



WWF

for a living planet

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Moist temperate forests in North district of Sikkim, with the backdrop of Mt. Khangchendzonga, the highest peak of India, are the preferred habitats of Red Panda in the region.



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WWF team in the temperate forests of Sikkim

WWF TEAM FINALLY GETS LUCKY AND SPOTS THE EXTREMELY ELUSIVE AND ENDANGERED RED PANDA IN SIKKIM.

By Partha Sarathi Ghose



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In the forests of the North-Eastern Indian state of Sikkim, a team of researchers had been battling hostile terrain, storms and incessant rains for five years just to find the cute and cuddly Red Panda. An animal which had successfully evaded our team for years.

On the morning of 3rd January, Mr. Basant Sharma from WWF spotted a Red Panda in Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary. While trying to run away from the jub-

lant team, the Panda managed to corner itself on the treetop, where it was well photographed. While the team was still coming to terms with this sighting, two more Red Pandas decided to raise the team's happiness quotient. The team's cook, Mr. Anshu Sherpa spotted one on 4th January and on 14th January the team spotted another Red Panda. WWF recognised Red Panda as a priority species and initiated a project in 2005 to conserve them in the Khangchendzonga



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Landscape – India and subsequently initiated work in the Western Arunachal Landscape in 2008. Along with the state forest departments, other government agencies, NGOs and CBOS, scientific institutions and communities, WWF is working in the Eastern Himalaya for long-term conservation of Red Panda. The idea is to create a potential distribution map of Red Panda using the GIS domain and then carrying out ground truthing to check existing situation in these areas. Threats, if any, will be identified and a participatory mitigation strategy will be put in place.

Discovered in 1825, 50 years before the Giant Panda, the Red Panda is unfairly known as the Lesser Panda. It has many other names- Fire Fox, Fire Cat and Cat Bear.

The Red Panda lives in temperate forests of China, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and Laos PDR.

A reddish brown, bushy-tailed mammal, the size of a cat, Red Panda has long white whiskers and patches of white over its eyes and cheeks. Red Panda has a beautiful long ringed tail, which it uses as a wrap-around blanket in winters. Sluggish on the ground, Red Panda is an expert climber of trees and spends most of its life on them. They love to eat bamboo and use their strong tongues to strip tender green leaves off the bamboo stem. Their digestive system cannot take in bamboo well and they have to eat large amounts of it every day to survive. They also eat grass, roots, nuts, berries and lichen. They will even eat insects, bird's eggs and chicks.

Known to be solitary, the only time two Pandas are spotted together is during the mating season. Each year in June or July, female Red Pandas give birth to one to four babies. Called cubs, Red Panda babies are born with their eyes closed and are tiny and weigh only about 200g. Cubs are usually born in a hole of an old tree, which the mother lines with leaves and sticks. Old growth forests are thus very important for the survival of Red Pandas, as they provide dens and hiding places for both cubs and their parents. For the first four months, cubs depend on their mother for milk. And later mother and her cubs move from tree to tree and together look for food.

Protected in India under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, Red Pandas are today fighting a lonely battle for survival. Severely threatened, they are losing their home as forests are readily being destroyed to collect timber, fuel or converted to agricultural land. Today tourists and domestic cattle have raided their homes. Their only source of food- bamboo is also being cut down. They are also poached for their fur and are victims of the cruel pet trade.

Rhino poaching gang busted in Assam

THE LAW FOLLOWS UP WITH DREADED CRIMINALS AFTER A RHINO IS FOUND BURIED IN A VEGETABLE GARDEN.

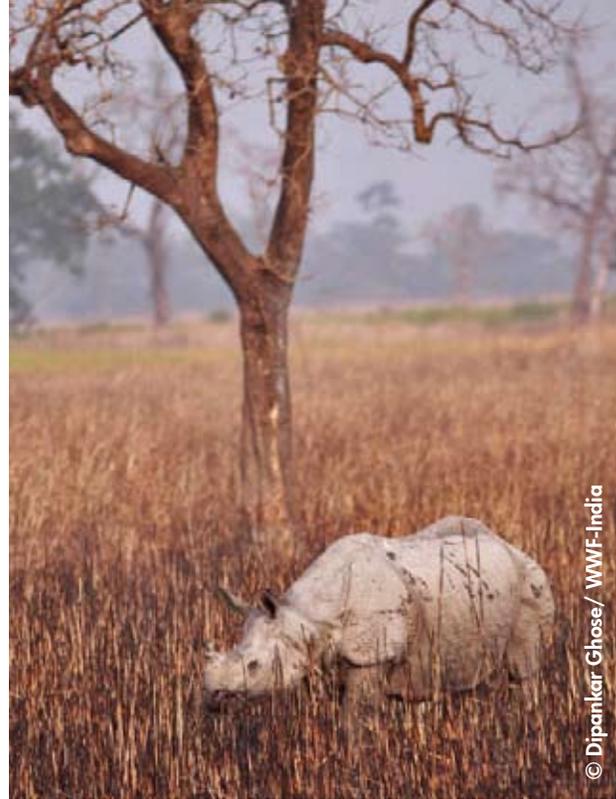
By Garga Mohan Das

A decomposed body of a female Rhino was found buried in a vegetable garden in the backyard of a house in Assam. The horn of the Rhino was missing. And it wasn't only the horn the animal was killed for. With it missing were the nails and tail too. The poachers had struck again in Kaziranga National Park.

But, unlike cases in the past, this time the criminals involved were apprehended by the police. Beginning from Gabendra Pegu, who converted his garden to a makeshift cemetery to the one who shot the Rhino, all were arrested. Pegu confessed to have received Rs. two lakh in advance to procure the horn. After Pegu's interrogation the police discovered the names of other criminals involved in this case and soon began a hunt to nail them all.

On 19th January, the police raided a house in Aphala Gaon and arrested Bipul Kaman. And this wasn't the end. The very next day, another dreaded poacher- Nomal Doley- was arrested from Kameri Sapori. Hiding in the granary, he was nabbed before he found his way out.

After sustained interrogation, the criminals confessed



to their involvement in the poaching of this Rhino and led the police to the weapons used- a handmade gun, safely lying in the drain of Doley's house. He admitted to killing two Rhinos with that gun.

More and more Rhinos are being killed today, all for their horns which is an ingredient of traditional Chinese medicines. Money drives organised gangs to kill these innocent animals. But, this time they were stopped before they could strike again. A Rhino was lost, but many more saved.



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Grounded? Not Any More!

A JUVENILE HIMALAYAN GRIFFON BILLED VULTURE SENT BACK HOME.

By Garga Mohan Das

A highly endangered Himalayan Griffon Billed Vulture was rescued by some villagers on the foot hills of Karbi Anglong hills.

A juvenile, who just sat and refused to fly, was found by Mr. Binison Ingti, a young Karbi boy. He took the bird home and informed WWF about it. Soon he rushed to the WWF office, where a veterinarian from Center of Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation (CWRC) was waiting to provide immediate treatment to the vulture.

Weighing around 7 kg, the neck of the bird was drooping. After examining it, the doctor declared it had not had any fractures or injuries. Except that it was still too young to be away from its parents and in severe shock. It could have accidentally fallen from a tall tree, where these vultures build their nests.

The bird was then transferred to a cage and shifted to CWRC for recuperation. There it was given a healthy diet and nursed back to health.

Soon it was flying in the cage and was ready to take a real flight out. Weighing a healthy 8 kg, its leg was banded for identification. Finally it was freed by a team from WWF and CWRC, accompanied by personnel from the Forest Department of Kaziranga National Park near the Kerosin camp, under the Kohora range.

The vulture was spotted in the same area after a week of its release.

It is indeed a happy moment for the team as their efforts to encourage locals to conserve nature led to this rescue operation.

Save Manas!

THE GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM ORGANISED A CAMPAIGN TO SAVE MANAS NATIONAL PARK

By Amit Sharma

“SAVE MANAS – An Awareness Campaign” was organized by Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) with the prime objective of promoting Manas National Park and its beauty to a bigger audience and also to spread the message to the world community. The program was supported by WWF, IFAW and WTI all working to help conserve the biodiversity of Manas and also to revive its lost glory. GUP-SHUP 94.3FM and The Telegraph were the media partners and Bodoland Infrastructure Development Company (P) Ltd. organized the event. Two popular young artists (singers) from Assam, Mr Zubeen Garg and Mr Angarag Mahanta also supported the cause and were the main attraction in the evening’s cultural program.

This is the first time in the history of Assam that a program of this magnitude and nature was organized

for the cause of conservation which received wide appreciation. Mr Tarun Gogoi- Honorable Chief Minister of Assam, Mr Rockybul- Hussain Honorable Minister for Forest & Tourism, Assam and a host of dignitaries attended the program along with a large number of citizens from different walks of life.

The Chief Minister of Assam, Mr Tarun Gogoi in his inaugural speech congratulated the efforts undertaken by the BTC and Forest Department to revive the glory of Manas. He highlighted the need for conservation of wildlife and specially forests and called upon all to lend a supporting hand for the future of mankind. He categorically stated that the problems faced by Assam today viz.- Human-Elephant Conflict, floods and erosion can be directly linked to the loss that the state is facing due to the depletion of tree cover. He further stated that if proper attention is not given to



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the issue the state and the region is going to face greater hardship due to global phenomenon like climate change and global warming which ultimately is going to affect the food security and economy of the common people. He called upon the concerned people to concentrate upon derivation of sustainable gains to boost the economy of the state based on the natural and forest based resources and also to promote the concept of naturenomics.

The Forest Minister, Mr Rockybul Hussain highlighted the schemes and programs undertaken by the government for the development of tourism and promotion of conservation in the state and in Bodoland. He stated that Indian Rhino Vision (IRV) 2020 has gone a long way in reviving the glory of Manas by bringing back the Rhinos and pledged that all efforts will be undertaken to populate Manas by translocating at least forty (40) Rhinos from Pobitora and Kaziranga.

There were a number of speakers who dealt on different aspects and one of the key speech was by Mr Khampa Borgoyari, Deputy Chief of BTC. He presented the vision prepared for the development of tourism and reviving the lost glory of Manas NP. He categorically thanked all the NGO's for their contribution to the cause and specially lauded the efforts made by WWF, Aaranyak and WTI in Manas. He dedicated the present success story of Manas to the efforts of the fringe villagers, specially the youth.

Manas Maozigendri Ecotourism Society (MMES) a key player in the revival of Manas specially through their efforts to convert poachers of yesterdays to become today's protectors was felicitated by handing over a letter of appreciation. Three ex-poachers who are now members of MMES and work to protect Manas were also felicitated on the occasion.

The program ended with a grand musical extravaganza led by Mr Zubeen Garg and Mr Angarag Mahanta. Mr Angarag Mahanta, who is also a wildlife enthusiast has been nominated as the brand ambassador for Manas and he has promised all possible help from his end to promote the beauty of the Park at different forums. He also released the theme song on Manas prepared specially for the occasion.

This is just the beginning and BTC plans to organise more of these campaigns in different parts of the country with help and support from all.

Excuse the Elephants

VILLAGERS DECIDE NOT TO RETALIATE
AFTER SOME ELEPHANTS KILL A LOCAL

By Dr. K.D. Kandpal

Villagers of Gaindakhali woke up to a rude shock on the morning of 20th December '08 when one of their people was killed and another injured by a herd of three Elephants.

These men, who had entered the nearby forest to collect fuel wood found themselves surrounded by rogues. They attacked Mr. Madan Singh, who succumbed to his injuries whereas his friend Ganesh, who tried to save him, was severely injured.

The villagers were angry and the Forest Department requested WWF to intervene. WWF immediately paid a compensation of Rs. 5,000 to the family of Mr. Singh and Rs. 1,500 to Ganesh. On 7th January a joint meeting with the villagers and the Forest Department was organised and discussions revealed that while villagers ventured into the forests to collect forest produce, Elephants entered the villages in search of water and food, as their food species was on the decline.

But despite having lost their fellow villager, there wasn't any retaliation from them. They agreed that their visits and proximity to the wild animals was fuelling such attacks and they were willing to find alternatives and to reduce their visits to the forests.



The Forest Department has now decided to build waterholes for Elephants in places where there is a serious scarcity of it. WWF officials trained them to drive the animals away using harmless methods. They were also informed about solar fencing, trenching and bio-fencing.

A life was lost. But this time, no Elephant was killed for revenge. The villagers were generous and the Elephants, lucky.

Q & A

IN CONVERSATION WITH THE VILLAGERS OF ASSAM

Many biodiversity rich regions are not inhabited by wild animals alone. But they have human neighbours too, who have called forests home for hundreds of years. And they will continue to live there. So, conservation is not possible without their support and participation.

Understanding this critical link, Soumen Dey of WWF spoke to the villagers of Assam and asked them how they wanted their 'home' saved. Here is an interview with him.

Q. Why were these workshops needed?

A. We needed a platform to discuss with locals what their woes were. As we know their livelihoods are getting affected by destruction caused by wild animals as well as by vested human interests. To involve the people in conservation efforts and perhaps support them with alternatives we had to assess possibilities and prospects of their participation to restore harmony in the Landscape.

Q. How did it all begin?

A. It began way back in 2001 with the setting of objectives of the North Bank Landscape Conservation Programme and its implementation thereon.

Q. Which were the areas of the landscape where this

interaction with the villagers was held?

A. People of Balipara and Bheluadanga (near Singlijan RF) areas of Assam and Tipi in Arunachal Pradesh were consulted.

Q. Were the villagers enthusiastic about this initiative? How many attended such meetings?

A. There were a number of consultations, meetings and workshops that were held. Attendance varied according to the number of invitees. While smaller consultations involving the Forest Department, NGO and Panchayats had about 10-15 people attending, the larger consultations had about 200 people including officials of both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh administration.

Q. What did the people have to say?

A. In all the three locations - Balipara, Tipi and Bheluadanga the people were in favour of conservation of the existing forests in their vicinity.

Q. What did we learn from these discussions?

A. We feel that value of conservation for ensuring sustainable livelihood has been realised by a section of the communities residing around the elephant habitats. We also realised that the pressure on the existing forests are very high. The local people and their aspirations for conservation are often crushed under the influences of the politicians and local level muscle power.

Q. What do we intend to do with our findings?

A. The findings present us with a challenge to work at policy level and lead us to ensure that a local community based governance system is set in place for conservation of elephants



habitat in these locations.

Q. Do these workshops help reduce Human-Animal conflict?

A. Yes they do. These discussions bring to the fore people's aspirations and expectations that haven't been addressed over the years. Many a misconceptions among the communities have also been also cleared about the status of our existing forests and the crisis we are faced with as a result of the decline of forest cover. Discussions on possible interventions by people themselves empowers them to see these forests as a sustainable source of water and minor forest produce. Also, if the ideal scenario is achieved i.e. people have control over the natural resources, the conflict scenario should show a declining trend.

Meet the Team

After completing his bachelors in veterinary science from B.V.Sc & AH at College of Veterinary Science, Khanapara, Assam, Garga Mohan Das went to Wildlife Institute of India and studied wildlife science. While following his dream to work in the field, after he graduated from WII, he joined WWF's Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong field office as a Project Officer.

On the first day at work, he was told he was to rescue a Rhino calf, severely injured after it was attacked by a Tiger. It was separated from its mother and needed immediate attention. After days of hard work, the Rhino lost the battle to septicemia and anorexia. Garga was looking forward to a lot of serious work from then on.

His next assignment was in the Karbi Anglong hills. Ridden with ethnic conflict, this area also known as Dolamora has a good population of wildlife. The Elephant corridor from Panbari RF of Kaziranga NP towards Karbi Anglong is critical. Garga was assigned to work in this corridor. It was dangerous, but Garga was happy to work for the pachyderms. And he has been really lucky. Garga hasn't received any threats so far and continues to work and travels to remote corners of the area. He has even carried out a survey here. And the grand feat- for the very first time after independence Wildlife Week was celebrated in Malasi (near Dolamora). The emphasis was on Elephant conservation and school students and locals participated. After the survey, Garga has played an important role in conflict mitigation activities along this corridor and the fringe villages of Kaziranga National Park and Karbi Anglong.

Very recently, Garga rescued another Rhino calf, whose mother was accidentally shot dead by a forest guard. The



Garga Mohan Das

was agitated to see a team of researchers too close for comfort. The team was there to put up camera traps to monitor Tigers, but they were being chased by the mother, when the forest guard opened fire. The calf was orphaned. Garga finally rescued the animal and drove it to the Center of Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation, where it doing well.

Garga is keen to study Elephant disease ecology in the entire landscape and wants to understand various factors responsible for their decline.

Let's Talk About

BEAUTIFUL WILD ANIMALS
OF INDIA, WHICH NEVER
GET TALKED ABOUT

by **Aishwarya Maheshwari**



Hyena

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Family: Hyaenidae

Genus: Hyaena

Species: Hyaena

Hyena or commonly known in Hindi as Lakkad bagga is an omnivorous scavenger. It is a unique animal because it has characteristics of both dogs and cats and thus has been put in a separate family- Hyaenidae.

A hyena has a very ungraciously shaped body. It has a sloping back and is brown to dirty white in colour, with black stripes on the flanks and legs and has a heavy dorsal crest of long fur and a long bushy tail. Its limbs and feet are typical of a dog but the structure of the skull and teeth are like that of a cat. The overall body weight may vary from 26-41 kg with body length from 150-160 cm. They have a peculiar laughing call that ends in a cackle.

It is distributed from foothills of the Himalayas, central and western India. It prefers scrub forests near human settlements and low hills and ravines offer convenient holes and caves for shelter.

Second largest after the Spotted Hyena, Striped Hyena unlike their African cousins, are solitary. They don't live in large families, but females are found

with hers cubs. Young ones are born in litters of one to four, after a gestation period of almost 90 days. They give birth in rocky dens or burrows dug by other animals. The cubs suckle for up to a year, while they learn important foraging skills from their mother.

Bring extremely shy and nocturnal in nature, they come out looking for food at night. Hyena plays an important role in the working of the ecosystem because of their role of a scavenger.

They are hunted by people due to their superstitions against them as they believe they kill their livestock, rob graves and lift small children. Smoking of their dens is quite common. Many become victims to road kills too.

Hyena is in Schedule III of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act (IWPA) and classified as Lower Risk by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). But the actual status of this important animal is still largely unknown.