



Conservation Watch - Nepal

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Three rhinos poached in a month

Daily rhino count in the offing

In stark contrast to the increased security measures, poaching of one-horned rhinos is seemingly unstoppable in Chitwan National Park. During the span of one month, carcasses of two poached rhinos were recovered while another bullet-injured rhino succumbed to death. Out of three cases, poachers were unable to pluck out horn in two cases.

On 2nd June, a female rhino of around 7 years was found dead near Majuhwa Lake, Dudhaura area in the eastern sector of Chitwan National Park. However, poachers were unable to make off with the horn and hooves. It remained intact in the body. The postmortem report proved that rhino has been killed with the marble-shaped bullet made by mill bearing. The bullet penetrated through left eye to the chest. It is believed that incidents occurred a week ago.

In the same day (June 2, 2009), 20 years old injured male rhino was found at Bhawanipur area in the eastern sector of National park. Rhino got two gun-shots in the right leg. One bullet exited through the body while other remained inside. After three days it succumbed to injury and dead body was found being drowned in the pond. Elephant was used to pull out dead rhino from water. Horns and hooves are, however, safe.



Earlier, on 20th May, park staffs have found a carcass of de-horned pregnant rhino with a stillborn calf. The incident happened in Tamor Lake, 2.5 km far from the CNP headquarter Kasara. Park staffs heard the gunshots but poachers were able to flee from the spot. The patrol team had reached the spot within 10 minutes after hearing a gunshot but to no avail. Rhino carcass was found there the next morning.

Same group of poachers are hold responsible in all of these three cases. In all incidents, poachers have used marble-shaped bullets made by mill bearing.

Amidst the increasing number of poaching, CNP has announced that it is going to count the rhinos in daily basis in a bid to rein in poaching incidents and tracking down natural deaths of one-horned rhinoceros.

The monitoring of rhino will begin from June 15 and 27 park employees will be mobilized for this purpose. Those

employees will be equipped with JPA camera, binoculars and at least one elephant. The monitoring team will capture the picture of rhino during their field visit and prepare detail accounts. As the identification, proper signs will be marked in ears, horn, back and other organs of these rhinos. All rhinos will bear different set of marks on their bodies to separate one from the other. These marks will help to identify the sick and injured rhinos so that necessary treatments could be provided on time. Apart from the poaching incidents, untimely death of the rhinos due to various diseases is equally responsible for their number depletion.

This initiative would also help to maintain up-to-date record of rhinos. For this purpose, Chitwan National area has been divided into five blocks. Area from Dudhaura to Post is categorized as first block, Dudhaura to Kasara as second block, Kasara to Golaghat third block, Golaghat to Gaidabas fourth block and Island area fifth block.

Chief Warden Dr. Narendra Man Babu Pradhan admits that there is no lack of resources and security personnel but feels it is more about security policy. He informed that improvised security strategy are recently put in place but refused to elaborate more. There are around 1200 security personnel, excluding park authorities, deployed in 47 security posts inside CNP. He informed that poachers are using modern weapons. "It has been proved times and again

that in-park security measures are barely enough to combat poaching. We are now planning to expedite joint patrolling including community people", he informed.



Poachers are also taking advantage of topographical condition of the park. They can easily enter and escape from the park as there are hillocks, tall grasses and bushes to prevent them from the eyes of the security personnel. Mostly, the rhino come out in the morning and afternoon to find food and water. Generally, the poachers tend to kill the rhino in the morning and afternoon with home made gun using iron rod as bullet.

Most poachers are found to be from Chitwan, Nawalparasi, Makawanpur, Bara and Parsa districts and sometimes even Indian nationals come to kill rhino in Chitwan. The smugglers are mostly from high classes families of Tibetan origin. It is said that most of the rhino horns go to Tibet for Chinese traditional

medicine. Many who have involved in protecting the rhinos claim that not only the local poachers but also high classes Nepalese, Tibetan and Chinese who live in Kathmandu are also responsible for the increasing poaching of rhino in Nepal.

According to Rupak Maharjan, unit chief of Anti-Poaching Unit, Chitwan National Park, 19 rhinos died in and around Chitwan National Park after the rhino count in March 2008. Out of them 12 were heinously poached and 7 died from natural causes. During the same period, one tiger and one bear was also killed by the poachers.

Wildlife face tougher time sans precipitation

Artificial ponds - boon for thirsty wildlife

This year Chitwan has witnessed presumably the most prolonged and panic drought ever. As a consequence, water crunch hits hard for the survival of birds and wildlife in and around Chitwan National Park. Fortunately, the habitat management works initiated by EPRC-II/Co-Action Nepal (CAN) and supported by Asian Rhino Project (ARP) Australia come to the fore when the wildlife needed it most.

"We had seven ponds in our 1100 hectares area before. Due to the long drought, none of these ponds could retain a single drop of water. But newly constructed pond with the support of CAN/ARP held the water up to 1 feet even in the extreme period", said Raju Prasad Silwal, President of Kumroj Community Forest. He praised the selection area of the pond where the underground water source is perennially providing the water.

According to the forest guard Gopi Humagain, the movement of the animals and birds has increased significantly after the construction of the pond. "This pond has been turned into the boon for the wildlife. Rhinos, Pigmy hogs, deers, leopards, birds are seen in the pond to quench their thirst", he opined. Local folks said that this sort of dry spell was seen after three decades in Chitwan.

Members of community forests are now becoming serious for the habitat management. Shyam Regmi, local conservation activist, stressed on more habitat management works. "Kumroj is the safe haven for the wildlife. Rhinos prefer this forest area for the breeding purpose. The only problem is the intrusion of wildlife in human settlement. We could mitigate this tendency by providing suitable habitat for them.", he explained.

Working committee members of the Kumroj Forest are enthusiastic from the support provided for the pond. "Record shows wildlife are safe in community forests. We need to provide conducive habitat for them. We urge the conservation community to support us for the grassland management in 18 hectares and maintenance of seven ponds. We are ready for labour-contribution", Silwal, president of the forest said.

EPRC-II/Co-Action Nepal has constructed ponds and grassland management works are underway in four community forest areas around Chitwan National Park. Similarly, it has also supported motor and pipes in Kumroj to pump the water on other natural ponds.



In the likely manner, Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve (SWR) Kanchanpur has constructed six lakes were constructed in the reserve from its own resources after several lakes inside the sanctuary started drying up in the prolonged drought. "We have been pumping water into three of the lakes with generators. Natural lakes continue to dry up due to drought", assistant conservation officer Kishor Mahato said.

Buried carcasses of 19 rhinos found !

The issue on mysterious 'disappearance' of 67 rhinos from Bardia National Park, four years ago, gets some twist after the carcasses of 19 rhinos were confiscated. On 5th May, police confiscated the remaining of rhinos which were buried in Sattar Farm at Bhimmapur VDC-6. The location is situated near the Nepal-India border.

Park authorities and conservation activists were hugely surprised when the whereabouts of 67 rhinos were not known. Though they have suspected poaching probability, neither the dead bodies were found nor they were spotted in Indian territory. Those rhinos were translocated to Babai Valley of Bardia National Park from Chitwan National Park in various dates.

According to the locals, Sattar farm was used by the suspected poachers for nearly a decade as the clutches of security force had hardly reached there. They suspect that apart from rhinos, they might be also responsible for killing of tigers, deers and other animals sheltered in the park.

BNP officials opined that the rhinos might have been killed in neighbouring Indian side while they went for grazing but buried in Nepal's area. However, it is predicted that destruction of rhinos en masse could be the result of connivance between the poachers of Nepal and India.

Bardia National Park is the second-most rhino habitat of Nepal. During the rhino count of 2000, 67 rhinos were numbered which was catastrophically reduced to 31 in 2007 and further plundered to 22 numbers in the latest count of 2008. Thirty one rhinos, including 18 female were translocated from Chitwan to Bardia during the period of 2000-2003.

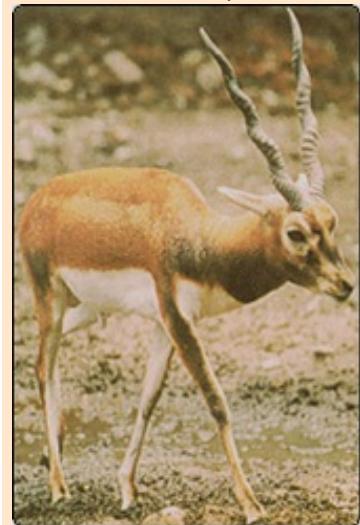
Musk deer falling prey to poachers

Wild buffalo increased in Koshi Tappu

Wildlife poaching has increased in Khaptad National Park area. This fact came to light in course of a study and observation of musk deer population in the park area carried out by the office. Park employees who conducted the observation and registration of musk deer population in the park found 72 deer snares and a dead musk deer trapped in a snare inside the park area. Similarly, two dead langur monkeys were found in two traps laid by the poachers in the park area for trapping musk deer.

According to the musk deer census report prepared by Khaptad National Park office, the observation team of the park found three dead musk deer in a period of two months.

A survey carried out by the park office among the local population identified many causes for the declining population of wildlife in the park area. Among the main reasons for the decrease in the wildlife population as pointed out by the locals are unrestricted pasturing and lack of effective monitoring by the game scouts. Sixty-three percent of the local people surveyed said allowing unrestricted pasturing in the park area is the main reason for the increase in poaching activities while 57 percent blamed the lax monitoring by the game scouts.



Spread over an area of 225 square kilometers, Khaptad National Park straddles Bajhang, Bajura, Achham and Doti districts of the Far-west region. The park is home to 24 species of mammals, 17 species of reptiles, 290 species of birds, two species of fish, six species of amphibians, 18 species of insects, 57 species of trees and 27 species of medicinal herbs.

Meanwhile, counting of wild buffaloes of rare 'Babuls' species found only in the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve has been completed. The latest count shows an increase in the number of wild-buffalos. There were some 159 wild buffalos in the reserve four years ago. The number has now increased to 219 in four years. The recent counting was conducted from May 2 to May 4.

The study panel comprised wildlife experts and security personnel. The panel conducted census for three days. The study shows that 34 male wild buffalos of Babuls species are found in the reserve. According to the study, 101 she-buffalos, 39 calves, 22 calves aged two, 23 calves aged one year and 74 buffalos of cross breed have been found in the reserve.

Narayan Mishra, the Conservation Officer, clarified the reason for the increase in wild buffalo population in the reserve. According to him, the eviction of local cows and buffalos and the sheer invigilation over illegal poaching are the major factors that helped increase the number of wild buffalos.

Degradation mars Sagarmatha National Park

Forest degradation ratio in Sagarmatha National Park and its bufferzone areas has been increasing due to the use of excessive wood for fuel, a survey has shown. The study on Fuel Wood Consumption and Forest Degradation has shown that forest degradation is at 8.5 square meters per hectare in the park. Nabindra Lal Karmacharya, who is undertaking a master's thesis under the Faculty of Environment Science in Khwopa Engineering College, had done the survey.

Annually, 27,000 international tourists, their guides, porters and accompanying persons are adding woes to the problem as food cooked in a wood oven is believed to be tastier. The total population of the area is 5,869. A whopping 92.5 per cent people depend on fuel wood, five percent on electricity, 1.5 on Liquefied Petroleum Gas and one percent on kerosene, according to Karmacharya.

An official at Ministry of Forestry, Land and Soil Conservation agreed that the forest degradation was taking place. "Locals are allowed to cut trees under certain conditions at a minimal scale," he added. Karmacharya said, "degradation is 71.35 percent for *Abies spectabilis*, 22.22 percent for *Acer spectabilis*, 83.64 percent for *Betula spectabilis*, 28 percent for *Juniperus sp*, 17.5 percent for *R campanulatum*, 24.37 percent for *R campylocarpum*, and 18.52 percent for *Sorbus sp* per hectare of forest." Dr Ramesh Kumar Maskey, researcher at Kathmandu University,

said use of fuel in the area has fuelled pollution and rise in temperature. "Carbon dioxide emission from cooking is higher," he added.

Both the researchers were involved in two separate studies on High Altitude Research in Nepal supported by EvK2 National Research Council Project of Italy in the Sagarmatha National Park in 2007 and 2008.

Forest officials draw flak from users

Users of forest resources in Dadeldhura district have accused office-bearers of community forest groups and forest officials of handing over the woods to timber smugglers in the name of development.

According to the users, the forest group officials leased out the forests after the smugglers agreed to build roads, public taps and school buildings. They also accused forest officials of receiving kickbacks.

"We have signed a five-year lease with the contractors on the condition that the latter will link the forest land with road," concedes Chandra Bahadur Bohara, secretary of the Jayalaxmi Community Forest in Alital VDC. Dozens of community forests at Palgadhi, Liude, Dharapani and Bhatteni have gone to the smugglers.

"Work on the construction of a 27-kilometre-long road from Kaluwapur of Kanchanpur to Jogbudha of Dadeldhura is about to begin," says Ganesh Bhat, a local resident. According to him, contractors can use forest resources without the consent of community forest users' groups.

"Besides constructing road, the contractors have also agreed to construct school buildings, taps and bridges," maintains a teacher of Dharapani on condition of anonymity. The teacher said each forest would get money equal to 300 cubic feet timber yearly. Jog Bahadur Dhama of Dharapani claims forest officials receive up to two million rupees in bribe while leasing out a community forest to smugglers. Dhama sees the wholesale lease of community forests as "a premeditated deforestation bid."

However, District Forest Officer Panchalal Shah says District Forest Office has no information about the unscrupulous practice. "Though laws donot let anyone to sell the forest, we can do nothing if user groups decide to lease the forest to contractors," reasons the officer.

Police gunned down two leopards

On May 24, police gunned down a leopard at 5:00 pm in Bhaktapur district. An ill-fated leopard had injured eight people in Ganesh Primary School area of Balkot VDC- 9 after it appeared at 9:00 in the morning. It was terrorized because of the crowd and noise of the local people who came to see it.

Likewise, five people were injured in an attack by a leopard at the Tibetan refugee camp in Hemja, Kaski district this morning. Among the injured, one Tashi Lama has sustained deep wound in his head due to the attack. The leopard was killed with orders from the District Administration Office, police said. It was shot dead by police sharpshooters.

On the other hand, the leopard poaching is still continuing in Rukum district. Police captured leopard-skins, a case in point that poachers are increasingly on the prowl for the big cat.

District Forest Officer Shankar Prasad Gupta said though there is no exact data that how many leopards have been killed so far, but many have fallen to poaching. Locals say there is a spike in poaching and the leopard is under threat.

It is said that there is increased value for leopard skins, claws, bones, and penises in the international market.



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