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A significant amount of rain in the last two years should result in a high survival rate for the offspring of gazelles (dorcas, dama and dune), 'wild' donkeys and Barbary sheep, and consequently there should be no food shortage for the big predators (cheetah, caracal and perhaps wild dog).

Tourism is given more attention and has become the main source of income for the whole region. Recognizing this, both Algerian parks see maintaining the abundance of wildlife as essential; they are trying to stop illegal killings by an information campaign and by setting up control posts in the parks. After some complaints about off-road pursuit of gazelles, the tourist agencies will be more rigorously controlled, too, and wood-cutting in the most visited places is prohibited now.

In the Ahaggar National Park a fauna and flora research unit has been set up and a mammal and bird survey is under way. Foreign observers are kindly requested to communicate their observations to the park, because even for big mammals there are still a lot of problems, even at species level: the foxes (*Vulpes ruppelli*, *Vulpes pallida*, a small fennec in the mountains) and cats (*Felis lybica*, *Felis chaus*, *Felis margarita*) are poorly known and in the Tassili n'Ajjer some Touareg claim that there is a second big cat, fiercer than cheetah.

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Kaziranga's calamity — a new threat to the Indian rhino

by Esmond Bradley Martin and Lucy Vigne

Wildlife personnel in Assam must be congratulated on their efforts to curb rhino poaching. In 1982, political disturbances had resulted in a partial breakdown of law and order, and well-organized gangs of poachers carrying automatic rifles invaded the parks and reserves. Out of Assam's rhino population of about 1300, an average of 57 were killed annually from 1982 to 1986. In 1987, however, only 41 rhinos were poached in Assam (P.C. Das, pers. comm.). In Kaziranga National Park, where about 1100

Indian rhinos live (over 80 per cent of the world's total population), only 24 were poached in 1987 as opposed to 41 the previous year.

This encouraging decline in poaching is due partly to efforts of dedicated managerial staff over the past few years. It is also due to a scheme set up by the Central Government of India in April 1986 to assist Assam by allocating 50 million rupees for rhino conservation over a period of several years. To date (31 March 1989) the Central Government has given Assam 25,400,000 rupees for the rhinos, which is being used for arms, ammunition, roads, bridges, vehicles, wildlife equipment and construction of anti-poaching camps, as well as for recurrent expenditure.

Due to this concerted effort, the picture for Assam's rhinos became very promising. Then came the 1988 monsoon. Kaziranga National Park's 430 sq km lie in the flood plains of the Brahmaputra River and during the annual monsoon, the river floods 70 to 80 per cent of the park. This event plays a vital role, increasing the soil's fertility and thus allowing a very high biomass potential, as well as weeding out weak animals and so maintaining healthy populations. Normally, during the floods, animals climb on to low hillocks for a day or so until the flood water subsides; rhinos, buffaloes and elephants are not much affected. The flood levels, however, have recently been increasing, and in 1988, the highest floods ever were recorded, according to the Chief Conservator of Forests and Wildlife, Assam (Roy, 1988). The 1988 flooding caused the death of at least 38 rhinos, including 23 calves. During the peak flood level, many rhinos were dislodged from the raised ground; some calves, older and weaker animals drowned while swimming in the deep, swirling water in search of shelter. Some female rhinos with calves would not try to swim for food knowing that their calves would invariably follow and be washed away by the strong current or drown. They were stranded on hillocks for several days waiting for the water to recede, and together, they starved to death.

Temporary platforms were built, which rescued a number of animals. But to avoid future catastrophes, Mr Deb Roy proposes to widen and raise the road that runs through the centre of

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The Indian rhino usually enjoys wallowing in water, but in 1988 38 of them died in the catastrophic floods (Esmond Bradley Martin).

Kaziranga, and to raise the higher portions of ground that were flattened by the flood. He also calls for an all-out effort to acquire some high land to the south. And he wants to strengthen, as much as possible, the rescue and relief operations in order to help distressed animals.

It is the cumulative effects of the over-use and abuse of the renewable natural resources in this complex, high rainfall area, that are gradually surfacing, states Mr Deb Roy. And he believes these will no doubt intensify unless an integrated forest policy plus intensive management of the watershed of the Brahmaputra are acted upon immediately, which may be able to head off the danger of recurring extreme floods.

It is not easy to assess the damage done during the 1988 floods. Apart from huge financial losses from destroyed buildings and bridges, and of course from the value of the animals themselves

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(a breeding pair of Indian rhinos alone is worth over US\$ 125,000), the death of 1050 deer, 69 wild boar, three baby elephants, three buffalo calves, two tigers and the 38 rare rhinos themselves is irreversible. As Mr Deb Roy states, the recent high floods are a serious and new threat to the Indian rhino species.

Source

Roy, S. Deb. 1988. Kaziranga National Park, The Problems of Floods, unpubl. 3 pp.

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Major effort to save the tamaraw

A major conservation initiative in the Philippines to protect and breed the endangered tamaraw *Bubalus mindorensis* has received little recogni-

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