



Conservation Watch - Nepal

A Fortnightly Newsletter

Volume-I

Issue-19

December 05, 2008

Tiger census begins in Nepal

Nationwide Tiger census has begun in Nepal since 15th November. The census will be undertaken in Chitwan National Park (CNP), Bardiya National Park (BNP), Parsa Wildlife Reserve (PWR), Sukhlaphanta Wildlife Reserve (SWR) and potential forest areas. Tiger census will be completed in about four months.

More than 25 teams with eight persons in each team are mobilized inside the protected areas and other forest areas including experts, officials and volunteers. Each team has one elephant during the counting. Similarly, more than 300 digital cameras are being used.

Prior to the census, a two-day tiger monitoring training has been given to those teams at Sauraha. Over 60 participants from CNP, Parsa Wildlife Reserve (PWR), National Trust for Nature Conservation, WWF, and different district forest offices located in Kapilvastu, Rupendehi, Palpa and Rautahat had participated in the training.

Officials at the Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) said that specially designed digital camera trapping system are being used for the first time and census will also cover forest areas stretching from Rautahat in south central to Kanchanpur in far-western region of the country.

Narendra Babu Pradhan, planning officer at DNPWC said, "This is the first comprehensive census being conducted in Nepal and will be more scientific compared to earlier surveys. Besides the protected areas (PAs), the census will also cover forest areas outside the PAs in 18 districts of the country." An earlier census was taken in 2000 and there were plans to take another one in 2005. However, the government could not take it up because of political instability and financial constraints.



Sukhlaphanta Wildlife Reserve (SWR), the third major habitat of the tigers in the country saw a drastic decline in the number of endangered tigers in recent years due to poaching. A recent survey of April 2008, showed a population between 5 to 14, down from 25-50 in the year 2005. In 2007, the number of tigers in the same reserve was 10-18.

DNPWC, Department of Forests, Save the Tiger Fund, World Wildlife Fund, and National Trust for Nature Conservation are jointly carrying out the tiger census.

Meanwhile, in the first week of tiger census, a body of a dead tiger was found near Chitwan National Park along the East-West Highway. On 21st November, the carcass was recovered lying on the road-side near the Sunachuri Katilekhola stream in Krishnasagar bufferzone community forest at Kawasoti in Nawalparasi district.

In another incident, an elderly woman who went to collect grass in a community forest in Western Chitwan, was killed in tiger's attack. On 20th November, the tiger attacked sixty-year-old Jamuna Kharel of Sharadanagar-4 to death in the community forest in Gunjanagar.

Birth of twin calves brings joy to park

A miracle happened in the history of wildlife conservation in Nepal when Devkali -25 (a female elephant) gave birth to twin calves at the Elephant Breeding Center, Khorshor at Chitwan National Park (CNP). Devkali also has a five-year-old male calf.

It was 11 p.m. on 6th November the twin calves born in the interval of four hours. This is the first time in Nepal that an elephant has calved twins. As the weight of an elephant foetus is high, it is very rare for an elephant to give birth to twins. Elephants generally give birth to a single calf at an interval of four or five years.

Khorsor elephant breeding centre is the only elephant breeding centre in the country — in the Chitwan National Park. The centre was set up around 23 years ago. Rameshwor Chaudhary, chief of the breeding center, was ecstatic as well.

"The health of both the calves as well as the mother is satisfactory," Chaudhary bubbled over with joy. "Both the calves are male," he added. Meanwhile, to celebrate the unique event, officials at the center sacrificed a goat thanking their lucky stars.



This is the 31st delivery in the history of the breeding centre. As news spread, curious locals flocked there in large number to get a glimpse of the newborns.

Three workers have been assigned to take care of Devkali and her two newborns. "I have not slept for the couple of days since the twin births," said Lal Bahadur Chaudhary, Devkali's newly appointed caretaker. According to Lal Bahadur, the nursing mother was given special care for 11

days. The center provided a variety of foods for both mother and calves.

Statistics reveal that the African elephants have given birth to twins. This year alone, the centre has been blessed with five calves. Though the first delivery was recorded about 14 years ago, Khorsor has been feted as a successful breeding centre in Asia for a decade or so. The centre now boasts of 37 pachyderms.

Plan to bring captive tigress in the zoo

Officials at the central zoo, Jawlakhel, are planning to bring an orphan tigress from Chitwan National Park in a bid to prevent the inbreeding of captive endangered Royal Bengal Tigers.

According to Sarita Gyanwali, project officer at the zoo, DNPWC is positive towards the zoo's request to bring the tigress from Kasara, Chitwan. An orphan tigress, Narayani, has been kept in captivity since five years at Kasara, the headquarter of the Chitwan National Park subsequently after the rescue.

At present there are three tigers in the central zoo: the mother tigress, Bhuntee, 13, and two five-year-old tiger cubs named Shiva and Kancha. Junge, 17, father of Shiva and Kancha, died two months ago.

"Both male tigers have already reached breeding age and there is a need for a young tigress to start captive breeding in the zoo," said Gyanwali.

Tigers start breeding at the age of four and have a life expectancy of 20-22 years age. Mating between the two male tigers with their mother will accelerate the loss of genetic diversity. "There are more chances that the offspring from inbreeding can have low immunity strength towards diseases and carry the defective genes from their ancestors," Binab Karmacharya, veterinary officer at the zoo said.

The central zoo has also been trying captive breeding of the endangered one-horned rhino since last year, but has not succeeded so far. The two rhinos Kancha 16, Kanchi 17, in the zoo demonstrate their sexual urges every 40-45 days but they do not mate, according to zoo officials. Incidents of rhinos mating in captivity are rare but zoo officials are trying a host of measures to encourage them to mate. These measures include providing more proteins and more green grass and other plants that increase potency.

These dietary supplements were given after consulting officials at the London zoo. The two rhinos at the London zoo have mated in captivity to give birth to a baby rhino. The adult rhinos were taken from Nepal as part of animal exchange programme in 1999.

"Recently there has been a change in Kanchi's behaviour. Therefore we expect some good news related with rhino

breeding. But we have been unable to test her urine," said Gyanwali. "It is very risky to go near a rhino, because they are very aggressive in nature."

The central zoo has been successful in recent years in breeding some major mammal species including hippopotamus, tiger, siamang (black-furred gibbon) and leopard, inside its own premises. Annually, more than 800,000 visitors come to the zoo, which houses over 1,000 animals, apart from birds.

Voice to declare the black buck conservation area

The locals of Khairapur in Bardiya district have demanded to declare this region as the black buck conservation area, which is the only habitat of black bucks in the country. The number of rare wildlife black buck has reached 213 in Bardiya for the first time. The number is increased with the proper food availability, and collective efforts of all at a time when it was almost about to extinct. But the situation is not beyond the threat yet. 'There are difficulties for black buck conservation because of human encroachment and poaching', said Hareram Yadav, an employee at the black buck conservation area.

According to the Mulchand Yadav, chairperson of the Black Buck Conservation Committee, the black bucks would strive with dire situation in next two years if the Government did not bring a long term plan. "Black buck conservation area should be declared along 708 bighas of land and at least 10 wells and suitable green grass should be managed", he implored.

In Khairapur area of Bardiya, 76 male, 110 female and 27 offspring were counted. The number, which was 9 in the beginning of conservation in 1975, reached 177 in 1991, 50 in 1999, 56 in 2001 and 74 in 2002.

Black bucks are leaving for other places due to the dearth of habitat in Khairapur. More than 1,000 buffaloes are brought everyday for grazing in the habitat of black buck. Local folks said they would not stop grazing cattle there unless local administration doesn't drive off landless squatters from the forest areas.



Poachers on the prowl in Ramaroshan area

Poaching of musk deer is on the rise in Ramaroshan area in Achham district, thanks to the apathy shown by authorities concerned.

The spiraling incidents of poaching have failed to move the Achham District Forest Office and other agencies, which are entrusted with conserving wildlife, according to locals. The rampant poaching has caused a drastic decline in the number of the endangered species.



"Some years ago, we used to see several herds of musk deer. These days, we hardly spot a musk deer, thanks to rising incidents of poaching," said a teacher, Nara Bahadur Buda. "Poachers from Achham, Bajura and Kalikot districts are on the prowl and have been killing the endangered species."

"We urged authorities to check the poaching of this rare animal, but to no avail. The authorities' inaction has boosted the morale of poachers," said Lal Bahadur Budha, a former chairman of Ramaroshan Village Development Committee. "Smugglers are behind the poaching of the rare animal." The staffers of the District Forest Office do not bother to visit the Ramaroshan area, grudging the villagers.

The area was declared a tourism destination this year, but poaching continues unabated. "Constituent Assembly members from Achham, Sher Bahadur Kunwar and Sarad Bhandari, visited the area recently, but the poaching alarm did not move the two," said the villagers. The locals have asked lawmakers to take initiatives for the protection of musk deer.

Locals declared Ghoral conservation area

Locals of five hilly VDCs of Nawalparasi district are jointly working for the conservation of endangered ghoral (Goat Antelopes) by declaring Ghoral Conservation Area.

Jhabilal Rana, programme coordinator, said locals of Dhaubadi, Deurali, Ruchang, Naram and Jhirubas VDCs have announced the area as Ghoral Conservation Area. "We are planning to establish it as a hunting area along 2,000 hectares of forest," said Rana.

Due to illegal poaching and deforestation, the number of various animal species, including ghorals, deer, bear and Kalij (Pheasant) are decreasing in the district, said Yam Bahadur Gurung, a local of Naram VDC. "The declaration will help protect animal species," said Gurung.

Meantime, lauding the locals' joint effort to conserve ghorals, District Forest Officer Laxman Gautam has assured them of possible support. According to District Forest Office, there are more than 150 ghorals in around the newly declared conservation area.



Brief News

Rhino horn seized

The police on 7th November seized a rhino horn and arrested two persons on the charge of carrying the body part of the endangered animal at Baireni in Dhading district. The District Police Office, Dhading, identified the arrestees as Ishwor Timilsina and Bidur Timilsina of Pangretar in Sindhupalchowk district. The two were taking the horn to Kathmandu from Chitwan.

Tuskers killed a woman

Wild elephants trampled Hira Tamang, 42, to death at Rampur of Udaypur on 10th November. Tamang was a resident of Thoksila-7. Surya Tamang, 62, of Thoksila-2 was critically injured in the attack. A herd of around 10 wild elephants had rampaged through the village causing havoc.