



Conservation Watch - Nepal

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Beeshazari lake on the brink of extinction

Beeshazari Lake, one among the eight Ramsar Sites (wetland of international importance) of Nepal, is now facing threat for the existence. The lake is nearing towards the extinction since the invasive species of grasses prominently *Eichhornia crassipes* (English name water hyacinth, local name Jalakumbhi Jhar) and *Leersia hexandra* (local name Karaute) have pervaded into the lake. Beeshazari Lake lies on the bufferzone area of the Chitwan National Park which has been also one of the major touristic attraction .

The total forested wetland area of Beeshazari and associated lake as listed in Ramsar site is 3200 hectare. This forested wetland is a part of Barandabhar Corridor Forest (BCF) that serves as a corridor for animals moving seasonally between Chitwan National Park in the south and the forest of Mahabharat range in the north.

Initiations were undertaken by Chitwan national park, bufferzone committees, tourism sectors, non governmental organizations to remove the invasive grasses. But these intermittent efforts could not be transformed into meaningful result as it lacks organized and sustainable planning. Last efforts for '*Beeshazari Cleaning Campaign*' had been undertaken during beginning months of 2006 with the initiation of local level. Nearly 25% of the lake had been made clean. But with the onset of monsoon, grasses re-surfaced. Now, the lake is virtually overlapped by the grasses thus reducing oxygen level of the lake and posing threats for survival of lake dependent floras and faunas. Consequently, the movement of birds, crocodiles, rhinos, tigers and other wildlife around the lake is decreasing. The beauty of the lake has been also destroyed gradually by these circumstances and seems as if Beeshazari lake is an open ground.



The lake has many ramifications. Most of the branches have already undergone succession and other are on the verge of succession. The main source of water for the lake is predominately annual rainfall and Khageri irrigation canal. The lake and its vicinity are used for fishing, water storage for irrigation, grazing, fodder, fuel wood etc. Fishing has been banned in this area. However, collection of fodder and fuel wood from the lake area have been regulated and monitored by buffer zone community forest. The demand for fodder is also significant due to the traditional practices of rearing livestock.

Barandabhar corridor forest is an important corridor and provides way for the movement of large mammals from CNP between the Churia hills and Mahabharat range. In Beeshazari lake forest, Royal Bengal tiger and spotted leopard are recorded. The area also supports small population of greater one horned rhinoceros, spotted deer, barking deer, sloth bear, smooth coated otter and fishing cat. Beeshazari lake basin is rich in biodiversity represented by 131 species of plants. This wetland supports mugger crocodile, small population of Indian Rock Python and several species of turtles.

Being rich in biodiversity, migratory birds used to come from thousands of miles north as far as Siberia. But activities like hunting, poaching, human encroachment amidst rife of invasive grasses have created unfavourable conditions for floras and faunas.

If Beeshazari lake is to be revived, the first step would be the formation of regular cleaning campaign and sustainable approach of lake management. Local people opine that tourism activities should be managed and revenues generated from the Beeshazari Lake should be fully utilized for it's regular maintenance.

Four more wetlands of Nepal included in Ramsar

Four more wetlands of Nepal have been able to get global recognition in Ramsar site- wetlands of international importance. Previously, none of the high altitude wetlands are recognized but interestingly all four newcomers of the list are high altitude wetlands. The newly recognized international sites are Gokyo Wetland Series of Sagarmatha National Park, Phoksundo Wetland Series of Shey Phoksundo National Park, Rara Lake of Rara National Park and Gosaikunda Wetland Series of Langtang National Park.

Nepal is home to 242 different wetlands including high altitude glacial lakes to hot springs, ponds to river floodplains, marshes to swamps and so forth. Wetlands spread over approximately 5% of Nepal's total landmass.

Among the sites, Gokyo Wetland Series consists of five lakes and lies at the base of Mount Everest. More than 80 species of flowering plants have been recorded in the Gokyo catchment. Gokyo Wetland Series is also the habitat for many wild species. Foksundo Wetland Series is a lake surrounded by steep mountain slopes. It is the winter habitat of snow leopard and musk deer. More than 155 species of flowering plants have been recorded in its catchment. Rara



lake is home to migratory water birds such as Gadwall, Mallard along with globally threatened bird cheer pheasant. Gosainkunda Wetland Series is an alpine freshwater oligotrophic lake series with alpine meadows, bogs, lakes, ponds, stream. Some 100 species of flowering plants have been recorded in the Gosaikunda catchment.

Previously, there are four Ramsar Sites in Nepal, Koshi Tappu in eastern Nepal, Beeshazari lake in central Nepal, Jagdishpur lake in southern Nepal and Ghodaghodi lake in western Nepal. The latter three were included in the Ramsar Site only in the year 2003.

The wetlands provide a wide variety of goods and services to the mankind in direct and indirect ways. Wetlands hold heavy rainfall and prevent possible downstream floods. Many wetlands help recharge underground aquifers that store 97% of the world's unfrozen fresh

water. Wetlands also act as significant carbon sinks and so the destruction of wetlands release carbondioxide - a greenhouse gas. Wetlands are reservoirs of biodiversity, they house a spectacular concentration of wetland dependent flora and fauna.

Fencing around Bardia National Park

Fencing has been started around bufferzone area of Bardiya National Park (BNP). BNP in co-ordination with Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) Program has started fencing around the buffer zone area to distract the wild animals.

Community Forest Coordination Committee under Khata range post has started erecting electric traps to save crops and houses from wild animals. According to Baburam Pariyar, member of the committee, 50 Kilometers of community forest is being covered by the fencing and Rs. 800,000 has been handed over to the community for wooden pillars. Rest of the materials like wire and batteries will be provided by TAL program. The committee encompasses 34 community forests covering 17,000 hectors land.

The buffezone area of Bardia National Park has alone recorded 1271 cases of elephant-caused damage in a period of 6 years. During this period, damage to crops, houses and injury to people were the highest of all elephant-caused damage. Crop damage accounts for nearly 56% of all incidents by elephants.

Central Zoo draws million visitors

Around one million people visited the Central Zoo (CZ) at Jawalakhel in the last fiscal year of Nepal. Keeping this surge in visitors, the management body is all set to upgrade the physical design of the zoo. The number of visitors had dwindled in the past decade due to the insurgency in the country.

R K Shrestha, director of the Central Zoo said that about 28,000 people visited the zoo on Baishak 1, 2064 (first day of new year in Nepalese calendar) alone.

"In the earlier years, the number of visitors never exceeded nine thousand a day. In this context, we have been encouraged to improve the zoo." Records show that more than 3,000 people visit the zoo everyday.



The zoo houses over 1,000 animals, including 15 endangered animals like one-horned rhino, tiger, clouded leopard and python.

Elephants make foray into human settlements

Intermittent incidents triggered by elephant-human conflict are continuously hitting newsstands in Nepal. Such incidents appeared one after other during the first week of October, in Eastern Nepal.

Five people, two of them minors, were injured at separate places in Sunsari district when a wild elephant attacked them on October 5. People living near forest areas in the district have been very edgy due to the frequent attacks on them by the elephant. Prem Bahadur Tamang and his two children, of Bishnu-paduka VDC, Sunsari district and Jaya Bahadur Shrestha of Dharan Municipality were injured by the elephant. Similarly, Chandra Kumari Rai of Dharan sustained serious injuries after the elephant attacked her near her house, police said. The injured are receiving treatment at BP Koirala Institute of Health Science in Dharan.

Similarly, two wild elephants sneaking from Koshi Tappu Wild Sanctuary have caused huge damage to paddy crops in Prakashpur, Madhuban, Western Kusaha and Shreepur VDC area. According to the affected farmer, elephants have damaged paddy crops cultivated in each 4 to 7 katthas of land belonging to Kusheswor Mandal, Kapleswor Mandal, Rajender Majhi, Shiv Raj Rawat, Baijanath Mandal, Umesh Mandal, Baldev Mandal, Parsuram Mandal, Sukan Ram, Ajhyya Sardar.

A campaign has launched by the Shree Baksa battalion of army at the initiative of locals to chase away wild elephants after it continued to cause damages in those VDCs.

The army has formed a group to chase away wild elephants within 24 hours, said battalion commander Major Mahesh Thapa. The Nepal army has provided 20 KG to 40 KG rice as relief to each families as compensation.

Elephants used to make forays into areas of human settlement and destroy crops, raid food stores, damage water sources and infrastructures, injuring and killing people in the process. Because elephants usually cause large-scale damages to crops, infrastructure and injure people, people usually view elephants as being far more hostile than other wildlife species such as tiger.

It has been assumed that the landuse practices could be one of the key factor to induce human-elephant conflict. Human-elephant conflict has more intensity in Eastern Nepal than in Western. In Eastern Nepal, there are no forest areas big enough for elephants to live inside thus forcing huge conflict. In contrast, Western Nepal has quite a few large forest blocks and in some cases due to restoration work spearheaded by Government of Nepal and WWF.

Threat of 'repeating poachers' looms large in CNP

Those persons once arrested as suspected poachers but convicted or released after juridical process, were again found involving in such a crime. Furthermore, they are bonding to resort into poaching activities.

Recently, on 23rd September, 2007, Chitwan National Park officials arrested Rana Bahadur Kumal of Meghauri VDC,



Chitwan and Hom Bahadur Lama of Belhani VDC, Nawalparasi from the Meghauri VDC along with 168 numbers of bullets, explosives and a motorcycle. They sheltered at the house of Santa Bahadur Kumal and hatching poaching plans from there. All three of them belongs to the indigenous and impoverished group, lagging far behind from the education and awareness. Santa Bahadur was in the search list of the park and has absconded.

According to the Chitwan National Park officials, Rana Bahadur and Hom Bahadur were previously arrested on similar charges. Hom Bahadur was sentenced to 15 year jail by Chitwan National Park but the Appellate Court gave him a clean chit in 2004. Rana Bahadur, however, walked out of the

jail in June, 2006 after completing punishment of 5 years and six months. Both of them further united to attempt for poaching activities.

Chitwan National Park has now charged them for attempting rhino poaching on 8th August, 2007 at Island jungle, near bufferzone VDC of Chitwan National Park, Meghauri. According to the officials they shot at rhinos but rhino fled unscathed.

Buddhi Bahadur Praja of Khairani VDC, Chitwan who got amnesty from the government, is also active in poaching activities now, as park officials claimed.

These situation stressed on special intervention for arrested and convicted poachers. During the case study of Media Consultancy on 2005, some of the imprisoned poachers had expressed interest to work for anti poaching activities if the government guaranteed their livelihood means.

Teachers urge to include conservation education in curriculum

Science and environment teachers of bufferzone area of Chitwan national park have urged to include conservation education as a local curriculum. Government of Nepal has induced the policy that local curriculum can be developed and implemented in school level regarding the local context, relevancy and need. However, initiations have not been taken hitherto to include conservation education at least in the schools of bufferzone area of Chitwan National Park.

During the workshop on "School Conservation Education" organized by Empowering People For Rhino Conservation (EPRC) project, Media Consultancy Nepal (with the support of Asian Rhino Project, Australia), teachers have also discussed on challenges while initiating so. Schools are not capable enough to develop and implement the curriculum on conservation education as most of them have to strive with financial constraints for even teachers salary, to maintain basic infrastructure and for other operating costs.

Chief guest of the program Mr. Gopal Krishna Poudel, Chief Education Officer of Chitwan, said he was for the very first time attending the program based on conservation education during his entire government service period of more than two decades. Mr. Poudel



opined conservation education on school will be very useful in the areas around Chitwan National park where there has been little or inadequate knowledge on conservation and the conflict between park and people are growing. He also pledged to render any support from his side that would help to implement conservation education.

Mr. Kamal Jung Kunwar, acting chief warden of Chitwan national park confessed on distraction of the park on school conservation education though conservation education has been prioritized in the policy. He said park has constraints of human resources and thus are primarily focused on anti poaching activities. He emphasized on the role of non governmental sectors for this endeavor.

During the workshop, teachers have drawn conclusion that could bolster the conservation education in the schools. They have recommended that investment on school conservation education should be increased, organizations involving on conservation should include school conservation education in their work planning, conservation education should be included from the primary level, informal education should be provided for indigenous and ethnic groups, various conservation related clubs established in the schools should be organized and co-ordinated in the network, network of environment and science teachers should be formed and they should be mobilized as conservation guide in school and community too.

Twenty environment and science teachers of bufferzone core areas have participated in the workshop.



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