



Conservation Watch - Nepal

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External mechanisms needs to be bolstered : CNP Warden

In the recent months, incidents of rhino poaching have increased significantly in Chitwan National Park (CNP) Nepal. According to the information provided by CNP, 19 one-horned rhinos died after the rhino count in March 2008, out of which 12 were brutally poached. Poaching incidents were more frequent in May and June this year where 3 rhinos perished due to the poaching or poaching attempts.

On the wake of these incidents, Conservation Watch talked with Dr. Narendraman Babu Pradhan, Chief Warden of Chitwan National Park (CNP). Here are the excerpts :

1) Rhino poaching incidents are on the rise in latter months. Public and media are blaming on CNP for tardy reaction. What CNP is doing to tackle this situation?

- It should be noticed that only in-park security measures are not adequate to rein in poaching. CNP is a huge area where our existing resources allow us for only random patrolling. CNP would have more advantage on anti-poaching movement if external mechanisms were effective. After the sudden increment in rhino poaching, we have consulted different stakeholders ranging from community and professional organisations to related government actors. They have committed to lend us needed support. We conducted high level meeting comprising upper rung of DNPWC (Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation) and Nepalese Army. After these intensive deliberations, we have chalked out new strategy. (Leave it secret). Nevertheless, what I can say is that we have stressed on community involvement as well.

We are also facing difficulties from illegal infiltration of bufferzone people in the park area. We have a record of arresting 250 people in a day. These sort of activities are also playing spoilsport on our anti-poaching activities

2) Apart from new strategy, what CNP has thought to consolidate 'external mechanisms'?

- Fore and foremost, we are planning to activate District Conservation Co-ordination Committee (DCCC) which is presided over by Chief District Officer (CDO) and comprise key actors such as CNP itself, Police, Army, District Forest Office etc. Plans are afoot to regulate monthly meeting and appoint focal persons from each of the participating organisations.

In the likely manner, we are holding discussions with bufferzone user committees to establish a mechanism in each of the 21 such committees to ensure effective and incessant information sharing regarding poaching. As poachers enter CNP area via the community, we are planning to promote effective communication measures between community and park. We have already established hotline telephone number 056-621069 for this purpose.



3) Recently CNP has begun daily rhino monitoring. What is it and how is it going so far?

– It is an initiative to update daily status of rhinos round the year. Now, daily rhino monitoring has been conducted from 16 posts. Each of rhinos will have separate set of marks in their body and CNP staffs equipped with camera, GPS will notice individual rhino status. It is only an additional work of the park staffs along with their routinely task as well as a bid to optimize our resources.

4) We have witnessed several disheartening cases in CNP where none of the bullet-hit rhinos survived. Why this happened and what is needed to end this situation ?

– Veterinary unit of Chitwan National Park comprises small team led by a veterinarian doctor. Our veterinary strength is limited on primary treatment only. We desperately need support to upgrade our dispensary capacity on the par of hospital level. We would be happy to work in unison with national and international organisations on this regard.

Dogs killed to save blackbucks in Bardiya

The stray dogs of Bardiya are being poisoned after they were widely found killing black bucks, an endangered species. The campaign of killing dogs has been undertaken for the preservation the endangered species. So far, 83 stray dogs have been poisoned and killed from the joint initiative of Bardiya National Park, and Krishnasar Protection Committee and the local administration.

Mukunda Subedi, a local, said that killing the street dogs was not only the way that would help in the preservation black bucks as they also attack other wild animals such as hyenas. "The surrounding of black bucks habitat should be fenced with bars and enough water should be provided at the grazing areas so that the endangered species would not stray out of their habitat," he added.

Earlier in the May, the most bizarre poaching-related killing were seen in Blackbuck Conservation Area, 36 kilometers from Bardiya National Park. One blackbuck was shot death but the poachers had only taken its tail. Another blackbuck's entire stomach was cut out but the rest of the body was left behind at the spot. Park officials say that another blackbuck had its ears cut off while yet another had only its belly button removed.



The blackbuck is an endangered antelope which is found in Nepal only in Bardiya. Blackbucks live in grasslands outside the forests and their habitat was recently declared a Blackbuck Conservation Area, covering a 1,625 hectares.

According to MulChandra Yadav, chairman of Krishnasar Conservation Committee, the total number of black bucks in the area is 216 out of which 81 of them are male and 115 female while 20 young kids.

The antelope has a special way of indicating that it has sensed danger or death: It leaps three times into the air. Rakesh Basyal, chairman of Integrated Conservation and Development Centre (ICDC), an organization working for antelope conservation, said the black antelope was in a dire need of a natural habitat.

"The government and international donors should show greater concern for antelope conservation. However, poaching has gone down drastically since we launched an awareness campaign for the villagers," claimed Basyal.

CNP reels under ecological disturbances

CNP officials have warned that the park's ecology could get disturbed as natural water resources go dry. Over three dozen natural ponds inside Chitwan National Park (CNP) have either dried up or turned swampy due to the long drought. Currently, CNP is focused on grassland management inside the park area. However, no initiative has been taken to save the ponds.

Local conservationists say improving ponds is equally important as grassland management. They claim that many animals, including the one-horned rhino, have been straying far off from their usual habitat in search of water. There are 41 ponds inside CNP. Some are artificially built, but the ones drying up are natural ponds.

Moreover, invasive plants have encroached upon large swathes of grassland near the ponds, where animals like the

one-horned rhinos and deer graze. Mikania micrantha, a type of invasive plant species locally known as Banmara, has grown over the ponds and flourished towards the grassland limiting both food and water for animals. Ashok Bhandari, assistant warden of CNP said that there is pressing need to preserve water sources and grassland to maintain biodiversity and ecological balance. Almost all the ponds are drying up rapidly and this will have a terrible impact on animals and the environment."



On the other hand, tourism entrepreneurs of Chitwan have been unable to make tourists lengthen the stay of tourists due to the dwindling number of rhinos, a major attraction.

The entrepreneurs have also been relying on Tharu culture, Chitwan National Park safari, elephant safari, sun-setting sights and village tour, which comprise a three-day package. On top of all this, rhinos have become a rare sight here due to rampant poaching of the endangered species. All this does not bode well for Sauraha, which is rich in biodiversity.

Tour operators are already talking about the loss rhino poaching could cause. Tourism expert Dr. Rudra Upadhyaya says rhino conservation is a must for the survival of Sauraha's tourism industry. Tharu culture and lifestyle, another attraction, is also under threat.

Status of Nepal's endemic mammals unknown

– Kushal Regmi

Only two mammals are endemic to Nepal. But due to lack of proper study the present situation of Csorba's Myotis, a species of bat, and the reddish brown Himalayan field mouse is unknown in the conservation world.

A 2008 illustrated book by HemSagar Baral and Karan Bahadur Shah titled 'Wild Mammals of Nepal' catalogs all of Nepal's mammals. The book lists only these two mammals as being endemic to Nepal. Csorba's Myotis and the Himalayan field mouse are not listed in IUCN's red list of endangered animals but this doesn't mean that their status is secure. No major study has been done on these species in recent times to establish their survival status. "These are small mammals but are important to our eco-system because they are found only in Nepal," said Karan Bahadur Shah, co-author of Wild Mammals of Nepal.



According to the book, the bat Csorba's Myotis (common name myotis csorbai) is native to the mid-hills of Nepal. It has dense soft wooly pelage with the hair on its back longer than that on its belly. The entire body of this mammal is chocolate brown but the face and muzzle are a darker brown. Apart from that, mammal experts in Nepal know little about this bat.

Another mammal endemic to Nepal, the Himalayan field mouse (scientific name, Apodemus Gurkha), derives its name from the place where it was first recorded: Gorkha. With white feet and a bushy tail that is 9-14.5 cm long, the Himalayan field mouse likes to feed on insects but also makes do with seeds of grass and other plants.

Shah says that the Himalayan field mouse was first discovered by conservationists in the 1970s in Gorkha and was also spotted in Kaski, Lamjung and Mustang districts but follow-up studies have not been done on this tiny rodent found only in Nepal. Shah feels that there are two reasons for the lack of information on these two mammals.



"First these two mammals havenot come to the attention of conservationists and secondly it is difficult to secure funding to study them because they aren't popular animals in the conservation world," says Shah. Rinchin Shrestha, a mammal expert at WWF, also feels that there have been very few studies done on the endemic mammals of Nepal.

While experts say that endemic species are important because they will have clues to the uniqueness of the ecosystem in this region, lack of any studies means that conservationists are losing out on a lot of important information on the ecosystem of the region.

Fund crunch hits orphaned animals

A leopard cub born a month ago in Chitwan National Park has been living under the care of park officials. A wild bear cub has also been living in their care for six months now. Park officials complain of lack of funding to take care of these motherless cubs.

"We receive only Rs 17,000 to take care of wild animals in need, but the amount is not enough at all," says Dr Narendraman Babu Pradhan, Chief Warden of Chitwan National Park. Pradhan said that he has been forced to use his own personal savings after repeatedly failing to source funds to care for the orphaned animals.

Along with the two cubs, the park also has a grown tiger and a year-old leopard. The 80 kgs of meat the leopard eats per month is funded by the National Trust for Nature Conservation. The tiger, named Narayani, was previously fed using funds donated by an NGO, but this funding ceased once the NGO heard Narayani was about to be shipped to the capital's Central Zoo.



The National Park is never short of wild animal orphans. It is not only responsible for animals orphaned at the park, but also those orphaned in other areas which are sent there for care. The park usually sends the orphans as gifts to foreign countries, but by observing the state of the wild animals under Chitwan National Park's care, it is clear they are not receiving the care that they deserve.

Dolphin numbers decline in Karnali

The number of dolphins, one of the world's first protected species, has been found to have decreased in the Karnali River. The dolphin number is declining in the river, the major habitat, because of the dam constructed by India in Girijapuri --15 kilometers south from Nepali border. Dolphins often come down to Girijapuri, but they cannot return back once they cross the dam. If a conservation officer's statement is anything to go by, the number of dolphins has decreased to a shocking level.

According to Ramesh Kumar Thapa, assistant conservation officer of Bardiya National Park, the number of dolphins has fallen to six from hundreds recorded in 1980. It is said that the lack of protection and incessant hunting of dolphins for its oil and skin, the abundance of this species has sharply declined.

In a bid to protect the declining number of dolphins, some people in the district want private sector be entrusted with the responsibility of dolphin conservation. Chairman of Gulariya Chamber of Commerce Rajendra Prasad Kandel said dolphins would get proper protection provided that the task of protecting the endangered mammals was handed over to private sector. "This would also help bring in more tourists here," he added.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) revised the dolphin's threatened status from Vulnerable to Endangered in 1996.

Locals embarks on lake conservation

With Nandan Lake being encroached upon gradually, local residents have taken up conservation of the lake listed in the World Heritage Site. Utilizing the amount apportioned by the Tourism Ministry for the lake, they are engaged in conservation efforts. Situated at Hakui and Sanai VDC in Nawalparasi district and spread in 142 bigha area, the lake is being encroached in absence of proper conservation.

Locals have constructed a dyke around the lake with the help of Rs. 250,000 aid provided by the District Development Committee, Nawalparasi. They say the encroached land will be vacated. Following news reports by various media, local residents have roped in themselves for the lake's conservation. Earlier, locals had demanded mapping of the lake and preparation of a master plan for its conservation.

Habitat management work elates community forest

In a bid towards rhino conservation, a pond and a grassland area has been developed in Majhuwa community forest area of Chitwan. This is one of the community forests where Co-Action Nepal (CAN) and Asian Rhino Project Australia (ARP) has implemented habitat management project outside of Chitwan National Park. Majhuwa community forest has been spread along 400 hectares and has regular presence of one-horned rhinoceros. Despite this fact, not a single wallowing pond was constructed nor grasses for rhinos were abundant there. As a consequence, rhinos were left with no option other than to penetrate into human settlements.



"Yearly we spend huge amount to fence around human residing areas but rhinos easily trample those pillars. With the construction of pond and nearby grassland in around 2 bighas, rhinos are seen confining themselves", Tek Kanta Pandit, president of Majhuwa community forest informed. He further added, "It makes me a huge pleasure when I see rhino steps around pond and grassland". The project has also supported for the construction of a well and well-ring which would provide water even in a time of dry spell.

In the aftermath of project inputs, Majhuwa community forest has conducted sensitization programs for its users and request them to remain far from habitat management area. "Committee members are very excited from habitat management work. This is the first ever financial support we received in our history. Because of this work, district forest office have promised us to provide a pump-set whereas other organisations have also assured us for the support", Shivalal Shrestha, Secretary of the forest beamed. Elated from the first project, community forest has already decided other areas for pond and grassland.

What are the challenges ? "We have only two forest guards to look after 400 hectares and they need to be more alert in habitat management area. Secondly, most of our consumers belong to indigenous community who need empowerment on conservation", president of the forest Pandit said.

Brief News

One dies in rhino attack

One person died in the attack by a rhino that came out of the Chitwan National Park on 7th June. The man who died was Ekrange Lo 60, of Jagatpur -5. The rhino attacked him near the Simaltandi lake of Jagatpur in western Chitwan, the National Park said. He died on-the-spot after being attacked while cutting grass in the morning, locals said. The rhinos come to the villages in search of better pastures.

Wildlife traders arrested

The Kailali District Forest Office on 14th June held three people with hide, teeth and claws of leopards. Police said the three — Haribhan Bohara of Udasipur, Ambar Kunwar of Malakheti and Bishnuraj Bhatta of Masuriya of Kailali district — were trying to smuggle the animal parts into China through a hill route. Likewise, in Chitwan, police arrested two persons with a tiger skin on 29th June. Accused were Ramesh Gurung (Chitwan) and Sonam Tamang (Dhading). They were busted from the lodge at Ratnanagar and handed over to Chitwan National Park. On July 7, District Forest Office Chitwan arrested Suk Bahadur Praja (50) and his nephew Purna Bahadur Praja (22) with a tiger head from Bharatpur-11, Ganeshthan. They were riding on a cycle with a tiger head inside the bag.

