

## Project Update: May 2011

The pilot project was initiated with a discussion with the Darjeeling Divisional Forest Officer, followed by further discussions with Rimbick Range Officer and Beat Officers. This is key to the project as Samanden Forest Village, the project site, comes under these offices. The Forest Department is the official department which deals with conservation and forest villages. The discussions were very fruitful and positive with the Forest Department offering verbal support for the project.



Community discussions were initiated at Samanden Forest Village. Mr. Rujeen Chettri was selected by the community and appointed for the project that will document and facilitate the project on a day to day basis at the community level. The focus of the discussion was human wildlife conflict based on seasons, crop and livestock loss as well as existing prevention methods. The existing traditional methods like night vigil, scarecrow, catapult, noise and fire to deter predators (collated in the project proposal development phase), have now been complemented with digging traps on animal pathways and digging moat like structures along with fencing. The traps have been for monkeys who once get trapped and struggle to escape do not come back to the spot again. The moat like structures along with the fences deter wild boars better as it reduces the space for the boar to move and break the fence.

An interesting fact of reduced wild boar depredation emerged in the discussion with a bumper fruiting of *Lithocarpus* in the forest. This has meant plenty of easy food for the wild boars and bears, reducing their raids on crops.

A data sheet was designed which looks into essentially collecting daily crop loss to wild animals. Rujeen has initiated the data collection. Sailesh and Roshan, DLR Prerna core staff, also initiated a base-line socio economic survey of Samanden Forest Village.

Secondary data and literature in terms of papers published are being collated from Forest Officials, Forest Protection Committees and partner organisations like ATREE. A number of academics from neighbouring universities have been contacted but the subject has not been the focus of studies. Elephant and tigers appear to be priorities for studies in India. Most studies are from the African and Northern American continent. Wildlife SOS India has been requested for more literature.

Sailesh attended a seminar on human-wildlife conflict and mitigation organised by Nature Conservation Society, Friends for Trees Forum, Mirik, India funded by WWF Nepal at Mirik, India on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2011. The seminar focused on elephant and human conflict in the North Bengal and Eastern Nepal Trans-boundary Landscape. Important linkages were established which are being followed up.

Sailesh has been regularly visiting Samanden and continuing the discussions with community and collating data.