

## Nature Orientation Around Kaziranga National Park

### Aaranyak

Aaranyak received a financial grant from Taronga Foundation through the Asian Rhino Project on Rapid Action Initiatives to strengthen anti-poaching measures in and around rhino bearing areas in Assam.

An amount earmarked for One Speed Boat Engine budgeted at \$3500 could not be processed as the Kaziranga NP received additional funding from the Government to buy the equipment. As such we proposed in October 2009 that the remaining funds be used towards community orientation towards rhino conservation.

Accordingly one community orientation camp was organized for school children of fringe areas around Kaziranga National Park (KNP) at campus of Western Range, Bagori on the other hand another one was organized in North East Region Farm Machinery Training and Testing Institute (NERFMTTI) campus near Northern Range, Biswanath Ghat of Kaziranga National Park.

About 90 school students were provided intense orientation. Eminent conservation experts, senior officials Kaziranga National Park interacted with the children in both the camp.

The children were engaged in various environment related activities everyday throughout the camp under the guidance of Bibhuti P Lahkar, Firoz Ahmed, Soumen Dey, Namita Brahma and Jayanta Kr Pathak of Aaranyak and Uttam Saikia of Bhumi. The children participants also staged five dramas that focused on conservation of environment and various species.

A detail audio-visual presentation on the KNP presented by the Divisional Forest Officer Dibyadhar

Gogoi covering conservation initiatives, floral and faunal resources, management and flood time emergency response was instrumental in educating the children on various aspects of the magnificent rhino abode. More audio-visual presentations were made on different topics by other resource persons working on different subjects.

Children were provided with stories and scripts of five dramas with conservation messages by the organizers for staging plays in five different groups. The children had prepared and staged those plays with their own efforts in both the camps.

An interesting interaction session with a panel of experts on different conservation topics was organized where students participated actively.

Kaziranga National Park (KNP) is one of the most important protected areas in India. Spread over an area of 860 Sq. Km. in the flood plains of the river Brahmaputra, it harbors the World's largest population of one horned rhino (*Rhinoceros unicornis*), wild buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*) and the swamp deer (*Cervus duvauceliranjitsinghi*). Its conservation value was much recognized when it become one of the Natural World Heritage Sites notified in India by UNESCO in the year 1985. Although the Kaziranga World Heritage Site has been recognized as century's greatest conservation success story in India, in-terms of protecting wildlife, however community participation is still lacking and which resulted in killing of more than dozen of rhinos and elephants every year. Considering the complexity of Kaziranga landscape, current elephant status and level of conflict, this Nature Orientation Initiative is organized at Kaziranga to create awareness and



*D.D. Gogoi DFO, KNP, giving a presentation about KNP.*



*Children were taken for a nature trail.*

involve the local community in conservation.

### Community Orientation Initiative – I

The orientation activities started on 31st January 2010 at around 11 am with the registration of all the participants. After that each student had to go through a medical check up where free medicines were also provided to the students after the check up.

The camp was formally inaugurated by Sri Sambhu Saikia, an eminent retired local teacher in presence of Sri S. N. Buragohain, Director, KNP and Sri D. D. Gogoi, Divisional Forest Officer, KNP. After the inauguration, students were formally introduced to each other through an ice-breaking session. During the three day residential camp, children were engaged in various environment related activities everyday throughout the camp under the guidance of Bibhuti P Lahkar, Firoz Ahmed, Namita Brahma and Jayanta Kr Pathak of Aaranyak and Uttam Saikia of Bhumi.

A detail audio-visual presentation on the KNP prepared by the Divisional Forest Officer Mr. Dibyadhar Gogoi covering conservation initiatives, floral and faunal resources, management and flood time emergency response was instrumental in educating the children on various aspects of the magnificent rhino abode.

A young and budding herpetologist Joydeep Mondal entertained the participants with his scintillating presentation on "Reptiles of North-East India". Mr. Robin Sarma, research officer KNP, a nice presentation of "Mammals of the world". Last but not the least Mr. Somen Dey of WWF interacted and played some EE games with the students.

On each morning the participants field activities like Nature trail and Jeep Safari. In the first morning on 1 February 2010, children were taken for a Natural Trail

to Kukurakata Reserve Forest adjacent to KNP. During this trail participants saw capped Langurs and Hoolock Gibbon for first the time ever in their life. In the next morning on 2nd February 2010, children enjoyed the beauty inside KNP in Jeep safari. The Jeep Safari was also very special for student participants as some of them had seen the Indian one-horned Rhinoceros for first time.

Since it was a World Wetland Day, we also observed it with the children on the bank of Dunga Beel inside KNP. The Range officer of Baguri range was present during the programme and he addressed the students about "Importance of wetlands in our ecosystem in general and Kaziranga in particular". In addition, Firoz Ahmed a biologist of Aaranyak briefed about the "World Wetland Day and why it is observed". Dr. Bibhuti Prasad Lahkar also a biologist of Aaranyak had described "What do we mean by wetlands and its value". Finally we ended up with bird watching activity from the tower adjacent to Dunga beel. Students were provided with binoculars and a spotting scope and were fortunate to see large number of migratory water fowls and other birds. The bird watching programme was volunteered by Namita Brahma, Jayanta Kumar Pathak and Joydeep Mondal of Aaranyak.

On the evening of 2 February 2010, the children played four dramas that focused on conservation issues of environment and various species. The story and script was provided by organizers and children prepared themselves and acted superbly.

After the drama performance an interaction with a panel of experts on different conservation topics was organized where students participated actively with many interesting question. In addition, a number of Environment Education games were conducted among the students.



Children taken to Dunga Beel to observe the "World Wetland Day"



Students participating in a EE game title "Ecolocation of bats"

After the drama, certificates were distributed among the participants by Sri D. D. Gogoi, Divisional Forest Officer of KNP, Mr. P. Kalita, Range Officer of Bagori Range of KNP, Dr. Bibhab Kr. Talukdar, Secretary General, Aaranyak, Anupam Sarma & Pranab Bora, WWF – India. On the evening of 2nd February the camp formally came to an end with a camp fire where children entertained everyone with poetry, song and dance.

### Community Orientation Initiative - II

The COI – II started on 1 April 2010 at around 10 am with the registration of all the participants. After that each student had to go through a medical check up where free medicines were also provided to the students after the checkup. The NOI-III was inaugurated by Sri Bhaskar Phukan, SDO (Civil) Biswanath Chariali, in presence of Sri M. K. Vishwakarma, Director of NERFMTTI and Sri S N Buragohain, Director of KNP. DFO Sonitpur East Forest Division, A. K. Das also graced the inaugural function.

A detail audio-visual presentation on the KNP presented by Sri Robin Sarma, Research Officer, KNP about sixth addition of Kaziranga National Park and its importance in greater interest of KNP and species conservation. In addition, a number of presentations on different topics were conducted. An interesting interaction session was organized with Ms Parbati Barua, elephant queen of Assam on Asian elephants and its conservation. Mr. Soumen Dey of WWF interacted and played some EE games with the students. An interesting presentation on Turtles and Tortoises of North East India was presented by Rajeeb Basumutary. Abhijit Das, renowned herpetologist of North East India entertained the participants with his scintillating presentation on "Reptiles of North-East India. During his interaction participants also got an

opportunity to touch non-poisonous snake.

In the morning of 2 April, participants were taken to a farm named Lakhimi Multipurpose Farm Project. This Farm belongs to a young entrepreneur Neelam Dutta who doing vermicompost and organic farming. The basic idea of taking young participants to that farm is to give them an exposure as to how to can also undergo farming avoiding harmful chemicals and going for organic farming that is environment friendly.

On 2 April 2010 evening, the children had played four dramas that focused on conservation issues of environment and various species. The story and script was provided by organizers and children prepared themselves and acted superbly.

On 3 April 2010 in the morning, children were taken to visit inside Kaziranga National Park in a Jeep Safari. The Jeep Safari was also very special for student participants all of them had visited the core area of KNP for the first time and above that had seen the Indian one-horned Rhinoceros for first time. During this Jeep Safari participants also saw a herd of elephants with calf. A huge tusker and a Makhana elephant, a herd of Swamp Deer, number of hog deers, bar-headed Goose, Spot billed Pelicans, Grey headed fishing eagle and also number of other birds.

In the evening on 3 April a cultural night was hosted for the participants. The participants performed Bihu dance and song, some of them sung songs of different ethnic languages and also few hindi songs. The participants were also encouraged by the Director of NERFMTTI who himself also sung a nice hindi song.

The camp came to end in morning of 4 April 2010 with the certificate distribution ceremony by Sri S. N. Buragohain, Director KNP.v



Students participating in an EE game title "Resource Run".



Participants seen enjoying during Camp Fire.