

Wildlife Conservation Nepal Newsletter

IN THE NEWS

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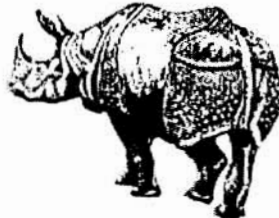
Rhino Conservation - LOOKING BACK at 2006

by Prasanna Yonzon

Two thousand six was a bad year for conservationists trying to protect rhinos. This mega vertebrate was being poached at an alarming rate of 1.5 per month. Furthermore, to add fuel to the fire, the Home Ministry released 10 rhino poachers from Nawalparasi penitentiary for good behavior and convicts that had served 50 percent of their sentence. The release of these poachers resulted in more rhino poaching.

As rhinos were poached, the focus was on how Nepal could develop a strategy to save the remaining rhinos? Amidst meetings, many suggestions were made towards the conservation of rhinos like taking up immediate precautionary measures such as moving in army personnel in vacated posts, upgrade armed personnel and strengthen anti-poaching team with logistic support.

One of the reasons for the escalating rhino poaching was the ongoing Maoist conflict. The guard posts manned by army and national park personnel were either vacated, or



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destroyed by the Maoists. Chitwan National Park had 37 posts and between two posts is a 28 km gap. These security personnel were forced to regroup and move into new locations where they could ward off the Maoists in case of engagement.

Poachers have developed many skills to poach rhinos. Today, most poachers use rifles to poach rhinos. Some use electric wire to electrocute rhinos – Sita Khanal admitted electrocuting a rhino and was found with 5 kg of electric wire in her possession. A few poachers hide guns in forests or bury it in the ground. WCN has been able to locate guns hidden in the park and have handed it over to the authorities. The table below shows the number of poachers arrested by WCN over the last six months.

Table 1. Name of people arrested from August to December, 2006

| Date | Name | Arrested for |
|----------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 28.12.06 | Buddhi Ram Chaudhary | Rhino poaching |
| 17.12.06 | Dil Bahadur Praja | Rhino poaching |
| 16.12.06 | Sukh Dev Bote | Rhino poaching |
| 15.12.06 | Min Bahadur Lama | Rhino poaching |
| 13.12.06 | Raj Kumar Praja | Rhino poaching |
| 31.10.06 | Sita Khanal | Electrocution of rhino |
| 31.10.06 | Gharti Kumal | Providing guns and selling rhino horn |
| 31.10.06 | Gaja Maya Kumal | Accomplice in rhino poaching |
| 27.08.06 | Gyalbo Gurung | Rhino horn trader |

Source: Wildlife Conservation Nepal, 2006

(MORE ON THIS AND RELATED IN PAGE 2)



WCN's small initiation towards urban wildlife conservation.

www.wcn.org.np/youth/urban

WCN STARTS PHOTO CLUB



OM PRAKASH YADAV

With an objective to bring nature photographers together in one forum to share pictures, experiences and thoughts on nature and conservation, WCN organised a photography interaction program on December 27, 2006. It was attended by ten nature and wildlife photographers. The program was moderated by Mr. Nripa Dhoj Kadhka, winner of WCN's first annual photography competition. The participants included Mr. Om Prakash Yadav, winner of the second competition.

More than a hundred photographs were shared and the role of photography on nature conservation were discussed.

WCN plans to conduct such interactions on a periodic basis by involving many photographers- novice and professionals. ■

The poachers know the penalty of poaching a rhino. But this does not deter them- it could be due to extreme poverty, lack of opportunities and the lure of money from traders. Such vortex of greed pushes them to poach more rhinos presuming it to be their last job which will continue till they are arrested.

Today, a poacher gets Rs. 60,000 to 100,000 for poaching a rhino, a big amount compared to five years ago. On the other hand, the government provides an award of Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 50,000 to any person that informs the government leading to arrests and seizure of rhino horn, tiger skins, etc. The award system of many years does not reflect the present poaching scenario. Perhaps, it is time for policy makers and authorities to upgrade the award system. Alternatively, if adequate policies are incorporated in the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1973 to provide opportunities to poachers family, poaching could come down and turn poachers into protectors.

With WCN intelligence, national park authorities and the district forest office arrested nine rhino poachers along with guns in Chitwan. Rhino poaching has been checked to some extent, however a holistic approach is needed if the remaining rhinos are to be protected.

In such extreme cases of rhino poaching, Nepal needs to take immediate action. The Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation can address rhino poaching and bring poachers and traders to justice, who are always under political umbrage, provided political parties do not interfere when meting justice. ■



Caring about our small neighbors



House sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) are widespread resident birds except in North East and North West of the Indian subcontinent. They are perhaps one of the few birds whose appearance are familiar across the globe. Once abundant, today house sparrow populations have declined in many areas of the world including Kathmandu Valley. Since no research in its population declination or status had been carried, Urban Wildlife Program conducted a pilot project on house sparrows from June 2005.

The research was conducted in Khokana, a small traditional village of Lalitpur district of Kathmandu Valley. The residence are Newars, the first settlers of Kathmandu valley and predominantly Khokana newars are farmers. As house sparrows are mostly dependent upon cultivation products, they have been a dominant bird species in the village and also have been a part of the way of life of the people of Khokana. Traditionally, the houses of Khokana used to have

specialy built house holes on its walls for house sparrows. Traditional houses of Khokana were built with mud, bricks and wood. UWP's research showed that this tradition is fast disappearing in the new cemented houses built within last fifteen years. Only 7.5 % of new houses have such holes for sparrows undermining the importance of birds in the villagers lives. This connotes that the tradition is fast disappearing. On the other front, the high usage of DDT in agriculture field could have stunted reproductive cycle which eventually have brought down the population. As Khokana prepares for higher harvest turnover, the result is high use of pesticides which directly definitely effects the sparrow population.

Building bird nest holes is a time old tradition in Khokana connected with religious values. It is believed that one must live in harmony with nature and respect all creatures of God. However, with changing times, such ethics, culture and values are diminishing. During construction and maintenance of houses, people have started to phase out this age old custom of having bird holes in buildings. The houses that had 14 inches wall are now they are 9, which cannot support bird holes in the buildings. The house owners confirm that they would have to put more resources if they are to maintain the age old tradition and that is not possible.

So both ways we are edging out sparrow population from amidst us. We use high pesticides and simultaneoulsy remove nests that limits the sparrow population. Because of our small negligence towards our neighbor, sparrows are in greater peril today than ever before. ■