

Project Update: May 2011

No sign of red panda in Khaptad National Park. For the indication of Red Panda presence in Khaptad National Park, consultation with Senior Conservation Officers, game scouts and herders (a total of 125 people) took place at the end of February 2011.

Interaction programmes with herders, teachers, and local people were conducted to get ideas of red panda in the past and present. During these programmes photos of red panda and their faecal pellets were exhibited. Nobody said the presence of red panda in Khaptad National Park. The area was intensely searched on the basis of presence of bamboo, *Sorbus*, *Abies* and *Quercus*. Only less than 5 km² of area is covered by bamboo in the Beechpani area. This habitat is dense with bamboo, *Sorbus* and *Quercus*. After that, three researchers with three herders and two park officials searched throughout the bamboo dominated areas. This is undisturbed area; there was no sign of heavy grazing throughout the year. Grazing is allowed only for 3 months from May of each year and rest of year is undisturbed. There is no sign of felling and cutting of trees and bamboos. This indicates the possibility of occurrence of red panda but there are so many obstacles in terms of scarcity of water and connectivity of Beechpani to other areas. Water source is in distant and available only in spring and most of the sources are drying near about the bamboo dominated areas.

Similarly, this area is not connected with nearest red panda presence area i.e. Rara National Park in the west. This park is like a plateau and there is no connection to other bamboo dominated areas in terms of temperature, altitude and wilderness. In other two sites, Nagdhunga and Saharshlingha, where bamboo were sparsely distributed and surface covers less than 5%. The available food resource is not sufficient enough for red panda throughout the year. There was no sign of food prints, faecal pellets over the snow.

We continued our research towards east from Khaptad National Park to find the extremity of red panda in the western Nepal. We observed and took the photos of red panda in Rara National Park and scats were collected for diet analysis from there.