

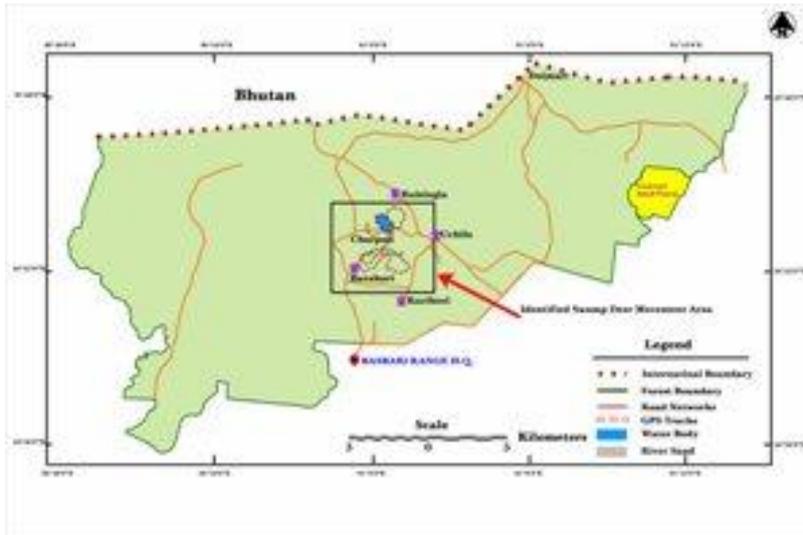
Project Update: March 2009

The study has been divided into three major parts for convenience - discussion with locals, field survey, community mobilization and reintroduction draft preparation. Initially, discussions were made with ex-poachers, forest guards, higher officials and local people to establish the historical distribution of swamp deer. Most of the interviewees specified four places within the Park where swamp deer were sighted prior to the civil unrest, Kuribeel, Burhaburi, Uchila and the Chorphuli area in the central Bansbari range. While the eastern Bhuyapara range also holds possibilities having had swamp deer in the past but no recent evidence of presence. A GIS map has been developed to identify the available wetlands in the Bansbari and Bhuyapara range using a satellite image (IRS LISS III, 2006).

During the last two months (December 2008 and January 2009) surveys were undertaken within the 2 km periphery of two big wetlands Chorphuli and Kuribeel. The initial survey revealed the existence of a single herd, possibly having 10-12 individuals, moving in the Chorphuli wetland and possibly covering the nearby Burhaburi grasslands. The survey team attempted to follow the herd for direct assessment but inaccessibility due to dense swampy grassland made it impossible. However, their presence has been confirmed with fresh pellets seen in the Chorphuli area and in the nearby woodlands. In the next two months, a camera trapping protocol is designed to assess the population or even to have photographic evidence. The Field Director has already provided five camera traps to the project team and five more camera traps will be made available from Aaranyak. Although there was no planning for camera trapping in the project application the team has realized the need of camera trapping to trigger the policymakers with photographic evidence.

Vegetation assessment within the study site is going on to assess the habitat status and to identify potential critical areas. The pellet count method in a 25m x 2m block is followed. The team has assessed 37 such plots in the Burhaburi and Kuribeel area to find swamp deer pellets and other ungulate species presence. This will give a clear indication of plot-based co-occurrence and avoidance of swamp deer with other ungulate species in the Park.





The identified swamp deer movement areas



The field team assessing habitat



The fresh swamp deer pellets at Chorphuli wetland