



Conservation Watch - Nepal

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Tiger-human conflict escalates in Doti

Four locals, a tiger killed

The village areas of Doti district, in close proximity to the Khaptad National Park (KNP) of Nepal are in grave situation since two months due to the growing tiger-human conflict. During this period, four people have been killed and some 50 have been injured from the tigers. In retaliation, a tiger was killed by security forces.

Khaptad is the only mid-mountain national park in western Nepal, representing a unique and important ecosystem which is believed to be home to the tigers. There has not been any record of the tiger numbers in Khaptad National Park (KNP). According to latest tiger census conducted in 2002, Nepal's tiger population was between 350 and 370 in Chitwan National Park, Bardia National Park and Suklaphata Wildlife Reserve. Nepal is yet to come up with an up-to-date statistics of tigers.

Human-tiger conflict has been rife in six villages Kadamandau, Gairagaun, Gajari, Bagalek, Sanagaun and Daud Toleni, around the Khaptad National Park. All of the deceased were minors and three of them were from same Purbi Chauki village development committee (VDC).



File Photo of 1999: Dead body of a tiger after it was killed in Meghauri, Chitwan

The reason behind the tigers emergence into the human settlement has not been studied yet. Locals said two tigers have been making foray in the villages. As a result of the repeated incidents, locals have stopped going to the jungles for firewood and fodder and few have left villages too.



A rescued tigress inside the fence of Kasara

Owing to the strong pressure from the villagers and local political parties, district administrative office (DAO), a supreme government body in the district, had declared Nepalese Rupees 10,000 prize for the head of "man eating tiger". On 3rd January, a joint team of the police force killed a tiger from the forest of Gairagaun and submitted it to the district forest office. Security persons are still deployed in the affected areas to kill next tiger.

Khaptad National Park covers an area of 225 sq. km. where 34000 people of 5500 families from 21 different VDCs of Doti, Bajhang, Bajura and Achham districts live. The park provides habitat for some 20 different species of mammals. Common ones include leopard, barking deer, wild boar, ghoral, himalayan black bear etc.

It is not a first case that government bodies are forced to deploy it's mechanism to kill the tigers in Nepal. In Chitwan National Park (CNP), several tigers and cubs were killed for the similar 'man eating' causes. In 2004, a tigress and her two cubs were brutally killed by the locals in west Chitwan, however, a third cub was rescued. Since then she has been reared inside the temporary fence at CNP headquarter, Kasara, Chitwan.

The conversion of forestland into other land use has constricted and fragmented wildlife habitat eventually transpiring dire consequences like in Khaptad. Conservation efforts in Nepal are largely inadequate to tackle with the challenges and threats.

Forest encroachment rampant in west Terai

Forests in Kailali, Kanchanpur, Banke and Bardiya districts have been shrinking after the land-sharks have been encroaching the jungles since last year in the name of the freed bonded labourers, and landless squatters.

Over 21,000 hectares of forest land has been encroached in Kailali alone since last year and it is continuing. Man Bahadur Khadka, district forest officer of Kailali said the once dense forest of Kailali was being encroached in the name of freed bonded labourers, landless, squatters, and the political parties have been inciting them to clear up the forest. Unless the political parties stop their activities and publicly commit to protect the forest, there will be no forest left in the district in 10 years time, Khadka said.

Khadka said that 300,000 hectares land in Kailali were covered by forests 50 years ago but the gradual encroachment has shrunk the vast forest area to just 172,000 hectares. We are really shocked by the alarming rate of encroachment but only our attempt will not be enough to protect the forest, he said.

Forest activists said a total of 80,000 hectares of forest was encroached in Kailali district. This encroachment has created a big challenge to conserve the bio-diversity of western Nepal, Dr. Keshav Kanel, director general of Forest Department, said.

Besides losing the forest area, the encroachment has put other valuable forest entities in deep crisis. Forest encroachment has become common in Ghodaghodi Tal (lake) and Basanta corridor, Khadka said. Recently, seven families have started cultivating in the area near Ghodaghodi Tal and other locals are also trying to encroach the adjoining land in the area.

As per the recent decision of Council of Ministers, the local government has decided to provide land to freed bonded labourers at Pashupati and Radha Krishna Community Forests. Those community forests were awarded by Abraham Conservation Award for best conservation practice but the government had given consent to settle the locals in the same forests.

Similarly, 2,891 families have been farming in the Basanta Corridor in the last one year. The encroachment has affected half of the total land in the Basanta Corridor and it will have an adverse impact on free movement of the wild animals, Netra Prasad Khanal, facilitator at the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal (FECOFUN) Kailai branch, said. The situation of encroachment and deforestation in other districts in western Nepal is not different from Kailali.

Devesh Mani Tripathi, district forest officer of Kanchanpur, informed that 700 hectares of forest at Pilariphanta was encroached under the protection of political leaders while over 23,000 hectares of forest was encroached in the whole district. Similarly, over 663.56 hectares of forestland have been encroached in Bardiya district. According to Raj Bahadur Rawat, DFO of Bardiya, 191 families have been taking shelter in the forest areas after the encroachment of forestland.

Besides the community forest and national forest, the National Parks as well as wildlife reserves are also being encroached. The encroachers have threatened to continue the work saying that the government had not provided any land for them.

Expressing serious concern over the growing rate of forest encroachment and deforestation in the Western Nepal, representatives of the parliamentary committee of the Natural Resources and Means, Director General of Forest Department and media persons visited the encroached land in four districts.

The state should take stern step to check forest encroachment and the problems of the landless people should be solved through other means, Dr. Kanel said after the visit. Lawmaker Hari Roka, who was also in the visit team, said that forest encroachment in Western Nepal should be taken seriously to stop desertification.

Armed poacher held in Bardia

Wildlife smugglers get 15 year jail

Security personnel at Bardia National Park here on Tuesday night arrested a hunter prowling inside the park area. Kul Bahadur Shahi of Tarunga VDC-6 in Surkhet was apprehended along with arms by a patrol team of Ranaser Battalion at Danav Taal area inside the park. Three others- Ganesh Bahadur Shahi, Lal Bahadur Bogati, and Santa Bahadur Salami Magar- fled upon the arrival of patrol team.

According to the battalion captain Tapta Bahadur Karki, the patrol team recovered a set of musket, four sets of bullet, two packs of gunpowder and nine sets of cape detonator, along with knives and other hunting devices from the alleged poacher. Arrested Shahi has been handed over to the park authority for action.

The poaching activities have upsurged in Bardia National Park since few months. Two rhinos and a tiger was killed by the poachers since November.

Similarly Langtang National Park, Rasuwa has slapped jail and fine on four wildlife smugglers. A single bench of chief protection officer of the park Jagannath Singh slapped 15-year jail and Rs 100,000 fine each on Utuk Lama aka Chhowang and Karsang Tamang aka Risang of Humla. They were involved in illegal trade in animal skin.

Likewise, Balaram Shrestha of Gorkha and Mingmar Chhiring Tamang of Rasuwa were each slapped with five-year jail. The hearing also decided to seized a truck (Na 2 Kha 9494) used by the duo for smuggling.

Nepali Army personnel had arrested the group along with five skins of spotted tiger, 36 skins of leopard, 238 sets of skins of other animals of the tiger family and 113 kg tiger bones worth Rs 50 million from Syafrubesi some two and a half years ago. They were trying to smuggle the goods across Tibet.

The park said the case against four other persons involved in the smuggling is on hold as they are still absconding. "It was a big challenge to punish the wildlife traders. We had to face political pressure to free them or to minimize the punishment", said Singh.

It is said that this is the biggest ever sentence slapped on wildlife smugglers involved in trade in wildlife in the park.

Similarly, police arrested three persons in Surkhet district of Nepal on the charge of smuggling tiger skins into Nepal. The arrested were Keshar Bahadur Samsheli, Hira Lal Samsheli and Khumjung Lama, all of them from Hariharpur VDC. Police claimed the group was bringing the animal parts from India. They were apprehended on 3rd January, 2008.

Infestation of poisonous ants worries Myagdi folks

It seems colonies of poisonous ants are out to destroy forests and animals in Myagdi district. The infestation of the poisonous ants named 'Bahudal' has destroyed over 9,400 hectares of forest among the 19,528 hectares protected by Thulo Swara, Goswara, patle, Jhamkili and Torakhet community forests so far.

The infestation of the ants was first reported 13 years ago. The ants feed on young shoots and leaves of the plants, ultimately leading to the death of the plants, according to District Forest Office, Myagdi. The ants have even spread to local settlements. President of Torakhet Community Forest Dil bahadur Sapkota says infant calves and kids die if the ants sting in the eyes.

Former president of the Community Forest Users' Association of Nepal Deb Bahadur Ghale said other species of ants have been extinct from areas infested by 'Bahudal' ants. The poison excreted by the ants is so poisonous that even snakes, frogs, monkeys, foxes, and other insects, birds and animals cannot survive the ant bite, he said, adding, "This will put the whole ecosystem in imbalance."

Locals' efforts to control the ants have failed so far. They complained that the higher authorities have not been paying attention to control the ants.

Five black bucks missing

Five black bucks have gone missing from the Khairapur area of Bardia which is considered as the only habitat of black bucks in Nepal for long.

Few pieces of bones were recovered at a nursery near the protected area a few days ago. Officials said the black buck might have been killed after setting it on a trap, as a rope has also been found in the site.

The animals have been missing for long, said Tanka Adhikari, the president of the local Forest Users' Committee. This is the first case in which so many black bucks went missing at same time for so long.

Currently, there are 158 black bucks – 52 males, 82 females and 24 babies. Black bucks or krisnasar (*Antelope cervicapra*) are endangered antelope species.

Staffers said no trace of the four missing black bucks has been found even after searching the entire area of 708 bigahs of the protested area. Though the information on missing black bucks has been relayed to Bardia National Park, no initiative has been taken by the park in this regard, locals said.

Agreement with wildlife victims

The struggling bufferzone people of Koshitappu Wildlife Reserve (KWR) have postponed their programmes of agitation after they reached an agreement with the district administration.

Extensive discussion among agitating body, political parties, KWR and Sunsari district administration office (DAO) finally culminated into the 5 point pact. According to the agreement, DAO would take lead to gather the details of loss induced by wild lives and would sternly request Forest Ministry and Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) to formulate policy for compensation and fencing around the reserve.

According to the Prem Narayan Sharma, Chief District Officer of Sunsari, agreement has been made to initiate compensation under the provision for disaster victims, to aware reserve staffs on their behaviour and to request authority for the explicit policy on taking control of attacking animals in human settlements.

Bufferzone people in the umbrella of "reserve victims" have started protest programs like demonstration, sit-in and transport strike to fulfill their demands. "We have postponed all our programs following the agreement", said Mustak Ansari, one of member of struggling committee.