

Text from Newspaper Article, 2015

The four village development committees (VDC) of *Taranga*, *Hariharpur*, *Lekhparajul* and *Chhinchu* lie in the Surkhet district, in the northern section of Bardia National Park (BNP). The area is in the fragile landscape of the Siwalik Mountains, where landslides are common. Every year, residents lose land due to floods and landslides. Loss of livestock and even human lives can also occur. In 2014, flooding of the Veri River caused 46 human deaths, loss of livestock and damage to 321 houses and properties, substantial cropping areas were also lost. The people affected were mostly migrants, originally from the upper mountain areas, who had moved to lower elevations in order to work, earn money and buy land. They are subsistence farmers who rely on agriculture and domestic stock for their livelihood. However, since productivity in the area is low, many young people travel to India and work in seasonal jobs, especially in the period from late November – April.

In the past, poaching of wildlife, specifically ungulates such as sambar, goral, wild boar, porcupine and langur contributed to the diet and income of people in this area. Wild meat was eaten locally and sold at nearby markets (*Surkhet-Birendranagar*) and settlements along the main road (for example, *Chepang*, *Harre*, *Karnali-Chisapani*). Poaching of endangered species such as rhinoceros and tiger has also occurred in this area. Recently, tiger skin and bones and a leopard skin were seized in *Surkhet, Birendranagar*. These products are highly valuable when sold (illegally). Shailendra Yadav, a Research Officer of the Bardia Conservation Program said, “The tiger skin was proved to be from Bardia National Park after comparing the seized specimen with camera trap photos of Bardia tigers”. Incidences of illegal hunting of sambar deer (jarayo) still occur. Bardia National Park authority recently reported two cases of such illegal hunting from the northern section of the Park.

Conservationist Babu Bhattarai has designed a project which will assess the current level of illegal hunting in Bardia National Park, encourage awareness of the effects of hunting and provide skill development activities so that local people have options for income generation other than hunting. The project is funded by a Small Grant from the UK-based Rufford Foundation and was co-designed with Associate Professor Wendy Wright, from Federation University, Australia. It focusses on conservation outcomes for large carnivores such as tiger and leopard. These species play a significant role in the ecosystem and are threatened both directly and indirectly by hunters, who may take prey species of these animals. Both Babu Bhattarai and Wendy Wright believe that the project will be an important tool in changing the attitude of local communities towards stewardship rather than exploitation. Mr. Ambika Khatiwada, Conservation Officer of the Bardia Conservation Programme said that this project would have a positive outcome for the conservation of carnivores because of the dual approach of conservation awareness and skill development activities.

Since the declaration of a buffer zone (a conservation area surrounding the park) in 2011, the Bardia Conservation Programme of the National Trust for Nature Conservation is also implementing some conservation projects in this area. The buffer zone in the northern section includes eighteen wards of the four village development communities. There are about 1700 households and 10,000 people in the buffer zone of the four village development committees.