

## Project Update: October 2010

The project work began with our active involvement with local GIS expert to design base maps for buffer zones of Manas biosphere reserve. Base map preparation for western buffer was accomplished while the work is going on for eastern buffer. With support of GPS, we have started the field work for gathering all ground information related to aquatic bodies, topography land use type, food plants, status of present and past threats, infrastructure and conservation strategy in buffer zones. This information will be used later to design rhino habitat suitability model. Preliminary survey indicated mosaic of medium patches of grassland and mixed deciduous forests in western buffer area. On the other hand, the eastern buffer is mainly dominated by very small patches of grassland scattered in the deciduous forest patches. Interestingly, presence of several small pond type aquatic bodies in the eastern buffer can be potential for walling site for rhinos while the western buffer is comparatively dry in nature.

Secondly, we have organised one awareness meeting involving community leaders, local NGO members and official of security agencies about the potentiality of rhino habitat in eastern buffer. We also distributed 10 anti-poaching kits (rucksack bag, raincoat, sleeping bag) as well as one dragon light, two solar powered lamps having mobile phone charger facility and two MHD-1 solar torch lights to the local NGO. Interestingly within an hour of the same day, the volunteers of the NGO had to move with the kits after receiving immediate request from forest official of buffer area to drive away wild elephants. The elephants already killed villagers in that area and damaged crops. It shows that how important this small support to conservation volunteers can be a great help to local community of buffer areas. The aquatic bodies with small grassland patches of the buffer areas served as earlier rhino habitat. One source informed us about poaching of more than 10 rhinos from these areas during 1988-94 periods. The remaining 10 anti-poaching kits, solar lamps and solar torches including one dragon light will be delivered to another conservation groups in western buffer shortly.

Base map for the core area of Manas was already prepared and we are now collecting information on distribution pattern of different invasive species. The core area is comprised of three ranges covering about 500 km<sup>2</sup>. The park authority also requested us for a detail study on invasive species which would be later help in designing management strategy to tackle the problem.

We are planning to start the survey for the alternative livelihood pattern in fringe of Orang national park as well as rhino awareness campaign with support of local conservation workers, park authority and wildlife biologist in coming months.

