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The Jungle Express

December 2008



Liontailed Macaque from the Western Ghats evergreen forest.

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Cheetal Stags in Kanha National Park

© Sujoy Banerjee/WWF-India



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Long Live Sathyamangalam!

A RAY OF HOPE FOR WILD ANIMALS AFTER SATHYAMANGALAM WAS DECLARED A WILDLIFE SANCTUARY.

A chunk of forests in the Sathyamangalam Forest Division in north Tamil Nadu was declared a Wildlife Sanctuary late this year. While the conservationists cheered on yet another success, elephants noisily chomped on grass, a tiger silently stalked on its prey and countless other beautiful animals went about doing their daily business, oblivious of the fact that they now have permanent home to themselves.

Though conservationists had been demanding declaration of these forest as a sanctuary for some time now, the efforts of Mr. Ramsubramaniam, DFO, who pressed for it bore fruit. This declaration translates into a secure habitat for Elephants and Tigers and a more resources for the conservation of wildlife and their environment.

Flanked by two Tiger Reserves (Bandipore Tiger Reserve and Mudumalai Tiger Reserve buffer zone) and Erode Forest Division on its east, the Sathyamanagalm WLS has now become a biodiversity preserve. With the valley of Moyar River at its core, the Sanctuary connects the Western and Eastern Ghats and forms an important corridor used by Elephants to migrate between Mudumalai WLS and the Eastern Ghats. Over 800 Elephants, both resident and migratory are dependent on this patch of forests.

These Elephants make their presence felt with heaps of dung sitting across the forest. And if you are alert

you may see a blackbuck or a chital dash across the road. This region is truly a biodiversity hotspot and houses leopards, wild dogs, sloth bears, porcupines, wild pigs, pangolins, sambars, barking deer, four-horned antelopes, guars and langurs.

But like all forests in India, Sathyamangalam too is threatened by people and their plans. Cases of conflict between people and Elephants were a matter of concern until WWF came in to help mitigate conflict and address other issues. On conflict with Elephants, while the rich manage to save their crops, it is the poor who have to put up with the brunt of Elephant transgressions. They resorted to laying electric wires directly plugged to the mains leading to electrocution of Elephants and other animals. However, WWF's action is bearing fruit. Elephant deaths due to electrocution is now reduced. Building awareness among villagers and booking cases against illegal fences has had its impact.

WWF has been working in this area extensively by helping village communities erect electric fences and training anti-poaching watchers in jungle craft and effective patrolling. WWF has also improved their reach by providing communications equipment. A motor boat to patrol the Bhavani Sagar Reservoir is a recent acquisition. This will help control poachers coming in through the reservoir. Many wildlife offenders in the area have been identified and work is under way to take them away from such activities.

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Anamalai Sanctuary, Tamil Nadu

© Mauri RAUTKARI / WWF-Canon

And the ecologically disastrous railway line that was to pass through the Satyamanglam WLS, has been spiked off. Thanks to the sustained efforts of WWF and other NGOs.

Satyamangalam WLS will live forever making sure that the gentle giants of our times – the Elephants – continue to migrate between the Ghats, and the Tigers expand their territories along the Sanctuary's own river, the Moyar.

Thank you Tamil Nadu!



BLACK BUCK

Painted Stork in Ranthambhore National

© Sujoy Banerjee/WWF-India

Electrocute Criminals. Not Elephants

A GENTLEMAN TUSKER PAINFULLY ELECTROCUTED IN THE NILGIRI PLATEAU.

A wild tusker was mercilessly electrocuted by a live electric wire left loose in a potato field on the Nilgiri Plateau. The incident took place during the wee hours of 23rd December and the news came in the next day.

This 35-year-old Elephant, with his companion took the Ghat road on the Kalihatti slopes everyday. The gentle giant had no past history of attacking people or fields. While walking on this road, he was known to stop and let the vehicles past first, something we humans could have learnt from him. While trying to stroll through the field, he walked right into the wire and lost his life.

According to the initial investigations, the killer wire was illegally plugged to the mains and then to the fence. Used as a protection measure from crop-raiding Elephants, it was put up by the night watchmen of the field on the instructions of his supervisor. The poor watchmen, a tribal, has been arrested. The supervisor and the owner of the field are absconding. While gathering evidence, the Forest Department (FD) confiscated the illegal wire, pole and the fence.

Proceeding very professionally, a postmortem was conducted and electrocution was confirmed as the cause of death. Since this was a clear case of theft of electricity, the Electricity Board has also registered a case.

This case of electrocution is the first in the Nilgiri plateau area. Considering its ramifications, a press conference was later organised by the District Forest Officer Nilgiris North- Mr. Sounderpandian and the Executive Engineer of Electricity Board, Mr. T. Haldorai. Describing the details of the case, they explained that the culprits had seriously violated many laws and it called for stringent punishment.

As has happened in the past, offenders are almost

never convicted in cases involving crime against wildlife. Therefore, the FD worked hard and documented the case well. Clear guidelines were laid, instructing what an investigating officer should do and how the postmortem should be conducted. This will help other officers to prove the case in the courts if another Elephant is lost under similar circumstances in the future. WWF-India extended all logistics, intelligence and documentation support for the operation.

An animal that respected people and didn't mind sharing his home with them has died. A death which was cruel and could have been avoided. We lose more Elephants to electrocution than to poaching and its time to save many unsuspecting animals from the horrors of electrocution.



ELEPHANT LIES DEAD IN THE FIELD



Female Sambar deer in tall grass. Rajaji National Park

© A. Christy Williams / WWF-Canon

Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted

A FARMER DECIDES TO TAKE POACHERS HEAD ON TO SAVE WILD ANIMALS.



MR. HARJEET SINGH (L) BEING FELICITATED DURING A SPECIAL FUNCTION ORGANISED IN HIS VILLAGE.

A field bordering the forests in the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve is now off limits for poachers. And no one is happier than the wild animals of the area.

Do not be surprised. Because Harjeet Singh, the owner of this field is a changed man. He now wants to protect nature. And this at any cost. Even if that means that he has to fight dangerous poachers.

But the poachers, regulars here were not aware of this. As usual, when they were walking through Mr.

Singh's field to go to the forests, he warned them not to use his farm. But when they turned up again, they didn't know an angry conservationist awaited them. Angry, Mr. Singh fought them and the poachers scurried away, leaving behind their weapons. The Forest Department was immediately informed, but despite a hunt, the poachers could not be nabbed. The result: they never returned and there have been no cases of poaching reported from this area again.

Mr. Singh, one of the many farmers of the area was once not worried by wild animals being poached. But this changed after he participated in a training organised by WWF. Many villagers were taken to Pilibhit and trained in vermicomposting to produce organic manure. But Mr. Singh did not only learn what was being taught and set up a big vermicompost unit but also declared that he intended to protect the wildlife. And now his family has become active in eco-development work and inspire other villagers to conserve nature.

This gesture of his was appreciated by many apart from animals. He was felicitated by the Forest Department and WWF at a function organised in his village of Bhagwantnagar. A determined farmer battled against armed poachers. Something never heard of before. And now it seems good time has come back for the wildlife of the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve.

WHAT'S ON THE GROUND

Eravikulam National Park - Shola forest.

© Chris Hails/ WWF-Canon

The runaway mountain goat of south India

WWF CONDUCTS SURVEYS TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE ENDANGERED NILGIRI TAHR



A KID LOOKS INTO THE CAMERA.

In the green mountains of south India lives a goat, with long bent horns and big childlike eyes. Shy and always on the run towards the scary cliffs, it seems even the Gods are favoring them with mists from nowhere blinding curious onlookers and helping the animal disappear. The Nilgiri Tahr is the runaway goat of the Western Ghats and the first love of many conservationists.

It is found nowhere but on the slopes of Western Ghats, northern most being the Nigiri Hills. Now re-

stricted to small pockets, it once thrived all along the Western Ghats. But hunted to a critical number in the colonial times, followed by loss of habitat due to planting of exotic species of plants, a conservative estimate says that only about 2,200 are left in the wild now. Their stronghold is in the Eravikulam Grass hills complex, where about a 1,000 of these elusive goats are found. And the rest are spread over the Western Ghats in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

But today it's not hunting but the presence of human activity that is threatening this animal. Developmental projects and unrestricted tourism are pushing the Nilgiri Tahr down towards the tipping point. And their small isolated groups are not helping them either. One stroke of a fatal disease threatens to wipe off the entire population or inbreeding, which will lead to sick and weak kids that is a cause of worry too.

Therefore, WWF decided to ease out the creases from worried Tahr parents, anxious about their future generations. A survey is being conducted to locate them across the range and strategies being made to strengthen their population.

Says Mohanraj from WWF, "We started work in the Mukurthi National Park. This Park is the northern most habitat where Nilgiri Tahr is found. Individual cliffs were looked at and this yielded very good sighting compared to earlier work. Now a rapid estimation of Nilgiri Tahr location on the ground is being car-

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Nilgiri Tahr, Eravikulam National Park.

© Gerald S. Cubitt/ WWF-Canon

IF YOU ARE SPOTTED, THE GAME IS OVER AND YOU'LL SEE THE HERD DISAPPEAR, HANGING ON THE EDGE OF THE CLIFF, WHERE YOU DARE NOT GO.

ried out, based on the information gathered by local people, earlier published material and from the GIS maps”.

Says Predit from the Nilgiris Eastern Ghats team who was a part of the survey, “A herd can be approached from a distance of 500m and if you lay still and move without catching their eye, you can go as close as 10-15 m too. If you are spotted, the game is over and you'll see the herd disappear, hanging on the edge of the cliff, where you dare not go”. Describing them, he said, “The males are called saddlebacks as they have a patch of white on the rump and which resembles a saddle. They are usually grey-brown in colour and young males and females are yellow-brown. The mating season is during the monsoons in June through August. And the offspring called kid is born in January. The Tahr prefers open grasslands and stay very close to the cliffs, to which they flee when they sense danger and make whistling sounds and stomp their feet to alert others”.

The only species of wild goat found out of the Himalayas, the the Nilgiri Tahr had reached the brink of extinction in the later half of the 19th century, but is on the road to recovery after focused efforts made by conservation organisations like the Nilgiri Wildlife Association, High Range Preservation Society. The was brought out of that crisis, but is still treading

dangerous waters. Efforts are being made to evaluate populations in Srivalliputer Range of Grizzled Giant Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary, Sivagiri and Kadanallur Ranges of Tirunelveli Forest Division, Kadayam Range of Kalakad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve and Variattumudi in Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary and identify more areas with the help of the Forest Department and conservationists.

WWF also plans to work in Srivilliputhur-Rajapalayam population which has a potential to hold 500 animals and on the Thiruvannamalai-Upper Kothayar-Variattumudi population at the southern end of Western Ghats.

Presently surveys and conservation work is concentrated only in areas where there are known populations of the Nilgiri Tahr. Once new spots are located across the landscape, then the team will study individual locations and estimate the number of Tahr, followed by threat analysis. Then WWF hopes to clearly understand the challenges to save this animal and prepare a conservation strategy with the help of other organisations working along the Western Ghats.

The Nilgiri Tahr can happily chomp away the grass for the moment because if things go as planned, there will soon be plenty more roaming on the slopes of Western Ghats.

A tiger in a middle of a crisis

AFTER RUNNING AWAY FROM HOME A TIGER CREATES HAVOC

ATiger from the Pilibhit Forest Division in Uttar Pradesh strayed away from its home and is in news for all the wrong reasons. He has already killed two people and injured one and now the hunter is on the edge, with scores of people ready to silence him forever.

Around 5th November, 2008 it was reported that this Tiger had moved out of the Pilibhit Forest Division in the Terai Arc Landscape (TAL). Domestic Elephants from the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve were sent by the FD to tranquilize the animal and bring it back. But the operation could not succeed.

Soon the Tiger moved to the Shahjahanpur Forest Division and remained there for about 4-5 days. Then his next stop was South Kheri Forest Division and around the 3rd December he was reported to be present in the Sitapur Forest Division. The Tiger, not de-

cluding to stop, moved to Sidhauri and then to Biswan and later to Mehmoodabad. Finally he reached the border between Barabanki and Lucknow where he killed a 14-year-old boy and consumed him almost completely sparing only the head and a leg. Possibly, the Tiger, constantly on the move, was hungry and attacked the boy.

Subsequently, the Tiger was declared a man-eater and orders were issued by the Chief Wildlife Warden of Uttar Pradesh to hunt him, under the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. At the same time, four domestic Elephants were mobilized with tranquilizing guns to capture the animal.

At the time of writing this report, the animal had moved to Faizabad district and is now in a place called Rudauli which was earlier in Barabanki district and now in Faizabad district. There is a small patch of forest of about 1000 ha, stretched over a 4-5 km area, but the animal is moving constantly. The Wildlife Institute of India is doing all it can to tranquilise it.

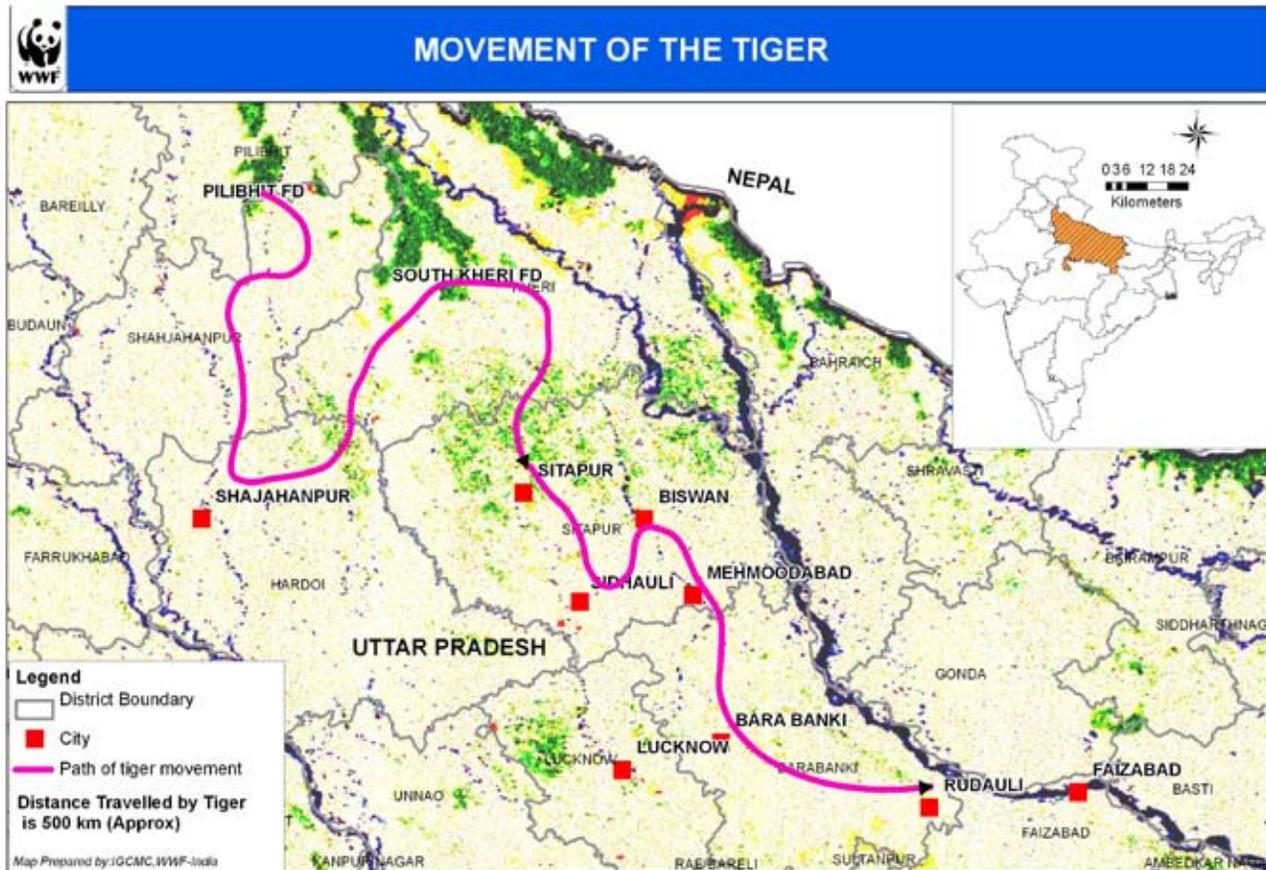
WWF-India had immediately provided the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department with a satellite radio collar which was handed over on the 17th December, 2008 all possible support as required has been promised.

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WHAT'S ON THE GROUND



Swamp Deer and Asiatic Water Buffalo herd.

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MoU to save endangered animals

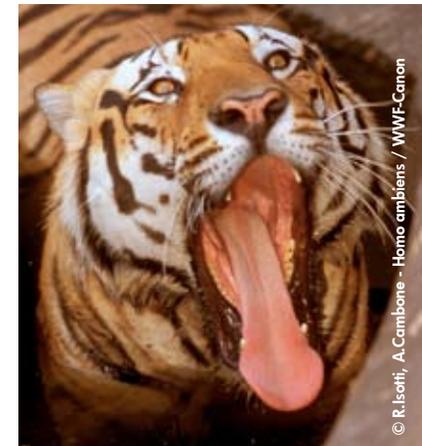
WWF INDIA AND THE FOREST DEPARTMENT OF ASSAM SIGN AN MOU FOR CONSERVATION OF SIX ENDANGERED SPECIES OF THE STATE.

by Tariq Aziz with inputs from Aishwarya Maheshwari

WWF India and the Assam Forest Department (FD) have signed an MoU for conservation of six endangered species of the state for the next 5 years. The two will work closely for eliminating the threats faced by the Indian Tiger, one-horned Rhino, Asian Elephant, Swamp Deer, Asiatic Water Buffalo and Ganges River Dolphin. These six flagship species of Assam are among the endangered list. "It is hoped that this joint effort will improve the conservations status of these and associated species in the state of Assam," said Mr. Ravi Singh, the CEO of WWF-India on signing the MoU.

Among the six mammals selected for conservation action is the Swamp Deer, the Asiatic Water Buffalo and the Ganges River Dolphin. These three equally endangered species of Assam are often forgotten in the din for conservation of the Tiger and the Elephant. The Swamp Deer (IUCN - Vulnerable and IWPA- Schedule I) with a brown coat, woolly in texture and the darker stags smarting manes prefer to live in grassland and swamps of Assam mostly along with Rhinos and Elephants.

Yet another impressive species of the grasslands and swamps of Assam is the Wild Buffalo (IUCN-Endangered, IWPA- Schedule I). Its sweeping horns are the largest among the mammals of the world. Its propensity to breed with domestic Buffalo poses a serious threat to the population in Assam.



© R. Isotji, A. Cambone - Homo ambiens / WWF-Canon

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Ganges River Dolphin.

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Among the only male rivers in India, the Brahmaputra is home to a large population of the Ganges River Dolphin (IUCN-Endangered, IWPA- Schedule I). Until the recent discovery of the Indus river Dolphin in River Beas by WWF, this Dolphin was the only true freshwater cetacean in India. Found only in the in Ganges, Brahmaputra river systems, its numbers are fast depleting.

Assam has a tremendous potential for Tiger conservation with large tracts of its habitat in the Himalayan foothills and along the river Brahmaputra. Though Kaziranga NP has a large population of the striped cat, its numbers are precariously low elsewhere in the state. This new collaborative initiative for conservation of the Indian Tiger (IUCN-Endangered, IWPA-Schedule I) in Assam is likely to give fillip to Tiger populations in the state.

WWF-India is already working very closely with the Assam Forest Department on the conservation of the Asiatic Elephant and the Indian Rhino. Indian Rhino Vision 2020, a joint programme with the Government of Assam, is creating new populations of the Rhinos (IUCN-Threatened, IWPA-Schedule I) in Assam by reintroducing them in habitats from where they were wiped out. Work on managing human-elephant conflict and restoring Elephant corridors and habitats is already underway. The Elephant is listed as

Endangered by IUCN and is on Schedule I of IWPA. Assam is home to one of the largest remaining Asian Elephant populations.

The coming together of the Forest Department and WWF will bring to table new ideas to conserve the wildlife of Assam. And we hope to see the animals thriving in this North-Eastern state of India.



Lucky criminals

VILLAGERS IN ASSAM TAKE AN OATH TO SAVE THE CATTLE-KILLER TIGERS.



VILLAGERS TAKING AN OATH DURING ONE OF THE MANY MEETINGS HELD WITH THEM.

Would you believe it if you were told that 'criminals' are being sheltered by the villagers of Assam? That they got together and took an oath to save them, despite losing their cattle to these 'attackers'? You must, because these 'criminals' are some of the 1,411 Tigers left in the wild in India and despite their unruly behaviour, villagers are now happy to save them, after WWF decided to intervene.

Tigers around the Kaziranga National Park in Assam have regularly been killing the cattle of poor farmers. Because many were forced to abandon paddy cultivation after losing their bullocks, such attacks have led to serious conflict like situations in the past. Desperate to save their cattle and in the fear of being driven to penury, the villagers retaliated. The action: a cub was found dead and one was rescued after poisoning the previous year when about 30 cattle were lifted by Tigers.

Last year, the Tigers were fortunate to have not faced real fury. But this year it seemed their luck would run out.

After having killed 113 domestic animals from January to November, conservationists were on the edge. There were fears of extreme action by the villagers, especially after 7 cows were found dead in a shed in the Buri Main Than, a Hindu temple on NH-37.

But WWF decided to do something before any Tiger was targeted. Since the official compensation distribution is a long drawn procedure, an Interim Relief Programme was rolled out with the help of the Forest Department, Kaziranga Park Authority. WWF provided the funds and relief for 90 cases of cattle lifting from April to November '08 has already been paid for, according to the specific guidelines of the programme. Many meetings and discussions with the distressed villagers were held and efforts were made to calm them down.

And these efforts got an extraordinary response. WWF was successful in gaining the villagers' trust. And they have promised not to harm the Tigers. Many even signed up for the signature campaign- 'Roar of the Tiger' and took an oath to protect the endangered animal.

Tigers around Kaziranga now have truly remarkable neighbours. Who in the times of poverty are going to protect them even if they have to lose their cattle. And thanks to the teams of the Forest Department and WWF, the luck of these Tigers is far from running out.

Finally Guilty

WWF ORGANISES A WORKSHOP FOR JUDGES SO WILD ANIMALS GET A FAIR TRIAL



There are courts, judges, lawyers and victims. But no accused. Because it is felt that poachers are not real criminals.

This callous attitude towards those who commit crime against wildlife is routine in India. In a country with a dismal record of conviction of poachers, there was a serious need to sensitise judges. And hence WWF conducted a training workshop for a batch of newly appointed judges in Madhya Pradesh.

Around 9 Judicial Magistrates First Class (JMFC) attended the workshop. These judges are the first to receive cases of wildlife related crimes.

Madhya Pradesh, a state of the Royal Bengal and one of India's most biodiversity rich regions, is under attack and the judges were told about this. They were informed of the agonizing state of the Tigers and the ravaged forests, for which greedy poachers are responsible. Details of the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) was also discussed.

With this drive it is hoped that there will be a serious attempt to fight poachers and efforts will be made to secure what is left of the numerous endangered animals and forests of this state. That judges will exercise their power and poor conviction rate of offenders of WPA would soon be history.

Workshops like this one are in the pipeline for District and High Court judges, District Government Pleaders and Police Prosecutors throughout the landscape. The fresh batch of newly appointed judges in other districts in the landscape is also planned.

And any conviction will go out as a strong message, which will deter those who thought that an animal in the wild could be killed at free will.

Know Them Well

WWF ORGANISES AN ORIENTATION WORKSHOP ON WILDLIFE OF TERAI ARC LANDSCAPE FOR JOURNALISTS

Seasoned journalists of the Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) took a break from reporting politics and crime and went back to the classroom as WWF organised an orientation workshop for them on the wildlife of the region.

Living close to the forests and having wild animals as neighbours, news on them is covered both by the print and electronic media. Sure they were being reported about, but mostly as if they were a nuisance. Incidents of a confrontation, the wild animals were always the villain and the losses were exaggerated.

This orientation exercise was attended by 22 journalists from many newspapers and news channels. Mr. Tewari, Landscape Coordinator TAL gave them a low-down on the status of the various Protected Areas of the region. WWF's Senior Project Officer, Dr. Kandpal highlighted the diversity of the area and the endangered species found. Films on conservation 'Leopard

in the Lurch' on the status of Leopards in Uttarakhand and 'Don't Buy Trouble', a movie on illegal wildlife trade were also showed to the participants.

This programme was also a platform to bring the Forest Department and the journalists together. The always-looking-for-news reporters were explained that their reporting on any case of poaching after a leak alerts the culprits and seriously affects the investigations. And thus they were told be responsible journalists and report if that meant it would help the poachers. The Divisional Forest officer (TAL West Forest Division) Mr. P. K. Patro, while addressing the participants shared his views on media reaction on wildlife related cases.

The journalists were happy to have such a workshop. A senior journalist of the leading newspaper 'Dainik Jagran' Mr. Vinod Papni said that this type of a workshop was very useful for media personnel to increase their knowledge about wildlife and forests. He said that the receipt of authentic news from the related department is a necessary part of any responsible coverage. Mr. Ganesh Rawat from Sahara News said that it is the duty of every media person to make his contribution to wildlife and forest conservation.

Now that such a workshop was organised, WWF hopes that the animals have just found their perfect media partners!



PARTICIPATING JOURNALISTS.

Let's Talk About Them Too

BEAUTIFUL WILD ANIMALS OF INDIA, WHICH NEVER GET TALKED ABOUT

by **Aishwarya Maheshwari**



BLUE SHEEP OR BHARAL

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Mammalia
Order: Artiodactyla
Family: Bovidae
Subfamily: Caprinae
Genus: Pseudois
Species: Nayaur

Blue sheep or "bharal" is one of the mountain ungulates inhabiting the North and North-West Himalayas (Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim) in India. Red-brown in summers and slate-blue colour in winters, Bharal is appropriately named the Blue Sheep. This change in

colour helps it to camouflage with ease with change in seasons.

With a black stripe running along the middle of each flank, down the front of the legs, it has round, smooth horns which curve backwards over the neck. Having picked up features from both goats and sheep, Bharal has no face glands and has smooth horns that resemble a goat and males do not sport beards and have feet glands like sheep.

To find bharal one must seek the higher altitude areas of its distribution range from 3,500 m to 5500 m from mean sea level. Usually they are found between tree-line and snow line. Bharal prefers grassland where it feeds on grass lichens, hardy herbaceous plants and mosses.

The males are usually solitary or found in small groups of 4-5 individuals, while females are found in groups of 10-50, even going up to 200-250 individuals. Like other ungulates Bharal plays an important role in the ecosystem of the mountains. It is one of the preferred preys of the Snow Leopard.

The species has been classified low risk, near threatened species by the IUCN (1996) and Schedule I of Indian Wildlife Protection Act. Today the Bharal is severely threatened by habitat loss, fragmentation, degradation and poaching.