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## *STATE*

### **Wildlife heritage of Digboi Oil Field under threat**

CORRESPONDENT

DIGBOI, April 29 – The sylvan heritage of Digboi Oil Field area is incredibly rich and varied. Dr Kashmira Kakati, a known and keen naturalist, who has very recently completed a project on the carnivores on the landscape comprising Dilli Reserve, Joypur Reserve and Upper Dehing East and West Reserves has told this correspondent that this landscape is the favourite home of all the 19 species of carnivores and as such it is one among the four richest spots in South East Asia.

The historic Digboi Oil Field, and indeed the world's oldest oil field today from the point of view of productive continuity, still has that antique aroma, despite being strewn with many abandoned and still active derricks and well among the primeval hillock. The stretch of Digboi Oil Field forms part of the Upper Dehing East Reserve Forest and shares the same biological heritage of the entire landscape with which it is organically integrated. The wild stretch which is canopied with myriad forms of green growths, dotted with innumerable hillocks and interspersed with very many waterbodies and swamps is the cherished haunt of the now endangered clouded leopard, tigers, marbled cat, golden cat, large Indian civet, small Indian civet, common palm civet, crab-eating mongoose, herds of wild tuskers, deers, sambhurs, hoolock gibbons, slow loris, Malayan giant squirrel, flying squirrel, white winged woodduck, all the five species of hornbills, grey peacock pheasant, Malayan sun bear, jungle cats, fishing cats, binturong and wild dogs.

Of the flora special reference has to be made to the existence of mor-saal (*Vatica lanceaefolia*) which has been declared as "globally critically endangered", lots of very old fern trees and the few very rare wild and tall tea plants. The wetlands within the oil field area are frequented by thousands of wild swans during winter. The whole area is also the chosen haunt of widely diverse kinds of birds, butterflies, moths and reptiles. The aesthetic glory of the wild stretch consists in the very sense of its primitivism, natural abundance and the unheard music of its deep seated silence.

This priceless heritage of the landscape of Digboi Oil Field is now facing critical threats from the dumping of the garbages of the township and the IOC (AOD) Hospital and from the plan to divert the 4-lane NH-37 through it. These garbages are now a source of pollution and large portions of these are not biodegradable. Occasionally, even elephants are seen devouring these wastes and thereby they push themselves into hazards. The proposed diversion

of the 4-lane NH-37 is looked upon by the nature-conscious section of the people as a grim presage to the dark doom of the very clock of life of the Digboi Oil Field Reserve which has over the last 120 years come to be protected by the security umbrella of the Assam Oil Company and Oil India Ltd.

The civil society including the Tinsukia district administration, the Forest Dept., the Oil India authorities and the Assam Oil Division of the IOC Ltd. must come together and adopt effective ways and means to stop all possible forms of depredations immediately and preserve the pristine glory of Digboi Oil Field in its entirety without the faintest let-up.