



# Conservation Watch - Nepal

A Fortnightly Newsletter

Volume-I

Issue-13

June 05 , 2008

**DNPWC official divulges army-poacher collusion**

## **Shoot at sight order sought against poachers**

An official at the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) said that 30 Nepal Army soldiers are caught every year for helping poachers in Nepal. Under-secretary at DNPWC, Surya Bahadur Pandey revealed those soldiers are caught with proof of helping poachers though they may not be directly involved in poaching.

"Every year, over 30 soldiers are caught with proof of helping poachers. They are punished internally," he maintained. He, however, refused to give details.



Around 5,600 army men, including technicians and assisting staffers, have been deployed in nine national parks and five wildlife reserves for over two decades.

Nepalese Army has refuted this statement. "The accusation levelled against the NA is baseless," NA spokesperson Ramindra Chhetri said, adding, "It seems somebody is trying to defame the NA for some reason."

"According to the National Park and Wildlife Conservation Act (NPWCA), the wardens of the national parks have the authority to investigate the case and punish the guilty. The NA is committed to helping the government punish

the accused as per the law of the land," NA spokesperson Chhetri said. He further stated that army will not come in the way of investigation being launched by a warden of the Bardiya Park against army personnel and deserters accused on poaching involvement.

Meanwhile, concerned over the recent poaching of endangered rhinos in Bardiya National Park (BNP) with the use of modern weapons like SLR and carbon guns, experts stressed the need for change in security strategy to fight against poaching.

Speaking at an interaction program held on 15th May, Diwakar Sharma, wildlife trade expert at World Wildlife Fund (WWF) said that the present security system is inadequate to take on the poachers well equipped with modern weapons. He also said the responsibilities given to government officials and Nepal Army personnel are not defined properly.

Surya Bahadur Pandey, Under Secretary at Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) said there is a need to formulate a clear policy for the implementation of security system inside protected areas. Pandey also added, "there should be 'shoot at sight' orders to the security persons to fight against poachers'.

## Number of blackbucks increased in Nepal

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has said number of Krishnasar (Black Buck - *antelope cervicapra*) that has been listed in IUCN Red Data Book has increased in Nepal.

The animal is found in Central Zoo at Jawalakhel and Khairapur of Bardia and its number has increased to 141 in 2008. Antelopes were illegally poached for their flesh, horn and leather. Khairapur has been declared as Krishnasar Protected Area. However, poachers have increased their movement in Bardia. On 8th May, poachers killed an adult blackbuck in Khairapur VDC. Poachers have killed three blackbucks including the recent one in the last six months.

Meanwhile, lack of food due to extensive encroachment of Black Buck Protection Area in Khairapur Bardiya, has gripped over a dozen of black bucks from diseases. Officials said the black bucks are suffering from wounds in the mouth and deformities in the head and the body.

The protection area expanded in over 708 bigahs of land has been encroached upon by 3,500 people who have build over 500 huts within the protected area. Officials at Bardiya National Park and District Forest Office area said they were planning to forcibly evacuate the encroachers after their repeated request to vacate the area went unheard.

The forage planted in over one bigah of land meant for black bucks is also not available for the black bucks as locals invade the area with domestic animals. Staffers of the protection area said locals even threaten them of life whenever they try to chase the domestic animals from the area.



## Leopard-human conflict on rise

### Two leopards killed, six people injured

A burgeoning conflict between leopard and human in various parts of Nepal has raised concern. On 11th May, police gunned down a leopard near Bhadrakali temple of Pokhara Sub-Metropolitan in Kaski district. The locals had informed forest office and police that leopard was creating terror. Three locals Sher Bahadur Gurung, 65; Khum Kumari Acharya, 71; and Sita Karki were injured.



Police had to make some ten rounds of firing to the leopard. The killed leopard was taken to the District Forest Office.

In Kathmandu valley, a mighty brawl broke out between a leopard and locals of Bhadrapur-6, a VDC in the north east. Three persons were injured in the fight. However, leopard had to face death in the hand of locals. The

leopard hidden in a bamboo bush had attacked locals as they reached to cut bamboos for building a house of Chet Bahadur Thapa. The locals had killed the beast with axe and sticks.



It is not new to the locals of Bhadrabas as three leopards were killed since eight years.

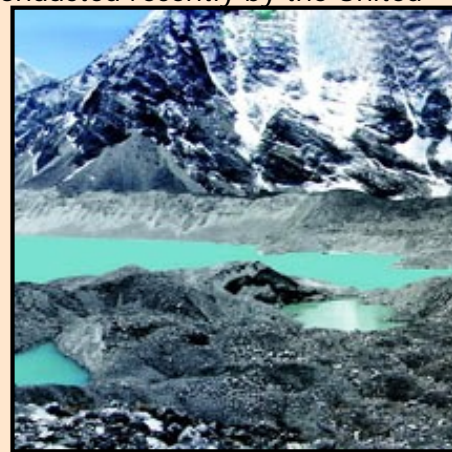
## Swelling Imja lake puts Khumbu region in peril

Imja, a fast-swelling glacial lake, is putting the entire Khumbu region in peril. The region, a popular destination for mountaineers from all over the world, will be swept away if the lake bursts. Due to global warming, snow of the Himalayan region is melting faster and water is accumulating in southern valleys. Small piles of snow, hardly spotted in the 1960s, are melting and turning into big glacial lakes. Imja is one such lake. The Everest region is one of the hotspots of glacial melting in the Nepal Himalayas.

Out of 20 potentially dangerous glacial lakes in Nepal, 12 lie in this region. A study conducted recently by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) states that Imja is the fastest-retreating glacier in the entire Himalayas.

Spotted as a group of small masses of snow in 1962, Imja has now turned into a one-square-kilometre lake. It is expanding at an alarming rate by 74 metres a year. To keep an eye on fast-swelling Imja, the ICIMOD has installed a pair of video cameras by the lake. These cameras take pictures of the lake every 10 minutes. Lake's rising level is recorded on a website through wireless internet and satellite.

"After a year-long experiment, we have begun monitoring the lake through remote sensing. Now we can at least see what is happening there and make locals aware of any impending tragedy on time," Basanta Shrestha from ICIMOD says. "The formation of glacier lakes and many other changes in the region may or may not be due to global warming, but we need to have some scientific database to predict possible accidents," Shrestha maintains.



### **Bufferzone people urge to thwart wildlife intrusion**

Farmers in the buffer zone of Langtang National Park in the western parts of Sindhupalchowk are worried of the crop decimation from the wildlife coming from the park. Sermathang, Kesharegaun, Ghangel and Tarke Bhanjyang, which are considered good pocket areas for potato farming, are suffering more. The areas located in high altitude are suitable for only a few crops including potato and maize.

A local Pemba Sherpa said wildlife destroy all the potato crops they grow. The areas are also hot tourist destinations. Local hotel entrepreneurs said there is a food shortage in the area due to the damage of crops by wildlife. Potato is planted in the month of January and harvested in July/August. Most of the farmers in the area exchange potato for other staple foods including rice and other essentials. But with the crops damaged by wildlife, they have nothing to use for exchange. Kanchhi Lama of Sermathang Restaurant said there is no food for them; forget about the tourists visiting the area.

Sermathang village, which has 130 households, alone, saw a 90 percent fall in potato production last year after the crop was destroyed by wild boars. Tarkeghyang's Kami Sarki Lama says they could not get rid off the nuisance of wild boar even after guarding the fields throughout the night. Furba Lama of Chhimighyang said wild boars destroyed all her crop and she is facing hunger for the rest of the year.

Locals said that wildlife are more straying into the farmland since the last one year. Mostly wild boars, deer and birds are the wildlife that enter the farmlands and destroy crops. They appealed to authorities to address their problem.

### **Chure range suffers alarming deforestation**

As the country concentrates on drafting a new constitution following the historic April 10 election, timber smugglers are making hay in Chure Range. Besides smuggling, locals at several places are now busy tilling land after chopping down trees in the forest area. According to District Forest Office (DFO) Siraha data, nearly 1,000 hectares of forest has been completely destroyed in the district. The main reasons for deforestation were smuggling and vacancy of forest employees at different range posts. Ram-briksha Yadav, the DFO of Udayapur stressed that forest employees, consumers and representatives of political parties should work together to control deforestation.

In Sarnath area of Sarlahi, the locals fell hundreds of trees in the forest under Murtiya Range Unit for cultivation. Farmers at Ghurkauli, Shankarpur and Rajghat are now busy tilling the land after clearing the forest. "About 75 percent forest under Murtiya Range Unit has been destroyed," said Ram Hari Lama, a local at Ghurkauli.

Similarly in Rautahat, deforestation continues unabated as most of the range posts are still without forest employees after the Department of Forest recently transferred 124 employees in the district for failing to control deforestation.

## 2 red pandas found

### A new plant species discovered

Two endangered red pandas were spotted in new habitats inside Langtang National Park (LNP) recently, a park official said. According to Jagan Nath Singh, acting chief conservation officer of Langtang National Park (LNP), two red pandas were found in the jungle located between Ghopte and Thadepani of Nuwakot district and Dhokachet of Rasuwa district inside park on 12th May.



These endangered red pandas are believed to be shifted to new habitats in search of food and peaceful habitats. Earlier, red pandas used Cholangpati and Polangpati areas located above Thulosyaffru of LNP as their prime habitats.

In Panchthar district, a new species of plant has been discovered in the remote reaches of Prangbung VDC at higher altitudes. The new species was discovered as a result of a joint effort of Nepal Janjati Botanical Society and Deepjyoti Club, a non-governmental organisation active for the last four years in conserving Himalayan flora and fauna. Botanist and leader of the foreign and domestic organisations -funded visiting team, Dr Krishna Kumar Shrestha, told that the new plant was taken to

London where laboratories confirmed that it was a new species. Botanists have named the new plant "Panchthar Begonia" while it is called "Magarkanje" in the vernacular.

Two months ago, Deepjyoti Club had launched its research on the new plant in the bordering Prangbung, Sidin, Memeng, Chyangthapu and Phalaincha VDCs. During the research, the club team found the two-foot high plant growing at an altitude of 2,600 metres. Botanist Dr Shrestha said it was a one-in-a-million find and that so far no other specimen of this plant had been found anywhere else in the world. Deepjyoti Club Director Sunil Bantawa said research was in progress to determine whether or not this new plant has medicinal value.

### Wildlife parts hoarded by American seized

On 23rd May, Nepal Police confiscated huge wildlife parts of endangered animals from the rented apartments of US citizen and legendary writer Ian Baker, who is also a contributor to National Geographic, Newsweek and several other magazines.

Ian Baker, who has been reportedly staying in Nepal for over 24 years, was found to illegally possess a huge collection of skeletons, statues and skins of tiger and deer including archaeological important materials from his two rented apartments located at Naxal and Baluwatar in the capital Kathmandu.

Senior Superintendent of Police Upendra Kant Aryal, chief of Metropolitan Police Crime Division, said the recovered materials were one of the largest collections ever confiscated by the police in the country. He said two cases will be filed against the Baker under the theft and smuggling of wildlife parts and Artifacts.

The CITES (Convention on international trade in endangered species of wild flora and fauna), to which Nepal is a signatory, also terms buying and selling wildlife body parts illegal.



Baker is learnt to be in Thailand. He has defended the cases against him through the emails. He stated that he is an ardent advocate of wildlife conservation. "Though I possess those materials, it does not mean for the trade. It is an open secret that Ranas, Tibetan and other high class families still have huge possession of wildlife parts. If I were to be punished, they should also be", he asserted.