



Conservation Watch - Nepal

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121 adult tigers speculated in Nepal

Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) in coordination with the WWF and the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) released an estimated population of the endangered tigers and snow leopards of Nepal.

It said that there were a total of 121 adult tigers spread over the four protected areas, with the highest number in the Chitwan National Park with 91 tigers. Bardiya National Park, Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve and Parsa Wildlife Reserve were estimated to have 18, eight and four tigers respectively. Similarly, the estimated population of snow leopards is 300-400 in the Himalayan region.

The department made public the statistics with the surging number of the tigers. According to camera trappings in the tiger census in 2000, it had been conjectured that there were around 60 adult tigers in Chitwan National Park. The tiger census was conducted for four months — from December 2008 to March 2009. Camera trappings and scouting footprints were the two major techniques to survey the number of tigers.

A total budget of Rs 25 million had been spent for the tiger census in 2009. There were 300 cameras placed in various parts of the conservation and park areas. Manpower of 9,480 workers, including 40 employees, 45 volunteers, and 85 technicians from Nepal government, National Park, Wildlife Conservation Department, National Nature Conservation Fund and WWF were mobilized for the purpose.



Although the first ever nation-wide estimation of the tiger population brought a positive ray of hope among conservationists, the result, they said, was far too speculative and created confusion about the actual population. The present estimation of the number of tigers through the recent census is also not conclusive as they are all based on speculation.

Meanwhile, the government has launched 'Tiger Conservation Action Plan 2008- 2012'. A comprehensive management plan has been devised aiming to increase the population of tigers by 10 percent within the first five years of its implementation. The main reason for the decline of tiger population has been attributed to poaching and illegal trade. Rapid deforestation destroying the habitat of the tigers and the lack of hunting grounds for the tigers are also a major factor in the decrease in the number of tigers. Apart from these, sporadic cases of retaliatory killings in nearby settlements also are reducing the numbers.

Campaign to protect wild buffaloes at Koshi Tappu

The Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve is launching campaign for protecting wild buffaloes, as the endangered wild species has been facing a crisis following the last year's Koshi floods. Wild buffaloes are found inside this protected area that covers 175 square kilometers.

"Despite the reconstruction of embankments of the Koshi River, there is no favorable habitat inside this protected area. Last year's floods damaged forests and pasturelands," said Nilambar Mishra, warden of the reserve. Mishra said that the people

living the bufferzone of the reserve have been entering into the habitat of wild buffaloes because of lack of effective laws and policies.

"Although army personnel and forest employees have been mobilized to protect the area, the efforts in this regard have not been so result-oriented," he said. Army personnel, who are assigned to look after the reserve, said that the people have encroached upon forests and taking out sands from pastureland. Mishra said that the habitat of wild buffaloes could not be protected without launching an effective campaign for the protection of the wildlife.

Under the wild buffalo protection drive, the reserve will run an awareness programme, chase away stray domesticated animals from the protected area, carry out monitoring activities and expand security camps, he said.



94 new species found in last decade

About 94 new species of plants, animals and invertebrates were discovered in the country in the last 10 years from 1998 to 2008, a World Wildlife Fund (WWF) report released on August 10 said. The Eastern Himalayas are now known to harbor a staggering 10,000 plant species, 300 mammals, 977 bird species, 176 reptiles, 105 amphibians and 269 types of freshwater fish.

The report on 'The Eastern Himalayas - Where Worlds Collide' details the discoveries of scientists from various organizations in the region spanning Bhutan, the north-eastern Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, North Bengal and Sikkim, Burma, Nepal and southern parts of Tibet.

Over 350 new species were discovered in the eastern Himalayas including the world's smallest deer and a gecko species dating to 100 million years. Ninety-four species were discovered in the last decade in Nepal alone. They include 40 plants, 36 vertebrates, 7 fish, 2 amphibians, and 9 reptiles, the report stated.

According to Ghanshyam Gurung, country conservation officer at WWF, one of the most remarkable discoveries in Nepal was the *Heterometrus nepalensis*, (photo) a scorpion new to the world, discovered in Chitwan National Park in 2004. "The discovery was significant as it was the first species of scorpion discovered in the country," he said. The 8cm long, reddish-black, species has a smooth carapace, and a reddish-brown tail tip or telson that contains the venom.



Similarly, *Psilorhynchus nepalensis*, a fish species was discovered from the Budi Rapti River, near CNP in 2008. *Hylarana chitwanensis*, a frog species was another major discovery. The Himalayan ecosystem provides vital habitats for different globally threatened mammals including the rhino, tiger and snow leopard among others, along with many threatened bird and plant species.

"Despite conservation efforts, the Himalayan ecosystem is under grave threat due to forest destruction, poaching, illegal wildlife trade, poorly-planned infrastructure and overgrazing by domestic livestock among others," said Anil Manandhar, country director of WWF. Besides the host of human induced and natural calamities, climate change is adversely impacting the Himalayas ecosystem through increased temperature, altered precipitation patterns, receding glaciers and threat from glacier lake outburst floods.

"All the countries who share the Himalayan ecosystem should come together with appropriate forms of systematic collaboration and exchange of information leading towards conservation of the Himalayas," said Deepak Bohara, minister for forest and soil conservation.

Eurasian Eagle Owl fast depleting !

The population of *Bubo bubo*, commonly known as the Eurasian Eagle Owl, is fast depleting owing to rise in its illegal trade. The rare species is high in demand in the international market for purposes as varied as research and its purported medicinal value.

While the extent of trade is debatable, the fact that they are no longer found in places where they were abundantly found suggest that organized trading rackets are involved in smuggling the owls out of the country, experts claim.

On March 3 this year, two Eurasian Eagle owls had fallen prey to poachers in the forests of Lumbini Development Trust. Around 20 species of owls are found in Nepal. The largest owls like the Eurasian Eagle are imperiled also because of the loss of habitat and shortage of food. The owls are smuggled mostly from the Tarai and the mid-hills. The owls were also found in places such as Kathmandu, Nagarjun, Shivapuri and Tokha, but not a single owl exists in these places anymore.

"Two owls were killed in Shivapuri five years back and their offspring was sent to Jawalakhel zoo," says Suchit Basnet, an ornithologist at Himalayan Nature, Kathmandu. Even countries like India and Bangladesh have smuggled owls for researches, domestication and stuffing, decoration and the perceived health benefits of its meat. Nepal's owls are being smuggled to other countries through a network of dealers.



Trade has proved to be a major threat for owls. People believe that its meat could be used as medicines for pregnant women. People even think that owls are worth lakhs of rupees which is untrue. Owls prices range from Rs 10,000 to Rs 60,000. There are indications of growing demand of the nocturnal bird in the Middle East for domestication as well as research on its night vision capabilities. Since these owls are main attraction for tourists visiting Lumbini, the decline in its population has also affected the tourism business there.

Two pronged approach against elephant menace

Faced with repeated threats from the enraged villagers of the easternmost Jhapa district, the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation is making efforts to restrict the movement of wild elephant herds into the villages in Jhapa from India.

The ministry has proposed a two-pronged approach to solve the problem. First, it is planning to erect electric fences around the village areas, and second bring into operation a compensatory mechanism to give relief to some 200 households whose crop fields have been completely destroyed by the migrating herds.



However, the ministry is yet to finalize the mechanism to resolve the local problems now getting out of hand. "Although the new budget has allocated around Rs 50 million for relief assistance, it is yet to be approved by the Finance Ministry," Dr. Annapurna Nanda Das, the spokesperson, Department of Forest Research and Survey, said. Das also denied having knowledge of any local-level consultation between Nepali authorities and their Indian counterparts in West Bengal over the matter.

The WWF-Nepal, on the other hand, has proposed "immediate consultation" between the eastern regional director and the district forest officer from West Bengal to address the rising problems faced by locals in Jhapa. "We have urged the authorities of both sides to immediately hold joint-meetings at the field-level and regional-level as it is difficult to divert the elephants from their traditional route," Anil Manandhar, the country head of WWF-Nepal said.

Contrary to the West Bengal state government's decision to stop and divert the herds headed to Nepal, the WWF has argued that translocation or relocating the wild animals and trying to change the traditional migratory route is not the correct way.

"Instead of changing the structure, we propose building little corridors, trenches and fortifying the village to protect the people and secondly to put in place a compensatory mechanism to give relief to those who suffer heavy loss of property," Santosh Nepal, WWF-Nepal's special policies and programs coordinator. According to Nepal, such a compensation fund should have 70-80 percent contribution from the Indian side and 30-20 percent contribution from the Nepal government.

With the Brahmaputra plains in India's Assam state being flooded, the herd began migrating, crossing the open border between India and Nepal and entering Jhapa. Since June 6, about 200 elephants descended on the village, destroying homes and crops. In the past, at least 24 people have been killed in Bahundangi alone by migrating herds.

On June 6, in Bahundangi, an elephant, said to be three to four years old, was killed after it came in contact with an electrified fence surrounding the house of a villager, Nepal informed. Another tusker was killed, either by a bullet or stones hurled by irate villagers, on June 11.

Stating that the killing of the elephants has been a rising concern for the conservationists, he, however added, "The news printed in Indian media lately that the elephants were shot by Nepali police personnel is false. The police only fired in the air to disperse the herd."

EPRC-II completed

The second phase of Empowering People For Rhino Conservation (EPRC-II) has been successfully completed in the community forests around Chitwan National Park. Under this project, rhino habitat management initiatives were undertaken primarily with the construction of ponds and development of grasslands in Gyaneshowr, Setidevi, Majhuwa community forests and Kumroj bufferzone community forest. The project started in January 2009. It was implemented by Co-Action Nepal (erstwhile Media Consultancy Nepal) with the support of Asian Rhino project Australia. The objectives of this project were to) manage suitable habitat for rhinos in the community forest areas, to improve rhino human relationship through reduced rhino entry in the village and to increase local community participation in rhino conservation activities.

Some areas within each of the forests were allocated for the grassland management in order to consolidate habitat requirements of rhinos inside the community forest area and to reduce the movement/entry of rhino along agricultural land and human settlements. As an initiation, selected area was cleared, weeds were removed, ploughed and then 'Para Grass' was planted. This grass has been selected as per the experience of the local people and recommendation made by Institution of Agriculture and Animal Science (IAAS).

Six ponds were constructed in those community forests so that they can be used by the rhino for drinking and wallowing purposes. In addition, the ponds are serving as reservoirs of drinking water for other wild animals during dry spell. Chitwan has witnessed unprecedented and prolonged drought of nearly nine months this year. The newly constructed ponds served the rhinos and other animals at the time when they need it the most. Attention has been given in the ponds to maintain a natural look.



Participation of local people was encouraged as far as possible. The members of users group involved directly during the planning of project activities. In every community forests, there are more several women groups. Hence, most of the labour works were carried by the women group members. They have deposited the wages in their respective women group funds.

Brief News

- Police held Arjun Sen, a resident of Rolpa, on 5th August from the Bhurigaun on the charge of poaching a one-horned rhino. According to the assistant conservation officer at Bardiya National Park (BNP), Ramesh Kumar Thapa, the accused had absconded after he killed an endangered rhino inside the park on April 26, 2008.

Similarly, Police on July 12 arrested Min Bahadur Moktan, 42, of Phoksingtar-3 with a rhino horn. Moktan, however, claimed an unidentified man had given the body part of the endangered animal and taken Rs. 25,000, assuring him Rs. 200,000 after selling it within a month. Police handed over the accused to the District Forest Office for investigation.

- Padam Bahadur Thapa, a local resident of Gunjanagar VDC of Chitwan district, was killed by a tiger. Thapa, the forest guard at local Majhyaula Community Forest, did not return home after he went to the forest area on 21st July. Villagers believe that the wild beast had attacked and killed him as they recovered remains of his body in the forest.



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