranga bows to tourist pressure, opens early', *The Telegraph*, 29/10/2011.

# **LAOKHOWA WLS**

## **2001**

### **Eco-club formed in school near Laokhowa**

An eco-club has been formed at the Laokhowa High School in the vicinity of the Laokhowa WLS. It has been started with the help of Early

Birds, an NGO, under the MoEF's National Environment Awareness Campaign (NEAC) programme. A committee of 20 students, with the headmaster of the school as caretaker, has been formed. The club will work among the public for general awareness and particularly towards saving the Laokhowa WLS from further degradation.

Source: Moloy Baruah. Letter dated 05/03/2001.

## **2003**

### **Encroachment reported inside Laokhowa WLS**

Encouraged by political powers, a vast tract of land inside the Laokhowa WLS was reportedly encroached upon in the month of December. 700 families settled in forest villages near the sanctuary forced their way into the Singimari area of the park and cleared vegetation in preparation for agricultural activities.

The FD, ill equipped to meet the mob and afraid of mob violence in the event of their action in evicting the encroachers, informed the Nagaon district administration about the incident. The administration instructed the SDC of Samaguri to help the forest officials, but the police of the area refused to provide the necessary support saying that the area under encroachment did not fall under their jurisdiction.

Source: 'Heavy encroachment inside Laokhowa WLS', *The Assam Tribune*, 14/01/2003.

# MANAS NP

## 1999

### Forest staff killed in Manas

A group of miscreants killed three staff members of the FD on the night of 20th Dec. 1998 when they attacked the Kahitama beat of the Manas NP. The three were Bimal Chandra Kalita, Forest Guard; Hav. Bentik Sangma, and Constable Chandra Keswar Gogoi.

A communication from Dr SP Singh, the field director of the park, said that all the three were excellent workers and now their families are left with no source of income.

Source: Email from Belinda Wright dated 19/02/1999.

### Police withdraw from Manas

It is reported that the Superintendent of Police, Barpeta district, has recently withdrawn the battalion of Assam police that had been posted in the Bansbari area of Manas TR since 1989.

The presence of the police next to the forest range office had been an essential help during the last years of social unrest and increased poaching. Their withdrawal now poses a threat to the park, and local conservation groups are calling for their redeployment in the area.

Source: 'Police withdraw from Manas', *TigerLink*, Vol. 5, No.2, 06/1999.

## 2000

### Militant activity in Manas resumes

After five years of relative peace, militants are reported to have again become active in the Manas NP since September 2000. Militants of both, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), fleeing from camps in southern Bhutan following a military build-up in the Himalayan kingdom, have taken shelter inside Manas.

In fierce encounters between militant groups and security forces at least one forest guard camp (the Dighari forest guard camp) was reduced to ashes. Another camp, located at Bhuyanpara, was also partially damaged. The park authorities had subsequently ordered the forest guards to temporarily pull out of the park so that the militants did not get an opportunity to steal their arms and ammunition.

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), on the other hand, claimed that they had flushed out about 200 militants from within the park. They were helped by villagers living on the fringes of the park who constitute the Manas Bandhu groups.

Manas had borne the brunt of militancy, with Bodo rebels virtually holding sway over it, for two years in 1993-95, when militancy was at its peak in the state. The rebels had even 'captured' the main tourist bungalow inside the park, converting it into their headquarters, until the Army was called in to flush them out in 1995.

Source: 'Security forces flush out armed rebels from Manas NP', *The Indian Express*, 26/09/2000.

## **Poachers pledge to protect wildlife in Manas**

18 poachers who had been engaged in the killing of wild animals in Manas NP recently took an oath to give up poaching. Manas Bandhu groups, which have been formed here over the last two years for the protection of the park played a key role in this development. The Manas Bandhu group from village Kahibari, in particular, played a vital role in motivating this group of 18 poachers.

The oath was taken at a public meeting organised at Bansbari village on the fringes of the park in September last year. Before a gathering of over 300 people that included village heads, members of NGOs, and forest staff, they swore that they would not hunt animals in Manas again, would provide information to wildlife staff engaged in curbing poaching inside the park and join hands in the efforts of the Manas Bandhu Groups for preservation of this endangered wildlife habitat.

The chief guest at the event was Mr KD Choudhury, IFS (ret'd), former field director of Namdapha NP, and the function was presided over by Senior Honorary Wildlife Warden, Mr Dharanidhar Wari.

90 beneficiary families including 18 of the former poachers were also provided with handlooms and pressure cookers on this occasion. The beneficiaries were selected by frontline forest staff in co-operation with volunteers of the Manas Bandhu groups and final approval was given by respective range officers of the park. The gifts were sponsored under an ongoing eco-development programme here.

Source: 'Poachers pledge to save wildlife', *The Assam Tribune*, 30/09/2000.

## **Manas Bandhu groups formed in Manas**

As an outcome of the combined efforts of the FD and the people of Manas over the last two years, more than 25 Manas Bandhu groups have been formed. These groups are comprised of young volunteers from the villagers around the park and have been mainly involved in conservation work and organisation of awareness campaigns.

In order to keep up the enthusiasm, the FD conducted a workshop in the month of September at Bansbari to explore the possibilities of cooperation between these groups and other NGOs for taking up various activities related to wildlife conservation, generating opportunities for self employment and for strengthening people's support for Manas.

Source: 'Manas Bandhu Groups', *TigerLink*, 10/2000.

## **Tourists not permitted in Manas**

Fearing attacks from gun-toting militants in the Manas NP, the state government did not allow the Assam Tourist Development Corporation (ATDC) to take tourists to the park when the tourist season started in early November, 2000. Some private tour operators were, however, reported to have taken the risk and guided a few tourists who were keen on visiting the park. The latest information on the situation in Manas is not yet known.

Source: 'State Govt yet to permit tourists into Manas', *The Assam Tribune*, 19/11/2000.

## **4 NDFB ultras killed in Manas**

Four NDFB ultras were killed in the Manas NP in an encounter with the army in December 2000. Defense sources in Bongaigaon had received information that a group of heavily armed militants were to take the route

through the NP, coming down from their camp in neighbouring Bhutan. Accordingly, an ambush was laid in the forest under the Bijni police station area.

The army also recovered two .303 rifles, two muzzle loading guns, one Chinese-made grenade, a large quantity of ammunition, IED materials, safety fuses, and some incriminating documents including a list of government contractors working in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts.

Source: '4 NDFB ultras killed', *The Assam Tribune*, 22/12/2000.

## 2001

### **Tiger population down in Manas**

The recent tiger census carried out in the Manas TR has revealed that the population of the tiger here is now less than 70, down from 92 in 1988 and 81 in 1993. These figures are, however, still to be declared officially.

The census also indicated that the population of the Indian wild dog and the Pygmy hog had increased considerably while that of the Hog deer had gone down drastically. The tiger census was conducted using the 'pug-marks' method with the help of 250 FD staff, 50 members of the Manas Bandhu Groups and 18 elephants.

Source: 'Tiger population in Manas declining', *The Assam Tribune*, 1/04/2001.

### **New group, Green Manas formed around Manas**

A new group dedicated to working towards the conservation of Manas NP was formed in April 2001. Called 'Green Manas', it is comprised of several active members of the already existing Manas Bandhu groups and intends to undertake long term work for the revival and conservation of the park.

In a letter issued recently the group has said that the situation in Manas has changed considerably and for the better. However the media continues to focus on Manas as a 'haven for militants', creating a fear psychosis both outside and within Assam. While the park is still under severe pressure from poachers and timber fellers, the projection of it being threatened by militants is incorrect.

In fact, in recent years the local militant groups, though physically present in the area, are voicing their support for conservation. The letter further adds that though the park has a long way to go before it recovers, people can definitely start visiting it and they have extended an open invitation to people from all over the country. They have also appealed to conservation groups to help and support them to build up their group and their capacities to ensure the protection of the park.

### **Manas opened for day tourists**

Manas NP was opened for day tourists in the first week of November. A new tourist travel circuit in and around this world heritage site has been drawn up, which involves boating, elephant safari, motor driving and a forest lunch for a single day trip. The tourists will be confined to the relatively safer Bansbari range of the park and the Forest Inspection bungalow at Mathonguri was also being readied to welcome tourists.

Mr Abhijit Rabha, who has taken over as the new director of the park, admitted that the infrastructure inside the park had been damaged in the recent past, but added that 'out of proportion' adverse publicity in the media about the presence of militants inside the NP had caused irreparable damage to its image as a tourist destination.

Source: Bijay Sankar Bora. 'Manas NP all set to receive tourists', *The Assam Tribune*, 07/11/2001.



**2003**

### **Special steps mooted for Manas NP**

The Assam Government has proposed to raise an eco-task force and sensitize the police, army and other paramilitary forces to improve the security situation and end militant activities in the Manas NP and its surrounding areas under the proposed Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). This was discussed at a high level meeting held in Guwahati in the month of July. It was suggested that the expense to raise the task force could be met from the funds sanctioned by the MoEF and grants proposed to be given by the centre to the BTC.

The FD has proposed a number of steps towards improving the situation in Manas. These include the clearing of the Bansbari Mathonguri road to Bhuyanpara via Uchila, restoration of more than 15 damaged bridges on the boundary road of the park and making functional the forest camps at Uchila, Buraburi and Kuribil.

The field director of the park has been instructed to intensify patrolling in the park and the deputy director and research officer are to undertake an extensive motivation and awareness drive in the fringe villages here. It has been reported that the question of bringing the core and buffer areas under a unified control was also examined but not found feasible as the buffer zone extends over a massive area.

Meanwhile the Dolphin Conservation Society (DCS) too has, in collaboration with the park, initiated socio-economic surveys in 28 villages under the Bansbari range office area. The main objective of the programme is to gain the support and cooperation of fringe villages.

Source: 'Assam plan to corner rebels, bring Manas Park back to life', *The Sentinel*, 16/07/03.

'Dolphin Conservation Society to help restore Manas NP', [www.sanctuaryasia.com](http://www.sanctuaryasia.com), 28/08/2003.

### **Meeting of the Manas Biosphere Conservation Forum**

A two-day meeting-cum-workshop of the Manas Biosphere Conservation Forum (MBCF) was recently held at Mathonguri in the Manas NP. It was attended by members of a large number of wildlife organisations that included Araanyak, Nature's Foster, Green Heart Nature Club, New Horizon, Green Forest Conservation, and Community Conservation Incorporate (CCI Inc), USA, along with research scholars from Assam.

Stress was laid during the meeting on the core issue of developing a suitable strategy for conservation of the Manas Biosphere Reserve. It was resolved during the meeting to accelerate the move for amending the JFM rules of 1998 and to speed up constitution of community conserved forests as per the latest notification under the WLPA – 1972. It was also decided to initiate short and long-term plans to manage and develop activities of the forum and to urgently prepare a draft plan for the conservation of the Manas Biosphere that is to be submitted to the government for necessary consideration.

Some of the other points discussed during the meeting included sharing of information, studying the ground realities, the trans-border protected area programme, socio-economic studies of communities for development, channelising of government support, and the protection of the Golden langur as an umbrella species.

In this regard, eight committees have been formed with the initiative of Dr Rob Horwich of CCI to work out plans and initiate activities. It was also decided in the meeting that the DCs of the districts of Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari and Darrang

are to be included in the Manas Biosphere Reserve Committee.

The MBCF was formally founded on February 22, 2003, at Kokrajhar with five partner organisations, and an objective of conservation and protection of biodiversity in Manas with a special focus on the Golden langur as a flagship species.

Source: 'Strategy for conservation of Manas Biosphere Reserve discussed', *The Assam Tribune*, 21/09/2003.

### **Plans to make Manas NP vibrant again**

A number of steps are being initiated by the FD to improve the infrastructure in Manas NP and to put the park back onto the tourist map. 12 of the 42 forest camps in the park have already been activated and the FD is planning to reactivate the remaining within the coming year. Vacant posts are being filled up, patrolling paths have been reconstructed and weapons are also being provided to the forest personnel to improve security.

The FD has written to the public works department to improve the condition of the road from Barpeta Road to Bansbari to facilitate movement of tourists. Review meetings are also being held in every two months to monitor the progress of the revival plan.

The Tourist Department Bungalow near Bansbari, which was lying unused for years, has been renovated and leased out to a private party so that tourists visiting Manas can stay there. The FD has also asked the tourism department to set up camps for allowing night stay of tourists at Mathonguri.

Source: R Dutta Choudhury. 'Plan to make Manas NP vibrant again', *The Assam Tribune*, 07/10/03.

## **2004**

### **Mahout training institute proposed in Manas**

The dying art of elephant-capturing might get a new lease of life with the setting up of a mahout training institute at the Manas NP. The institute will also try to solve some of the basic problems behind rising incidents of human-elephant conflict. The Assam State Government has sent a proposal for the institute to the centre and has also taken up initiatives on its own.

Following the restrictions on forestry operations and the ban on the transport of forest timber, nearly 1,500 elephants used in the operations were forced to become unemployed. With less demand for elephants in the forests fewer elephants were required to be caught from the wild, and the art of elephant-trapping was on its way out. The proposed institute will be opened to keep alive this tradition of Assam.

The announcement for the proposed institute was made during a six-day workshop for mahouts being conducted at the Manas NP under the guidance of celebrated elephant expert, Parbati Barua. More than 15 mahouts and veterinary experts participated in the workshop and training program that was being held under the aegis of Project Elephant.

Source: 'Assam to have mahout training institute', *The Sentinel*, 26/05/2004.

### **Flood impacts in Manas**

Flash floods carrying uprooted trees and huge amounts of silt washed away parts of the Manas NP, killing a large number of deer. There were, however, no immediate reports of human casualties.

A large number of fibre-glass and inflatable boats of the FD in the park were

also washed away, leaving the staff stranded. This is the first major flood after 1985 and there are suggestions that one of its important causes is the dam that is under construction upstream on the Manas river near the Bhutan border. The road from Barpeta to Kokrajhar was breached, completely cutting off access to the park.

Source: 'Flash floods wash away parts of Manas NP', <http://www.wildlifetrustofindia.org>

### **ABSU for the protection of Manas NP**

The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) has taken up initiatives for the protection of the Manas NP. The Kokilabari unit of the student body recently handed over to the park authorities 50 firearms it had collected from poachers in the area.

Illegal trade in timber is said to have gone down as also the sale of deer meat. ABSU members have reportedly taken to patrolling portions of the park themselves, and are protecting a major part of Bhuyanpara area within the park. Efforts are also being made to conserve soil and water in areas neighbouring the park.

Source: 'ABSU goes all out to protect Manas', *The Sentinel*, 30/05/2004.

## **2005**

### **First Manas Biosphere Celebration**

The Manas Biosphere Conservation Forum (MBCF) is organizing the First Manas Biosphere Celebration on April 4 & 5 at Ultapani in Kokrajhar district. The aim of the celebration is to provide a platform for interactions among different stakeholders as by sensitizing the public for effective conservation of the reserve. The MBCF is a

consortium of various NGOs in Assam, that was formed in September 2003 to work for the conservation here.

### **BTC to celebrate Manas centenary**

The Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) has announced that it will be celebrating the centenary festival of the Manas TR in November later this year. This is to be modeled on the celebrations that were held recently in Kaziranga. The BTC is reported to be peeved at the step-motherly treatment received by Manas from the state government, because, they say, both Kaziranga and Manas were declared reserved forests under a similar notification in 1904.

According to Bisiram Narzary, Executive Member in charge of the Forest, Soil Conservation and Library Service Department of the BTC, the main objective of the centenary celebrations would be to make the people of the villages adjoining the park aware about the benefits of forest and wildlife conservation, and also to promote tourism in the region.

Narzary also expressed concern over the financial problems plaguing the BTC due to non-release of government funds in time. The Central Government's fund of Rs 1.58 crore for the ten-year working plan of the Manas Tiger Project had been released to the state government but had not yet reached the BTC authorities. Other funds against the plan heads for the year 2004-05 were also reported to be pending.

It has been pointed out that one of the biggest bottlenecks to the celebrations in Manas would be the poor condition of the roads to the park, including the 22-km stretch between Barpeta Road and Bansbari, and the roads from Patarkuchi to Bansbari via Salbari and from Nathkuchi to Simila via Kokrabari. Narzary also said that the process was already on to create a separate website for the Manas NP. A committee will also be formed

soon to chalk out the details of the centenary celebrations.

Source: 'Now BTC to celebrate Manas centenary', *The Sentinel*, 18/02/2005.

### Community based eco-tourism project in Manas

Residents of Kokilabari under the Bhuyanpara range on the eastern fringe of the Manas NP have reconstructed a 40 km stretch of road inside the park to enable the work of the FD and are also part of a new community-based ecotourism initiative in the region.

The initiative has been taken up jointly by the Chapaguri-Kokilabari unit of the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), the Maozigendri Eastern Manas Eco-Tourism Society, the Siliguri-based Help Tourism and Ashoka Holidays. A special tour package, Manas-100, has been launched, too. It includes jeep safaris, exploration of forest trails, elephant rides, visits to Hornbill Point and a Bengal florican survey.

The activities lined up in the nearby villages include treks, functions showcasing folk culture and an introduction to traditional weaving and methods of distilling country liquor. ABSU's office has been converted into a dormitory where tourists can stay. There is also a proposal to start home stays by October and 10 houses are expected to be readied for this by then. The project is expected to cover 57 villages in eastern Manas.

Source: 'Villagers pave protection path', *The Telegraph*, 04/03/05.  
Anuradha Sharma Lakhotia. 'Bodos give up the gun to conserve and promote wildlife sanctuary', *The Telegraph*, 10/03/2005.

### Rhino relocation to Manas

The FD and the Manas NP authorities are planning to reintroduce the rhino into the

Manas NP. As the first step, a three-year-old female rhino from the Animal Rescue Centre at Kaziranga is to be relocated in Manas by November, later this year. The rhino would be radio-collared and kept under constant monitoring for protection. The animal's movements will be restricted to a specific area and she will be under constant observation for a period of a year.



The rhino is to be released near Kuribeel under the Bansbari range of the Park. Field Director, Manas TR, Mr Abhijit Rabha said that with the gradual improvement of the security scenario a feasibility study of translocation of rhinos from other protected areas was carried out recently. He said that initially they wanted to begin with one or two rhinos, because the security scenario was still not totally foolproof.

Manas was reported to have nearly 100 rhinos till about the late 1980s. After that, the period of social unrest severely damaged the park's security system as well as other infrastructure, and the rhinos were poached out of existence here.

The field director also said that there have been recent reports of the presence of at least one other rhino in the Park. The last rhino was thought to have been killed in

Kokilabari in 2001, but the present indication is that a couple of rhinos might still be surviving. There are also indications of to and fro movement of rhinos from Kurichu in Bhutan.

Source: 'Rhinos set for return to Manas', *The Assam Tribune*, 09/06/2005.

### **Document on wildlife areas in BTAD**

The Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) authorities have commissioned a document titled 'Prospects of Wildlife Areas in BTAD'. It is being put together by a team of wildlife experts and researchers including the field director of the Manas TR. The document will focus on the present status of the Manas NP, Orang NP, Barnadi WLS and Chakrasila WLS along with 26 RFs here.

Manas NP is likely to occupy centre-stage in this plan, details of which are still awaited. The BTAD has said that much needed to be done for the improvement of Manas, particularly its infrastructure. The FD has pointed out that there is an urgent need for resources, including money and frontline staff to ensure better protection of Manas.

Source: Prabal Kr. Das. 'Protection of Manas biodiversity top priority', *The Assam Tribune*, 13/06/2005.

### **Camera traps installed in Manas NP**

A project for the use of camera traps to research wildlife and its behaviour was recently launched in the Manas NP. The cameras being used here have been designed by the Indian Institute of Science's Centre for Electronic Design and Technology. The camera contains a motion sensor that triggers its shutter, when there is movement in front of it.

At present the cameras are gathering images at randomly selected sites within the NP. A total of 16 such traps will eventually be installed. Presently five are in place. The project was formally launched by Dr Anwaruddin Choudhury, Deputy Commissioner, Baksa, in November, and will be managed by the NGO Aaranyak.

Source: Prabal Kr. Das. 'Camera traps installed in Manas Park', *The Assam Tribune*, 22/12/2005.

## **2006**

### **Conservation training program held at Manas**

A week long conservation training programme, starting February 22, 2006, was held at the Manas NP. Titled "Conservation Beyond Boundaries" is was meant for young conservation workers and was organized jointly by the British High Commission, the British Council, Association of British Scholars (ABS) Guwahati Chapter and Aaranyak. The FD and Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) were the collaborating agencies for the programme.

23 trainees participated in the programme that was inaugurated by Mr Kampa Borgoyari, Executive Member – Forests and Tourism of the BTC. Those who spoke at the inaugural function included Dr Bibhab Talukdar of Aaranyak; Dr Rosie Trevelyan, Tropical Biology Association affiliated to the Cambridge University; Dr Anwaruddin Choudhury, DC Baksa; GC Basumatary, Council Head of Department, Forests BTC; Abhijit Rabha, Field Director Manas NP; and Sanjay Sarkar of the British Council.

Source: Dr. Bibhab Talukdar, Email dated 24/02/2006.



## GPS mapping of Manas

A project initiated by the field director of the Manas NP is trying to create a detailed GPS-based map of the Manas NP. It is hoped that once completed, the effort would create a new database for the use of park authorities and researchers. As part of the initiative so far some animal tracks inside the park have been marked. The pugmarks of tigers and some routes preferred by elephants have been recorded as are details of a few important forest types.

Several important man-made routes among various beats and camps have been marked. It is hoped this will enable forest personnel to reduce response time in accessing different areas, a significant factor in confronting poachers or timber smugglers. The project is, however, said to be short on funds, which is affecting its initial momentum.

Source: 'GPS to map Manas NP', *The Assam Tribune*, 07/05/2006.

## Award for Manas Maozigendri Ecotourism Society

The Manas Maozigendri Ecotourism Society (MMES) has been awarded the Anirudh Bhargava-INTACH Environmental Award for the year 2005. The MMES has been working in parts of the Manas NP and has been able to reduce poaching and illegal felling of trees inside the park. Acting as volunteers, its members patrol the park and also play host to tourists at a venue they have developed.

Source: 'Eco-tourism body chosen for award', *The Assam Tribune*, 23/05/2006.

## Manipur bush-quail re-sighted in Manas

The Manipur bush-quail has been re-sighted in the grasslands of the Manas NP by a team including Dr. Anwaruddin Choudhury, Deputy Commissioner, Baksa District and Deputy Director of Manas NP, Ritesh Bhattacharya. The bird was spotted in the Panbari Range of the park 75 years after its last confirmed sighting.

The bird was last seen in Assam nearly 99 years ago, when some specimens were collected from the Mornai Tea Estate (now in Kokrajhar district) for the British Museum, American Museum of Natural History and Bombay Museum of Natural History between 1905 and 1907. A pre-1932 sighting of the Manipur bush-quail in the Imphal Valley by a British officer J C Higgins was believed to be the last of this specie in the world.

The Manipur bush-quail is a 'restricted range' species as its global range is confined to two adjoining small areas, between North Bengal and the northern bank of the Brahmaputra and between the hills on the southern bank of Brahmaputra and Manipur.

Source: 'Rare bird sighted after 75 years in Assam', *Deccan Herald*, 25/06/2006.

## Bodoland Forest Protection Force raised

The Department of Forests in the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) has recently created the Bodoland Forest Protection Force (BFPF) involving local youths, on the initiative of NGOs. During the 57th Vanmahotsava week celebrated at the Kachugaon forest inspection bungalow in the Kokrajhar district, recently, 100 BFPF personnel were ceremonially given identity cards.

A total of 200 youth are to be recruited as part of the force. 100 of these have been recruited in Kokrajhar while 50 have already been posted at Manas NP to protect the forest



and wildlife and to take up conservation activities.

A monthly remuneration of Rs 1500 will be given to each of these men along with an uniform, vehicles and other logistic support. The BTC authority is also going to approach the Ministry of Home for arms for the personnel, to be used for forest protection while on duty throughout the forest territory in BTAD. The recruited personnel have already received some training from the Assam Forest Protection Force of the FD. It has also been reported that the newly formed force has already been effective. In one instance, 2000 cubic feet of forest wood was seized from illegal traders in the area. Additionally, hundreds of bicycles of woodcutters and sellers of illegal forest timber and two vehicles used by timber smugglers have been caught by them.

Source: 'Bodoland Forest Protection Force raised', *The Assam Tribune*, 02/08/2006.

### **White-winged wood duck sighted in Manas**

In what is believed to be a significant sighting, five White-winged wood ducks were recently spotted in the Manas NP. This is the first time in many decades that the bird, which is the state bird of Assam, has been seen outside of the Upper Assam region.

The bird was seen by noted conservationist Dr Anwaruddin Choudhury who was also able to photograph the bird.

Source: 'Rare duck species spotted at Manas', *The Assam Tribune*, 08/08/2006.



### **Reports of timber smuggling from Manas TR**

There are reports that organized gangs are indulging in large-scale tree felling in the forests of the Manas TR and ferrying them out to nearby trading posts. Trees with a good market value such as bonsum, khokan, sida and titasopa are in good demand. Illegal sawmills are also reported to have cropped up in parts of Barpeta district to process this timber.

The banks of the Beki River and the eastern side of the Panbari Range are said to be the most affected. Other reports also suggest that Indian nationals were entering Bhutan for felling of trees in the Royal Manas NP. The Bhutanese authorities have written to their Indian counterparts referring to the problem.

Forest officials have suggested that they need to be given jurisdiction over adjoining regions where the timber is sawed to effectively deal with the problem. They also cite a shortage of field staff to undertake effective patrolling. At the field level the Manas NP presently suffers from a shortage of 129 personnel.

Source: Prabal Das. 'Field day for timber smugglers', *The Assam Tribune*, 17/08/2006.

### **Manas celebration program held**

A day-long Manas celebration programme was held on December 13 at Zumduar at the foothills of the Indo-Bhutan Black Mountain located in the Gossaigaon subdivision of Kokrajhar district.

The program that was organized jointly by the Assam FD (Kachagaon Forest Division), NGOs and the fringe villages of the Manas NP was attended by thousands of people. It was organized as per the resolutions of the Manas Biosphere Celebration (Ultapani) 2005 aimed at accelerating the process of people's

participation in the conservation process of Manas. The program was supported by the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) and sponsored by the BTC, the WTI, Aaranyak, the WWF- India and the Rhino Foundation.

One of the main aims of the celebration at Zumduar was to re-establish the linkage of the various communities with Manas. It also provided a platform to exchange and share views among the stakeholders about future conservation and management needs of the park. The programme began with the ceremonial inauguration of the celebration by BTC Deputy Chief, Khampa Borgoyari and was followed by traditional dances.

A public meeting to discuss and recommend measures for the future conservation of Manas was chaired by Gossaigaon MLA Majendra Narzary. Community Conservation Executive Director, Dr Robert Horwich; the SDO (C) of Kalikala Subdivision of Bhutan, Dilip Kumar; SDO (C) Gossaigaon, SK Tyagi; Commandant, 31 SSB GB Gurung; BDO from Bhutan, GM Karki; Assistant BDO, Bhutan and many other dignitaries from Bhutan, BTC and the Assam FD also participated.

Source: 'Manas celebration meet highlights the importance of conservation', *The Sentinel*, 14/12/2006.

## 2007

### Two rhinos released in Manas

Two female rhinos, named Manashi and Roje were recently released at Bansbari in the Manas NP. The animals had been translocated from Kaziranga NP as part of an initiative of the WTI and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW).

Source: 'Two rhinos released in Manas', *Assam Tribune*, 30/01/2007.

### Elephants translocated to Manas suffer from bug bites

Six elephant calves translocated to the Manas NP from the Kaziranga NP are suffering from bites of the *Tabanus* flies, blood sucking parasites that are not found in Kaziranga.

The flies are found in Manas in abundance in the dry season and there is also a shortage of wallows in Manas that could have helped the elephants to escape from the bites. The elephants had to be drugged by the authorities to provide them temporary relief.

Insect samples have also been sent to the College of Veterinary Science in Guwahati to find out if they can spread diseases.

Source: 'Shifted elephant calves in Assam face bugs', *Deccan Herald*, 16/04/2007.

### Timber smuggling in Manas NP

There are a number of reports of increased timber smuggling from within the Manas NP. About 100 logs were seized in the month of May by Border Security Force jawans at Kahitema beat under Bansbari forest range when an attempt was being made to load them into a boat. These were then handed over to Barpeta Road forest office.

Similar seizures of 55 logs at Lubdunguri and 200 logs at Nichukaghat were also made in the preceding months. It has been alleged that timber smugglers are carrying out their activities in connivance with a few officials and workers of the FD.

Source: 'Timber smuggling on at Manas NP', *The Sentinel*, 20/05/2007.

### World Heritage Committee's monitoring mission not satisfied with Manas NP

Manas NP continues to be on UNESCO's list of World Heritage in Danger because many recommendations of the World Heritage

Committee's (WHC) Monitoring Mission of 2005 have not been implemented.

Some of the recommendations that were made include the need to work with the Bhutan government regarding release of water from the upstream dam as it causes widespread floods in Lower Assam; setting up of a co-ordination mechanism between park staff and the Bodo people on planning and conservation activities; identifying sources of funds and timely release of money for the park's management in compliance with the Supreme Court ruling; mechanisms for transferring funds directly to the park through agencies such as the Wildlife Areas Development and Welfare Trust; a management plan for invasive species and defining roles and expectations of all relevant stakeholders in relation to future community development activities.

The Govt. of Assam had submitted its report in response at a recent meeting in Christchurch in New Zealand and the WHC found many inconsistencies. It was pointed out, for instance, that there was a discrepancy in the elephant population reports for 2006 and 2007. The 2006 report noted an increase from 567 to 658, whereas the 2007 report indicated a decline from 567 to 247. The report did not include new information on communication facilities within the park, particularly re-building of bridges and culverts. On vacancies too, it was found that there was a shortfall of 140 positions out of 445 sanctioned posts. The committee also made a note of the fact that the information on bird population and habitat was very limited.

The WHC has asked the central government to provide an updated report on the park by February 1, 2008 for examination by the committee at its 32nd session next year.

Source: 'Why is Manas still in danger', *The Telegraph*, 02/08/2007.

## **Two flyovers in Manas to protect wildlife**

Two flyovers will be built on a stretch of NH-152, flanked by the wilds of Manas NP, to divert speeding vehicles away from wild animals crossing the road. A 12-km stretch of the busy highway, which connects Pathsala in Barpeta district to Nganglam in Bhutan, cuts through the park.

The project for the flyovers was sanctioned recently by the Union ministry of Surface Transport. The budget and the specifications of the proposed flyovers have not been finalised yet, but each of the structures would be between 1 km and 2 km long.

The highway is also to be realigned to facilitate construction of the flyovers, resulting in a portion of it moving further east. The project includes two more bridges on the River Pota, which flows along the Indo-Bhutan border. The Manas flyover project is the result of a suggestion made by the Deputy Commissioner of Baksa District, Anwaruddin Choudhury, to the public works department (PWD) in September 2005.

A meeting was convened on December 3 that very year to discuss the issue with engineers of the PWD's highway division following which they gave their assent.

Source: Pullock Dutta. 'Fly over forest, spare animals', *The Telegraph*, 21/09/2007.

## **Cycle squads to counter poachers in Manas**

Taking a cue from the Indian Army's extensive use of bicycles in counter-insurgency operations, Manas NP authorities have decided to deploy 'bicycle-squads' in its anti-poaching drive. The army had found bicycles to be very effective in interior areas with very poor or no roads at all.

The squad in Manas comprising of 40 bicycles was to be launched in the last week

of November. An additional 40 bicycles will also be eventually procured.

The park has also procured four motorcycles and several new guard camps have been set up in the remote areas of the park to ensure better protection.

Source: Pullock Dutta. 'Manas cycle squads to counter poachers', <http://www.telegraphindia.com>, 20/11/2007.

## 2008

### 61 poachers surrender in Manas NP

A group of 61 poachers, the most in a single day in Assam, surrendered before authorities in the Manas NP in February.

They surrendered before the Deputy Chief of the Bodoland Territorial Council, K Borgoyari and also deposited 26 country-made weapons that were in their possession. Those who surrendered have also promised to be part of the rhino conservation program that has been recently initiated in Manas.

The surrender program was attended by the Director of the Manas NP and the Executive Director of the WTI.

Source: 'Surrender rids Manas of poachers', *The Telegraph*, 26/02/2008.

### Fourth rhino introduced into Manas NP

A one-and-a-half year old female rhino was recently introduced into the Kuribeel area of the Bansbari Range of the Manas NP. This is now the fourth rhino that has been introduced here as part of the Indian Rhino Vision 2020 program to repopulate areas like Manas with rhinos.

Since 2006, four rhinoceros calves raised in captivity have been brought to Manas from the Kaziranga NP for release here. The four animals, all orphaned females, were raised

at the Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC) near Kaziranga, a project initiated by the WTI and the IFAW with support from the FD.

The first three rhinos had been transferred in 2006. The latest animal to be relocated to Manas had been rescued from a tea garden next to the Kaziranga NP after its mother was shot dead by poachers in September 2007.

Source: Sanjeeb Baruah. 'Manas park set to repopulate rhinoceroses', *India E-News*, 04/03/2008.

### Rhinos relocated from Pobitara to Manas 'straying' regularly

Authorities at Manas NP plan to erect an electric fence along a 10-km stretch on the southern boundary to stop two trans-located rhinos from moving into adjoining fields and settlements.

The two rhinos were brought from the Pobitara WLS a few months ago as part of the Vision 2020 plan to increase the rhino population in the park. They have, however, been regularly straying into the adjacent paddy fields, where they recently injured three farmers as well.

At present, the park has six rhinos. Four of these are restricted to a special enclosure while the two from Pobitara are allowed to roam freely. Forest guards on bicycles are constantly guarding the boundaries of the park to stop the rhinos from moving into human habitat and are reportedly facing many problems since these areas are inaccessible because of the lack of proper roads.

The field director of park said that the rhinos had become a headache and that the problem would hopefully be solved once the animals get a few electric shocks.

Source: 'Manas to fence in 'homesick' duo', *The Telegraph*, 18/06/2008.

## **Manas poachers join green NGO**

Four poachers from the Sibrubari area under the Batabari Forest Range, who were involved in poaching activities in Manas have joined the Manas Souisi Khongkhor Eco-Tourism Society.

The four surrendered their guns under an initiative of the All Bodo Student's Union (ABSU)'s Nikashi Anchalik Committee in Baksa district and have vowed to help the NGO in protecting wildlife.

Source: '4 poachers join green NGO, vow to protect wildlife', *The Assam Tribune*, 01/09/2008.

## **Male rhino gores female to death at Manas**

A two-year-old female rhino was found dead within the fenced area of the Manas NP in October. She was one of four rhinos rehabilitated to Manas by the WTI as part of the Vision 2020 plan to increase the rhino population in the park. It was confirmed that the cause of death was a severe attack by a male rhino that had been recently been moved here from Pobitara WLS.

One of the two male rhinos trans-located to Manas in April has also reportedly been damaging crops and entering residential areas near the park. It had gone missing for a fortnight in September, and was finally found by park authorities in an interior area near Mushalpur.

Source: 'Male rhino gores female to death at Manas NP', *The Assam Tribune*, 26/10/2008.

## **2009**

### **SSB proposal to set up border outpost in Manas NP**

The Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) has sought permission from the Assam FD to set up a border outpost inside the Manas NP along the Indo-Bhutan border. Similar outposts have been set up in the Valmiki NP in Bihar along the border with Nepal.

The SSB has, in a letter to the FD, mentioned that there are five outposts in Chirang district but those were nearly 20km from the border and were not helping in preventing subversive activities, including wildlife crimes. The SSB now has border outposts in Panbari, Lakibhora, Bishnupur, Donsiapara and Kumarsali, which are part of the buffer area of park.

Forest officials are reported to have expressed their concern about the setting of the outpost because of the disturbance this would cause to the wildlife here. It is feared that road construction itself would be a disturbance and further, that better and more roads will also lead to more road kills of wild animals. The SSB is reported to have said that its structures will be temporary and all care would be taken to conserve wildlife.

Source: 'Manas frowns on outposts – Foresters say SSB hub inside park may affect wildlife', *The Telegraph*, 21/01/2009.

### **Erosion threat to parts of Manas NP**

The Beki River is reportedly eroding vital areas of the Manas NP. Only 12–15 feet now remain between the river and the well-known Mathonguri tourist bungalow. The land beneath the bungalow is also leaning onto the river. Forest officials have reportedly not yet undertaken any erosion-control measures here.

The lower Assam districts of Barpeta and Baksa had sustained heavy damage in 2004 and then again 2007, when the Beki broke its embankment in Narayanaguri. Although the breach was plugged last year, the erosion has continued and the Tinmail area of the park is also threatened.

Source: 'Manas Tiger project threatened by erosion', *The Assam Tribune*, 17/02/2009.

### **Rs. 646 lakh relocation package for Manas TR**

The central government is reported to have sanctioned Rs 646 lakh to relocate people from inside the Manas Tiger Reserve. A total of 912 families have been identified for the relocation.

The reserve authorities have said that each family will be paid Rs 10 lakh as part of the relocation package.

Source: 'Delhi move to save tigers', *The Telegraph*, 16/04/2009.

### **Hand reared Asiatic black bears released in Manas NP**

Three orphaned Asiatic black bears that were hand reared have been returned to the wild in the Manas NP. The bears were acclimatised to the wild conditions through daily walks in the forests, following a soft-release protocol. The release was executed jointly by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), the WTI and the Assam FD.

The bears had been rescued by the FD in three different incidents from local people, who had held them captive around March 2008. They were handed over to the lower Assam unit of the IFAW-WTI Mobile Veterinary Services for hand-raising and eventual rehabilitation.

This is the third batch of bears to be successfully sent back to the wild. The first two batches were rehabilitated by IFAW-WTI and Arunachal Pradesh FD in 2006 and 2008 respectively in the Pakke Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh.

Source: 'Bears back to the wild', *The Hindu*, 31/05/2009.

## **2010**

### **Timber cut illegally from Manas NP seized**

A team from the Bureau of Investigation into Economic Offences (BIEO) of the Assam State Police seized 227 logs allegedly cut from the Manas NP. The seizures, estimated to be worth Rs. 3 lakh, were made from different parts of Barpeta district: Bhaluki, Solmara, Joysreehati under Barpeta Road Police Station; Helpaguri, Gohain Kamal Ali under Howly Police Station and Gellipara under Sarbhog Police Station.

According to the BIEO the logs were smuggled out of the park through the Beki river. Some licensed saw mills and another 150 odd illegal bench saw mills in various parts of Barpeta district are reported to be operating based on timber procured in this manner from the Manas NP.

Source: 'Timber seized in Barpeta dist', *The Assam Tribune*, 24/01/2010.

### **Manas Tiger Reserve Information System**

The environmental NGO Aaranyak, in collaboration with the FD of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), has developed an information database for the Manas Tiger Reserve called the Manas Tiger Reserve Information System (MANTRIS).



It is a web-based Geographical Information System (GIS) that will be of immense help for park managers and stakeholders besides nature and wildlife enthusiasts. It contains detailed information on all aspects of the tiger reserve including administrative centers, forest boundary, land use pattern, drainage, forest villages, NGO locations, roads network, elephant points, Golden langur points, and a digital elevation model (topographic model) of the tiger reserve.

The project was financially supported by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) and is the first of its kind web-based information software on any of the protected areas in the north-east of the country.

The software is now available in digital format with Aaranyak which has plans to make it available on the internet subject to approval of the FD. The digital copy of MANTRIS is available for conservation agencies on request.

### **India, Bhutan to jointly monitor Manas tigers**

Officials of the Manas NP, India and the Royal Manas NP, Bhutan have agreed to a joint initiative to monitor the movement of tigers between the two parks having contiguous areas. The decision was taken at a meeting held recently at Bansbari on the Indian side of Manas.

Around 450 sq km will be covered on both sides of the boundary and the exercise will continue for two months. On the India side, the areas covered would be Bansbari and Bhuyanpara, while in Bhutan the authorities would be covering the Manas range of the Royal Manas NP. The meeting discussed the concept of Greater Manas. The need for trans-border cooperation and for having regular joint meetings was also discussed. A resolution was passed for conservation of greater Manas landscape.

The different organizations that will be part of the program include WWF-India, Aaranyak and the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment.

Source: Roopak Goswami. 'India, Bhutan to jointly monitor Manas tigers', *The Telegraph*, 11/11/2010.

### **Health camps for patrol elephants and staff of Manas NP and Pabitora WLS**

Three health camps for forest staff and elephants working under Bansbari Range of the Manas NP were organised in the month of December 2009 and a similar one-day camp was organised in Pabitora WLS in January 2010.

The Manas camps were organized by the North Bank Landscape team of WWF-India, ATREE (UNESCO-WHS program) and Assam FD in collaboration with the Department of Health and Family Welfare, Barpeta district; Indian Medical Association, Barpeta Road; College of Veterinary Sciences, Khanapara and Blue Cross Society, Guwahati.

The Pabitora health camp was conducted with support from International Hospitals, Guwahati, in association with the Assam FD and the Pabitora Conservation Society.

Source: 'WWF-India strengthens patrolling of Assam's wilderness during winter', <http://www.wwfindia.org/?3960/strengthens-patrolling>

## **2011**

### **Four more rhinos for Manas NP**

Four rhinos were released in the Bansbari range of the Manas NP in the month of January. The rhinos were transported overnight with security cover and under the expert supervision of five veterinarians.

They are fitted with radio collars and will be monitored continuously for the next year by the staff of Manas NP with support from WWF-India.

This was part of the second round of the second phase of rhino translocations under the Indian Rhino Vision 2010 programme which aims to reintroduce a total of 20 rhinos into Manas by the year 2011. Eight of these have already been translocated from Pabitora WLS.

Source: '4 rhinos released in Manas', *The Assam Tribune*, 19/01/2011.

### Rescued elephant calves released inside Manas NP



Five elephant calves from the Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC) were released in the Manas NP in February as the first step towards their re-integration with wild herds.

The calves, one female and four males, between the age of three and five years, were rescued under varying circumstances from different parts of Assam. All these calves had been separated from their natal herds – two were victims of conflicts with people, one was displaced during floods while the remaining two were found in tea gardens. They were admitted to the CWRC situated

near the Kaziranga NP for rehabilitation, as they could not be reunited with their herds immediately.

After a 12-hour journey, monitored by CWRC veterinarians and animal keepers, the calves were released in the wild at the Daimari beat for the initiation of their in-situ acclimatisation. At Manas, the calves will undergo a prolonged habituation process under close supervision of the FD officials. Their behaviour as individuals and their interactions with each other as well as other wild elephants would be observed and recorded as they grow independent of their keepers. Once the calves are completely detached from their keeper and return to the wild, they would be monitored through radio collars.

The rehabilitation of these calves in the wild and is being implemented by the Assam FD, the International Fund for Animal Welfare and WTI with the support of the Bodoland Territorial Council.

Source: 'Elephant calves moved to Manas', *The Assam Tribune*, 05/02/2011.

### Rebels kidnap WWF volunteers in Manas TR; released subsequently

About 20 suspected militants of the anti-talks faction of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) abducted six WWF-India volunteers at gunpoint from the Labanyapur area of Ultapani RF which falls under the Manas Tiger Reserve. The incident took place in the first week of February at a place that straddles Kokrajhar and Chirang districts in the western part of Assam. It is near the India-Bhutan international border.

The abducted volunteers were working in the area for about a month and were expected to finish their work in a couple of days when the incident occurred. Four personnel of the FD, who accompanied the volunteers, were, however, left free by the abductors.

The needle of suspicion pointed towards the proscribed anti-talks faction of NDFB, which had recently sent feelers to the state government on its intention to hold peace talks. It has a strong presence in Ultapani and its adjoining areas along the international border. Ultapani, a 34-km drive from NH- 31, is known for the presence of a wide diversity of life, including the Golden langur.

Security forces said the abduction could be a retaliatory measure against the anti-insurgency combing operation in the area, which is about 60 km from Kokrajhar, the headquarters of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). The abductors also reportedly refused to talk till the combing operations were withdrawn. BTC deputy chief Kampa Borgoyari and BTC executive member James Basumatary also visited Ultapani in a bid to secure the release. Borgoyari even contacted the abductors and appealed for the safe release of the abducted volunteers.

Several conservation NGOs in the north-east had demanded the safe and early release of the abducted volunteers. In a joint statement, WWF-India, WTI, Aaranyak, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, Dolphin Foundation and EcoSystems-India, said the volunteers were students from the region who were engaged in tiger population estimation work in Manas Tiger Reserve as a part of an all-India exercise.

In July last year, four SSB personnel including an assistant commander were ambushed and gunned down by the anti-talks NDFB faction in a forested area near the Bhutan border in Chirang district. The anti-talks faction was also involved in the abduction and subsequent release of Maharashtra forest official VS Bardekar. He was abducted from a village in Arunachal Pradesh and later released at Dhekiajuli in Sonitpur district of Assam.

The six volunteers were eventually released unharmed. The three women

volunteers were released on February 9, while their male colleagues were released about a week later.

Source: 'Rebels kidnap WWF volunteers in Manas', *Times News Network*, 08/02/2011.  
'Militants release WWF volunteers in Assam', [www.assamtribune.com](http://www.assamtribune.com), 17/02/2011.

### **Genetic assessment of tigers at Manas TR**

The Assam Government has asked the wildlife NGO, Aaranyak, to carry out a genetic assessment of the tiger population in the Manas TR. This follows the success of the NGO researchers in a similar exercise carried out in the Buxa TR in North Bengal.

The authorities at Buxa TR had asked Aaranyak to carry out a genetic assessment of the tiger population as the NGO has its own wildlife genetics laboratory. There are at present 15 tigers in Buxa of which three are male and nine female. The gender of the remaining three could not be ascertained following the methodology used for the study. The Buxa study had shown that DNA-based techniques of tiger identification were a practical and low cost option to estimate the population of the big cat and for the long-term monitoring of this species in the protected areas of the country. Unlike camera trapping, where huge costs and lot of logistics are involved, this method is cheaper as faecal samples are easy to collect.

Following the request of the Manas TR authorities, faecal samples have been collected from Bansbari and part of Panbari range. Manas TR is estimated to have a tiger population ranging from 15 to 18 animals.

It is relevant in this context that the National Tiger Conservation Authority



has been talking to experts in genetics to standardize a uniform protocol for field data collection and analysis.

Source: Roopak Goswami. 'DNA study of Manas tigers', *The Telegraph*, 22/03/2011.

### **Manas TR taken off World Heritage danger list**

UNESCO has upgraded Manas NP from the list of 'World Heritage in Danger', reflecting the revival of the formerly beleaguered PA. The decision to remove the 'in danger' tag was announced during the recently held 35th Session of the World Heritage Committee (WHC) in Paris. The decision was an outcome of voting by 22 member countries to the WHC. An independent review on the status was done by the IUCN to apprise the committee on the present situation in Manas.

It was in 1992, amidst the civil unrest of the 1980s and 90s, that Manas was declared 'a World Heritage in danger'. The turn-around in Manas is believed to be a combination of the resolution of political strife resulting in the creation of the Autonomous Bodoland Territorial Council under the Bodo Accord (February 2003) and the concerted efforts by successive governments and local people assisted by committed NGOs and individuals.

Till date, the WHC has deleted two sites from the World Heritage List. These include the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary in Oman, delisted in 2007, and Dresden Elbe Valley in Germany, in 2009.

Source: 'India gets back its pride: Manas no longer 'in danger' of losing World Heritage status', [www.wti.org.in](http://www.wti.org.in), 21/06/2011.

### **Manas to get more Swamp deer**

The FD is planning to increase the population of Swamp deer at Manas NP in accordance

with the suggestion given by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee (WHC). According to the FD, a plan has already been charted out for exploring the prospects of translocation of the deer based on deliberations at a workshop held in February. The FD and the Wildlife Institute of India had organized the workshop.

The relocation project will be for a period of three years and would be carried out after it gets the nod from the MoEF.

It is expected that some of the 1200 deer found in the Kaziranga NP will be moved to Manas. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) has insisted that a proper assessment of habitat and number of swamp deer to be introduced will be carried out before actually implementing the translocation plan. The present Swamp deer population in Manas is said to be about 20 animals.

Source: 'After rhinos, forest dept plans to increase swamp deer population in Manas', [www.economictimes.indiatimes.com](http://www.economictimes.indiatimes.com), 02/07/2011.

## **NAMBOR-DOIGRUNG WLS**

### **2003**

#### **Proposal to create sanctuary comprising Nambor and Daigrong Forests**

The Golaghat Forest Division of the Assam FD has proposed the creation of a new WLS comprising the RFs of Nambor and Doigrong and spread over an area of nearly 9450 hectares. A proposal for the same was recently submitted to the Chief Conservator of Forests of the state.

The division has also reportedly formed 24 public committees to assist the FD in

forest protection work here. Additionally a Rs. 4.8 crore plan has also been drawn up for the protection of the area and this is proposed to be done with the help of the committees.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) has also released some funds for project work of the division and Project Elephant authorities too have visited the area.

Source: 'FD plans to protect Nambor reserve', *The Sentinel*, 14/01/2003.

### **New 'Nambor Daigrong WLS' declared**

The Assam Government has recently issued a notification announcing the declaration of the Nambor Daigrong WLS spread over an area of 97.15 sq. kms. This includes 20.73 sq km of the Lower Daigrong RF, 21.50 sq kms of the Upper Daigrong RF and 54.92 sq km of the Nambor RF.

Source: 'Nambor Reserve Forest now a wildlife sanctuary', *The Assam Tribune*, 16/10/2003.

## **NAMERI NP**

### **2001**

#### **18 elephant deaths in Nameri**

At least 18 wild elephants are reported to have died in the recent past in the Nameri NP and the adjoining



Pakhui WLS in Arunachal Pradesh. Most of the wild elephants killed were calves and semi-adults in the 3–7 years age bracket. The first death was reported in the first week of July and the reasons for this are not yet clear.

According to one point of view the elephants have been poisoned by villagers who live in areas adjoining the park. Elephants here are known to cause large scale damage to crops and the villagers may have retaliated to save their crops. The other reasons to support this theory include the fact that the elephant deaths were mainly reported from areas where there is large scale crop depredation. Death due to diseases like Foot and Mouth were also ruled out because all herbivores other than the elephants remained unaffected.

The other point of view is that the elephants have been severely hit by some disease. The symptoms, which include blood, pus and body fluids oozing out from all the pores of the body - mouth, ears, trunk and anus towards anthrax. However, the State Veterinary Department, in a statement released to the press, said that the elephants were affected by liver fluke worm. The worm is water borne and is usually found in the livers of sheep and pigs. At least 13 domestic elephants of the State FD too were reported to have been affected.

Recent reports have suggested that the deaths were due to poisoning. The doctors of the State Veterinary College investigating the elephant deaths have confirmed this, following the forensic report in which the 'organo-phosphorus' pesticide (Demecron) was detected in a sample of an elephant carcass. It has been suggested that the pesticide was mixed in country-made liquor that the elephants are very fond of.

Source: '7 tuskers die in Nameri', *The Assam Tribune*, 15/08/2001.

'18 elephants feared poisoned in national park', *The Hindu*, 20/08/2001.

Shankhadeep Choudhary & Mita Goswamy. 'Man-animal inflict claims 12 tuskers', *The Times of India*, 21/08/2001.

Samudra Gupta Kashyap. 'Elephant deaths in Assam park spell trouble



for authorities', *The Indian Express*, 21/08/2001.  
 Dibya J Bora. Email to Kalpavriksh dated 30/08/2001.  
 Surajit Khaund. 'Pesticide poisoning responsible for pachyderm deaths at Nameri', *The Assam Tribune*, 15/09/2001.

## 2002

### **Sonitpur administration bans Demecron**

The Sonitpur district administration has prohibited the sale and purchase of the organo-phosphorous pesticide called Demecron throughout the district with immediate effect. The order was issued in view of a number of cases of death of wild elephants due to the consumption of the pesticide in Nameri NP in Assam and the adjoining Pakhui WLS in Arunachal Pradesh.

Source: 'Pesticide banned', *The Assam Tribune*, 05/07/2002.

### **Six elephant deaths in October in Kameng-Sonitpur ER**

There have been reports of the death of at least six elephants in the Kameng-Sonitpur ER in the month of October. Forest officials have said that at least three of the deaths seem to have occurred because of natural reasons, as the bodies of the animals were found in deep gorges, indicating death due to fall. The other three bodies were found next to the Monobag Tea Estate.

Forest officials suspect that the death of these three animals could have been because of the consumption of the pesticide, Demecron, which was banned a few months ago. They feel that, despite the ban, some of the tea gardens are continuing to use the pesticide. Tea industry officials have however refuted these allegations stating that none of the tea gardens were using the pesticide after

it had been banned. They did not, however, rule out the use of the pesticide by some of the encroachers in the forest areas who were using the forest land for paddy cultivation.

According to villagers of Balipara, Ghoramari and Bihaguri, the migrating wild elephants from nearby forests damaged their standing crops worth around Rs 8 lakh in September and October. The villagers have reported that 250 to 300 wild elephants have been moving in groups in the inhabited areas of Sonitpur and have created panic here.

Last year too, a large number of elephant deaths, due to poisoning by Demecron, were reported from Nameri NP in Sonitpur District and the adjoining Pakhui WLS in Arunachal Pradesh. While official sources had put the death of elephants in the district at 17, unofficial sources say that at least 31 elephants were killed here.

Source: 'Villagers kill 4 wild tuskers in Sonitpur', *The Assam Tribune*, 12/10/2002.  
 'Elephant deaths baffle Assam officials, blame game begins', *The Times of India*, 22/10/2002.

## 2010

### **Road widening threat to wildlife in Sonitpur Elephant Reserve and buffer of Nameri Tiger Reserve**

The Assam FD has allowed the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) to widen the Balipara-Bhalukpong road in Sonitpur district, raising concerns about impacts on wildlife and its habitat in the Sonitpur Elephant Reserve and the buffer of Nameri Tiger Reserve (TR).

It has been reported that the BRO has started massive hill-cutting in the area to facilitate the widening, despite the MoEF not issuing the mandatory clearance. A three-member expert committee of the FD, which was asked to give an on-the-spot report,



observed massive earth-cutting from the adjoining hillocks and also found that 4 km of the road inside the buffer area has already been constructed.

The BRO had sought right of way of 36 metres, which was later reduced to 22 metres. As compensation, the FD has asked the BRO to pay five percent of the proportionate project cost for wildlife conservation and human wildlife conflict mitigation measures. The BRO has also been asked to put up speed restriction signals on the road, similar to what has been done in Kaziranga NP.

The request for widening of the road was made in light of its strategic importance and relevance in the context of concerns on the Indo-China border. An expert committee of the FD had pointed out the serious impacts this would have but the recommendations have been overlooked.

The committee had pointed out that elephants from the Nameri TR use this road frequently as a corridor. The use is particularly substantial in winter when they move to Sotai Pahar, which is a part of Balipara RF on the western side of the road. A major part of Sotai Pahar is still intact with the presence of bamboo at many places. The construction and widening of the road is also expected to lead to cutting down of many trees.

Source: Roopak Goswami. 'Road threat to wildlife', *The Telegraph*, 21/08/2010.

## **ORANG NP**

### **Medical camp in Orang**

The Refineries Employees' Trekkers' Guild (RETG) along with the WWF-India and Early Birds conducted a month long veterinary and human camp in January in villages around the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP.

Over 1000 heads of cattle were vaccinated in the villages of Bezimari, Mislamari, Borbhogia, Thapaparara, Nalbari and Kaoharitop bordering the park. FD elephants were also treated. Employees and family members of the FD were also examined on the occasion.

## **1999**

### **Orang in trouble**

The population of the rhino in the Orang NP has fallen drastically. According to the latest census in March 1999 only 46 rhinos were counted here, compared to 97 in 1991.

Meanwhile, in February, a few hundred villagers moved into the sanctuary, began felling trees and erecting temporary structures in the Chandanpur area. However, combined action by the administration and the police was instrumental in evicting the encroachers within four days.

Source: 'Rhinos decimated in Orang'; 'Civil administration rescues Orang', *TigerLink* Vol.5, No.2, June 1999.

## **2000**

### **Veterinary and human care camp at Orang**

The Guwahati-based NGO, Early Birds, recently organised a veterinary cum human care camp in and around the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP. The camp which was held for the sixth consecutive year was organised in association with another NGO, the Refinery Employees' Trekkers' Guild.

Source: Letter from Moloy Baruah dated 24/01/2000.

## Rhino poaching continues in Orang

Five rhinos have been poached in the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP, in the first half of 2000. Additionally there is continued large scale poaching of other wildlife like deer and migratory birds as well. On the 24th of May the DFO (Wildlife) Mangaldoi Division, in association with the police, apprehended three individuals who admitted to be associated with a number of rhino-poaching incidents in Orang.

The rhino population in the park has fallen drastically from 97 in 1991 to only 46 in 1999. At this rate, experts believe, rhinos will be wiped out from Orang like they were earlier from Manas and Laokhowa. There are also reports of large-scale encroachments on the park by foreign immigrants, some allegedly with political backing. It is estimated that of the 80 sq km of the park area, 28 sq km have been encroached upon in this manner.

One of the problems here continues to be the shortage of manpower. According to wildlife officials, 30 posts have been lying vacant in Orang and these need to be filled immediately to ensure the effective patrolling and protection of the park. This is also important considering Orang's proximity to the porous Bhutan border. Poachers are known to sell animal products like rhino horn, tiger teeth and bones and hides to insurgent outfits camped across the border. These are then resold to procure arms for secessionist activities.

Source: Dr. Rathin Barman. Email dated 28/05/2000.  
 'Orang WLS in grip of encroachers', *The Assam Tribune*, 09/06/2000.  
 Rahul Karmarkar. 'Poachers enjoying free run', *Hindustan Times*, 15/06/2000.

## Rhino poaching in Orang

The continued poaching of rhinos in the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP was discussed during the last meeting of the State Wildlife Advisory Board in Guwahati in July earlier this year. It is estimated that 51 rhinos have been killed in Orang in the last decade and five were killed in the first half of 2000 itself.

According to an official present at the meeting, concern was expressed at the situation but no concrete plan was drawn up to tackle the issue. The Guwahati High Court has also asked the government to reply within three months on the steps being taken to stop the incidence of poaching here. A public interest litigation (PIL) has been filed in the matter by the Aranya Suraksha Samiti, an NGO working for wildlife conservation in the state.

Source: Roopak Goswami. 'Extinction spectre over rhinos', *The Telegraph*, 27/07/2000.

## 13 rhino deaths in Orang in 2000

13 rhino deaths were reported from the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP in the year 2000. Of these eight were killed by poachers while the other five died during floods. Orang has been adversely affected by a number of factors including poaching, encroachment and a severe shortage of staff.

The FD says that it needs at least another 150 personnel, including forest guards, to effectively protect the park. According to the 1999 census report the park had 46 rhinos. This is now reported to have fallen to 30. According to police sources, poachers have links with an international gang who supply rhino horns from Dimapur in Nagaland.

In spite of the problems the FD was able to apprehend five poachers with the help of the police last year. Those arrested included notorious poachers like Hasen

Ali of Rangagara village, and others like Roysuddin, Naresh Mandal, and Maqbul Ali.

Source: 'Rhino death toll 13 in Orang', *The Assam Tribune*, 16/12/2000.  
'Orang sanctuary in danger from encroachers, poachers', *The Assam Tribune*, 19/12/2000.

## 2001

### **50 rhino poachers surrender in Orang**

50 rhino poachers operating in the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP recently surrendered in front of the forest officials of Darrang district, police staff of Silbari police station and members of Aranya Surakhya Samiti at Orang recently. A greater Silbari 'Aranya Aru Banyaprani Surakhya Samiti' was also formed on the occasion.

Source: '50 rhino poachers surrender in Udalgiri', *The Assam Tribune*, 08/03/2001.

## 2004

### **Protection for Orang NP to be upgraded**

The Assam FD and the Darrang district administration have decided to launch a joint effort along with NGOs to curb poaching in the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP, the only home of the rhino on the northern bank of River Brahmaputra. The initiative will be launched with the participation of the people living in the vicinity of the park.

The district administration has already decided to form at least five village defence parties (VDP) in the fringe areas of the park for the protection of the park and its wildlife. It has also been decided to upgrade the Silbari Police Outpost adjacent to the park as a tourism and eco-friendly police post. This

will be done by providing basic facilities, information and security arrangements to the tourists.

These decisions were taken after a visit to the park, a few days earlier, by Superintendent of Police (SP), Darang; DFO (Wildlife) and DFO (Territorial) to review the situation here. The SP had reportedly assured the park authorities of all assistance and co-operation in protecting the park.

Source: 'Plan to protect Orang NP', *The Sentinel*, 02/03/2004.

### **Flood impacts in Orang**

The rising waters of the Rivers Dhansiri and Panchnoi, along with that of the Brahmaputra, submerged about 90% of the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP.

The floods resulted in the erosion of about 20 hectares of the park in addition to causing major damage to 15 camps and four buildings, including the washing away of the forest camp at Gaspara. An estimated 150 hog deer and 80 wild pig were also reported to have been killed.

Source: '90% of Orang park area submerged', *The Sentinel*, 18/07/2004.

## 2005

### **Opposition to naming NP in Orang after Rajiv Gandhi**

The decision of the Assam state government to rename the Orang NP as the Rajiv Gandhi NP has elicited considerable opposition from various quarters. The announcement for renaming of the park was made during the celebrations of the Rajiv Gandhi Abhay Urja Divas on August 20.

Bhargab Kumar Das, Honorary Wildlife Warden resigned from his post in protest.

A number of organizations, including the Green Society, the Aranya Suraksha Samiti, the AASU, the AJYCP and the Dalgaoon Forest and Wildlife Conservation Society have condemned the move and asked the government to refrain from mixing wildlife issues with politics.

The organizations have asked the government to instead work for the upkeep of the park by sanctioning the required funds, increasing the strength of the staff, improving the road condition and tourist facilities and taking up special measures to improve living standards of the people in the fringe areas. It has also been pointed out that Rajiv Gandhi was not involved with the park in any way. The authorities of the Bodo Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) too have come in for criticism for granting formal permission to rename the park.

Orang had been declared a WLS in 1985 and was made a NP in 1999. A similar move to rename the then sanctuary as the Rajiv Gandhi WLS by the Congress Government in 1992 had also provoked similar opposition, forcing the government to revoke the move.

Source: 'Locals up in arms over renaming of Orang NP in Rajiv Gandhi's name', *The Sentinel*, 23/08/2005.

### **Two tigers found dead in Orang NP – poisoning suspected**



Two adult tigers were found dead in the

Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP in the last week of November, triggering fears of either locals poisoning them or of a viral attack in the park. The viscera and other organs had been sent for forensic tests and the results were awaited.

One of the dead tigers was found bleeding from the nose. A buffalo carcass was found near one of the dead tigers, while the body of the other tiger was recovered a day later a few kms away. Wildlife officials said that there were crows and vultures near the dead buffalo but they had not touched the carcass.

It was suspected that some toxic chemicals or poison was sprayed on the buffalo carcass and so the birds had kept away from it. The two tigers, on the other hand, may have eaten the dead animal and perished subsequently. Wildlife officials were planning to arrest three local villagers being considered responsible for the poisoning.

Locals residing in the periphery of the park have in recent times complained that tigers had entered their villages and killed several cows and buffaloes. The suspected poisoning could have been a retaliatory measure on the part of the villagers.

Source: 'Two tigers feared poisoned to death in Assam park', <http://www.newindpress.com>, 25/11/2005.

## **2006**

### **Rhino population up in Orang; other positive developments too**

The latest rhino census carried out on March 31 has counted a total 68 rhinos in the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP. This included 28 males, 27 females and 13 calves. This number is significantly higher than the 46 that was reported in the last rhino census that had been carried out here in 1999. The rhino number in the 1985 census was 65 while in 1991 it

was 97.

The period between the last census in 1999 and this one also saw the death of 30 rhinos – 20 at the hands of poachers and 10 of natural causes. The details are as follows - 1999 (poaching 7, natural death nil), 2000 (P 8, ND 5), 2001 (P 1, ND nil), 2002 (P nil, ND 1), 2003 (P 1, ND 1), 2004 (P nil, ND 2), 2005 (P 3, ND 1), 2006 (upto March: P nil, ND nil).

48 enumerators comprising forest officials, wildlife activists, NGOs and journalists participated in the count this time. The 78.80 sq km area of the park was divided into 16 blocks for the purpose of the count. No rhinos were found in four blocks.

It has also been reported that in spite of the considerably poor infrastructure here and limited accommodation, the number of visitors, both domestic and foreign, has been increasing. In 1997 the number of domestic tourists was 964, the highest, while only 15 foreign tourists had visited the park. Significantly, the park recorded the highest number of foreign tourists in 2005; their number being 207. A trip to the park on the Brahmaputra introduced by a private operator from Guwahati had helped in this matter.

A new forest bungalow was also inaugurated near the range office of the park on March 31 to accommodate four persons in two rooms. This is in addition to the existing bungalow at Sal Simalu and the dormitory in the park. In an effort to make wildlife viewing easier for visitors, arrangements have also been made for an elephant safari and 12 departmental elephants have been trained for the purpose.

The state government has also undertaken the reconstruction of the 18 km long Dheruguri-Silbori PWD road off the NH-52 under the programme funded by the Asian Development Bank. Grazing in the park by cattle from the fringe villages is said

to be having a serious impact on the habitat of the rhino and the FD has appealed to the villagers to prevent their cattle from entering the park.

Source: 'Orang rhino census: Increasing trend enthuse conservationists', *The Sentinel*, 07/04/2006.

### **Poachers surrender in Orang**

The recent creation of the Orang NP Surakhya Samiti, an initiative of DFO Sukumar Momin of the Orang Wildlife Division has resulted in a number of positive developments in and around the park.

The most recent of these was the surrender by two poachers of village Laudong under the Dalgaon police station. They were compelled to do so by the villages like Hami sar, Nabu sar and Lohori sar located on the fringes of the park. The two are also reported to have confessed that they were involved in the killing of five rhinos in recent times.

Source: 'DFO's initiative bears fruit; poachers surrender', *The Sentinel*, 21/12/2006.

## **2007**

### **Staff shortage plagues Orang NP**

The Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP is reported to be plagued with a serious shortage of manpower and this is adversely affecting protection and conservation work here.

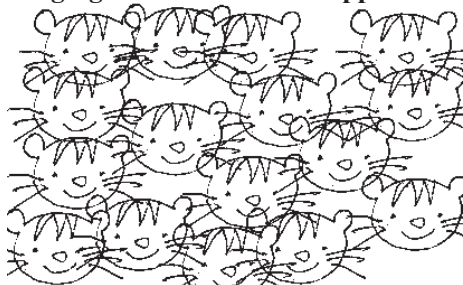
The park does not have a veterinary doctor and the park authorities have to look elsewhere in cases related to death of or injury to wild animals. Of the 186 forest guards required to patrol the park, only 50 guards and 36 casual employees are employed at present. The park also has only four mahouts and five gardeners, against the requirement for 16 each. Similarly, while 18

boatmen are required for the 16 country boats and two motor boats, only nine have been employed.

Source: 'No cure for park illness – Orang reels under veterinary crisis', <http://www.telegraphindia.com>, 22/10/2007.

## 2008

### Orang tigers to be camera trapped



A project has been recently launched in the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP for the documentation of the tigers here through camera trapping in tandem with other methods. The project is being executed by the NGO, Aaranyak, in collaboration with the park authorities.

The project's technical support is from the Wildlife Institute of India, while financial aid has been provided by the David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation, the Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation, Seaworld Busch Gardens' Conservation Fund and the US Fish and Wildlife Services.

The project hopes to identify existing or possible dispersal routes of tigers into and out of the park. It will first seek to identify individual tigers in the park and estimate the density of tiger and prey animals using camera trapping and line transect methods respectively. Subsequently, it would attempt to fill in considerable gaps on wild tiger research and monitoring in the region.

Other spin offs from the project include

the creation of a GIS database of the park and its fringe areas, along with a habitat stratification map prepared and correlated to tiger and prey density; and capacity building of local scientists and foresters for long-term monitoring of wildlife. The forests of Orang are presently estimated to have about 20 tigers.

Source: 'Move to document Orang tigers through camera trapping', *The Assam Tribune*, 18/06/2008.

## 2009

### Two rhino poachers killed in gun battle in Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP

Two alleged rhino poachers were shot dead in a gun battle inside the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP in the month of October. This, after they had killed a female rhino and chopped off the horn – the sixth rhino killed this year in the park.

The horn was later recovered from a bag found on one of the slain poachers, Harmuj Ali, a dreaded local criminal who is said to have been involved in killing rhinos earlier at Orang and at Kaziranga NP. The other poacher shot dead was not identified while the third member of the group fled under cover of thick fog and darkness.

The gun battle, one of the fiercest in the park, continued for over half an hour in pitch darkness close to midnight and more than 30 rounds were fired by the guards. Two empty cartridges and a live bullet of a .303 rifle, two bags containing food, a bottle of country liquor and the rhino horn were found at the site of the shootout. A blood-soaked axe that had been used to chop off the horn was also found. The exchange of fire started after a forest patrol heard gunshots around 10.45 pm and then took 15 minutes to zero in on the exact location from where the shots were



being fired.

Ali, the slain poacher, had been arrested several times under the WLPA and the Arms Act. On June 28, earlier this year, he was involved in the killing of a female rhino at Orang and was arrested the following day from a Dimapur-bound bus. During a raid on his residence soon after, a US-made pistol, a 12-bore rifle and ammunition were recovered. He had managed, however, to jump bail soon.

Source: 'Rhino killers shot after Assam hunt', *The Telegraph*, 19/10/2009.

## 2010

### **Four suspected poachers arrested from Orang NP**

Four poachers, suspected to be involved in rhino poaching at the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP, were apprehended from two different places on the periphery of the park in January. While three of them were arrested from Beesimari village, one was apprehended from Rongagora village.

The group had killed a female rhino in the southern part of the park and exchanged fire with forest guards. The .303 rifle used in killing the rhino and six live cartridges were recovered from them.

A police official in Sonitpur district is reported to have said that the nationality of a large number of people who had settled in the area was doubtful and suggested that a proper survey would help in establishing this fact. All those who were arrested, too, are believed to be Bangladeshi nationals. One of them, Abdul Rashid, had surrendered five years back, but the rifle recovered from his possession confirmed that he was still involved in poaching activities.

Source: 'Four rhino poachers arrested in Orang', *The Telegraph*, 14/01/2010.

### **Poachers killed, apprehended in two different incidents in Orang NP**

Two alleged poachers were killed in the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP in July by personnel of the Forest Protection Force. Two firearms were also recovered from them.

According to a range officer of the park, the unidentified poachers were killed in an encounter with the forest guards near Rowmari forest camp. An automatic 7.65 mm pistol, one 303 rifle and 10 rounds of live bullets were recovered from the encounter site. The two bodies were subsequently sent to the Mangaldoi civil hospital for post-mortem.

In another incident in August, authorities claimed to have apprehended another group of four rhino poachers, including the allegedly 'most wanted' poacher from Bihudia village on the fringe area of the park. The four, it is believed, were about to enter the park when they were held. Several items, including food, medicine and mosquito repellents were recovered from them.

Forest officials claimed that Joyналuddin, one of those arrested, is involved in the killing of several rhinos in the Orang and Kaziranga NPs.

Source: '2 poachers shot in Orang NP', *The Assam Tribune*, 31/07/2010.  
'Poachers held near Orang park – Leader in net, search on for rifle', *The Telegraph*, 22/08/2010.

### **Ecodevelopment committees formed in 11 villages bordering the Orang NP**

11 eco development committees (EDC) covering 11 villages from the fringe areas of the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP were formed in the year 2009-10 in an effort to reduce tension between the FD and communities in these areas. Each of the 11 villages has

been provided with drinking water facilities (hand tube wells), solar lights and village roads in the current year. Some of the EDC members have also started extending support by keeping vigil along the park's boundary and by sharing information with the forest officials.

While the park administration's biggest concern was that locals from the peripheral villages were in league with rhino poachers, the villagers would be surprised when house to house raids were conducted after every case of rhino poaching.

There have also been many cases of cattle killing by tigers outside the park boundaries, resulting in retaliatory killing by the poisoning of tigers. At least six tigers have been poisoned here since 2005, the last one being in August 2009. Additional problems have been created on account of crop raiding by wild animals specially wild boar and deer.

The FD has reportedly taken a number of steps to deal with these and other conflicting situations. If cattle are killed by tigers outside the park, urgent relief is paid to the affected party within 24 hours. An electric fence is also being constructed in the vulnerable 2 km stretch to prevent animals from coming out of the park. In the November & December 2010, around 5000 heads of cattle in the fringe villages will be vaccinated to avoid possible disease transmission to the wild animals of the NP. Human health camps will also be organised by the FD for the fringe communities during the same period.

A couple of locals who guided poachers but have surrendered subsequently have been engaged by the FD as informers and are paid reward money for help rendered.

Source: 'Eco development committees for Orang', *The Assam Tribune*, 07/10/2010.

### **Arms training for Orang NP staff**

120 numbers of forest staff, including

permanent, fixed pay and casual workers of the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP, were recently given training in the use of firearms. The 10-day training was held at the Kurua firing range, Darrang and was supervised by the SP, Darrang.

This is the first time that the forest staff here has been given such sophisticated fire arms training.

Source: Jayanta Kumar Das. 'Arms training for Orang NP forest staff', <http://www.assamtimes.org>, 27/10/2010.

### **FD, WWF – India to deal with human-tiger conflict at Orang NP**

The Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP plans to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with WWF – India, to work jointly to minimise the incidents of conflict between tigers and humans.

The park has witnessed a rise in tiger numbers which has resulted in the tigers straying out of the park. A tiger, which was killed by security personnel at Morigaon district a few days back, is said to have strayed from Orang. The rise in these incidents has triggered fear that the villagers will try to poison the tigers in retaliation.

Tigers have killed at least 15 heads of cattle in villages near the park in recent weeks. The park has also seen the death of at least 15 tigers since 2005, six of which are said to be due to poisoning. According to the census conducted last year, the park has 14 tigers, while a recent census is reported to have put the number at 18.

According to the agreement, WWF would pay interim relief to owners of the cattle killed by tigers to earn the villagers' confidence. Interim relief would be paid to the owner of cattle killed by tigers only on condition that he/she would not poison the carcass. It is generally seen that the carcass of the cattle killed is used as bait by the

villagers to poison tigers. From now on, once the compensation is paid to a villager, he/she will be made responsible if a carcass is found poisoned.

Source: Pullock Dutta. 'Joint drive to save tigers – Orang to team up with WWF', *The Telegraph*, 29/11/2010.

## 2011

### **Cameras for tiger study capture poachers at Orang**

Camera traps that were set up as part of a tiger study in the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP captured, for the first time, poachers as they moved around in the park. Forest officials said that the camera traps hung on trees had taken pictures of a group of poachers who had killed a rhino on January 9. The poachers were carrying .303 rifles.

70 cameras have been put up at strategic locations in the park as part of the camera trapping exercise being carried out by the wildlife NGO, Aaranyak.

The animal was said to have been killed at about 1.30 am in the morning and a guard on duty was suspended for allegedly conniving with the poachers. It was noted that the poachers were from outside the area and the pictures taken by the camera traps were sent to nearby police stations to help in investigations and arresting the guilty.

Source: 'Cameras for tiger study capture poachers at Orang', *The Telegraph*, 14/01/2011.

### **Orang NP being considered for introduction of the pygmy hog**

The Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) NP could be the next site for the introduction of the Pygmy hog. The Assam FD is preparing a feasibility

report for the examination of the site in Orang for the same. The northern area of the park is being considered suitable for the release of 10-12 of the critically endangered animals.

The Orang proposal comes after the successful reintroduction program at the Gelgeli grasslands of Sonai-Rupai WLS. A total of 35 hogs were released in the three-year period 2008 to 2010. Ground surveys and camera trapping has confirmed that nearly 70% of these animals have survived well. New-borns have been recorded and so has been their dispersion to newer areas.

The conservation programme is a collaborative project between Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, IUCN/SSC Pigs Peccaries and Hippos Specialist Group, the Assam FD and the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests.

Source: Roopak Goswami. 'Report suggest Orang home for pygmy hog', *The Telegraph*, 24/02/2011.

### **Brahmaputra threatens Orang NP**

The changing course of the Brahmaputra river and erosion caused by it has been threatening the Orang (Rajiv Gandhi) NP. The river had changed course devouring the Borkhe and Jawani camps. The FD had to reconstruct the Borkhe anti-poaching camp at a new location in 2010 while another camp is also under serious threat with the river flowing just a few metres away.

However, new land has also come up on the northern side of the river and several animals have started taking shelter on these new forest lands which are part of the NP.

No effort has been made so far to mitigate the situation and forest officials have said that a proposal would be prepared soon to undertake anti-erosion projects in the park.

Source: 'Erosion threatens Orang park – Brahmaputra devours anti-poaching camps', *The Telegraph*, 08/06/2011.

## PANI-DIHING WLS

2003

### Pani-Dihing Birds festival held



A two-day Pani-Dihing Birds Festival was held at Sivasagar in Assam in the last week of January. A seminar on 'Bird Habitat and Ecological Balance' was held on the second day of the festival. Experts who spoke on the occasion included Dr Asad Rahmani, Soumyadeep Dutta, Dr Anwaruddin Choudhury and Dr Hilloljyothi Singha. The Deputy Commissioner, Sivasagar, Gayatri Baruah also participated in the programme.

Source: 'Dr. Asad Rahmani stresses need for bird conservation', *The Assam Tribune*, 25/01/2003.

## POBITARA WLS

2001

### Human-cum-veterinary camp in Pobitara

The NGO, Early Birds, organised a full day human-cum-veterinary treatment camp in and around Pobitara WLS on July 1, 2001. 242 patients were examined by the doctors of

the organisation.

A total number of 42 cattle heads were vaccinated against the diseases of HS + BQ. The villages of Kuchwari, Hatigor and Sildubi were the main beneficiaries of the programme.

Source: Moloy Baruah. Letter dated 03/07/2001.

2002

### Rhino poached in Pobitara, poachers electrocuted

In the first incident of poaching in the Pobitara WLS in 18 months, a rhino was killed by electrocution on January 8. Its horn was also taken away. A team of six poachers was reported to be responsible for the incident. Ironically two poachers were also killed when they were themselves electrocuted during the incident. Their bodies were found by the forest staff at the location of the incident inside the sanctuary.

Swift action (within 18 hours of the incident) by the police and forest staff resulted in the recovery of the horn from a house in a nearby village and the arrest of two alleged poachers, including a woman. Further follow up action also resulted in the arrest of one Md. Abdul Kalam, allegedly the kingpin in the rhino horn and ivory trade. He is known to have links with buyers at Dimapur and also has strong political backing.

Source: M Firoze Ahmed. Email dated 23/01/2002.

Bibhab Talukdar. Email dated 20/02/2002.

### Veterinary camp held at Pobitara

The NGO, Early Birds, organised a free veterinary vaccination-cum-treatment camp around Pobitara WLS from Nov 22-24 for

the ninth consecutive year.

1200 cattle heads were vaccinated against HS + BQ diseases. The main beneficiaries were the villages of Hatimuria, Morabari, Rajamayng, Bordia and Sildubi. Huge quantities of veterinary medicines were also distributed free of cost. INTERVAT, a pharmaceutical company, donated vaccines for 800 cattle during the camp.

Source: 'Early Bird's veterinary camp at Pobitora', *The Assam Tribune*, 02/12/2002.

## 2003

### **Two rhinos electrocuted by poachers in Pobitora**

Two rhinos, a mother and her calf, were killed by poachers in Pobitora WLS in the month of May. High tension wires that pass through the grasslands here were used to electrocute the animals.

The incident occurred at night near the Kamarpur camp inside the park. This is the second such case in the sanctuary in the last two and a half years. Within two days, however, the Assam FD claimed to have arrested three persons who had allegedly killed the rhinos and decamped with the horns.

Source: 'Two rhinos killed in Pobitora', *The Assam Tribune*, 24/05/2003.  
'Poacher gang held', *The Assam Tribune*, 26/05/2003.

## 2005

### **Fishermen attack forest guards in Pabitora**

In an incident that occurred on February 21, several frontline forest personnel of

the Pabitora WLS were brutally attacked by miscreants who were fishing within the boundaries of the sanctuary. Three of the forest personnel were seriously injured and were admitted to the Guwahati Medical College Hospital.

The incident took place in the middle of the night, when the lightly-armed forest personnel tried to check the intruders from fishing in Hadut beel, well known as a habitat for fish and avifauna. The personnel were trying to reason with the offenders when they were attacked by some forty people with sticks and machetes.

Unable to face the wrath of the large number of people, the personnel had to blank fire, alerting and enabling other personnel to come to their aid. By the time more people could come to their rescue, the miscreants had fled from the scene. The injured forest personnel reported that most of the people who were responsible for the attack were residents of Kukari and Kuranibari villages.

The episode is said to have created unease among a section of forest personnel in Pabitora, who feel that poachers are taking undue advantage of their lack of weapons and manpower. Environmental groups like Aaranyak have demanded that action against the guilty should be taken immediately; otherwise it would adversely affect the morale of those men engaged in protecting Pabitora.

Responding to the incident, Y Suryanarayan, Conservator – Wildlife, and other forest officials visited the site where the incident took place, and an FIR was also filed at the Mayong Thana.

Source: 'Poachers attack forest guards in Pobitora', *The Assam Tribune*, 22/02/05.

## 2007

### Rs. 1 crore for Pabitora WLS

The Tiwa Autonomous Council has announced the allocation of Rs. 1 Crore for the all-round development of the Pabitora WLS. This will include the creation of infrastructure for the large number of tourists that visit here. Thousands of tourists visited the sanctuary on New Year's Day. The sanctuary has also earned tourist revenue of Rs. 1.50 lakhs in the last two months of 2006.

Source: 'Rs. 1 cr. for Pabitora', *The Assam Tribune*, 06/01/2007.

### Veterinary Camp around Pobitara WLS

Early Birds, an NGO for animal care, conducted a free veterinary vaccination-cum-treatment camp around the Pabitora Wild Life sanctuary on 19th and 20th May '07. A total of 497 heads of cattle in the villages of Morabori and Kuchiani were treated as part of the camp.

The DFO (WL) and the RFO, Pabitora, offered field support for the initiative that was the 26th such camp organized at Pabitora in the last 14 years.

Source: Moley Baruah. Email dated 29/05/2007.

## 2008

### Disease kills rhino calf in Pabitora, 2nd one ailing

A mysterious disease claimed a 1½ year old rhino calf at Pabitora WLS in early October. Another calf had also started showing similar symptoms of paralysis of the posterior, fever, loss of appetite and weakness. Experts from the College of Veterinary Science, state zoo and Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation &

Conservation at Kaziranga were called in to Pabitora to take stock of the situation.

Forest officials said that providing treatment to the calf was difficult because of the continued presence of its worried mother. Officials were using three elephants to chase away the mother so that saline and vitamins could be administered to the calf.

Source: 'Disease kills rhino', *The Telegraph*, 23/10/2008.

## 2009

### Tourism infrastructure enhanced at Pabitora diff spellings WLS LS

Tourism infrastructure has been enhanced at the Pobitara WLS to cater to the needs of the constantly growing tourist numbers here. Room capacity of the Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) run lodges has been increased to 14. The jeep safari in the sanctuary, too, is expanding with the involvement of local unemployed youth who run five Maruti Gypsies for tourists. The FD here uses eight elephants for the safari.

The FD earned a revenue of Rs 9.60 lakh from visitors to Pobitara WLS in 2008-09 – up from Rs 3.50 lakh in 2006-07, and Rs 6.50 lakh in 2007-08. The number of foreign tourists to Pobitara has also shown a rising trend. There were 145 backpackers last season, while the number in 2007-08 was 45.

Source: 'Pobitara opens to tourists', *The Assam Tribune*, 25/10/2009.



**2011**

**Elevation of road along western boundary of Pabitara WLS threatens grasslands, rhinos**

The construction of a road along the western boundary of the Pabitara WLS is believed to have changed the drainage pattern in the area and is in turn threatening the grasslands and rhinos here.

The Chamota-Pobitara road along the western boundary of the sanctuary (the Mayong-Pomapur portion) was raised recently by the public works department (PWD) without leaving sufficient outlet for floodwater to pass. While waters from the Brahmaputra inundates the sanctuary every year, replenishing the grassland as well as the water-bodies of the sanctuary, last year's floodwater stayed stagnant inside the sanctuary from June to September. Earlier, the water used to recede within a week, which is essential for Pabitara's ecosystem to survive.

Forest officials said that they had repeatedly taken up the matter with the PWD authorities, but the suggestions and advice to create water outlets/culverts was not heeded.

Source: Sivasish Thakur. 'Road elevation causes waterlogging in Pabitara', *The Assam Tribune*, 28/01/2011.

**School teacher held for rhino poaching in Pobitara**

A school teacher resident in the Kurahibori village adjacent to the Pobitara WLS was arrested recently in connection with the poaching of a rhino in the sanctuary.

He was arrested for allegedly giving shelter to the poachers who killed a male rhino in the sanctuary. The poachers had

shot dead the animal and fled with its horn.

Source: 'School teacher held for rhino poaching', [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com), 16/06/2011.

## **SANKOSH-AIE WLS**

**2002**

**Proposal for a new 'Sankosh-Aie' WLS**

The Kokrajhar-based NGO, Green Hearts Nature Club (GHNC) has proposed that a new 'Sankosh – Aie' WLS be declared that will include the forests of Ripu, Chirang and Manas. The area stretches from the River Sankosh to Manas along the foothills of Bhutan and includes good forests contiguous with Manas NP on the east and Buxa TR on the west. The forests belong to the Kachugaon, Haitugaon and Aie Valley Forest Divisions in the Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts.

The region was once famous for its sal forests and patches of good terai grasslands which support populations of endangered species like the Pygmy hog, Hispid hare, and the Bengal florican. Other endangered species of fauna that are found here include the Golden langur, tiger, Clouded leopard, leopard, Leopard cat, elephant, Slow loris, and binturong.

This area has already been included under Project Tiger as a buffer zone for tigers from the Manas TR and, more recently, it was proposed by the MoEF to include it under Project Elephant. GHNC has already submitted this sanctuary proposal to the State Forest Minister.

Source: 'Demand for Sankosh-Aie WLS', *The Assam Tribune*, 02/11/2002.

## SONAI-RUPAI WLS

### 2001

#### Large scale encroachments in Sonai-Rupai

Large scale encroachments are reportedly taking place in the 220 sq km Sonai-Rupai WLS in the Sonitpur district of Assam. In an apparent bid to increase the Bodo population in this area on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, large numbers of the community are moving here from the Kokrajhar and Darrang districts of the state.

The areas worst affected include the Batasipur, Balipara, Belsiri and Chariduar RFs. The situation is also reported to be volatile as the encroachers are allegedly being helped by the Bodo militants and their leaders.

43 tigers were counted last year in Sonai-Rupai which is also the home for two species of highly endangered birds, the White-winged wood duck and the Bengal florican.

The wildlife officials here have also submitted to the central government, a project proposal with an estimated budget of Rs. 1 crore for the development of infrastructure, camps and other facilities. This is in addition to an amount of US \$ 35,000 that has been sanctioned by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for the sanctuary.

Source: 'Sonai-Rupai sanctuary in grip of encroachers', *The Assam Tribune*, 02/02/2001.

### 2002

#### Encounter with NDFB in Sonai-Rupai

Three militants of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and a military jawan were killed in an encounter in the Sonai-Rupai WLS in the first half of September. A huge cache of arms, including an AK-47 rifle, 63 rounds of ammunition, two IEDs and wireless sets were recovered from the slain militants. It has been reported that the militants were staying in the WLS in a bid to cross over the Assam Arunachal border.

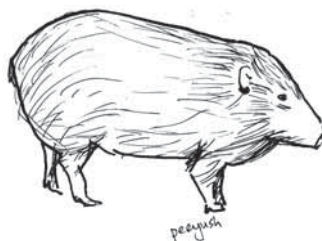
It has been further reported that the forests and protected areas along the Assam-Arunachal border have become a hotbed of militant activity, and security forces are taking special steps to deal with the situation.

Source: 'Army men, 3 NDFB militants killed in encounter', *The Assam Tribune*, 17/09/2002.  
'Operations against NDFB stepped up', *The Assam Tribune*, 20/09/2002.

### 2005

#### Pygmy hogs to be released in Sonai-Rupai WLS

16 Pygmy hogs raised in captivity in Guwahati, as part of the Pygmy Hog Conservation



Program, are to be released into the wild in the Sonai-Rupai WLS. Initiated 12 years ago, the program has been implemented by the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust in collaboration with the Assam FD. The hogs were first soft-released in an enclosure in

the grasslands of the sanctuary and are to be eventually let out completely into the wild.

The species was considered to have gone extinct in the 1960s, but it is now believed that about 400 live in the Manas NP. Six hogs were captured here in 1996 for the captive breeding program. Encroachments leading to the loss of grasslands in the regions inhabited by the pygmy hog are said to be the biggest threat to the survival of this endangered species.

Source: Subir Bhaumik. 'Rare pygmy hogs head for the wild', <http://news.bbc.co.uk/19/05/2005>.

## 2011

### **Firing range inside Sonai-Rupai WLS to stay**

The MoEF has ruled out the dismantling of the short firing range located within the Sonai-Rupai WLS but has asked the army not to practise there until it obtains the necessary clearances. The issue of the firing range had been taken up by the MoEF

following representations from various quarters, including the members of the Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife, on the construction and use of the firing range behind the Lama camp within the sanctuary.

Gajraj Corps, stationed at Missamari, had established the short firing range on forestland within the sanctuary without following the legal procedures. The troops were also practicing at the range in violation of the provisions of the WLP and orders of the Supreme Court. The FD had constituted a five-member committee in the last week of April to examine the entire matter but the report has not been submitted yet.

Senior wildlife officials have said that the MoEF decision to maintain status quo on the range was a set back as having the firing range was against wildlife laws. In April, earlier this year, the FD had tried to dismantle the firing range but was prevented by the forces from doing so.

Source: Roopak Goswami. 'Status quo over Sonai-Rupai firing range', *The Telegraph*, 02/06/2011.

# MANIPUR

NO.	NAME OF THE PA	AREA (SQ KM)
1	Keibul-Lamjao NP	40
2	Siroi NP	100
3	Buning WLS	115.8
4	Jiri-Makru WLS	198
5	Keilam WLS	187.5
6	Yangoupokpi-Lokchao WLS	184.4
7	Zeiland WLS	21
	TOTAL	846.7



As for the sangai, prior to 1891 they were recorded as having been 'preserved by order of the royal family, and any man who was proved to have killed one had his hand chopped off. In 1934 by order of the Manipur State Durbar it was resolved that no further permits be issued for shooting these deer until further orders, as this animal was in danger of extinction. In December 1951 the Government of Manipur informed the writer of this report that 'enquiries have been made by the Forest Department and it has been found that this deer has become totally extinct and no alive specimen is now available. In view of what is stated above there is no need to establish a Wild Life Sanctuary at present.' Subsequently it was found that the deer did actually exist, and in October 1953 the whole of the Logtak Lake area was closed to shooting and declared a sanctuary by the Government of Manipur in order to protect it. Later on it was pointed out that it was unnecessary to close the whole of the lake to shooting [and] in July 1954 the Logtak was opened to shooting – except the southern portion where the deer existed, which was made into a sanctuary of approximately 20 square miles (52 sq. km.) in extent.

*EP Gee*

Report on the status of the browantlered deer of Manipur (India) –  
October-November 1959 and March 1960  
Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society 57(3), December 1960

## STATE NEWS

2003

### First meeting of the Manipur State Board for Wildlife held

The first meeting of Manipur State Board for Wildlife was held in November in Imphal. Some of the important matters discussed included the management of the Keibul-Lamjao NP; identification of Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESAs) under the Environment Protection Act (EPA); framing of guidelines for identification of community reserves; and matters relating to the regularisation of forest guards, providing them with better equipment for field work and the anti-poaching campaign.

The Member-Secretary of the board, Dr RB Lala, Chief Wildlife Warden, Manipur, informed the members that a file had been forwarded to the Chief Minister for forming of a State level Co-ordination Committee for the management of the Loktak Lake with particular reference to maintaining the water level in the lake at a desired level during the lean season with the objective of revitalising the Keibul-Lamjao NP.

The committee will consist of representatives from the Irrigation & Flood Control Department, the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation, the Loktak Development Authority and the FD.

Source: Salaam Rajesh. Email dated 27/11/2003.

2006

### Manipur demand for Wildlife Crime Cell

The Manipur government is reported to have demanded the creation of a regional wildlife

crime cell in Imphal for the control of wildlife crime that is said to be booming in the region. The demand was put up at a conclave of Forest Secretaries and PCCFs that was held in New Delhi in January.

Manipur's contention is that the porous 398-km border it shares with Myanmar makes the presence of the crime-control office imperative in the state. It has also been pointed out that there was only one centre of the anti-poaching cell in Guwahati for the entire Northeast region. This, too, was understaffed, making it difficult to monitor crime in a huge area.

The centre is said to be considering the demand of the state favourably.

Source: 'Manipur plea for wildlife cell', *The Telegraph*, 14/01/2006.

## KEIBUL-LAMJAO NP

2000

### Project for Loktak Lake



The India Canada Environment Facility (ICEF) is sponsoring a project for the Loktak Lake, the largest fresh water lake in the north-east. The Keibul-Lamjao NP, home to the world's last wild population of the Manipur Brow-antlered deer, is a part of this wetland.

The ICEF, which has sponsored 17 environmental projects costing Rs. 167 crore in India, has decided to give special attention



to the Loktak Lake because of its unique biodiversity. Further details of the project are however not available.

Source: 'Project to save Loktak lake', *The Statesman*, 14/04/2000.

### **Steps for the protection of lakes in state**

The Chief Minister (CM) of Manipur, Wahengbam Nipamacha, has said that his government will take up various steps for the protection of many 'dying' lakes in the state, including the Loktak Lake. He was speaking at a workshop on 'Hydrological modelling, reservoir operation, and flood mitigation management of the Loktak Lake' held in Imphal recently.

As a first step in this direction, he said, the Loktak Development Authority (LDA) may be converted to a Lake Development Authority.

Special attention was also being paid to the Loktak Lake, and the CM said that he would write to the 11th Finance Commission seeking funds for the protection and development of this unique water body.

Source: 'Manipur to take steps for protection of Loktak lake', *The Assam Tribune*, 03/09/2000.

### **Threat to destroy hydro-electric project in Loktak**

A proscribed underground organisation, the Kanglei Yawol Kunna Lup (KYKL) has demanded the winding up of the 105 MW Loktak Hydroelectric project and threatened that it would resort to its demolition for the purpose. The project has been constructed and is being run by the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation.

The KYKL has said that the promises made by the project have not been realised. The villagers in the area still continue to face

a power shortage. Industries too are having a serious problem.

Additionally large areas of fertile farm land and grazing grounds for cattle have been submerged, causing huge losses to the local people. The quantum of fish production too has reportedly decreased. There have been reports in the past that the commissioning of the project has adversely affected the fauna and flora in the lake and the Keibul-Lamjao NP, the only home of the highly endangered Brow antlered deer.

Source: 'KYKL threatens to demolish Loktak project', *The Sentinel*, 17/10/2000.

### **Encroachment threat to 2nd home for sangai at Iroishembba in Imphal West district**

The Manipur government's attempt to find a second home for the rare Brow-antlered deer at Iroishembba in Imphal West district, is facing threats from encroachment. Some persons have been allegedly allotted land on the sly by the settlement department of the state, without the knowledge of the FD. The encroached area is a RF, and a formal complaint has been lodged with the police.

Recently a small number of sangai, whose main home is the Keibul-Lamjao NP in the Loktak lake, were shifted to the Iroishembba area. At present, the total population of the sangai in the state is reported to be around 150 animals.

Source: 'Concern over encroachment at sangai sanctuary', *The Sentinel*, 23/12/2000.

## **2002**

### **Poachers caught in Loktak**

Members of the Sangai Protection Forum (SPF), based in the Keibul-Lamjao NP,

apprehended two poachers from the park on April 10. Two of their accomplices, however, managed to escape. The forum had given them two weeks' time to surrender, but it is not known what happened.

The poachers were reported to be hunting sangai in the park. Local organisations, including the SPF and the Meira Paibi (women's) organisation, issued a people's punishment for the poachers who were caught. They were ordered to remain within their homes from April 26 to May 26 and not to venture outside at all.

Source: Salam Rajesh. Email dated 29/04/2002.

### **Loktak Development Authority to get funds for another two years**

The Indo Canada Environment Facility (ICEF) has agreed to extend funding for the work of the Loktak Development Authority (LDA) for another two years. ICEF funding to the project had been suspended last year. The 10th and 11th Finance Commissions of India too had recently suspended funding of the LDA programmes.

The ICEF decision was made recently, following the visit of an eight-member team to the state. The team was headed by the First Secretary of the Canadian High Commission in New Delhi. It has appealed to the LDA to speed up work of clearing of weeds, purification of the water and for the proper demarcation of the lake boundary.

The LDA Minister, W Leima Devi is reported to have told the Canadian delegation that her ministry was trying to put up a bill in the state assembly for the conservation of the lake and for its development.

Source: 'Tenure of Loktak Development to be extended by 2 more years', The Poknapham Daily, 20/09/2002.

### **Special measures being taken to save Loktak Lake**

The Loktak Development Authority (LDA) Minister, Smt. Leima Devi has announced ten measures to save the Loktak Lake. These are to: (1) Draft a Loktak Protection Act, (2) Construct a 'ring bund' all around the lake periphery, (3) Convert the phumdi vegetation mass into manure, bio-gas, etc., (4) Develop a water sports complex in the lake, (5) Develop tourist interest spots and to build tourist rest houses, (6) Construct Loktak guest houses in catchment hill areas, (7) Plant trees on the banks of feeder streams, (8) Introduce/induct tourist boats, (9) Plant flowers, medicinal plants and to encourage fishery, and (10) Launch public awareness campaigns.

Source: 'LDA to take up ten measures to save Loktak Lake', *The Poknapham Daily*, 22/11/2002.

### **Committee set up to implement programme of the LDA; NEC to give Rs. 38 crores**

The Manipur State Forest & Environment Department has constituted a 16-member committee for the implementation of the 10-point program of the Loktak Development Authority (LDA) announced earlier (see story above).

The committee will be headed by the LDA Minister, W. Leima Devi. The Additional Chief Secretary in charge of Forests & Environment will be the Vice-Chairperson. Other members are the Addl. Chief Secretary (Finance), Secretary (Law), Directors of Planning, Agriculture, Horticulture, Tourism, Fisheries, Youth & Sports Affairs, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Chief Engineer (Roads & Bridges), Chief Engineer (IFCD), Deputy Commissioner Bishnupur, Superintendent of Police Bishnupur and the LDA Project Director.

The responsibility of the committee is to look into the implementation of the 10-point program of LDA and to monitor the proceedings, to have monthly sittings, and to coordinate the different departments involved in the program.

The North Eastern Council will be providing Rs. 38 crores to the LDA under the 10th five year plan for the development of the Loktak Lake. Wetlands International South Asia, New Delhi has been approved as the consultant to prepare a detailed project report for conservation of the lake and other adjoining wetlands like Pumlun, Khoidum, Kharung, and Ikop. The report will be submitted in July later this year. Work on the commercial utilisation of phumdi vegetation by converting to manure too has started at Ningthoukhong. 50 metric tonnes of manure were reported to be available for use.

Source: 'Committee set up to implement 10 point programme of LDA', *The Poknapham Daily*, 13/12/2002.  
'NEC to provide 38 crores', *The Poknapham Daily*, 04/01/2003.

## 2003

### **Two sangai poachers caught**

Volunteers of the Environmental Social Reformation & Sangai Protection Forum (ESRSFP) apprehended two poachers on the night of January 19, 2003, with the meat of freshly killed sangai. Both the poachers were fishermen and they admitted that they had caught the deer inside the Keibul-Lamjao NP and then butchered it on the banks of the River Ithai Turel. Both the poachers were identified, but they managed to make good their escape.

The volunteers of the ESRSFP then handed over notices to the families of the two individuals, following which they surrendered

to the local forest office a couple of days later. A criminal case was filed against them under section 50 (1c) of the WLPA. They were then released on bail the next day by furnishing a bond of Rs. 10,000 each.

Source: 'Two sangai poachers handed over to police', *The Poknapham Daily*, 23/01/2003.

### **Sangai poachers shot at by RPF**

In another incident in early February, cadres of the underground, Revolutionary People's Front (RPF), gave a harsh warning to wildlife violators by shooting two sangai poachers in the legs.

Prior to the shooting the RPF / People's Liberation Army's (PLA) Division No. 6 paraded the two poachers before the press. The PLA is the armed wing of the RPF. The RPF has reportedly set itself an agenda of protecting and preserving the sangai and other fauna in the region. They have said that the sangai is symbolic of Manipuri identity and punishment to the poachers was meant to be a warning to all who would dare to hunt the animal.

Source: 'Sangai poachers shot', *The Poknapham Daily*, 06/02/2003.  
'Waterfowl handed over', *The Poknapham Daily*, 03/02/2003.

### **PIL filed to save Loktak lake**

A public interest litigation (PIL), to save the Loktak Lake and Keibul-Lamjao NP was recently filed before the Imphal Bench of the Guwahati High Court by the Imphal based Environment Protection Committee.

It has been pleaded in the PIL that the gates of Ithai barrage be lifted for a period of five years so that the phumdi and silt can be removed from the lake. It has also asked for forming a ring bund on the peripheral areas of the NP. In response to the petition,

a division bench of the HC had issued show-cause notices to the respondents, returnable within two months.

Source: 'Keibul PIL', *The Imphal Free Press*, 08/05/2003.

## 2005

### **Six underground camps destroyed inside Keibul-Lamjao NP**

The state police, acting in concert with the army, busted six underground camps located inside the Keibul-Lamjao NP and recovered a huge cache of arms and ammunitions, following a brief encounter in the last week of February.

The operation was launched after midnight by a combined team of state police commandoes, 2nd IRB personnel, and army troops of the 73rd Brigade located at Bishenpur, and Assam Rifles troops, following reports of the presence of the camps. It was conducted after cordoning off the areas of Keibul-Lamjao, Chingmei, Kumbi, Khordak, Arong and Laphupat Tera. It is estimated that a total of about 150 people may have been staying at the camps at the time of the operation.

Source: 'Police backed by Army troops bust six UG camps at Keibul-Lamjao', *The Imphal Free Press*, 26/02/2005.

## 2006

### **New law; Rs. 400 cr project for Loktak**

The Manipur State Government has initiated a number of steps in relation to the Loktak Lake. These include, among other things, the introduction of the Manipur Loktak Lake (Protection) Bill 2006 and a Rs. 400-crore

project proposal for 'sprucing up' the lake. The proposal will soon be sent to the central government.

One of the main aims of the new bill, that was introduced in the recent budget session of the state legislature, is to give the Loktak Development Authority more power to prevent pollution, encroachment and unauthorised fishing in the lake. The bill proposes to prevent alteration, lease, mortgage, transfer or allotment of any part of the lake. Besides, no person would be allowed to obtain any resources from the lake or knowledge associated thereto for research or for commercial utilisation or for bio-survey and bio-utilisation without prior permission. The proposed legislation will also prevent anyone from transferring results of any research relating to the lake or its resources without prior approval of the lake authority.

One of the main thrusts of the Rs. 400-crore initiative is to convert the lake into a major tourist spot. The state government has engaged an Australian consultant to formulate a strategy following suggestions from the Planning Commission.

The project will entail clearing of the phumdi (floating vegetation) that reportedly covers 40% of the water body and the rehabilitation of the fisherfolk who live and work here. The North Eastern Council has reportedly agreed to provide an initial amount of Rs 41 lakh for rehabilitation of the 1,000-member-strong fishing community.

State tourism department officials have welcomed the move. They said that the lake has always been a tourist attraction and if the wetland is cleared, water sports too could be introduced to attract more domestic and foreign tourists.

Source: Khelen Thokchom. 'Hope ripples for Loktak', *The Telegraph*, 21/03/2006.

## **Sangai census in Keibul-Lamjao NP**

A three-day Sangai census starting April 7 was jointly conducted in the Keibul-Lamjao NP by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the Manipur Forests and Environment Department.

New methods and equipments were employed in the count and the earlier practice of using helicopters to count the animals was dispensed with this time. The count was conducted under the supervision of two experts from the WII with the help of a number of people from various sectors. This included seven people from the FD, 33 from various NGOs in addition to four environmentalists and two Manipur University representatives. The park area had been divided into 24 blocks for the exercise.

The details from the count are not known yet.

Source: 'Sangai head count begins at Keibul', *The Sangai Express*, 08/04/2006.

## **2007**

### **KYKL camp busted in Keibul-Lamjao NP**

A camp of the proscribed Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lupkykl (KYKL), an underground group in Manipur was busted inside the Keibul-Lamjao NP by the 7 Assam Rifles in a pre-dawn operation conducted in the latter half of March 2007.

The underground activists who were camping at an overgrown spot located 4 km from Keibul Sagram fired at the advancing troops at around 5 am, leading to exchange of heavy firing from both sides. After the firing ceased they were reported to have abandoned their camp and fled.

No casualties, however, were reported on either side or to the endangered sangai

that is found here.

Source: 'Army busts KYKL hideout', *The Sangai Express*, 24/03/2007.

### **Wetland International report expresses concern over Loktak**

A report by Wetland International South Asia (WISA) titled 'Conservation and Management of Loktak Lake and Associated Wetlands Integrating Manipur river basin' has expressed concern over the status of the lake. The report is an outcome of a study conducted by WISA with the active support of the Planning Commission.

The report has pointed out that the size of the natural habitat of the Brow-antlered deer has shrunk from its earlier 40 sq kms to only 6 sq kms now, the main reason being the construction of the Ithai Barrage. It has also pointed out that the soil in the Keibul-Lamjao NP has become highly acidic and this is preventing the growth of many kinds of vegetation. The acidity of the soil has also disturbed the fish breeding farm here.

The report also says that in 1982 the phumdis covered only 30% but after the Ithai Barrage was built this increased to 74% in 2002. The ability of the lake to retain the water has also decreased to 175 million cubic meters in the last two decades. The rapid deforestation in the catchment areas is said to have resulted in large scale erosion that has caused siltation in the lake. Shifting cultivation too has led to the erosion of soil from the hills.

The report has stressed the need to formulate a policy for the operation of the Ithai Barrage and the creation of an Environment Flows Team for the implementation of the policy. It has been suggested that the team be comprised of representatives from the National Hydro Power Corporation (NHPC), the State FD, Fisheries, Irrigation and Flood Control, Agriculture, the Loktak



Development Authority and Wetlands International.

The report further said that based on the data and information collected by the SDWRA, an alternate site for the Sangai has been identified at the Phumdis at Maibam Phumlak. Other suggestions mooted in the report include planting over 3000 tree saplings in the catchment areas of the lake by the FD and the additional planting of bamboo over 5000 hectares under an Integrated Forest programme.

To control floods, the report has mooted the opening of 10 regulators at the southern and northern zone of the lake as well as the construction of 10 culverts on the road between Toubul and Mayang Imphal. Installation of 16 fresh hatcheries to enable the Fisheries Department to breed fingerlings and construction of 2000 low-cost latrines around the lake by the PHED has also been suggested.

Source: 'Sangai's habitat shrinks to 6 sq. kms', *The Sangai Express*, 04/06/2007.

### **Field kits for staff of Keibul-Lamjao NP**

Six deserving forest guards at the Keibul-Lamjao NP were recently given field kits containing a rucksack, raincoat, jacket, water bottle, ground sheet, sleeping bag, and a torch as an incentive for their dedication at work.

The idea had been mooted by Mr. Salam Rajesh, a member of the State Board for Wildlife and the support was provided by the WTI as part of its Rapid Action Project. The kits were distributed by the Addl. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and the Deputy Conservator of Forests – Parks and Sanctuaries.

Source: 'Manipur forest guards get field kits', [www.wti.org.in](http://www.wti.org.in)

## **2009**

### **Fire destroys over 60% of Keibul-Lamjao NP; many Sangai feared dead**

A huge fire is reported to have destroyed more than 60% of the Keibul-Lamjao NP, the only home of the Brow-antlered deer. Many Sangai were also reported to have perished in the fire incident that is the first of its kind here since the creation of the NP in 1977.

The fire was first reported on the morning of February 23 by locals. Till evening large portions of the park including the areas of Toya Ching, Kachin Achouba, Chingmei Natal, Khordak Maning, Khordak Echil, Nongmaikhong, Ngakha Pat and Keibul-Lamjao Haorang had been destroyed. It has also been pointed out that the fire spread rapidly on account of the fact that work on the firelines by cutting the phumdis (floating biomass) had not been properly done by the FD. Forest officials said that they were unable to do anything to stop the fire as it was raging out of control and they were ill-equipped to fight it.

The cause of the fire is still not known. Some locals expressed suspicion that the fire was lit by some individuals simultaneously from at least three to four points in the park. Others have also pointed to the possible role of the Assam Rifles as some of their personnel were seen in the area early in the morning on the day of the fire. Comments from the Assam Rifles were, however, not available.

Source: 'Several Sangais feared killed in Keibul-Lamjao fire', *Hueiyen Lanpao*, 23/02/2009.

### **Joint military operation against militants inside Keibul-Lamjao NP**

A joint Army, Assam Rifles and police operation, code named Summer Storm, was launched on April 12 in the Keibul-Lamjao



NP to flush out militants believed to be holed up there.

The operation had been launched after electronic as well as human surveillance confirmed the presence of militants. The army claimed that 12 militants were killed, five camps of the Peoples Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (Prepak) were destroyed and 10 weapons, including six AK-series rifles, recovered in the operation that was still going on at the time of reporting. It was further stated that Summer Storm was the most successful joint operation in Manipur.

The army has also clarified that there have been no civilians or wild animals casualties, though other unconfirmed reports say that some sangai were indeed killed.

The announcement and clarification issued by the GOC 57 Mountain Division, Maj. Gen. Shakti Gurung came a day after displaced villagers held a rally in Imphal. They made a representation to Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh, seeking an end to the operation, as the life of nearly 2500 people settled on the fringes of the Loktak lake had been disrupted. They also threatened that they would boycott the ensuing 15th Lok Sabha elections, particularly the polling in the Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency if the operation was not called off. The displaced Nongmaikhong and Khordak villagers were taking shelter in Ithai and Laphupat Tera villages in Bishnupur district.

The GOC said that the army would compensate the villagers deprived of their livelihood after the operation was over and that relief materials were already being provided to the affected people.

The army and police have said that a Loktak Protection Force was being put in place and the Centre had sanctioned Rs 5.5 crore for the purchase of hovercraft for the purpose. They expressed confidence that no militant would be able to enter the area once the force is formed. The army also said that they had no plans to open any army post inside the NP.

Source: 'Displaced villagers boycott polls', *The Assam Tribune*, 17/04/2009.  
'Loktak operation to continue', *The Telegraph*, 18/04/2009.

## 2011

### **Climate change threatens Keibul-Lamjao NP**

Keibul-Lamjao NP in Loktak Lake is said to be extremely vulnerable on account of rising temperature due to climate change. The concerns were raised at a recent workshop – 'Impact of climate change on biodiversity management in Northeastern India with particular reference to Manipur'.

Dr NC Talukdar, Director, Institute of Bio-resources and Sustainable Development (IBSD), Imphal, pointed out that the rise in temperature might increase decomposition rate of the Phumdi materials of the lake and it will result in reducing their thickness and subsequent drying of the lake.

Source: Sobhapati Samom, 'Sangai deer vulnerable to extinction', *The Assam Tribune*, 10/10/2011.

# MEGHALAYA

NO.	NAME OF THE PA	AREA (SQ KM)
1	Balphakram NP	220
2	Nokrek Ridge NP	47.48
3	Baghmara Pitcher Plant WLS	0.02
4	Nongkhyllem WLS	29
5	Siju WLS	5.18
	TOTAL	301.68



In Garo Hills Hill Mynas are persuaded to breed in artificial nests. Such a nest consists of a framework of split bamboo about 5 feet long and 1 foot wide at the middle, tapering towards each end; this is thickly covered on the outside with thatching straw. A hole is cut about two-thirds of the way from the slightly thicker lower end of the nest, which is then attached to the branches of a tree at an angle of about 45 degrees, with the hole at the higher end and pointing downwards. The trees chosen are usually tall, and are situated in, clearings in the forest, or at the edge of a small village. A Garo may have 4 or 5 of these nests, in different trees, and by observation he can tell when there are young birds in the nest. Usually he does not want to run the risk of their fledging escaping, and so he takes the young from the nest earlier than is desirable, feeds them on a not-very-adequate diet of gram-powder made into large plugs and pushed down the gaping throat, and then sells them at the weekly market or 'haat' at prices usually between Rs. 10 and Rs. 20.

*Brian Bertram*

'Hill Myna *Gracula religiosa* Linnaeus breeding in artificial nests in Garo Hills, Assam  
Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society 64 (2), August 1967

# STATE NEWS

## 2002

### No elephant census due to paucity of funds

The plan of the Meghalaya FD to conduct an elephant census in the state in March, earlier this year, could not be implemented due to paucity of funds.

A sum of Rs. 4.21 crore as central assistance under Project Elephant has been received by the state till 2000-2001. Rs. 3.85 crores had been spent. However schemes for Rs. 36 lakhs that was left over and an additional amount of Rs. 30 lakhs that was released in the year 2001-2002 have not yet been sanctioned by the state government.

It has been reported that 22 villagers were killed and another 17 injured in elephant depredations till 2001-2002. A recent survey has indicated that 28% of the villagers wanted the total removal of elephants from their areas.

Source: 'Elephant conservation suffers in Meghalaya', *The Hindu*, 13/04/2002.

### Suggestion for NP in Jaintia hills for rare primates

The American Society of Primatologists (ASP) has indicated a need for the creation of a NP in the Jaintia hills for the preservation and conservation of rare primate species found here. A recent survey conducted by the society has reported that seven primate species: Slow loris, Assamese macaque, Rhesus macaque, Pig-tailed macaque, Stump-tailed macaque, Capped langur and the Hoolock gibbon are found here. The survey stated that a viable population of all these primates was confined to the Narpuh RF.

The report also said that jhum cultivation, alteration of the tropical forest habitat and large scale hunting by the local populace was the main reason for the decline in the primate populations. The survey was conducted by Dr. Anwarrudin Choudhury on behalf of the ASP.

Source: Manasij Bhattacharjee. 'Park to be set up for primates in Meghalaya', *The Asian Age*, 08/08/2002.

## 2004

### Garro version of elephant manual released

The Centre for Environment Education (CEE) North-East, in collaboration with Samrakshan Trust, recently released the Garro version of the Elephant Manual, 'Nature Scope India – Endangered Elephant'. This was released on the occasion of a Children's Day function jointly organised by the Deputy Inspector of Schools, and Deputy Commissioner, South Garo Hills, at Rangku Memorial Secondary School in Baghmara.

The manual was developed by CEE North-East as part of the educational package under the United States Fish and Wildlife supported project 'School Education to Support Asian Elephant Conservation'. This project includes the design, development and production of educational materials and the implementation of an intensive Asian Elephant environmental education programme in schools, targeted primarily at students of age group 10 to 14 years, and through them to the larger community.

The manual meant for the teachers' community aims not only to provide information about various facets of the conservation of the Asian Elephant, but also suggests ways in which teachers can effectively communicate this to students.

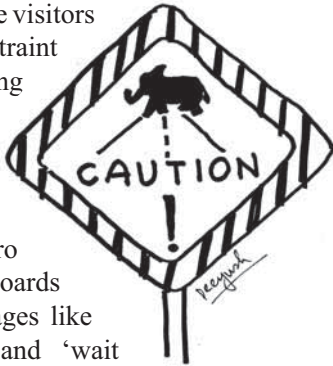
Daniel S Marak, ex-Chairman of Municipality Board and T Dkhar, Deputy Commissioner, South Garo Hills, Baghmara, released the manual.

Source: 'Garo version of manual on pachyderms released', *The Assam Tribune*, 24/11/2004.

## 2008

### **'Caution' signboards help save elephants in the Garo Hills ER**

In order to urge visitors to exercise restraint while crossing wild - elephant - bearing areas of the South Garo Hills, signboards bearing messages like 'be patient' and 'wait for it to pass', have been put up on roads in the Baghmara and Rewak RFs that form part of the Garo Hills ER. The Samrakshan Trust, an organisation working for biodiversity conservation in collaboration with Meghalaya FD, has put up these messages in Garo and English, and has also been distributing handbills to drivers asking them to be cautious.



While NH-62 passes through the Rewak RF, which is used regularly by elephants crossing the Simsang river from Siju, State Highway 31A passes through the Baghmara RF, which has a resident elephant population as well as seasonal visitors.

Though statistics are not maintained and most cases of encounters with elephants on the road go unreported, rough estimates indicate a minimum of three to four encounters in a week. Some of these turn violent and

dangerous with elephants damaging vehicles and chasing people.

Source: Roopak Goswami. 'Caution signboards help save elephants', *The Telegraph*, 11/08/2008.

## 2009

### **Community reserve set up for pitcher plant conservation in South Garo Hills**

Residents of the Baghmara A'king in the South Garo District of Meghalaya have recently set up a community reserve for the conservation of the pitcher plant *Nepenthes khasiana*. The Matcha Nokpante Community Conserved Pitcher Plant Reserve (MNCCPPR) has been established in an area called Matcha Nokpante, which in Garo translates to 'Bachelor Hut of Tigers'. The area has traditionally been rich in wildlife and tigers have also been seen here.

The reserve is spread over an area of 1.5 sq km where the pitcher plant is found in abundance. It was set up after several meetings and discussions by hamlets located in the vicinity.

The Samrakshan Trust that works in the region helped the communities in creating the reserve, setting up an institutional mechanism and in formulation of the rules for its management. Samrakshan's team had surveyed and mapped the area and has now initiated a biodiversity survey of the reserve.

Source: 'About Matcha Nokpante Community Conserve Pitcher Plant Reserve (MNCCPPR)', *Green Footprint Newsletter*, September 2009.

## 2010

### **Wildlife awards instituted for conservation in the Garo Hills**

The conservation NGO Samrakshan Trust has instituted 'Wildlife Conservation Awards' to acknowledge individuals working on conservation issues in the Garo Hills. Asith Sangma and Lambu Sangma of Baghmara were the first awardees, for their contribution towards wildlife rescue and conservation recently.

Officers from the Tourism Department, Industries, educational institutions and citizens from Baghmara and Tura participated in the awards function.

Source: 'Conservationists honoured in Garo Hills', *The Shillong Times*, 23/08/2010.

### **Community conservation awards instituted in South Garo Hills**

The Samrakshan Trust has instituted community conservation awards in an effort to recognize and support such initiatives in the South Garo Hills in Meghalaya. The first awards went recently to two nokmas (village headmen) for their efforts towards forest protection.

One of the awardees was the management committee of Dambuk Atong in South East Garo Hills for catching and fining a person for smuggling timber from a RF. They have also made and erected signboards to spread awareness about the importance of forests.

The awards were given away by the Deputy Commissioner of the South Garo Hills during the inauguration of Baghmara's Annual Winter Festival in the month of December.

Source: 'Pat for Garo hills conservationists', *The Telegraph*, 16/12/2010.

## 2011

### **Survey on Western Hoolock Gibbon in Garo Hills**

Samrakshan Trust has initiated a study of the Hoolock gibbon in the Balphakram Baghmara Landscape through research, community based conservation action and increased involvement, participation and awareness of the FD and the government. The landscape includes, among others, the Balphakram NP, the Siju WLS and the Baghmara RF.

Two sets of data, one for the monsoon and the other for winter, will be collected from Baghmara RF and detailed information on presence of the Hoolock gibbon will be collected from across the landscape during winter i.e. between October and February.

Source: 'Survey on Western Hoolock Gibbon presence in Garo Hills', *Green Footprint Newsletter*, June-July 2011.

### **Garo Hills Conservation Award 2011**

The Garo Hills Conservation Award 2011 was presented to the Baghmara Range Forest Office (RFO) of Balphakram NP Division and the Garo Students' Union - Ruga Unit for their commitment and contribution towards curbing wildlife hunting, and combating the issue of wildlife pet-keeping in the South Garo Hills.

CG Momin, the Baghmara RFO, and his staff have been carrying out field trips to combat illegal wildlife trade in the Garo hills resulting in the rescue of several mammals, reptiles, primates and birds, and in their subsequent rehabilitation in the forests. They have also booked a number of culprits under provisions of the WLPA. The Garo Students Union, Ruga unit, led by Matgrik Marak, got the award for their role in numerous conservation activities and also for raising



their voice against haphazard coal mining in the region.

This is the 2nd year that the awards are being given. They were initiated in 2010 by the Samrakshan Trust on the tenth anniversary of their foundation

Source: 'Garo Hills Conservation Award 2011', *The Shillong Times*, 07/09/2011.  
'Foresters, students bag Garo hill prize', *The Telegraph*, 08/09/2011.

### **Meghalaya claims 47 tigers in state: seeks detailed tiger survey**

The Meghalaya FD has requested the central government to direct the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun, to conduct a detailed survey to ascertain the current tiger population in the state. According to the Meghalaya Additional PCCF and Chief Wildlife Warden, the state has 47 tigers. The number is based on the surveys conducted employing the conventional method in the past three years.

The number of tigers in Meghalaya was 33 in 1993 while in 1998 it went up to 69. In 2002 the number was down to 47. The FD has asked that the census should now be conducted via the camera trapping method. The most recent tiger count by the WII put the total population in the country at 1411. From among the states of the North-East, only Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram were included in it. Meghalaya had not been covered.

Source: 'Govt seeks detailed tiger survey in State', *The Shillong Times*, 10/10/2011.  
'47 tigers in M'laya', *The Sentinel*, 29/10/2011.

## **BALPHAKRAM NP**

### **1999**

#### **Land acquisition scam in Balphakram NP**

There has been a huge scam involving acquisition of land for the Balphakram NP. The land tenure system in the state is such that the government does not own any land. To create sanctuaries or NPs, the government has to purchase land from private people. Crores of rupees have been given for the acquisition of the land for the park, but the ownership of the land has not been transferred to the park authorities. Whereas the official documents say that the area of the park is 425 sq km, a survey in 1998 by the then Chief Wildlife Warden of the state, SB Singh, revealed that the actual area was only 169 sq. kms.

Singh's findings clearly indicated that a massive fraud had taken place over the years, in which unscrupulous politicians, hand-in-glove with landowners and government officials, had allegedly siphoned off crores of rupees in the name of purchasing land for the park.

A public interest litigation (PIL) had been filed in the matter before the Guwahati High Court. The petitioner however withdrew the case when it was learnt that the Government of Meghalaya was to hand over the issue to the Central Bureau for Investigation (CBI) and the Chief Minister had assured of the same. The Court thus dismissed the case, but the state government then went back on its promise and, though many months have passed, there is no sign of the promised CBI enquiry. The government had not even prepared the chargesheet which is mandatory before the CBI steps in.

Source: Linda Chhakchhuak. 'An elephantine question', *Grassroots Options*, Autumn 1999.

## 2002

### Balpakram NP to be remeasured

The Government of Meghalaya has asked the Survey of India to re-measure the area of the Balpakram NP to lay to rest the controversy over the exact size of the park.

A massive scandal had broken out a few years ago after a survey by the then Chief Wildlife Warden, Mr SB Singh, revealed that the area of the park was 50% short of what was officially recorded. Since the land was acquired at a rate of Rs. 60 lakhs/sq km, the amount of money that may have been fraudulently paid for non-existent land ran into a few crores.

The state government has finally given the go ahead to the FD which in turn has approached the Survey of India (SI). However the FD has said that the price of Rs. 25 lakhs that was quoted by the SI to do the survey was too steep.

According to the latest information however, the state government has decided to provide the required amount for the re-survey. The Survey of India would now start the work after the monsoons are over and on receipt of the funds from the state government.

Source: 'Govt. orders Resurvey', *Grassroots Options*, Spring 2002.

## 2005

### Monitoring elephant movement in Garo Hills

The movement of the wild elephants in the Garo Hills is being monitored as part of a project taken up by the NGO, Samrakshan Trust. Local people are being trained for the purpose. As part of the initiative, a 'record-

keeper' is being appointed in each A'king (a tract of land belonging to a particular clan) to make a note of elephant movement and presence in the respective areas in a prescribed format.

As a pilot activity, this exercise has been undertaken in five A'kings: Amapangre, Alokpang, Halwa Atong, Gongrot and Panda. The Trust intends to eventually expand its scope to all thirty-three A'kings that constitute the Balpakram Baghmara Community Conservation Landscape (BBCCL). The idea behind the exercise is to obtain information, in a structured manner, over a period, about the areas within the A'kings used by the elephants. This is pertinent as there is lack of information on presence and distribution of elephants in the landscape.

The BBCCL is the informal name given to an area of approximately 300 sq kms in the South Garo Hills district. Its boundaries have been roughly designated as follows: Simsang river (West); West Khasi Hills district (East); Balpakram NP (North); India-Bangladesh international border (South). The area provides refuge to a diverse array of wildlife including elephant, gaur, tiger, Clouded leopard and the Hoolock gibbon. In conjunction with the Balpakram NP, the BBCCL is possibly the largest tract of habitat in Meghalaya that has the best long-term possibility of conservation of wildlife in general and mega fauna such as elephants in particular.

Source: 'Pachyderm movement in Garo Hills being monitored', *The Assam Tribune*, 29/08/2005.

## 2008

### **Garo Students Union Opposes Coal Mining near Balpakram NP, South Garo Hills**

The Garo Students Union has opposed the continued coal mining in the South Garo Hills including in areas adjoining the Balpakram NP. In a press release issued in September they condemned the move of the Gongrot A'king

to mine coal on their land. The A'king is located in the Rongara Block adjoining the Balpakram NP.

The union holds that the mining will destroy the rich natural and cultural heritage of the Garo people who have their last remaining stronghold in this region. The press release states that the livelihood sources of a number of villages will be destroyed as a result of the degradation of land. There would be severe negative impacts on the drinking water supply and the paddy land of A'kings downstream of Gongrot i.e. Halwa Atong, Rongrengpal, Alokpang, Ampangre and Halwa Ambeng. These A'kings include 26 villages with about 600 families.

A delegation of the Garo Students Union met the representatives of the Gongrot A'king to convey their concerns and has also called upon the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, the District Administration of South Garo Hills and the Meghalaya State FD to ensure that the mining does not start in the region.



The mining in this region is generally not by industry but by the land owners themselves. A majority of the land is also held by the village community.

Source: 'Garo Students Union Opposed coal mining in South Garo Hills', Press Release, Garo Students Union, 22/09/2008.

## 2009

### **Mining stopped near Balphakram NP**

The Deputy Commissioner (DC) of the South Garo Hills District has issued a notice to the relevant persons of the Gongrot A'king to halt mining and associated road construction. The mining was being undertaken in the forests adjoining the Balphakram NP.

The Chitmang Hills Anti-Mining Forum, (CHAMF) that was opposing the mining on grounds of loss of livelihoods and damage to the environment, has welcomed the action. In a press release, the Forum had pointed out that the mining was clearly illegal as the chosen site was a forest area, and as clearances had not been obtained from the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority and State Pollution Control Board.

The Forum is a conglomeration of organizations and citizens against unplanned and unscientific mining. It is comprised of the Garo Students Union, Youth Development and Vigilance Committee, Southern Youth and Cultural Organization, Atong Cultural Organization, Samrakshan Trust, Siju Youth Socio Cultural Organisation, Achik Tourism Society and Achik Youth and Cultural Organisation.

## **Land adjoining Balphakram NP reclaimed from illegal miners**

The Garo Students Union (GSU) and the Chitmag Hills Anti Mining Forum (CHAMF) have recently reclaimed the land that had been illegally denuded of forest for constructing a road to the proposed mining spot in Gongrot A'king bordering the Balphakram NP. The land that was reclaimed lies in the Halwa Atong A'king in the South Garo Hills District of Meghalaya.

In a symbolic gesture of returning the land to the forest, an 85 strong contingent of GSU members and other NGOs of South Garo Hills planted saplings on the 1.5 km of road that has been cut through standing forest. Though a commitment has been taken from the headman of Halwa Atong A'king to not permit any further illegal activities on the land of his village, the anti-mining coalition had decided to maintain a constant vigil to ensure that no fresh moves to start road construction are made.

The anti-mining coalition has also petitioned the MoEF regional office in Shillong regarding the violation of the Forest Conservation Act. Similarly, a complaint has also been filed with the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council for prosecuting the headmen of Gongrot and Halwa Atong A'kings for felling of standing forest, that too with malafide intent of illegal mining.

Source: 'Reclaiming Land From Illegal Miners in Halwa Atong A'king, South Garo Hills District, Meghalaya', Press Release by the GSU, 12/08/2009.

## **2010**

### **Opposition to uranium mining in Balphakram NP; Govt. puts project on hold**

The standing committee of the National Board of Wildlife (NBWL) has decided to send a site inspection team to the Balpakram NP to ascertain people's views on the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) proposal to conduct its exploratory mission for uranium in the park.

The DAE has asked the MoEF to de-notify an area of eight sq km on the Rongcheng plateau for the exploration of uranium ore. Surveys in recent years have identified the area as a good source of uranium and the DAE wants to start the exploration exercise to confirm the deposits to meet the country's nuclear energy requirement which is targeted to be 20,000 MW by 2020.

The Balphakram NP is home to a number of rare species of plants and animals and is considered sacred by both, the Hindus and the indigenous Garo community.

There has been considerable opposition to the exploration on grounds of the impact it will have on the wildlife and the ecology. Prominent among those who are opposed to the project are the Garo Hills Anti-Mining Forum (GHAMF), the Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA) and the Garo Students' Union (GSU). The GSU has also written to the state Chief Minister asking him to oppose the de-notification proposal.

The state Chief Wildlife Warden Mr. Sunil Kumar has meanwhile said that the proposed exploration will have no biotic interference in the park. His argument is that the drilling exercise is of a temporary nature that will be carried out only in the daytime.

According to the latest reports the state government has decided to keep in abeyance the proposed exploratory mining. The

decision was taken in the last week of April following a meeting with the GSU.

Source: 'Opposition to Uranium Mining from Balpakram Mounts', <http://in.news.yahoo.com/14/04/2010>.

'NBWL to carry site inspection of Balpakram', *The Shillong Times*, 16/04/2010.

'GNLA opposed Uranium mining', *The Meghalaya Times*, 19/04/2010.

'Uranium mining at Balpakram kept in abeyance', *The Assam Tribune*, 01/05/2010.

### **NBWL rejects uranium mining in Balphakram NP**

The National Board on Wildlife (NBWL) has finally rejected the uranium mining project in Balphakram NP in Meghalaya after stiff opposition from various quarters. The decision was taken at a meeting of the standing committee of the NBWL held in the month of May following a site inspection visit by its members.

A number of organizations including the Garo Students Union (GSU) had opposed the Department of Atomic Energy's (DAE's) move for exploratory drilling for uranium by denotifying an area of eight sq km of the Rongcheng plateau inside the Balpakram NP.

A report submitted by the inspection team has asked for all road construction and mining to be stopped inside the park. It has also recommended strict regulation for all coal mines in the Garo Hills and other parts of the state and implementation of proper mining plans.

Source: 'NBWL rejects uranium mining project in Balphakram Nat Park', [www.economicstimes.com](http://www.economicstimes.com) 14/05/2010.

## **NOKREK NP**

### **2002**

#### **Tura winter fest held in November**

The Tura Winter Fest was held in the first half of November at Daribokgre near the Nokrek NP. Promotion of eco-tourism was one of the themes of the festival that was organised by the Meghalaya Tourism Department in collaboration with the West Garo Hills Community Resource Management Society, a project under IFAD.

Those who addressed the function included Debora C Marak, Minister for Mining and Geology; KN Momin, West Garo Hills District Officer; Dr V Darlong, Regional Director, Ministry of Environment and Forests and Dr. Jimmy Momin, Veterinary Officer.

Source: 'Tura winter fest commences', *The Assam Tribune*, 15/11/2002.

### **2008**

#### **Nokrek BR nominated for UNESCO Biosphere Reserve program**

The MoEF has forwarded the nomination of the Nokrek Biosphere Reserve located in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya for recognition under UNESCO's network of biosphere reserves. The Nokrek BR is spread over an area of 800 sq kms and includes the 48 sq. kms Nokrek NP.

The nomination was made following a research project carried out here by the Botanical Survey of India. Nokrek is particularly famous for the discovery of the mother germplasm of *Citrus-indica*,

considered to be the progenitor of all other varieties of citrus plants in the world.

Source: 'Native land of oranges awaits UNESCO tag', *The Statesman*, 21/04/2008.

## **NONGKHYLLEM WLS**

**2003**

### **Stronger punishment urged for poachers**

A Shillong based NGO, The Wilderness Concern, along with the Eastern Ri Bhoi

Wildlife and Forest Protection Association and Sordars and Rangbah Shnongs of the villages of the Nongkhyllem WLS have urged wildlife authorities to mete out stronger punishments to poachers and other miscreants who are involved in wildlife crime.

Recently, in fact, miscreants accused of dynamite fishing near Nongkhyllem WLS were fined Rs. 30,000 by the concerned authorities.

Source: 'Stronger punishment urged against poachers', *The Shillong Times*, 20/09/2003.







# MIZORAM

NO.	NAME OF THE PA	AREA (SQ KM)
1	Murlen NP	100
2	Phawngpui NP	50
3	Dampa WLS (TR)	500
4	Khawnglung WLS	35
5	Lengteng WLS	60
6	Ngengpui WLS	110
7	Pualreng WLS	50
8	Tawi WLS	35.75
9	Thorangtlang WLS	50
	TOTAL	990.75



**T**hroughout the whole of this dense jungle many wild animals abound, from the smaller to the great species of the animal kingdom. Jungle Wolves, or Wild Dogs; Civet Cats, in great variety; the Barking Deer; the Samber Deer; the Rhinoceros; the king of these jungles, the Tiger; and the largest animal of all, the Elephant. In greater numbers than any of the above animals appears the monkey, of which there are number of species. The long-tailed monkey is also found in large troops, whilst the Gibbon Ape is seen swinging from branch to branch, calling out with its weird, hollow sound. These Gibbon Apes have no tails, and are the nearest approach to human beings that I have ever seen. Amongst the feathered flock many species of game are present. The Peacock Pheasant, the Black Pheasant, the Partridge and many others; also the Jungle Fowl; whilst the smaller birds from the Paroquet downwards abound on every side. There is one bird in particular whose male and female differ only in the colours of their bodies, the one being crimson and the other blue, but with all their beauty they are no songsters.

*Reginald A Lorrain*  
‘5 Years in Unknown Jungles’, Lakher Pioneer Mission, 1912

## STATE NEWS

### 2001

#### Sanctuary status for Palak Lake, Thorang area

The Mizoram Environment and Forest Minister has recently said that the state government was actively considering a proposal to declare areas around the Palak Lake and the Thorang mountain as wildlife sanctuaries. The announcement was made during the wildlife week in October 2001.

Further details are however not known.

Source: 'Sanctuary status likely to Palak lake, Thorang areas', *The Assam Tribune*, 06/10/2001.

### 2002

#### Myanmarese poachers in Mizoram

There are reports that Myanmarese poachers regularly enter the forests of Mizoram for poaching of elephants, leopards, tigers and also other forest wealth like orchids which are abundant here. Forest officials have said that it is very difficult to apprehend them as they use the thick forests as convenient cover to easily cross over the international boundary to their country.

The areas visited by the poachers include the Ngengpui WLS and the newly proposed Palak Lake Sanctuary in the southern most part of the state.

Source: 'Myanmarese poachers cross over to Mizoram frequently', *The Assam Tribune*, 12/08/2002.

#### Two new bird sanctuaries to be set up at Reiek Mountain and Tamdil Forest

The Mizoram FD has proposed the creation of two new bird sanctuaries at Reiek Mountain and the Tamdil Forests. The two sites are located at 1485 m and about 1000 m above sea level respectively and are home to many endangered species of birds and 10 species of wild animals.

The state FD has completed the survey of the two areas and is now planning a project to plant fruit-bearing trees here.

Source: '2 bird havens to be set up in Mizoram', *The Assam Tribune*, 06/07/2002.

### 2003

#### Awards for wildlife preservation given away in Mizoram

Six people were recently awarded Phawngpui and Murlen awards for their contribution to preserving wildlife and forests in Mizoram at the 'Nungeha Humhalhtu Khawmpui', a state-level conference. The Phawngpui award, carrying a citation, certificate and Rs 10,000 in cash, was given to Laldingliana of Kawlkulb village, K Lianthanga of Sihphir village and Laldawla of Laite village. The Murlen award, carrying a citation, certificate and Rs 5,000 in cash was given to C Sangkhuma of Aizawl, Lalthuama of Chhippui village and PC Lawmsanga of Zuyangtui.

The six people were awarded for their outstanding contribution to the preservation of wildlife and forests, by creating their own private sanctuaries and educating people on the importance of wildlife preservation.

Source: 'Award for wildlife preservation given away in Mizoram', *The Assam Tribune*, 16/06/2003.

2007

### New species records for Mizoram PAs



Two new species of mammals have recently been reported from PAs in Mizoram. A Malayan bear *Helarctos malayanus* was recorded via a camera trap in the Dampa TR while the Asiatic brush tailed porcupine (local name Sumsi) was found in the Tawi WLS.

Source: Navraj Pradhan. Email dated 24/08/2007.

2010

### State awarded Indira Priyadarshini Vriksha Mitra Award 2010

Mizoram has been awarded the Indira Priyadarshini Vriksha Mitra (IPVM) Award 2010 in recognition of the state's laudable contribution in the field of afforestation and wasteland development. The award given by the MoEF carries a cash prize of Rs 5 lakh, a citation and a scroll.

In the latest report of the Forest Survey of India, Mizoram was ranked first among the Indian States and Union Territories in terms of forest cover as percentage of the state's geographical area. According to the report, 82.42% of Mizoram's total geographical area of 21,081 sq km is under forest cover.

Mizoram is followed by Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Nagaland. Started in 1999, the Green Mizoram programme

has helped a lot in maintaining Mizoram's greenery.

Source: <http://www.sinlung.com/2010/11/mizoram-gets-green-award.html>

## DAMPA NP

2002

### LPG for villages around Dampa TR

About 1000 families in 12 villages around the Dampa TR have been provided with LPG cylinders by the Government of Mizoram. The main aim of the programme is to wean the



villagers away from use of wood as fuel and thereby reduce the pressure on the forests of the reserve. It is hoped that nearly 10,000 families in the 20 odd villages surrounding the park will be provided with gas cylinders in the next couple of years.

The cylinders have been provided under the Rs. 35 lakh, central government funded ecocodevelopment programme. The ecocodevelopment programme in Dampa was started in 1995.

Source: 'LPG to rescue the tiger', *The Sentinel*, 20/04/2002.

'Mizoram distributing gas cylinders to save tigers', *Indo-Asian News Service*, 23/04/2002.

2007

### Indo-Bangladesh border patrol road to pass through Dampa TR

The Aizwal-based Centre For Environment Protection (CEP) has expressed serious concern over the construction of the Indo-Bangladesh border fencing and patrol road, more than half of which will pass through the Dampa TR. Of the 147 km long road, nearly 80 kms between Andermanik (BP No. 2306) and Silsuri (BP No. 2313) falls within the TR. A link road from Phuldungsei to Keisalam II BOP for about a length of 20 km is also within the boundaries of the reserve.

Not only will the construction activities have an impact on the wildlife and the forests, all wildlife movement corridors will also be blocked once the work is completed.

CEP has suggested alternatives that will deal with the problem and also ensure that the TR and the forests are not as badly affected. It has suggested that 20 patrolling posts inside Dampa will do the job of the 80 kms of proposed road.

Source: AC Zonunmawai. Email dated 07/02/2007.

### 227 families to be evicted from Dampa TR



227 families belonging to the Chakma community from Andermanik village are to be evicted for the expansion of the Dampa TR. Forest officials had already imposed

restrictions on jhum cultivation that is the community's main source of livelihood. For some amongst those to be evicted now, it will be a 2nd eviction, as they had been moved once in 1989 when the Dampa TR was created. In other cases, it was an earlier generation that had been displaced. They had been moved outside the TR area and settled at the present Andermanik village.

The villagers are opposed to the relocation. They link it to the fact that they never got the promised compensation when they were displaced the first time. The villagers have also pointed out that even today their village has no road connectivity and no health care centre. The villagers have to walk nearly 18 km through difficult terrain to Rajiv Nagar to get basic things like the PDS grain or medicines.

They are also not clear about the choices to be made this time – between Option I which is a financial package of Rs 10 lakh per family and Option II where the FD has the responsibility for the relocation/rehabilitation of the villages from the tiger reserve.

Source: 'Mizoram's Dampa tiger reserve to evict 227 tribal families', [www.merineews.com](http://www.merineews.com), 25/09/2010.

## NGENGPUI

2003

### Elephants poached in Ngengpui WLS; surrounding villagers to be punished

The Mizoram Environment and FD has decided to punish the villages surrounding the Ngengpui WLS for refusing to help in the probe to trace poachers who had recently killed two elephants inside the sanctuary.



The Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Chhimituipui Forest Division, has been instructed to suspend all eco-development works in Mampui, Ngengpui, Rulkual, R Vanhne, Paithar, Saizawh and Bungtlang villages. All the village eco-development committees (VEDCs) too are to be abolished by the DFO. The Ngengpui WLS spread on an area of 110 sq km is situated near the Indo-Bangladesh border.

Source: 'Pachyderm poaching puts Mizo villagers on the dock', *The Assam Tribune*, 28/06/2003.

## 2005

### **World Heritage Site proposal for Ngengpui WLS**

The Central Government will approach UNESCO to seek World Heritage Site status for the Ngengpui WLS. Senior MoEF officials recently visited the state in this context. The formal proposal for the same is likely to be submitted to the World Heritage Committee (WHC) of the UNESCO in February 2006.

Ngengpui WLS is spread over 110 sq km and the altitude here ranges from 200 metres to about 1,200 metres above sea level. The sanctuary is home to a diverse range of wildlife including tiger, Clouded leopard, gaur, Barking deer, goral, sambar, Hoolock gibbon, Blythe's tragopan, Kaleej pheasant and Hume's bar-tailed pheasant.

Source: Santanu Ghosh. 'Mizoram TR to be upgraded to states' first bio-diversity hotspot', *The Telegraph*, 06/10/2005.

# PHAWNGPUI NP

## 2006

### **Poaching inside Phawngpui NP**

Cases of wildlife poaching were detected inside the Phawngpui NP in the month of January. Six serows, one sambar and one monkey were reportedly killed by five people from one of the ten villages located on the fringes of the NP.

Even though the identity of the poachers is not yet known, forest officials have filed a case against the killing of animals.

Source: 'Poaching rampant inside Phawngpui NP', *Zee News*, 23/02/2006.

# NAGALAND

NO.	NAME OF THE PA	AREA (SQ KM)
1	Intanki NP	202
2	Fakim NP	6.4
3	Puliebadze WLS	9.23
4	Rangapahar WLS	4.2
	TOTAL	221.83



**F**rom the vegetational aspect the Naga Hills are more interesting than the Khasi Hills, because of the change in forest types which takes place as one proceeds up the valley of the Brahmaputra. The forests on the neck of the hill range dividing the Brahmaputra and Surma valleys, consist first of a 'dry' evergreen belt containing the locally noted BonSum (a species of Phoebe), and further eastward a 'moist' type characterised by the giant Dipterocarp Hollong. This Hollong, forests extends along the foothills of the Naga country up to the tip of the valley, near the point where the Burma-China-India triangle begins. The strip of country between 2000 ft. and 5000 ft. generally is the main habitated and cultivated portion of Nagaland. In the interior of the Naga Hills at elevations above 3000 ft., the Dipterocarps give way to a peculiar type of evergreen forest which deserves the name 'temperate' evergreens, as they are found on the higher and cooler elevations. Forested caps of the mountains are clearly visible when flying over Nagaland and constitute a unique feature of an otherwise rather monotonous expanse of secondary jungle. But the scene is not as monotonous as the one presented by the Lushai Or Mizo Hills as they are now known where the secondary vegetation consists entirely of bamboo.

*PD Stracey*

'A Note on Nagaland'

Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society 64 (3), December 1976

## STATE NEWS

### 2002

#### Village declares itself a no-hunting zone

The Village Council of Changtongya village in the Mokokshung district of Nagaland has declared the village as a no-hunting zone. The council resolved that no one would be allowed to kill wild animals or use poisons for fishing here and those found violating these rules would be penalised.

It was also resolved to plant wild fruit trees in the forest and jhum areas. The council decided that the moratorium on hunting would be for five years initially and would be extended further if animal and bird populations increase. It was also clarified that the ban was on hunting for commercial purposes or for sport and that seasonal hunting with 'limited opportunity' may be permitted.

Source: 'Nagaland village declared no-hunting zone', *The Sentinel*, 29/01/2002.

### 2003

#### New NP in Japhu Hills

A new NP is to be declared in the Japhu Hills in the capital of the state, Kohima. The assurances for this were recently given by the MoEF to the State Chief Minister. Further details are not known.

Source: *The Hindu*, 03/07/2003.

### 2007

#### Protests against encroachment in Intanki NP

Students and villagers of the Zeliangrong Naga tribe recently demonstrated before the Nagaland Assembly demanding removal of encroachers from Intanki NP located in the Kohima district.

The demonstrators, who had assembled under the aegis of All Zeliangrong Students' Union, were protesting against alleged inaction by the government despite 'continued encroachment' on the park for the last couple of years.

They also demanded eviction of encroachers from the Dhansiripar subdivision, in Dimapur district, asserting that the encroached land traditionally belonged to the Zeliangrong community.

Source: 'Protests against Nagaland sanctuary encroachment', *The Assam Tribune*, 21/03/2007.

### 2009

#### Singphan RF declared as Singphan WLS

The Singphan RF in Nagaland's Mon District has been declared as the Singphan WLS. The Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Mon District recently issued a notification under Section 26A of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, creating the sanctuary over an area of 2357 hectares.

The boundary description of the sanctuary is as follows: 'South – Shenmen Nallah and Upper Tiru village, North – PWD Border Road Assam, East – Sufrai/Tiru River up to the junction and West – Churaideo Tea estate on the Assam side'.

Source: 'Mon DC declares Reserved Forest as WLS', *The Morung Express*, 08/10/2009.

## 2011

### **Review of status of hunting, conservation efforts in Nagaland**

The Nagaland Empowerment of People through Economic Development (NEPED) has recently released a review and report on the status of wildlife conservation in Nagaland. The report is an outcome of the programme ‘Strengthening Community Conservation Efforts in Nagaland,’ that is being funded by the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (SDTT) and being executed in collaboration with the Coimbatore based Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON).

The survey found that more than three lakh animals and birds were killed in Nagaland in year 2008. This included nearly 10,000 large animals; close to 50,000 small animals, 34,758 large birds and over two lakh individuals of small bird species. The results are based on a survey conducted in 66 villages involving 14,578 households. It was found out that of the 928 households that were involved in hunting only 6% were, in fact, habitual hunters. Hunting was mainly reported from two distinct three-month periods in the year: January – March and then October – December.

The survey concluded that hunting did provide evidence of presence of wild fauna in the forests and also noted that significant reduction in hunting of wildlife could be achieved as only a small percentage of the population was actively engaged in it. It also noted that despite resolutions passed by village authorities, enforcing the resolutions requires strengthening and support, including from the administration.

In the first phase of the overall programme, technical support on biodiversity conservation and livelihood options has been imparted to communities in the districts of

Phek, Tuensang, Longleng, Kiphire and Mon. It has also identified several specific programmes appropriate to the specific village community that would lead to economic benefits and sustainable development.

The survey also notes that the number of community conserved areas (CCA) increased from 109 villages before the project to 285 villages in 2009. In many cases villagers, under the leadership of the elders in the communities, have come together to ensure the creation of forest and wildlife conservation areas. Prominent joint conservation committees formed during the project period include the Saramati Awung Conservation and Management Society (SACAMS), Hongmong Conservation Committee (Mon), Yai Zone Wildlife Control Managing Committee (Shamator), Phoyisha Range Conservation (Phek district) and Helipong Khong Joint Biodiversity Conservation Area (Tuensang district). Residents in several other areas in Tuensang and Phek district have also expressed their desire to form joint forest conservation committees

A simultaneous effort at documenting traditional knowledge and the formation of Peoples’ Biodiversity Registers is also going on.

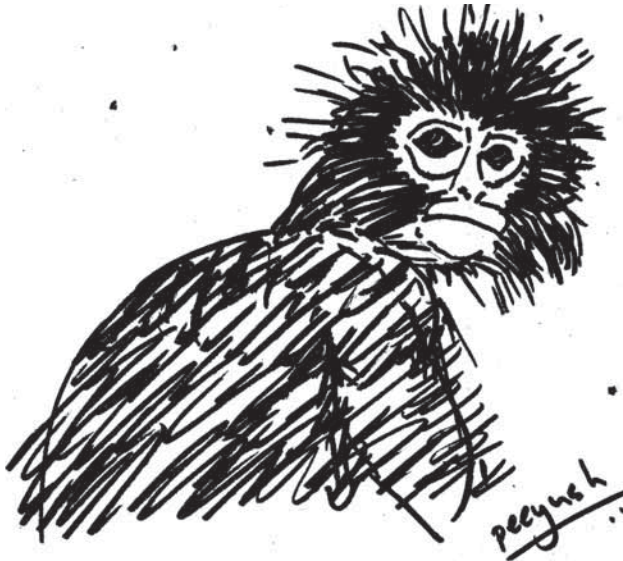
The Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) has also recently directed its constituents not to involve wildlife in any church-related activity. This is a significant step as most local hunters are members of the church and the direction sends out a message that exploitation of wildlife is ethically wrong.

In its 74th Annual Session held in early February at the Rotomi Baptist Church under Zunheboto district, the NBCC reaffirmed its resolution to join hands with the community leaders and government departments for the protection of the environment. It was decided that the Baptist Churches will initiate climate-change-friendly and eco-biology-friendly

actions, sensitise the public to matters of the conservation of forest and preservation of wildlife and work closely with the community leaders and concerned departments in addressing environmental issues. It further resolved that the churches will abstain from using meat of wildlife during any gathering of NBCC and the churches, and will also

discourage people from offering wild animals during thanksgiving services.

Source: 'Over 3, 00, 000 animals killed in Nagaland in 2008', <http://www.morungexpress.com/local/61349.html>  
'Nagaland Church vouches for environmental protection', *The Sentinel*, 11/02/2011.

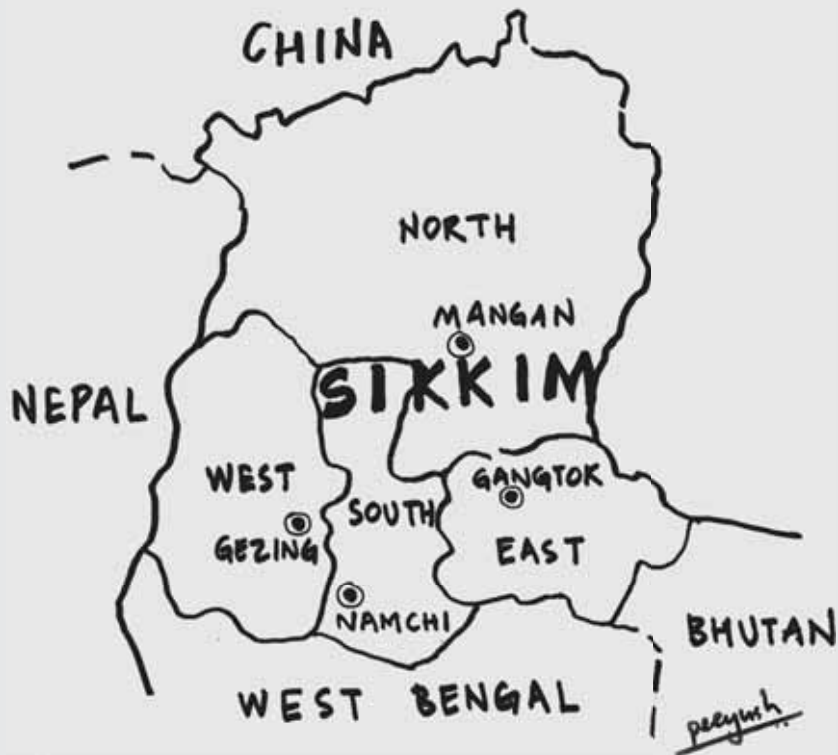






# SIKKIM

NO.	NAME OF THE PA	AREA (SQ KM)
1	Khanchengzonga NP	1784
2	Barsey Rhododendron WLS	104
3	Fambong Lho WLS (TR)	51.76
4	Kitam WLS	6
5	Kyongnosla Alpine WLS	31
6	Maenam WLS	35.34
7	Pangolakha WLS	128
8	Shingba (Rhododendron) WLS	43
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2183.1</b>



The shikari suddenly said, 'There they are!' and pointed towards the grassy slopes further up the opposite (North) side of the valley. I could hardly believe him, as I was under the impression that we should have to go considerably higher before finding any 'shepi', but on examining the slope through my binoculars, I could certainly make out two or three black animals grazing at the top of one of the cliffs. I was still somewhat sceptical however and thought they were probably only Serow after all, as we had noticed plenty of Serow tracks in the jungle on the way up from Chum Tang, but the Shikari swore that they were not Serow ('Tahr' in his language), but 'shepi'. The next morning we could see no 'shepi' from the camp, so we climbed up through the jungle on the north side of the Pim Chu, and by about mid-day, reached the top of a rock slab over-hanging the slopes on which the 'shepi' had been grazing the previous evening; (...) and except for some tracks and droppings in the jungle, which might easily have been those of Serow, there was no sign of the 'shepi. We were resting on the top of the cliffs, high above the floor of the valley, when three or four black objects appeared, but this time on the south side of the nullah, i.e. the side opposite to us.

*CJT Wrenicke*

'Occurrence of the Himalayan Tahr (*Hemitragus jemlahicus*) in Sikkim  
Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society 44(1), August 1943

## STATE NEWS

### 2004

#### **Conservation Reserve proposed for the cold desert region of Sikkim**

The Department of Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management, Government of Sikkim has proposed the creation of the Tso Lhamo Cold Desert Conservation Reserve (TLCDCR) in North Sikkim in an attempt to protect the habitat and wildlife here.

The proposal is based on extensive field studies of the cold desert and trans-Himalayan areas of North Sikkim carried out in the alpine grasslands in collaboration with the Bombay Natural History Society. The field studies that were facilitated by the Indian Army stationed in the area, under Commander 112 Mountain Brigade and CO 30 Assam Rifles have generated valuable information on a hitherto virtually ignored area of Sikkim.

A stakeholders' consultation has been planned in October 2004 at Tsunghang, North Sikkim, to discuss various issues related to the area.

The army has reportedly expressed concern that the creation of the conservation reserve 'will impose severe restrictions on defence related activity, ultimately impinging on their operational preparedness and national security'. They have written to the Governor, Chief Minister and the Chief Secretary, Government of Sikkim, and the FD, suggesting that the workshop should not be held until clearance is received from the Ministry of Defence (MOD).

### 2006

#### **Workshop on eco-tourism**

A workshop on ecotourism was organized in Gangtok in the last week of January by the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment (ATREE). It was attended by officials of the Sikkim FD, the Eco Conservation Society of Sikkim (ECOSS), various NGOs and the state tourism department.

The workshop was part of the four-state eco-tourism study being conducted by ATREE to synthesize the experience of eco-tourism in Sikkim, West Bengal, Kerala and Karnataka. The workshop in Sikkim was the 3rd in the series, while the 4th one will be in Darjeeling.

The basic purpose of the project is to formulate guidelines covering economic, ecological, social and cultural parameters for evaluating and implementing eco-tourism.

Source: 'Workshop mulls eco-tourism', *The Statesman*, 26/01/2006.

#### **Villagers to be made Himal Rakshaks – Honorary Mountain guardians**

The Sikkim Government is soon launching an initiative to recruit willing villagers with concern for wildlife conservation and a clean personal record residing in high altitude areas as honorary mountain guardians (Himal Rakshaks) for the conservation of the Himalayan ecosystem.

This was notified in the state gazette recently. The reason for this initiative of the state government is that inspite of determined efforts by the Forest and Environment Department, unregulated grazing, unplanned trekking, tourism, hunting, trapping of wild animals, smuggling of medicinal and aromatic plants had continued unabated in the upper Himalayas.

Further, the high altitude, remoteness, tough terrain, harsh climatic conditions, lack of adequate infrastructure, limited resources and high cost of patrolling by the forest staff also made conservation action very difficult. The rationale now is that the new initiative, with the villagers practising traditional subsistence livelihood in high altitudes, would result in more effective conservation jointly with the FD.

As part of the program, the Himal Rakshaks would be imparted training to control poaching, illegal trade in wild animals, prevent damage to wildlife habitats, smuggling of medicinal and aromatic plants, reduce negative impact of trekking and spreading the message of conservation among the people. They would also be delegated power to search, seize and detain persons for offences under the WLPA. They would initially be recruited for a period of one year and would work along with the forest staff. The period of their service could be extended for a maximum period of two to three years at a time. The Himal Rakshaks would also be honoured for their outstanding work with a letter of appreciation and cash would be given in suitable cases.

Source: 'Himal Rakshaks to protect and conserve Himalayan eco-system', *The Sentinel*, 08/04/2006.

### **Nathula opening could boost wildlife trade**

Conservationists and those dealing with issues of wildlife trade have expressed concern that the opening of the Nathu La trade route between Sikkim and China could boost this trade as it was once an important entry point to Tibet for the same.

Concern was expressed during a Wildlife Enforcement Sensitisation Workshop that was organized jointly by WWF-India and the WTI and attended by representatives from

the police, army, the Indo Tibetan Border Police and the state FD.

Those speaking at the workshop include Mr Ashok Kumar of the WTI, Mr Dipankar Ghose of the WWF, and Brigadier, Deputy GOC, 17th Mountain Division who explained how the army was engaged in wildlife protection.

The speakers emphasized the need for strict enforcement measures at the border post as also trained, sensitised enforcement personnel with the right equipment.

Source: 'Shot in the arm for smugglers', *The Statesman*, 24/06/2006.

### **Army proposal for eco-battalion for Sikkim**

The Indian Army will be proposing the creation of an 'eco-battalion' and the 'Sikkim Scouts' to the Sikkim State Government for the protection of the state's biodiversity. The announcement was made in Gangtok recently by General PK Rampal, GOC 9 Corps and Colonel of 11 Gorkha Rifles. The full details of what is proposed and the response of the state government are not known.

Source: 'Bijoy Gurung, 'Army plans eco-battalion', *The Statesman*, 16/11/2006.

## **2009**

### **Forest fires across the state in March**

The continuous dry spell in Sikkim led to widespread fires across the state in the month of March. Areas affected by fire include the following:

East Sikkim: Khesay, Gangyap, Sichey, Ganseh Tok, Daragaon, Nam Nang, Gangyap, Sang, Nazitam, Rongli, Basmey, Ranka Lingdum, Rongey, Namnang; Sang RF, Singchyel RF, Nimthang RF, Syari RF,

Rangpo, Rhodong Khasmal forest, Kopibari (private holding), Central Pandam Khasmal area, Basmei RF, Fambong Lho WLS.

West Sikkim: Nethang, Malbasey, Pipaley, Tatopani, Sakyong, Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary, Achalay RF, Tatopani RF, Reshi RF, Sakey RF, Sakyong RF, Burung RF, Raksang RF

North Sikkim: Dikchu, Lower Phodong (private holding)

South Sikkim: Melli Tribeni RF, Malbasey RF, Rabongla RF, SumbuRF, Tumin RF, Sadam Tareybhair, Salghari, Ralong.

Source: 'Outbreak of forest fires across Sikkim', *Panda Newsletter*, 2009.

### **PANDA Newsletter from ENVIS Sikkim**

The Sikkim ENVIS, Forests, Environment and Wildlife Management Department, Govt of Sikkim have recently published the PANDA Newsletter 2009.

It is a bi-annual news magazine which was initially published in 1993 but had gone into hibernation after that. It was re-launched on June 5, 2009, by the Sikkim Forest Minister. It can be accessed at the following weblink <http://www.sikennis.nic.in/Newsletter.htm>

## **2010**

### **Sikkim says no to SC directive of 10 km eco-sensitive zone around PAs**

The Sikkim wildlife board has said the central government's directive to declare zones around NPs and sanctuaries as eco-sensitive cannot be implemented because of the mountainous terrain of the state.

The Inspector General of Forests (Wildlife) had in May, earlier this year, asked Sikkim to prepare detailed proposals

as a follow up to a 2006 Supreme Court order asking for declaration of the area within a 10 km radius of PA boundaries as eco-sensitive.

A state official is reported to have pointed out that the 10 km areas put together came to 3,730 sq km which was 52.57 per cent of the total area of the state. The total area under the protected areas and the eco-sensitive zones together would then be 83 per cent of the state. This, added to the fact that the state was largely mountainous with deep valleys and steep gradients would leave very little space for human habitation.

It was also noted that, if notified, the eco-sensitive zones would cross three international borders and also cross into Bengal.

Source: 'Contour blocks eco tag – Hill state no to '10km plea', *The Telegraph*, 25/05/2010.

### **Gangtok Himalayan Zoological Park to be upgraded**

The Himalayan Zoological Park in Gangtok that houses high altitude endangered wildlife species is to be upgraded at an estimated cost of Rs. 30 crore over the next five years. The park's revamp is being taken up as part of the Rs. 330.57 crore Sikkim Bio-diversity Conservation and Forest Management project, funded by the Japanese International Co-operative Agency (JICA). An agreement to implement the bio-diversity conservation project was signed between Indian and Japanese governments earlier in 2010. The Sikkim FD is the nodal agency of the project that spans 10 years.

Spread over 235 hectares at an altitude of 5,840 ft, the park has the Red panda, Himalayan black bear and Snow leopard among other animals. The zoo has been designed to allow people to see high altitude animals in a semi-wild environment. It has been showing good results in captive breeding of Red pandas and the animal's



population at the facility has risen to 11 now. The animals are kept in three separate enclosures. Upgradation of the ex-situ conservation facilities at the park is also part of the project. Offices and an interpretation centre would also be set up.

Funds from JICA will be spent on the scientific mapping of wildlife species and to derive ways of improving the economic status of the people living on the fringes of forests. Some other features of the project are sustainable bio-diversity conservation, afforestation, eco-tourism and non-consumptive management of the forest. A butterfly park will also come up in North Sikkim under the project.

Source: 'Japan to fund Gangtok zoo upgrade – Rescue centre for trespassing animals on the anvil', *The Telegraph*, 05/10/2010.

## 2011

### 300 Red pandas in Sikkim

A recent survey conducted by the Sikkim FD and WWF-India has revealed that there are around 300 Red pandas in the state. The panda is the state animal of Sikkim and is found in six PAs of the state.

The project that started in 2008 has surveyed the Pangolakha and Barsey Rhododendron WLSs. The first phase of the project, 'Long Term Survival of Red Pandas in Sikkim', that began in Pangolakha, was completed recently, while a preliminary survey has started this year in Barsey.

By combining the findings at Pangolakha and Barsey the FD has estimated the total population of red pandas in Sikkim to be around 300. It has been suggested, however, that this is a rough estimate and more surveys are needed to come up with the exact number.

The FD also plans to initiate surveys in the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve and Khangchendzonga NP, which covers West and North districts of Sikkim, from 2012.

Source: 'First survey on red panda - Reports say around 300 animals in Sikkim', *The Telegraph*, 09/06/2011.

### FD's GPS mappings helped pilots in earthquake relief in Dzongu

GPS technology used by the Sikkim FD to map wildlife areas is said to have helped pilots with the much-needed co-ordinates to carry out relief operations in the almost inaccessible Dzongu in the aftermath of the September 18 earthquake that hit Sikkim.

More than a dozen villages scattered and hidden amidst dense forests of Dzongu in North Sikkim, the worst hit in the quake, had been cut off from the rest of the state because of the innumerable landslides that followed. A remote destination, the protected Lepcha reserve of Dzongu had few landmarks to identify each village. Most of the hamlets in Dzongu consist of only a dozen houses.

Small hamlets, like those of Bey in Upper Dzongu, Sakyong and Pentong which are adjacent to the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve and Tholung monastery could be reached only with the help of co-ordinates provided by the FD. The co-ordinates were provided to both the Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation and the Army that was involved in the relief efforts.

The FD had procured GPS equipment and technology through the centrally sponsored Integrated Forest Protection Scheme. Personnel from the FD had been sent for training to the Forest Survey of India, Dehradun, and a select lot was also sent on an exposure trip to the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, Kathmandu. The technology has been used,

over the years, to map out the RFs and PAs of the state. Villages on the fringes of RFs were also marked during the process.

Co-ordinates provided by the FD also enabled the central teams of experts who had come to assess the damage in Nampridhang, the major gateway to Dzongu. From there, the central team made its way to Lingzya by road. Another central assessment team was dropped at Sakyong with the help of a chopper.

Source: Bijoy Gurung. 'How they tracked Dzongu after quake – Forest dept's GPS mappings came to rescue of pilots without coordinates', *The Telegraph*, 15/10/2011.

## **KHANG-CHENDZONGA NP**

### **1995**

#### **Teesta Hydro-electric Project threatens Khangchendzonga NP**

A public meeting was held at Magan Bazaar, on 20 August 1995, to discuss the Sikkim Government's proposal to implement Stage III of the Teesta Hydro-electric Project, in the North District of Sikkim. The Project site lies in the buffer zone of Khangchendzonga NP, an area of considerable biodiversity value. A resolution passed at the meeting made the following demands:

1. The Government of Sikkim should consider cancelling the Teesta Hydro-electric project.
2. The memorandum submitted to the President of India on 21 October 1991 should be duly considered by the government.

3. The impact of the Project on the local Lepcha community, and on the Khangchendzonga NP are likely to be severe enough to warrant cancellation of the Project.
4. Small scale power project should be actively considered for power generation and meeting the power requirements of Sikkim.

The resolution, signed by local village leaders, panchayat representatives, and current and former MLAs, was submitted to the Union Minister of Environment and Forests in November 1995.

### **1999**

#### **Biodiversity workshop in Sikkim**

Centre for Environment Education (CEE) North East in collaboration with the 'Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee (KCC) organised a one day workshop on December 9, 1999 at Yuksam in West Sikkim.

The workshop was attended by 53 porters, local businessmen, hotel owners, town committee members, office bearers of the KCC and representatives from Field Studies Council (FSC), UK and CEE. The workshop was organised under the Darwin initiative project of CEE and FSC.

KCC has implemented a successful small-scale biodiversity conservation project with financial support from Darwin initiative and facilitation from CEE and FSC. The project was to promote community based ecotourism in the Khangchendzonga NP (KNP) and one of the main target groups of the project was the porters who are critical for the tourism industry here.

A booklet for the porters containing information about the park and various dos and don'ts has also been produced. The draft booklet was released at the workshop and is

to be field-tested. It is also going to be sent to all important organisations in India and Nepal for comments.

Source: 'Biodiversity workshop conducted by CEE NE, KCC', *The Sentinel*, 20/12/1999.

## 2000

### **Biosphere reserve for Khangchendzonga**

The Khangchendzonga Mountain and its surrounding areas are to be notified as a biosphere reserve. The proposal is to create a 2200 sq kms reserve which will include about 1700 sq. kms. of the Khangchendzonga NP.

Source: 'Kancehnjunga biosphere reserve', *The Indian Express*, 13/03/2000.

## 2001

### **Butterfly smuggling from Khangchengdongza NP**

Two Russian nationals, Victor Siniaev and Oleg Amosov, were arrested in the Khangchengdzonga NP in August on charges of illegally collecting live insects. It was reported that they had in their possession around 20 kgs of insects that included about 2000 beetles, moths and butterflies. They also had with them other collecting materials including a petrol generator, uv-bulbs, killing and collecting jars & envelopes, chemicals, wires, and nets. Four porters (including two Nepali nationals) were also arrested along with the Russians.

The arrests were effected by the FD along with members of the Khangchengdzonga Conservation Committee (KCC), an NGO from Yuksam in West Sikkim. According to some sources the two arrested Russians are well established smugglers and part of the

large and illegal international trade in these insects. The arrested individuals however said that they are scientists and did not know that the area in which they were collecting insects was a NP. They have also said that they had only collected moths and beetles and there were only two butterflies in their collection. The Russian Consulate in Kolkata too issued communications to the FD saying that the two individuals were reputed scientists and this was a case of mistaken identities.

Forest officials and environmental organisations in the country have pointed out that even official organisations in India like the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) and the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) cannot enter NPs without valid permissions and correspondence on official letter heads. They also point out that any 'genuine' scientist would certainly visit local authorities if their collection work was of real significance to the international scientific community.

A Sikkim court later granted them conditional bail but refused to grant them permission to leave the state. They have been charge sheeted and during a recent court hearing the confiscated insects were handed over to the court.

Source: 'Russians caught while catching rare butterflies for smuggling', *The Asian Age*, 08/08/2001.  
Amalendu Kundu. 'Russians smuggling butterflies remanded', *The Times of India*, 12/08/2001.  
Dr. Ron Brechlin. 'Email Communication dated 15/08/2001.  
'Butterfly case: Charges to be framed', *The Times of India*, 18/08/2001.  
'Russians held for collecting insects granted bail', *The Times of India*, 22/08/2001.

## **Court frees Russians caught in Khangchendongza**

Two Russians who had been caught with a large number of specimens of butterflies and other insects inside Khangchendongza NP have been freed by the courts. They were also allowed to leave the country.

The court dropped the charges and allowed them to leave the state after they agreed to pay a fine of Rs. 20,000 (US \$ 417) each.

Source: 'India frees two Russians arrested for catching bugs', Reuters News Service, 19/10/2001.

## **2008**

### **Panang hydel project opposed over fears of impact on people and Khangchendzonga NP**

The members of the Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT) have opposed the Panang hydel power project in a preliminary round of talk with the Sikkim Power Department officials. The meeting centered on the Panang and Teesta IV projects in the heart of Dzongu, where four such projects have already been scrapped so far.

ACT members said that the projects, if executed, would harm the people of the area, and that all project work must stop until it receives concurrence from the Central Electric Authority, and clearances from the Forest and Tribal and Social Justice Ministries. The state power secretary on his part said the government can stop the projects if the majority of the people were not in favour of them.

ACT members also alleged that the catchment area treatment (CAT) plan of the Panang project was encroaching 4005 hectares of Khangchendzonga NP and

Biosphere Reserve, and that this directly violated Supreme Court Rulings and the NP notification.

It has also been pointed out that monasteries along with the sacred springs, lakes and landscapes propitiated by the Lepchas, were also getting affected by the project work in the Dzongu region. The activists however maintained that they are ready to comply with the suggestions of the independent expert committee which had visited the project area in May and that a moratorium of ten years is also acceptable to them in the case of Panang project.

Source: 'Talks over Panang project in Sikkim held', *The Assam Tribune*, 11/08/2008.

## **2011**

### **Hydro-power projects approved close to the Khangchendzonga NP; local communities object**



The Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee (SIBLAC) has written to the Union Minister of Environment and Forests, Ms Jayanthi Natarajan, objecting to the environment clearance (EC) granted to the 99 MW Ting Ting hydel power project on the Rathung Chu river. The SIBLAC has noted that the EC was given despite MoEF stating earlier that it had not received any proposal on the project.

Three power projects—Lethang (96 MW), Ting Ting (99 MW) and Tashiding (97 MW)

– had been planned over the Rathung Chu, a tributary of the Rangeet river. The Lethang project had been rejected by the standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife in October 2010 following objections from SIBLAC. It had pointed out that the proposed project would hurt the ‘religious sentiments’ of Bhutias and Lepchas as the dam projects are proposed in a landscape that is sacred to these communities.

According to the documents collected by SIBLAC, the MoEF had, on July 4, 2011, communicated its EC to a private company that is developing the Ting Ting project. This EC was given within two-and-a-half months of the then Minister, Mr Jairam Ramesh, saying that the MoEF was not aware of the Ting Ting project nor the other one proposed over the Rathang Chu. On March 16, Mr Ramesh had written to the National

Commission for Minorities member from the north-east, saying that of the three power projects initially proposed over the Rathung Chu, the Lethang project had been rejected, while proposals for the other two projects had not been received by the MoEF.

While granting the EC to the Ting Ting project, the MoEF has now stated that there is no NP, sanctuary, biosphere reserve or historical monument in the vicinity of the project area. The SIBLAC has however noted, based on information gained in response to a Right to Information (RTI) application, that all the three projects are located within 10 km of the boundary of the Khangchendzonga NP.

Source: Bijoy Gurung. ‘Probe cry on green nod’, *The Telegraph*, 22/07/2011.

# TRIPURA

No.	Name of the PA	Area (sq km)
1	Clouded Leopard NP	0.051
2	Rajbari NP	31.63
3	Gumti WLS	389.54
4	Rowa WLS	0.858
5	Sepahijala WLS	18.53
6	Trishna WLS	127.078
	TOTAL	572.006





A marked tolerance was noticed when Phayre's leaf monkey came in contact with other species of monkeys. There was not much agonistic behaviour observed within a group. No interaction was observed between this monkey feeding on top and macaques feeding on low branches or on ground below the same tree. On one occasion a group of 25 Phayre's leaf monkeys and a group of 18 rhesus monkeys were observed feeding close to each other in Abhoya forest in South district and finally when both the groups moved in the same direction and emerged at one point on the same tree, both the groups gave vocal threats and then retreated in the opposite directions. Not much interaction was noticed between this species of monkey and the other two species namely, hoolock gibbons and capped langurs, that shared the habitat and food with the Phayre's leaf monkey. The capped langurs were observed feeding on the same type of food that was taken by the Phayre's leaf monkey. On many occasions it was observed that the capped langurs feeding close to Phayre's leaf monkey without any agonistic behaviour and their home ranges also overlapped extensively.

*RP Mukherjee*

Phayres Leaf Monkey (*Presbytis Phayrei* Blyth, 1847) of Tripura  
Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society 79(1), April 1982

## STATE NEWS

### TRISHNA WLS

2003

#### **Thermal power plant to come up near Trishna WLS**

A 500 MW thermal power plant is likely to be set up near the Trishna WLS by the Northeast Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO).

The foundation stone for the Rs. 2500 crore power plant at Morakchak in Tripura West District, was laid in March 2002. NEEPCO had approached the ONGC for a commitment to provide uninterrupted natural gas for 15 years. A SC order preventing drilling or construction within or near PAs, however, disallowed ONGC from committing to such an undertaking. NEEPCO had allegedly begun drilling operations on a site adjacent to the sanctuary, but the SC order led to suspension of work.

The State Minister for Power and Finance, Mr. Badal Chaudhari had meanwhile stated that the state will go ahead with the power plant and has requested the Union Petroleum Minister to urgently convene a meeting, ascertain the natural gas resources in Tripura and finalise its timely supply for the project.

Source: 'Tripura government pushes for thermal power plant in Trisna WLS', [www.sanctuaryasia.com](http://www.sanctuaryasia.com), 13/04/2003.

2007

#### **NP status to Trishna WLS**

The Trishna WLS has been declared a NP by the state government. The park is reported

to have an estimated 456 plant species, 150 species of birds, and about 46 species of wild animals.

Source: 'Tripura WLS become NP', <http://newspostindia.com/report-22346>, 06/11/2007.

2008

#### **Confusion over wildlife reserve proposal; locals fear massive displacement**

Tribal communities and political outfits have strongly opposed the Tripura Government's move to create a 'wildlife reserve', fearing that it will lead to large scale displacement of the indigenous people here.

In early November, the State Wildlife Advisory Board had apparently approved the establishment of a wildlife reserve at Kalajhari-Laxmipur-Dhalagari in Dhalai district, and at Mukhcherri and New Gomati village in South Tripura district. More than 400 indigenous families residing inside the earmarked reserve area were subsequently served eviction notices by the local administration and were told by sub-divisional magistrates to submit details of their lands.

The Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura (INPT) has alleged that the project would displace between 50,000 to 100,000 families and that the people to be evicted have already been displaced once before. When the Dumbur Hydro electric project was commissioned in 1974 they had had to leave three hill ranges – Atharamura, Kalazhari and Bhagaban tilla – bordering Bangladesh. The Tripura Janajati Jami Punuroddhar Committee (JJPC), a non-political wing of indigenous people and the Tribal Wing of the Congress Party has also opposed the government's move to create the wildlife reserve.

The Tripura Forest Minister, Jitendra Chowdhury, however, denied that the state government was creating a new WLS in the state. He held instead that a 'critical habitat area' was being planned in southern and northern Tripura, especially as the elephant population here has increased to 59 from 38 in 2002.

According to an earlier report, an Elephant Reserve was being planned in the Atharamura Hills of the Dhalai District and a high level committee had been formed to submit a rehabilitation plan for the 800 odd tribal families that would be displaced because of the project.

(Ed: It is quite evident from the three reports quoted that there are many inconsistencies and contradictions and that a lot of local social and political dynamics is also playing out. There is a lot of confusion and lack of clarity, and it's difficult to explain or understand what exactly is the real situation on the ground.)

Source: 'Elephant population on the rise in Tripura', *The Assam Tribune*, 17/11/2008.  
'Tripura parties stir against WLS', *The Times of India*, 24/11/2008.  
'Wildlife reserve plan irks Tripura tribals', *The Assam Tribune*, 25/11/2008.

## SEPAHIJALA WLS

### 2005

#### **Focus on tourism promotion in PAs; maximum revenue from Sepahijala WLS**

As part of special plans to increase revenue flow, the Tripura government has decided to focus on the protected areas in the state to promote tourism. These include the Sepahijala, Trishna and Roa WLSs.

The Union Tourism Ministry has

sanctioned Rs 5 crore for a tourism interpretation centre at the Sepahijala WLS. The interpretation centre would provide a comprehensive database and information to tourists about the places to be visited in the state and their special features, with detailed visuals, pictures and other documentary support.

The total revenue to the state from tourism was Rs 4.2 lakh in 2001-02. It rose to Rs 12.29 lakh in the year 2004-05 – with a major share coming from the Sepahijala WLS located in the Bishalgarh subdivision of West Tripura. Of a total revenue of Rs 32.28 lakh between 2001-02 and August 15, 2005, Rs 31.84 lakh had come from Sepahijala.

The reason is that Sepahijala is only 30 kms from Agartala, has facilities for lodging and boarding and good road connectivity. The security situation there too is supposed to be good. The state now wants to upgrade facilities at Roa and Trishna so that all the PAs are placed on an equal footing.

Source: 'Tripura plans to revamp sanctuaries', *The Telegraph*, 15/10/2005.

### 2006

#### **Seven spotted deer die of pneumonia at Sepahijala WLS**

Seven spotted deer were reported to have died of pneumonia at Sepahijala WLS in West Tripura district in the month of September. The animals had been suffering from pneumonia due to continuous rains. Officials said that the place was unable to accommodate the 200 spotted deer here because their numbers had increased over the years.

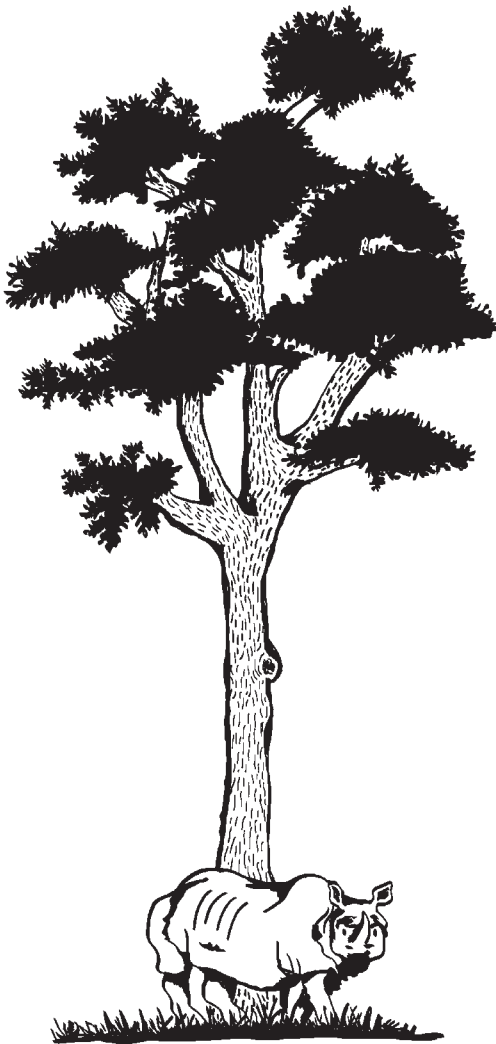
Source: '7 spotted deer die of pneumonia', *The Assam Tribune*, 26/09/2006.

# SECTION 2

Analysis & Perspective

# 1. The Print Media's Kaziranga Obsession: An Analysis

*Mehak Siddiqui & C Rajesh Reddi\**



**W**hat are the major ecological issues being faced in the protected areas of north-east India? How are these issues reported and dealt with by the mainstream news media? Which regions receive the greatest coverage and why? These are some of the key questions that we seek to explore through this paper. It is an attempt to summarize as well as analyse several years of news coverage about the protected areas of the north-east, as chronicled by the Protected Area Update (PAU).

A detailed content analysis of the archive of PAU was carried out to decipher what the media has considered to be the key environmental and conservation issues in protected areas in the recent past. The north-east in general evokes a sense of mystique and romanticism amongst most people across India, and the content analysis proved a way to get past this and come up with a comprehensive picture of the realities of wildlife and its interaction with humans in the region.

The news reports have broadly ranged from covering the tragic – the various problems and crises faced by the region – to the ceremonial – the occasional achievements, developments and fruitful initiatives that have benefited the environmental cause. The major national parks such as Namdapha, Manas, Orang, and Kaziranga have been the primary focus area of the coverage and of these, Kaziranga National Park particularly

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stands out as a hotbed of media attention. This is, perhaps, not surprising given the attention the park has received as the main habitat of the rhino and the location of a number of other conservation efforts.

The primary aim of this analysis was, thus, to investigate the scale and kind of attention that Kaziranga National Park receives in the media. We studied how issues related to the park are framed in the news media and what this tells us about our preoccupations in relation to environmental issues and the north-east as an ecologically rich (and threatened) zone. Moreover, we also tried to identify what lessons we, as journalists, can learn from the analysis.

From 1998 to 2011, a total of 516 news stories about the north-east region have been chronicled in the PAU. Assam got the maximum coverage while Tripura was the least reported (see Table 1 and Figure 1). This works out to an average of about 39 stories per year. 275 of these 516 stories (53%) are about only five PAs in the region (Table 2).

### Kaziranga in focus



As the data clearly shows, a striking majority of reports in the PAU are about the Kaziranga National Park, that is, 138 out of 516, which translates to a substantial 26.7% of

Table 1

State	Number of stories
Assam	404
Manipur	25
Meghalaya	21
Arunachal Pradesh	20
Sikkim	19
Mizoram	14
Nagaland	8
Tripura	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>516</b>

Figure 1  
Statewise distribution of News Stories

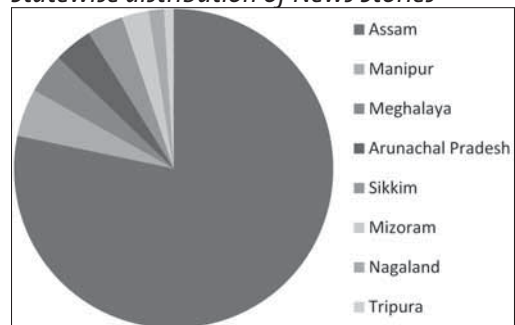


Table 2

Name of PA	Number of stories from 1998-2011
Kaziranga NP	138
Manas NP	76
Orang NP	33
Nameri NP	15
Dibru-Saikhowa NP	13
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>275</b>



the total coverage. Stories were identified based on whether they specifically mentioned Kaziranga and spoke about an issue either directly or indirectly related to the wildlife and welfare of the park. The logic was to categorize each report according to the main themes it dealt with and see how these fit into the larger picture of how the entire region is perceived and portrayed by the media. We found that the largest chunk of stories dealt with the three major problems of poaching (of rhino, tiger and elephant), flooding of the Brahmaputra and resultant impacts on the park and its animals, and lack of funds to park authorities. The major theme of positive articles was tourism development and the increasing popularity of the park as a destination for eco-tourists and wildlife enthusiasts. In addition, there was a significant amount of coverage given to issues related to general upkeep of the park and problems related to staffing (Table 3; Figure 3).

Table 3

Theme	Number of articles from 1998-2011
Poaching	19
Flooding	11
Funds crunch	7
Tourism development	13
Miscellaneous stories (see below for description)	28
Other Themes	60
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>138</b>

The stories included under the miscellaneous theme above were all related to one or more of the following:

- Maintenance and upkeep of the park through eco-development initiatives and projects
- Cases related to forest staff such as compensation to be given for injury/death due to wildlife
- Retrenchment of staff
- Animal censuses and counts
- Developments related to the park such as setting up of a wildlife rescue centre, eco-sensitive zones and a guerilla training school.

An analysis of newspaper wise coverage of Kaziranga (Table 4) clearly shows that proximity as a news value is privileged. *The Assam Tribune*, for instance has more than a third of the Kaziranga stories in the PAU. Although Kaziranga may on the face of it be seen as part of our “national” natural heritage, journalistic coverage is apparently fuelled by more everyday values such as localness – hence the significantly higher level of coverage in the regional newspaper. It is significant at the same time that newspapers with a much wider pan-India coverage such as *The Times of India* and *The Hindu* also give this park substantial coverage.

Figure 3  
Themewise distribution of News Stories

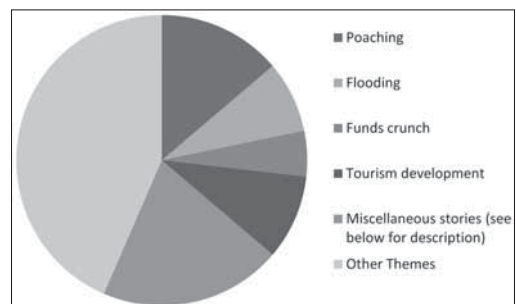


Table 4

Newspaper	No. of stories
The Assam Tribune	48
The Sentinel	18
The Hindu	12
The Times of India	11
The Statesman	4
The Indian Express	3

## The Rhino Question

Poaching, particularly of rhinos has been one of the central themes of concern in and reporting about Kaziranga. According to a January 2001 report of *The Assam Tribune*, 48 rhinos were killed in the park during the year 2000. Moreover, one forest guard was also killed by the miscreants. This figure has kept fluctuating over the years, at times increasing alarmingly such as in 2006 when 58 rhino deaths were reported, and other times decreasing substantially such as in 2007 when just 18 rhino deaths were reported. There appears to be no 'pattern' or trend where rhino poaching is concerned. What is interesting is the attempt on part of the poachers at trying different approaches to get the animals as seen in their occasional use of the pit-poaching method. This is a more discreet method involving the digging of pits at strategic locations into which the unsuspecting animals get trapped. The danger here is that all kinds of animals, including the non-target species can fall into the trap. For instance, *The Assam Tribune* reports in a 2004 report that a baby elephant fell into such a pit left behind by poachers and sustained critical injuries.

Despite poaching being a persistent problem over many years and sustained efforts to combat it through for instance,

installation of metal detectors and use of Belgian shepherd dogs, no substantial success seems to have been achieved. Of course this may just be a reflection of the general news culture of highlighting problems with little follow up on solutions that have been implemented or planned. In 2006, the FD arrested 27 poachers with rifles, live cartridges and wires but there are no follow-up reports of what punishment was doled out. According to a 2007 report in *The Telegraph* metal detectors were introduced to the park to help the authorities find weapons hidden by poachers, but again there has been no follow-up to how effective this measure proved. According to a report in *Daily News and Analysis* in June 2008, there were suggestions to increase the punishment for poaching to a 10-year jail term and doubling the fine of Rs 50,000. This proposal to amend the 1972 Wildlife Protection Act was passed and implemented in 2010 after the killing of at least nine rhinos in Kaziranga. Earlier that year, 250 forest guards received training in commando operations by the elite National Security Guard (NSG), including use of sophisticated weaponry and martial arts.

The continual recurrence of this rhino poaching (as also of other species of wildlife) is a clear indication of the existence of an international market in wildlife contraband. It also seems to implicate a nexus of sorts between forest staff and poachers, a possibility that is both highly unnerving and poses a grave threat to wildlife and park security. "Forest officials involved in rhino poaching", read a *Sentinel* report in July 2010, noting that arrested poachers had confessed the involvement of many park officials in poaching activities. However, the absence of detailed investigative or interpretive stories that provide a longitudinal picture of this issue is telling, both in terms of media attention and public understanding.

## The Brahmaputra floods

The second major cause of concern and reporting in Kaziranga is the flooding of the river Brahmaputra during the annual monsoon season and the challenges this poses to both, the animals and the park authorities. Animals are forced to move to higher ground across National Highway 37 (NH 37) on the southern edge of the park. Here where speeding vehicles cause innumerable animal casualties. There have been numerous proposals to help address this problem, right from the implementation of rumble strips to slow down traffic to the diversion of the highway, but none have been effectively implemented so far.

Flooding also results in erosion, leading to severe degradation of the land. According to a 2001 report of *The Assam Tribune*, the Kaziranga National Park is losing 0.7 square kilometers of land every year due to erosion. However, there were no follow-up reports mentioned, so it is not clear whether the problem has been effectively tackled.

## A shortage of funds

Another key recurring theme in the reportage is that of funds shortage. There have been repeated reports over the years about the state government authorities not releasing funds on time, though this trend appears to have been reversed in the last couple of years. Lack of funds in the past has resulted in staff not being paid for months on end or being laid off. Not only does this hamper the upkeep and safety of the park and its wildlife, but also has an adverse effect on the people who depend on their jobs in the national park to sustain their livelihoods. In addition, even when funds are allocated to address various issues and enhance the park, it is crucial to ensure that they are appropriately used

and not mismanaged or wasted. Again, the lack of detailed analysis of these issues limits the effectiveness of such reports, and represents a lost opportunity to inform and perhaps mobilise public opinion.

## Kaziranga as a tiger reserve



On a more positive note, Kaziranga has acquired Project Tiger status due to the fact that it has one of the highest population densities of the animal at 16.8 tigers per 100 sq km. Further, the park was made part of the Incredible India campaign when it celebrated its centenary year in 2004, and this has helped it earn more funds from national and international agencies as well as a range of NGOs. In 2001, Kaziranga was one of two national parks to receive USD 46 million from UNESCO. Project Tiger status as well as the park's recognition as a World Heritage site appear to have played an important role in the increase of tourists here as well as a spate of tourism development projects. *The Sentinel* notes for instance that, a record number of 1,12,844 tourists visited the park in 2009 and Rs122 lakhs worth of revenue was collected.

An increase in tourism surely brings in revenue and increased interest but it cannot be ignored that increasing popularity also brings along a whole range of other problems. To start with, tourist facilities are not enhanced at par with the increasing inflow of visitors. This results in pollution of the natural environment as well harm to wildlife and a potential threat to the visitors as well. In 2006, it was reported by

*The Assam Tribune* that a throng of New Year's tourists left behind a large amount of waste including plastic which is harmful for the park and the wildlife here. Further, in 2010, tourists sustained injuries from a domestic elephant when they did not follow the mahout's instructions while clicking pictures of the animal.

Such occurrences force us to question the relevance of tourism enhancement when the park is suffering a funds crunch, and basic problems such as safety and health of animals have not been properly addressed? Perhaps the tourism industry is an integral part of any region's economic progress but at what cost? It should be ensured that development takes place in a sustainable way and that facilities are such that tourists don't cause damage to the environment

## **The focus of media (in)attention**

The mainstream news media on the whole depicts the north-east as a tourism hotspot, with the Kaziranga National Park being a key attraction due to its rich wildlife and natural beauty. However, media reports over the years have repeatedly highlighted the major problems affecting the park and how these hinder or have an adverse effect on tourism development. There has been little light shed on the more humanistic problems that may be occurring such as neglect and displacement of tribal populations that traditionally reside in the forest areas. There are no reports on how tourism development affects the indigenous people and no attempts seem to have been made – at least according to mainstream media reports – to protect their welfare.

The news coverage shows a trend of increasing focus on promoting tourism but our analysis reveals that there is not enough

space given to the possible negative effects of such steps. If tourism promotion and commercial gain become the sole reason for development of the park, what about the effects on the people and the danger of over-development causing irreversible harm to biodiversity? It is not entirely clear whether the exemption of reports addressing such concerns is a conscious effort by news gatherers or something that has just come to be an accepted practice. Do we even think beyond development when it is sure to bring in much-needed revenues?

On the whole, the content analysis has revealed that Kaziranga, being one of the country's better known national parks while receiving a fair amount of media attention in terms of numbers of stories, suffers from the same lack of sustained and detailed coverage that plagues many other environmental issues. The stories that do make it to the pages of the dailies are in the nature of breaking news, focusing on moments of crisis which then lead nowhere in terms of finding solutions or bringing sustained attention to the underlying issues. For instance, a lot more needs to be said and done about the poaching crisis so as to create increased awareness amongst people and bring about change for the better. More human interest stories on the lives of people who deal with the issues in the park, governance of such ecologically sensitive areas, and the socio-economic and environmental implications of tourism need attention.

The issues related to Kaziranga are framed in the media, including in the PAU, according to whether they are negative or positive in nature. In case of the former, a disaster frame is utilized, with every negative occurrence being projected as a problem that is eating away at the region and needs urgent alleviation. Positive issues, on the other hand, such as acquisition of funds from international agencies and increase

in tourism are framed as achievements, which have the potential to enhance the future of both the park and the region as a whole. Development has always been seen as necessary and useful by the mainstream media, but perhaps there is a growing need to pose intelligent questions against this trend.

Further, the analysis seems to point at a preoccupation with numbers – whether it is increasing the number of tourists, procuring more funds, or keeping a count on how many endangered animals continue to reside in the park. As many as 23 stories out of the 138 about Kaziranga are related to numbers. This constant quantification perhaps bars us from viewing issues from multiple dimensions and working to alleviate them from their crux. However, the only way to overcome this would involve challenging traditional journalistic practice that largely involves talking in numbers and statistics so as to substantiate reporting. This is of course easier said than done but certainly merits thought.

The media reports archived in the PAU tend to project an image of Kaziranga being a

place that the country as a whole should be very proud of – the park is almost like a jewel in the crown for both, the tourism industry and a large section of the wildlife conservation community. While there is nothing wrong with this per se, a more humane view may help in understanding the area as a complex habitat rather than just a prime protected area of the country. Kaziranga is indeed ecologically rich and well-endowed, but are we going about protecting it in the right way? And if not, then how and when do we change our approach? Moreover, what should be the goals of such a change?

As journalists who are perennially caught in the need to get the news out there and garner as much attention as possible, it is important to find the space to step back and appreciate how extremely crucial it is to take a holistic view of development and conservation. Both are two sides of the same coin and neither should overpower the other if we are to achieve economic progress without causing ecological harm and irreversible environmental damage.

## 2. Replenishing Empty Forests – A Case Study of Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation in Western Assam

*Sonali Ghosh\**



It is well known that north-east India is home to several wildlife species. Majority of this wildlife also exists outside protected areas in reserved forests, commercial plantations of tea and rubber, in community owned forests and even in urban greenery and homesteads. This unique assemblage can be attributed to availability of optimal microhabitat and climatic conditions, relatively low human population density, greater cultural tolerance for man-animal conflict and the absence of major habitat barriers such as large dams, canals or highways until recent times.

### Livelihood dependency on forests

From an anthropological perspective, it is also home to over two hundred tribal groups, majority of which continue to practise their traditional culture and customary laws. There is heavy dependency on forests and forest related products that are often managed through community-based initiatives as exemplified by the conservation of sacred groves in Meghalaya or the religious protection to certain wildlife species as in the case of golden langurs by the Bodo tribals in western Assam.

While this dependency on forests and forest related resources has gradually diminished and was also proactively discouraged by the state until recently, the per capita income

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of local people has reduced significantly after the closure of commercial logging operations and forest-depleting industries. At the same time, a history of chequered forest governance, unsettled local rights and armed conflicts between and within states has made the issue of forest and wildlife conservation even more complex and difficult to administer. There is also confusion because of the existence of Unclassed State Forests (USFs) and Proposed Reserved Forests (PRFs) where local communities have held customary rights while the state government has taken the area to be a government land resulting in an inevitable conflict between the customary rights and statute law.

## Bushmeat



One such controversial aspect of conservation in the north-east is when tradition meets modernity that is linked to the issue of hunting by locals. 'Bushmeat' hunting of wildlife is common across the tropics. It is done mainly for food, trophies, medicines and other traditional uses and it was always thought to be near sustainable. The main reasons for hunting for wild meat was attributed to low productivity and high input costs for rearing livestock and traditional methods such as catapults, traps, bows and arrows, and snares have been used. There were also cultural taboos with restrictions on time and species to hunt. With the advent of modern weapons

including the easy availability of guns and poisons and the increasing human population, hunting in its present form is no longer sustainable. Biomass removal due to hunting is difficult to quantify, but studies have indicated that tribal communities have average economic dependence of 32-59% on the forestry sector and wild meat contributes up to 25% to this economy. At least 135 species of wild animals are known to be hunted with ungulates, primates and birds contributing to the highest proportion of biomass extracted. Over-hunting has in some areas resulted in what is typically known as 'empty forests' or 'green deserts' and is a growing concern, especially for the survival of large prey-dependant species such as the tiger. Given this complex situation, it is not possible to implement the rule of state law in its present form as concessions for local customs are inadvertently granted at the field level.

## Wildlife rescue and rehabilitation

What does work are new and ingenious ways of creating awareness against hunting on the one hand and on the other, the preparedness to deal with rescued animals that are often handed over to the forest department through voluntary donations, raids and confiscations. In my opinion, wildlife rescue and rehabilitation needs to be treated as a specialized science for which every field forester must be trained and well-equipped. The territorial wing of the forest department controls majority of the forests in north-east India and since their mandate is primarily to curb illegalities against timber smuggling and land encroachment, wildlife rescue takes a backseat in their day-to-day activities. In many instances, wildlife rescue and rehabilitation is burdened over to the nearest wildlife wing or to the state zoo which then takes over,

to keep the animal in life-time captivity. At the same time a lack of basic housing and medical facilities and ignorance of handling procedures, results in an abysmally low survival rate of rescued animals. This becomes particularly relevant if an animal is injured, a young one, an ungulate or a bird, all of whom are more susceptible to manhandling shock. Sometimes the wild animal is immediately released back into the wild with much fanfare and publicity and very little considerations are given to any procedures for a post-release protocol or to the suitability assessment of the site of release.

In the following pages, I describe my experience of handling rescued wildlife from hunting prone areas in a tribal dominated region of western Assam. The area in question is similar to many regions in the rest of north-east India because of the presence of high forest cover, a recent history of civil strife and subsequent tribal self-rule through a democratic process and hence the lessons learnt are applicable to other areas as well.

*1) Building confidence and local intelligence network:*

While working as a Divisional Forest Officer for Wildlife at Kokrajhar, we observed that local villagers in the vicinity of forests kept wild animals, especially young ones as pets. Confiscation and arrest of the person could have been counter-productive especially if it created a negative atmosphere and general apathy for the department that was understaffed and had a minimalistic presence in remote locations.

We, therefore, slowly built on the confidence of the villagers and convinced them to get the animals checked by a veterinarian. We were lucky that sometimes villagers would themselves come with a very sick animal that could be revived with the help of medical care and this instilled confidence

in what the department was doing. We also cajoled the locals to hand over the animals stating that we had better housing facilities and resources to provide food. Once the animal was fit for release, we sometimes also took the villagers along with us to the post-release site to show how the animal would now be roaming free in its own habitat.

Other than that, outright seizures and confiscations were done in market areas, especially during the prime market time so that it sent across a message that trading in wildlife meat was banned. The support of local staff and small monetary incentives for information was crucial to these organised raids. We also encouraged local groups, especially small NGOs with youth, for rescue work and took their help for creating publicity. Gradually, we won the confidence of local people and several came forward with information. An instance of the number of animals rescued can be found from the diary of official records maintained at the wildlife office which indicates that more than 136 animals were rescued from December 2005 to July 2008. This means that on an average 6-7 animals had been rescued every month! The records also suggest that these animals belonged to an astounding number of 43 species several of them belonging to the various Schedules of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (Table 1 and 2).

From the above, we see that the highest numbers of animals rescued were in Kokrajhar (41%), followed by Barpeta (21%) and Baksa (19%) districts in lower Assam. This data proved quite useful in convincing our superiors for setting up a transit centre and strengthening the existing mobile rescue squad at Kokrajhar.

*2) Creating a dedicated mobile rescue squad:*

Now that we had people's confidence we chose 5-10 select field staff at the

level of forest guards and provided them specialized exposure and training to deal with mobs especially while rescuing large carnivores such as leopards and for handling wildlife rescue crisis situations. They were also equipped with a mini truck, cages, a tranquilising dart gun and medicines that were to be administered with the help of local vets. The wildlife rescue truck also doubled up as a publicity vehicle in which we carried a small generator, a screen and a projector to show wildlife films in remote villages. This soon became a popular programme for creating awareness during wildlife week celebrations.

### *3) Creating a transit shelter home:*

Once our rescue numbers increased, we procured funds to develop a semi-permanent transit home that was constructed on the lines of the Centre For Wildlife Rehabilitation (CWRC) at Kaziranga National Park. The transit shelter home was adjacent to a RF and therefore permission was also obtained to use part of the Sal forest to house the animals during the quarantine and pre-release period. Electric fencing was provided and temporary structures made of locally available material such as thatch and wood were erected as per the requirement of the animal concerned. A separate nursery was also created for very young animals that needed to be hand-reared. Importantly, all animals were kept away from public eye. We also tied up with Wildlife Trust of India to permanently house a veterinarian and

animal keepers for general upkeep of the rescued animals.

### *4) Hand rearing and medical care:*

This was a crucial step as survival of most of the animals depended on their time at the transit home. A number of animals received into the transit home were usually in a state of shock and required sensitive handling. If the animal was a pet with humans for some time then there were issues of malnourishment and imprinting. Because of our collaboration with WTI, a dedicated wildlife trained vet and animal keepers were now permanently available at the transit home. Sometimes, almost nothing was known about rearing a wild animal as in the case of a rescued wild dog pup and help had to be sought from other vets in the region. Not all animals survived and in a few cases they could no longer be released back into the wild; a injured Himalayan Griffon vulture, for instance, that was found on the Dhubri bound railway track whose wing had to be amputated. These animals were then transported to centres for ex-situ conservation such as the state zoo or the vulture breeding centre at Guwahati.

The star attraction and a success story of the transit home however had been the arrival of two clouded leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*) cubs in March 2009. The cubs were less than a month old when they were handed over to us by local villagers and making them survive was a challenge as virtually nothing was known about their behaviour in the wild. Vets in the Guwahati Veterinary College and the state zoo were consulted and with active involvement of at least three people to care on a round the clock basis, the cubs survived. Gradually, the cubs gained weight and within two months, they had become highly active and were provided with a healthy diet of about 250 gms of meat per day along with nutritional supplements. Since most species of mammals and birds rely heavily



on individual experience and learning as juveniles for their survival, the cubs were given the necessary training at the transit home and the animal keepers coaxed them to keep their wild instincts such as those for climbing trees and hunting live bait like small chickens. By end of six months, the cubs were ready for soft-release into the wild.

*5) Establishing a pre-release and release protocol:*

Wherever feasible, we followed the guidelines laid out by IUCN-SSC reintroduction species specialist group for in-situ reintroductions. These guidelines provide a comprehensive set of checklists and systematic steps that are ideally suited for conditions in the north-east. As per the guidelines, the first step was to conduct a feasibility study and background research on the choice of release site. This was usually in the vicinity of the place where the animal was first rescued. In case the animal was confiscated from a market place with no information available on their place of capture, they were usually released in the nearest protected area which in our case was the Chakrashila Wildlife Sanctuary. We also observed that release in the vicinity of water sources during dusk was ideal for snakes and other reptiles. If the animal was a small carnivore such as a leopard cat rescued from a village forest then they had to be released back usually at dusk and away from public gaze. For large carnivores such as the clouded leopard cubs, the site of their original rescue was no longer feasible due to the presence of human habitation. We therefore opted for the three RFs and did a comparative site selection survey for prey availability, level of human disturbance, vegetation, connectivity with other forests etc, to arrive the most suitable site for release. At the same time, necessary paperwork and permissions were also obtained for release of schedule animals at the local level and in

case of the clouded leopard cubs permission was also obtained from the CWLW of the state. The vets also gave presentations to local villagers and gave an insight into what rescue and rehabilitation was all about and hence created awareness.

The second step was to ensure that the animal was free from infectious or contagious pathogens and parasites and in some cases also vaccinated during the preparation stage so as to allow sufficient time for the development of the required immunity. In case of hand reared animals (as in the case of the clouded leopard cubs) they were first released in a 'soft' release site within the chosen area where they could roam free but under human supervision. Special enclosures and transportation was arranged and help from the Border Security Forces was also sought for their security. They remained at the soft release site with only the animal keepers who took them to the forest for acclimatization and also provided live prey. It is only after the vets and animal keepers were convinced that the juveniles could hunt on their own, that they were finally released completely into the wild.

*6) Post-release activities:*

Post-release monitoring is essential for the success of any rescue and rehabilitation work and for most of the animals, the local villagers were asked to notify us of re-sighting of the released animal. In case of carnivores as in the case of the clouded leopard cubs, they were fitted with radio collars and were tracked for almost two months before one collar failed and it was difficult to obtain signals from the other. A team of filmmakers went into the forest to look for them after a year of release and indirect evidences did raise hope that the cubs had survived.

## Conclusion

To summarize, wildlife rescue and rehabilitation in a scientific manner is possible and must be recognized as a separate entity from a mere animal rights issue. With the expansion of urban areas, wild animals are more likely to come into conflict with humans and rehabilitation can be problematic in areas where the original habitat is lost or highly fragmented. However, it should be encouraged especially in north-east India where large forest tracts are still available but hunting is prevalent due to socio-cultural reasons and cannot be curbed only through the rule of law.

Table 1 shows number of animals rescued by Kokrajhar Wildlife Division and Mobile Veterinary Service-Lower Assam (MVS-LA) in Bodoland Territorial Council and adjoining districts from Dec 2005 to July 2008

Table 1

	Birds	Mammals	Reptiles	Total
Species	13	21	9	43
Numbers	35	56	45	136

Table 2 shows number of animals rescued by Kokrajhar Wildlife Division and MVS-LA, district wise in BTC and adjoining districts from Dec 2005 to July 2008

Rescue and rehabilitation must therefore find place in the national forest policy with special funds earmarked for such work at the ground level so that it becomes sustainable in the long run. Since it also requires some specialization, especially in medical care, a dedicated national wildlife veterinary service would be ideal to serve the 600 odd protected areas across the country. Special training can be provided to select frontline staff within the forestry and police department to handle mobs and for rescuing large carnivores from urban and peri-urban areas.

As they say, every drop counts and reinstating one animal back to its survival in the wild is certainly worth the effort.

Table 2

	Kokrajhar	Baksa	Chirang	Barpeta	Udalguri	Bongaigaon	Goalpara	Dhubri
Birds	16	5	4		6		2	1
Mammals	19	11	7	11	2	2		4
Reptiles	21	10	2	11				1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>

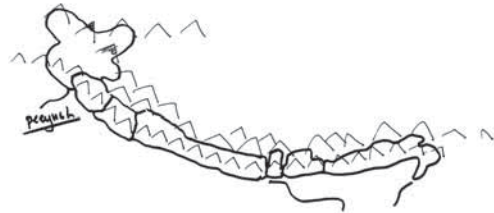
### 3. Snow Leopards in the Land of the Rising Sun

*Yash Veer Bhatnagar\**



The snow leopard is a charismatic species inhabiting the high, cold mountain tracts of the Himalaya and Central Asia. They are so rare that until the remote areas were penetrated by roads and the advent of modern monitoring tools like camera trapping came into practice, this felid had a highly mystical aura and was often referred to as the 'grey ghost'.

#### The snow leopard's range in India



Even though the snow leopard is spread over a vast landscape covering over 2 million sq.km, the population estimates, albeit very coarse, put it at a mere 4,000 to 7,000 animals. India possesses just 6 % of its global range but is attributed with about 10% of its global population. Five of our Himalayan states, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, have snow leopards occurring mainly in rugged mountains above the 'tree-line', the elevation beyond which trees find it difficult to survive and

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only low bushes, grassy and herbaceous meadows exist. Their preferred habitat however appears to be in the drier parts beyond the Greater Himalayan chain, often called the 'cold deserts' of the Trans Himalaya. The former are high, rugged mountains formed by igneous rocks and the highest peaks, where the southern slopes have alpine meadows, scrub and forests. The Trans Himalaya, on the other hand are mostly sedimentary mountains with steppe, mostly treeless vegetation. In India these two parts of the snow leopard range constitute roughly 50% each. The three western states constitute c. 93% of snow leopard's c. 1,30,000 sq.km range in India, but the c. 9,000 sq.km that occurs in the north-eastern (NE) states is unique in many ways. Most of the area is Himalayan with a small portion of Trans Himalaya in North Sikkim. The treeline in the Eastern Himalaya however usually begins above 4,200m, unlike about 1,000m lower in the Western Himalaya. This is because the Eastern Himalaya are two to six degrees of latitude lower than Western Himalaya and are wetter compared to the western areas and thus the forests here extend much higher. Permafrost and glaciers above 5,200 m leave the area mostly devoid of life all along the Himalaya. In the east therefore, the snow leopard's range is compressed within just about 1,000 m of potential habitat between 4,200 and 5,200 m.

## **Sikkim**

The snow leopard habitat in Sikkim is shaped like an inverted 'U' spread over c. 3,000 sq.km. (c. 36% of state's area). The eastern tracts are adjacent to Nepal, northern areas with China and eastern with China and with Bhutan (see map). The Trans-Himalayan region of Sikkim that have the Snow leopard, includes all areas within the proposed Cold Desert Conservation

Reserve, such as Lhonak Valley, Lashar Valley, Donkung – Tso Lhamo Plateau, Sebu La, Lava, Yume Samdong, Upper Thosa lake (source of Chakung Chu), and Nimphu. In the Greater Himalaya, this includes Khangchenzonga National Park including areas such as Kishong La, Green Lake, Lampokhri, Bikhma taar, Talung Glacier, Dudh Pokhri, Khang La in West Sikkim and Lampokhri (Jelepla) in East Sikkim.

## **Arunachal Pradesh**

Most of the narrow northern rim of Arunachal Pradesh with alpine areas (c. 6,200 sq.km.; c. 8% of state's area) spread over nine districts is considered to have snow leopards, and some of the protected areas in this region include the proposed HH Tsangyang Gyatso World Peace Park (Tawang and West Kameng districts, western Arunachal), areas in and around the Namdapha National Park (Changlang district, eastern Arunachal), Kamlang Wildlife Sanctuary (Lohit district, eastern Arunachal), Yordi Rabe Supse Wildlife Sanctuary (West Siang, central Arunachal), Mouling National Park (Upper Siang, central Arunachal) and the Dihang Dibang Biosphere Reserve (West Siang, Upper Siang, and Dibang Valley, central Arunachal).

While considerable area is expected to have snow leopards in Eastern Himalaya, so far just one or two brief surveys have covered small portions of the region to establish their occurrence and understand threats. The entire tract mostly remains unexplored. Direct evidence of snow leopards have been rare in this area, but given the fact that many areas in Sikkim for example have wild prey populations 3-4 times higher than in the western Himalaya, one can expect correspondingly higher snow leopard densities.

## Rich prey base

Blue sheep or bharal is the primary prey of snow leopards through most of the Himalaya, and in addition, in the eastern parts there are a large number of other prey that are likely to be consumed. At least three species of musk deer (alpine, black and Himalayan) and three of goral (red, Chinese and Himalayan), Himalayan serow, and takin, are sympatric with snow leopard in the eastern Himalaya and are likely to be contributing to its diet. Most of these species are classed in a high category of global threat, comparable with the status of the snow leopard itself. Information on these also remains scarce, scattered and sometimes unreliable. In addition to these herbivores the area is rich in a large number of pheasants and other birds and small mammals, some of which certainly would be forming a part of snow leopard diet. Snow leopards also consume livestock, thus leading to varying degrees of conflict with the local community.

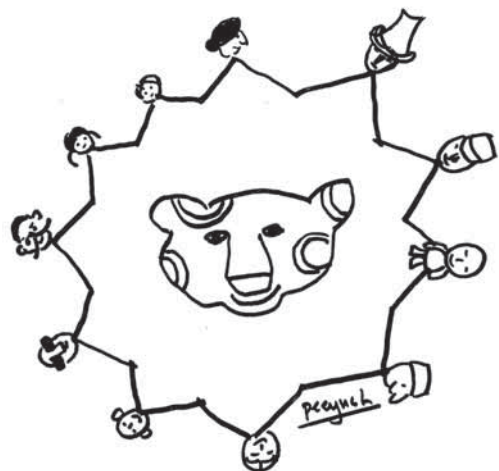
## The tiger and the snow leopard

In the Western Himalaya, India's national animal, the tiger, is mostly extinct but even in the past they were not reported from anywhere above the temperate zone ending at about 3,000m. On the contrary, tiger have been reported from parts of Eastern Himalaya and from Bhutan, in alpine areas well above 4,200m; surely sharing habitat with the snow leopard. We don't know yet, but in places such as the Namdapha National Park and Dihang Dibang Biosphere Reserve in Arunachal too we may have sympatric populations of tiger and snow leopard. Imagine seeing evidence of both these elusive cats together on the same trek! It is fascinating to imagine the kind

of interactions happening between these two species. Much has been said about how the common leopard separates from tiger in forests of India by choosing a different set of prey species or time of hunting to coexist with the tiger. In such mountainous tracts large prey like sambar are scarce and smaller nimble species like bharal that can easily escape into rugged cliffs might be too much of a contest for the tiger. Anyhow, the possibility of both these flagship species, plus many other endangered felids, endangered prey and smaller fauna, makes these tracts truly unparalleled and worth saving.

## Threats to the snow leopard

A unique feature of snow leopard range in India is that they are mostly pervasive in the entire inhabitable landscape; that is, the area between the tree line and the snow line (around 5,200m). By and large, human induced barriers haven't really cut off populations, although they may have caused decimations in some parts. The snow leopard faces some traditional threats such as its wild prey being decimated due to competition with livestock, retaliatory killing of snow leopard and other carnivores



such as wild dog due to livestock depredation and collection of biomass. However, in recent years a huge thrust in improving infrastructure in the remote tracts for the sparsely distributed human population has brought in newer threats from mega developmental projects and importantly, by migrant labourers who often are involved in poaching, collection of non timber forest produce, wildlife trade and degradation of areas near water bodies. Developmental changes such as tourism, and activities of the armed forces often leads to sustaining a large feral dog population that are increasingly harming wildlife, including the snow leopard. In Arunachal Pradesh traditional hunting is leading to serious decimation of many wildlife species.

## **Project Snow Leopard**

Considering the fact that the snow leopard range in India has extensive presence of wildlife, with many good populations lying outside the current protected area network, and that local people also depend on this landscape pervasively, the MoEF, along with the five Himalayan states and civil society organizations has developed an alternate strategy for planning and implementation of the conservation programmes, called the Project Snow Leopard (PSL). The Nature Conservation Foundation and the Snow Leopard Trust catalyzed this process. PSL is a landscape based, participatory programme that lays due importance to generation and use of local and scientific knowledge in designing and implementing conservation programmes at landscape and local levels.

PSL should be able to provide the much needed thrust for knowledge generation and planning for better implementation of programmes in the Eastern Himalaya, and such assessments in Tawang-West Kameng (Arunachal Pradesh) and North Sikkim

have already been initiated by the forest departments with assistance from the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF) and others such as WWF -India. It is hoped that this will allow for inclusive conservation of the snow leopard and other wildlife while maintaining livelihood security of the local population.

## **Many gaps to be filled**

There are a variety of needs in the area that include filling the tremendous gaps in information, developing local partnerships and ensuring that the much needed development in remote regions is in sync with conservation goals. The Eastern Himalaya are a fascinating region with a tremendous wealth of biodiversity, even at very high elevations. Most of this remains mostly unexplored. There are serious threats, both traditional and modern, and it is important to make concerted efforts to ensure survival of species in an inclusive paradigm of conservation.

In simple terms, what is urgently needed is explorations that yield information on biodiversity, local land-use systems, dependence, and local institutions, which can be used to prioritize areas for conservation. It is important to initiate rapid surveys in as many parts of the potential range as is possible and simple occupancy of snow leopard and prey species should be recorded. These studies should also record local use in the region, ways in which the people depend on the land, and activities that are critically important to people in the region. An effort also needs to be made to try and detect all possible threats posed by local people and development on biodiversity. Ideally, information on livelihoods and threats to these also should be obtained. Various government departments, community based organizations and

NGOs may be active in the region and it is important to understand their mandates and thrust areas. Any areas of convergence with conservation in their activities should be identified as also others that may be detrimental to conservation goals. As mentioned, it is fine if these assessments to begin with, are rapid and coarse in resolution of the data, but can be sufficient to identify and prioritize areas for conservation. Such studies usually have the ability to list species, utilize direct and local knowledge to identify the better areas for some target species and ensure that conservation measures don't impinge upon any critical need of the people. As also suggested by the PSL, a mosaic of small community managed or legally protected areas or 'core landscape units' (CLU) is effective for snow leopard conservation. Unlike the forested areas for example, where protected areas are habitat islands, these CLUs in the snow leopard area will be in a continuum of snow leopard habitat where there are some good and some not so good areas. Each of these areas should be managed based on local threats through locally formed committees. Coordinated management of this mosaic with the involvement of all or most stakeholders can help achieve true landscape level conservation.

Threats need to be understood better in order to make conservation effective. Often this can lead to a better strategy and implementation of the mitigation measures. For example, livestock depredation may be a serious issue at a village which may lead to retaliatory killing of carnivores. Mere compensation programmes may

provide some relief to affected families, at a considerable cost, but not really address the problem fully. Sometimes it may be a certain pasture, during a certain season, where most of the damage takes place. If this is so, finding out ways of reducing the losses through better herding practices in specific site and season, may be more effective in addressing and reducing the problem than providing compensation alone. Similarly, identifying the reasons for any threat to be present in an area, its history, patterns, etc, can be very helpful in designing mitigation mechanisms. Mitigation with the help and involvement of local people, other local agencies and NGOs can be more effective. Well-designed awareness programmes are critical for eliciting cooperation of people not connected with conservation directly. Also such interactions allow the team spearheading conservation to gain local insights and adapt their strategy for conservation.

An important stakeholder in snow leopard conservation all through its range in India is the Indian Army and paramilitary forces such as the Indo Tibetan Border Police and the Border Roads Organization. These forces are constantly monitoring all the mountains from east to west and have a mixed record with conservation. They have in many places been involved with protecting species, forests and in afforestation, but in others they have been involved with hunting and other destructive practices. There is however no doubt that these disciplined forces can greatly help in facilitating assessments and help in implementing conservation programmes.

## Project Snow Leopard

Project Snow Leopard (PSL) was developed by MoEF over three years of consultations. This process was led by the Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysore and the Snow Leopard Trust, who have over two decades of experience on a variety of issues in the Himalaya, spanning from basic and applied research, socioeconomic assessments, developing innovative conservation models and policy.



It was launched in January 2009 and hopes '...to safeguard and conserve India's unique natural heritage of high altitude wildlife populations and their habitats by promoting conservation through participatory policies and actions.' Its ten objectives relate to landscape based, knowledge guided, participatory conservation of the Indian high altitudes. The PSL suggests a process to set up a 3-tier consultative structure in the state, and a steering committee for the country so that effective participation at all levels can be ensured.

Simultaneously, each of the five Himalayan states needs to identify a large landscape (2,000-4,000 sq.km), conduct surveys to delineate a mosaic of small 'core landscape units' to focus conservation efforts, and prepare a detailed scientific management plan for the region. The emphasis of the plan is on focusing effort in the larger landscape by understanding and dealing innovatively with all threats while keeping track of any potential ones. Developing partnerships is another key of the PSL where emphasis is laid on understanding all institutions in the landscape, their mandates and activities, so that all their environment friendly and unfriendly activities are understood and the partnership helps in strengthening the conservation convergence works while trying to alter any damaging activity.

The Himachal Pradesh FD has, for instance, identified an approximately 3,000 sq.km area, the Upper Spiti Landscape, as their first PSL landscape and NCF-SLT have assisted them in preparation of its management plan, which is being implemented since 2011. Hopefully the other four states will also identify their PSL sites during the year 2012 and commission preparation of management plans for them based on the guidelines prepared by NCF and the Wildlife Institute of India.

## 4. Karbi Anglong – A Little Known Wilderness in Assam

*Anwaruddin Choudhury\**



### Assam's largest district

**F**ormerly known as the Mikir Hills, the Karbi Anglong district (25°32'–26°37'N, 92°09'–93°53'E; 10,330 km) in central Assam is the largest district in the state. It is also the district with the largest forested area in the state and still has considerable pockets of unexplored wilderness.

The district consists of two disjunct regions separated by Hojai-Lanka plains. The eastern region comprises the Diphu and Bokajan sub-divisions, and the western region is the Hamren sub-division. The area is mostly rugged and hilly, being part of an Archaean plateau (known as Karbi Plateau). The East Karbi Plateau is like an isolated 'block' linked to the main plateau through lower undulating terrain called the Lumding-Dhansiri Gap. The West Karbi Plateau is contiguous with the larger Meghalaya Plateau. There are three small plains, all formed by different rivers, namely, the Kopili, Dhansiri and the Jamuna. The highest point of the Karbi Plateau is 1,360 m above sea level, and I had proposed its name as the 'Hoidu Parbat' (Hoidu means hoolock gibbon in local Karbi parlance). The second highest peak is Singhason or Chenghehison Parbat (1,357 m above sea level).

The climate here is tropical with hot and wet summers (May to September) and cool and generally dry winters (December to February). Annual rainfall ranges from 800 to 2,800 mm, the bulk of which falls

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during the summer monsoon. Rainfall is considerably variable because southern Karbi Anglong is in a rain shadow area. The temperature ranges from less than 5°C in higher areas in winter to more than 35°C in summer and often reach 37°C in the plains.

## Rich in wildlife

Karbi Anglong still harbours around 8,000 sq.km. of forest, of which about 5,000 sq.km. is dense, constituting about one-third of all the dense forest left in Assam. With the exception of a few districts in Arunachal Pradesh, no other district in the Northeast can boast of such a large forested area. Not surprisingly, some of the best populations of Asian elephant, gaur, Hoolock gibbon and Capped langur in Assam can be found here. It also supports the most extensive habitat for Slow loris, Pig-tailed macaque, dhole, Himalayan black bear, tiger, leopard, Clouded leopard, sambar, muntjac, serow and birds such as the Great-pied Hornbill.

Karbi Anglong's birdlife is rich with more than 400 species, including the globally endangered White-winged wood Duck and the Greater Adjutant stork, the 'vulnerable' Lesser Adjutant stork, Swamp francolin, Kaleej pheasant, Red junglefowl and the Oriental Pied hornbill. The Grey peacock pheasant, White-cheeked hill partridge and Mountain bamboo partridge are also common. The Dhansiri forests are also a stronghold for the 'near-threatened' Brown hornbill. The threatened Rufous-necked hornbill was reported from Singhason area while the Wreathed hornbill is common as well. Swarms of wintering Spot-winged



starlings and a few Blyth's or Jerdon's baza can be seen near Langcholi and Black bazas are also common. The only record of Large Indian or Oriental pratincole in Assam is from the Parokhowa area of Karbi Anglong.

## Protecting Karbi Anglong's wild riches

The northern slopes of Karbi Anglong are vital to the world famous Kaziranga national park because one-horned rhinos, elephants, wild water buffalo and a host of other animals are able to find refuge here when floods come calling each year in the park's low lying Brahmaputra flood plains. I visited the area in early 1990s to have a first hand experience on the basis of which I could recommend that the forest be declared a sanctuary or a national park. For this I had to lobby with the local autonomous council as Karbi Anglong has a special status under the 6th Schedule of the constitution and without their support and consent no area could be declared a sanctuary. It had taken almost half-a-decade, but things were on the right track, thanks to Jotson Bey who became the Chief of the Council in the late 1990s.

Following my surveys in the district, a meeting with him in December 1998 paved the way for not one but four wildlife sanctuaries in this district. The Mikir Hills RF was notified as East Karbi Anglong Wildlife Sanctuary while the unclassed forests that connect it with Kaziranga became the North Karbi Anglong Wildlife Sanctuary. Two more – Nambor, and Marat Longri Sanctuaries – followed soon.

## **Tigers, Hoolock gibbon and much more**

But my efforts to get Dhansiri – the tigerland of 1990s, declared as a protected area could not see light. At 770 sq. km. this is Assam's second largest RF. In a sample area of about 10 sq. km. (between Langcholiyet-Nailalung), we had evidence of a full-grown tiger and a tigress and her near-adult cub. Two more areas of Dhansiri, Monglumukh and Khelma also had tiger signs almost everywhere. Elsewhere in the reserve too I conducted transects and here too I saw evidence of the big cats, including in the adjacent RFs of Daldali, Tamulbari and Barlangpher.

My estimate for the entire 1,000 sq. km. area was about 70-80 big cats in the early 1990s. I recommended the area as a tiger reserve and later on revised the proposal to include four more RFs in the north, Disama, Kaki, Inglongkiri and Miyungdisa making the total area for the proposed tiger reserve 1,454 sq. km. The last four RFs were declared as the Marat Longri ('Abode of Wildlife' in the Karbi language) Wildlife Sanctuary although the tiger reserve is yet to be declared. I have again written to the Project Tiger authorities on 24th June 2010 although the number of tigers must be alarmingly low by now.

My research in the early 1990s also suggested the presence of large number of Hoolock gibbons in Dhansiri and adjacent areas – the largest for any single RF in Assam. The Karbi tribe does not harm gibbons as they believe themselves to be related to the apes through common ancestries. Despite being located on the Assam-Nagaland border, which often allows miscreants from both sides to escape punishment, these forests have good tree cover and are still clearly wildlife rich. One reason is that the Intanki national park in Nagaland has served as a

sort of buffer to reduce poaching pressures from across the state border.

Sarsing Rongphar, a hunter-turned-guide was my companion in many of the Dhansiri expeditions. Walking with him in these glades, I was able to confirm the existence of the rare and elusive Marbled cat (two specimens examined), Clouded leopard, a small herd of Wild water buffalo, Stump-tailed macaque and Keeled box turtle. I also identified some wild varieties of citrus plants that could have great genetic value at some point. Sarsing had earlier reported sighting Khenglong-po, the legendary ape-man of Karbi folklore, but this remained elusive, and probably always will!

## **Garampani and Nambor**

Tuskers stopping traffic on National Highway No. 39 passing through Garampani and Nambor forests and demanding a 'toll' – food – was a common occurrence until the mid-90s. This behaviour had been reported since the 1970s and was probably related to the transportation of sugarcane through the forest to a sugar mill. In the early 1990s it became a regular phenomenon and continued until an upsurge in poaching and the closure of the sugarcane mill in the mid-1990s.

Nambor which was a large rainforest wilderness stretching up to the Naga foothills, was declared an RF in 1865. Because of the rich primate diversity and its elephants, gaurs and other wildlife, I had recommended for an extension of Garampani Sanctuary to cover the entire Nambor North Block RF and the adjacent Doigrung forests of both Golaghat and Karbi Anglong districts, totalling 198 sq. km. Though the entire area was not protected, 140 sq. km. (97 sq. km. in Golaghat and 43 sq. km. in Karbi Anglong) actually did end

up with sanctuary status thanks to co-operation of the autonomous council and forest officials of Golaghat. With patronage from Padyut Bordoloi, then Forest Minister of Assam, I was directly involved in the creation of the Nambor-Doigrung Sanctuary as the Joint Secretary in Environment & Forest department.

## **The bird catchers of Habang**

A little known aspect of Karbi Anglong are the bird catchers of Habang in the Hamren sub-. Habang or Umwang is a relatively remote area comprising a few villages inhabited by Khasis, Nepalese and a few Karbis. The Umkhen or Borpani river passes along its southern side, and this area has been identified as an 'Important Bird Area'. Beyond lies Meghalaya. Every autumn migrating Amur Falcons congregate at Habang. They are said to travel from northeastern China and south-eastern Siberia to southern Africa, using north-east India as a staging point. At night, large numbers congregate to roost at Habang. While their total abundance is not known, I personally counted at least 3,000 falcons in a single night in late October 2000. This number could be higher. The birds move through the area for about a month, suggesting that a staggering 90,000 birds might be stopping over en route to their wintering grounds.

Every October and November, the villagers get ready to capture the roosting birds. Most are eaten in the villages and some are sold in urban areas such as Shillong. This 'feasting season' is much awaited by the villagers. Together with Amol Sharma, the then Divisional Forest Officer, I have participated in awareness drives in the area, jointly undertaken by the local FD and The Rhino Foundation for Nature in Northeast India. In recent years the annual capture has

reduced drastically. Interestingly, none of the villagers could identify the species nor were they aware that it is a long-distance migrant. When explained to them, the migration saga generated a lot of sympathy, particularly among the elders.

## **Much more to be done**

Karbi Anglong is among the most significant biodiversity hotspots in the north-east. But it will not remain one for too long unless the local autonomous council gives it the highest priority. As of now the area is directly threatened by jhum cultivation and poaching, and in the north by expanding tea plantations. The sacred groves of Hamren including Killing Sarpo cry out to be preserved for posterity. The large wilderness of Dhansiri, now threatened with fresh encroachment and insurgency, also requires be declared as a PA. All these forests are prime water sources, particularly Singhason, which is the origin of many rivers and streams of the eastern Karbi Plateau. In my view the entire area should be declared a biosphere reserve, with de jure protection afforded to the most biologically vital cores.

The initial success of getting declared several PAs in Karbi Anglong inspires me a lot. I was, however, unable to follow up conservation activities in the area as owing to my postings in areas away from Karbi Anglong. I believe that many of my conservation efforts were successful but also that this was possible only because of the support of local officials, politicians and some villagers.

New initiatives need to be taken up to ensure conservation and regulated wildlife tourism initiatives that could benefit local communities need to be considered seriously. The North Karbi Anglong Wildlife Sanctuary which borders the Kaziranga NP

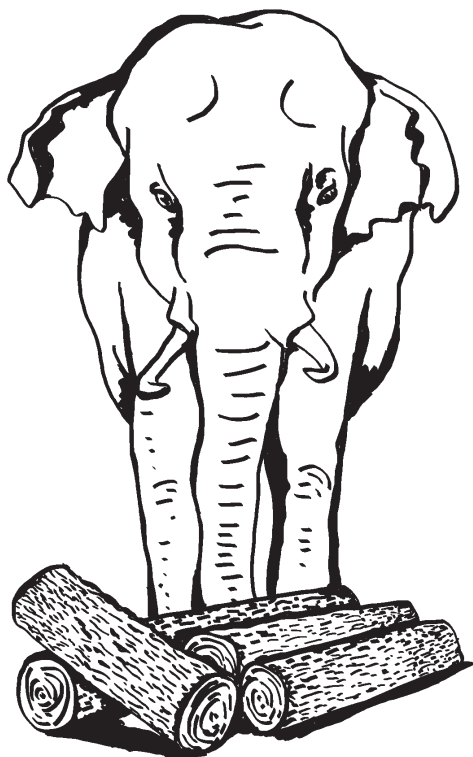
could easily attract a large chunk of the one lakh plus tourists that visit this famous wilderness. Apart from educating villagers, we desperately need effective anti-poaching measures through armed guards both inside as well as outside officially declared PAs.

Unless these and other measures are not taken up urgently, the forests and wildlife of Karbi Anglong will soon become a part of history and this is something we surely don't want.



## 5. Driving Down a Forested Lane: Elephants and Other Memories of the Garo Hills

*Nimesh Ved\**



**M**y bike stopped at the very place it used to then. I would either have to push it a little or kick-start it to reach the next turn from where Panda was downhill. Panda lies on the India – Bangladesh border in South Garo Hills and abuts the Baghmara Reserve Forest (BRF). As I drove on I relived moments from my three year (2004 - 2007) stint in the landscape; some of which I happily share below.

### The Garo Hills Landscape

I was at Baghmara after a hiatus to review the efforts at Samrakshan's field base and my only condition was that I would take a day off to drive around with a bike. Samrakshan Trust is based at Baghmara and works towards conserving biodiversity values in an equitable and just manner. The Garo hills along the Indo-Bangladesh border are comprised of three districts: West Garo Hills, East Garo Hills and South Garo Hills (of which Baghmara is the head-quarter), covering a total area of 8,197 sq.km. Barring very small plots of government owned lands that have been designated as reserve forests, national parks or wildlife sanctuaries, the rest of the landscape is community owned. Governed under Schedule 6 of the Indian Constitution these villages (akings) continue to harbour and manage large patches of community forests that have helped maintain contiguity of the forest cover across most of the Garo Hills

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and are also home to a wide diversity of wild animals and plants. The vegetation types here include tropical evergreen forests, moist deciduous forests, secondary forests and bamboo forests. The biggest threats to the landscape come in the form of coal mining and conversion of natural vegetation patches to single crop plantations.

## Of Elephants and Bears

While driving downhill, shutting off the bike-engine makes a world of difference. Another world comes alive; unwanted noises are shown the door; birds and insects suddenly became audible and sweetly at that. This many-potholed, main road of the district is regularly crossed by elephants (*Elephas maximus*; Mongma) and there are many a turn on the road that I have often seen elephant dung. Elephants use slopes most favourable for movement and these are later used by humans - mongma rama is how the elephant paths are locally referred to. The road I took snaked from Baghmara to Panda through the Baghmara Reserve Forest (BRF) – an interesting patch of green in the mosaic that constitutes the Garo Hills Elephant Reserve. This is what the report of the Elephant Task Force has to say of the Garo Hills Elephant Reserve: “spread over 3500 sq kms and supports approximately 1,700 elephants. However developmental activities and clearing of forest for shifting cultivation has resulted in degradation and fragmentation of habitat”. The landscape has always been known to have had good populations of the pachyderms. In the pre-independence period elephants were regularly captured here; P D Stracey notes in his book *Elephant Gold*, for instance, that 255 elephants were captured here in just a three year period between 1911 and 1914 in these Garo hills. Interestingly elephant capture, here, was allowed till as late as 1982 with 171 elephants being captured in the 5

years preceding the ban that was enforced that year.

As I drove from Baghmara I crossed the Karvani aking to my left. It was here that a colleague and myself had got very excited on coming across fresh bear signs on the sand. Our discussion on the bear species had been cut



short on hearing an elephant who had sounded too close for comfort. We had rushed back, exactly like one does when wild elephants are around! We had known already from our 2004 visit, to a village on the Baghmara - Tura road near Jatrakona, that bears regularly came to eat jackfruits! In his ‘Records of Sloth Bear and Malayan Sun Bear in North east India’, Anwaruddin Choudhury talks of the “Garo Hills being the western most range of the Sun bear (*Helarctos malayanus*; Mapil)”, but also “that the presence of Sloth bears (*Melursus ursinus*; Mapil sarang) in Garo Hills needs confirmation!”

Driving further I crossed the point where I had my first sighting of the elephants in the landscape while with another colleague. Two of them stood at a slightly elevated position on our left. As we drove past, I dreadfully glanced towards the valley on the right that lazily went down to Bangladesh. We were able to drive further and relief we experienced was alive till only the moment we realized that we would have to return in a while by the very same route! Elephants used to cross over the international border and it once created quite a furore. A NGO based in Bangladesh demanded that the Indian government take back the 100 odd elephants that had crossed over. They had even argued for the elimination of the

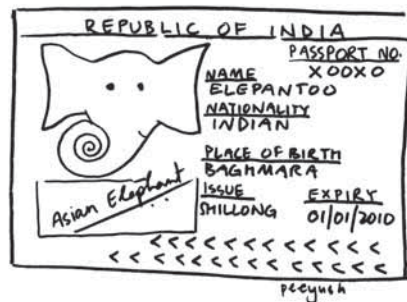


elephants; this was the price they would have to pay for attacks on people, and for destruction of trees, roads and houses. Anwaruddin Choudhury too reports this in his report on the impact of border fence along India-Bangladesh border on elephant movement. This point was also not very far from where I was first chased by an elephant. That incident in the wet darkness instilled in me a confidence in my bike driving abilities that I, rather immodestly, still hold on to. On that eventful day we were returning from Gongrot to report a case of elephant mortality to the forest department. In the three years from 2005 to 2007 we had reported 13 mortalities in the landscape to the authorities.

We had come across an elephant on the path that leads from Gongrot to Balpakram National Park (BNP). We saw it moaning and struggling to stay on its feet and as we wondered what lay ahead, it fell down with a thud. The moans increased - they were sad enough for us to feel some of the pain and realise of the helpless situation we were in. It died not much later. The mark on its body made us wonder if it had been killed with a spear. In their 'Conservation of Asian Elephant in North east India', Anwaruddin Choudhury and Vivek Menon note that "killing elephants with poisoned arrows and spears is still practiced, although with the easy availability of modern firearms such primitive methods survive only in some areas". BNP, it must be noted, is the largest protected area in the state and encompasses an amazingly beautiful canyon that is associated with local beliefs and myths. While an earlier management plan of the park notes of its being part of the first list of proposed tiger reserves during early 1970s; of its current management status – the lesser said the better.

## Hunting, road building, tree felling

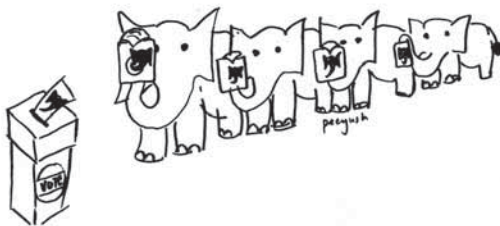
Driving on I reached the Pilot Project; a rubber plantation (located within the BRF) set-up as a pilot initiative and hence the name. Across the road from the plantation entrance is a path that leads down-hill to a stream. At this junction we had seen a hunter cross the road with a Barking deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*; Balgitchak) across his shoulders. We had decided to delay the evaluation of the self help groups that we had actually come for and drove instead to Baghmara to inform the forest department. At his office the Divisional Forest Officer said he was busy since the Conservator was visiting later that day. I recall being irritated during the brief discussion after which he reluctantly agreed to send the Range Forest Officer to the spot. The deer had been trapped using an old fishing net near the stream. It was many months later that I had my first clear sighting of the Capped langur (*Trachyithecus pileatus*; Ranggol) when he had gone to bathe in a stream. In a questionnaire based survey focusing on large mammals we undertook in the landscape, 77% respondents stated that they had seen the animal.



Further down the road I was at one of the turns where a friend and me had driven late one night to see elephants. I recalled how after a few minutes of shared silence, at this point where darkness met more darkness, the forest had suddenly seemed full of life

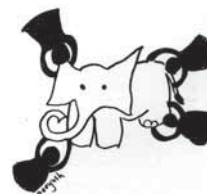
– we thought we heard elephants. In the dense growth, sighting them during the day in these forests was not an easy task, what to speak of the night; unless, of course, they wanted to be seen. As I write I recall Rudyard Kipling in his 'Toomai of the Elephants'; a young boy “who had seen what never man had seen before – the dance of the elephants at night and along in the heart of Garo Hills”.

Driving along I reached a point where a road was then freshly planned by the Border Security Force (BSF) – one that would connect the border road to the road I was then on. I had put in few afternoons in the silence here as I wondered on the need to have roads cutting the lovely forest. We had taken up the matter with the authorities at Shillong along with the other issue involving the BSF – cutting trees from BRF for use as firewood. It was not far from this point that an elephant had attacked a vehicle during the assembly elections. People had remarked that the elephant attacks were on account of increased activity in the area, resulting perhaps in greater stress for the animals. Later during the parliament elections several booths in Garo Hills were marked sensitive on account of presence of elephants in the vicinity! One can imagine what this can escalate to if the road construction and tree-felling goes on.



Further on, after crossing Ampangre, I reached the point where with people who knew the forest much better than I did, I had my first wild sighting of the Slow Loris (*Nycticebus bengalensis*; Gilwe). We observed one for a while and were pleasantly

surprised when the 2nd one appeared. We watched fascinated as the endearing creature clasped the teak branches and moved on slowly and gracefully. Only a few months earlier we had successfully helped release a Slow loris from a family in Gongrot. We were very enthused initially on seeing it and began talking for its release in the village. However we seemed to be losing steam in our negotiations when I suddenly fell at the feet of the concerned person asking him to return it to its home. It surprisingly worked! Gongrot was one of the villages where we had in place an interesting participatory elephant monitoring program. People recorded information on the elephant presence in their villages and we would build on it further by collating and analysing information over a period of time. Driving on further I reached the turn which signalled the downward slope to Panda and steered silently to the village. It here that I saw a house damaged by the elephants for the first time and also where the largest herds were then reported in the elephant monitoring program. Panda brings back memories of the quaint and dainty guest-house maintained by the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council and also of the initial days when the District Collector, who had offered me a lift, stopped his vehicle to hunt Wild pig (*Sus scrofa*; Wak burung)! Baghmara memories also take me to the discussion I had with a colleague eight years ago. He had asked if I was willing to move to Baghmara and I had replied that I knew nothing about that part of our country and little about elephants too. He had said he was willing to take the gamble if I was ready. Quite thankfully, I took the gamble, the gamble worked and it changed my life!



## 6. Let Wildlife and PAs be Damned!

*Neeraj Vagholikar\**



**A**n April 2011 proposal by the Sikkim government to declare ecologically sensitive zones (ESZs) around PAs, restricts the proposed zone around the Khangchendzonga National Park to 200 metres (0.2 km) around bulk of its boundaries and to 1000 metres (1 km) in a relatively smaller section in the North. To put this in perspective, the National Wildlife Action Plan 2002-2016 and the subsequently adopted Wildlife Conservation Strategy 2002 had recommended declaring a 10 km radius around sanctuaries and national parks as ecologically sensitive zones under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 to provide for ecologically appropriate land use zonation around PAs. Though subsequent developments in this Supreme Court-monitored process gave flexibility to state governments to decide the exact distances, 200 metres is indeed very conservative. But an examination of a PA map of Sikkim overlaid with proposed large hydropower projects in the state makes it very clear what the motivations of such a small protective ESZ cover is. A series of large hydropower projects encircle the Khangchendzonga NP the park on its eastern and southern boundaries in North and West Sikkim respectively. Ironically, even in the proposed 200 metre ESZ around the park hydropower projects have been listed not in the ‘prohibited’ but within the ‘regulated’ category.

Earlier, in June 2006, the environment impact assessment (EIA) report for the 1200

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MW Teesta III project in Sikkim did not have a single mention of the Khangchendzonga National Park or the Biosphere Reserve after a year long study, even though the project is within a kilometer of the former and actually within the latter! When this was brought to light during a public hearing, a biodiversity management plan was quickly drawn up, a no objection certificate (NOC) obtained from the Chief Wildlife Warden and the project granted environmental clearance. Now while construction is in an advanced stage, we still do not have a study to show the impact of the project on the national park and biosphere reserve to decide whether the project is viable in the first place. Despite a December 2006 Supreme Court (SC) order requiring all projects within 10 km radius of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries to obtain wildlife clearance from the Standing Committee (StC) of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL), no such permission has been obtained as of May 2012 for the 1200 MW Teesta III project. The Honorary Wildlife Warden of North Sikkim has also reported killing of Schedule I species under the WLPA, a serow in particular, at the dam site. Clearly, it is a case of 'Let wildlife and PAs be damned'.

## Northeast: India's 'future powerhouse'

With the north-east identified as India's 'future powerhouse' and at least 168 large hydroelectric projects' set to majorly alter the riverscape, the above example is likely to repeat itself



time and again across the region. The region is rich in biodiversity and is home to important populations of wildlife species such as the rhino, elephant, tiger, Wild water buffalo, Pygmy hog and the Gangetic river dolphin. Three out of 34 biodiversity hotspots identified globally<sup>2</sup> – Himalaya, Indo-Burma and Western Ghats and Sri Lanka – cover parts of India. The north-east is traversed by the first two and in 8% of the country's geographical area it also houses 21% of the Important Bird Areas within India. It is an area which is still poorly documented and in recent years biologists have discovered new species and extended known ranges of existing ones in the region. This is not just restricted to smaller life forms, but also large mammals such as primates, discovery of which is rather rare these days. The north-east also has a high level of endemism. The region is drained by the Brahmaputra and Barak river systems, which are intricately linked with the floodplain ecology of wetlands (beels) and grasslands in the valleys. These linkages are evident, for instance, in the world-renowned ecosystems such as the Kaziranga National Park and Dibru-Saikhowa National Park in Assam.

The large dams' juggernaut promises to be the biggest 'development' intervention in this ecologically and geologically fragile, seismically active and culturally sensitive region in the coming days. Its impact on the PA network is one of the major existing and future concerns. Some of the prominent examples include: impact of multiple Kameng basin hydropower projects on the Pakke Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh (AP) and the Nameri Tiger Reserve in Assam; impacts of the Lower Subansiri project on the Tale Valley Wildlife Sanctuary (AP); impact of the 1500 MW Tipaimukh project on the Kailam WLS (Manipur); impact of the Loktak hydroelectric project on the Keibul

1. Central Electricity Authority 2001
2. [www.biodiversityhotspots.org](http://www.biodiversityhotspots.org)

Lamjao NP (Manipur); impact of the 2700 MW Lower Siang project on the D'Ering WLS (AP); impact of 280 MW Panan project on the Khangchendzonga NP (Sikkim); impact of the 1750 MW Demwe Lower project on the Kamlang WLS (AP) and the Dibru-Saikhowa National NP (Assam).

## **Environmental Impact Assessment: a Farce<sup>3</sup>**

Considering the unique features of the region and the scale of intervention planned, it is critical that the environmental and social impacts are carefully assessed before deciding whether these projects are truly feasible. Large hydroelectric projects need to pass through mandatory 'environmental clearance' procedures, administered by the MoEF, to evaluate their viability on environmental and social grounds. Based on their specific location they could also require other clearances such as a 'forest clearance' from MoEF and approval from the StC of the NBWL for locations inside or within a 10 km radius of PAs. A key feature of the environmental clearance process is the EIA report, which is a critical document aiding the decision-making.

What about the quality of these EIA reports for dams in north-east India? Let us, for example, look at certain biodiversity aspects of the EIA reports of projects either directly impacting PAs or in close proximity of them. Dr. Anwaruddin Choudhury, renowned naturalist from Northeast India, has examined EIA reports of at least five such hydroelectric projects – Kameng, Lower Subansiri, Middle Siang, Tipaimukh and Dibang – and finds them all poor on wildlife aspects. A common feature of his introductory comments on these reports has been: "contains innumerable

(instances of) incorrect data, unverified and superfluous statements, and above all reveals the casual approach," referring to the power companies and EIA consultants. Dr. Choudhury says: "It is shocking that mega hydel projects in the north-east are being granted clearances based on such reports. How can we decide the fate of some of the country's most important wildlife habitats based on sub-standard impact assessment studies?"

Here are a few examples from these reports: the EIA report for the 1,000 MW Siyom project lists five bird species in an area which has over 300 and even this short list has one which is non-existent; the EIA for the 600 MW Kameng project reclassifies carnivores such as the Red panda, pangolin and porcupine as herbivores; the EIA for the 2,000 MW Lower Subansiri lists 55 species of fish in a river which has at least 156 and reports an area called the 'Arctic' in the Eastern Himalayas.

In some cases additional rapid EIAs have been asked for, which prove to be entirely inadequate. In the Lower Subansiri project on the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border, the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) spent six days doing an additional study in the submergence area impacting Tale Valley WLS and other contiguous habitat and then made surprising statements such as: "...The long and vast water body thus created by the reservoir will be happy haunt for aquatic creatures." It is well known that native aquatic species, whose habitats are fast-flowing rivers, do not find the still waters of a reservoir a 'happy haunt'! While reservoirs may benefit exotic species that are introduced for fisheries, such introduction has very often proved to be detrimental to the native species. It is a matter of serious concern that reputed government institutions such as the ZSI have given such

3. This section is adapted from the following briefing paper by this contributor: Vaghlikar, N and Das, P.J., 2010. Damming Northeast India. Kalpavriksh, Aaranyak and ActionAid India.

poor reports. While biodiversity was used as an indicator in the above examples, the reports have been found to be poor in many social and environmental aspects as well.. In some cases the MoEF has indeed asked for additional detailed studies when EIAs were found to be poor, but often they have been post-clearance studies! There is little logic in first clearing the way for destruction of wildlife habitats and then doing a detailed assessment as a formality after project work and environmental destruction is well under way.

Another trend has been to grant clearances to projects that destroy sensitive wildlife habitats, based on poor assessments, and then claim to compensate the losses by asking for other areas to be declared protected areas. While appropriate compensatory mechanisms may be relevant in some cases, they cannot substitute a sound decision-making process project based on comprehensive environmental and social impact assessment. The main problem in current environmental decision-making processes is that virtually every project is treated as a *fait accompli* both by the expert committees appraising these projects and the regulatory authorities concerned. This subverts the possibility of a proper environmental decision-making process.

## **Hydropower projects: Inside and just outside PAs**

Perhaps the most controversial case until recently was that of the 2000 MW Lower Subansiri project impacting a small portion of the Tale Valley WLS and substantially larger portions of biodiversity-rich contiguous forests in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. It became obvious to developers and state governments from this example that although clearances were virtually

guaranteed in all cases (as evident from clearance rates of over 90 % by the MoEF), projects involving submergence inside PAs would need to go through a protracted clearance process: permissions from the SC, greater scrutiny of the StC of the NBWL and payment of Net Present Value (NPV) five times the normal NPV as part of the forest clearance process.

Therefore, a new *modus operandi* has been devised. Instead of keeping destructive projects away from protected areas and ecologically sensitive contiguous areas, changes in alignment are being done in such a way that the project is almost touching the boundary of the PA, but not technically using land that is legally inside. This does not do much to reduce to impact of such infrastructure on important wildlife habitats. The 160 MW Teesta Low Dam IV (in North Bengal) bordering Mahananda WLS was the first to experiment with this approach in the Eastern Himalayas and the most recent example is the 1750 MW Demwe Lower project in Arunachal Pradesh.

It has been argued by project authorities that they have changed the project design to avoid submergence of the Kamlang WLS and that the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) on River Valley and Hydroelectric projects of the MoEF has examined this issue during examination of the scoping clearance (first stage of environmental clearance) of the Demwe Lower project. Critics have argued that the EAC asking for the Kamlang WLS to be “outside the submergence area of the project” while subsequently allowing for submergence to be as close as 0.050 km (50 metres) to the boundary, indicates that the issue has been examined from a legalistic angle alone and not a comprehensive ecological angle. The intention was to only keep the submergence out of the legal boundaries of the sanctuary and not to examine what the overall ecological impact.



The last time the Demwe Lower project was discussed in the EAC for scoping was on June 16, 2009. This was for increasing of the installed capacity from 1630 MW to 1750 MW by increasing the full reservoir level (FRL) from 420 metres to 424.8 metres. Prior to this meeting the developer had written to the Additional Director in the MoEF handling river valley projects, noting as follows: "Now, after the necessary studies as desired by CEA, we found that the FRL could be raised as close to the border of Kamlang Wildlife Sanctuary due to the enhanced Spillway capacity." This logic was agreed to by the EAC from an environmental perspective and the project allowed to go ahead with submergence almost touching the boundary of Kamlang sanctuary after increase of FRL.

Such an approach is, evidently, against the precautionary principle and a holistic ecological view. Instead of having an approach that the submergence should be as far away as possible from the sanctuary (considering habitat in its immediate vicinity is sensitive too), the approach was that the submergence should be as close as possible to the sanctuary without submerging land within the legal boundaries to avoid additional legal hassles. Both the project developers and the MoEF have skipped these details and publicly projected this project as a green project which was re-aligned to avoid submergence of the Kamlang sanctuary!

## **Damming the downstream**

When large dams block the flow of a river, they also trap sediments and nutrients vital for fertilising downstream plains. They alter the natural flow regimes which drive the ecological processes in the downstream areas. Quite literally they disrupt the connections between the upstream and

the downstream, between a river and its floodplain. The individual and cumulative downstream impacts of over a hundred dams planned in the Brahmaputra river basin has been a major issue of debate in the north-eastern region in recent times, including on protected areas in the floodplains such as the Kaziranga and Dibru-Saikhowa NPs. Concerns raised about downstream impacts are related to the loss of fisheries; changes in beel (wetland) ecology in the floodplains; impacts on agriculture on the chapories (riverine islands and tracts); impacts on various other livelihoods due to blockage of rivers by dams (e.g. driftwood collection, sand and gravel mining); increased flood vulnerability due to massive boulder extraction from river beds for dam construction and sudden water releases from reservoirs in the monsoons; dam safety and associated risks in this geologically fragile and seismically active region.

One of the key issues to arise is the drastic daily variation in river flows which will take place after these dams are commissioned, particularly in winter. For example, a flow of around 350 - 400 cubic metres per second (cumecs) in the month of January (lean season) in the Lohit river will see drastic daily fluctuations after the commissioning of the proposed 1750 MW Demwe Lower project in the lower reaches of the Lohit river. The flow will fluctuate between 35 cumecs (for 18-19 hours when water will be stored behind the dam) and 1729 cumecs (when water is released during power generation for 5-6 hours). In winter the flow will be less than 10% of lean season flow for 18-19 hours and will increase 400% of lean season flow (equivalent to average monsoon flows) during power generation periods, submerging habitat which is normally exposed in winter. The Lohit directly influences the eastern and southern parts of the Dibru-Saikhowa NP.

As per official downstream impact assessment studies conducted recently ([http://apspcb.org.in/lower\\_siang\\_hydroelectric\\_project.htm](http://apspcb.org.in/lower_siang_hydroelectric_project.htm)), simultaneous operation of the three proposed lower-most dams on the Lohit, Dibang and Siang will cause the flow at the tri-junction at Dibru-Saikhowa NP in the month of January to fluctuate between 663 cumecs and 7610 cumecs (average monsoon flows) on a daily basis. This will lead to water-level fluctuations of between 3-4 metres (similar to high tides and low tides) inside the park in winter. It will be alternatively starved and flooded in the winter months, changing the natural ecology dramatically. This report was revised to facilitate the wildlife clearance of the 1750 MW Demwe Lower project. But the revised report still indicates that the daily unnatural water level fluctuations caused due to the three dams at Dibru-Saikhowa in winter is 2.34 metres.

The downstream livelihoods and activities likely to be impacted by this unnatural daily flow fluctuation in these Eastern Himalayan rivers include fishing, flood-recession (winter) agriculture, river transportation and livestock rearing in grasslands for dairy-based livelihoods. Major flow fluctuations in rivers such as Lohit, Dibang and Siang will seriously impact the grassland habitat and breeding grounds of critically endangered grassland birds such as the Bengal Florican and Black-breasted parrotbill, foraging areas of the endangered Wild water buffalo, habitat of the endangered Gangetic river



dolphin, ecology of seasonally-inundated salix swamp forests, and the hibernation of reptiles and amphibians. Dr. Jagdish Krishnaswamy, ecologist and hydrologist with the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment, reviewed the impact assessment report related to the downstream impacts of these three dams on Dibru-Saikhowa NP and observed with respect to impacts on Gangetic river dolphins and other species as follows: "The estimated reduction in water depth indicated under various scenarios (by subtracting bed level from the minimum depth) clearly shows that at various cross-sections, areas of the river spread will become inhospitable for this critically endangered species as the water depth for several hours will be below the threshold. Furthermore, species such as fresh water turtles which need to bask for several hours in a day when the sun is out for thermo-regulation and be in the water when it is hot, will be severely affected because of the artificial regulated fluctuations in flow and water depth, which will cause sudden submergence and exposure of sand spits, banks and islands." An expert committee which studied the downstream impacts of the under-construction 2000 MW Lower Subansiri project has warned that such unnatural daily fluctuations in winter will lead to increased erosion and alteration of groundwater regimes downstream.

But despite such concerns, the Union Environment Minister, Jayanthi Natarajan, over-ruled the opposition of at least seven wildlife experts on the StC of the NBWL to give wildlife clearance to the 1750 MW Demwe Lower project in Arunachal Pradesh in February 2012. With the Indian government authorities continuing with their shoddy environmental governance related to these mega dams impacting important PAs in the north-east, leading conservation group from the Northeast, Aaranyak, has appealed to UNESCO

regarding the impacts of proposed upstream dams on World Heritage Sites in the Brahmaputra floodplains. The note focuses on the cumulative impacts of dams in Arunachal Pradesh on Kaziranga National Park and the dams in Bhutan on Manas National Park. It states: "UNESCO, the apex authority that selects and monitors the status of the natural world heritage sites, should take cognizance of the serious threats posed by the large dams being constructed in Arunachal Pradesh (India) and Bhutan to the world heritage sites of Kaziranga and Manas in Assam and ensure proper assessment of impacts and

mitigation thereof so that the rich natural heritage of these two sites can be protected and conserved at any cost. Unless sincere efforts are made to check the large number of ecologically harmful and unsustainable dams being constructed and planned in the Eastern Himalayas, it will only be a matter of time before Kaziranga and Manas, the two renowned World Heritage Sites of Assam become severely degraded, impaired and lose the prestigious WHS status."

That would indeed be an extremely unfortunate day!



## 7. Community Conservation of Wildlife in the North-east

*Neema Pathak Broome\**



The north-eastern region of India has been described by Myers (2000) as one of the hotspots of biological diversity along with neighbouring countries like Bhutan, China and Myanmar. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has identified it as a centre of rice germplasm and the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR), India, has highlighted the region as being rich in wild relatives of crop plants. The region is rich in medicinal plants and many other rare and endangered plants and animals. According to the Indian Red data book published by the Botanical Survey of India, of the 1500 endangered floral species in India, 800 are reported from this region. High biological diversity is often related to the forest cover of a region. Most of the north-eastern states have more than 60% of their geographical area under forest cover, a minimum suggested coverage for the hill states in the country.<sup>1</sup> All the eight states that constitute the north-east (NE) are not only biologically diverse but also ethnically, socially and culturally extremely diverse.

It is important to note that the traditional and customary rights of local communities in the NE India have been protected through the sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution under which, autonomous regional and district councils have been constituted. These councils have legislative, administrative and financial powers over

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1. Chatterjee, S. 2011. India Forester. August 2011

40 subjects including forests. Presently NE India has 16 district councils, including three in Assam, three in Meghalaya, three in Mizoram, one in Tripura and one in Manipur. In addition, in states like Nagaland, governance is through village councils based on customary systems under the Village Council Act, which give governance autonomy to the village councils on a number of subjects including education and forests. Customary governance systems are therefore, still quite prevalent in most parts of the region. Possibly, the combined effect of the above factors has led to the fact that in last few years the north-eastern states of India have also attracted attention for numerous conservation efforts by local communities and indigenous peoples.



## The larger context

Community conserved areas (CCAs) have emerged as a powerful new concept in the global conservation discourse. Such areas, encompassing a huge diversity of initiatives at conserving ecosystems and species, and characterized by community-based decision-making, are the oldest in the world. Yet formal conservation policy and practice have ignored them till very recently. It is only in the last few years that they have gained attention and recognition, and many countries are now exploring how they can be supported in ways that would considerably enhance the conservation of biodiversity and wildlife while supporting the traditional territories, rights, livelihoods and traditional knowledge of the local

communities (see [www.iccaforum.org](http://www.iccaforum.org)). Many local communities and indigenous peoples, the world over are conserving either their territories or areas within their territories through continuation of old practices, or innovating on new ones to face newer challenges. There are also numerous examples where the local communities and indigenous peoples have launched mass movements against destructive processes ravaging their territories.

CCAs are facing enormous threats from unsustainable 'development' projects, demographic and cultural changes, climate change, and other factors. On the other hand it is also being realized that the greatest hope for the future of biodiversity lies in the conservation efforts by the indigenous peoples and local communities. It is not surprising therefore that various steps are being suggested and taken at national and international levels to support and encourage CCAs. These include:

1. The Protected Area Programme of Work of the Convention on Biological Diversity that has asked the signatory countries to recognize and support CCAs with full consent and participation of the local people (see <http://www.cbd.int/protected/pow.shtml>) among a series of other decisions related to supporting CCAs.
2. The World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC), a UNEP sponsored body, has agreed to include CCAs in their database of PAs across the globe, giving the same importance to CCAs for conservation as government designated PAs have received so far (see <http://www.iccaregistry.org/en/sites/23>)
3. A group of indigenous peoples, local community members, small NGOs, academic institutions, and networks

have come together to form a consortium to support and lobby for the recognition of CCAs at international and national levels (see [www.iccaforum.org](http://www.iccaforum.org)).

4. The government of India had decided to recognize and support CCAs and allocate funds for their support under the 11th 5-year plan. Implemented by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) at the centre and the state wildlife departments, this scheme seeks to support well functioning CCAs.

In 2010, at the tenth Conference of Parties (CoP) of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the signatory parties (including India) arrived at the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and Aichi Targets, which is a ten-year framework for action by all countries and stakeholders to save biodiversity and enhance its benefits for people. Target 11 states that by 2020, at least 17 % of terrestrial and inland water, and 10 % of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscape and seascapes. (See <http://www.cbd.int/doc/strategic-plan/2011-2020/Aichi-Targets-EN.pdf>). It is now widely believed and accepted that this target can only be achieved if community conservation efforts are supported and encouraged.

In the above context the NE region of India gains considerable significance. There is immense potential for conservation of the rich biological diversity if the CCAs here are appropriately recognized and supported and an environment is created for traditional conservation systems to improve and continue even as cultures and economies

evolve to suit the present context. Through a few sporadic documented examples it appears that CCAs are fairly widespread in the region and include both the traditional forms of conservation as well as new ones. There is an urgent need to understand the diversity, spread and needs of CCAs and also the role that they have played in achieving conservation. At the same time we also need to figure out how best they can be supported to continue while also respecting their autonomy and governance systems. Given below is a short description of the diversity of CCAs found in different states in the NE: these range from a situation where there is a total taboo over resource extraction in sacred landscapes to multiple use and management zones:

## CCAs in Assam

Constitutional provisions such as Article 371-B; and Article 244 (2) and 275 (1) of the sixth schedule are operational in the state. A huge diversity of CCAs are spread over various districts in Assam, but in particular, in areas under the autonomous councils of Karbi Anglong, North Cachar, Bodo, and Kokrajhar that have been created under provisions of the sixth schedule. These initiatives range from traditional institutions managing sacred landscapes, conserving areas as a water catchment, and new initiatives at habitat and wild species conservation. Some such examples include the following:

1. The CCAs of village Kolbari Tokbi I in Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council: The village inhabited by 21 households of the Karbi tribal with a population of about 150 has been traditionally protecting two sacred groves, namely Tharveso (meaning 'small mango') and Parmusor, covering a total area of around 100 ha. In addition, a patch of forest about 25 ha surrounding these



sacred forests is also managed by the village community. In the last few years their efforts have been recognized by the forest department and they have received financial help for carrying out some plantations and appointing forest watchers from the village.<sup>2</sup>

2. In a similar effort in Malong Kisir in Chingthong Development Block of Karbi Anglong, 35 households with an approximate population of 400 are protecting a 100 ha patch of forest. This serves as a catchment to the stream which is the only source of drinking water and fish for consumption. The village has received support from the International Foundation for Agriculture and Development (IFAD) for building a tank in the forest and reaching water till the village.<sup>3</sup>
3. The CCAs of Goalpara are managed by the Rabhas, one of the major plains tribes of Assam who live mainly in the Lower Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. The villagers consider their forest, forest resources and water bodies as their most important assets. The village has had a forest protection committee for last 20 years which is elected once a year and ensures that the rules and regulations are followed. The committee charges a fine up to Rs. 500 for violations.<sup>4</sup>
4. Margherita is a civil sub-division of Tinsukia district of Assam. The region is inhabited by tribal groups like the Singhpho, Tai Phake, Tai Khamyang, and Tangsa Naga. All these tribal communities have their own traditional

conservation ethics with prominent practices of sacred spaces, sacred trees and animals. Traditional institutions which are respected in most areas ensure continuation of traditional knowledge and conservation of many species. Elephant, tiger, leopard, Wild pigs, Bear, Barking deer and Spotted deer are commonly found wildlife in the forests surrounding the villages of the area.<sup>5</sup>

5. In Shankarghola village in Bongaigaon district, the young and the old came together in the mid 1990s under the leadership of a village youth, Hemanta Rabha, to protect and regenerate their fast degrading forests. The village is inhabited by 70 household and is protecting a patch of 50ha. Protection has not only revived the dwindling wild animal populations but has also benefitted the poorer families more critically dependent on the forest resources.<sup>6</sup>
6. Chakrashila Wildlife Sanctuary, Dhubri (Bodo Autonomous Council): More than 20sq km of Chakrashila WLS was declared an official wildlife sanctuary in 1994 at the insistence of the local villagers. These forests are a habitat for the Golden langur, which thanks to the protection provided, now thrives in these forests. A pivotal role in this process was played by a local NGO, Nature's Beckon, comprising of youth from the villages surrounding the sanctuary. Chakrashila also harbours a set of sacred mountains 'Dan duphur' that are worshipped during the April festivals. The term Chakrashila is

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2. Chatterjee, S. 2011. India Forester. August 2011

3. Chatterjee, S. 2011. India Forester. August 2011

4. Chatterjee, S. 2011. India Forester. August 2011

5. Chatterjee, S. 2011. India Forester. August 2011

6. Singha, H. Shankarghola village, Bongaigaon. In Pathak, N. (ed). 2009. Community Conserved Areas in India – A Directory, Kalpavriksh Pune/Delhi (pg 157-158).

also loosely derived from the word 'Sikrisikla' which means butterfly in Bodo language. Within the township of Kokrajhar, close to Chakrashila, Gendrabil is a small patch of Sal forest that has been preserved by the local community since 2001. The Bodo tribals of two villages, Boro Gendrabil North and Boro Gendrabil South, have been able to successfully prevent any illegal felling of trees of this RF and as a result 3 troupes of Golden langur are residing in this area.<sup>7</sup>

Chakrashila is not the only example of communities coming forward for conservation of this endangered primate. In the 1980s the Ujan Rabhapara villagers of the Kakojana RFs in the same area decided protect their forests which were fast degrading because of unregulated use, state extraction of timber and increased settlements of people from outside. In the 1990s a local NGO, Nature's Foster, extended support to the village initiative, which was not only conserving over 1700 ha of forest but also protecting a number of species such as the Golden langur, the pangolin, and the Crab eating mongoose, among others. In 2008, following support by the NGO, 16 villages have come together to form the Pateshwari Golden Langur Green Conservation Foundation to ensure the long term survival of this initiative.<sup>8</sup>

In addition there are many local community groups in Kokrajhar and other forests which have formed teams of local youth for making inventories of flora and fauna, creating awareness among the local people, carrying out plantations and protection activities largely voluntarily.

## CCAs in Meghalaya

In Meghalaya 69.5% of the geographic area is under forest cover, which is around 15,584 sq. km.<sup>9</sup> Of this, area under reserved and



protected forests managed by state FD is 12,124 sq km. The remaining 22% is managed by the autonomous district councils, village durbars and other traditional institutions and private owners. Autonomous district councils control 96% of the community owned forests.<sup>10</sup> Based on the ownership pattern and management control and the tribe that preserves them, these forests are known by different names. The Law Kyntang are the sacred forests, while Law Adong are forests from which resources are drawn but with concessions. There are elaborate rules, regulations and systems and rituals associated with fines. Law Shanon cater to all needs of fuelwood and have detailed rules and regulations. Amongst the community forests the best documented are the sacred forests which are named differently in different areas. The sacred forests are known as Khloo Blai in the Jaintia Hills and Asheng Khoshi in the Garo Hills.<sup>11</sup>

The Khasi Hills of Meghalaya are characterised by pockets of rich biodiversity. These have been protected by the Khasi tribe and form the basis of nature worship

7. Dutta, S, Chakrashila Wildlife Sanctuary, Dhubri. In Pathak, N. (ed). 2009. Community Conserved Areas in India – A Directory, Kalpavriksh Pune/Delhi (pg 156-161)
8. Kothari, A. 2009. Protecting the Beautiful and Endangered Creatures. The Telegraph, Calcutta. September 2009
9. Forest Survey of India 2001
10. State of Environment 2005
11. Chatterjee, S. 2011. India Forester. August 2011



practices in the area, manifested in the trees, forests, groves and rivers. The Khasi people believe that those who disturb the forest will face misfortune including death. They also believe that some sacred animals such as the tiger bring prosperity, happiness and well-being. In fact, the people of Thaianing believe that the destruction of their forest by their forefathers has caused 'good luck' (i.e., the tiger) to leave, leading directly to suffering due to a scarcity of medicinal plants, wood, water and fertile soils. Sacred groves are often quite limited in size, but there are at least 40 of them in Meghalaya (out of a total recorded 79) that range from 50-400 ha, including the well-known Mawphlang sacred grove which is spread over an area of 75 ha.<sup>13</sup>

## CCAs in Arunachal Pradesh

About 61% of the total geographical area in Arunachal is forest of which about 60% of is dense forest. 37% is under clear ownership of the state government and the rest is under village forest reserves, anchal forests, protected forests or described as unclassified forests. Much of the unclassified forest is under dispute between the state and the local communities, who consider these as their traditional territories. Many CCAs in Arunachal are on such unclassified forests.<sup>14</sup> The state holds a special status under the Article 371H of the Indian constitution of India, with special provisions for the constitution of elective village councils and anchal samitis, which decide upon the ownership rights over land and resources. The state is a legally pluralist state as both indigenous customary laws and state and central government laws govern different aspects of people's lives.<sup>15</sup>

The CCAs in Arunachal are also diverse ranging from the agro-ecosystems of the Apatani peoples to conservation of the Black-necked crane by Buddhist people of the Sangati Valley, to conservation through a combination of revived traditional systems and evolving newer systems facilitated by groups such as the local unit of WWF India. In Central Arunachal Pradesh are the community forests of the Apatanis, globally known for their paddy and fish cultivation. They conserve the forests which are sources of water that feed their paddy fields making them one of the most

12. B.K. Tiwari, S.K. Barik and R.S. Tripathi, Sacred Forests of Maharashtra: Biological and Cultural Diversity (Shillong, Regional Centre, National Afforestation and Eco-Development Board, North-Eastern Hill University, 1999)
13. Pant, R. Arunachal Pradesh: Community conservation in the land of wilderness. In Pathak, N. (ed). 2009. Community Conserved Areas in India-A Directory, Kalpavriksh Pune/Delhi (pg 131-137).
14. Pant, R. Arunachal Pradesh: Community conservation in the land of wilderness. In Pathak, N. (ed). 2009. Community Conserved Areas in India-A Directory, Kalpavriksh Pune/Delhi (pg 131-137).
15. Pant, R. Arunachal Pradesh: Community conservation in the land of wilderness. In Pathak, N. (ed). 2009. Community Conserved Areas in India-A Directory, Kalpavriksh Pune/Delhi (pg 131-137).

productive agro-ecosystems of the world.<sup>16</sup> Apatani are also known for conservation of their sacred forests following specific rules and regulations.<sup>17</sup> Part of the Apatani land described by the government as unclassified forests were declared the Tale Valley Wildlife Sanctuary by the state government. This the local people have been resisting legally. In the recent times they have also opposed a hydro-electric project which will submerge part of their territory.<sup>18</sup> The Apatani practice conservation using the traditional system of Dapo, under which illegal hunting and over extraction is punished by heavy penalty that is levied in, both, cash and kind. Realising that the medico-ritualistic use of the Orange bellied Himalayan Squirrel was leading to a serious decline in population of the species, the traditional institutions now restrict the hunting. It is allowed only for rituals and not for meat or for decoration - a decision which is believed to have led to revival of the squirrel population.<sup>19</sup>

The Buddhist Morpa community in Sangti Valley in Arunachal has co-existed with the endangered Black-necked cranes for generations, viewing them as a harbinger of better rice yields. They have formed the Black-necked Conservation Committee and set rules and regulations such that the cranes will not be disturbed when visiting the village.<sup>20</sup> Conservation systems and practices of many tribes such as the

Wanchoo on the Arunachal Pradesh – Nagaland are yet to be documented.<sup>21</sup>

Among the communities whose conservation systems and practices are not very well documented are the Adi Gallong. As per the little available information, the Adi Gallong of Mega, Molo and Dipu villages of West Siang district have been protecting about 200ha of forests that they consider sacred. The associated rules and regulations are strict and followed despite there not being any specific system for enforcement. The sentiment is so strong that when the government offered felling permits for timber extraction in these forests the traditional institution of the Adi called Kebangs unanimously rejected the proposal.<sup>22</sup>

The territories belonging to the Monpa tribal community in Dirrang block of West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh is also part of the Western Arunachal Landscape (WAL), a priority area for biodiversity conservation for WWF-India. During the process of establishing a conservation system in the area, the WWF team realized that Thembang village along with many others in this area have had traditional systems for conservation and regulated resource use. However, the traditional systems have not been very effective in the recent times leading to degradation of the forests. An intervention by WWF-India re-initiated the

16. Ramakrishnan 1997.

17. Chatterjee, S., Dey, S., Rana, R.S., Sastry, A.R K. 2000. Conservation and Sustainable Use of Natural Bio-resources: A case study of Apatanis in Arunachal Pradesh. World Wide Fund for Nature-India, New Delhi.

18. Pant, R. Apatani valley, Lower Subansiri. (ed). In Pathak, N. 2009. Community Conserved Areas in India-A Directory, Kalpavriksh Pune/Delhi (139-143).

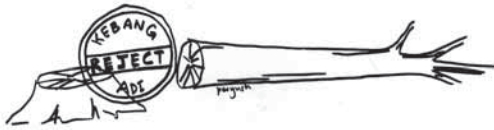
19. Dollo, M., Gopi G.V., Teegalapalli, K., and Mazumdar, K.2010. Conservation of the Orange-bellied Himalayan Squirrel *Dremomys lokriai* using Traditional Knowledge System: A Case Study from Arunachal Pradesh, India. *Fauna Flora International, Oryx* 44(4), (pg 573-576)

20. Pant, R. Sangati valley, West Kameng. In Pathak, N. (ed). 2009. Community Conserved Areas in India-A Directory, Kalpavriksh Pune/Delhi (pg 144-145)

21. Chatterjee, S. 2011. *India Forester*. August 2011

22. Pant, R. Mega, Malo and Dipu villages, West Siang. In Pathak, N. (ed). 2009. Community Conserved Areas in India – A Directory, Kalpavriksh Pune/Delhi (pg 146-149).

effort with new and more effective systems of management that were adapted by the community in consultation with them.<sup>23</sup> As a result, by 2011 the Thembang Bapu CCA and Pangchen Limpo Michat CCA with an area of approximately 312 sq km and 98 sq km respectively have been demarcated by the villagers, who have also established rules and regulations such as no hunting, no unregulated resource extraction. A system of monitoring and patrolling by the village youth has also been put in place. Realising that lack of appropriate livelihood options was one of the major issues, WWF facilitated the process of establishing an eco-tourism initiative in the area. Encouraged by the positive outcomes both for conservation and livelihoods a number of other surrounding villages are now interested in exploring similar processes.<sup>24</sup>



## CCAs in Nagaland

As per 2003 satellite data, 82% of the total geographic area in Nagaland is under forest cover, nearly half of which is moderate to highly dense and rest is open and/or degraded forest. 88% of the forest is under individual, clan or community ownership. Rampant and unregulated hunting has affected the wildlife population in the state. Timber being a major source of income

till 1996, led to serious degradation of forests. Considering that most land is under community control, hope for the struggling wildlife in the state comes from a wave of community conservation initiatives.

The traditional systems of resource management and conservation have been rarely, if at all, documented in this state. In last couple of decades various kinds of CCAs and measures for conservation of biodiversity have been declared voluntarily by the village communities, including, wildlife reserves, forest reserves, wetland reserves, seasonal hunting bans, total hunting bans in some areas, and stretches of rivers being protected. Most of these measures are declared by the village elders and implementation is supported by the youth unions. These measures are leading to protection of threatened species such as the Blyth's tragopan, Beautiful sibia, White-naped yuhinia, Wild dog, leopards, Clouded leopard, and the Hoolock Gibbon among others. Interestingly, Nagaland enjoys a special status in the Constitution of India under article 371A. Each village therefore has a governing body under the Village Council Act. The village council is responsible for the management and conservation of forests within its boundary. The CCAs in Nagaland therefore enjoy a legal status as they are often declared by the village councils.<sup>25</sup> Some of the best documented examples include:<sup>26</sup>

Khonoma Nature Conservation and Tragopan Sanctuary, Khonoma village council, Kohima. Khonoma, a legendary village in Naga history declared the entire 123 sq km of the village area as a no hunting

23. Pijjush Dutta, WWF – India (Arunachal Pradesh) e-mail conversation 2011

24. Dutta, P.K., Wange, P. and Dorjee, D. 2011. Strengthening of Community Based Conservation through Tourism as Incentive in Western Arunachal Landscape, India. *Naturenomics* 4.0, Vol 1, December 2011, Jamshedpur.

25. Pathak, N. (ed). 2009. *Community Conserved Areas in India-A Directory*, Kalpavriksh Pune/Delhi

26. Also see Pathak, N., Kothari, A., and Balasinorwala, T. 2006. *The Naga transformation: Conservation by Communities in Nagaland, India*. Kalpavriksh, Pune.



zone and about 70 sq km of its community forest as a Tragopan Sanctuary. Although proud of its initiative the village is now facing conflicts because of increasing wild animal populations and are looking for help in generating livelihoods for the local youth.<sup>27</sup>

Sendenyu village, also in Kohima district was recently in the news after declaring 10 sq km of their village area as a wildlife sanctuary under the Village Council Act in 2005. In addition, they have declared a seasonal hunting ban in the forests surrounding the sanctuary. Violators have been dealt with strictly for any wildlife offences. Village youth organisation spent many days trying to douse a fire which was started because of a long dry spell in the sanctuary in early 2012.<sup>28</sup>

The fact that the CCA phenomenon was widespread was brought out in early documentation and research by Kalpavriksh, resulting in a state-level workshop organised by the Nagaland Empowerment of People through Economic Development (NEPED) and Kalpavriksh in 2005 to discuss the experiences and steps to strengthen them. In 2005 the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) then launched a programme along with NEPED to support about 30 such initiatives in the state. The programme came to an end in 2009 and an effort is being made to ensure that this support programme is taken forward. In the meanwhile, some of the CCAs in the Saramati area along the Myanmar border are in the process of working out a detailed conservation action plan even as the project has come to an end.

## Need for support

Considering the widespread existence of CCAs in the region and recognizing their role for biodiversity conservation, for continuation and evolution of traditional knowledge and strengthening of governance systems and a potential role in meeting the livelihoods requirements of the youth, a regional workshop was organised in Nawgaon, Assam, in May 2009 jointly by Nawgaon Girls College, Assam; Winrock International-India, New Delhi, and Kalpavriksh. Following are some of the thoughts that emerged after deliberations by about 40 participants representing local indigenous peoples groups, NGOs, government agencies and academic institutions.

1. In order to support CCAs or to be able to facilitate the processes that will lead towards revival or creation of CCAs it is important to understand what defines CCAs in the NE context. A detailed discussion regarding the definition of CCAs led to the emergence of the following clarifications:
  - An initiative where predominantly the local community/peoples take or influence major decisions that impact their forests, other natural resources and livelihood, irrespective of ownership or official classification of such forests.
  - Land ownership is important but not an essential criterion for being defined as a CCA.
  - It is important that an initiative is called a CCA when it is actually leading towards conservation or

27. Pathak Broome, N. and Hazarika, N. 2010 *Khonoma: Community Conservation at a Crossroads*. Protected Landscapes and Wild Biodiversity Values. A book in the Values of Protected Landscapes and Seascapes series from the WCPA Protected Landscapes Task Force. In Press.

28. G. Thong in Pathak, N. (ed). 2009. *Community Conserved Areas in India-A Directory*, Kalpavriksh Pune/Delhi. And E-mail correspondence with Mr G. Thong of Sendenyu village on 3rd March 2012, about village youth struggling for days to put out an accidental fire in the conserved area.



- the current actions are likely to lead towards conservation in the future.
- The community, either has an existing institutional structure with rules or regulations (customary or written) or is in the processes of making them and those rules and regulations centrally deal with issues related to conservation.
  2. To be able to support CCAs in the region it is important to gain an understanding about their spread, knowledge systems and governance and management practices. A detailed and ongoing documentation needs to be carried out for CCAs in the NE and where communities are willing, they should be helped to map their sites to assert their rights and responsibilities as well as see links with the surrounding ecosystem.
  3. Success stories need to be shared through the print and electronic media on a regular basis.
  4. Support is needed by the communities in various forms, depending on the local situation. More important than receiving support, however, is the manner in which this support is received, because sometimes support processes can cause local conflicts or create dependence. It is critical to establish an effective and transparent mechanism by which support can reach the communities. This could be through a regional, state-level or national support forum. The members for this forum need to be from all sectors – academics, activists, community members (particularly youth) and government officials.
  5. Academic institutions in the region could work as centres of information useful for CCAs and work as constant support and advisory body for them. These agencies, if at the sub state level, could help communities develop inter-community, community-government, and community-rest of the world linkages. There is a possibility of state biodiversity boards becoming such a forum, provided they work in a transparent, participatory manner.
  6. External financial support is often crucial and sometimes essential for CCAs. The community, however, needs to be very clear about what they need the money for, how it would be spent and how best can transparency be maintained in its accounting. Communities also need to explore local sources of funding rather than depending on large, external funds.
  7. Support is often required for generating local livelihoods and this is essential in many CCAs if the motivation of the youth, in particular, is to continue. Technical support is sometimes more important than financial support, for example, for registration of local bodies, mapping exercises and management planning.
  8. Any support or legal interventions must be carefully designed, should respect community dynamics and be initiated with the full participation and consent of the community.
  9. To support CCAs it is also important to engage with the political processes as communities are also linked to politics.
  10. Women have a much larger role within CCAs, something that is often not highlighted but needs greater attention. Local institutions often do not encourage role of women in decision-making and this issue urgently needs to be urgently addressed.
  11. Checks and balances are often needed even within CCAs if conservation is a long term goal.
  12. An international database would be helpful in strengthening the CCAs through recognition and support. It must, however, ensure that issues of bio-piracy are handled effectively; only non sensitive information is provided in the database; prior informed consent of

the communities is sought; adequate care is taken such that the traditional ecological knowledge is not misused; clarity is maintained in defining and delineating CCAs; arrangements are made to provide the feedback to the communities on their respective CCAs. Further, authors publishing information about CCAs should duly acknowledge the communities and share benefits, if any. If the community reveals highly sensitive information due to excitement of the moment, the responsibility of safeguarding the interest of the community rests with the agency/individual collecting information.

13. In order to arrest degradation and depletion of species many PAs corridors could be considered for creation of CCAs. Some of the possibilities include corridors between the PAs of Dibru Saikhowa and Laikhowa, and between the Kaziranga and Orang National Parks.
14. NGOs working with CCAs in the region need to coordinate better amongst each other to facilitate creation of regional support processes to deal with issues facing CCAs.
15. No development projects of any kind should be initiated in these areas without free, prior and informed consent of the concerned communities/ peoples.

Among the various reasons for the presence of a large number of CCAs in the region is reasonably higher degree of tenure security as compared to other regions in the country. Emphasis must be paid to ensure that this security is not threatened and where threatened, measures such as implementation of Scheduled Tribes and other Forest Dwellers Forest Rights Act (FRA) – 2006 are taken. Efforts are taken to ensure that existing territories of the communities are not alienated from them in the name

of development projects or creation of protected areas.

Two recent developments would have a direct impact on the ecosystems and the communities of the NE:

1. The implementation of the Forest Rights Act 2006: It is important to understand how this Act would support or not support CCAs in different states and whether or not it can bring in a greater security of tenure for the conserving communities. (See for details the report of the Joint Committee constituted for review of the implementation of the Act (<http://fracommittee.icfre.org>). Also to be reviewed is whether other legislation, such as the WLPA, the Biological Diversity Act, and the FRA, or state-specific laws, could provide legal backing to CCAs in the region.
2. Rapid increase in development projects and activities impacting ecologically and culturally sensitive areas in the region (e.g mega hydro-electric projects). It is important to understand what have been and would be the impacts of such processes on the CCAs in the region, and what support could CCAs receive if they wished to thwart threats faced by their lands and territories from external development projects.

## Conclusion

So what do these initiatives all across the various states in the NE indicate? Because of diverse cultures and the fact that wildlife in the NE has suffered because of a number of reasons, there is a huge potential for conservation particularly by people themselves. In fact, supporting community conservation may be the better option for the region than even declaring protected areas under the WLPA. Most states have received some kind of constitutional

protection which combined with a number of other factors have ensured that local (traditional and new) governance systems continue to play an important role in the social fabric of the region. In many areas the traditional knowledge and systems are deeply entrenched in a conservation ethos. In some cases traditional systems are not effective any more while in others they have been socially unjust and institutionally weak. However, work of organisations such as WWF Samrakshan, National Conservation Foundation in addition to those are based in the region, indicate that these weaknesses can be overcome by working with the communities in a sustained manner and for a long period of time. Organisations such as IFAD have attempted to provide timely support to these CCAs which has ensured that they continue to exist. Despite their spread and increased recognition among the non government sector, it has not yet become an accepted paradigm for conservation in the thinking and policies of the central and state governments. Officially, there is no recognition of the importance of these initiatives for conservation in the region.

An attempt was made in Nagaland to support some of the CCAs by the MoEF, but a condition was laid that these be declared community reserves under the WLPA. A similar situation in Thembang made the community take a decision against the declaring of a community reserve.

The need of the hour is to carry out a detailed documentation of CCAs in the region, map such sites if the communities thus wish, carry out a need assessment and provide them timely and need based help as is being done in some sites in Meghalaya and by some NGOs. Help also needs to be provided to overcome the weaknesses of traditional institutions, and help them generate local financial and other resources as well as livelihood options for the local youth. This could perhaps be best achieved, as suggested above by the creating a regional, multi-representative forum for support and recognition of CCAs. Financial and other support provided needs also to be provided with accountability at all levels and transparency but without any conditions, except that of achieving justice and conservation.

# SECTION 3

Annexures

## ANNEXURE 1

### Statistical overview of protected areas in the north-east<sup>1</sup>

State-wise details of the protected area network in the north-east

	State/UT	No. of national parks	No. of wildlife sanctuaries	No. of conservation reserves	No. of community reserves
1	Arunachal Pradesh	2	11	0	0
2	Assam	5	18	0	0
3	Manipur	2	5	0	0
4	Meghalaya	2	3	0	0
5	Mizoram	2	7	0	0
6	Nagaland	1	3	0	3
7	Sikkim	1	7	0	0
8	Tripura	2	5	0	0
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>

Tiger Reserves in the north-east

	Year of notification	Name of TR	State	Total area of core/critical tiger habitat (sq km)
1	1973-74	Manas	Assam	840.04
2	1982-83	Namdapha	Arunachal Pradesh	1807.02
3	1994-95	Dampa	Mizoram	500.00
4	1999-2000	Pakke	Arunachal Pradesh	683.45
5	1999-2000	Nameri	Assam	200.00
6	2008-09	Kaziranga	Assam	625.58

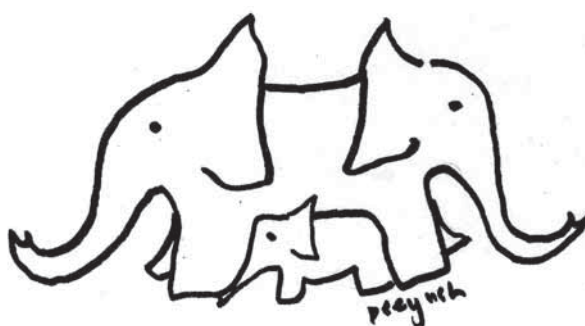
<sup>1</sup> Source: Protected Area Network in India, <http://moef.nic.in>, 15/09/11

## Elephant Reserves in the north-east

No	Elephant Reserve	Date of notification	State	Total area (sq km)	PA in ER (sq km)
1	Kameng ER	19/06/2002	Arunachal Pradesh	1892	748
2	Sonitpur ER	06/03/2003	Assam	1420	420
3	Dihing-Patkai ER	17/04/2003	Assam	937	345
4	South Arunachal ER	29/02/2008	Arunachal Pradesh	1957.50	378.13
5	Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong ER	17/04/2003	Assam	3270	1073
6	Dhansiri-Lungding ER	19/04/2003	Assam	2740	
7	Intaki ER	28/02/2005	Nagaland	202	202
8	Chirang-Ripu ER	07/03/2003	Assam	2600	526+
9	Eastern Dooars ER	28/02/2002	West Bengal	978	484
10	Garo Hills ER	31/10/2001	Meghalaya	3500	402
11	Khasi Hills ER	Approved but not yet notified	Meghalaya	1331	

## Funds Released under the CSS – “Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats” during XI Five Year Plan (Rs in lakh)

No.	Name of the State/UTs	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
1	Arunachal Pradesh	125.05	193.31	193.14	213.197
2	Assam	81.775	161.095	114.79	186.63
3	Manipur	105.894	100.095	118.31	88.316
4	Meghalaya	64.88	58.007	59.75	58.03
5	Mizoram	169.46	289.09	186.85	707.763
6	Nagaland	19.11	28.415	34.115	33.595
7	Sikkim	159.22	187.73	240.93	183.78
8	Tripura	36.00	0.00	13.00	2.84 .00





Details of funds released under the centrally sponsored scheme 'Project Tiger' during the XI Five Year Plan (Rs in lakh)

States	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Arunachal Pradesh	110.2542	246.1710	64.7100	226.7020
Assam	95.6140	1092.3790	194.2900	1509.4720
Mizoram	82.9000	241.4500	2171.000	187.6900

State wise funds released under Project Elephant during the XI Five Year Plan (Rs in lakh)

STATES	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Arunachal Pradesh	54.50	65.00		10.00
Assam	144.00	175.19	160.26	139.55
Meghalaya	68.39	50.00	80.483	103.838
Mizoram	1.33	0	0	0
Nagaland	26.60	17.45	50.00	41.30



## ANNEXURE 2

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### Statistical overview of PAs in India<sup>2</sup>

India is one of the 17 mega diverse countries of the world. With only 2.4% of the world's land area, 16.7% of the world's human population and 18% livestock, it contributes about 8% of the known global biodiversity, however, putting enormous demands on our natural resources. India is home to world's largest wild tiger population and has got unique assemblage of globally important endangered species like Asiatic lion, Asian elephant, One-horned rhinoceros, Gangetic river dolphin, Snow leopard, Kashmir stag, dugong, gharial, Great Indian bustard, Lion Tailed macaque etc.

#### *Protected Area Network in India:*

A National Board for Wildlife (NBWL), chaired by the Prime Minister of India provides the policy framework for wildlife conservation in the country. The National Wildlife Action Plan (2002-2016) was adopted in 2002, emphasizing the people's participation and their support for wildlife conservation. India's conservation planning is based on the philosophy of identifying and protecting representative wild habitats across all the ecosystems. The Indian constitution entails the subject of forests and wildlife in the concurrent list. The federal ministry acts as a guiding torch dealing with the policies and planning on wildlife conservation, while the provincial FDs are vested with the responsibility of implementation of national policies and plans.

A network of 664 protected areas (PAs) has been established, extending over

1,58,508 sq. kms. (4.83% of total geographic area), comprising 99 national parks, 516 wildlife sanctuaries, 42 conservation reserves and 7 community reserves. The State/Union Territory wise details of PAs in the country with year of notification and area is given below. 39 tiger reserves (TRs) and 28 elephant reserves (ERs) have been designated for species specific management of tiger and elephant habitats. UNESCO has designated 5 PAs as world heritage sites. As the ecosystems and species do not recognise political borders, the concept of trans-boundary PAs has been initiated for coordinated conservation of ecological units and corridors with bilateral and/or multilateral cooperation of the neighbouring nations. There are 4 categories of the PAs Areas viz, national parks, sanctuaries, conservation reserves and community reserves.

A sanctuary is an area comprised within any reserve forest or the territorial waters, which is of adequate ecological, faunal, floral, geomorphological, natural or zoological significance. The sanctuary is declared for the purpose of protecting, propagating or developing wildlife or its environment. Certain rights of people living inside the sanctuary could be permitted. Further, during the settlement of claims, before finally notifying the sanctuary, the Collector may, in consultation with the Chief Wildlife Warden, allow the continuation of any right of any person in or over any land within the limits of the sanctuary.

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2. Source: Protected Area Network in India, Source: <http://moef.nic.in>, 15/09/11

A National Park is an area within a sanctuary or outside having adequate ecological, faunal, floral, geomorphological, natural or zoological significance. The national park is also declared for the purpose of protecting, propagating or developing wildlife or its environment, like that of a sanctuary. The difference between a sanctuary and a national park mainly lies in the vesting of rights of people living inside. Unlike a sanctuary, where certain rights can be allowed, in a national park, no rights are allowed. No grazing of any livestock shall also be permitted inside a national park while in a sanctuary, the Chief Wildlife Warden may regulate, control or prohibit it. In addition, while any removal or exploitation of wildlife of forest produce from a Sanctuary requires the recommendation of the State Board for Wildlife, removal etc., from a National Park requires recommendation of the National Board for Wildlife (However, as per orders of Hon'ble Supreme Court dated 9th May 2002 in Writ Petition (Civil) No. 337 of 1995, such removal/ exploitation from a sanctuary also requires recommendation of the Standing Committee of National Board for Wildlife).

Conservation Reserves can be declared by the state governments in any area owned by the government, particularly the areas adjacent to national parks and sanctuaries and those areas which link one protected area with another. Such declaration should be made after having consultations with the local communities. Conservation reserves are declared for the purpose of protecting landscapes, seascapes, flora and fauna and their habitat. The rights of people living inside a conservation reserve are not affected.

Community Reserves can be declared by the state government in any private or community land, not comprised within a national park, sanctuary or a conservation reserve, where an individual or a community has volunteered to conserve wildlife and its

habitat. Community reserves are declared for the purpose of protecting fauna, flora and traditional or cultural conservation values and practices. As in the case of a conservation reserve, the rights of people living inside a community reserve are not affected.

#### *Regulations/laws relating to Protected Areas (PAs):*

The PAs are constituted and governed under the provisions of the Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, which has been amended from time to time, with the changing ground realities concerning wildlife crime control and PAs management. Implementation of this Act is further complemented by other Acts viz. Indian Forest Act, 1927, Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986 and Biological Diversity Act, 2002 and the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006. The Wildlife Crime Control Bureau of the Central Government supplements the efforts of provincial governments in wildlife crime control through enforcement of CITES and control of wildlife crimes having cross-border, inter-state and international ramifications. In order to strengthen and synergise global wildlife conservation efforts, India is a party to major international conventions viz. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora (CITES), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), International Whaling Commission (IWC), UNESCO-World Heritage Committee and Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).

#### *Main issues concerning the management of Protected Areas:*

Wildlife conservation and management in India is currently facing a myriad of complex challenges that are both ecological and social in nature. Issues such as habitat loss/fragmentation, overuse of biomass

resources in the context of biotic pressures, increasing human-wildlife conflicts, livelihood dependence on forests and wildlife resources, poaching and illegal trade in wildlife parts and products, need for maintaining a broad base of public support for wildlife conservation exemplify and characterize the contemporary

wildlife conservation scenario in India. The government and the civil society are taking several measures to address these issues. Improved synergies and better coordination amongst the wide array of stakeholders are needed to meet the challenges of conserving India's diverse wilderness resources.

#### State-wise details of the protected area network of the country

No.	State/UT	National Parks	Wildlife Sanctuaries	Conservation Reserves	Community Reserves
1	Andhra Pradesh	5	22	0	0
2	Arunachal Pradesh	2	11	0	0
3	Assam	5	18	0	0
4	Bihar	1	13	0	0
5	Chhatisgarh	3	11	0	0
6	Goa	1	6	0	0
7	Gujarat	4	22	0	0
8	Haryana	2	8	2	0
9	Himachal Pradesh	2	32	0	0
10	Jammu & Kashmir	4	16	34	0
11	Jharkhand	1	11	0	0
12	Karnataka	5	21	2	1
13	Kerala	6	15	0	1
14	Madhya Pradesh	9	25	0	0
15	Maharashtra	6	35	1	0
16	Manipur	2	5	0	0
17	Meghalaya	2	3	0	0
18	Mizoram	2	7	0	0
19	Nagaland	1	3	0	3
20	Orissa	2	18	0	0
21	Punjab	0	11	0	2
22	Rajasthan	5	23	0	0
23	Sikkim	1	7	0	0
24	Tamil Nadu	5	21	1	0
25	Tripura	2	5	0	0
26	Uttar Pradesh	1	23	0	0
27	Uttaranchal	6	6	2	0
28	West Bengal	5	15	0	0

No.	STATE/UT	National Parks	Wildlife Sanctuaries	Conservation Reserves	Community Reserves
29	Andaman & Nicobar	9	96	0	0
30	Chandigarh	0	2	0	0
31	Dadar & Nagar Haveli	0	1	0	0
32	Laksha-dweep	0	1	0	0
33	Daman & Diu	0	1	0	0
34	Delhi	0	2	0	0
35	Pondicherry	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	99	516	42	7

### Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) for Wildlife Conservation

The Ministry of Environment and Forests provides some financial assistance to the State/ Union Territory Governments for protection and management of the protected areas under the three main centrally sponsored schemes viz.,

- Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats
- Project Tiger
- Project Elephant

Funds released under the above schemes during the XI Five Year Plan are as under:

Funds Released under the CSS – “Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats” during XI Five Year Plan (Rs in Lakh)

NO.	NAME OF THE STATE/UTs	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
1	A& N Islands	82.86	73.48	85.91	87.872
2	Andhra Pradesh	168.055	92.378	102.02	64.341
3	Arunachal Pradesh	125.05	193.31	193.14	213.197
4	Assam	81.775	161.095	114.79	186.63
5	Bihar	4.00	37.558	42.29	19.889
7	Chhattisgarh	379.197	323.235	851.15	281.966
8	Chandigarh	0.00	00	00	12.29
9	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	11.78	15.62	14.88	00
10	Goa	31.59	41.94	71.03	32.879
11	Gujarat	332.084	318.52	426.10	1106.749
12	Haryana	70.03	86.02	17.22	15.114
13	Himachal Pradesh	233.319	241.983	265.92	253.80
14	Jammu & Kashmir	221.54	470.87	375.397	537.336
15	Jharkhand	98.128	99.753	80.267	63.64

NO.	NAME OF THE STATE/UTs	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
16	Karnataka	630.643	625.150	566.71	412.252
17	Kerala	493.574	864.96	432.48	366.786
18	Madhya Pradesh	800.915	613.34	541.98	635.366
19	Maharashtra	331.325	390.22	273.679	343.32
20	Manipur	105.894	100.095	118.31	88.316
21	Meghalaya	64.88	58.007	59.75	58.03
22	Mizoram	169.46	289.09	186.85	707.763
23	Nagaland	19.11	28.415	34.115	33.595
24	Orissa	357.081	576.88	390.95	315.331
25	Punjab	0.00	40.29	36.26	25.12
26	Rajasthan	347.24	414.58	496.746	348.068
27	Sikkim	159.22	187.73	240.93	183.78
28	Tamil Nadu	274.64	727.91	518.67	334.449
29	Tripura	36.00	0.00	13.00	2.84
30	Uttar Pradesh	332.362	307.173	274.45	296.179
31	Uttarakhand	76.671	216.09	145.08	134.90
32	West Bengal	356.215	345.78	381.318	276.385
33	Delhi	0.00	0.00	0.00	00
34	Daman & Diu	4.721	6.12	6.05	00

Details of funds released under the centrally sponsored scheme 'Project Tiger during the XI five year plan (Rs in lakhs)

NO.	STATES	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
1	Andhra Pradesh	73.9175	56.9830	138.2540	155.6450
2	Arunachal Pradesh	110.2542	246.1710	64.7100	226.7020
3	Assam	95.6140	1092.3790	194.2900	1509.4720
4	Bihar	98.3205	49.6730	8.8560	158.3550
5	Chhattisgarh	35.2250	169.8700	1383.5020	1813.7250
6	Jharkhand	45.1600	115.3770	117.1386	130.6160
7	Karnataka	1159.7149	689.8390	657.0620	1660.0500
8	Kerala	153.2449	267.0900	311.4200	323.4600
9	Madhya Pradesh	2975.9411	6998.5420	2582.4762	3962.730
10	Maharashtra	295.7191	411.1250	373.5170	2789.0600
11	Mizoram	82.9000	241.4500	2171.000	187.6900
12	Orissa	43.2800	625.9900	221.7400	815.2900
13	Rajasthan	410.6800	2708.9500	10694.1700	2368.925
14	Tamil Nadu	45.0000	690.8060	258.3540	520.9450



NO.	STATES	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
15	Uttarakhand	202.0050	462.8500	246.2050	339.9450
16	Uttar Pradesh	134.8900	417.5130	431.5170	407.4600
17	West Bengal	308.6741	228.3940	298.7850	502.4800
	<b>Total</b>	<b>6,270.5403</b>	<b>15,473.002</b>	<b>20,152.997</b>	<b>17,872.391</b>

State wise funds released under Project Elephant during the XI Five Year Plan  
(Rs in Lakh)

STATES	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Andhra Pradesh	60.00	45.00	17.85	15.00
Arunachal Pradesh	54.50	65.00	60.00	10.00
Assam	144.00	175.19	160.26	139.55
Chhatisgarh	83.77	60.43	111.22	75.00
Haryana	0	0	0	100.00
Jharkhand	132.17	80.00	80.00	80.00
Karnataka	212.65	249.00	247.16	300.76
Kerala	147.70	356.80	286.70	265.39
Maharashtra	56.86	77.76	49.18	29.00
Meghalaya	68.39	50.00	80.483	103.838
Mizoram	1.33	0	0	0
Nagaland	26.60	17.45	50.00	41.30
Orissa	148.50	180.60	100.00	113.50
Tamil Nadu	124.978	269.163	358.58	226.879
Tripura	12.00	28.96	14.80	0
Uttar Pradesh	55.33	58.24	38.45	80.15
Uttarakhand	126.46	209.45	221.55	206.82
West Bengal	185.725	176.096	207.06	410.406
<b>Total</b>	<b>1640.963</b>	<b>2099.139</b>	<b>990.44</b>	<b>2197.593</b>

## ANNEXURE 3

### Unclassed forests and lost of forest cover in the north-east

Table 1: Unclassed Forests in India

State	Geographical Area in ha	Recorded Forest Area in ha	Unclassed Forest in ha	Population (in million)	Per Capita Land in ha
Arunachal Pradesh	83,74,300	51,54,000	31,46,600	1.10	7.60
Assam	78,43,800	26,83,200	8,96,800	26.66	0.29
Manipur	22,32,700	17,41,800	11,78,000	2.29	0.97
Meghalaya	22,42,900	94,96,00	8,37,200	2.32	0.96
Mizoram	21,08,100	16,71,700	5,24,000	0.89	2.37
Nagaland	16,57,900	92,22,00	8,62,800	1.99	0.83
Tripura	10,48,600	62,94,00	2,11,700	3.20	0.32
<b>Rest of India</b>	<b>30,32,18,000</b>	<b>6,57,11,900</b>	<b>57,42,200</b>	<b>988.00</b>	<b>0.30</b>

Sources: FSI, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2005.

Table 2: Loss Forest cover in North Eastern India

STATE	Change in forest cover during different assessment periods (in ha)			
	1991-1993	1993-1995	1995-1997	1997-1999
Arunachal Pradesh	-9600	-4000	-1900	+24500
Assam	-24300	-44700	-23700	-13600
Manipur	-6400	-6300	-14000	-3400
Meghalaya	-10600	-5500	-5700	-2400
Mizoram	-15600	-12100	+19900	-43700
Nagaland	+2700	-5700	-7000	-5700
Tripura	+300	0	+800	+19900
<b>TOTAL FOR NE REGION</b>	<b>-63500</b>	<b>-78300</b>	<b>-31600</b>	<b>-27800</b>
<b>TOTAL FOR REST OF INDIA</b>	<b>+156000</b>	<b>+27600</b>	<b>-516600</b>	<b>+421200</b>

Sources: FSI, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2005.

Source: Reducing Deforestation and Degradation through Post-colonial Settlement of Land Rights: A Case Study in India, Promode Kant and Wu Shuirong In Reducing Deforestation and Degradation through Post-colonial Settlement, 2008

## ANNEXURE 4

# PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

Vol. XVIII No. 5

October 2012 (No. 99)

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**Protected Area Update**

Vol. XVIII, No. 5, October 2012 (No. 99)

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<http://indiaenvironmentportal.org.in>; [www.conservationindia.org](http://www.conservationindia.org)

**EDITORIAL**

**The real costs of ‘Coalgate’**

How much really is Rs. 1.86 lakh crore? This is the figure presently doing the rounds of the loss the nation has incurred because of the corruption in the allocation of coals blocks in different parts of the country. This huge amount of money is at the centre of a huge churning that is taking place in the political establishment and in the media. There is an outrage at what looks like a loot of unprecedented proportions.

Even as political parties slug it out, skeletons tumble out of corporate cupboards, as the electronic media finds juicy bits to occupy airtime and the many column inches of newspaper space get consumed by Coalgate, there is a more fundamental question that has neither been asked nor answered - what is it really that we are losing? The Rs. 1.86 lakh crore is an evaluation in one dimension, in one metric, actually, in only one world view. It is a computation of the loss in Indian National Rupees (INR) that has been incurred to the national treasury because a whole set of people (almost) successfully ducked the system. It is the alleged illegality, the cheating of the system where the real money for the coal was not paid.

But, what if we assume for a moment that the game would be played by the book, that there would be competitive bidding, that the ‘correct’ price would be paid? The state would earn the Rs. 1.86 lakh crore but would anything else change? To answer that question, even if as a partial counterpoint, one has to look at Greenpeace India’s most recent report ‘How coal mining is thrashing tigerland’ (Page 12). Over 1.1 million hectares of forest, mostly dense, is at risk from coal mining in just 13 coalfields in Central India that the report analyses; there are 40 other coalfields which still remain to be evaluated.

These forests are home to a diverse range of flora and fauna including mega fauna such as the tiger, leopard and elephant; these forests are the carbon sinks which we want to exploit and market in international fora; and these are the lands that are home to thousands of adivasi communities who have lived here for generations. The Rs. 1.86 lakh crore is only the notional value of a single resource that lies buried deep; it does not include the value

of anything and everything else, even if a valuation was indeed possible.

The mining, where it will happen or where it has already happened, cares neither for the estimated economic losses nor the legality. The coal is the same, the processes are the same and the outcomes are same. The forests will be ripped apart, watersheds will be destroyed, rivers and streams poisoned, livelihoods and cultures of the adivasi communities sacrificed at the altar of development. It doesn’t matter that these people bear the lightest footprint on the planet in these times of a climate change crisis and neither will it matter that many of these forests are adjacent to tiger reserves or are part of corridors linking one tiger or elephant habitat to another. Let’s also not forget that conservation policies which aggressively seek to evict traditional communities for purposes of conservation are rendered almost completely impotent in the context of this discourse.

Coalgate could be an eye-opener, but only if we understood the real value of this Rs. 1.86 lakh crore!

**NEWS FROM INDIAN STATES**

**ASSAM**

**Two poachers killed in Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) National Park**

Two alleged poachers were killed in an encounter with forest guards at the Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) National Park late night on July 31. A .303 rifle, 18 rounds of ammunition, three mobile phones, two bags containing food, clothes and other items were recovered from the encounter site. An Imphal-Dimapur bus ticket was also recovered from them, triggering suspicion that one of them could be either from Manipur or from Nagaland. The ticket was purchased on July 29.

Forest officials said that a gang of four poachers had crossed the Purnchoi river and entered the park when they were accosted

by a group of forest guards. They opened fire with their two .303 rifles and it was in retaliatory fire by the forest staff that two of them were killed. This was the fourth attempt by poachers to kill rhinos in Orang this year.

Source: 'Two poachers killed in Orang', *The Telegraph*, 02/08/12.

Contact: **DFO**, Orang NP, Mangaldoi Wildlife Division, P.O. Mangaldoi, Darrang - 784 125, Tel: 0914-22065(O), 22349(R)

### **Elephant killed by speeding train near Amchang WLS**

A young female elephant was recently killed in a collision with an inter-city train in the Kurkuria area under Sonapur forest range of Kamrup district. The train was going from Guwahati to Tinsukia in upper Assam. The railway track where the mishap occurred is close to the Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary. Forest officials said the elephant may have been around seven years old.

The total death toll of elephants due to collision with trains in Assam this year has now reached four. In July an elephant succumbed to injuries after being hit by a train in the Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary in Jorhat district, while two elephants were killed in the Karbi Anglong area in February and June respectively. In May this year, another elephant was injured by a moving train in the Deepor Beel area.

Last year, five elephants were killed in collisions with moving trains in different parts of the state, including three in Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary alone. In 2010 seven elephants were killed by speeding trains in Karbi Anglong and Deepor Beel areas. Assam tops the national list with 36% of elephant casualties due to train-hits since 1987, followed by West Bengal with 26% and Uttarakhand with 14%.

Source: 'Elephant killed by speeding train', *The Times of India*, 03/08/12.

## **GUJARAT**

### **Scanty rainfall in Gir; FD makes alternative arrangement**

A severe shortage of rainfall in the Junagadh district has forced the forest department (FD) to operationalize a contingency plan to provide water

for wildlife in Gir. The district received only 10% of normal rainfall till August and water levels in water bodies have fallen drastically. The seven rivers — Hiran, Saraswati, Datardi, Shingoda, Machhundri, Ghodavadi, and Raval — that pass through the forests here too have been drying up.

The FD has been replenishing more than 500 artificial waterholes in the Gir National Park and its periphery but they are worried that there were no such arrangements in Amreli, Bhavnagar and in the coastal areas. In normal course, forest authorities stop filling the artificial waterholes in and around Gir by June 15 every year — unless it is required in summer. But nearly after a decade, they have been forced to fill them up in August as well.



Source: Himanshu Kaushik, '500 artificial ponds to be filled up for thirsty lions in Gir National Park', *The Times of India*, 18/08/12.

Contact: **CF (Wildlife)** Junagadh, Sardar Bag, Junagadh, Gujarat. Tel: 0285 - 631678/630051. Fax: 631211. Email: [cfwildlife\\_ad1@sancharnet.in](mailto:cfwildlife_ad1@sancharnet.in)

## **KARNATAKA**

### **State opposes TR status for Kudremukh**

The Karnataka state government has opposed the declaration of the Kudremukh Tiger Reserve, the final approval for which was recently accorded by the Union Ministry for Environment and Forests. The state has also opposed the heritage tag accorded to 10 sites in the Western Ghats by UNESCO recently.

While initially the state had favoured the tiger reserve declaration, it changed its stand following pressure from legislators representing Udupi, Dakshina Kannada and Chikmagalur districts (*PA Updates* Vol. XVIII, No. 2 and Vol. XVII, No. 4).



Legislators from these areas are contending that nearly 1,500 tribal families in the Kudremukh NP and 4,000 families living on its borders would be affected if the park becomes a TR.

While answering a question in the legislative assembly, state Forest Minister, Mr. C.P. Yogeshwar announced that a Government Order spelling out the state's stand on the TR status would soon be issued.

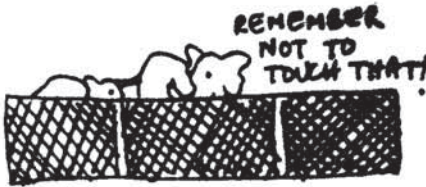
Source: Muralidhara Khajane, State opposes tiger reserve tag for Kudremukh National Park, *The Hindu*, 17/08/12.

Contact: **DCF**, Kudremukh Wildlife Division, Karkala, Dakshina Kannada, Karnataka. Tel: 08258-221183(O), 221004(R). Fax: 08258-221183

**Chief Wildlife Warden** - Karnataka, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 18<sup>th</sup> Cross, Malleshwaram, Bangalore – 560003, Karnataka. Tel: 080-3341993.

## KERALA

### Solar powered fences for Wayanad forests



A Rs. six crore project to curb the increasing human-animal conflict in the Wayanad district is to be implemented soon. As a part of the project, 300 km of solar power fence would be installed around human settlements adjacent to forests, in the border areas of the North and South Wayanad forest divisions, as well as in the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary. Fencing will also be installed in some areas of Palakkad, Malappuram, Kasaragod, and Kannur districts.

The National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD) has sanctioned Rs. six crore for the project which will be executed by the Kerala Forest Development Corporation (KFDC). It has proposed to establish a base station at its tea estate at Kamba Mala in Manathavady for coordinating the maintenance of the fencing network. Technicians will be located every 5-kms for ensuring timely maintenance. Training would

also be given to forest watchers for installing and maintaining the fences.

The memory of the electric shock that will not harm the animal is expected to serve as a psychological deterrent and prevent the animals getting into areas and situations with conflict possibilities. Some experts have however cautioned that movement paths of animals could be interfered with because of these fences, resulting in increased aggressive behavior and even more conflict.

Source: 'Rs.6-crore project to curb man-animal conflict', *The Hindu*, 10/08/12.

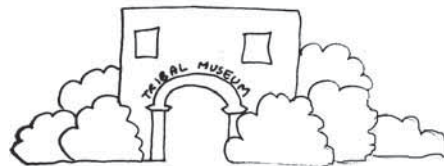
K.S. Sudhi. '300-km-long solar fence in Wayanad', *The Hindu*, 13/08/12.

Contact: **Wildlife Warden**, Wayanad Wildlife Division, P.O. Sulthan Bathery, Wayanad-673 592, Kerala. Tel: 0493-2620454

## MADHYA PRADESH

### Tribal museum to be set up near Kanha TR

The Corbett Foundation is setting up a Tribal Museum in village Baherakhar on the outskirts of the Kanha Tiger Reserve. To be built completely by members of the Baiga tribes and in the style of a 'Baiga House', the museum will showcase the culture, heritage and art of the Baiga and the Gond tribes through information panels, artifacts, implements and instruments used by these tribes. There will be a dedicated workshop for members of the tribes to make articles out of natural resources and to sell them through a self help group as well.



Source: 'Tribal museum in Kanha'. Newsletter of the Corbett Foundation, July 2012.

Contact: Corbett Foundation, Email: [info@corbettfoundation.org](mailto:info@corbettfoundation.org) Web: [www.corbettfoundation.org](http://www.corbettfoundation.org)

## MAHARASHTRA

### Wildlife conservation plan for Chandrapur district

The Maharashtra Forest Department (FD) is chalking out a plan for wildlife conservation in the Chandrapur district. This is being done in response to the demands made by wildlife activist Bandu Dhotre during his recent fast in Nagpur to save tigers.

Principal Secretary (Forest) Praveen Singh Pardeshi has directed officials to take measures in this direction. CCF Virendra Tiwari has been asked to review the action taken on a monthly basis. In July, Bandu Dhotre, under the banner of his organization Eco-Pro, had launched an indefinite fast in Nagpur to press 16 demands for the protection and conservation of tigers in Chandrapur. The fast was called off nine days later after the state government conceded to nearly all his demands.

Forest officers have been directed to prepare a 'wildlife conservation plan' for the area under the Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra (FDCM) and non-buffer areas in the district for tiger protection on the lines of the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR). This plan will incorporate a number of measures, including alleviating burden on forest guards, building protection huts and raising check posts.

A proposal has already been forwarded for the re-formation of beats in TATR and re-acquiring the fire fighting rights in the core area from the FDCM. TATR presently has 32 forest beats, which will be restructured into 85 beats. Fire fighting responsibility of TATR is now shouldered by the FDCM. The department is contemplating handing over the fire fighting responsibility to TATR. This, however, will need recruitment of additional staff.

Steps have also been initiated for mapping of tiger corridors and of declaring these corridors as eco-sensitive zones. The Forest Minister, Mr Patangrao Kadam has reportedly also agreed to declare Chandrapur a tiger district. This will be done once the tiger conservation plan for FDCM and non-buffer area is prepared. The announcement is likely to be made in the winter session of the assembly in Nagpur. Proposals over demands for installing electronic eye surveillance in TATR and

raising heights of parapet walls of wells in the fringe areas have also been set into motion.

Source: Mazhar Ali. 'Wildlife conservation plan being chalked out for Chanda district', *The Times of India*, 06/08/12.

Contact: **Field Director**, Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Project, Mul Road, In front of Sanchiti Chamber, Chandrapur – 442401, Maharashtra. Tel: 07172-51414(O), 56382(R)

### Panel for management plan for Pench TR buffer zone

A six-member committee has been constituted to study forestry operations and other management issues in the buffer area of Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR). The committee that was constituted on August 23 by the principal chief conservator of forests (wildlife), SWH Naqvi, consists of the additional PCCF (wildlife), AK Saxena as chairman and chief conservator of forests (CCF) and field director of Pench, MS Reddy as member-secretary.

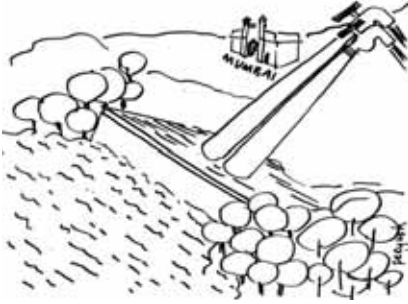
The other members of the committee include CCF Nagpur, SH Patil; General Manager of the FDCM, Jarnail Singh; representative of the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), Prafulla Bhamburkar; and honorary wildlife warden, Kundan Hate. The committee has been asked to submit its report within one month.

The terms of reference (ToR) of the panel include studying present forestry practices as per the prescriptions of the approved working plan and management plan being followed in the area falling in the buffer zone of Pench and to recommend a set of activities that are in consonance with NTCA guidelines. The panel will suggest the ideal administrative set up for achieving the objectives and also make other recommendations in the interest of the overall management of the buffer zone.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Panel set up for Pench buffer management', *The Times of India*, 29/08/12.

Contact: **DCF, Pench National Park**, Near Govt. Press, Civil Line, Nagpur - 440 001, Maharashtra. Tel: 0712-2524727(O), 2267282(R) Fax 0712-2539226

### State wildlife board clears Gargai Dam; to submerge part of Tansa WLS



The Maharashtra State Wildlife Board has cleared the Gargai Dam that will submerge a part of the Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary. The approval was granted on June 5 earlier this year and the proposal will now be sent to the National Board for Wildlife for the final clearance.

The 440 million litres per day (MLD) dam is to come up on the Gargai river in the Wada taluka of Thane district and is being constructed, mainly, to supply water to the city of Mumbai. An environment impact assessment (EIA) report is being prepared by the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI). It is expected that the EIA report will be cleared by the Central Ministry of Environment and Forests by December next year. The actual work on the dam will then begin in 2014 and is slated to be completed in four years.

Source: Eknath Makne. 'Gargai dam gets nod; now, over to Centre', *DNA*, 14/08/12.

Contact: **Dy. Conservator of Forests**, SGNP, Borivili (East), Mumbai – 400066, Maharashtra. Tel: 022-28860362, 28860389(O), 8862780(R) Email: sgnpmumbai@gmail.com  
**Chief Wildlife Warden**, Maharashtra State, Dr. Ambedkar Bhawan, 4 & 5th Floor, M.E.C.L. Building Seminary Hills & Campus, Nagpur – 440001, Maharashtra. Tel: 0712-2526758 / 2530126. Fax – 2510671. Email: cfwl@nagpur.dot.net.in -

## NAGALAND

### Workshop on Community Conserved Areas in Nagaland

A two-day workshop 'Community Conserved Areas (CCAs) and Framework for Management Plans' was held in Kohima in the month of July. The workshop was organized jointly by Nagaland Empowerment of People through Economic Development (NEPED) and Foundation for Ecological Security (FES).

The two main objectives of the workshop were:

- Evolving broad principles in the context of developing the Management Plan.
- Developing a framework for the Management Plan that can be replicated with appropriate changes in similar socio-ecosystems.

80 odd participants representing government departments, educational institutions, churches, Community Conserved Areas and civil society organisations working in the arena of community led conservation participated in the workshop.

Source: 'Community conserved areas and framework for management plans', [www.nagalandpost.com](http://www.nagalandpost.com), 14/07/12. 'Greater ecological service in the age of climate change'. [www.morungexpress.com](http://www.morungexpress.com), 17/07/12

Contact: **FES North East**. [northeast.fes@ecologicalsecurity.org](mailto:northeast.fes@ecologicalsecurity.org)  
**NEPED, Kohima**.  
Email - [nepedkhm@yahoo.co.in](mailto:nepedkhm@yahoo.co.in)

## ORISSA

### Alternative livelihoods planned for Simlipal forest dwellers

The Orissa government has decided to scale up livelihood projects to provide alternative livelihoods for the people living in the forests of the Simlipal Biosphere Reserve (BR). There are an estimated 1265 villages with a total population of about five lakh people spread over the reserve area.

The decision was taken during a recent meeting of the Simlipal Biosphere

Reserve Management Council that was chaired by the state Chief Secretary, Mr. Bijay Kumar Patnaik. The officials of the Forests and Environment and that of Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes Departments have been asked to prepare an integrated action plan for providing alternative skills and vocations to the people living within the Simlipal forests.

The council also reviewed the action plan for 2011-12 and finalised the action plan for management of the bio-sphere for the year 2012-13. Rs. 65 lakh had been allocated for the year 2011-12, while the annual action plan has been estimated at Rs. 2.41 crore for the year 2012-13.

Source: 'Comprehensive survey for dwellers inside Simlipal bio-sphere mooted', *Pragativadi*, 01/08/12.

Contact: **Director**, Simlipal Tiger Reserve, P.O. Baripada, Dist. Mayurbhanj – 757002, Orissa. Tel: 06792-252593(O), 252773(R) Fax: 256705

**CWLW– Orissa**, Plot No. 8, Shahid Nagar, Bhubaneswar – 751007, Orissa. Tel: 0674-2512502 / 2513134 / 2515840. Fax: 512502

## RAJASTHAN

### Mordoongri village moves out of Ranthambhore

The Mordoongri village has moved out from the core of the Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve (TR). 30 families — with an approximate population of 150 and many heads of livestock - are said to have voluntarily relocated to Amla, some 35 km away in Tonk district. They have been provided with land as compensation and the authorities have provided them with below poverty line cards, gas connections, water supply and roads.

The Sawai Madhopur Collector is reported to have played a pivotal role in the process. Along with the authorities, the local tourism sector also helped the outgoing families settle in the new environs. The full cooperation of non-government organisations and non-interference of local politicians is cited as another reason for the smooth transition in Mordoongri.

In the past five years, efforts to shift villages have been renewed (*PA Update* Vol. XV, No. 6) here - Indala was the first settlement to go, followed by Padra. According to the Divisional Forest Officer, now Katauli and Bhid villages are

now waiting to move out. A tigress, T-9 had moved into Padra soon after the villagers left, and it is expected something similar will be seen in Mordoongri as well. At least four tigers — T-13, T-22, T-23, and T-43 are known to frequent the area where the village used to be located.

Source: Sunny Sebastian, 'Men making way for tigers in Ranthambhore', *The Hindu*, 27/07/12.

Contact: **Director**, Ranthambhore TR, Sawai Madhopur – 322001, Rajasthan. Tel: 07462-220223 / 222004 / 221139 / 221142

### More tigers to be re-located to Sariska TR



A decision was taken in the early part of August to re-locate more tigers to the Sariska Tiger Reserve. A tigress is to be moved from the Ranthambhore TR and one or two more tigers might also be brought in from the forests of neighbouring Madhya Pradesh.

The decision was taken at a meeting presided over by the Minister for Environment & Forests Ms. Bina Kak and attended by State Chief Secretary, Additional Chief Secretary, Finance Secretary and Head of the Forest Force in Rajasthan among others.

The proposal has been sent to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) for its approval.

Source: Sunny Sebastian, 'More tigers for Sariska this monsoon', *The Hindu*, 09/08/12.

Contact: **Director**, Sariska Tiger Reserve, Sariska, Alwar – 301022, Rajasthan. Tel: 0144-41333 (O)

## TAMIL NADU

### Buffer zones notified for Anaimalai, Mudumalai and Kalakkad Mundanthurai TRs

The Tamil Nadu state government recently notified buffer zones for the three tiger reserves in the state – the Anaimalai, Mudumalai and Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserves. The move came in response to the recent Supreme Court reprimand that also imposed a fine on some states, including TN, for failing to notify the buffer zones. The court had given the states time until August 22 to submit details of the notification or face contempt proceedings.

Source: 'Tamil Nadu notifies buffer zones in tiger reserves', The Times of India, 15/08/12.

Contact: **Wildlife Warden**, Mudumalai WLS, Mt. Stewart Hill, Udhagamandalam - 643001 Tamil Nadu. Tel: 0423-244098  
**Field Director KMTR**, NGO 'A' Colony, Palayam Kottai, Tirunelveli - 627 007. Tel: 0462-273075, 2552663(O), 2580115(R). Fax: 0462-2580115

### Merchants federation urges exclusion of Valparai from Anaimalai TR

The Valparai Merchants Federation and various other associations have urged that Valparai be excluded from the core and buffer areas of Anaimalai Tiger Reserve (TR). It has been noted that traditionally, Valparai had been a land of plantations providing livelihood to thousands of workers from backward and suppressed communities. It houses a number of reservoirs and hydel power stations. In addition, there are a number of places of worship frequented by devotees for hundreds of years.

It has been pointed out that things have actually worsened after the Forest Department (FD) declared Valparai as a constituent area of Anaimalai TR. Using the TR status, the FD started issuing tickets and collecting charges. The Monkey Falls, The Chinnakallar falls, upper Nirar, and the 100-year-old hanging bridge have all been closed for the local population. The Nallamudi Pooncholai estate and number parai (number rock), which are on a private estate area at a visible distance from the forest boundary, have also been closed for the local population.

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The federation has expressed the fear that today's buffer was likely to become a core zone tomorrow and considering this possibility, the Valparai pocket should be excluded from the core and the buffer zones, so that the local population did not face any denial of rights.

Source: 'Exclusion of Valparai from core, buffer areas of tiger reserve sought', *The Hindu*, 09/08/12.

Contact: **Wildlife Warden, Indira Gandhi WLS** 178, Fisheries Dept. Road, Govt. Timber Depot, Pollachi 642 001, Tamil Nadu. Tel: 04259 - 225356

### In-principle nod for Sathyamangalam TR; proposal for TR status for Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel and Meghamalai WLS

The Union Environment and Forest minister, Ms Jayanthi Natarajan, recently announced an in-principle approval for notifying the Sathyamangalam forests as a tiger reserve. The announcement which was made in the Rajya Sabha also invited Tamil Nadu to send a proposal for converting the Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Sanctuary (SGSS) into a tiger reserve.

Where the Sathyamangalam TR is concerned, forest officials have said that the nearly 1400 sq km reserve will have a core area of 790 sq km. Locals in the region have strongly opposed the tiger reserve for fear of the impacts this will have on their livelihood activities (*PA Updates* Vol. XVIII, No. 4, 3, 2 & 1 and Vol. XVII, No. 6)

The proposal for the new tiger reserve includes the Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Sanctuary (SGSS) in Virudhunagar and the Meghamalai sanctuary in Theni. SGSS shares a border with the Periyar TR in Kerala and it is hoped that the creation of this tiger reserve will help consolidate the corridor for tigers between TN and Kerala.

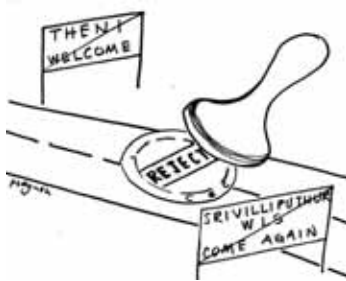
Source: 'Two more tiger reserves for Tamil Nadu?' *The Times of India*, 15/08/12.



October 201



## CEC rejects road connecting Theni forests and Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Sanctuary



The Supreme Court appointed Central Empowered Committee (CEC) recently rejected a proposal cleared by the Tamil Nadu government for a road connecting Karumbarai in Theni forest division with the Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Sanctuary near Watrap in Virudhunagar district.

The CEC, after inspecting the areas in Theni and the sanctuary on June 13, held public hearings on four occasions. The last one was on August 7, at which it announced the rejection of the proposal. It stated that the laying of a road in the ecologically sensitive forest area would only help ganja cultivators, encourage poaching and tree-felling, besides encroachment in the forests.

It pointed out that more than 600 trees would have to be cut for the proposed road and this would lead to soil erosion and landslips, which would ultimately de-stabilise the entire region. It would also affect the seasonal migration of elephants from the neighbouring Periyar Tiger Reserve and Theni forest division towards the sanctuary areas.

The CEC team also expressed its concern over increased encroachment of forests in the Karumbarai area in Theni forest division. It was noted that a larger number of people have, over the last three decades, cleared the forests here and raised silk cotton plants and cashew-nut plantations.

Source: P. Oppili, 'Supreme Court panel rejects State proposal for road to sanctuary', *The Hindu*, 17/08/12.

Contact: **Wildlife Warden**, Srivilliputhur WLS, No.8 Kallikulam Street, Srivilliputhur – 626129. Tel: 04563-260565

## Delay in relocation from Mudumalai TR

A long delay in the relocation process of forest dwellers and tribal people living in 30 villages, including Mudhuguli village, located inside Mudumalai Tiger Reserve (TR) may cost the state nearly double the amount in compensation as the number of families in the villages has increased significantly in the past five years.

Villagers, most of them belonging to the Mountadan Chetty community, have been waiting to be relocated for over five years. In 2005, the community leaders had approached the Madras High Court seeking a directive for their resettlement. The court ruled in their favour in 2007. A survey was then held in 2007 and around 449 families (1,940 people) from 20 villages in Mudumalai panchayat and 10 villages in Nilakottai - both inside the Mudumalai wildlife sanctuary - were found to be eligible for voluntary resettlement.

However, as per the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) guidelines, an individual of age 18 and above is considered a separate family. So, the FD fixed a cut-off date - December 31, 2010 - for identifying families that were to be relocated. After the cut-off date was fixed, the FD received claims from 763 families (almost one and half times the number decided in 2007) from the said 30 villages. Almost all villagers who are to be relocated own titled land. The Revenue Department is scrutinizing the authenticity of the 763 families who have submitted the claims.

According to the officials, 398.47 hectares of land near Ayyankolli has been identified for relocation, of which 289.49 hectares come under the Gudalur forest division.

Source: Shantha Thiagarajan, 'Delay on relocation of villages in Mudumalai Tiger Reserve to cost govt dear' *The Times of India*, 14/08/12.

Contact: **Wildlife Warden**, Mudumalai WLS, Mt. Stewart Hill, Udthagamandalam - 643001 Tamil Nadu. Tel: 0423-244098



## UTTAR PRADESH

### Thermal power plant in Sonbhadra rejected because of proximity to Kaimur WLS



The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has rejected a proposal by Jaiprakash Associates Ltd. (JAL) for setting up a captive thermal power plant at Churk in Robertsganj tehsil of Sonbhadra because of its proximity to the Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS). The Uttar Pradesh Principal Secretary (Forests) has been informed about the decision, taken by the standing committee of the National Board of Wild Life (NBWL).

Work, however, is reportedly going on and two 125-meter tall stacks are the most conspicuous structures. The proposed integrated project includes 4X60 MW captive thermal power plants with a one million tonne per annum cement grinding unit and a one million tonne per annum coal washery. These are reportedly situated within a distance of 1.5 km from the boundary of Kaimur WLS. JAL had applied for environment clearance in 2011. Since the site was close to the Kaimur WLS, the MoEF had referred the matter to the NBWL.

An eight member NBWL team, consisting of experts from the Wildlife Institute of India and senior forest officials had conducted a spot inspection between July 17 and 19, 2011. During the site visit, the team found that certain claims made by the company were incorrect. JAL had claimed there was no forest within a 10 km radius of the plant. However, the team found that the boundary of Raunp forest block is separated from the boundary of the project by a road with a distance of hardly seven meters separating them.

JAL had also claimed that there are no sanctuaries or national parks within a 25 km radius of the plant site. But the team found that the nearest boundary of Kaimur WLS was only 1.5 km from the boundary of the project site. JAL had also submitted an incomplete faunal checklist and many important species were missing.

The team reported that the proposed plant will have noisy equipment such as crushers, belt conveyors, fans, pumps, a milling plant, compressors, boilers, and turbines, which will

affect the local habitat and the flora and fauna of Kaimur. Further, the proposed unit will also emit gases along with particulate matter from two stacks, which will affect flora and fauna. The plant also proposes to draw water from a nearby river, which it is feared will have serious ecological impacts and negatively affect the availability of drinking water.

At the meeting of the standing committee of NBWL, which was held on June 13, 2012, it was pointed out there had been apparent violations of the Forest Conservation Act, the Environment (Protection) Act, and the Wild Life Protection Act as work on the plant had been started without requisite permission from the standing committee and without obtaining environmental clearance.

Source: 'Jaypee's power plant project in Sonbhadra hits green hurdle', *Indian Express*, 18/08/12.

Contact: **DFO**, Kaimur WLS, Kaimur Wildlife Division, Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh. Tel: 05442-253126  
**Chief Conservator of Forests & Chief Wildlife Warden**, Govt. of Uttar Pradesh, 17, Rana Pratap Marg, Lucknow - 226001. Tel: 0522-206584(O), 237715 & 223015(R). Fax 0522-222061/ 206188

## NATIONAL NEWS FROM INDIA

### CBSE warns against use of rare/endangered species in classrooms

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has reminded affiliated schools that it is illegal to use rare/endangered species and plants in school laboratories and classrooms. This recent letter was a follow up to a circular sent last year. In that circular the board had asked affiliated schools

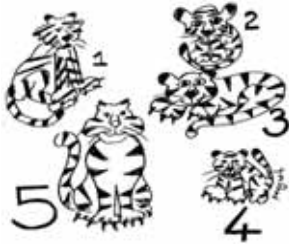


to surrender preserved museum specimens of plants and animals that are rare and threatened (as per the Wildlife Protection Act - 1972) to the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

A committee of experts at CBSE had unanimously agreed to follow the WP Act and to sensitise students towards care and protection of biodiversity. However, understanding the need for schools to teach students about such animals and plants, the board has encouraged the use of computers and virtual specimens to study plant and animal diversity.

Source: 'CBSE warns against use of rare/ endangered plants and species', *The Times of India*, 19/8/12.

### Five new tiger reserves approved



The National Tiger Conservation Authority has given in-principle approval for the creation of five new Tiger Reserves (TRs) - in Pilibhit (Uttar Pradesh), Ratapani (Madhya Pradesh), Sunabeda (Odisha), Mukundara Hills (Rajasthan) and Sathyamangalam (Tamil Nadu). The proposed Mukundara Hills TR comprises three wildlife sanctuaries - Darrah, Jawahar Sagar and Chambal.

States have also been advised to send proposals for declaring other areas including Bor, Nagzira-Navegaon (Maharashtra), Suhelwa (Uttar Pradesh), Guru Ghasidas National Park (Chhattisgarh), Mhadei Sanctuary (Goa) and Srivilliputhur Grizzled Giant Squirrel/Megamalai Wildlife Sanctuaries and Varushanadu Valley (Tamil Nadu) as TRs.

The Minister for Environment and Forests, Ms Jayanthi Natarajan has also confirmed that the final approval has been accorded to the Kudremukh TR in Karnataka.

Source: 'Centre gives approval for creation of five new tiger reserves', *The Indian Express*, 14/08/12.

Contact: **Dr. Rajesh Gopal**, NTCA, Annexe No. 5, Bikaner House, Shahjahan Road, New Delhi-110011. Telefax: 2338 4428. E-mail: dirpt-r@nic.in

### Coal mining threat to 1.1 million ha of forest, over 10 tiger reserves in Central India

A GIS analysis commissioned by Greenpeace and carried out by the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE's) Eco-Informatics Lab has found that over 1.1 million ha. of forest, most of it dense, is at risk from coal mining in just 13 coalfields in Central India. It is feared that as mining expands in these coalfields, forest areas will be lost, possibly leading to greater human-wildlife conflict.

Greenpeace has warned that this is just the tip of the iceberg as Central India has about 40 coalfields, many of them in forest areas, most of which have not been analysed. The 13 coalfields analysed were in the states of Jharkhand (North Karanpura, W. Bokaro and Auranga), Madhya Pradesh (Sohagpur and Singrauli), Chhattisgarh (Hasdeo-Arand, Mandraigarh, Sonhat and Tatapani), Orissa (Talcher and Ib Valley) and Maharashtra (Kamptee and Wardha).

Almost all showed significant presence of either tiger, leopard or elephant. Many corridors linking tiger reserves also pass through the coalfields and are at risk of being snapped by coal mining. These corridors have been identified by the National Tiger Conservation Authority but have yet to receive any kind of legal protection. The tiger reserves threatened by the loss of connecting corridors due to coal mining include Tadoba-Andhari, Kawal, Satkosia, Simlipal, Palamau, Sanjay-Dubri, Bandhavgarh and Kanha. The full report is available at <http://www.greenpeace.org/india/en/publications/How-coal-mining-is-trashing-tigerland/>

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[ashish.fernandes@greenpeace.org](mailto:ashish.fernandes@greenpeace.org)  
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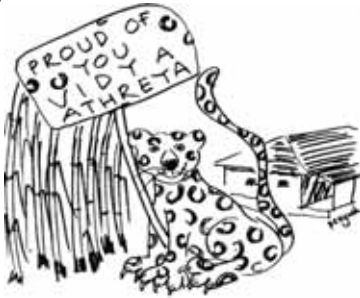
### **The IBN Network Young Indian Leader award for Kamal Medhi**

Kamal Medhi of the Samrakshan Trust was recently awarded the Young Indian Leader award for his efforts to involve local communities in conservation related work in the Lower Garo Hills in Meghalaya. The award was given by the IBN Network in partnership with IRB Infrastructure Developers Ltd.

Medhi was one of nine young Indians who received the award from Chief Guest Sachin Pilot, Minister of State for Communications & IT.

Source: Press Note, IBN Network

### **TN Khoshoo Memorial Award for Vidya Athreya**



Pune-based wildlife biologist, Ms. Vidya Athreya was recently conferred the prestigious 9th TN Khoshoo Memorial Award – 2012 for conservation, environment and development. She was awarded for her research on the dynamics of human-leopard encounters, the ecology and biology of the species, and the political and socio-cultural aspects of this encounter.

Athreya is a research associate with the Kaati Trust, Pune as well as the Centre for Wildlife Studies and Asian Nature Conservation Foundation, Bangalore. She has worked extensively with the Maharashtra Forest Department to decrease conflict by using knowledge-based management interventions, and contributed to the national guidelines on human-leopard conflict published by the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

The TN Khoshoo Memorial Award has been instituted to honour the memory of environmentalist, the late Triloki Nath Khoshoo,

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who was the first secretary of the department of environment in 1982. 'Biodiversity Asia 2012', the second Asia region conference of the Society for Conservation Biology, organised by the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and co-organisers hosted the 2012 TN Khoshoo Memorial Award this year.

Source: 'Pune wildlife biologist receives TN Khoshoo memorial award', *The Times of India*, 13/08/12.

## **SOUTH ASIA**

### **PRESS RELEASE**

(20 August 2012, Gangtok, Sikkim, India)

### **Bhutan, India, and Nepal agree to enhance cooperation in the Kanchenjunga Landscape**

The unique, culturally and biologically rich landscape around Mount Kanchenjunga covers parts of western Bhutan, northeastern India, and eastern Nepal and is one of several Himalayan areas where countries need to work together to conserve and manage biodiversity. In a meeting held at Gangtok in the Sikkim State of India from 16 to 18 August 2012, senior officials and experts from Bhutan, India, and Nepal developed a road map for carrying out collaborative work in this area.

The Kanchenjunga landscape includes 15 protected areas. The countries agreed to work towards connecting these areas through 'biodiversity corridors' for species migration to assist adaptation to climate change; and to address problems that cross borders such as poaching, overgrazing, forest fire, and spread of livestock disease.

The consultation was organized by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and hosted by the GB Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development (GBPIHED) in India, with support from the Forest Departments of

October 2012 (No. 99)

Sikkim and West Bengal. It was attended by more than 40 representatives of governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).



“The challenges of biodiversity conservation and management in the landscape can only be addressed if all three countries cooperate at various levels from local to bilateral to regional”, said Mr Bhim Prasad Dhungel, Minister of Tourism, Forests, Environment, and Wildlife Management of the Government of Sikkim, India. To this end, a similar collaborative initiative undertaken by ICIMOD in the Kailash Sacred Landscape could provide a model. “The work around Kailash already provides substantial scientific information to lead the process”, said Dr BMS Rathore, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India.

The joint biodiversity conservation effort will focus on the people living in the landscape. “People in the mountains have to be compensated for their conservation efforts”, emphasized Dasho Sherub Gyaltsen, Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, Royal Government of Bhutan. Mr Krishna Acharya, Director General of the Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation of the Government of Nepal, pointed out that the landscape programme must also jointly address wildlife-people conflict.

The participatory and consultative process of preparing the transboundary initiative during the next 18 months will be led by ICIMOD. The preparations will include a feasibility assessment report, a conservation strategy, and a comprehensive environmental plan, resulting in a framework for transboundary cooperation. “We are very satisfied with the progress made at this consultation”, said Dr Eklabya Sharma, Director of

Programme Operations at ICIMOD. “All three countries have given their full commitment for the preparatory phase of the Kangchenjunga landscape initiative”.

Contact: Dr. Nakul Chettri, Biodiversity specialist, Team Leader-BCM/ICIMOD. Email: [nchettri@icimod.org](mailto:nchettri@icimod.org)

## BANGLADESH

### 10,000 deer killed every year in the Sundarbans

A survey jointly conducted by the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh (WTB) and Zoological Society of Bangladesh in 2010, has found out that about 10,000 deer are killed by poachers in the Sundarbans and its adjacent Reserve Forests in five southern districts of Bangladesh every year. The study identified at least 20 local gangs which are involved in illegal hunting of deer.

The findings show that the gangs are spread across eight upazilas that include Shymnagar of Satkhira, Koira and Dakop of Khulna, Mongla, Morelganj, and Sharankhola of Bagerhat, Patharghata of Barguna, and Mothbaria of Pirojpur.

In a recent event on July 11, a Coast Guard team had seized 350 kilograms of venison and a live deer on Bishkhali river under Patharghata upazila, Barguna. The poachers, however, fled after leaving the trawler on the river bank. Earlier, on February 19, 10 kilograms of venison, a rawhide, and two traps were seized in Sharankhola and two poachers were arrested. In January too, a Coast Guard team seized two mounds of venison and arrested two poachers in the Patharghata upazila. In the same month, seven live deer were rescued from the Gyanpara area.

Source: Sohrab Hossain. ‘Ten thousand deer poached every year: Survey, *The Daily Star*, 26/07/12.

## The Forest Rights Act, Protected Areas and Wildlife Conservation



### Tiger reserve cores, buffers and ecotourism – An update

In the matter of Ajay Dubey versus NTCA and others, while the main controversy has revolved around banning of tourism in core areas, several connected matters of tiger conservation have come up, increasing the complexity of the situation.

In a press release dated August 13, the Future of Conservation Network (FoC) has stated that the 24<sup>th</sup> July interim order of the Supreme Court on the matter of tourism in core areas of tiger reserves (*PA Update* Vol. XVIII, No. 4) has created a situation of serious illegalities. The organisations that has signed the release include Vasundhara, Kalpavriksh, Sahjeevan, Natural Justice, KRAPAVIS, Oxfam India, RCDC, ARCH-Vahini, Khoj, SHODH, NFFPFW, SPWD, ATREE and some wildlife conservationists. The FCN has noted that in their rush to notify buffer areas, which the Court directs should be done within three weeks, state governments are bypassing and violating the processes laid out in the Wild Life Protection Act and the Forest Rights Act. These time frames, the press release states, make a mockery of the due legal process of consultations with Gram Sabhas and an expert committee that has to be carried out for identifying and notifying buffer areas. The release has pointed out that the assurance that traditional and livelihood activities of villagers will not be affected is hollow. Already in many areas such as the Corbett Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand and the Tadoba Andhari TR in Maharashtra, restrictions are coming into place in the areas notified as buffers.

#### Sequence of events

3 Apr: Interim order by Supreme Court to state governments for fixation of buffers and finalisation of ecotourism guidelines in three months

9 July: the Guidelines are finalised and submitted to the Supreme Court by NTCA

24 July: Interim order by Supreme Court banning tourism in core areas of tiger reserves till final directions are issued by the court on the matter. Taking exception to the fact that some states had notified buffers of Tiger Reserves yet, the Court ordered them to carry this order out within three weeks, failing which contempt proceedings would be initiated against them, and the State Secretaries would be fined Rs. 50,000.

29 Aug: SC order allowing MoEF time for guidelines on cores, buffers and ecotourism.

29 Aug: NTCA puts in public domain a draft set of guidelines (though only related to ecotourism).

11 Sept: NTCA constitutes a committee to develop comprehensive guidelines in compliance with the SC order dated 29.08.2012 giving the deadline for this exercise as 22.09.2012.

The more recent Supreme Court Order (29 August 2012) has allowed NTCA time for finalising guidelines as the NTCA had submitted that 'a comprehensive set of Guidelines are being framed by the National Tiger Conservation Authority and Ministry of Environment & Forests with regard to fixation of core areas, buffer areas and tourism



including welfare and religious tourism as contemplated, amongst other laws in force, under Section 38-O(c) of the Wildlife Protection Act as well as with regard to the protection of the tigers in forest areas as well as non-forest areas.' The draft guidelines titled 'Guidelines for ecotourism in and around Protected Areas' were put into public domain on 29 August giving one week of time for comments. Many groups and individuals have submitted comments in response.

A submission by Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD) on the guidelines states that at present the fixation of buffers can not be done as there is lack of clarity on what a buffer zone would mean in terms of rights, land use and regulation, and that an exercise of gram sabha consultations for delineation of buffers will also only make sense only after a set of guidelines has been prepared (after a due set of consultations) for buffer zones, coexistence, protection of local livelihoods and land use within them. The submission urges MoEF to put on hold all further notifications of Tiger Reserves (cores and buffers) until scientific and objective criteria are developed for the same and also revoke all buffer notifications as no meaningful process of consultation could have taken occurred. The CSD submission also asks MoEF to revoke notifications of Critical Tiger Habitats that are not accompanied with scientific studies showing irreversible human impact and proofs of local consultations and consent.

Separately, a few members of the Future of Conservation Network have also submitted comments on the guidelines. The submission states that there needs to be an extension of time for formulation of guidelines on tiger conservation as these need to go beyond just ecotourism and need to take into account the critical issues of recognition and settlement of rights, co-existence, development and livelihoods needs of the local people, conservation and management by the local people, and relocation, as prescribed in these laws. Also it is impossible for one of the most important stakeholders, the local communities, to provide their inputs *within a week*. The submission also requested MoEF to use the 'Proposed guidelines on identification of Critical Tiger Habitats, Coexistence and

relocation related to Tiger Reserves' prepared by FoC in 2007 as a base document for preparing draft guidelines/protocol on all the above matters.

NTCA has formed a committee for finalising the guidelines, with a deadline of 22 September.

The next hearing on the issue will be on 27 September 2012.

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## GUJARAT

### Consultation in Kachch on the FRA

A two-day consultation on 'Community Forest Rights under Forest Rights Act: Challenges and Opportunities for Biodiversity Conservation in Kachch District' was organized by the Kachchh based NGO Sahjeevan on 6th and 7th September, 2012. Member representatives of various pastoralist communities from Banni and other parts of the district, who are keepers of cattle, camels, sheep and goat, fisher folk and salt pan workers of the district participated in this consultation along with experts from different sectors from across the country.

Four key issues and recommendations emerged from the consultation. These included a demand for the immediate implementation of the FRA in the district and for the constitution of the SDLC/DLC; a demand for the withdrawal of all clearances for forest land diversion granted in violation of the FRA and MoEF guidelines; for halting of government processes such as settlement of rights in disputed areas and sanctuaries, working plans operations, and others on the common lands on which FRA recognizes rights and on which communities are in the process of making claims; and for the allowing of traditional rights in protected areas.

Communities at the consultation resolved to constitute Forest Rights Committees and initiate the process of making claims under the FRA. They also resolved to sustainably manage all the ecosystems on



which they have rights, including for the conservation of biodiversity and wildlife.

Source: 'Communities Demand Implementation of Forest Rights Act in Kachchh

District' Note on the consultation organized in Bhuj.

Contact: **Sabyasachi Das**, Sahjeevan.

Email: [sabyasachidasindia@gmail.com](mailto:sabyasachidasindia@gmail.com)

**'The Forest Rights Act, Protected Areas and Wildlife Conservation' special section is being revived with support from ActionAid. We invite readers to send us news and information about developments that link the FRA and various aspects of wildlife conservation in general and the protected area network in particular.**



Coming Soon

**The State of Wildlife in North-East India  
1996-2011**

**A compilation of news from the *Protected Area Update***

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Edited by **Pankaj Sekhsaria**

Published by the **Foundation for Ecological Security**

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- 'first of its kind' publication based on the information in the *Protected Area Update*; over 200 pages
- 15 years of news and information on the protected areas in the north-east
- information organized chronologically and PA wise, creating a 'media-history' of conservation and protected areas in the region
- essays and expert analysis of conservation issues in the north-east

**Write to the Editor, *PA Update*, Email: [psekhsaria@gmail.com](mailto:psekhsaria@gmail.com) for details of how to get a copy**

## Important Bird Areas Update

### NATIONAL NEWS

#### Concern over threat to vultures from veterinary painkiller Aceclofenac



A new research paper has found out that Aceclofenac, a new veterinary painkiller widely used for treating cattle and dogs, can be potentially dangerous to vultures that feed on cattle carcasses. In the paper titled ‘Aceclofenac as a potential threat to the critically endangered vultures in India’, published in the Journal of Raptor Research, author Pradeep Sharma has noted that like Diclofenac, Aceclofenac is equally dangerous to vultures as it gets metabolised into Diclofenac.

Sharma works in the Rajasthan University of Veterinary and Animal Science, Bikaner. His research found that practitioners considered Aceclofenac a cost-effective and clinically effective substitute for Diclofenac and that its market share of Aceclofenac had increased in the past two years. The paper highlights the presence and involvement of Diclofenac and its metabolites in monkeys, rats, humans and dogs suggested qualitative similarities in Aceclofenac metabolism.

Source: ‘Aceclofenac: the new drug dangerous for vultures’, *Hindustan Times*, 23/08/12.

### ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

#### Coast Guard radar project on Narcondam Island rejected

The Ministry of Environment and Forests has rejected the application of the Coast Guard to install a radar on Narcondam Island in light of

the impacts this could have on the endemic and endangered Narcondam Hornbill (*PA Update* Vol. XVIII, No. 4). The decision was announced recently by the Minister, Ms Jayanti Natarajan. She said that the decision had been taken in light of the serious concern expressed within the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) in the matter.

In October 2011 the NBWL had prescribed a site inspection team including Dr Asad Rahmani, Director of the Bombay Natural History Society; K.B. Singh, Conservator of Forests, Andaman and Nicobar Forest Department; and others to look into the matter. The field report rejected the Coast Guard’s proposal, but it was up to the minister to take the final decision.

The memorandum of the MoEF rejecting the radars proposal states that while the Indian Coast Guard has an option of setting up the radar on some other island, “there is no such option available for the hornbill whose survival may get seriously threatened.” For the full order see <http://moef.nic.in/assets/wl-04092012.pdf>

Source: Neha Sethi. ‘Wildlife board denies approval to coast guard project in Narcondam’, *Mint*, 07/09/12.

Contact: **CWLW** – A&N Islands, Haddo, Port Blair – 744102. A&N Islands

### GUJARAT

#### Vultures to get two ‘safe zones’ in state

In an attempt to help arrest the decline in the population of vultures in the state and the country, the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), in collaboration with the Bird Conservation Society of Gujarat (BCSG) plans to create Vulture Safe Zones (VSZ) in Gujarat.

Two VSZs, spread over 30,000 sq km, will be created in Gujarat. Of this, one will be in Ahmedabad district and cover areas like Mehsana, Kadi, Virpur and Daslana. The other will be created in Mahuva and include Mahuva, Nageshri, Aasrana and surrounding areas. The areas have been chosen on the basis

of the stability in vulture populations seen here over the last four-five years.

Vultures bred in captivity will be released in these VSZs. However, before these zones are formally declared as such, the BNHS will create a provisional VSZ where those associated with the programme will assess the presence of various factors necessary for the survival of vultures.

This will include looking for the presence of Diclofenac in the area and random sampling of about 800 animal carcasses found over a large area will also be done to see if they are Diclofenac-free. Nesting data, details about whether medical shops sell Diclofenac for veterinary use, and intense awareness programmes to ensure zero presence of the banned drug will be carried out to ensure that the provisional zones are 100% safe.

Source: 'Vultures to get two safe zones in state', *DNA*, 18/08/12.

### **Gujarat has the highest number of Lesser floricans**

A recently published study by the Wildlife Institute of India reveals that Gujarat has the highest number of Lesser floricans in the country. The birds were sighted only in Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh with the numbers being 54, 18 and 12 respectively. These figures are for the year 2010 when the counting was done in the breeding season of the bird. It is 65 per cent lower than the figure reported a little more than a decade ago in 1999. That year there were 141 Lesser floricans in Gujarat, 63 in Madhya Pradesh, and 34 in Rajasthan.

The team surveyed 91 grasslands for the present study, which also included the grasslands studied in 1999. Lesser floricans were found in only 24 grasslands in 2010 as against 37 in 1999. The study states that most of the grasslands belonging to state forest departments were either pure grasslands or mosaic grasslands. The latter are saline patches. The study revealed that over 68 per cent of the birds were seen in the grasslands - 35 per cent in pure grasslands and the rest in mosaic grasslands. It was noted that several

grasslands have either degraded due to grazing or have been planted with tree species that make them unfit for Lesser floricans.

Source: Himanshu Kaushik. 'Gujarat is India's lesser florican capital', *The Times of India*, 02/08/12.

## **MAHARASHTRA**

### **Six wetlands proposed as Ramsar sites**

The Maharashtra State Government has proposed the inclusion of six wetlands in the state as Ramsar sites. These are the Sewri Creek (Mumbai), Jayakwadi (Aurangabad), Ujni (Solapur), Navegaon Bandh (Gondia), Nandur Madhmeshwar (Nashik), and Lonar (Buldhana). The Itiadh lake in Gondia district is to be listed under the National Wetland Conservation Program (NWCP).

The proposals have been made in response to a request by the Ministry of Environment and Forests for a list of wetlands for notification under the new Wetland Regulatory Rules 2010, for inclusion on the Ramsar list and also high altitude wetlands for protection and conservation.

Source: Vijay Pinjarkar. 'Navegaon, Itiadh wetlands to get state, national recognition', *The Times of India*, 27/08/12.

### **New IBAs being identified in Maharashtra**

The Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN) and Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) are trying to identify new or potential Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Maharashtra.

Birdwatchers and ornithologists are being invited to send suggestions and up-to-date information for this keeping in mind the global criteria for IBA with a justification for their qualification. Check [www.ibcn.in](http://www.ibcn.in) for more information.

Contact: **Raju Kasambe**, BNHS,  
Email: [ibabnhs@gmail.com](mailto:ibabnhs@gmail.com)

## PUNJAB

### Fishing contractors raid range office at Harike WLS

In an attempt to intimidate wildlife staff and wildlife researchers at the Harike Wildlife Sanctuary, a group of fishing contractors and their henchmen raided the range office and forcibly took away two motorcycles after the arrest of a poacher and seizure of a pick-up truck with 50 kg of fish and six nets in August.



A number of assaults on wildlife staff have been reported in Harike in recent months (*PA Update* Vol. XVIII, No. 4) On February 2, 2011, a posse of the wildlife staff impounded a boat and motorcycle of the land mafia at Kot Kemp Khan on the Satluj, but they were waylaid and the bike snatched away. Three wildlife officials were seriously injured and three others, including a police constable suffered minor injuries in another attack on the forest staff in June.

Source: Vikram Jit Singh, 'Fishing mafia strikes at Harike wildlife office', *The Times of India*, 14/08/12.

Contact: **Wildlife Warden**, Harike Lake WLS, Near Police Station, Harike, Dist. Firozpur, Punjab. Tel: 0181 - 248409  
**Chief Wildlife Warden**, Punjab, SC No. 2463-64, Sector 22-C, Chandigarh - 160022. Tel: 0172-2705828(O), 2675661(R). Fax: 2705828

## TAMIL NADU

### No new construction work within 5 km radius around bird sanctuaries near Chennai

The Tamil Nadu Forest Department (FD) has declared areas around three bird sanctuaries — Vedanthangal, Karikili and Pulicat — as no-go zones for real estate developers and banned any kind of real estate ventures there. A team

of forest officials recently explained the restrictions on new constructions and repair of existing structures within a 5 km radius of the three sanctuaries to residents, elected representatives including panchayat presidents and village administrative officials of 20 villages. The meeting had been organized by the FD in the Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary.

The restrictions are meant to ensure that there will be no change in the land use pattern around the sanctuaries. Apart from real estate ventures, restrictions have also been placed on construction of factories, industrial units and mining in the three sanctuaries. The restrictions are based on a Supreme Court order and instructions from the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) prohibiting any non-forest activities in areas around all sanctuaries. Residents of these areas have, however, been given permission to repair their houses and also to construct new houses if they meet stipulated standards for height and width.

Thandarai, Karunkulazhi, Mangalam, Nellavai Kutt Road, Rettamangalam, Vaiyyur, Perumbakkam and Vellaputhur are among the villages where the restrictions will come into place. The state's department of town and country planning (DTCP) had in August 2011 issued a notice to a developer for not obtaining prior permission to construct a farmland resort less than half a kilometre from the Vedanthangal bird sanctuary. The DTCP also sent a notice to Vedanthangal village panchayat president Vasanthi Lakshmi for approving the plot.

Source: D Madhavan. 'No-go for realty near Chennai bird reserves', *The Times of India*, 06/08/12.

**The Important Bird Areas Update is a new section that is being brought out in collaboration with and support from the *Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS)*, the *Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN)* and the *Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)*, UK**

## Quick NEWS

"Protecting **Bustards** in India" Special issue of **PANDA** from WWF-India. <http://www.wwfindia.org/wwf/publications/panda/?7680/Panda-Special-Issue>

"Investigating the Role of Bats in Emerging Zoonoses: Balancing Ecology, Conservation and Public Health Interest" <http://www.fao.org/docrep/014/i2407e/i2407e00.pdf>

- A hands-on reference to bat history, biology, monitoring, handling, and disease screening -

### **LOOKING for FUNDING?**

Asian Waterbirds Conservation Fund supports the conservation of migratory **waterbirds** and their **wetland habitats** in the East Asian Australasian flyway, as well as projects which bring socio-economic benefits to local communities. Deadline: **31 October**. <http://www.wwf.org.hk/eng/maipo/awcf/info.php>

THE Birdfair/RSPB Research Fund for Endangered Birds provides small grants for research on birds listed by IUCN as endangered, critically endangered, or data deficient. Priority is for researchers working in their own countries, particularly in

collaboration with BirdLife's partners. The maximum grant is US\$ 2000. <http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/projects/details/198251-the-birdfairrspb-research-fund-for-endangered-birds>  
Closing date 31 October

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** <http://www.fws.gov/international/grants-and-reporting/how-to-apply.html> Marine Turtle Conservation Fund (October 1 and April 1), Asian Elephant Conservation Fund (November 1), Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund (November 1 and April 1), Critically Endangered Animals Fund (April 1), Amphibians in Decline Fund (May 1).

**Cleveland Metroparks Zoo** Africa Seed Grants and **Asia Seed Grants** - Grants for wildlife conservation for projects focusing on wildlife and habitat protection, human-wildlife conflict, sustainable environmental practices, capacity building, and conservation biology. <http://www.clemetzoo.com/conservation/grants/>  
The *deadline* for pre-proposals is **05 November 2012**.

**Rolex Awards** -- Young Laureates 2014. The Rolex Awards for Enterprise support pioneering work in five areas: *applied technology; cultural heritage; environment;*

*exploration and discovery; and science and health.* The 2014 series of Awards will be devoted to Young Laureates, ages 18 to 30, of all nationalities and backgrounds. <http://www.rolexaward.com/about/apply>

*National Geographic Conservation Trust* will fund projects that contribute significantly to the preservation and **sustainable use** of the Earth's biological, cultural, and historical resources. SEND proposals at least 10 months before the project is to begin. <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/explorers/grants-programs/conservation-trust-application/>

**WHITLEY AWARDS**  
**£35,000 GBP** in conservation funding to be spent on projects over a period of one year. [www.whitleyaward.org](http://www.whitleyaward.org)  
Up to seven awards to be given  
Deadline: **October 31, 2012**.

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS, GOVT OF INDIA call for proposals on environment research. Deadline December 31, 2012. <http://www.envfor.nic.in/assets/re-advert-28082012.pdf>

**Readers Respond**  
to the editorial in the August 2012 issue of the *PA Update*

**Misleading, inaccurate and mischievous**

The editorial 'The tiger tourism debate is on fire' (*PA Update* Vol. XVIII, No. 4; August 2012) has made some sweeping generalizations about wildlife conservationists that are misleading, inaccurate and mischievous. It makes the startling allegation that "It is noteworthy that wildlife conservation and tourism are implicated in an interesting and important overlap of interests. Those wanting conservation of wildlife are increasingly benefitting from it as tourism operators or then as consumers of a wild experience". These statements are irresponsible. There are hundreds of conservationists and dozens of conservation NGOs in the country — who are fighting lonely and often thankless battles to save India's wildlife and wild habitats — who have absolutely no stake in wildlife tourism, financial or otherwise.

I personally know dozens of conservationists who volunteer an enormous amount of their time to conservation every year. Not only do they not expect or receive any rewards or accolades, they are often targeted by the people they take on, and suffer for their efforts. In fact, the majority of conservationists in India don't have any stake in tourism. The editorial has done them all a great disservice. As for being "consumers of a wild experience", it is sheer perversity to label the enjoyment of nature as some kind of guilty pleasure. Indeed, I would suggest that the editor of the *PA Update* himself is a prolific consumer of wild experiences, as evidenced from his writings over the years.

- **Shekar Dattatri** on [nathistory-india@Princeton.EDU](mailto:nathistory-india@Princeton.EDU), 03/08/12.
- Email: [shekar.dattatri@gmail.com](mailto:shekar.dattatri@gmail.com)

**Not a crime**

Scientists too "benefit" (i.e. they have a job) from and get a great deal of enjoyment out of nature. And wildlife photographers and filmmakers. Some conservationists make a career out of their interests, others follow their interests as volunteers or - dare I say it - as wildlife tourists.

And I know a huge number of resort wallahs, where wildlife conservation comes first and business second; people who have chosen this way of life because they get a great deal of joy out of nature and NOT because this was the most lucrative thing they could do, by any means. Personally, I would much rather that wildlife tourism was in the hands of diehard conservationist, than hardheaded business interests. But the fact is that sustainable, responsible wildlife tourism is in all their interests, and that it is the responsibility of the authorities to ensure that effective regulations and land use policies are strictly implemented.

So many people are "consumers" (which is a strange way of putting it) "of a wild experience" - thank god for that, and that it is not yet a crime !

- **Belinda Wright** on [nathistory-india@Princeton.EDU](mailto:nathistory-india@Princeton.EDU), 03/08/12. Email: [belinda@wpsi-india.org](mailto:belinda@wpsi-india.org)

**No commercial interest**

A large number of wildlife NGOs and persons managing them do not have any commercial interest in wildlife tourism. WWF is one example, the Wildlife Trust of India is another. There are numerous more. The managing personnel specially trustees do not take a salary. Some of us have devoted half a lifetime to conservation of nature and wildlife. And not just the tiger, a whole range of species and habitats from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and Eastern India as well as Bhutan.

I have seen excesses in wildlife tourism, scores of gypsies surrounding and chasing a tiger. Besides, this debate is futile. Those who have cogent views are welcome to put in an intervention petition in Supreme Court of India.

- **Ashok Kumar** on [nathistory-india@Princeton.EDU](mailto:nathistory-india@Princeton.EDU), 06/08/12. Email: [ashok@wti.org.in](mailto:ashok@wti.org.in)



## A DECADE AGO

Protected Area Update 39, December 2002

### Blackbuck threat to Bustard in Rolapadu

The increasing population of the blackbuck in the grasslands of the Rolapadu WLS is threatening the Great Indian Bustards that are found here.

When the area was first declared a sanctuary in the 1980s, particularly for the conservation of the bustards, the population of the blackbuck was very small. Over the years this population has multiplied rapidly and the figure today is estimated to be around 700 animals.

Further details are not known of the exact impact that they are having on the bustard populations or the ecology of the park, but senior forest officials have expressed the opinion that the only way to deal with the situation is for the culling of some of the blackbuck.

Source: Mir Ayoob Ali Khan. 'Blackbuck threat to bustard', *Deccan Chronicle*, 11/07/02

### State pursuing denotification of Madei WLS

The Goa Chief Minister, Mr. Manohar Parrikar has said the state government was strongly pursuing the denotification of the Madei Wildlife Sanctuary. A cabinet decision had been taken and the state had also moved the Supreme Court in the matter. The CM in the state legislature while replying to an opposition query regarding the recent 'agreement in principle' by the MoEF to the proposal for declaration of the Sahyadri Ecologically Sensitive Area (SESA) over 7350 sq. kms of the Western Ghats spread across Maharashtra, Karnataka and Goa.

The opposition leader, Mr. Pratapsingh Rane said that this proposal (for SESA), if accepted, will make matters worse for those who had been already adversely affected by the notification of the Madei Sanctuary. Political parties in the state are unanimous in their opposition to the Netravali and Madei WLSs that were declared a couple of years ago. The stand has been that the process of notification of the sanctuaries had been faulty and irrational and a number of villages will be affected because of this. The CM has further elaborated that no public

notice was issued for the notification and neither were objections sought from the public as in mandated by the law.

Meanwhile, the *Sattari Nagrik Suraksha Manch* too has taken up the matter of the SESA with the CM. They have expressed their apprehension that the declaration of the SESA would complicate the matter of the denotification of the Madei WLS and would directly affect the growth and development of the taluka.

Source: 'Govt. pursuing denotification of Madei sanctuary areas: CM', *Herald*, 21/08/02.

### Conflict over Krusadai island in GoM

The dispute between the Forest and Fisheries Departments of the state government has intensified over the ownership of the Krusadai island in the Gulf of Mannar (GoM). This island is one of the 21 that forms the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve. All 20 islands, except Krusadai were handed over to the Forest Department when the park was established in 1992. The conflict took an ugly turn recently when the Forest Department, reportedly destroyed cages, floating rafts and pearls worth Rs. 10 lakhs in a private pearl oyster farm set up at the island.

Pearl oyster culture is the monopoly of the Tamil Nadu Fisheries Development Corporation Ltd (TNFDCL) and it can lease the rights to pearl oysters. A private firm had established the farm after a lease agreement with the TNFDCL for a period of five years starting December 2001. The lease deed covered the pearl culture project at Mandapam and Tuticorin, the pearl oyster hatchery at Mandapam and the farming areas at Krusadai.

Source: PS Suresh Kumar. 'Forest, Fisheries departments fight over Krusadai island', *The Hindu*, 16/09/02

## PERSPECTIVE

### **Thoughts from a conservation gathering: SCB Asia 2012**

At the outset I must emphasise that this piece does not intend to make a comment either on the Society for Conservation Biology that organized Biodiversity Asia 2012, nor wildlife scientists; both have enabled me to learn in no small measure. My attempt is merely to share questions which confronted me during the event, left me puzzled and at times, even disturbed.

One of the panel speakers, in his otherwise amazing talk, referred to social scientists' (*I don't quite agree with the term*) role being that of raising 'questions' and not of providing 'answers'. This was somewhat difficult to comprehend: On the one hand we talk of a multi-disciplinary approach to conservation being the need of the hour and on the other we freeze our boundaries. Is this tantamount to throwing the ball into someone else's court? Who then answers these questions put up by social scientists?

During a dinner conversation I shared with a well-known wildlife scientist details of a project involving wolves in Rajasthan that I was a small part of. He talked of his visit to the place and said he was stunned to listen to drivers and guides talk at length of tiger behavior and their identification of individual tigers and added that even scientists were not aware to this degree! This was a little difficult for me to digest and I recalled reading a piece by a friend which questioned the practice in vogue; that of information being data if seen by a scientist and

anecdotal if seen by others! These drivers and guides accompany tourists on the jeeps (*and canters*) inside the national park on a regular basis throughout the year excepting when the park is closed. Wasn't it natural, I thought, given the situation that they would have far more sightings of and time with tigers than many wildlife scientists?

I attended many presentations where a lot of what was said was fresh for me and some of it quite invigorating. However, I kept wondering why people put up formulae and references to their own academic papers in the power-points that accompanied their talks. Many, if not all, of these people would have had unique experiences and I would have been happy to listen to their stories and to see a small part of their world. These made me recall an email on a discussion group which questioned the practice of using references to one's own publications as also an interesting article in *The Telegraph* which said while we refer to them as 'power-point presentations' they at times end up without making any point!

- **Nimesh Ved** presented a paper at  
Biodiversity Asia 2012 on his  
experiences on conservation education in  
Mizoram.  
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# PROTECTED AREA UPDATE

News and Information from protected areas in India and South Asia

[Vol. XVIII No. 5

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## FES in the North-East

To highlight the need for conservation action in the highly diverse ecological, social and physical landscapes of the north-eastern region of the country, FES set up its regional office in Guwahati in August 2011.

With the intent of helping create a larger constituency for 'Communities in Conservation' in the region, FES plans to:

- provide support on effective land use planning and conservation through community institutions;
- partner with local agencies, understand the complexities and add value to local efforts;
- support local youth through fellowships to further the thinking and spread awareness on issues of conservation in the region;
- undertake studies that help in promoting conservation and local governance in the region.

*The Protected Area Update* started publication in 1996 and fulfils an important need of news and information related to protected areas from across South Asia, particular India. The newsletter is published six times a year and mailed to nearly 1800 people. Additionally, it goes out in an electronic form to about 2000 individuals via an e-discussion group – 'paupdate@yahoogroups.com' and now also has it's own facebook group page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/protectedareupdate/>

*The Protected Area Update* is published by Kalpavriksh and edited by Pankaj Sekhsaria. Financial support for the newsletter has been provided by a number of organisations over the years. These include, among others, the Foundation for Ecological Security, Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust, World Wide Fund for Nature – India, Bombay Natural History Society, Greenpeace India, and Action Aid India. Many individuals have also extended support either as donations or by sending in a subscription.

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For over a decade and a half the Protected Area Update (PAU) has religiously presented a consolidated account of India's wildlife and protected area (PA) network. Published six times a year, it carries in a tightly edited format, news and information of what is happening in, to and around these national parks and sanctuaries that have been at the core of India's wildlife conservation strategy.

Now, for the first time a section of this huge body of information has been re-organised to become 'The State of Wildlife in North-East India – 1996-2011'. What is presented here, then, is an historical account of developments in the PA network in the eight states of the region. While the primary unit still remains the individual protected area, the time line has changed from two months of one issue to 15 years that this publication covers.

In following one news item after another about any particular PA we see what happened month after month, year after year; what developments recurred at what periodicity; what were the issues that were important and what was done about them – it's an important glimpse into the contemporary history of a place (many places) marked on the map as a protected area.



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