



# Conservation Watch - Nepal

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## Alarming situation of megafaunas in Nepal

### Four rhinos poached, three tigers found dead

Nepal is reeling with the consecutive rhino poaching incidents. Along with the good news about the jump in rhino numbers, shocking incidents about rhino poaching have transpired. Within a month, four rhinos were heinously poached. Out of them Chitwan National Park (CNP) has lost three rhinos and one in Bardia National Park (BNP). An army guard was also killed in Bardia.

The series of rhino-poaching started during the census period in Chitwan National Park. A rhino census team had recovered a dead de-horned rhino at Tamor lake inside the CNP. The spot was about two kilometer far from the Kasara, headquarter of CNP. Subsequently after the census, on 26th March, an eight-year old male rhino with missing horn was found hit with handmade bullets at Jayamangala Ghol, Simalghari inside the park. The incident spot was four kilometer far from the Sauraha.

On 3rd April, an adult female rhino was found dead with bullet hit at Amaltari of CNP western sector with missing horn. The site is near the Temple Tiger Hotel.

There was not any known poaching incident in CNP since June 2007. These poaching incidents came after the gap of nine months. In the history of CNP, poaching incident was not stalled for more than two months before this.

Bardiya National Park has also seen no respite. Poachers shot dead an army man and an adult rhino in the night of 3rd April. According to the chief of Nepali Army Ranasher Battalion, Samir Singh, the hunter gunned down the rhino at Guptipur community forest in Manau VDC-9 and took away the rhinos horn. Soldier Dinesh Chaudhary, deployed for the park's security, was also killed by the poacher. Security personnel have recovered a dozen shells of SLR rifle ammunition from the incident site.

The suffering of Chitwan National Park has more compounded with the loss of tigers. Dead body of a tiger and two tiger cubs were recovered at different places. Two dead cubs were found at Chaturmukhi Community Forest, Jutpani on 30th March. After the postmortem report, Mr. Ram Prasad Lamsal, District Forest Officer of Chitwan said two cubs in an age of one and half years succumbed to death from diarrhoea. The important body parts were parted out safely.

But the locals have different opinion. They said a tigress along with these cubs were seen roaming around frequently. They suspected that tigress might have been trapped by the poachers and orphaned cubs were not able to struggle for the living.

Adding more to these terrible series, park staffs of Chitwan National Park have found a dead body of matured tiger at community forest near the Amaltari post. Park is under investigation but park officials have said the tiger might have devoured ox which has been poisoned by the poachers or locals.

## Rhinos number increase in Chitwan

A total of 408 rhinos have been spotted during fresh census in Chitwan National Park. Rhino census was carried out in CNP from 8th to 23rd March 2008. Among the figure, 100 are male, 130 female and sex status of 178 rhinos could not be established. The report says that 277 fully grown up rhinos, 51 young ones and 80 newborns are counted.

DNPWC officials have said that the count is much reliable as direct count method has been applied with technically sound equipments and experienced human resources. Two hundred manpower equipped with GPS, binocular, cameras have counted the rhinos with the help 40 elephants during the 16 days long venture.

The result has gestured stable population of one-horned rhinos in CNP which is one of the world's potential rhino habitat. In 2005, 372 rhinos were counted in CNP, which is increased by 36 number now.

Analysing the age and sex wise distribution, number of breeding adults is increasing, many female rhinos are found in their prime and the female-male sex ratio is nearing which meant promising future of this endangered species.

Nepal listed one-horned Rhinos as an endangered species in the 1960s after the number of animals hit an all-time low of just over 60. Conservation efforts saw the population rebound to more than 600 in Chitwan National Park in the early 1990s. After 2000, the rhino population declined in an alarming way with two consecutive count in 2000 and 2005 had pointed out declining number.



<b>Comparison of last three counts in Chitwan National Park.</b>			
	Count 2000	Count 2005	Count 2008
a) Age distribution			
Adults	332	262	277
Sub-adults	87	42	51
Calves	117	68	80
b) Sex distribution			
Male	305	133	100
Female	223	173	130
Not known	16	66	178
Total	544	372	408

## NTNC money embezzled in millions : Report

Financial irregularities worth millions of rupees has been found to have taken place in the then National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), when led by the King, Crown Prince and Prince.

The financial and administrative review sub-committee constituted under the convenorship of Manu Humagain, the board member of the Trust made its situation public on 25th March. The sub committee was formed following complaints that the NTNC was involved in misappropriating government funds to the tune of whooping millions in the past years.

Making the report public, prepared after the four months long study, member-secretary of the Trust, Bimal Kumar Baniya said the trust used to run as per a verbal order in the past, resulting in massive financial irregularities. According to the report, millions of rupees were released to the royal family for foreign visits including trips to England for Queen Komal's check-up, King Gyanendra's foreign visits and Crown Prince Paras' trips to Austria and France.

Similarly, about Rs 1.3 million was wasted on alcohol and Rs 130,146 on tips given away in hotels by the NTNC. Former management staffs of NTNC, Arup Rajouriya and Bijay Bahadur Shah, made about 30-40 percent of the total expenses on fuel and maintenance of vehicles. Likewise, the Rs. 37 million taken as loan by the king Gyanendra when he was prince was returned after he became the king.

The study report compiled after cross checking the vouchers from the Fiscal Year 2057/58 to FY 2063/64 states that a total sum of Rs. 41 million is yet to be settled, clarifications on the spending of Rs. 5.7 million is yet to be taken, Rs. 7.7 million remains to be collected and interest on Rs. 42.65 million is yet to be raised. A sum totaling Rs. 390 million invested till the end of fiscal year 2064 B.S is yet to be audited.

The report states that the arrears to the tune of Rs 21.98 million to be paid by different resorts and hotels inside the Chitwan National Park to the NTNC as per the agreement between the NTNC and Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation. Similarly, three laptop computers, one computer, one air compressor and four vehicles taken to the palace are never returned.

The officials at NTNC pointed out that the donation from countries abroad has also decreased by 24 per cent in the current Fiscal Year. Last year the amount collected through donation was 45 percent of NTNC's total budget.

### **Bufferzone Council should be autonomous : Bhurtel**

Mr. Krishna Prasad Bhurtel is the president of Bufferzone Management Council, Chitwan National Park. Bufferzone Management Council is responsible to handle all activities of bufferzone area. There are 22 bufferzone user committees and bufferzone management council comprises all 22 chairpersons of bufferzone user committees. The executive body of bufferzone user committee is selected from the 1500 bufferzone user groups of CNP bufferzone areas.



Mr. Bhurtel has a decade long experience in bufferzone management council and leading it since five year. Conservation Watch has talked to him on several conservation related issues. Excerpts :

#### *a) How would you assess conservation aspects in Chitwan National Park ?*

- It is difficult to earn immediate return from the conservation inputs. However, situation is encouraging now than a decade back when the bufferzone concept has kicked off. I must admit conservation issues have not received needful attention from the state but situation is improving. Bufferzone people are gradually going conscious to protect wildlife and their habitat despite of the several travails. Youths motivation towards conservation is laudatory. But inclusion of excluded, marginalised and vulnerable group on conservation is still a challenge, the perennial problem of conflicting issues are yet to be doused.

#### *b) What should be done for more effective role of bufferzone management council and bufferzone user committees ?*

- Bufferzone management council should be made an autonomous body with power at the decisive level. It should have right to acquire and mobilise fund on it's own decision. Rights and responsibilities are two sides of the coin. With limited rights, bufferzone committees and council cannot function efficiently.

Bufferzone user committees need support to raise their efficiency technically and financially. Even key members of the bufferzone committees need scientific training, trainings on conservation issues, community mobilisation etc. They should be assisted on ensuring transparency and good governance practices.

#### *c) Don't you think that the well off members of the community have dominated bufferzone user groups/committees and thus voices of poor and excluded are rarely heeded upon ?*

- Bufferzone management council develops planning and activities from the recommendations of 1500 user groups and 22 bufferzone user committees. The problem is that poor, excluded and marginalised groups rarely participate and voice on their views during the framing of work plan at the grass root level. As a consequence, their needs and voices get suppressed and not addressed appropriately.

*d) Bufferzone management council has drawn flak for spending much on infrastructure than conservation activities. What is your comment ?*

–According to the bufferzone management regulation, bufferzone user committees have to spend 30 percent of the resources in conservation program, 30% in community development program, 20% in income generating and skill development program, 10% in conservation education program and 10% in administrative expenses. But as I have said above, demand for the development activities top the priority list. Being a democratic body, we cannot refuse their voices totally. However, this trend is improving now. Most of the bufferzone people perceive bufferzone committees as a development agency rather than conservation body. The need here is to sensitize people on benefit from conservation investment and building their access towards the governmental agencies meant for development.

*e) What are the priority points to be addressed in buffer zone area of CNP ?*

- There are several points which should be addressed for the immediate and long term benefit of conservation. Compensation issues should be resolved through the legal provision. Crop insurance system should be piloted in few areas.

I/NGOs, CBOs should be encouraged for community based awareness and livelihood support program. Programs based on wildlife victims and poachers family should be intensified. People needs empowerment to raise stewardship and ownership on conservation. School education program is profoundly needed in CNP bufferzone area. Conservation activities should be related with poverty alleviation strategy. Political commitment stands atop and political level interventions and leverage should be intensified.

### **Deforestation intensifies on the eve of a poll**

Deforestation in Kanchanpur district is intensifying as the attention of the security bodies has been focused on the CA election.

Smugglers of timber have been intensifying deforestation and smuggling of timber from various places including Pipaladi, Beldandi, Chandeu, Kalapani and Kichar adjoining the Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve.

They have been selling timber to brick kilns, tile kilns and saw mills by sawing them in the forest itself, as there is no presence of forest guards in the reserve. Poaching of wildlife and felling of sal trees increased from the reserve along side timber smuggling.

Young trees of sal have been felled from community forests also including from Kalika and Janaki of the buffer zone, said the locals. The Reserve Office has said it had no knowledge of it.

Likewise, trees are felled indiscriminately by smugglers in the national forests near the Janajagaran Community Forest at Parasan VDC in the south of the district and selling them to tile and brick kilns, it is learnt.

### **National flower Rhododendron in peril**

There was a time when areas like Tinjure, Milke and Jaljale of Sankhuwasabha district were considered to be the places where rhododendron was found in plenty. However, those areas are now losing its charm.

Dozens of rhododendron trees are cut down in the jungle spread in Terhathum, Sankhuwasabha and Taplejung districts. Deforestation at Tamaphok, Madimulkharka, Nundhaki in Sankhuwasabha, Sanga, Panga, Dhungesaghu of Taplejung and north west of Terhathum has posed threat to rhododendron. Locals said they have to depend on





rhododendron trees for firewood as there are no other alternative.

Rhododendron trees are cut for firewood, timber and for sheds construction. The area is the home to 28 of 32 species of rhododendron.

Rhododendron being national flower of the country, the locals should be provided with alternative energy like bio-gas, coal, solar powered oven so that the trees do not have to be cut for firewood.

Media persons in Sankhuwasabha have gone for a on-the-spot observation at Tinjure, Milke and Jaljale areas. Media person Ganga Bista said the deforestation has given a uglier

look to the jungle. Locals show concern that there is a danger of being rhododendron limited to picture only if the activities went on unchecked.

### Conservation Calendar distributed in bufferzone areas

In a bid to inform and aware bufferzone people on rhino conservation, Empowering people For Rhino Conservation (EPRC) program has produced and widely distributed yearly Conservation Calendar on the eve of New Year 2065 B.S.

Along with the yearly date, days, special days, festivals according to Nepalese culture and government announcement, this wall calendar consists several slogans on rhinos, information and importance of rhinos, its present status and anticipated role of people for rhino conservation. The pictures of EPRC activities are also included in the calendar.

Conservation calendar are primarily distributed in the five buffezone Village Development Committees of Chitwan National Park. It has been provided to the schools, CBOs, social organisations and governmental institutions located at the bufferzone areas of Chitwan National Park.

It is anticipated that conservation calendar will ratchet up conservation motivation of the people through the information it has encompassed.

