



Conservation Watch - Nepal

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Rhino poaching is a serious conservation threat - DG, DNPWC

Mr. Shyam Bajimaya is the leading name in the conservation sector of Nepal. He has been heading Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) of Nepal as an Acting Director General. Conservation Watch Nepal has talked with him about various aspects of conservation of Nepal. Here are the excerpts:

1) What do you think the major challenges of conservation in Nepal ?

- Challenges and problems on conservation are changing with the time. For e.g. we have prepared management plan but are facing difficulties to update it. Management plan of all protected areas and species work plan are yet to be completed. Implementation of bufferzone program is also equally challengeable. We are also striving for funding resources to materialize our plans. Conservation activities are constricted and very limited in those areas which cannot generate enough revenues, for instance Parsa Wildlife Reserve, Rara National Park.

2) In our study, bufferzone people are not happy with the prevalent compensation mechanism and juridical timeline of the park which have only nurtured conflicting situation. What would you say on it ?

- It is likely because we are struggling to live up their expectations. Park revenues is largely inadequate to compensate the wildlife victims even in the areas like Chitwan National Park, Bardia National Park which are among the highest revenue generators. We have requested Government of Nepal to formulate legal provision for the compensation right of the wildlife victims. Fencing work are going on some protected areas to avert possible wildlife attack.

Regarding the grievances towards the protracted juridical timeline, we are aware on it and are trying to finalize the cases within maximum 2,3 years of investigation although we have limitations.

3) How would you assess the practice of bufferzone management program ?

- The concept of bufferzone management program has been conceived to bridge the park and people and to mobilize bufferzone people for the conservation. But we have to still overcome pitfalls and shortcomings to transform it into the



real essence. There are remarkable gaps between bufferzone user group and bufferzone committee. Awareness level of the people needs to be intensified for the successful bufferzone management program.

In order to sort out these problems, we have already recommended government to amend the existing act and to provide more authority and responsibility to the bufferzone committees.

4) Number of one-horned rhinos are plummeting in Nepal. What will be the strategy of the DNPWC to cope up with this problem ?

- Rhino poaching is the serious conservation threat of Nepal. After the emergence of peace process in Nepal, security posts have been gradually reinstated. Fore and foremostly, DNPWC has planned for urgent rhino census with the collaboration of other organizations. Possibly, rhino census will be conducted during March/April of 2008.

Poachers kill rhino, tiger in Bardia

On last week of November, poachers killed two endangered flagship species in and around Bardia National Park (BNP) area of Nepal. A rhino and a tiger was shot dead.

On 26th November, an adult male rhino was found dead with the horn and hooves missing at Patharbhoji area of Suryapatuwa VDC. Nepalese army from Ramsher Battalion, Thakurdwara, which is deployed for the security of wildlife at BNP found the rhino carcass. The death spot lies along the wildlife corridor between Bardia National Park and Kattarniya Wildlife Sanctuary in India. The wildlife corridor was established in 2001 in coordination with Tarai Arc Landscape, a project under the World Wildlife Fund meant for easy movement of wild animals from both protected areas.

Only 30 rhinos are now left in the Bardiya National Park (BNP) which is second most rhino habitat of Nepal beyond Chitwan National Park. Thirty-one rhinos were counted during the last census at BNP on May, 2007 whereas the number was 67 during rhino count of 2000.

A royal bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris*), another endangered species, was found shot dead at the Dasgaja 'no man's land' on the Nepal-India border. According to BNP officials, Indian forest officials have taken the dead tiger for investigation. BNP also has started an investigation into the killing of these two endangered species.

Bardia National Park is also inflicted with deforestation. Deforestation is rampant in Sainawar, Manau, Baragadahi, Dumarhi and other adjoining areas at large scale. Locals said timber smugglers intrude into the park at night, fell trees and transport them.

Yeti footprints found at Khumbu

A team of US explorers have claimed that they had traced fresh footprints of Yeti, a mysterious snowman believed to inhabit the Himalayan mountains.



'Destination Truth', an American television crew said that they discovered fresh Yeti footprints on the bank of the Manju river in Solukhumbu district, northeast of Kathmandu.

The nine-member television crew that is touring the world in search of unsolved mysteries and phenomena came to Nepal in search of an ancient creature which, according to Himalayan folklore, is not only known as the protector of the mountains but is also feared. The Yeti according to folklore is believed to live in the Himalayan regions of Nepal and throughout history there have been claims of its sightings.

Tul Bahadur Rai, representative of Equator Expedition Nepal, which is the liaison of the American crew, found the foot marks near the river banks of the Manju river on November 28 which according to the crew is a clear sequence of a six-foot stride prints embedded in the banks of the river. "We found it around 11 pm during our investigations, it looked like it was freshly made. We found those prints not long after it was made," said Rai. He also said that one of the prints was around 12 inches long and others were smaller because the ground was not even and the prints were not clear.

According to Josh Gates of 'Destination Truth', they started their investigation in accordance to the common folklore and started looking in places where the locals claimed it had been sighted. "Till date its sightings have been in regions of the Himalayan regions of Nepal and Tibet which is not too high up in the glacier nor too down below where there are human settlements but in areas where there is a lot of vegetation cover," he said.

The crew said the footprints were found away from the usual trekking trail and half-an-hour away from the nearest village at an altitude of approximately 2,850 meters.

Brad Kulham, the show's executive producer, stated that this sighting was unique because they were able to document the events as they took place. "We are extremely excited about this sighting because we were able to document each step of the finding from the initial sighting of the prints to the casting of the prints to safely bring it back," he said.

He further stated that the Yeti footprint is just over a foot long with a toe span of over an inch and this is the first time the findings have been catalogued this way. The crew used infra-red cameras, night vision opticals and thermal scopes for the investigation to ensure the proper documentation of their finding and are hoping to air this finding as the first chronicle of their second season very soon.

This is not the first time, footprints of yeti, a species of hairy, humpbacked and dark giant biped ape, were found in Nepal's Himalayan valleys. In 1925 a Greek photographer, NA Tombazi, claimed that he had spotted an ape-like creature walking in the valley near Mt Everest. Another noted explorer who claimed to have seen yeti was the father of Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, the first person to climb Everest.

Similarly, British mountaineers Eric Shipton and Michael Ward found the yeti footprints in 1951 near the border area. Even Sir Edmund Hillary and his Sherpa guide, Tenzing Norgay, found giant footprints on the way up the top of Mount Everest, in 1953.

Tikauli lake revamped by the community

Tikauli Lake stands as a perfect instance of community endeavour for sustainable biodiversity conservation in Chitwan district of Nepal. Total area of the lake is about 10 hectare. It is about 10 km far from district headquarter Bharatpur and near to the Ramsar site Beeshazari lake. Since 15 months, Tikauli bufferzone community forest committee spearheaded the campaign for cleaning and maintenance of the lake along with resource generation.

The movement of endangered rhinos, tigers, deers, crocodiles and birds have significantly increased around the lake areas. Lake has been serving wildlife as an important water source. To raise the resources, some areas of the lake are allowed for boating also. Five boats are available for boating in the areas other than restricted zone. Tikauli Bufferzone Community Forest Committee has determined the boating charge of NRs 20 per hour. Visitors in remarkable number throng here for bird watching too. Fishes of different species have been released in the lake for the commercial fish farming.



'The income from the lake has been utilized for the maintenance and cleaning of the lake as well as for the welfare of 500 household users of this forest", Krishna Sharma, office assistant of Tikauli bufferzone community forest committee said. The management committee is equally aware on the possible poaching activities after wildlife are attracted towards the lake. Committee has also deployed forest guards who keep vigil around the activities around the lake. Likewise they are conscious with the possible human disturbances and have implemented strict regulations to refrain visitors from restricted areas.

This sort of initiatives where the development and conservation are playing supplementary role to each other are rarely practiced in the bufferzone areas of Chitwan National Park. Community attempts and leadership towards conservation needs to be inspired and assisted to foster it further.

Commitment to maintain co-ordination

Commitment has been made by Chitwan National Park (CNP), Bufferzone Management Council and chairperson of bufferzone Village Development Committees (VDC) to maintain co-ordination and co-operation among themselves to bolster the conservation activities at the grassroot level.

On November 30, Empowering People For Rhino Conservation (EPRC) conducted discussion program with bufferzone VDC chairpersons about prevalent practice, gaps and challenge on conservation activities at the villages. Chief



guest of the program Mr. Bhupal Bahadur Niraula, Local Development Officer of District Development Committee Chitwan said co-ordination gap from park and bufferzone committee has eclipsed the role of VDC towards the conservation and has impeded overall conservation activities at the grassroots level.

Chairperson of most of the VDCs expressed dissatisfaction towards park and bufferzone council for 'derogating' their roles on conservation. "I have never been invited by park and bufferzone committee on planning or any of the conservation related programs during my eight years service in VDC", Hari Babu Dhakal, chairperson of Jagatpur VDC said.

Mr. Ananath Baral, assistant conservation officer of Chitwan National Park confessed the co-ordination gap with VDCs. "We have given responsibility to look after additional 750 sq.km area of bufferzone beside CNP

areas but with equal staffs. Hence, We too have limitations, nonetheless, it can be redressed and we will mull over on it", he stated.

Mr. Yemunath Acharya, member of CNP bufferzone council opined that 'individual conflict' between chairperson of VDC and bufferzone committee has also played key role to make distance in several places. He committed to relay the grievances of VDC chairpersons to bufferzone council.

Planning Officer of District Development Committee, Chitwan, Mr. Mohan Marasini emphasized to make 'institutionalised' system of co-ordination. "Conservation related activities are found to be replicated with the lack of co-ordination", he added.

Participants stressed to amend contradictory points between bufferzone act and local governing act, which has created ambiguity on roles and responsibilities between bufferzone committee and VDCs.

www.onehornrhino.org in the offing

Media Consultancy Nepal (MCN) is an organization active in social changes through mass communication and advocacy tools. It aims to deliver the positive aspects to the society and to provide awareness so as to ensure well-being of the society. MCN is focused on conservation, animal rights, anti poaching movement and to reduce park-people conflict. Owing to the deteriorating situation of the one horn rhino, MCN has launched **Empowering People for Rhino Conservation (EPRC)** program with the support of Asian Rhino Project, Australia

Empowering People for Rhino Conservation (EPRC) is going to launch a new website www.onehornrhino.org. It consists detail and updated information, news on one horned rhino, threats, conservation practices, information about protected areas and bufferzone, government act and policies, rhino species, rhino population, rhino death record and other conservation related issues. It will be launched within a week and expected to be useful for all level of viewers.



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