

Year 2 Edition 10 Jestha

Published by: JP Media Pvt. Ltd.
Regd. 181/2073/74

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION 5000.00

tour *news*

MONTHLY

A group of wild dogs, possibly Indian wild dogs, are gathered around a carcass in a natural setting. The dogs are brown and have pointed ears. One dog in the foreground is looking directly at the camera. The background is a blurred green landscape.

WILD DOGS
in the verge of
extinction

International Dhole Conference

1-7 June 2023

Organized by IUCN/SSC/CSG/Dhole Working Group



Cornell University
College of Veterinary Medicine



Venue:

National Trust for Nature Conservation
Biodiversity Conservation Center, Sauraha

Congratulations!



Thakur Bhandari
President



Birkh Bahadur Shahi
Senior Vice President



Parvata Gautam
General Secretary



Dilli Giri
Secretary



Shanta Neupane
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We would like to extend our warmest congratulations and best wishes to the newly elected President, Thakur Bhandari, Senior Vice President, Birkh Bahadur Shahi, General Secretary, Parvata Gautam, Secretary, Dilli Giri, and Treasurer, Shanta Neupane, of the Community Forest Consumers Federation Nepal (FECON) on their successful election during the seventh national convention. May your tenure be filled with success and achievements. We send our heartfelt greetings and well wishes for your future endeavors.

Editor-in-Chief: Prem Bastola
Chief Editor: Rajendra Bhatt
Tour News Monthly Magazine Family

Cover Story



Wild Dogs in the verge of extinction

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Local people in conservation



Enthusiastically Awaiting the Historic First International Wild Dog Conference in Nepal



Why is the International Canine Conference being held in Nepal?



Human life to be in danger: failure to protect dhole



The government should prioritize Dholey conservation

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JP Media Pvt. Ltd
Anamnagar

Regd. no.182 2073/74
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Layout:

Thememaker Pvt. Ltd
Adwaitmarg, Bagbazar, Kathmandu

Printing:

Jagdamba Multi Printers Pvt. Ltd.
Kathmandu



EDITORIAL

Preserving the Endangered Wild Dog: A Call to Action

There seems to be a lack of sufficient interest in the search for and conservation of the highly endangered Wild Dog. While the world is actively engaged in protecting large and iconic wildlife species, we are not giving due importance to the extinction threat faced by the Wild dog, despite its crucial role in maintaining the balance of our biological diversity.

Scientists, engineers, and professionals from various nations are making concerted efforts to locate, study, and conserve the Wild Dog species that has been on the brink of extinction. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, the Dholey Working Group (DWG) within the Candid Specialist Group has taken the initiative to organize a week-long "International Conference on Asiatic Dog (Dholey)" conference in Nepal. The symposium, scheduled to be held in Sauraha from May 18 to 24, will bring together 15 experts in Wild Dog Conservation from around the world. During the meeting, a collective decision was made to develop and implement an action plan aimed at safeguarding the Wild dog population.

According to outdated data from 2015, the global population of Wild Dogs is estimated to be around 1000 individuals. However, the exact numbers are uncertain, particularly in the case of Nepal, where it is believed that the population ranges from 50 to 100 individuals. Wild Dogs can be found in 11 countries, including Nepal, India, China, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos. In Nepal, they are primarily found in Chitwan, Parsa, Bardia, and Shuklaphanta National Parks on the Terai side. In the highlands, they have been observed in the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area, Rara National Park, Khaptad National Park, Dhorpatan Game Reserve, and the Limi Valley in Humla. Nowly, Sightings of these creatures are common in the Chure area.

Efforts are still required to accurately determine the population of Wild dogs, considering their higher vulnerability compared to tigers. It is crucial to establish sustainable management practices, allocate sufficient resources, and ensure the preservation of safe habitats for these animals. Furthermore, conservation efforts should encompass the protection of food species vital to the Wild dog's survival. Government agencies and non-governmental organizations dedicated to wildlife preservation and biodiversity conservation must collaborate at all levels to safeguard Wild dogs and promote their population growth. It is essential to prioritize the protection of these creatures, even if their numbers are small, rather than allowing them to face the threat of extinction and merely preserving their skeletal remains as a memory.


Rajendra Bhatta



*Understanding the **Endangered Dholes** & importance of their Conservation*

Ambika Prasad Khatiwada,
Dhole Conservation Specialist



Researcher Khatiwada is taking details of the Dhole and Cow fighting place below Sammewa Vedichowk, Yamphudin

ABOUT

Dholes are dogs ! The dhole (pronounced "dole") is also known as the Asiatic wild dog, red dog, and whistling dog. It is about the size of a German shepherd but looks more like a long-legged fox. This highly elusive and skilled jumper is classified with wolves, coyotes, jackals, and foxes in the taxonomic family Canidae.

Dholes are unusual dogs for a number of reasons. They don't fit neatly into any of the dog subfamilies (wolf and fox, for instance). Dholes have only two molars on each side of their lower jaw, instead of three, and have a relatively shorter jaw than their doggie counterparts. Also, female dholes have more teats than other canid species and can produce up to 12 pups per litter.

Dholes are incredibly athletic. They are fast runners, excellent swimmers, and impressive jumpers. These skills are critical when the pack

is hunting. In some protected areas, they share habitat with tigers and leopards.

Here's a short review highlighting Dholes;

Origin and scientific classification

The dhole originates from South Asia after the late Pleistocene mass extinctions c. 12 000–18 000 bp, when it became extinct across North America and Europe, along with several other large species such as mammoths and dire wolves (Thenius 1954; Dundas 1999; Iyengar *et al.* 2005). Dhole is classified in the subfamily Simocyoninae, together with the African cape hunting dog (*Lycaon pictus*) and the South American bush dog (*Speothos venaticus*), although the validity of this association has often been questioned (Kleiman 1967; Fox 1971; Clutton-Brock *et al.* 1976; Cohen *et al.* 1978). The scientific classification of dhole is:

Kingdom: Animalia

Order: Carnivora

Genus: Cuon (Hodgson, 1838)

Phylum: Chordata

Family: Canidae

Species: *C. alpinus*

Class: Mammalia

Subfamily: Caninae

Binomial name: *Cuon alpinus* (Pallas, 1811)

Subspecies

There are about eleven subspecies of the dhole, spanning different sizes and colors. Two subspecies of the dhole are classified as endangered by the World Conservation Union, meaning that they face serious risk of extinction. Another two are on the verge of extinction (Durbin *et al.* 2004). Eleven subspecies were recognized at one point, but a current genetic analysis identified two major phylogeographical groupings within *Cuon* (Iyengar *et al.* 2005).

The recognized eleven subspecies are:

- *Cuon alpinus javanicus*, found in Java, has a short, bright red coat, though there are regional variations.
- *Cuon alpinus sumatrensis*, found in Sumatra, has a short, bright red coat and dark whiskers.
- *Cuon alpinus infuscus*, found in Southern Myanmar, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam has a dark brown coat and distinctive cranial features.
- *Cuon alpinus adjustus*, found in Northern Myanmar and Indo-China, has a reddish-brown coat.
- *Cuon alpinus dukhunensis*, found south of the Ganges in India, has a red coat, short hair on the paws, and black whiskers.
- *Cuon alpinus primaevus*, found in Himalayan regions of Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan, has a longer, redder coat than dukhunensis, and has long hair on the paws.
- *Cuon alpinus hesperius*, found in Eastern Turkestan, Southern Siberia and Western China (Altai and Tianshan), has a long, bright yellow coat with a white underside and pale whiskers.
- *Cuon alpinus laniger*, found in Kashmir and Southern Tibet, has a full yellow-gray coat.
- *Cuon alpinus fumosus*, found in Western Szechuan, China, and Mongolia, has a luxuriant yellowish-red coat with a dark back and gray neck.



Setting Camera_Sammewa Deurali_Photo Taken by Mr. Tashi Lama

- *Cuon alpinus lepturus*, found south of the Yangze in China, has a uniform red coat with thick underfur.
- *Cuon alpinus alpinus*, found in Eastern Russia (east of eastern Sayans), including Amur, has a thick tawny-red coat with a grayish neck and an ochre muzzle.

The Indian subcontinent has four subspecies of dholes (Johnsingh 1985) and of these, possibly two occur in Bhutan—*Cuon alpinus Primaevus* in the lower and middle Himalayan region, and *Cuon alpinus laniger* in the higher regions (Johnsingh *et al.* 2007).

Description of the dhole

Dholes are large Canids (typically 12-20 kg), usually having a reddish or brown coat and darker, bushy tail (sometimes with a white tip). Sexual dimorphism is not very distinct with no quantitative anatomical differences known. The ears are triangular with rounded tips (about half the length of the face). The pinnae are usually whitish-fawn on the inside and reddish-brown on the outside. The muzzle is brown, relatively short and slightly convex in profile. The nose is black and the eyes slightly hooded with amber irises. The dorsal and lateral pelage is red to brown and the fore neck, chest and undersides are often whitish or light ginger colored. In the south and south-west of the dhole's range, the fur is shorter and rusty-red colored. In the north and north-east the fur is longer, brownish-red or yellowish-brown. The legs are notably shorter in some alpine regions and the coat is a yellowish-grey color in Himalayan region (Durbin *et al.* 2004).

Habitat

The dhole exploits a large variety of habitats, reflecting its adaptability. It normally inhabits dry and moist deciduous forests and thick jungles, as well as tropical rain forests, which all provide better cover for hunting.



Dhole Camera Trapped in KCA at an Elevation of 3759 m in August 2010

Dholes like open spaces and during the day they can often be found on jungle roads and paths, river beds, and in jungle clearings. The dhole inhabits in the widest range of climates in the canid family – from freezing cold to tropical heat, but is not recorded in deserts (Wikipedia 2011). They exist only in small pockets of forest in the north-east Indian hills, in the states of Assam and Meghalaya. The best populations exist in Myanmar and central and southern India. Ample preys in the dry deciduous tracts of forest are partially responsible for their relative security in these areas. Human pressures on habitat and wanton hunting of prey species have virtually exterminated dholes from most parts of south-east Asia. In many areas it has traditionally and erroneously been classified as vermin, thought to deplete natural populations of wild ungulates as well as kill domestic cattle. Systematic bounty hunting and poisoning has caused its extinction over much of its range, especially in Central Asia (Venkataraman 1996). It inhabits areas of primary, secondary, degraded, evergreen, and semi-evergreen forms of vegetation, and dry thorn forests, as well as scrub-forest mosaics. It can also, however, survive in dense alpine forests, meadows, and on the open steppes (Dictionary 2010).



wild dog kca

Food

The main prey of dholes varies throughout their range. Beetles, rodents and birds have all been recorded among dhole prey items (Davidar 1975; Durbin et al. 2004) and dholes also occasionally consume grass and other plants like most other carnivores (Durbin et al. 2004). However, dholes hunt mainly vertebrate prey, with a preference for medium to large ungulates. Dholes prey on wild ungulates such as Sambar (*Cervus unicolor*), Chital (*Axis axis*), Barking deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*) and Wild pig (*Sus scrofa*) and also on livestock when available. In Bhutan wild ungulates such as Sambar, Wild pig, and Barking deer, which provide a

INTERESTING FACTS REGARDING DHOLES

- The dhole has some extraordinary vocal calls - it can whistle, scream, mew, and even cluck like a chicken.
- It can urinate while doing a handstand on its front two legs.
- Sometimes it forms temporary packs of over 40 animals.
- It breeds communally with most pack members helping to feed or guard the pups.
- When hunting as a pack it can subdue prey over 10 times its own body weight, and can even fend off a tiger!
- It exploits a variety of habitats from tropical rain forest and dry-deciduous jungle, to cold alpine forest and open plains.
- It has amazing jumping powers and can reach a vertical height of at least 2.3 metres (7.5 ft).
- Its dental formula is unique among the dog family.
- It is a capable swimmer and often drives its prey into water.

WHY SHOULD WE CONSERVE DHOLES?

- Dholes are key predators in the ecosystem: they help with the regulation of prey. Without them:
- Prey numbers will boom, thus increasing the risk of human-wildlife conflict due to crop raiding.
- The balance of the ecosystem and its biodiversity would be affected. Some predators would thrive and some species could go extinct due to a chain reaction.
- Dholes are endangered and their main threats are all caused by humans. We are the only ones who have the power to help this species. Wild dogs have inhabited these habitats long before humans and it's our moral obligation to ensure their survival into the future.
- Even if they now exist in the shadow of other species such as tigers or snow leopards, dholes have the potential to be charismatic species in their own right, like their close cousin, *Lycan pictus*, has in Africa. They could become a potential draw for eco-tourists and thus for the economy of local people.
- Dholes are the last representative of the Genus *Cuon* in the Canid family. If they go extinct, an entire portion of evolutionary history will be lost forever.
- Dholes play an important role in ecosystems and contribute to biodiversity. This amazing species is a heritage we should not deprive the next generation of.
- Dholes – like all species – are worth more alive than dead. We should be proud to share their habitat.

suitable habitat for dholes (Johnsingh *et al.* 2007). Other items include birds, lizards, insects and vegetable materials including grass, leaves and fruits (Fox 1984; Gopi *et al.* 2010).

Predation to livestock or game

Dholes generally prefer to kill wild prey species and ignore domestic livestock (Venkataraman *et al.* 1995; Durbin *et al.* 2004). Dholes sometimes prey on endangered species; for example, it was feared that the banteng population of Alas Purwo National Park in Java was being driven to local extinction by dhole predation (Hedges & Tyson 1996; Durbin *et al.* 2004). It was the dholes that finally “disappeared” when banteng numbers reached a level that, apparently, could no longer sustain them. Possibly, these dholes turned to cattle predation and suffered retributive human persecution (Durbin *et al.* 2004).

Prey preferred by dholes is usually medium sized prey (Karanth & Sunquist 2000) while they are said to hunt large sized prey in a separate study (Wang & Macdonald 2009). The most preferred kill in Nagarhole, India by dholes was Chital (*Axis axis*) followed by Sambar (*Rusa unicolor*) and hare (*Lepus nigricollis*) (Karanth & Sunquist 1995; Johnsingh 1983). In another study it was shown that Sambar are more common in dhole scats suggesting that they were preferred (Wang & Macdonald 2009; Cohen *et al.* 1978). Among age class dholes prefer adult male then yearlings, fawns then females in case of Chital (Karanth & Sunquist 1995). Johnsingh's (1983) study estimated that an adult dhole (15-17 kg) consumed 1.86 kg meats per day, or 0.103kg per kg of its body weight.

Studied conducted in Bandipur Johnsingh (1983) and in Nagarhole Karanth & Sunquist (1995) documented that the size of the major prey was positively related to the size of the predator. Karanth & Sunquist (1995) found that dholes usually focused on prey in the 31-175 kg size class. Dholes in Bandipur preferred

to kill chital males that had longer antlers, possibly because stags with large antlers may be hampered when running through dense vegetation and are easily killed (Johnsingh 1983). Juvenile animals (excluding gaur calves) appear to have been taken non-preferentially by all three predators (Karanth & Sunquist 1995).

Common hare (*Lepus nigricollis*) was the commonly represented prey species of the dholes (Cohen 1978). Venkataraman *et al.* (1995) studied feeding habits of two packs. They found that both the packs preferred to hunt chital. According to Acharya (2007), Chital was highly hunted by dholes, but scat analysis indicated Sambar was highly consumed by dholes more than their availability. Dholes also scavenge when prey was scarcity especially during dry season (Durbin *et al.* 2008). Dholes also scavenged on Tiger kills and Leopard kills (Johnsingh 1983).

Hunting behavior

Dholes display a high level of sociality. They are communal hunters, occasionally forming pack of 30 individuals (Fox 1984), packs of 3–20 individuals (Iyengar *et al.* 2005). Circumstantial evidences suggest that packs have a sex ratio biased towards males as a consequence of higher female dispersal (Johnsingh 1982; Venkataraman 1998; Iyengar *et al.* 2005). Dholes show behavioral thermoregulation which influences daily activity and they rarely resort to high movement during the day and generally prefer to hunt during dawn or dusk. Rarely do they hunt during nights but prefer moonlit nights (Fox & Johnsingh 1975). In Bandipur, Karnataka, India; nearly 70% of the kills were made before sunrise and before sunset; while approximately 20% were made after sunrise and after sunset. Moonlit nights also showed 2/3 of the kills made at night (Johnsingh 1983). Dholes prefer to hunt during the morning and evening (Venkataraman *et al.* 1995).

Hunting behavior is usually of

two types, by forming a line while any adult locates and starts a chase toward the prey or the second strategy is by interception by some members while it is being driven towards them. Most kills chase last for less than 500m. Dholes generally attack larger prey from the back (Johnsingh 1983). Snout injury or rump and flank evisceration are common in killing of a prey by dholes that causes loss of blood or shock (Karanth & Sunquist 2000; Johnsingh 1983). Throat injury is not part of a dhole hunting forte (Johnsingh 1983). Time taken to make a successful kill is between 7 to 15 minutes (Johnsingh 1983). Dholes do not cache their prey (Karanth & Sunquist 2000). Total meat consumed by a dhole is roughly 2 Kg/day (Johnsingh 1983). Dhole has excellent sense of smell, which they use to locate the prey aided by sight (Johnsingh 1983; Prater 1980). Dhole pack selects a particular prey individual in order to separate from the groups (Krishnan 1972). Gaur

and buffalo herds are stampeded by the dhole pack in order to attack the calves (Prater 1980). Among the medium sized prey Barking deer was the most preferable for dhole (Aiyadurai & Verma 2003). Average weight of the prey killed by the dhole was 55.3 kg (Acharya 2007).

Unlike other canids, there is no evidence of dholes using urine to mark their territories or travel routes. They may defecate in conspicuous places, though a territorial function is unlikely, as feces are mostly deposited within the clan's territory rather than the periphery. Feces are often deposited in what appear to be communal latrines. They do not scrape the earth with their feet as other canids do to mark their territories (Wikipedia 2011).

Conservation

Dholes are legally protected in all countries they occur in, under CITES – Appendix II. However, law enforcement needs to be strengthened to ensure their

protection as many of their range countries fail to address it. More conservation projects need to include dholes in their long-term strategies to improve their studies to estimate their densities and the ecology of this poorly known species.

In Nepal the dholes' range extends from tropical forest (Terai PAs) to Alpine meadows (high mountain PAs and corridors) from eastern to western parts of the country. However, even though their range is wide and they are present in several PAs, their conservation is confined to just a few PAs. Nepal's dhole population is estimated as low (250 -750 individuals). The Dhole project in eastern Nepal is focused on understanding more about the integral role of these unique dogs in the ecosystem and engaging local communities - so that we can show they are more valuable alive than dead.

(SHORT EXCERPT : AMBIKA PRASAD KHATIWADA ON STATUS AND HABITAT PREFERENCE OF DHOLE (CUON ALPINUS) IN KANGCHENJUNGA CONSERVATION AREA)

हार्दिक स्वागत

यहि जेष्ठ १८ गतेदेखि २४ गतेसम्म चितवनको सौराहामा हुन गईरहेको विश्वकै पहिलो "अन्तराष्ट्रिय वन कुकुर सम्मेलन"मा सहभागी हुन पाल्नुहुने नेपाल लगायत १८ देशका वैज्ञानिक, अनुसन्धानकर्ता, वन्यजन्तुविद्, वातावरणविद् र वन संरक्षणका लागेका अभियन्ताहरूलाई हार्दिक स्वागत गर्दछौ ।



अध्यक्ष: कृष्णप्रसाद बगाले
पञ्चकन्या सामुदायिक वन
उपभोक्ता समुह, परिवार
रत्ननगर नगरपालिका वडा
नम्बर ११, चितवन



WILD DOGS

in the verge of
extinction



Ambika Prasad Khatiwada



Sujan Khanal



Raju Jhallu Prasad

Introduction:

Wild Asian dogs are the most endangered mammals belonging to the Canidae family. Their scientific name is *Cuon alpinus*. The species is currently in IUCN red list of endangered species. The indigenous people living around National Park can easily see the difference between dhole and common dogs while most other people confuse it with either wolf or jackal. From being different in terms of both body structure and habits, dhole is not wolf and wolf is not dhole. Although the ancestry of every species of dog can be traced back to wolf, a comprehensive study of DNA shows that dhole and wolf have evolved into completely different animals some 19,000 to 32,000 years ago.

Despite having allocated approximately 20 percent of the total land mass for nature conservation, the approach taken by Nepal in the conservation of this endangered species does not even amount to a bare minimum. We don't talk enough about this animal, that is, in a way a part of our local natural heritage. The cause calls for our rapid action. This issue also needs more publicity because the mammal is the only other big endangered carnivore after tiger. Merely putting it in conservation list is not enough, we need to come up with a solid action-plan for their conservation. There needs to be a practice of tracking down and keeping record of the animal and then rehabilitating them in their appropriate habitat. We have failed to address the burning concern that is the void in ecosystem resulted from the absence of this species for far too long. What they show in the movies like Jurassic Park is one thing, but it is not a child's play to bring back the species into life, once they have gone extinct. Therefore, it is the only sensible thing to get alarmed now and make necessary arrangements for conservation than to go on collecting the remains of wild dogs to keep in the museums.



In the wake of severe destruction of forests and resulting loss of shelter and food, and from being a target among the poachers, the Wild Asian Dogs a.k.a. Dhole that once used to be found all over Asia have now perished from most countries. The remnants of the now at-risk species are scarcely found in Nepal, India, China, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Laos

As per the International Laws of conservation, this rare species belongs to the annex-2 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and has also been put in the distressed group of species by IUCN. With the intent of highlighting the importance of this species on an international level, 28th may of every year is recognized as the world wild dog's day. Unfortunately, in Nepal, one of the last remaining homes of this animal, we barely hear any news about this day. This just goes to show how far behind we are and how inadequate our legal provisions are in the conservation of this valuable endangered species.

What does a Dhole look like?

With broad round ears, dark mouth and reddish-brown appearance, the animal is very thin around the waist. It is physically very active and quick, and has a thick bushy tail with dark-colored tip. Those having white collar have mostly shorter limbs and are white/yellowish in appearance. Depending on the place and local tongue, this endangered mammal is

also known by the name of Bwaso, Bansa Kutta, Ban Nagi, etc. Seeing its long skeleton and thin limbs, some people even call it a cat. It even looks like a Hyena at the first glance.

While erect, the animal measures as tall as 12-17 inches and as long as 3 feet. They commonly take shelter in caves and between the rocks around water resources. While the adult/alpha female weighs around 16 kgs, the alpha male is almost 21 kgs. Their average life expectancy ranges around 15-16 years.

Wild dogs found in Africa (scientific name: *Lycaon pictus*) as like Hyenas in terms of anger level. Dholes are usually calm and composed. They mostly live in groups of around 5 to 10. Dholes have never been known to attack people like wolves do. These animals prefer seclusion and privacy and hence, are rarely seen around human settlements. However, due to the recent spike in human settlement and activities around the park zone, these peace-loving creatures have been suffering from undue distress.

Based on the availability of prey and the suitability of ecosystem, the population density of these animals is

not the same everywhere. Nearly 25,00 wild Asian dogs are believed to have remained the world today, but this data is disputed by the conservationists. The number of alpha males is not believed to be more than 500 and the it is constantly declining. There are unsupported claims regarding the number of dholes in Nepal being around 100.

Where are wild dogs found around the globe?

The wild Asian dog is especially a native species of Asia. In the Pleistocene period, this organism was spread across various parts of Asia, Europe and North America, but it later became limited to Asia some 12-18 thousand years ago. The creature was first mentioned in literature in 1794 by an explorer named Pasteref, who, during his trip to Far Eastern Russia supposedly came across it and compared the creature to a 'packed hunter' and the golden fox, citing numerous similarities.

In the wake of severe destruction of forests and resulting loss of shelter and food, and from being a target among the poachers, the Wild



A wild dog under camera trapping Parsa National Park.



Asian Dogs a.k.a. Dhole that once used to be found all over Asia have now perished from most countries. The remnants of the now at-risk species are scarcely found in Nepal, India, China, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Laos. Wild Asian dogs are found in the highest number in Western Ghats of India. After India, they are mostly seen in China. A good number of wild dogs are found in Bhutan's Jigme Dorjee National Park. The presence of wild dogs has been confirmed by camera trapping in 11 areas of Myanmar and they have seemingly replaced tiger to become the country's top predator after the leopard.

Dry forests, wet forests, warm evergreens, warm rain forests, open plains etc. ranging from the from seal level to 5300 meters are considered suitable habitats for the wild dogs. In Nepal, studies have shown that it can be found up to 4,350 meters from the sea level. Most of the national parks and conservation areas of Terai and Hilly regions are stretched at this height so naturally, it can be assumed that the forest dogs are scattered in

different parts of Nepal.

Where can you find wild Asian dogs in Nepal?

In the context of Nepal, the creatures have been traced in and around the conservation areas of Terai as well as the conservation areas and biotic path lying along the mountain trails.

The presence of wild dogs has been recorded in Chitwan, Parsa, Bardia and Shuklaphanta National Parks of Terai and Kanchenjungha Conservation Area, Rara National Park, Khaptad National Park and Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve situated in higher altitude. Libhi Valley situated in Namkha Rural Municipality of Humla, apart from being a popular attraction center for Tibetan Heritage has also been known for being inhabited by a few of these animals.

Till today, the species have been tracked in various parts of Chitwan National Park (Chitwan, Parsa & Nawalparasi- 100-815 m.), Bardia National Park (Bardia- approx. 415 m.), Parsa National Park (Chitwan, Makawanpur & Parsa- 500-950 m.), Annapurna Conservation Area (Kaski, Lamjung, Myagdi, Mustang & Manang-

790-8091 m.), Khaptad National Park (Bajhang, Bajura, Doti & Achham- 1262-3276 m.), Kanchenjungha Conservation Area (Taplejung- 1829-8550 m.), Rara National Park (Mugu & Jumla- 2800-4039 m.), Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve (Rukum, Baglung & Myagdi- 3000-7000 m.) and Libhi Valley (Humla- 4100 m.).

Similarly, writer/journalist Mr. Mohan Mainali recalls someone showing him a wild dog while on a field-reporting inn Lamtang area after the earthquake. This account proves the presence of the animal in Lamtang area as well.

In 2011, with the help of camera trapping, pack record and presence of wild dog were verified in Chitwan National Park and Kanchenjungha Conservation area. Dr. Ambika Prasad Khatiwada, in 2010 did research on wild dogs of Kanchenjungha Conservation Area during his master's levels in 2010. From a personal level, very limited number of people seem to have shown any interest in this field. An organization named Friends of Nature has been seen doing something in relation to dhole, however their prime focus is to work in the conservation of

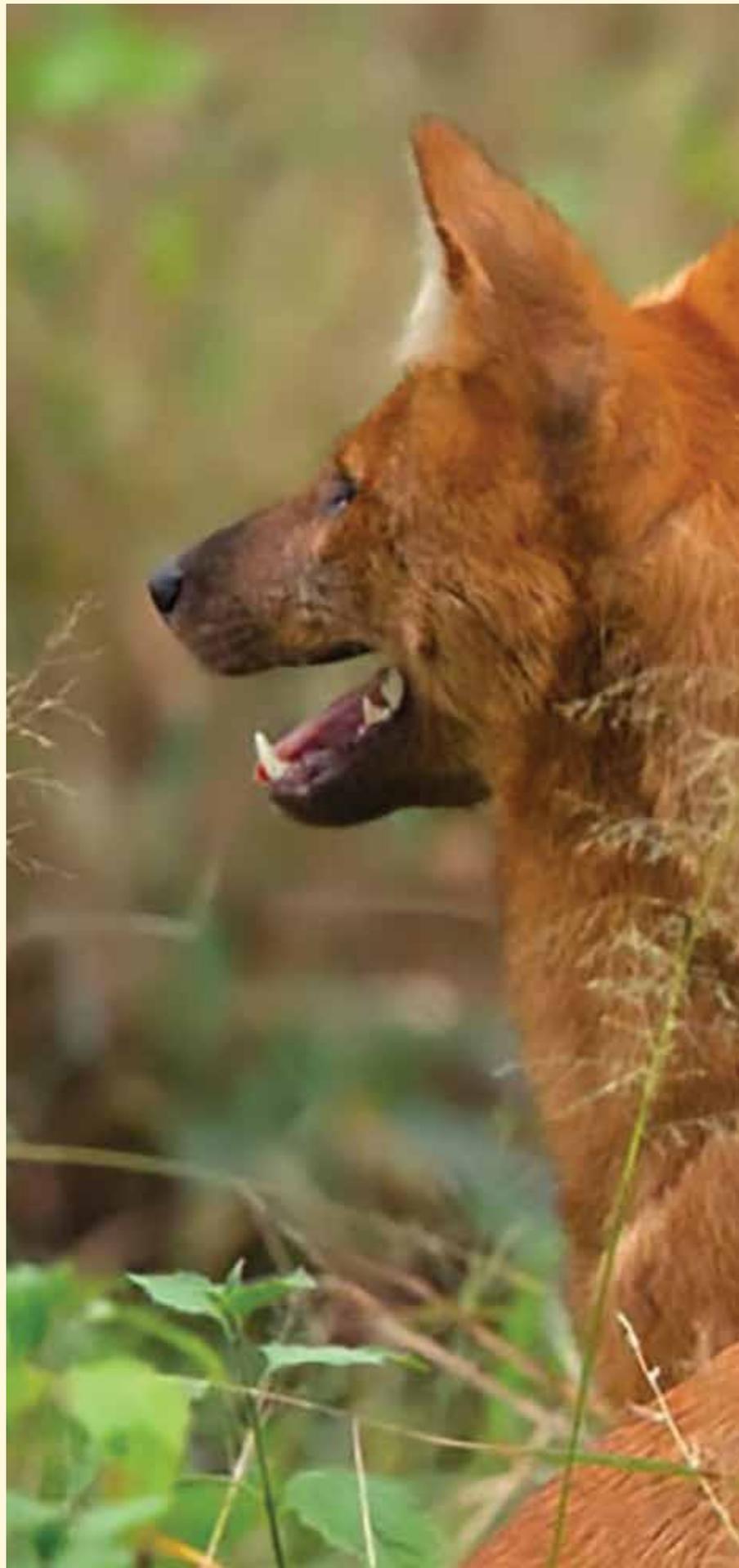
many different endangered species and dhole just happened to be a part of it. Students of Forestry have obviously been more invested on a personal level. A finite number of people including Dr. Khatiwada, Smriti Lama, Sujan Khanal, Trishna Rayamajhi and Asmita Pandey have been actively working for the cause of wild dog conservation in Nepal.

Subspecies

There are about eleven subspecies of the dhole, spanning different sizes and colors. Two subspecies of the dhole are classified as endangered by the World Conservation Union, meaning that they face serious risk of extinction. Another two are on the verge of extinction (Durbin et al. 2004). Eleven subspecies were recognized at one point, but a current genetic analysis identified two major phylogeographical groupings within *Cuon* (Iyengar et al. 2005).

The recognized eleven subspecies are:

1. *Cuon alpinus javanicus*, found in Java, has a short, bright red coat, though there are regional variations.
2. *Cuon alpinus sumatrensis*, found in Sumatra, has a short, bright red coat and dark whiskers.
3. *Cuon alpinus infuscus*, found in Southern Myanmar, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam has a dark brown coat and distinctive cranial features.
4. *Cuon alpinus adjustus*, found in Northern Myanmar and Indo-China, has a reddish-brown coat.
5. *Cuon alpinus dukhunensis*, found south of the Ganges in India, has a red coat, short hair on the paws, and black whiskers.
6. *Cuon alpinus primaevus*, found in Himalayan regions of Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan, has a longer, redder coat than *dukhunensis*, and has long hair on the paws.
7. *Cuon alpinus hesperius*, found in Eastern Turkestan, Southern Siberia and Western China (Altai and Tienshan), has a long, bright yellow coat with a white underside and pale whiskers.
8. *Cuon alpinus laniger*, found in Kashmir and Southern Tibet, has a full yellow-gray coat.
9. *Cuon alpinus fumosus*, found in Western Szechuan, China, and Mongolia, has a luxuriant yellowish-red coat with a dark back and gray neck.
10. *Cuon alpinus lepturus*, found south of the Yangze in China, has a uniform red coat with thick under-fur.
11. *Cuon alpinus alpinus*, found in Eastern Russia (east of eastern Sayans), including Amur, has a thick tawny-red coat with a grayish neck and an ochre muzzle.





The Indian subcontinent has four subspecies of dholes (Johnsingh 1985) and of these, possibly two occur in Bhutan—*Cuon alpinus Primaevus* in the lower and middle Himalayan region, and *Cuon alpinus laniger* in the higher regions (Johnsingh et al. 2007).

Features and hunting nature of dhole

1. Dhole makes 'Sisi..' sound the way humans do. They communicate among themselves by whistling. Yelling, meowing and even producing the sound of a hen, these creatures have an interesting ability to imitate other creatures. How they do so still remain a subject to be researched about. They produce 'kaka..kaka..' sound while hunting preys whereas the young ones produce a distinct sound while asking for food.
2. Dhole is naturally good at swimming. They are adapted that way since they hunt 70-80% of their prey around water resources. Same is the reason why they are seen more nearby water resources, grassland, etc. Unlike tiger and leopard, these creatures do not live in dense forests and hunt. They are among a very limited number of species that eat before their young ones do.
3. Dholes compete with tiger and leopard in the tropical forests. They usually live in a group of 2-30 and are mostly active during the morning and the evening time. The size of their group varies from places to places as there are 7-10 in one in Terai whereas only 2-3 are seen in the Mountain regions. Conflict among the groups is a rare occurrence.
4. Each group is led by a pair of dholes known as Alpha Couple or simply Team Leader. Alpha male and Alpha female take turns chasing their prey down. When one gets tired, the other takes the lead.
5. Dholes are known for their impeccable hunting skills. They are known to kills their prey by chasing them far and wearing them out. They even prey on animals like Gaurigai, Yak and Wild boar which are all 4-10 times bigger in size. They have the ability to run with the speed of 30 mph.
6. They have been rarely known to put an eye on the prey of tiger and leopard and prey on smaller species at all times. Dhole and tiger-leopard rarely have any encounter since tiger and leopard try not to prey on dhole because they always stay in groups. On some occasions, tiger preys on dhole if they are ever found alone or in little numbers. In mountain regions, dhole may come out of forests and roam around the sheep stables due to fear of bears and snow leopards. However, in the weird turn of events, Asiatic black bears have also been found to be hunted by the pack of dholes.
7. Unlike most predators, they don't straight up target the throat region of their prey. They attack in pack



- and surround the prey and then start eating from the tail area while the prey is still alive. It is in their hunting nature to jump and feast on the prey from behind. In some events, they may even target the eyes of the prey and make them blind before eating them. Surprisingly, these creatures even eat grass, herbs and leaves, not necessarily to recover from illness but simply for fun (to improve digestion).
8. A wide range of animals from rats to deer, Chital, wild boar, gaurigai, etc. fall prey to dhole. In mountain regions, dhole mostly preys on buffalo, cow, sheep, goat, etc. taken up to the pastureland. While the dhole of Terai hunt in groups led by alpha couple, in mountains, they may come alone looking for domestic animals.



9. Their breeding season starts in September every year. A healthy female alpha is capable of reproducing up to 12 young ones. Their pregnancy period usually ranges between 60-63 days. During this period, the pack brings food up to the pregnant one living in the den. The young ones after attaining the age of six months come along with the adults to the hunt and by the time, they are eight months old, they are capable of taking part in the hunting of such huge creature as sambar deer.
10. Due to adaptation, dhole in Terai have very thin fur while those in mountain possess thick layer. The food habits between the dhole also varies between these places. These differences have resulted due to separation of habitat over time.
11. Dholes do not urinate taking their one leg up like the common dogs. They raise both their limbs up. The smell of urine is an identity of the dog species. What is interesting is the smell of urine varies from animal to animal. While the common dogs have been known to mark their territory with the help of urine, same has not been found in the case of dhole. This fact alone separates the dhole from the rest of the species of dog.

Fact: Dholes run after and separate their favorite Sambar Deer, a creature that weighs somewhere between 60-80 kgs, from their group and chase them up to a nearby water resource, attack from behind and then feast on it right there.

What are the challenges facing wild dog conservation?

Even during the Rana regime, the elite Ranas of Kathmandu would sometimes go to Charkoshe Jhadi for hunting and as a winter getaway. An encounter with a wild dog started to be taken as a bad omen since then and the concept still prevails. There are wild superstitions prevalent in some parts where people believe that a drop of dhole urine in the eyes will leave you blind and if the creature jumps over you, you will be disabled. These beliefs have definitely posed more complications in conservation.

Encroachment of habitat and an increase in human settlement nearby conservation area, decline in the availability of prey, killing of the animals by use of poison and trap, lack of animal-friendly infrastructure for their locomotion, transmission of disease from domestic dogs, etc. are the main challenges seen in their conservation. Destruction of Charkoshe Jhadi and increase in human settlement post the eradication of malaria are also the probable reasons for decrease in number of dhole. Development activities carried out via forest trails have resulted in fragmentation of wildlife habitat and the development leading to human activities have also been causing significant effects.

There is a conflict at rise between humans and dhole because of the latter attacking the domestic animals. Practices like poisoning, setting traps and even shooting dhole are rampant. Especially, Indians are more active in the killings of dhole in the name of ensuring the safety of their cattle. In fact, the use of forest area in various sporting events during British rule by the British aristocrats may have also been responsible for the decline in dhole population.



©Dr Ajay Kumar Singh

In the context of Nepal as well, the hunting expedition of the royalty in the past remains a major reason why dhole population so severely went down. Every year the king and the queen would have a two-week tour to Chitwan and Bardia. The necessary arrangements for lodging, fooding and security would be taken care of by the army, ministry of home affairs, ministry of forest and the local administration. The responsibility to facilitate the technical aspect of hunting would be of national park officials. Such extravagance in hunting expedition must have compelled the peace-loving dhole to move elsewhere.

Even during the Rana regime, the elite Ranas of Kathmandu would sometimes go to Charkoshe Jhadi for hunting and as a winter getaway. An encounter with a wild dog started to be taken as a bad omen since then and the concept still prevails. There are wild superstitions prevalent in some parts where people believe that a drop of dhole urine in the eyes will leave you blind and if the creature jumps over you, you will be disabled. These beliefs have definitely posed more complications in conservation.

Most of the locals rely on the nearby forest for grass,



firewood and the additional income generating non-timber products of the forests. Traditional forest managing skills, using cow/yak-dung as an alternative to firewood, avoiding deforestation around water resources, etc. are the very useful practices that have now been slowly going out of practice, in the wake of climate change. In protest of stringent forest policies causing difficulties to them, indigenous people who consider forest as their god and worship it, have now started troubling the wild dogs.

Alarming issue of climate change has also been factoring in the decrease in dhole population. Global warming has caused significant changes in the physical, chemical and molecular structure of wetlands, lakes and rivers as well as in the physical and communal structure of aquatic animals and in the overall quality of water. Ever since we started tampering with the natural condition of water resources, the number of wild dogs seems to have started going downhill.

Risk of various diseases also surrounds dhole. While coming in contact of other animals of Canidae family, germs such as *Toxocara canis* found in their excreta seem to have

entered dhole's body. The situation leads to diseases such as rabies, canine distemper, mange, trypanosomiasis, canine parvovirus, cestodes, roundworms, etc. in the creature.

Wild dogs have been facing persecution on the hands of humans and the practice is on a quick rise in various places. The trade of dhole fur has surged in the recent times which is also making it increasingly difficult to conserve the animal.

According to the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2029, whoever kills, injures or causes harm to dhole shall be liable to pay Rs. 20-50 thousand in fine or serve a prison sentence of 6 months to a year or both. Relief Assistance Guidelines for damage caused by Wildlife, 2069 and its third amendment, 2075 have made arrangements for relief in the event of death or injury of the person or cattle. Nepalese legal provisions in the matter of crimes relating to wildlife are strict compared to that of other countries but there still are a few loopholes. Due to our failure in understanding the importance of conservation of endangered wildlife and seriousness of the crimes relating to wildlife, Nepalese laws have not been able to be as effective as they were supposed to be.



*Photo of a wild
dog by Binita
Bhandari*

Why protect this rare species?

Why conserve dhole? What is the point of it? What happens if we don't? Simply asking these questions is the first step towards conservation. Because the answer is very clear-protection of dhole means protection of our surrounding. Dhole is a gift from the nature. If we gained some perspective, we will be able to see how unfair it is that a whole species, a beautiful creation of nature has to be endangered as a result of our recklessness and selfishness. If the dhole goes extinct, their whole genes will perish. For that matter, the aim of conservation is the protection of species and its genes. It makes a huge difference in the ecosystem and even in our own survival. It is the most noble thing to prevent the possible extinction of a whole species. Even the very point of medical science is to rule out death if possible.

Not only humans, but every species have an equal contribution in the ecosystem and biodiversity. Humans are not the most supreme. Even a slight change in any element in the earth affects the others. It is the right of every wild animal to live freely and survive. We need to understand that the protection of every species is required to protect our entire existence. There is no chance of human development without the right interaction with nature. The grave effects of ecological imbalance on the regular functioning of every living being are as clear as the day. Therefore, we better shift our attention towards addressing the impending existential crisis of every living being possibly resulting from the environmental degradation currently that is currently going on.

The role of wild dogs in the ecosystem remains a less studied topic compared to that of other wild animals. However, much can be said about why must the species be protected. The reasons to protect dhole are as follows:

1. Being a prime hunter specie, dhole helps in the regulation of its preys. In its absence, the number of dietary species would go spiraling which could spark some serious concerns.
2. Wild dog is the last surviving representative of *Cuon* subspecies in *Canidae* family. It is a strong enough reason for conservation.
3. Nepal is rich in natural heritage, thanks to the impeccable biodiversity present in the conservation area and nearing places. It is believed that a very limited number of dhole with strong features are found in Nepal, a fact that is very useful in attracting tourists. As per the department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, more than 60% of the foreign tourists that visit Nepal visit national parks, conservation areas and related places. In the event of growth in endangered dhole population, we can assure the tourists that they will definitely be able to see one. They will be very much impressed upon seeing a beautiful piece of nature and its very beautiful gift that is dhole.

What to do for the protection of Dhole?

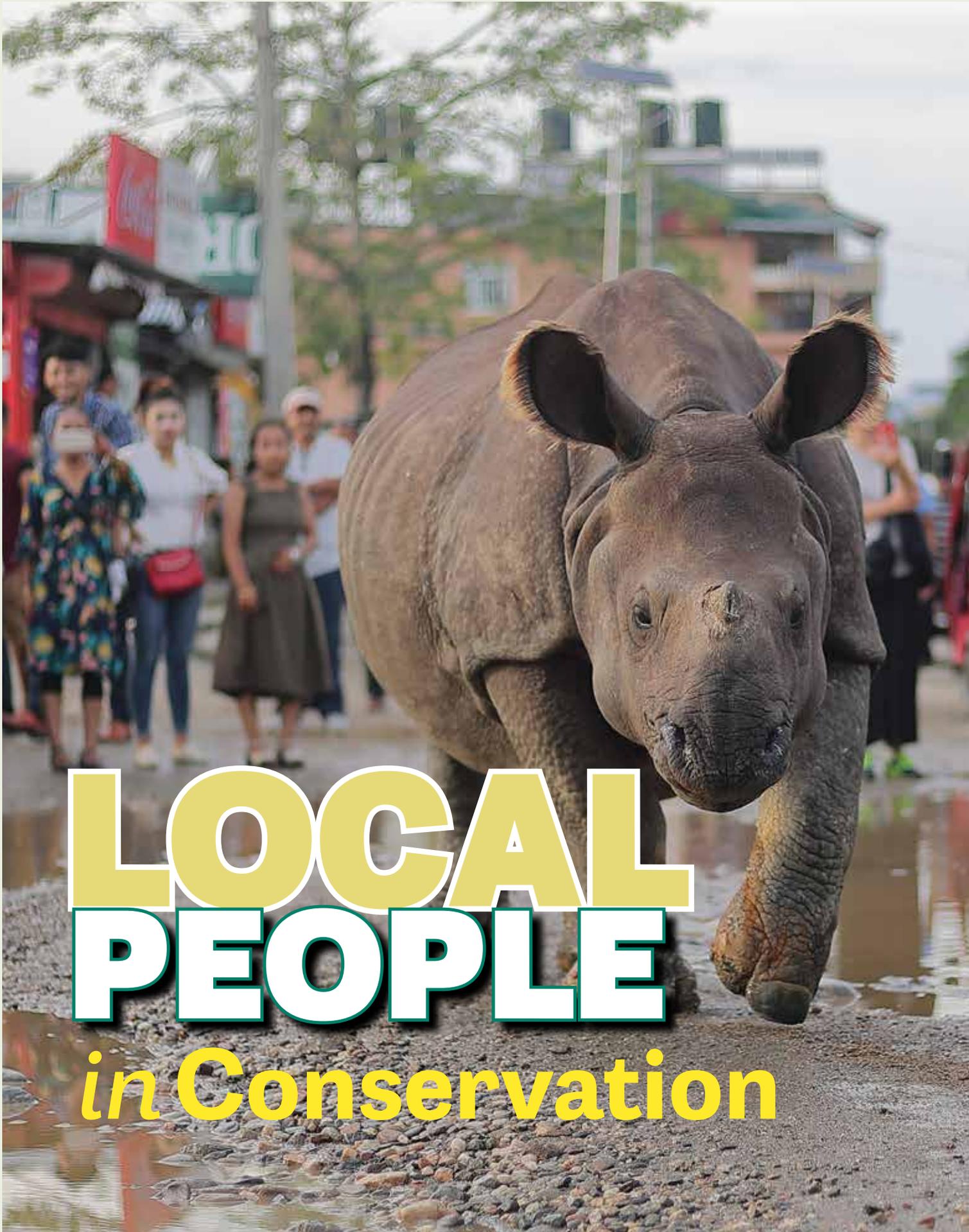
1. *Wild dog information center*: It is the need of the hour to establish a 'wild dog information center' or a 'wild

dog study and research center' so as to collectively disseminate the information regarding its locomotion, numbers, activities, damages/injuries, etc. It helps to keep track of the whereabouts of the creature and also helps the concerned authority gather information regarding the damage to the lives and assets. It is high time we had a solid-action plan for the management of wild dogs.

2. *Creating a peaceful habitat*: Dhole gets alarmed by the noise of horns, noises produced while collecting grass and firewood and when someone cuts the branches or trees. Also, if entry inside the forest during child-rearing seasons were prohibited, the risk of mother dhole abandoning the children could be mitigated and as a result the young ones would not have to die due to lack of care. It will also help increase dhole population.
3. *The new hub of wild dogs- community forests*: The extreme growth in population density in the Terai has resulted in the dholes of Terai moving towards the now flourishing community forests of the hills. As a result of people's reliance moving away from agriculture and products of the forest, forests in the Mahabharat range have grown dense. If the community forest consumers committee could be made aware of the importance of wild dogs, the flourishing community forests could be developed as a hub for these animals. Running eco-tourism by incorporating the rich local biodiversity would even help create a lucrative source of income for the community forest consumers group.
4. *Building wildlife friendly structures*: While crossing roads, wild dogs get injured by coming across high-speed motor vehicles. Building structures such as flyover bridges and culvert, underpass, village road-bridge, eco-bridge and canopy bridge to help animals move freely to and from water resources and other places would also be helpful in increasing their population. While constructing wildlife friendly structures, it would be better to include locally resourced materials and incorporate guiding fence and noise-cancelling techniques.
5. *Prepare learning materials and textbooks*: Topics related to conservation, conservation area and local conservation practices, wild dogs, human-wildlife conflict and conflict management, culture, practice and tourism should be taught and read about. To raise awareness regarding conservation, course of study right from the school level should be revised to cover the topic of local conservation techniques and prevalent practices.

In Conclusion:

Humans and wildlife have had a deep relation since ages. Every single animal is equally responsible for the maintenance of a healthy ecosystem. Food chain has woven them into a common web. The message is clear: Let's create wild dog-friendly environment in and around the national parks and conservation areas. Wild dogs are more precious alive than dead. Therefore, protect them.



LOCAL PEOPLE *in Conservation*



Photo: Sagar Giri

Introduction:

Chitwan National Park has been continuously celebrating the success in conservation of endangered wildlife. The number of tigers have reached 128 with an increase of 38 percent in 2022. Similarly, the number of rhinos has reached 694 with an increase of 15 percent in 2021. The narratives of increase and increasing the number of rhino and tiger populations often ignore and exclude the role of local people which is harmful for sustainable conservation. Sustainable conservation often sets the discourse of conservation with people. The article tries to address the issues of sustainable conservation from people's perspective focusing on local people's participation in conservation focusing on Chitwan National Park.

Forest and wildlife conservation in Chitwan

The wildlife conservation in Nepal dates back to Rana oligarchy in the early 20th century when wildlife were used for big games. The Ranas often convened big games to strengthen the diplomatic relations with the British Empire. Wildlife had been a gem for maintaining the foreign relations and therefore wildlife conservation was important for diplomacy. Therefore the forests of Chitwan were always a priority for conservation.

Second malaria epidemics in Chitwan also played a vital role in forest conservation. Malaria not only controlled the indigenous Tharu population but also prevented the migration from hill and other parts of Nepal and India.



Photo: Sagar Giri



The estimated Tharu population of Chitwan in the early 20th century was 10,000. The small size Tharu population and prevention of migration in Chitwan helped in forest and wildlife conservation.

Third, Tharu indigenous knowledge and tradition of living around forests and water bodies helped further forest and wildlife conservation in Chitwan. The shifting agriculture and culture to worship and honor nature helped maintain the grasslands and forest. Because of shifting agriculture, the internal mobility of Tharu was very high and they never built permanent big houses. The small housing pattern of Tharu people never demanded plenty

of timber and other forest products and compelled them to clear the trees.

Despite the value of forest and wildlife for diplomacy, the ownership of forest was in the hands of few people in the name of Birta and other forms. Nationalization of forest in 1957 brought all the forest into state control. Nationalization of forests was the landmark step for better forest regulations; however, the nationalization of forests massively excluded local people from forest management and access to forest resources.

The state control of the forest further became stricter when national parks were established. Nepal's first national park, Chitwan

National Park was established in 1973. The park not only ignored the Tharu indigenous knowledge and their practices for sustainable forest management but also excluded local people's access to forest resources. Ignoring the indigenous culture of forest management and exclusion of local communities from the forest management have raised the many questions in sustainable management.

Park Vs People Policy for Park Management.

Nepal's conservation policy is still guided by strict protectionist conservation accompanied by Rana and Panchayat legacy. The emergence of conservation policy in Nepal started during the early 1950s but institutionalized in the 1970s - a peak time of the Panchayat regime. The Panchayat regime was autocratic and policy formulation and implementation were mostly top-down. The central government would form and enforce policy in the interest of the rulers, often ignoring the needs and perspectives of the locals.

Nepal's current conservation policies are still founded on a strict protectionist concept. The strict protectionist idea envisioned

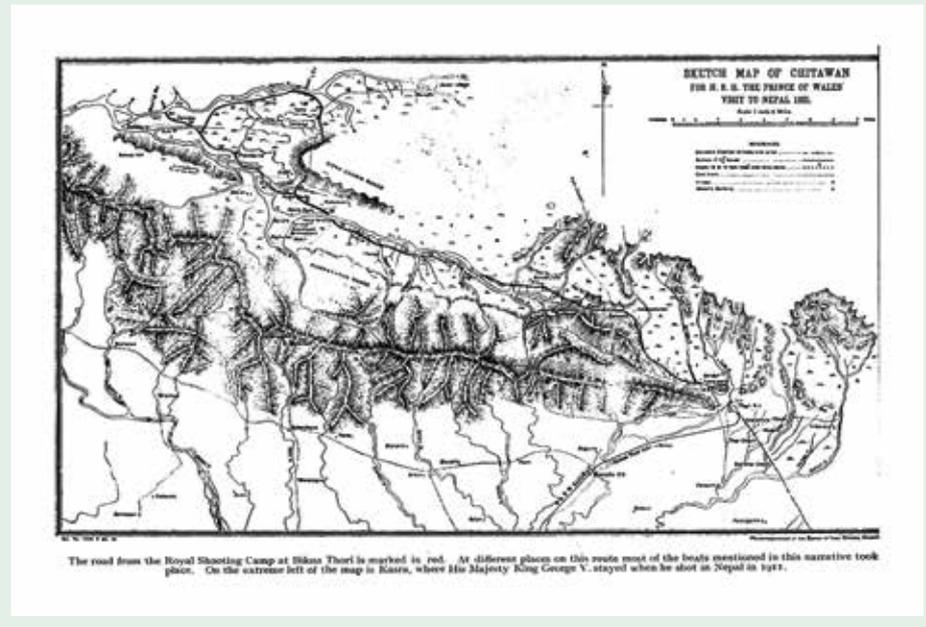


Photo: NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVES, Centennial of hunting diplomacy in Nepal by Tom Robertson.

conservation without people. Therefore, the conflict between park and people has been increasing day by day. For example, the atrocities of the park in Kusumkhola and the killing of Raj Kumar Chepang are some representative cases of conflicts. Most of the sanctions are neither reported nor registered such as soldiers often confiscate hand saws, ropes of the local people who enter the park to collect grasses and firewood. The 1990s democratic transition and 2006 people's movement restructured many institutions but could not influence conservation policy that still excludes local people. It's time to rethink Nepal's conservation policy.

Park vs people policy does not go hand in hand with values of democracy and sustainable conservation. The strict protectionist conservation mindset, however, seemed relevant to Nepal's Panchyat values during the early 1970s but the conservation policies of Nepal are worn out as the context changes. The democratic transitions have provided adequate space to include indigenous people and their understanding of forest management but the park policy is almost the same as it was in the 1970s.

The Buffer Zone policy in 1996 however tries to ensure local people's participation by sharing the benefits of

the park with people but the policy is also guided with a strict protectionist mindset. It has nothing to do with park management and its governance. The chief conservation officer of the park can dismiss anytime to the elected chair of the buffer zone committee. He has sole authority to issue the operation plans of the buffer zone community forests. In this way, buffer zone structure to include local people for better park management is a myth.

The buffer zone policy has been an effective tool to establish local elites as a witness to park officials for park management. Park officials and local elites coordinate to issue local policies that further excludes local people. For example, the buffer zone regulations often excludes Tharu leadership in the buffer zone and is exclusive to women. In the 22 buffer zone committees no women are elected in the executive committee and are mostly nominated. High caste male elites dominate the leadership and buffer zone council.

Nepal's conservation policies are still guided by the strict protectionist conservation mindset with Rana and Panchayat legacy. They often ignore and exclude indigenous people and their activities in the park management. Exclusion of local communities has increased the cost of conservation and conflict between

the park and people which is harmful for sustainable park management. The ideas involving indigenous people in forest management have many benefits. It can decrease the conflicts between park and people; reduce the cost of forest management. Most importantly, involving local people in both policy formulation and management of forests creates a sense of ownership and consolidates the democratic culture in Nepal.



Sanjaya Mahato (PhD) is a faculty at department of Public Policy, Kathmandu University, Nepal. He studied political sociology at Lancaster University UK and Graduate School for Social Research, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland. His current researches include politicization of community forestry and its governance; the myth of local people's involvement in park management through buffer zone committees; policy making process and PLS in Nepal's parliament.



Enthusiastically Awaiting the Historic First International Wild Dog Conference in Nepal

- **Rachana Shah**, Head, National Nature Conservation Fund

Established in 2039, The King Mahendra Nature Conservation Fund operates as an independent, non-profit organization supporting Nepal's government in conserving and managing the nation's natural resources and biological diversity. The Fund manages projects such as the Biodiversity Conservation Center, Bardia Conservation Program, Shuklaphanta Conservation Program, Annapurna Conservation Area Project, Manaslu Conservation Area Project, Gaurishankar Conservation Area Project, and Central Zoo at Lalitpur.

Rachana Shah, head of the National Nature Conservation Fund in Chitwan, sheds light on the conservation of the enigmatic wild dog.
Rachana Shah,
Head, National Nature Conservation Fund

Are you excited about the International Wild dog Conference taking place from June 1 to 7 ? How do you perceive this conference?

The ecological system, habitat condition, food species condition, and distribution of wild dogs have received limited research compared to other wildlife. Furthermore, cases of mistreatment by nearby settlements, failing to recognize their significance and considering wild dogs as omens of bad luck, have led to the critical endangerment of the species. The world's first international wild dog conference organized by the Dhol Working Group in Nepal brings immense joy to all involved. NTNC, as the local program coordinator, is excited about this opportunity.

Experts from 17 countries, including Nepal, dedicated to wild dog conservation will convene at this conference. Throughout the week, valuable insights on wild dogs will be shared, covering their global presence, population estimates, current conditions, and more. The conference will also delve into topics like species diversity, food availability, human-wildlife conflicts, interbreeding concerns, and habitat conditions. The conference will lay the groundwork for an action plan, ensuring long-term protection for these highly endangered species. It is a matter of pride for everyone involved in this conservation idea, and I want to congratulate all on this success. It's heartening to witness the implementation of programs aimed at safeguarding small wildlife, like wild dogs, alongside majestic creatures like tigers, elephants, and rhinos. We extend a warm welcome to all nature enthusiasts and advocates of biodiversity conservation to join us at this conference.

What makes the protection of wild dogs essential?

The preservation of wild dogs is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, they serve as the final representatives of the "Cune" class within the "Canid" family. Additionally, being one of the few endangered large carnivore species

alongside the tiger, the wild dog plays a significant role in preserving and enhancing ecological system biodiversity. Protecting this major predator species contributes to the regulation of nature food sources. Recognizing that every wild animal has the right to thrive in their natural habitat, it becomes our collective responsibility to safeguard wild dogs.

How is the National Nature Conservation Fund, responsible for safeguarding Nepal's natural resources and biological diversity, contributing to the protection of endangered small wildlife, such as wild dogs? In addition, what further actions can be taken to enhance the conservation efforts?

Currently, this center collaborates with local communities and stakeholders in Chitwan National Park, its buffer zone, and Barandavhar Biological Path to implement conservation and development initiatives for endangered wildlife, including both large and small species. It actively assists the government of Nepal and local bodies in managing and mitigating issues related to controlling problematic wild animals. Additionally, the center plays a vital role in providing treatment, care, and management for vulnerable, orphaned, and injured wild animals.

As mentioned earlier, the study of wild dogs is still in its preliminary stages, with limited research conducted on their habitat, diet, species diversity, and overall conservation. Consequently, the development of an action plan for the conservation of wild dogs is yet to be undertaken. NTNC remains committed to its ongoing programs aimed at preventing the endangered wild dogs, crucial for maintaining ecological balance, from disappearing. This conference will serve as a platform for advancing the creation of an action plan. Trishna Rayamajhi, currently associated with NTNC, is conducting her research on wild dogs in collaboration with Cornell University, while other researchers are also actively studying this fascinating species.



What specific areas does the National Nature Conservation Fund prioritize in its conservation efforts?

The National Nature Conservation Fund operates as a donor-supported partnership, collaborating with parks, intermediate areas, consumer committees, and CBAPU (Community-Based Anti-Poaching Operation in Nepal). Our activities encompass a range of programs, including conferences focused on biodiversity and wildlife conservation. Our primary objective is to protect biodiversity by addressing global environmental challenges such as global warming, climate change, deforestation, forest fires, water and air pollution, groundwater depletion, food insecurity, declining biological energy, destruction of border areas, greenhouse effect, and ozone layer depletion. To achieve this, we strive to foster stronger regional and international partnerships and engage local communities.

The decline in biological diversity can be attributed to factors such as population growth, poverty, illiteracy, limited conservation awareness, increased use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, improper waste management, excessive exploitation of forest resources, illegal

poaching, illicit trade in biological resources, and shifting temperatures. Recognizing the vital role of public participation and public interest in nature conservation, development, and utilization, the fund actively engages in coordinated efforts with local communities, conservation groups, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. We believe in the mutual dependence of biodiversity conservation and community development, and thus strive to establish the rights of farmers and local indigenous communities who have historically played a significant role in protecting and managing biodiversity.

How actively is the public involved in nature and natural resource conservation at present? How can public participation be increased?

Nepal possesses abundant natural resources, including water, forests, and scenic beauty, which form the foundation of the country's prosperity. Despite its rich heritage, civilization, and culture, the nation has been slow in implementing effective measures to safeguard these invaluable assets. In the pursuit of development, we have often exploited nature without considering the consequences. Urbanization has led to alarming trends such as land encroachment, destructive development practices, deforestation, and excessive exploitation of rivers. The urgency of regarding the conservation of natural resources as a collective social responsibility is yet to be fully acknowledged.

In Nepal, people's participation in nature and natural resource conservation is commendable. However, the government needs to better convey the importance of preserving these resources for economic, social, cultural, religious, and environmental benefits. I also request local communities to value their heritage, including their homes, water sources, and traditional landmarks.



We can start by producing 'Wild Dog' Specialist nature guides

Rajendra Dhami, Chairman, Nature Guide Association, Sauraha

"If we started showing concerns towards habitat conservation and making ways for increasing the population of wild dogs, in the near future it may be possible to set the trend of wild dog tourism similar to tiger tourism. Today there is a keen interest in rare entities everywhere, and the wild dog is one rare and captivating wildlife species." Intro

Nature Guide Association based in Sauraha, Chitwan, is an organization of guides working in the National Park. Rajendra Dhami is the current president of the association. The following is the edited excerpts of the interview of **Mr. Dhami** taken by **Tour News** where he talks about his experience with the wild dogs:

How often have you seen wild dogs?

We last got a sight of wild dogs before the corona pandemic. There was a herd of 3 or 4 by the riverbanks. Before that, we saw them during the multadays walking a little further from Surung Khola.

I also saw them once before when I was working as a volunteer in a research study. I had not yet started working as a professional nature guide. I got to know that it was a wild dog through some knowledgeable individuals present there. The herd was at some distance from us. They were of red color. Nowadays, we do not see them that easily.

How often do you have conversation with domestic and foreign guests about forest dogs?

Not much. Guests who possess some knowledge about wildlife show a little excitement upon knowing about the presence of wild dogs. However, not many people know about it.

Based on what you have seen, tell us something about wild dogs.

The wild dogs I have seen were right about the size of common dogs. I have mostly seen them around the river and usually in a pack. They ran away as soon as they saw us. They were not hunting but appeared to be chasing something. A few crows were trailing right behind them.



There are various programs being conducted for the conservation of large mammals, but the ones specifically focused on the highly endangered species like wild dogs are almost non-existent. What do you think needs to be done for the conservation of wild dogs?

I could ask you what challenges for preservation of wild dogs do you think are there? Could one of the reasons for rarity of wild dogs be decline in prey? Loss of their natural habitat and a lack of public awareness could also be the reasons. To address these issues, it is essential for concerned authorities to organize various programs in collaboration and coordination with locals. Prioritizing community participation, community ownership, and community management, conservation committees, groups, and stakeholders should actively lead the wild dog conservation campaign. Unless the local consumers and officials of conservation committees and groups lose their patient and grit, with their dedication, a significant success is awaiting us in the field of wild dog conservation. I believe nature guides will actively contribute to this cause since wild dog is an extremely endangered and rare species, that plays a vital role in maintaining ecological balance and supporting the interdependence of various organisms.

Does the Nature Guide Association, Sauraha conduct training sessions,

discussion forums, and interactions regarding wild dogs?

We have not done anything of the sort till today. However, we will fully assist and support any training and conservation activities that are initiated. Just like there are tiger specialists and rhino specialists, developing the concept of wild dog specialists among nature guides will be warmly welcomed by us. It only enhances the capacity and horizon of us professionals.

Conservation, local development and tourism- these three are intertwined. If you are thinking about bringing wild dogs into Sauraha's tourism market, you need to start by conducting programs prioritizing the animal. If we started showing concerns towards habitat conservation and making ways for increasing the population of wild dogs, in the near future it may be possible to set the trend of wild dog tourism similar to tiger tourism. Today there is a keen interest in rare entities, and the wild dog is one rare and captivating wildlife species. I can see immense tourism prospects in wild dog. Given its prospects in eco-tourism, wild dog could be a major step in the field of environmental and biodiversity conservation as well as in improving the economic standards of the locals and fueling social development.

How exactly has the organization been carrying out its activities?

This organization is primarily

engaged in nature and biodiversity conservation, including promoting and protecting professional. To be honest, conservation is a complex matter. It is one thing to make noise but conservation itself has its challenges. We are so rich in diversity that the rest of the world is longing for and yet we haven't been able to fully utilize our own resources. Forty years ago, whatever activities were available in tourism, the same are prevalent as of today, and nothing further from them. There is a lack of new flavors and new experiments. Only the crowd has increased in the name of change and has led to an alarming level of pollution.

Before talking about the organization let's talk about nature guides and talk about how the nature guides are being produced. The world knows, "tourism is smokeless industry." The role of nature guide in this industry is very important. In the context of conservation, nature guides play a crucial role in raising awareness among local communities in the intermediary areas as, after receiving training, not only they themselves get educated, but also impart knowledge to their families and society. It is unfortunate that nature guides are not provided with a separate curriculum that could help them develop a solid perspective. There is a need to guide them towards modern practices in business, and help sharpen their skills and abilities, and use them in nature conservation.

What are the problems faced by the organization?

There are problems in policies than within the organizational contexts. We have been lagging behind in the matter of finding a connecting link to the wildlife experts around the world and conveying information about the rich biodiversity here. Nature guides undergo a mere 7-day training, receive a pass and secure a medium of income generation. Can one possibly learn enough during those 7-days to be able to do justice to our



rich heritage? There is a practice of seating down a technician as a trainer and handing out the passes in the end, which is absolutely wrong. include a general technician under the title of a nature guide and issue them a card. This is a mistake. In this way, we are losing out on our own potential in the name of convenience. On the other hand, nature guide has emerged as a line of work where you can do politics with minimal investment. Our society is politically divided, and hence, everyone is concerned about collecting votes. We have been raising our voice regarding these diverse issues.

Speaking from a professional perspective, the methods and practices today should not be the same as they were over 30 years ago. For example, back then, we lacked education, there were limited demands and very few tourists. However today, organized tourism has emerged and requires competent and regulated guides. Hence, it is inevitable for the office of the council of ministers to make an organized nature guide procedure.

In the future, there is an increasing risk of a shortage of nature guides, which poses a great threat.

Nature guides are the main workforce in tourism hence, to prevent the risk of brain-drain, the government needs to implement programs for their resurrection and to keep them around. Currently, there are only around 16 female and just over 500 male nature guides nationwide, with over 300 in Sauraha alone.

If we could solidify the nature guide industry, it would significantly contribute to conservation efforts. Nature guides are in a huge herd. Their collective voice can move the mountains in the matter of conservation. Our initiatives can help take this cause up to the community members.

Would you like to comment on the safety concerns of a nature guide approaching and showing a tiger from up close?

Since you brought up the topic of jungle walks, let me start by saying that it is a dangerous adventure. People out in the world are fascinated when we tell them that we give the tour of Chitwan National Park with no guns and only bamboo sticks. This attracts mass attention towards tourism safari in Nepal. There are challenges and

risks like you rightly mentioned, but most of these problems can be solved with careful considerations. It is not that hard to stay safe.

Safari walks can be unsafe, but they don't necessarily have to be that way. Various trails can be developed for the purpose of safety. Safety is also determined by factors such as the way we dress. Maintaining silence, keeping a distance, and avoiding provoking wildlife and making them feel trapped are the essential ways to minimize risks.

Areas where conflicts arise between humans and wildlife are risky, and when entering such areas with tourists, we always exercise special caution. In places with higher conflicts, the animals tend to be more aggressive. Elephants tend to be aggressive in the places where they menstruate and breed. Conflicts can occur in such places around those times. If encountered then and there, elephants may attack and even kill. When observing rhinos, it is important not to surround them from all sides as they could feel threatened and could attack. It is essential to adapt our behavior according to the animals' reactions and act accordingly. Experienced senior nature guides have knowledge of such safety measures, and with the intent of spreading such information we conduct various discussions and meetings.

What kind of support do you expect from concerned authorities?

We expect a lot, but the expectations are not consistently met. Nature guides are being produced by incompetent training sessions organized by certain parties with the objective of benefiting themselves. Some people are unaware of the term "nature guide" because of the kind of trend that has been set. We want to actively engage in conservation activities along with ensuring the occupational safety of the nature guides. We have been actively conveying our message up to all three levels of government to help us achieve our goals.

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HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT:

A Reference to Wild Dog (*Canis familiaris*)



Suvarna Ghimire

Environment Student (Saptagandaki Multiple
Campus, Bharatpur, Chitwan)
and Environment Activist

The dholes or Asiatic wild dog (*Cuon alpinus*) is one of the less-known wild animals in the world. Lots of other animals are focused on the study from the school level because of their large numbers and easily noticeable in nature. The dhole is listed as an Appendix II species by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES 2010) and endangered by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species with a decreasing population trend (IUCN 2010). These wild dogs were reported at various distances from

uphills to low lands having locations like Rara National Park, Chitwan National Park, Tinjure, Annapurna Conservation Area, and other places too (AP Khatiwada; 2011).

The term 'dhole' is reported to have an ancient Asiatic origin signifying "recklessness and daring" (Wikipedia 2011). There are 24 species of wild dogs found all around the world and the Asiatic wild dog is found in Nepal. An Asiatic dog was found in different countries like India, China, the Philippines, etc.

Habitat is being declined rapidly through various mediums like overgrazing, deforestation, timber, etc. Natural resources are the ultimate materials for the fulfillment of humans and animals. Human visits natural resources to complete basic needs for livelihood and for cultural rituals. Recent data shows that the human population is over 8 billion, shows resources damaging and reflect desertification, while water sources get down from sea level while urbanization reflects pollution and disturbs the ecosystem. Forest fires natural or man-made, makes ecosystem damage to all the creatures living there get burned, injury to animals, and timber get losses while harms to the country's economic condition furthermore no more importance over forests. The forest is the home for every wild animal as well as for wild dogs too. Due to an unbalanced number of animals in Forests or National Parks, endangered species are increasing at a faster growth rate while the forest area is in decline process, and here comes the principle of survival of the fittest. Due to this principle, lots of species vanished from their existence.

In Nepal, citizens are of low profile and have more rely on natural resources. On a daily basis, citizens consume resources directly and indirectly. Having said that, the government of Nepal had made national parks, buffer zones, conservation areas, and corridor areas (barandabar area). In the context of Chitwan, Chitwan National Park is the main habitat for wild dogs and or animals too. Lots of endangered animals' homeland is Chitwan National





Park. Here, Chitwan is home to different ethnic groups living in a country where as migrant population human also increases in the last decades. Due to overpopulation and unplanned housing, it affects the surrounding ecosystem. People destroy the house of wildlife for the settlement of humans then after massive damage to wildlife habitat, it comes to the settlement area of humans and kills people, and domestic animals, and damages properties. While the animals do not forget their shelter and way of traveling the route of their destination. Similarly, people also go to the inner part of the forest for cultural importance and basic needs and for nature visits and adventure tourism which connects humans and wildlife and makes conflicts over them and damage occurs and ultimately harms nature. Chitwan National Park

(CNP) is listed as a world heritage site and had more importance all around the world, it's a property of the whole world not only of Nepal. So, it must get special care from the government and international communities. Moreover, there is no fencing on the territory of CNP and people visit regularly the forest for livelihood and get killed by wild animals, people used to become negative on wildlife and kill wild animals too. But the forest act is more powerful, people who harm nature in any way get punishment from the government and from international rules. People are also not getting proper information about natural resources acts and policies and awareness isn't being proper as per need.

Although, natural calamities also make conflicts. Water is necessary for flora and fauna. Water sources are

being polluted by unmanaged waste through which leachate comes to river Narayani and another river. River Narayani and other flows inside CNP and the drinking source of wildlife is the same river where oxides and harmful chemicals mix that affect wildlife health and have been in the process of being endangered and no species remains in the near future because of our immature activities.

Finally, all of us need to have long-term planning to save nature for future generations through our better work. We need to work smartly to save our creatures and have to minimize the wastes which go to nature itself at last. While unnoticeable small animals like wild dogs need to survive for balancing the nature and ecosystem.



Why is the International Canine Conference being held in Nepal?

Professor Hill Kobayashi will be putting his thoughts regarding new technologies that shall be used for wildlife monitoring. Arjun Shrivastava will be performing the red-list assessment. Martin Gilbert will be presenting about the disease caused to wild dogs and the preventive measures for such whereas Sujan Khanal will discuss the reasons behind human-dhole conflict and potential solutions.

A week-long 'International Wild Dog Conference' will be held in Nepal organized by Dhole Working Group (DWG) under the Canid Specialist Group. 15 Dhole conservation activists working in the field of conserving dhole from around the world will be joining this conference starting from the 18th of Jestha to 24th of Jestha at Sauraha. National Nature Conservation Trust will be co-hosting this very conference and Nepal Foresters' Association will assist in making it a success.

Wild dog (dhole) found in South-Asian region is listed under endangered mammal after tiger in the IUCN Red list. As per the report of Dhole Working Group (DWG) under the Canid Specialist Group the density of dholes around the world is stipulated to be from the range of 4500-10500, out of which 989-2215 are expected to be adults. Various species of wild dogs are seen in especially in southern region of China, in India, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia and in Indonesia. But, due to the lack of information regarding the distribution, density and reproduction of wild dogs, there was a confusion regarding the situation of this organism, mostly seen in South-East Asia. This confusion however will now be far away.

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What is Dhole Working Group?

IUCN has a group named "Special Survival Commission" under which specialists are chosen for various species. Under those groups, Dhole Working Group (DWG) is a group of life minded environmentalist working especially for the dholes. As of now, DWG has been working in conserving dholes under the Canid Specialist Group of ICUN. Nucharin Songsasen is the coordinator of this group who is involved with Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute.

Currently, there are 19 people working in this group, out of which 15 will be joining the conference. Arjun Shrivastava and Girish Punjabi from Wildlife Conservation Society- India, Independent Consultant Bhaskar Acharya-India, Heike Maisch from Thüringer Zoopark Erfurt, Germany, Jan Kamler from Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, University of Oxford, Kyran Kunkel from Conservation Science Collaborative and University of Montana, Sheng Li from Peking University, Phuntsho Thinley from Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environment Research, Linnea Worsoe Havmoeller from Natural History Museum of Denmark, University of Copenhagen, Monsoon Pokharel Khatiwada from Research Unit of Biodiversity, University of Oviedo, Spain, Ambika Prasad Khatiwada from National Trust for Nature Conservation, Nepal, Patrick Roux from Reserve Zoologique de la Haute-Touche, France, Pallavi Ghaskadbi from Wildlife Institute of India, Martin Gilbert from Cornell Wildlife Health Center, Cornell University are in this group and various students, conservationists are assisting them in this campaign.

Workshop that happened in Thailand:

Keeping in mind the threatened situation of dholes, a workshop was done in Thailand for assessing the numbers of dholes and their habitat conservation. After that, this conference is going to be the first huge conference for the conservation of dhole. The conference to be held in Sauraha is preparing a 'Dhole Conservation Action Plan' by

discussing the global situation of dholes, prey species management, habitat protection and other issues. The work plan developing via this conference will be world's first work plan for the conservation of dholes.

International Wild Dog Conference- 2023

Member from Nepal for DWG and the coordinator of this conference Ambika Khatiwada says that this conference will be crucial for developing an important ecological system by allocating the numbers and census of dholes. "We will collect, update and catalogue the information regarding dhole from different countries to determine its distribution and develop a global perspective related to dhole" he says.

Another coordinator of the conference, Sujan Khanal says that the conference will work on the assessing and making error-free the various dimensions of human-dhole conflict, existing techniques for conserving dhole. Whilst Khanal has been active in dhole conservation for the last five years, Khatiwada has completed his masters' degree in the study of dhole on 2010.

What will happen on the conference?

The mutual meeting and interaction of the representatives of different countries working on dhole conservation will make it clear about the various dimensions of dhole conservation. First day will have an introductory session whereas conservationists will be elaborating about the situation of dholes in their respective countries from the second day. Representatives from various countries will be publishing the information regarding the situation of dholes, numbers, distribution, availability of food and things to be done for the conservation of dholes in their respective countries. A Red List of dhole as an endangered species will be made globally.

Dhole conservationists Aakash Muntasir from Bangladesh, Tibidi from Bhutan, Guan Taipei from China, Girish Punajbi from India, Sandy Noervianto from Indonesia, Tan Cheng Cheng from Malaysia, Nwage Lwin from Myanmar, Ambika Prasad Khatiwada and Sujan Khanal from Nepal and Khwanrutai Charaspet from Thailand will be present in the conference.



Wild Dog, by Bijay Venugopal



Professor Hill Kobayashi will be putting his thoughts regarding new technologies that shall be used for wildlife monitoring. Arjun Shrivastav will be performing the red-list assessment. Martin Gilbert will be presenting about the disease caused to wild dogs and the preventive measures for such whereas Sujan Khanal will discuss the reasons behind human-dhole conflict and potential solutions.

Forest and environment students working in the field of dhole conservation will also present a working paper at the conference. Molly Milson will be giving presentation about the record of the fossils used for the conservation of dholes, while Trishna Rayamajhi, Abhinaya Pathak, Mansoon Pokhrel, and Smriti Lama from Nepal will be presenting about their respective experience and the situation of dhole in Nepal.

In this conference, where dhole protection action planning and determination of dhole population world widely are kept in priority, the members of DWG will be having one-day visit of Chitwan National Park and Parsa National Park each. There will be an interactive discussion among the heads and conservationists of various community forests and of buffer community forests, as a part of the conference. This way, work plan for dhole conservation will be implemented in Nepal along with Bhutan, Thailand and India via conference.

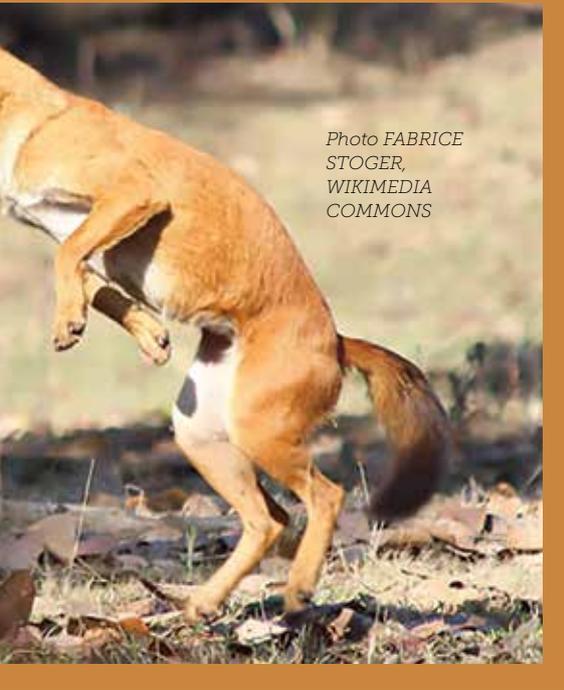


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Why is this conference being held in Nepal?

Based on geographical structure, India has larger number of dholes. But, the number of dholes is not more than 250 in any conservation area in the world. Having any rare species for more than 250 in numbers at a conservation area is considered as valuable population. There exists no threat of extinction in the place having valuable population. But unfortunately, there is no official information of having 250 dholes in any conservation area yet. Although Nepal is a small country in terms of area, dholes have been seen from Chitwan to Kanchenjunga. Dholes have been found in Nepal from the lowlands i.e., 67 metered Terai area to 5000 meters' altitude. With the finding of dholes, the interest of dhole conservation activists to protect them is one big reason for conducting this conference in Nepal. Conservationists are however active in finding out the existence of dholes in various other areas.

The conference was set to be held in Bhutan earlier but it was not a success. "A tourist had to pay 400 dollars per day in Bhutan, resulting to very high expenses. When the discussion was going on about where to do it elsewhere, we said 'we will do it in Nepal' said coordinator Khatiwada. He added that Nepal being the first among the range countries in terms of dhole conservation is also another reason for this conference to be in Nepal. "We are going to invite conservationists from all

over the world to Nepal to make an action plan for the protection of endangered species, this is a pleasant moment for us" Khatiwada said.

Why Sauraha?

Coordinator Khanal says there is no exact reason to hold the conference in Sauraha. "Since the habitat of dholes is mostly in the forests around Sauraha, we are going to have the conference here with an intention to show dholes to the guests who come by. As the numbers of dhole is comparatively higher in Chitwan and Parsa of Nepal, the habitat, nature and characteristics of dholes can be observed closely", he added, "Sauraha is just a venue, the concerned will be placed on the dholes from all around the world."

Khanal further clarified about the conference happening in Sauraha also because the local organizer of the world-famous conference i.e., National Nature Conservation Trust, Biodiversity Conservation Center is in Sauraha. This organization has an important role to play in making conservation a success. Established by the King, this organization has been working for conservation since last 40 years and making Nepal well known around the world; getting to work with this organization is a pleasure" he said.

Future Course of Action:

Information regarding the numbers of dhole should be confirmed prior to making future action plan, as per Khatiwada. "Till today we only have a rough estimate of their population. We only know they were seen somewhere but we can yet not confirm about it. For instance, 1-2 students had asked to work on dhole and I agreed to it. Later they brought their report attaching the picture of wolf. This is why, collecting the enough information about dholes will be our very first action" he said.

Khanal told to had invited the heads of about 800-900 community forests. "We will be performing a social survey with them, for which we have also prepared questionnaire of 15 questions. We will be reporting about information as to where dholes were seen and their condition, via survey. After deriving the

information from survey, we will work on collecting physical evidences as next step. By identifying the areas where dholes are found, we will gather information about the challenges to conservation and will be starting discussion for the required programs which address the issues. This way, we will reach to a concrete decision after the interaction. Thus, we have taken this conference as an opportunity" Khanal said.

He said that after making work plan for the dhole conservation, work shall be done both in capacity building and management of resources for safe habitat to increase the numbers of dholes. Along with this, Khanal also pointed out in the need of carrying forward the works related to conserving clean water resources and forest, capacity building to bear the consequences of climate change, making the best use of wetland areas, in parallel. Similarly, he expressed his confidence that through the conference, the number of dholes will increase globally in the next ten years and more than 250 dholes can be seen in Chitwan-Parsa and other areas.

He also shared his sorrow towards how instead of government who should have been showing interest in the global issues and protection of threatened species, only limited people are working for it. "Government should have made action plan on its own and should have moved forward with it, but it has not done so. As a result, a very limited people are bearing this responsibility; it is a sad part. The government should prioritize the conservation of dholes and help us or ask us for help. It would be wiser to save them in small numbers rather to show their remains" Khatiwada said.

He said that at this time when foreigners are paying special attention to wildlife conservation, it is necessary for Nepal to show the world that it is protecting certain species. "Financial assistance is required for conservation. It is not possible to do it on our own. If we could show them that we are protecting endangered species like dholes, we can possibly appeal them for help. Because the conservation of any animal anywhere in the world is good not only for that country but for the entire world" Khatiwada said.

Human life to be in danger: failure to protect dhole





As per the report of Dhole Working Group under the Canid Specialist Group the density of dholes around the world is stipulated to be from the range of 4,500-10,500, out of which 989-2,215 are expected to be adults. In case of Nepal, the number of dholes is expected to be around 100, which are found in national park under Chure, conservation areas, some community forest and national parks around the Himalayan region



Prem Bastola



Rajendra Bhatta

Ware well known about pet dogs and stray dogs. We have been worshipping the pet dogs on Kukur Tihar as a part of Hindu culture. Treating them as a caretaker of people and home, pet dogs are also treated with desserts and delights on this very day. We have been hearing and reading instances of how some species of dogs among the dogs petted by humans all around the world have been doing greater things that humans cannot. The tales about the contribution of such dogs in investigating the crimes worldwide are praiseworthy and desirable to hear.

But, only few people not just in Nepal but in the whole world know about the dhole/wild dog.

Dholes are on the verge of extinction worldwide. For the study and protection of dhole, (an extremely threatened mammal after the tiger, listed under the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species) the scientists, researchers, wildlife experts, environmental specialists and activists working in the field of forest conservation of 18 countries including those from Nepal, considering the threat, have been running conservation programs for the protection of dhole. As of now, the Dhole Working Group (19 members) under the Canid Specialist Group of IUCN has been working in the area for worldwide protection of the dholes.

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*Jogendra Mahato , Jankouli
Madhaywanti Community forest*



*Krishna Prasad Bagale,
Panchakanya Community forest*



*Udayachandra Aryal,
Old Nature Guide*



*Rajendra Dhami, Chairman, Prakriti
Path Pradarshak Sangh, Sauraha*

which are found in national park under Chure, conservation areas, some community forest and national parks around the Himalayan region.

Be it small or large species of wild lives or insects, or even plants, everyone has an equal and important role to maintain the biodiversity. Specialists view that the disappearance of one organism from the ecosystem has a serious effect on the whole life cycle of humans.

There is no arguing about the enactment of laws in Nepal with respect to maintaining the biodiversity, to conserve the wild lives, plants and water resources and to maintain the environmental balance. The Government, NGOs are also engaged in the environment and wildlife protection projects. But, given that most of the projects are more "budget oriented" and centered

towards the protection and increasing numbers of large animals such as tiger, elephant, rhino, arna, bear, concerns about even the basic protection of endangered wild lives like dhole are neither heard nor seen.

A conference of scientists and dhole conservation campaigners from 18 countries including those from Nepal with an aim of conserving dholes from not only Nepal but from around the world is happening from Jestha 18 for seven days at Sauraha, Chitwan. This week-long "International Dhole Conference" organized by the DWG will be co-hosted by the National Nature Conservation Trust.

As per the co-ordinator of the conference Ambika Prasad Khatiwada, a 2010 Ph.D holder environmentalist on the study of dholes and a dhole conservation activist, the con-

ference in Sauraha will be assisting the government in the policymaking by making a work plan for the conservation of endangered dholes. He also pinned out the main objective of the conference which is creating a Dhole Conservation Action Plan so as to batter the government in developing necessary human resources and technology for the dhole conservation and scientific research.

Khatiwada adds, "We, the Dhole Working Group from all around the world, will collaborate with stakeholders to record and collect official data on the number of dholes, the condition of their habitat, the identification of diseases affecting them, and the condition of food species, from our respective countries and on the basis of data so collected steps to conserve dholes will be initiated.



Dholes are highly social and hunt in large packs ©Nimit Virdi



Another Dhole conservation activist from Nepal, Sujan Khanal points out on the paramount contribution of dhole in keeping a balance on the ecological system and as dhole lies in the middle of food chain, the decrease in the number of dhole would lead to a massive and uncontrollable increase in the numbers of herbivorous animals it feeds on such as deer, swamp deer, chital, hog deer, wild boar, gaur, etc. leading to a problematic situation for humans.

Dhole usually preys on aged and diseased wild lives because strong and robust deers are beyond its power to instant attack. Because of that, only the strong wild animals stay in the forest who breed healthy children and their number also continues to grow. Khanal also claims that this way, it is clear that dhole has been contributing in selecting the healthy wild lives in the forest. He said that the conference will introduce dhole to the locals and organizing this conference is a matter of pride for Nepal.

Trishna Rayamajhi, a PhD scholar on the study of dhole who is preparing research paper for her PhD under the National Nature Conservation Trust says that she saw a picture of dhole in her camera trap during her research. She also shares that it was her first-

time seeing dhole beyond the Chitwan National Park area.

Rayamajhi says, "Interesting thing I got to know while doing my research is they usually stay in a group and are also very less in number. Because of their shy nature, instantly seeing them is not quite an easy task." As dhole falls under rare and endangered species after the tiger, researchers and efforts to protect their lives and are to be made from all the sectors, she expressed her thoughts.

The chief of Nepal Foresters' Association, Dr. Kiran Paudel addresses how the density of community forest and population in Terai has been excessively increasing due to which dholes inside the parks if Terai are being seen in the upper areas. He further assures that enlightening the consumers' group of community forest about the significance of could also lead these growing community forests to be new home for dholes.

According to him, dry forest, wet forest, tropical evergreen, tropical rain forest, open land etc. lying up to 5,300 meters above the sea level are considered suitable habitats for dholes. Dholes in Nepal are seen 4,350 meters above the sea level. He said that since there are mostly parks and conservation areas on both the Terai and Hi-

malayan sides of Nepal at this level, it can be assumed that the dholes are scattered in different parts of Nepal.

Paudel says "Whilst dholes are reportedly seen in Chitwan, Parsa, Bardiya and Suklaphanta National Parks of the Terai, as for in the upper-lands, they are said to be seen in Kanchenjunga Conservation Area, Rara National Park, Khaptad National Park and Dorpatan Hunting Reserve. Besides, some of our friends say that dholes have also been sighted around Limi Valley of Namkha municipality of Humla.

Rachana Shah, officer in-chief of National Nature Conservation Trust, Sauraha addresses the need for conservation of the dholes as they are the last representatives of the class Cuons under the species of canids. As dhole is the only most endangered carnivore after the tiger, there is a huge contribution of dhole in protecting and flourishing ecological system and biodiversity, she further ascertains.

Shah adds, "Protecting a major predating species like dhole could help in the regulation of its preying species. Every wild lives in nature has a right to live and conserving dholes thus is our obligation"

Dhole conservation activist and a researcher Smriti Lama said that the habitat of dholes has decreased by 75 percent since last century. "Dhole living scatteredly in smaller numbers than before due to the destruction of habitat has been making it more challenging to protect them. The increasing encroachment of villages in and around the forest of conservation area, decreasing number of edible species, killing of animals using poison and trap, failure to develop favorable infrastructure for their transmigration, transmission of diseases from pet dogs are the challenges to protecting dholes" she says. She adds "A very less legal importance is given to dholes in Nepal but as per international law it falls under the annex 2 of the CITES and under threatened species of IUCN."

Jitbahadur Tamang, the chief of Baghmara Community Forest, Sauraha shares that he saw dhole around

the west of Chitwan National Park i.e., Chure area, for the first time while he was working as a nature guide. Ever since then, he has never seen nor heard of anyone seeing dhole around community forest area.

"I have got an uncommon opportunity to spot dhole while working as a nature guide. The habitat demarcated for tiger might have assisted in protecting the dholes but without a formal study I cannot explain how the situation of dholes are in the forest I chair" he told.

Likewise, the chief of Janakauli Buffer Zone Community Forest, Joggendra Mahato said that dholes are sometimes seen in the forest. He said that locals while coming to drink water from the river and the nature guides had seen the dholes and informed him. "Dholes are not seen this year as much as previous years; no one claims as such either. Last year, the people row-

ing boat had noticed the dhole but they could not capture its picture as they did not have camera" he says.

Remembering the stories, he had heard from his forefathers, he says, "dhole jumps from the back of the prey before killing it. This way the back gets broken disabling the prey to walk so that dhole can easily have it"

Mahato fears about the extinction of dholes which are hardly seen these days. "Humans are the main reason of reduction in the number of animals having important role in ecosystem such as dhole; we need to reform our activities, he adds. He expresses his praise towards conducting such conference to address the urgency to generate awareness about such endangered species among people and explain its necessity.

On a similar note, the chief of Mrigakunja Bufferzone User Committee, Durga Ghimire said about failing

to recognize the endangered species. He says, "The animals in the park must have been unrecognized rather than unseen. We could have confused it with jackal. I will now give necessary direction to nature guides and forest watchers for recognition." He also suggested in introducing public awareness programs with regard to the conservation of dholes as much as the regular discussion about threatened situation of tiger and rhino in the local level. He also expressed his commitments towards working for dhole conservation.

Similarly, the chief of Chitrasen Community Forest, Pusparaj Shrestha tells that although having basic knowledge about dholes, no one has seen them in his area so far. "It is not seen yet, but since it is likely to be seen, we will inform the forest watchers and the locals for its conservation." He further made it clear that it is the common



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responsibility of us humans to protect the plants and animals in the planet.

Krishna Prasad Bagale, the chief of Panchakanya Community Forest located at Ratnanagar Municipality of Chitwan says that there has been no report of any dholes around the forest. "Since we are not in the intermediary areas, dhole might have been seen around here" he said. He further told that the community is more than ready to work in the field of monitoring, protecting and increasing the number of dholes, if they are seen around the community forests along with the national parks.

The chief of Nature Guide Association, Sauraha talked about his live experience of catching a sight of a bunch of dholes of different colors, five years ago. However, he expressed his sorrow of not spotting a single dhole in recent years despite going jungle safari on daily basis. He claims that

due to the lack of seriousness from the government level employees involved in wildlife protection, dholes have fallen into the verge of extinction.

He also expressed that if the concerned state agencies want to provide necessary support and cooperation to the "nature guides" for the study and protection of forest dogs, they are always ready. He tells about how foreign tourists get excited when he tells them that they can spot wild dog (dhole) while on jungle safari. "They used to get a lot happier knowing that they can see wild dog but we have not been able to show them these days. If we explore enough and conserve them, we can also attract tourist by showing dholes as much as we do so by showing tigers and rhinos and contribute to the prosperous nation via eco-tourism."

Udayachandra Aryal a conservationist and the former chief of Nature Guide Association, Sauraha talked about noticing the dhole twice in his 30 years of career as a nature guide. "Once I got to have eye contact with a bunch of dholes around the base of Chure on my way inside from Dumariya Post. Next time, during a campaign of Chitwan Jungle Lodge, I had seen a dhole around Dharampur situated at the National Park," remembering his past days he says, "I recognized it as soon as I saw the animal with a black squiggly tail beneath a reddish skin. I still remember that day, it was summer. They were coming down the hills. We saw them from the jeep."

Aryal also shared his happiness about this conference being held after such a long delay. "The study was yet not conducted when in the situation of potential extinction, it is deemed necessary to discuss about the protection of dholes as much as we do of tiger and rhino. We, along with the state have failed", he told how sad it is to not have a timely study and accurate reporting of the dhole. Aryal expresses his commitments with regard to helping the conference if it is to start the study of dholes well-mannerly and make "Dhole Conservation Work Plan and Dhole Tourism" its future plan.

Local intellectual and environmentalist Dr. Sanjay Gupta addressed the need for reformation in the Rana Regime-like laws and rules related to biodiversity and wildlife protection. As per him, some of the wild lives are in the verge of extinction owing to the undemocratic laws. He says, "Rather than reforming the laws, the heads of parks persecute by stowing away the existing laws and imposing their self-made laws out of anger." Gupta is seen hopeful towards the conference as the arbitrary of the parks (excavation of meadows and ponds using dozer and tractor) is leading to breakage of habitat and disease being spread around from the pet dog-bites.

"These sorts of conferences are necessary to save from extinction the endangered species which assist in balancing the ecological system" he added.



Pushpa Shrestha,
Chitrasen Mid Community Forest



Jit Bahadur Tamang,
Baghmara Mid Community Forest



Sharadchandra Adhikari,
Member Secretary, NTNC

National Nature Conservation Trust (NTNC) is the mother of community-based conservation.

Sharadchandra Adhikari is the member-secretary of National Nature Conservation Trust (NTNC), an organization that has been assisting the government in making policies regarding the conservation of nature and natural heritage after running thorough research study on various wildlife and the overall natural heritage in the country. Mr. Adhikari, hailing from Chainpur, Sankhuwasabha has the experience working as the Information and Communication officer of the organization for five years. Prior to joining the organization, he used to serve as the Information and Communication Specialist at Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority (CIAA). Adhikari, who has a Master's degree in Mass Communication and Journalism from Tribhuvan University, has, at various times in the past two and a half decade, been associated with Kantipur Daily, Samay Saptahik, Setopati dot com, etc. Given below is the account of our discourse with him regarding the activities carried out by the trust in the field of wildlife since its inception, and its future course of action:

What are the functions and responsibilities of NTNC?

First of all, it is imperative that we all have the basic understanding of the establishment of the trust. It is an autonomous organization established as per the National Nature Conservation Trust Act-2039, an act passed by the sovereign parliament. It has been made very clear in the act itself that it conducts scientific investigation and study of, and protects, promotes and manages the wildlife and natural heritage and makes all the necessary arrangements for the development of National Parks and Conservation areas.

We have been discharging our every duty as mentioned in the laws. By that means, ever since its inception, the trust has been facilitating the successful completion of every work and project related to conservation initiated by the Ministry of Forests and Environment.

The trust has a history of having initiated a joint investigative study with the team of Tiger Ecology Project that came to Nepal in 1973 to study Tiger after the estab-

lishment of Chitwan National Park. The trust was established in 1982. For 3 years beginning from 1986, we were fully invested in studying and investigating the nature and habitat of one-horned rhinoceros, along with its migration and inspection. From that, we went to starting a conservation program based on public participation which we later developed into a research center and handed over to the then Shree Panch Mahendra Nature Conservation Trust and renamed it to Nepal Conservation, Investigation and Training Center. Later in 2003, the center was renamed to today's Biodiversity Conservation Center, with the aim of developing it as a regional investigation, study and training center that conducts investigation, study and inspection of forest and wildlife, and helps uplift the living standards in the local communities by making people capable of conservation and management of natural resources. In the present, the trust has been dedicated to protecting the biodiversity, conducting study, research and inspection of the wildlife and resolving the human-wildlife conflict in all the national parks of Terai.

Apart from these activities, NTNC has been running community-based conservation and development program, and has taken up the responsibility of managing three conservation areas along with Annapurna Conservation Area.

What sort of activities does the organization carry out and how?

The organization has been conducting various conservation and development related programs with the help of Biodiversity Conservation Center, Chitwan, Bardia Conservation Program, Bardiya, Shuklaphanta Conservation Programme, Kanchanpur, and Kanchanpur & Koshi Conservation Center in Terai. Similarly, in Hilly and Himalayan areas, Annapurna Conservation area planning, Manaslu Conservation Area planning and Gaurishankar Conservation Area planning have been in operation. The trust has

also been operating and managing the Central Zoo based in Lalitpur. Of late, we have started our direct activism in the premises of Koshitappu Wildlife Reserve by setting up an office of National Nature Conservation Trust-Koshi Conservation Center.

We are now running in the 41st year. In our 40 year-long of being in existence, we have developed an impeccable experience in the study and management of wildlife. We have a great team of specialists and technicians, part of which are even the PhD holders. Our priority lies in looking after the wildlife that needs caring, providing medical treatment, and managing, studying and investigating them for conservation. We have also been, in coordination with the Ministry of Forests and Environment, and Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, conducting various programs for human-wildlife conflict resolution.

For instance, we encountered a very unfortunate incident in Shuklaphanta recently. One of the civilians were attacked by a tiger. We had no option but to capture the tiger and at least recover the body to hand it over to victim's family. our team of technicians and specialists did just that and the body was handed over to the family for further procession. We deal with far too many delicate and challenging situations like this.

In coordination with the locals residing in and around the protected areas, intermediary areas and wildlife route along with the concerned authority, the trust has been actively conducting various programs related to conservation and development. Similarly, we have also been assisting the government and the local authority in taking problem-causing animals in control if required and providing treatment and care to the helpless, orphaned and injured animals.

What sort of issues and challenges has the organization faced while carrying out the activities related to conservation and development?

Currently, human-wildlife conflict

remains the main challenge in every conservation area. We have been trying our very best to mitigate this issue. We are positive that in collaboration with the concerned authorities, we will succeed in this cause among others.

The issue of climate change remains an equally challenging one. However, we are hopeful that we will successfully tackle this challenge with our collaborative efforts with the local communities.

We have initiated all these activities with the joint effort of private sector, international communities and the locals. Our cause does not regularly receive the required financial assistance from the government. However, we do get some facilities from the government. Using that in coordination with the donor agencies, we have been hustling to make our cause for conservation a success.

How is the relation between National Parks and the Trust?

This question itself is very futile. We clearly share the relationship like that of flesh and nail. The attempts of conservation would never be successful without a relationship based on understanding and cooperation. Whatever we have done in the field of conservation would not have been possible without our joint efforts and cooperation. We have been providing our assistance to the national parks department in Terai and in return, receiving considerable amount of help from the department of national park and conservation area in the management of Annapurna Conservation Area, Manaslu Conservation Area and Gaurishankar Conservation Area.

What is the Trust's stance on the exploitation of Chure?

The topic of Chure conservation has been in discussion for a very long time. Chure suffers from flood and landslide on a regular basis. The need for a comprehensive plantation in the region has been highlighted and talked about one too many times. After the advent of republicanism, our team presented



a briefing in front of the then President that led to the initiation of work in the field of Chure conservation right after the completion of initial assessments. At that time, our plan was to initiate the President Chure Conservation Program for the conservation and development of Chure. A meeting of the fund operation committee took place and decided to take on an initial conceptual framework, and work was started as planned. We are still moving forward with a sheer determination to take this to the finish line. A master-plan for the conservation of Chure has already been in motion. Our trust established with the noble purpose of conservation has already been associated with this campaign. We were also involved in the formulation and revision of necessary strategies, five years down the line in this 20-year master-plan. The master-plan is now a part of government's list of ambitious projects. Besides playing such import-

ant role in a campaign like this, the trust has also successfully completed a full-scale study and investigation of the biodiversity in Chure region, on its own.

How do you see the relation between locals and the national park?

We hear about park-people conflict not just in Nepal but in the whole world. In fact, the cases here are much less compared to that in other countries. The park-people conflict in Nepal remains the one between wild animals and humans. The trust is greatly concerned regarding the ways to mitigate such incidents. We have been continuously looking for the ways to solve human-wildlife conflict, in collaboration with the concerned authorities of the state. We are determined to resolve such issues in and around the park premises.

People often complain about not being allowed to collect 'Niguro', a kind of fern eaten as vegetable. The job of the

park administrative is to strictly adhere to the laws regarding national park. Everybody has to abide by these laws. We cannot look at every matter solely from the perspectives of the local people. We cannot completely base our judgment on sentiments. When we look at it from the perspective of an all-round environmental conservation, we will see the amount of good work that have been done by the park. For instance, the fresh air we get to breathe in is also in some way, a result of the park's actions. With regards to animals, let's just take a termite as an example- a tree falls down and decays, which then turns into a shelter for termites. This way, park is making sure to address the right to life of something as miniature as a termite. However, addressing the rights of every creature should not be interpreted as being ignorant to people's needs. There is no prohibition on consuming natural resources. It's just that a line has to be

drawn somewhere. There are easier and peaceful ways to make arrangements for the livelihood of people. Let's discuss those ways instead of inciting conflict. People depend on leaves, wood, timber, grass to make a living. Let's think of alternative ways to manage these needs. We, being the most intelligent creatures cannot forsake our numerous responsibilities that make us humans.

What sort of works has the trust been doing in the eco-tourism market of Nepal?

Tourism industry in Nepal is based on nature and is also known as eco-tourism. I believe NTNC has played a huge role in the organizational development of the practice of eco-tourism. I am telling you this with a hundred percent surety that NTNC is the mother of eco-tourism. The Sauraha you see today is also a product of NTNC's initiatives and activism. Up until 30 years ago, the place had simple cottages and nothing more. The trust set up its office there in 1973, back when Sauraha was not remotely anything like in the present day. Right after that, Sauraha peaked in the whole wide world as a hub for eco-tourism and thus began the organizational development of the term 'eco-tourism'. Unfortunately, today Sauraha is on the verge of existential crisis.

Apart from its activism in Sauraha, the trust has also played a responsible role in starting community-based conservation activities in Annapurna region by starting the practice of 'ecology integrity'. Community-based conservation opened the doors for community-based tourism. It led to a considerable amount of tourism development in the region. Prior to the advent of 'ecology integrity', the place was mostly under the wraps and a very limited number of people would go there. The collaboration with the trust brought along numerous opportunities. Hotels and lodges started to open and tourism activities saw a dramatic surge. The trust has now been prioritizing nature-friendly measures of tourism there.

Another interesting thing about the trust is our association with the gen-

der-sensitive practice. Back when the discussion regarding gender sensitivity was just around the corner in the world, we had already moved ahead with the concept of 'Aama Samuha' i.e. group of mothers. The practice quickly spread all over the nation. So, we first started 'Aama Samuha' and connected the female members of various communities with tourism industry. In totality, it was our trust that taught women the lesson of empowerment along with entrepreneurship. So, I would say our campaign has been a big help in the capacity enhancement of women.

Nepal has played the role of a savior of some sort in the ecosystem by increasing tiger population. It is said that other countries have also played some part in this. What is your opinion regarding this?

Yes, we have been successful in increasing tiger population by a considerable margin. Needless to say, the job of protecting tiger is not only of Nepal, but of the whole world. There once was a risk of tiger being extinct, globally. As a result, the campaign to double the tiger population began in 2010 and by 2022, Nepal had achieved its goal. This has been possible only through the combination of Nepal's sheer determination and the help from donor agencies. The rest of the world has been helping us resolve human-tiger conflict with deep interest and must continue doing just that. The world community along with our state machineries has been of great help in putting restrictions on illicit trafficking of wildlife.

How to mitigate human-tiger conflict?

Tiger remains on the top of our ecosystem. It is very much scarce and equally attractive. It is common for something as rare and hidden to be so attractive and resultingly, endangered. Tiger has long been in that condition.

There are a variety of factors posing risk in tiger conservation. The continued human intervention on ecosystem is also a major reason why tiger is on the face of a crisis. Skyrocketing population and resulting population density, and people's dependence on

the forests are just a few of many ways in which humans are encroaching a huge space in the ecosystem. I think that's what's leading to so many instances of human-tiger conflict.

It is no news that human and tiger can never be friendly. The point is to deal with that animosity by keeping them apart. We need to think of ways to minimize human arrival in the places where tigers are dominant. We have never heard of a tiger attacking a tourist in the national parks. But sadly, there are human settlements in the surrounding areas and locals depend on the forests for livelihood, which they are bound to continue. National economy is in the eye of the storm, leading to an extreme lack of employment. We need to create real jobs for the people that completely depend on national park to make a living.

We must realize that there is no alternative to protecting the ethereal beauty that tiger is. It would not be an exaggeration to point out that tourists mostly if not only come to see it. Our next priority has to be minimizing the dependence on forests and maximizing our efforts of creating a better habitat for the wildlife.

What is your opinion regarding the International Wild-dog Convention soon to be held in Sauraha?

Being an ardent advocate of conservation myself, and being in a responsible position of the conservation trust, I get excited hearing about any convention taking place in the field of conservation. On top of all, Nepal is playing a pioneering role in bringing the issue of conservation of a species as rare and equally unheard about as wild-dog, in front of the world community. I am absolutely certain that the intellectual discourse between the specialists of wild-dog research and conservation fraternity from around the globe will help bring unexplored and undiscussed information about it in the light.

The initiative is very noble and will definitely send a positive message to the whole world. The findings and outcomes of the convention will be highly useful for the cause of wildlife and biodiversity conservation.



The government should prioritize **Dholey** conservation

Sujan Khanal, Dholey Conservation Activist

Forestry was not my major, but I eventually completed my Master's in it. I completed my Plus Two in Science at Caribbean College in Kathmandu. I then traveled to Pokhara for two months to study engineering (electrical engineering) once I had cracked the entrance examination. I had never been so far away from home as a Hetauda guy. It made me homesick. Uncle also advised me to study the "DFO Course." Then I traveled to Hetauda and finished my undergraduate degree there. I was working on my thesis on changes in land use at the time. Following this, I continued my education at the Institute of Forestry (IOF), Pokhara. I took a closer look at the various aspects of environment and biodiversity protection as I was doing all of this. To support the theses of my forebears, I had already begun independent research in this area. This is how I came to be a student of forestry. I currently belong to The Federation of community Forestry Users Nepal and serve as the Dholey Working Group's representative from Nepal.

Why did I become more drawn to forest dogs?

My fascination with the Dhole, also known as the Wild Dog, stemmed from several reasons. Firstly, during my undergraduate studies, I discovered that the Dhole is a rare species within the canid family found in Nepal, which includes jackals, wolves, brown Fyauro, and red Fyauro. This fact intrigued me, and it led me to unintentionally connect with Smriti Lama, a researcher working in this field. In 2015, Didi was conducting research on elephant habitats and the conflicts between human populations and wildlife.

I was at Hetauda campus, and my undergraduate thesis remained incomplete. Suddenly, I received an unexpected call from Smriti Didi. It took me by surprise as we had never met in person or outside of work. She informed me over the phone that she needed to travel from Parsa National Park to the Rautahat. Without much thought, I grabbed a bag and headed out to assist her. Our initial meeting took place near Parsa National Park, which was still a reserve, as far as I can remember. Chumla sister and Smriti sister were also present during our encounter.

We embarked on our journey in search of elephants. As an assistant, I accompanied them, using Parsa Park as our route to Rautahat. Throughout this expedition, I had the chance to witness and grasp the vastness of the forest. I was amazed by the countless mysteries of geographical and biological diversity that unfolded before me. It was a bewildering experience, but it also granted me the unique opportunity to witness a forest dog for the first time in my life.

As we ventured into the 'Ratmate community forest area', two forest dogs gracefully strolled along the banks of the Bagmati River. Their movements were as gentle as a feather. In that moment, I managed to capture a photo of their footprints, although I couldn't capture an image of the dogs themselves.

My interest in this subject grew, and I became deeply invested in

understanding the treatment of Wild Dogs within the park area. I started reading and conducting research on the topic out of sheer curiosity. As a result, it could be said that I embarked on a self-initiated study program focused on Dholes in 2015. Back then, there were approximately 100 forest dogs in Nepal, and I suspect their numbers may have declined since then.

In 2016, Santa Bahadur Theeng Dai was working on his bachelor's thesis focused on the habitat of forest dogs. Coincidentally, during the same year, I had the opportunity to spend 72 days in Parsa Park assisting him with his research, including his thesis and fieldwork. It was during this time that I had a close encounter with the wild dog myself. I still have several images from that period, although it should be noted that the quality is not great due to the lack of a good camera. Nevertheless, it is evident that the images depict a Dhole.

Santa Bahadur Theeng Dai chose the same geographical area for his master's thesis, which he successfully completed in 2018, focusing on Wild dogs. Upon reuniting with him, I spent nearly two months in Parsa. As far as I can recall, we were in the ChuriaaMai jungle in Makwanpur. During this time, I had the incredible opportunity to witness a rare sight of a three-quarters pack of forest dogs engaging in Sambhar hunting. It was truly one of the most beautiful moments of my life.

As my interest in Wild dogs continued to grow, I made the decision to pursue research on their status in 2021. I submitted a proposal for this study to Ruford, but unfortunately, it was initially rejected. Undeterred, I resubmitted the same proposal, and to my surprise, I was selected. I was granted a full scholarship to pursue my research on forest dogs, which is still ongoing and nearing completion. I am excited to soon publish my findings.

During my studies on forest dogs, I made several significant discoveries:
During the Pleistocene era, Wild dogs



A wild dog seen in Shuklapanta

were found in Asia, Europe, and North America. However, by 12-18 thousand years ago, their distribution became limited to a few Asian countries, including Nepal, India, China, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos. Forest dogs are known to inhabit a variety of habitats, including dry woods, wet forests, warm evergreens, warm rainforests, and open plains. They are typically found at elevations between sea level and 5300 meters.

In Nepal, Wild dogs have been observed as high as 4350 meters above sea level. Considering that a significant portion of the Terai and Lekali regions of Nepal fall within parks and protected areas, it is reasonable to assume that forest dogs are distributed throughout the country at these altitudes. The protected areas provide suitable habitats for their survival and contribute to their presence in various regions of Nepal.

Wild dogs, also known as Dholes, exhibit intriguing vocalizations and communication methods. They are

capable of mimicking human speech, often uttering sounds resembling "Sisi." Additionally, they use whistling as a means of communication among themselves. These creatures possess remarkable vocal abilities, capable of producing sounds that range from screams and meows to imitating the crowing of chickens. Further research is required to understand the mechanisms behind their unique vocalizations.

During hunting, forest dogs emit "kaka.kaka" noises while attacking their prey. Younger individuals make distinct sounds when pleading for nourishment. Wild dogs are skilled hunters, employing a strategy of exhausting their prey through running before launching an attack. They are capable of taking down prey that is 4-10 times their size, including animals such as cows, chawris (a type of deer), and wild boars. Their agility and speed allow them to chase down prey at speeds of up to 30 mph.

Wild dogs are cooperative hunters, utilizing pack tactics to capture their prey. They encircle their target from all



Wild dogs caught on camera trapping in Parsa National Park

sides, initiating the hunt by attacking and consuming the prey while it is still alive, starting from the tail. Their natural predatory instincts drive them to leap onto the back of their prey, inflicting injury. They may also target the eyes, occasionally rendering their victims blind.

Breeding among Wild dogs typically occurs around September each year. It has been observed that a healthy alpha female can give birth to a litter of up to 12 cubs. The gestation period lasts for approximately 60-63 days.

During this time, the group provides nourishment to the mother in the den. After six months, the cubs begin accompanying the adults on hunts, gradually learning the skills required for capturing larger animals like sambar. By the time they reach eight months of age, they actively participate in killing and hunting alongside the adult members of the pack.

Threats to Wild Dog Conservation:

During my research from 2015 to the present day, I have discovered

that Nepal, which has allocated approximately 20% of its land for environmental protection, faces challenges in adequately assessing and conserving Wild dogs. The precise number of Wild dogs, their distribution patterns, their specific habitat requirements, and the availability of their prey species cannot be accurately estimated. This lack of information is not unique to Nepal but is a common issue in other countries where Wild dogs are found. Limited interest and attention are given to the conservation



of Wild dogs.

To address these challenges, efforts are being made by the Dholey Working Group (DWG) under the Candid Specialist Group, which focuses on global Wild dogs conservation. In Nepal, Ambika Dai (Khatiwada) and I serve as representatives of the DWG. As part of our conservation efforts, the second Wild dogs conference is currently being organized in Sauraha. The first was held in Thailand. These conferences aim to gather information on the number and distribution of Wild dogs, assess their habitat requirements,

and develop a comprehensive conservation action plan.

It is crucial to establish a better understanding of Wild dog's ecological needs, promote their conservation within Nepal and globally, and collaborate with local communities, conservation organizations, and researchers to ensure their long-term survival. The efforts of the DWG and initiatives like the Wild dogs conferences play a vital role in advancing Wild dogs conservation and addressing the knowledge gaps surrounding these fascinating creatures.

The conservation of many small and vulnerable wild species, including Dholey, is being neglected due to a government policy that focuses exclusively on safeguarding large animals. This is a significant concern and a major setback for biodiversity conservation efforts. Although the Forest Policy 2071 outlines the need to conduct studies and research for the protection, development, and management of forests, wildlife, and ecological systems, as well as the conservation of threatened, rare, and endangered flora and fauna, this policy is not effectively implemented.

The discrepancy lies in the surprising preference of senior government officials towards large wild animals, which leads to a disproportionate allocation of resources and attention. This biased approach in conservation strategies creates a discriminatory situation where smaller and less charismatic species, such as wild dogs, are overlooked and their conservation needs are not adequately addressed.

It is crucial for conservation policies and practices to be inclusive and considerate of the diverse range of species and ecosystems. Protection and management efforts should not solely focus on larger animals but also prioritize the conservation of smaller and vulnerable species, recognizing their ecological significance and the interconnectedness of ecosystems. By adopting more comprehensive and inclusive conservation strategies,

we can ensure the preservation of all wildlife and maintain the balance and integrity of our natural ecosystems.

Despite the misconception that wildlife conservation should only focus on financial gain, the Wild dog plays a crucial role in the ecosystem. It has been classified as an endangered species in both the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List and the National Red List of Nepal. It is essential to acknowledge the importance of wildlife conservation beyond monetary considerations.

However, the conservation of Wild dogs faces numerous challenges. The expansion of human settlements, both within and outside protected areas, poses a threat as it encroaches upon their natural habitat. This encroachment leads to a reduction in the diversity of edible species available to the Wild dogs. Additionally, there is an increased risk of hunting through the use of poisons and traps.

The lack of appropriate infrastructure that supports wildlife movement is another challenge. Without suitable infrastructure, forest dogs and other wildlife species struggle to navigate their habitats, further compromising their survival.

Furthermore, the spread of diseases by domestic dogs poses a risk to Dholey. Diseases transmitted by domestic dogs can have detrimental effects on the population of Dholey and other wildlife. To address these challenges, it is crucial to prioritize measures that mitigate human encroachment, conserve biodiversity, develop wildlife-friendly infrastructure, and implement effective disease management strategies. By recognizing the ecological importance of the Wild dog and taking proactive steps to protect its habitat and address these challenges, we can contribute to its conservation and the overall health of the ecosystem.

In addition to the challenges mentioned earlier, the habitat of wild dogs is facing further threats due to the depletion of water resources. The Chure region, which has been subjected to illegal exploitation, is particularly affected, resulting in



water-related issues within the parks. Among these, Parsa National Park is significantly impacted.

Conflicts between humans and wild dogs have escalated, primarily driven by retaliatory actions against the harm caused to domestic animals. As a result, methods such as the application of insecticides, setting traps, and even shooting have become more prevalent during these conflicts. Unfortunately, some individuals resort to these measures in an attempt to protect their livestock, leading to the indiscriminate killing of wild dogs.

It is important to address these challenges through sustainable water management practices and strict en-

forcement against illegal activities in the Chure region. Efforts should also be made to promote coexistence between local communities and wild dogs, raising awareness about their ecological importance and implementing effective measures to protect domestic animals without resorting to lethal methods. Collaborative initiatives involving government authorities, conservation organizations, and local communities can help mitigate conflicts and ensure the conservation of wild dogs while addressing the concerns of livestock owners.

The decline in water sources has likely contributed to the decrease in the population of wild dogs. Another

challenge in protecting forest dogs is the increasing trade in their hair, known as Bhutla. This trade poses a threat to their survival and adds to the complexities of conservation efforts.

Historically, during the British Raj, the wild dog population suffered due to the activities of British sports hunters who utilized the forest areas for hunting.

Globally, including in Nepal, the rapid degradation of biological diversity is a significant environmental threat alongside climate change. The loss of biodiversity undermines our progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Wild dog conservation faces various obstacles, including the depletion



of wetlands, deforestation, forest fragmentation, landslides, erosion, and overexploitation of natural resources.

These challenges need to be addressed urgently through effective conservation measures and sustainable land and resource management. Protection and restoration of wetlands, preservation of forests, efforts to prevent habitat fragmentation, and the promotion of sustainable practices are vital for the conservation of Wild dogs and the overall preservation of biodiversity. Additionally, addressing the illegal trade in Wild dog's hair is crucial to ensure their protection. Collaborative efforts involving government, local communities, and conservation organizations are essential for successful conservation outcomes.

"Preserving Wild Dogs: The Imperative for Ecological Balance and Human Well-being"

Protecting wild dogs is crucial for several reasons. By conserving wild dogs, we are also safeguarding our environment. Wild dogs are a natural gift, and it is our moral obligation to prevent any animal from going extinct. If wild dogs were to become extinct,

we would lose a significant part of our natural heritage and the lineage of this species.

Furthermore, the conservation of wild dogs contributes to the preservation of ecological systems and biological diversity. Every animal, including humans, plays a role in maintaining the delicate balance of the planet's ecosystems. Even small disruptions in any component of the ecosystem can have far-reaching impacts on other species and ecological processes. Therefore, the preservation of wild dogs is essential for maintaining the overall health and functioning of the ecosystem.

Additionally, from a human perspective, the conservation of wild dogs is important. All living beings have the right to a natural life, including wild animals like wild dogs. Recognizing and protecting this right is crucial for our own well-being and survival. Our engagement with nature and the conservation of diverse species are essential for sustainable human development. Furthermore, the medical community acknowledges the ethical responsibility to prevent the extinction of any living being.

In summary, conserving wild

dogs is not only a matter of preserving a specific species but also a fundamental aspect of protecting our environment, maintaining ecological balance, and ensuring the overall well-being of both wildlife and humans.

Finally:

It is unfortunate that only a small number of individuals must work for the government in order to safeguard critically endangered species like the wild dog and look out for the interests of the entire world. It is unfortunate that the government must move on with the wild Dog Conservation Action Plan, but that constrained individuals like us must shoulder the burden. The government should prioritize protecting wild dogs and assist us or ask for our assistance.

Through judicious and equitable distribution of genetic resources and sustainable use of biodiversity components, biodiversity conservation can be accomplished. Small mammals like the severely endangered wild dog should be treated effectively when the strategic approach and plan for global biodiversity conservation, restoration, and sustainable management are being developed.