

FINDING SPACE FOR COEXISTENCE OF HUMAN AND SLOTH BEARS IN BALASORE, EASTERN INDIA

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The project work initiated after the recruitment of two field assistants, the fieldwork started from the 1st week of December 2017. In the study area, line transects, indirect evidence, distribution of den sites and bear count in the vicinity of den sites methods are used to obtain for estimating population abundance and distribution of sloth bear.



Photo 2: Marking plot on transect

location of den sites in their areas during the field work. Den with single or multiple openings in a small hillock was considered as one den site. 10 den sites in the study area were identified to date.

Through intensive surveys in and around the study area, 20 trail transects of 1 kilometer each have been laid in all the representative areas covering various habitat types. All the transects have been walked twice, Seasonal information is collected, and observations were recorded in pre-designed formats. Bear den sites are being located and identified as active sites and temporary ones. Besides collecting den sites information along the transects, villagers were contacted to find the



Photo 1: Monitoring the den

During the fieldwork, 100 sample plots of 10 m radius at every 250 m interval of each transect were taken to assess the impact of biotic pressures on bear habitat. The evidence of biotic pressures such as cattle grazing (dung), cut/fell and lopped trees, a collection of non-timber forest produce, distance from human habitation, disturbance from roads, stone quarries and other human activities are being recorded in pre-designed formats and locations of the affected areas.



Photo 6: Cutting bamboos for livelihood



Photo 5: Sloth bear scat in agricultural field



Photo 4: Sloth bear digging



Photo 3: Cutting of tree in sloth bear habitat

Students were principal respondents in this study objective. Because they are not only one of the stakeholders in conserving the sloth bears but they are also social factors for which their perceptions are very important to be analyzed. The participants in the painting competition were students from Class 3 to 8. It was because these children are believed to have a better expression of their insight through paintings than elder students. Basically, this was done with the 26 schools in the peripheral of Swarnachuda reserve forest. The conflict-affected village kids are more prone to the conflict and their sensitivity towards the sloth bear conservation will be very useful for the study. They don't suggest or fantasize a utopia but provide realistic sensible means to the present scenario of the sloth bear conservation.

The painting competition was titled —"Bear in my village". Three such painting competitions were organized in three different locations (Mahisapata, Kendukhunta and Nilgiri) covering the entire study area. Painting competition proved to be a beautiful platform for the students to present their perceptions. The participants were divided into two categories Junior Group of Classes 3, 4 & 5 and Senior Group of Classes 6, 7 & 8. All total there were 102 students participated in the 3 program which includes 58 junior students and in senior category 44 students had taken part.

Some kids perceived the sloth bears to be happy in their habitat while some others critically portrayed the plight of sloth bear-human conflict. They highlighted the reason for this miserable condition being deforestation and human interferences. In the senior section, students highlighted the issue of human-sloth bear conflict and the stated the main reason to be deforestation and quarries. Pencil box was given as a consolation prize to all of the kids who took part in the painting competition.



Photo 7: Painting competition at Kendukhunta



Photo 8: Painting competition topic "Bear in my Village"