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September 2008



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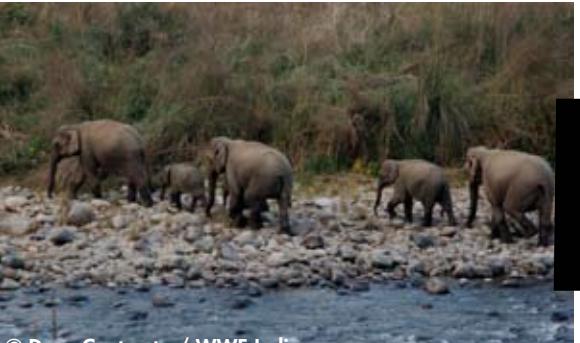
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about
them
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Tiger Network Initiative

CONCERTED EFFORTS OF WWF TO SAVE THE LAST REMAINING TIGERS IN ASIA.

BY DEEP J. CONTRACTOR

Transformational was the word that resonated throughout the three days of the WWF Tiger Network Initiative (NI) South Asia Workshop as the core team of the Tiger NI

The NI plans to galvanize political will and take action to double the number of wild Tiger by 2020, focusing on 13 landscapes that the world's top tiger experts have identi-



came together with the Tiger range countries of South Asia viz. India, Nepal and Bhutan to achieve the greater goal of Tiger conservation in the wild. The NI itself is remarkably transformational considering the goals it has set to achieve by year 2020 in the 13 Tiger range countries. WWF realized the abysmal state of wild tiger populations across its range - occupying 40% less habitat than what was estimated just one decade ago - and felt an urgent need for bold action at a landscape level transcending country borders.

fied as offering the best chances of growing the world's Tiger populations across the species' range.

The South Asia Tiger NI workshop was part of a series of such workshops across the Tiger range countries. The first one of this series took place in SE Asia and the next will be involving China and Russia. The objective of these workshops is to make all involved to think out of the box and think of goals and strategies which would help achieve



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the meta goal: The wild Tiger population increases to at least 6,000 by 2020, through conservation in 13 priority landscapes - and to reach the next rung in the ladder of effective Tiger conservation in the wild.

The participants included the members of species conservation division of WWF – India and TRAFFIC India, WWF – Nepal and WWF – Bhutan, the three Tiger range countries of South Asia region. Personnel of WWF-International, WWF-Netherlands, WWF-UK and WWF-US brought their experience from the SE Asia workshop and guided the participants to successfully complete the exercise.

Presentations were made on various issues including the current status of Tiger in India, Nepal and Bhutan, the main threats to wild Tiger populations, the goals and strategies of the Tiger NI, 'Carbon Forests' as well as the new and more effective technology in monitoring. The landscape coordinators from all Tiger landscapes in India presented posters depicting their current status and habitat in their landscapes and their activities for their conservation.

The participants were divided into smaller groups and were assigned to different landscapes where each small group was given the task of coming up with long and short term goals for tiger conservation in their landscape and list out strategies and activities that would deliver transformational outcomes. Priorities were set from these

for the next year and budgets made.

This exercise led to certain outstanding plans and strategies for each landscape at the same time addressing the shortcomings and redundancy in any of the activities being currently carried out. One of the most important aspects was the focus on trans-boundary conservation issues and their integration into future plans especially for landscapes like Terai Arc and North East where conserving only within country borders without collaboration would prove futile.

The Tiger NI workshop proved to be a great platform for not only sharing and exchanging information among the participant countries and landscapes but, also to critically evaluate the current state of affairs in each of the these areas, generating scope to improvise and learn, moving a step closer to more meaningful conservation of the Tiger and its home.



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Innocence reclaimed

A NEW LIFE FOR CHILDREN OF POACHERS.

Children born to poacher parents are mostly deprived of the basic amenities like food, clothes and clean drinking water. They might live in abject poverty, remain uneducated and may not learn anything but the only thing their parents have to pass them is- learn how to catch and kill wild animals for their survival.

But the children of the Pardhi community, a nomadic caste found in Katni, Panna, Sagar and Vidisha districts of Madhya Pradesh, have hope in their lives. This community has been involved in poaching and wildlife crime, but their children are now busy studying. To bring these children into the mainstream, WWF in coordination with the Forest Department has started the Residential Bridge Course (RBC), under the provision of Sarv Siksha Abhiyan (Education for all, a programme of the Indian Government).

From the 15th Aug '08, two RBC's, separate for boys and

girls, started functioning with 57 boys and 38 girls. The children are in the age group of 7-14 years.

With basic education, care is also being taken to meet the nutritional requirements of these children. A glass of milk, a seasonal fruit and green vegetables is what they get with their daily lessons at the school. A new set of uniforms will give them a chance to experience life outside the criminal past of their parents and assist them to be a part of the society. Education will prove to be a vital tool to ensure that these children don't resort to poaching for

their sustenance.

They are also being provided with notebooks, pens and pencils, joy for every child, while course books are being given by the Government. Not only this, children were very enthusiastic about sports and very soon a volley ball, a football and a cricket kit will also be made available for each school.

With this WWF hopes to bring some joy in the lives of these unfortunate children and is hopeful that with education, many future poachers in the making would have other professions to be a part of and have a life beyond crime.



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to protect them from the winter chill

WARM JACKETS
GIVEN TO THE FIELD
STAFF OF MADHYA
PRADESH FOREST
DEPARTMENT.



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Our Forest Department personnel are brave and dedicated. Patrolling vast stretches of Panna Tiger Reserve with limited resources and in harsh conditions, they are trying their best to save the Tiger. And now with teeth chattering winter round-the-corner, they have a tougher time ahead. So WWF decided to provide warm jackets to the field staff, just to make their job a little easier.

Amongst 549 field staff of the Panna TR, including the ex-army men employed by the Madhya Pradesh Forest Division, winter jackets were distributed. Two functions were organised to bring together the personnel. The Field Director, Panna TR and State Director WWF-India gave away the winter jackets and their presence encouraged the rangers. This isn't much, but just a thought that we understand that it's not easy out there, and we are here to provide as much support as needed, made a difference to the rangers' morale.

These jackets are the part of the ongoing support being provided to the Forest Department to facilitate effective patrolling and curb the poaching of wild animals, especially the Tiger.

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while driving through corbett

DRIVERS OF CORBETT LEARN
TO DRIVE SAFE, FOR WILD
ANIMALS' SAKE.



A step towards responsible tourism was taken when more than 100 drivers attended a training session organised by WWF. These drivers ferry thousands of tourists inside the Reserve every year (approximately 3.5 lakh tourists visited Corbett last year).

The aim of this workshop was to train the drivers in safe driving practices so as to minimize accidents involving wild animals. Experts from Maruti Driving School along with their technical staff explained various aspects of safe driving. With the aid of video clips, drivers were explained how to drive inside the Reserve, in the interest of the wild animals.

With technical sessions and field experiences, the participants were provided information on issues concerning wildlife. During the training, presentations on local fauna and their direct, indirect signs and behaviour, were made in a very interactive way. Since they double as tourist guides during the safari, training was imparted on birding and were encouraged to spread the word of conservation for other associated species.

During the workshop drivers also interacted with Mr. V. K. Singhal Field Director and Warden Corbett National Park and discussed many related issues. Chairman, Municipal Corporation, Ramnagar suggested that drivers wear uniforms and badges with their names. Director Corbett TR also proposed that they keep literature about Reserve in Hindi and English. Personnel from Maruti also helped

the drivers with tips to optimise their vehicles performance without compromising safety and hands on demonstration with vehicles. It's important to note that all vehicles in the area are Maruti Gypsy.

The response from the drivers was encouraging and the workshop's effectiveness would be visible once the busy tourism season starts in October. WWF would be implementing a mechanism of collecting feedback from tourists, Park authorities and the drivers themselves. Based on the experience, similar workshops would be imparted to other target groups such as tourist guides, forest guards, school children, etc.

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The strikingly beautiful, Snow leopard- the big cat of the mountains, is one of the world's most elusive felines. Rarely spotted, it has a 12-country home range and is found in the higher reaches of the snow capped Himalayas in India. This cat is the top predator of this region and though it doesn't pose any threat to humans, it's still persecuted as it preys on their livestock.

However, little is known about this cat as it is not studied because it is rarely spotted and the terrain where it dwells is hostile. No one knows the species' actual status and even its currently occupied range is poorly mapped. WWF undertook a survey to collect the baseline data and know more about the status and distribution of Snow Leopard in the states of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.

Aishwarya Maheshwari from WWF spent months in the

Himalayas, trying to spot the star cat. But after climbing tall mountains, living through snow storms, he couldn't see one. However, the signs were all over - scat, scrape (a mark with hind paw consisting of an oblong depression with a pile of earth at one end), pug-marks, kills, and spray/urine and claw – marking. During this survey, only twice did Aishwarya see pugmarks and 10 times he came across scat of Snow Leopard.

Anyone is welcome in Snow Leopard's home up in the lofty peaks, packed with ice, frequently visited by storms. It's beautiful and dangerous. Aishwarya didn't just face steep climbs and low oxygen, but experienced high altitude sickness too, when he excitedly tracked up to 5000m in three days, after staying out of the field for over two months, without acclimatization. This was just

in the land of the snow leopard

IN PURSUIT OF THE CAT OF THE MOUNTAINS.



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one of the many problems. But here what he says about Tapoban, Gangotri National Park, "I still remember the camping at Tapoban. There was a more or less continuous snow fall for two days, snow had accumulated on my tent in the night and I could not arrange a pressure cooker and had to survive three days only on noodles". His most memorable experience was crossing the Gangotri Glacier, a stretch of around two kilometers. But he still cannot get over Bharal (Blue Sheep), the main prey of the Snow Leopard. He told us, "I can never forget my first sighting of Bharal at Gangotri NP, it was a group of 55 individuals".

During survey work, information on the attacks on livestock and humans was gathered through questionnaire surveys. Data on vegetation type, vegetation cover, topography, distance to human settlement and water sources, and proportion of kill consumed was collected for each livestock and wild kill. The exact location of kill was recorded in order to prepare accurate map of distribution of livestock kills. Total number of livestock, their cost, knowledge about wildlife, grazing areas and other information was recorded in structured questionnaire surveys and preference for particular age or sex group as well as frequency of attack were used to estimate high, medium and low conflict zones in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.

Snow Leopard signs were seen between 3190m to

4100m. The survey shows that there were some cases of livestock depredation by Snow Leopards across the Himalayan region.



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tragedy with storks

CENTURY OLD BANYAN TREE FALLS ON STORKS' NESTING SITE, KILLING HUNDREDS.

A century old banyan tree came crashing down on some 1500 endangered Asian Open-billed Storks in Karbi Anglong, killing about 800 of them. This tree and four others are in the complex of a Buddhist monastery.

On 15th September, around 6.20 p.m. Rev. Sovita Bhikku the head monk of the monastery heard the sound of a falling banyan tree. When he rushed out he saw the oldest of the five with nesting colonies with many newborns on it, down on the ground. Villagers rescued about 200 of them alive and informed the forest officials of Silonijan Forest Range of Nambor-Garampani Wildlife Sanctuary. A rescue team from Center for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation, Kaziranga NP immediately rushed to the spot with a local veterinarian. More than hundreds of birds had already lost their lives.

Out of the many rescued birds, about 70 are doing fine and eating on their own. Whereas 5 birds with serious fractures are in the intensive care room for recovery.

Though the cause of the accident is not known, there could be several reasons. Since the nests were on the oldest of the five trees, it is being speculated that the tree gave in under the weight. It was also observed that the base of the tree was infected. It could be because of the droppings of the birds led to a chronic infection. The other two trees which have nests have the same infection and need immediate safety measures, whereas the younger trees which have no nests are strong and healthy.

The villagers, disturbed by this painful loss want to find out the reason of this accident. As the birds are considered sacred and even the banyan tree is a holy tree known as *Budhaa Breekshya*, where Lord Buddha found nirvana, more than a thousand villagers of Banglung gathered at the temple to pray for the innocent souls. With folded hands, they prayed for peace and eternity and the *bhikshuks* chanted *shlokas* for hours.

Necessary steps for the protection of the remaining four trees with fence are also being considered. Even local youth emphasized the need of a trained rescue team for



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after the rhino

TRANSLOCATED RHINO
FROM MANAS DECIDES
TO RUN AWAY. BUT HE
WAS SAFELY CAUGHT
AND TAKEN BACK.



A Rhino decided to go for a long walk and this gave sleepless nights to more than a hundred men. One of the Rhinos, translocated from Pobitora to Manas National Park strayed almost 68 km away to Kalseni, where he was finally tranquillised and caught.

The Rhino was being tracked all this while with the help of the signals transmitted from his radio collar. Says Deba Kr. Datta of WWF, "The radio signals were superimposed on a map of the area using global positioning system to pinpoint his exact location". All through this nervous journey, the Rhino had many curious onlookers, eager to catch a glimpse of him or some even wanted to touch the sacred horn! Others asked WWF personnel for his hair or a piece of his skin, both of which have religious significance in the region. Not even his dung was left. Since it is considered auspicious to keep Rhino dung in the granaries, his dung just vanished!

After trekking for fourteen days, the Rhino was finally tranquillised by Dr. Bhaskar Choudhury from WTI and was taken back to Manas.

This rescue was a well coordinated effort, where the Rhino was captured without any hiccup. Our sincere thanks to the Director, Manas National Park and the entire team of the Forest Department to bring the Rhino back to where he belongs. This incident brought the best in all the members and this feat could not have been achieved without the support of all the agencies. IRV 2020 is a dream and

this Rhino doesn't know that he is making history.

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Let's talk about them too

BEAUTIFUL WILD ANIMALS
OF INDIA, WHICH NEVER
GET TALKED ABOUT.

BY DEEP J.
CONTRACTOR



CARACAL

Classification

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Mammalia
Order: Carnivora
Family: Felidae
Scientific Name: *Caracal caracal*

The tall and slender, plain coated Caracal is a medium sized cat inhabiting the drier parts of North Africa, Central Asia, and south-west Asia. It has a brick-coloured coat which is buff on the undersides and limbs.

It weighs roughly 14 - 22 kg and can grow as tall as 60 -70 cm. Females are slightly smaller than males in size. The most conspicuous feature of the Caracal is elongated, tufted black ears, which also explains the origin of its name – from the word *karakulak*, Turkish for “black ear”.

In India, it is found in the semi-arid woodlands, rocky area as well as in the desert. It occurs in the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan and drier parts of Madhya Pradesh.

Caracal is solitary and nocturnal in habit and hunts at night. It takes a variety of prey, including relatively large prey such as gazelles and smaller prey like rodents. They are known for their exceptional ability to catch birds, leaping high into the air to knock down a bird in flight. Like other cats, Caracal may survive without drinking for a long period — the water demand is satisfied with the body fluids of its prey.

The Caracal is almost impossible to see in the wild, not because there are very few of them, but because it is extremely shy and a master of camouflage.

Habitat loss and poaching are the major conservation threats faced by the wild Caracal populations. In Asian range states they are included in CITES Appendix I and Lower Risk in the IUCN Red Data Book and hunting of the species is prohibited in India.