



# Conservation Watch - Nepal

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## Rhino census starts in Nepal

Rhino census is underway in Chitwan National Park (CNP) and Bardia National Park (BNP) in Nepal from the month of March. From the 8th March, rhino count has been started in Chitwan National Park and from 1<sup>st</sup> March in Bardia. The count is slated to complete within the three weeks. This season has an advantage for counting due to the greater visibility of rhinos.

According to Dr. Narendra Pradhan, planning officer of Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), all the potential habitat of the rhinos, inside and outside of the park will be carried during the count. Forty five observers equipped with GPS, digital cameras and binoculars are mobilized. Thirty elephants are moved parallel for the count whereas five elephants are kept in stock. Two days rigorous training was rendered for the observers. Most of the observers have past experience of rhino count.

Mr. Shyam Bajimaya, Director General of DNPWC stated that the count will be instrumental to understand rhino population, it's age, sex and geographical distribution and ultimately to develop rhino conservation strategy beside alarming decline post 2005 rhino count.



Dr. Shanta Raj Gyanawali, planning and implementation officer of National Trust For Nature Conservation (NTNC) said Rhino Count 2008 has technical advancement comparing before. "The use of GPS has been made wide this time unlike earlier counts in Nepal which would be very crucial to study rhinos location and would also help to mentor the observers," he said.

Rhino habitat is classified in different blocks and DNPWC has a plan to follow up the count with blockwise and individual monitoring of the rhinos.

Rhino count 2008 is a joint collaboration of DNPWC, NTNC, WWF Nepal and Zoological Society of London/Darwin Initiative. Previous census revealed that the number of pachyderms in Nepal declined from 612 in 2000 to 446 in 2005. The experts believe the number is declining fast. Death of 50 rhinos have been identified in CNP after the rhino count 2005. CNP is the major rhino habitat of

Nepal. Thirty one rhinos were counted in BNP during rapid count conducted last year which had 67 rhinos during previous count in 2000.

## Legal provision sought for wildlife victims

Conservation stakeholders have stressed to promulgate legal provision for the compensation to the wildlife victims. They were of the view that the issue will not be resolved without such provision because the national park resource is hugely inadequate for reparation.

During the seminar on "Issues of wildlife victims : problems and solution", organized by Empowering People For Rhino Conservation (EPRC)/Media Consultancy Nepal, Mr. Krishna Prasad Bhurtel, chairperson of the Bufferzone Management Council, Chitwan National Park said simultaneous attempts of habitat management, consolidating compensation system and lobbying to induce legal provision should be initiated so that cause and consequences of wildlife intrusion into the human settlement could be mitigated.

Senior advocate Mr. Krishna Bhakta Pokhrel presented his paper "wildlife victims and legal rights" in which he put forth the laws, acts and provisions related to national parks and compensation system. He said there is not any legal responsibility for the state to

compensate wildlife victims and thus intervention is needed to attain legal rights. Extensive discussion was held on paper after the presentation.

Assistant Chief Warden of Chitwan National Park, Mr. Ananath Baral stated compensation issue is creating backlog for the conservation goal and should be addressed at the earliest.

In seminar, wildlife victims of CNP bufferzone area narrated their ordeals and gravely implored to support for livelihood and education to their children. "My husband was a single breadwinner of our family. Three years ago, he lost his life in rhino attack. My family is now struggling for two square meal and my three children have to face hardship for education. We should not be left in lurch", Yamuna Chapagain of Sukranagagar VDC lamented. Other victim Chitra Bahadur B.K. requested to provide full treatment expenses for wildlife victim and mechanism for swift compensation.



Bufferzone Management Council of Chitwan National Park has recently increased the compensation amount amidst continuous lobbying. Now, the family member of deceased could get Nepalese Rs. 50,000 (US\$ 790) and injured could get Nepalese Rs. 15,000 (US \$237) in maximum.

### **Electric fence reduces tusker menace in Bardia**

#### **Three killed in elephant attack**

Electric fences have been set up around villages adjoining Bardia National Park to keep wild elephants from straying into human habitat and creating terror there. Park warden Phanindra Kharel said the step was taken after a torrent of complaints about elephants straying into villages and demolishing houses began pouring in. Most of the depredations by elephants occur at night, he added.

Claiming that the wild elephant menace had lessened greatly, Kharel said, "We don't activate the fences during the day. Elephants trying to barge into the nearby villages are forced to return to the park after getting a mild shock." Villagers in Thakurdwara, Shivpur and Suryapatuwa VDCs said they were greatly troubled by wild animals. They added that this year wild elephants had demolished more than 60 houses and devoured crops on 150 bighas of land. Lotan Chaudhari of Thakurdwara VDC said the elephant menace was reduced after the electric fence was installed.

In Jhapa district of eastern Nepal, three persons were killed on the spot when a wild elephant attacked them separately in Damak at around 5:00 am on 11<sup>th</sup> March. A wild elephant from a jungle in Chulachuli attacked them.

### **More hotels established inside the park**

The Sagarmatha National Park (CNP), UNESCO world heritage site, which also houses the Mt Everest, is now ruined under encroachment for haphazard commercialisation. Two resorts Kong Dey View Resort and Farak-pa Village Resort that are being constructed in the national park area were constructed in controversial circumstances.

The locals claim that the hotels are built on encroached public land and are damaging the cultural and national landscape of the world heritage site. "We are more than shocked to know that two grand hotels are being constructed in core area of Sagarmatha National Park. This is going to damage the nature and value of the national park," said Sonam Gyalzen Sherpa, chairman of the Buffer Zone Management Committee of the park.

He said the locals had been very conscious about the conservation issues for thousands of years but since the people from other areas have migrated to the sacred village for commercial purposes, the tradition to conserve nature has been destroyed.

According to the officials at Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology, the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) for both the projects were passed in November and December, 2004. On the other hand, assistant management officer at Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), Surya Bahadur Pandey admitted that it was the result of the government's mismanagement. He added that many other big hotels there have violated the norms.

UNESCO had also tried to raise the issue and had asked the DNPWC several times about the authenticity of the hotel but the government officials were found skeptical on this issue.

Though the conservation organizations have repeatedly warned about dire consequences to wildlife by the in-park hotels, their urges are not heeded upon. In Chitwan National Park too, eight hotels are in operation since decades under the condition of renewable contract period. In-park hotels are reckoned responsible for the habitat fragmentation and pollution in the park.

## Local livestock breeds facing extinction

Nepal Agriculture Research Council (NARC) has warned that many indigenous breeds of farm animals will face extinction if initiatives were not taken on time to conserve them. Chief of the animal breeding division of NARC Dr Sriram Nyupane said a few of the 25 identified local species of livestock are at risk of extinction.

Among the indigenously found livestock breeds in Nepal are seven breeds of cow, three of buffalo, four of goat, four of sheep, three of pig and one breed of horse. Likewise three breeds of chicken have been recorded to have been found indigenously. According to Dr Nyupane Srijat and Achhami breeds of cow are facing extinction. Achhami cow is considered the dwarfest breed of cow in the world. Likewise Bampudke breed of pig and Lampuchchre breed of sheep are also facing extinction. Similarly, the number of Lulu (cow), Hurra (pig), Chyangra (goat), Bhyabung (sheep) and Chauri (cow) has also gone drastically down in the recent years.

Chief at the publication and communication division of NARC Dr Bholaman Singh Basnet said efforts from all sides were needed to conserve our indigenous breeds of farm animals. "NARC alone cannot do it and the ministry of agriculture and cooperatives should also take interest in it," he added. Currently, it is believed that the population of cows exceeds seven million in Nepal. Likewise, there are 3.5 million buffaloes, six million goats, 0.85 million sheep, 0.88 million pigs and 18 million chickens.

Among the total income from livestock sector, 60% comes from buffaloes and 24% from cows, Basnet said. It is believed that 3.5 million people are exclusively dependent on livestock farming in Nepal. Worldwide, 3,831 breeds of animals and birds are found.

## 15 arrested in sweep operation

Fifteen persons involved in illegal activities were arrested and 55 buffaloes, three guns and other logistics were seized during a three-day sweep operation launched jointly by the reserve administration and the security men from the Sribaks Company of the Nepali Army in the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve.

The army men and reserve's administration officials launched the operation that ended on 2<sup>nd</sup> March after receiving tip off that illegal activities in the reserve were on the rise. Azodi Sada (50), Mantu Sada (11) and Amar Sada (18) of Saptari's Odraha were arrested for their involvement in illegal trade of tortoises from within the reserve premises.

Likewise, bird hunter Ramdev Mukhiya of Saptari's Pathari was caught red-handed. The security men also arrested wildlife traders Dipak Rai and Chhatra Bahadur Gurung of Sunsari's Prakashpur, and Arjun Limbu and Lalit Limbu of Mahendranagar. Army men seized three guns, other logistic goods and wildlife products from them, company commander Mahesh Thapa said.

Saptari's Basanta Yadav, Barram Yadav, Pratik Yadav, Devdutt yadav, Ram Dutt Yadav and Sabhapati Yadav who were involved in grazing domestic buffaloes within the reserve area allocated for wild buffaloes (arnas) by setting up illegal cowsheds within the reserve area. They also seized 55 domestic buffaloes and handed them over to the reserve administration. Legal action has been initiated against the arrested persons, the reserve administration said.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> March, a patrolling team of security personnel has nabbed an armed poacher here Bardia National Park. The alleged poacher, according to security personnel, has been identified as Ram Prasad Chaudhari, a resident of Dhadhwar-5 of the district. Chaudhari was arrested while he was poaching in the protected area. From his possession, the security men also seized one country-made gun, half kilo of fire powder and sharp weapons.

## Condolence

We are extremely shocked from the news of untimely demise of Dr. Nico Van Strien, IRF Asian Program Coordinator. It has been two years we got touch with him. We found him as a down to earth person always willing to suggest us on our efforts. His unswerving dedication and contribution to safeguard Asian rhinos and legacies will always be in our memory. His death is an irreparable loss to the whole rhino conservation fraternity.

We would like to pay heartfelt condolence to the bereaved family. May the departed soul rest in a heaven for ever.

