

ORANG

Poaching threatens to eliminate rhinos

Populations of the endangered one-horned rhinoceros continue to plummet in Assam's Orang National Park, falling from 97 in 1991 to 46 in 1999 on account of rampant poaching. In the first six months of 2000, five more rhinos have been lost to poachers. Unless the Assam government and the Centre provide the adequate resources and protection to Orang, rhinos could soon be a thing of the past in this small but important park.



BITTU SAHGAL

The Orang National Park in northeast India covers an area of 72 sq. km. on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra, 150 km. from Guwahati and 32 km. from Tezpur. Also home to buffalo, leopard, sambar, barking deer and tiger, the park is however most famous for the one-horned rhinoceros.

But the once thriving rhino population is now in trouble. There has been a serious deterioration in the security situation in Orang over the last five years, with a sharp increase in poaching reducing the rhino population to just 46 individuals in 1999.

At one time there were five Protected Areas in Assam where the rhino was found -

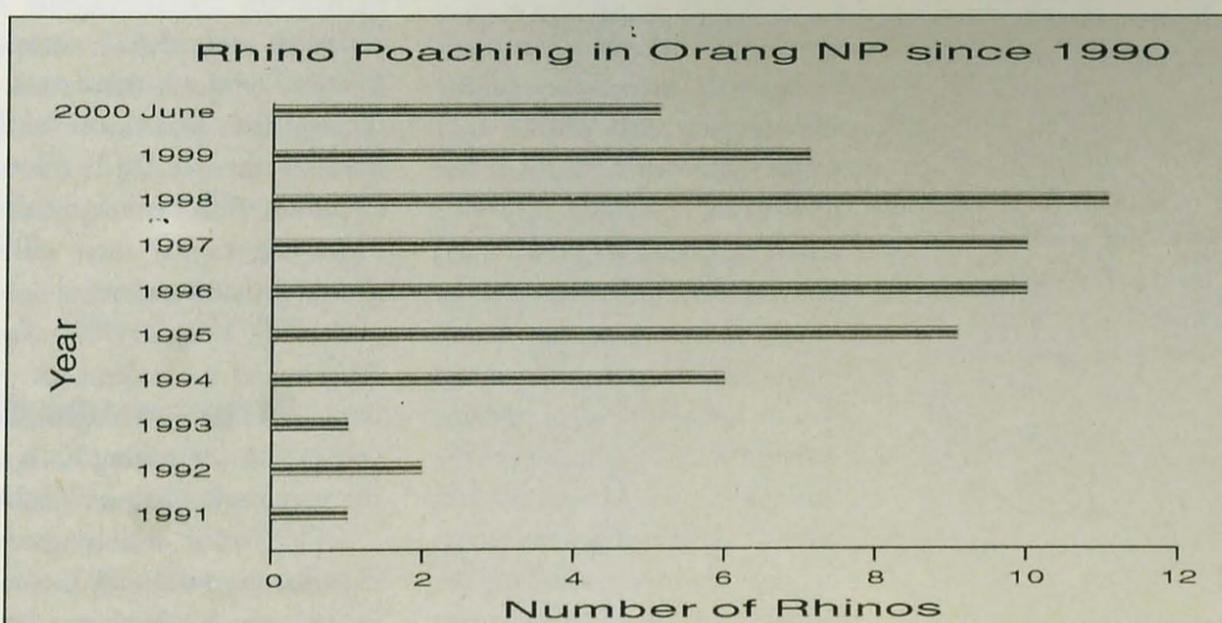
Kaziranga, Manas, Pabitora, Orang and Laokhowa. But now, rhino are found only in Kaziranga, Pabitora and Orang. Poachers and insurrectionists have slaughtered 70 rhinos in the Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary and around 80 in the Manas National Park. Ethno-political unrest and terrorism were blamed, but the state government cannot offer similar excuses in the case of Orang.

Orang has been badly hit by a lack of proper staff strength, with a high percentage of posts lying vacant, severely affecting protection work. Filling these posts is the first and most important step towards

rectifying the situation. The cooperation of civil and police authorities is also important. The increase in the rhino population in Orang in the late 1980s and early 1990s was the result of the dedicated contribution of forest officers and rangers.

Pressure needs to be put on the state and central governments to provide adequate resources and institutional support for the rhinos of the Orang National Park. 

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To ask for more protection for the rhinos of Orang, write to:

*The Prime Minister of India,
Secretariat, South Block,
New Delhi 110 001.*

*Minister for Environment,
Parayavarn Bhavan, CGO Complex,
Lodhi Road, New Delhi 110 003.*

*Chief Minister of Assam
State Government Secretariat
Dispur, Guwahati 781006*

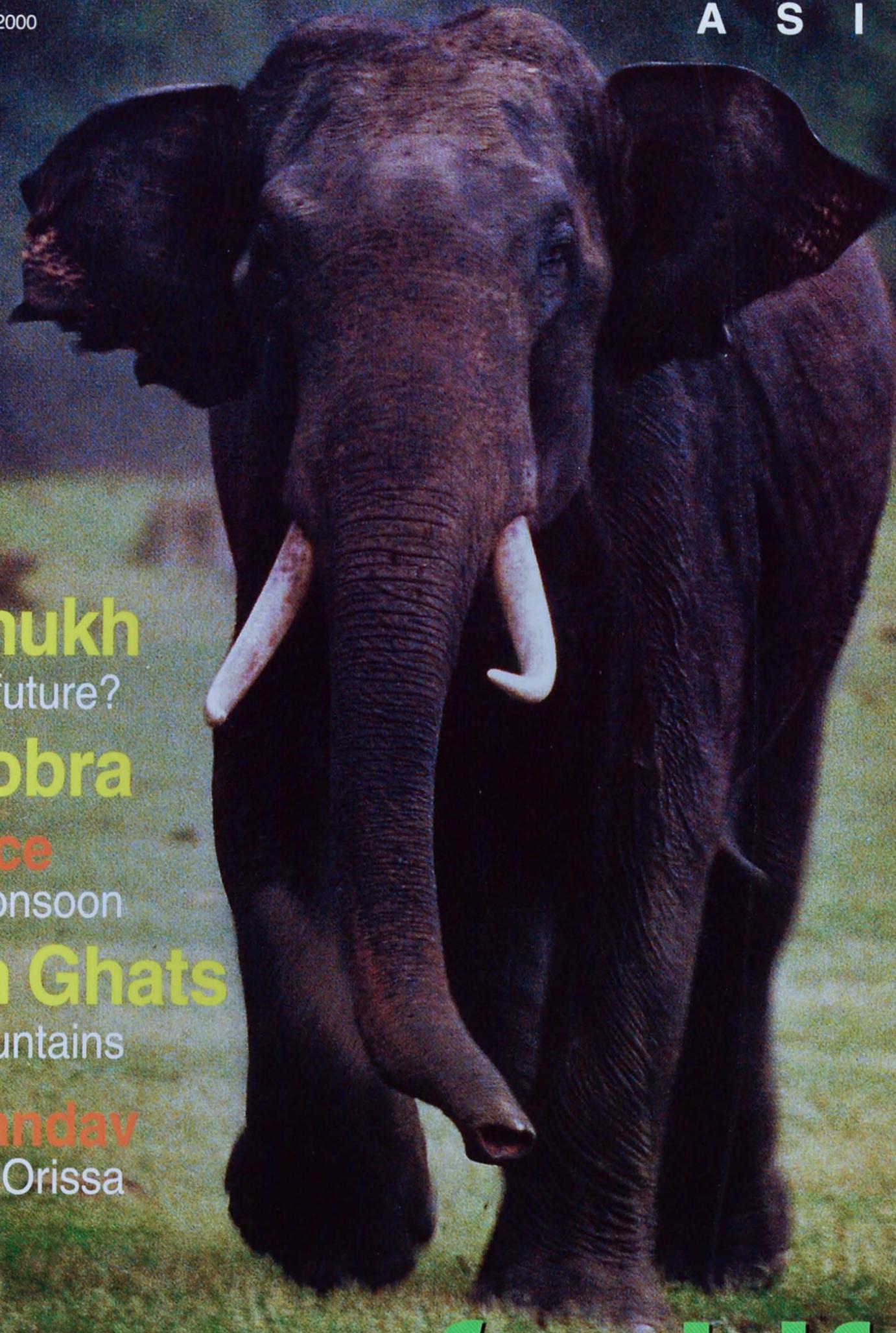
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Sanctuary

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