



Conservation Watch - Nepal

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Gharial population declines drastically

According to a recent study done by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) with the support of WWF Nepal, only 81 gharials (*Gavialis gangeticus*) remain in Nepal. The study team has found 41 gharials in Narayani River, 24 in Rapti, 10 in Babai and six in Karnali. Until 1985 Nepal had 222 gharials in six river systems — Narayani, Rapti, Kali Gandaki, Sapta Koshi, Karnali and Babai. Now this species is no more found in the Koshi river system.

Although Nepal released over 661 gharials in different rivers from the breeding centres in Chitwan and Bardiya, 580 of them failed to cross the age of 30 even though gharials have a life span of 100 years.

Following the discovery that there are less than 200 breeding adults left in the wild, IUCN has uplisted the gharial from "endangered" to "critically endangered" on 2007 red list.

A breeding centre in Chitwan often releases gharials in the nearby Narayani river but the environment along the river banks is so polluted that the gharials are found running way from the river bank. "We were surprised to see that a gharial was walking its way back to the breeding centre days after it was left in the river," Dr. Narendra Pradhan, an ecologist at DNPWC said. Dams constructed across the river on the Indian side had also restricted free movement of gharials, causing damage to their natural growth.

The number of gharials, the slender-nosed crocodiles, found only in South Asian Rivers, is drastically decreasing due to increasing human activities and pollution in their habitats. Many factors contributed to the decline of the gharial population. The major threat at present is habitat loss due to human encroachment, and disruption of populations through fishing and hunting activities.



Habitat destruction is related to increasing human pressure on the environment due to extensive agriculture, firewood collection, cattle grazing, grass cutting and heavy traffic in the river course. Intensive fishing, unscientific fishing technique, entrapment in nylon gill nets, river pollution, lack of strict enforcement of existing laws have been the leading cause for declining crocodile population.

A lack of suitable release sites has also started to become a problem for the management of the gharial. The decline in gharial populations have been linked to a decline in fish catches, as predatory fish form a major part of the crocodiles' diet. The gharials are also hunted for their skin because the locals believe in mystical power of the snouts of male gharials. Gharials eggs are also poached by the local people for medicine and food. The local Tharu community believed that gharial eggs are aphrodisiac and the dry powder of the egg is considered to be effective as a cough medicine.

The big males, who are the only ones to have a ghara, were thus the favourite preys of the poachers. Local tribesmen (specially the Tharu) believed that a ghara placed under the pillow of an expectant women relieved and speeded labor. They also believed when the ghara is made into incense and burned in their fields, crops are freed of insects and pests.

Gharial eggs were believed to have medicinal value in part of Nepal. The local Tharu community believed that gharial eggs are aphrodisiac and medicinal value. For example, the dry powder of the egg is considered to be effective as a cough medicine.

DNPWC to forge co-operation with locals

Former poachers re-arrested

The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) has envisaged a plan to forge cooperation among army, police and local communities for the conservation of wildlife. According to Annapurna Das, director general of DNPWC, meetings are underway with security forces and local communities to work out ways to conserve wildlife.

"We have understood that conservation of wildlife will not get required momentum unless local communities and security bodies work in tandem", he said. With the aim of finding ways to conserve wildlife, a meeting of officials of security organs, district forest office and representatives of local communities were held in Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve and Chitwan National Park. DNPWC officials have also urged local communities to help the government control poaching and save villagers from attacks of wild animals.

During the meeting held in Chitwan on 15th July, local communities criticised the government officials and the security sector for not controlling poaching in national parks. After holding meetings in all national parks and wildlife reserves, the department would hold a national-level joint meeting to share ideas and experiences of the conservation workers and institutions.

Meanwhile, patrolling team of Chitwan National Park has arrested two suspected poachers. The team led by Assistant Conservation Officer Ananath Baral apprehended them. One of them has admitted involvement in the poaching of two rhinos. Surprisingly, both were already convicted in poaching cases and had spent jail term. Park officials have not disclosed their identity. This case has again buttressed for the planned action to avert poachers from re-involvement.

In Bardiya, a patrol team of Nepal Army (NA) deployed at Bardiya National Park (BNP) and poachers exchanged fire inside the park precincts on 17th July night. Ranasher Battalion at Thakurdwar, however, said that the poachers were able to escape due to geographical difficulties at the site. The poachers have left a musket and ammunitions while fleeing. The NA source claimed they had intensified patrolling due to increased poaching in the BNP lately.

Electric fencing against elephant intrusion in the offing

Government of Nepal has planned to fix the electric fencing in eastern border of Jhapa district in a bid to control the human and property losses by the wild elephants from India. The total 8 km area is going to be fenced with three rows of gabion wire fixed on 9 ft high polls. DNPWC decided to send the technicians, equipments and the budget to the related spot.

The wild elephant caused 35 human death within the period of 6 years (since 2000 to 2006) in the eastern development region. In last October, a wild elephant killed 3 people in the eastern Nepal. The destruction of houses, crops and other property is more than a million per year. The elephants also have been killed by the villagers while in defense practice.

Specially, the villages like; Bahundangi of Jhapa, Mechi Municipality, Anarmani, Satasidham, Shantinagar, Dhajjan, Budhabare, Khudunabari, Arjundhara, Suraunga and Sanischare are highly affected. People in this region also used to set the bar of naked aluminum wire with electricity. They even keep bee in the houses and apply other local means like fire patrolling etc. to chase the elephants. The patrolling team used to stay awake whole night in the Machan. The forest ministry has build 16 Machans by the Mechi river side.

The human elephant tussle has been started when the human settled there on the grassland and roaming area of the elephant. But, yet no compensation system has been made by the government for elephant induced damages there. In eastern Nepal, there are no forest areas big enough for elephants to live inside thus forcing huge conflict.

According to the recent reports from Parsa, central terai district, locals at Thori, Nirmalbasti, Bijayabasti, Solakhpur and other adjoining VDCs have been terrorized due to the havoc from wild tuskers. On 14th July, the elephants that entered to the villages from Chitwan National Park destroyed crops worth thousands of rupees at Thori VDC.

The villagers said a herd of wild elephants enters the areas every rainy season and attack people and destroy crops. "We have requested concerned authorities time and again to help control the wild animals but they are indifferent toward our problems," a local complained. Similarly, the wild tuskers destroyed a house belonging to Laxmi Magar and damaged crops planted on about 10 bighas of land at Dumarwana VDC in Bara on 12th July.

Likewise, in western region district of Kailali, a herd of wild elephants damaged wooden houses of 10 families in Basanta village of Ratanpur VDC on 21st July. The herd of 20-25 pachyderms entered the village from the nearby Basanta jungle and started rampaging crops and physical structures. The elephant destroyed crops in over 10 bighas of land.

Locals chased away the elephants by raising fires and noise. Every year, elephants coming from India's Duduwa National Park located some 50 km from here damage crops and other human property from July through September.

Endangered wildlife decrease in SWR

The number of tiger has suddenly been found decreased in Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve (SWR) of western Nepal. It is one of the best habitat areas for wildlife in Nepal. The conservationists suspects that poachers from nearby protected areas in India may have entered Nepal. Not only the tigers but also other endangered species like one horned rhino, crocodile and bison have been found lesser in number than the previous years in the recent count.



Report of recent tiger census 2008 in SWR, the third greatest habitat of tiger, shows this unexpected result. The Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) states that the cause of such unexpected decrease in tiger number is the increased poaching.

According to the data released by DNPWC, only 6 to 14 tigers have been found in the reserve while this number was about 10 to 17 last two years ago. The technicians have trapped only five tigers' pictures in their cameras during the count. Through the technical analysis, the number can be guessed about 14 tigers including cubs, sub-adults and the adults remained in the reserve.

The census has been conducted within 82 days through the 12 digital cameras fixed in 8 different blocks in the reserve. But, in the census of 2004/05 and 05/06, the camera tapping has shown 17 and 9 tigers respectively, though fewer cameras have been used in those counting than the present.

Annapurnananda Das, the DG of DNPWC said that the poachers from India may have entered here after they have finished the tigers in the nearby Indian forest. He also suspects on more poaching after the counting held on April. Recently, the poachers have been arrested with tiger bones. The easy availability of weapons and lack of proper security posts are attributed for the increased movement of poachers.

Wildlife hospital soon at central zoo

A wildlife hospital is going to be established at central zoo in Jawalakhel. Until now, doctors treat the animals by going within the cages of the animal. There are veterinary doctor and two assistants to take care of the animals and birds kept in the zoo.

According to the Sarita Gyawali, executive director of the Zoo, the veterinary services at the zoo, which are limited to a room so far, would be replaced with a modern hospital equipped with x-ray, operation theatre and laboratory. Check up and animals infected with communicable diseases would be kept in isolation.

The zoo was established some 76 years ago and it was opened to the public 54 years ago. The government took over the zoo's management in 1960 and it is being managed by National Trust For Nature Conservation (NTNC) since 1995.

The zoo is expanded over 133 ropanis of land and currently it houses 865 animals of 113 different species including 32 mammals, 57 birds, 10 amphibians and 14 fish species. Fifteen of the 38 animal species of Nepal which has been listed as endangered species have been protected in the central zoo. After the establishment of the hospital, animals kept in the zoo will undergo regular check up. Opened in 1932 as a personal menagerie of the then Prime Minister Juddha Shumsher, it was taken over by the government in 1956.

Meanwhile, locals of Godavari VDC say they are ready to provide land required to relocate the Jawalakhel-based Central Zoo. The locals say they are thinking of forwarding a proposal to the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) with a pledge to provide up to 200 hectares of land in the forest at Naumule.

The National Trust for Nature Conservation is looking for a better place to relocate the zoo and has surveyed certain sites. The space the zoo occupies is not enough to accommodate more animals and it is unable to upgrade facilities due to the space constraint.

Ram Chandra Acharya, leader of the group who wants to provide land to the zoo said, "Naumule site is rich in flora and fauna. It has over 70 species of birds. Godavari is one of the favourite spots for picnic, hiking and researches related to bio-diversity. The shifting of the zoo to Naumule will also help locals earn livelihood."

Tiger count in CNP on November

Tigers in Chitwan National Park (CNP) will be counted from November, conservation officer Megh Bahadur Pandey said. Tigers had not been counted since 2002. The counting would throw light on habitats of tigers.

The Royal Bengal tigers that until 30 years ago roamed freely in the Terai forests of Nepal's southern plains are now confined in three protected areas in central and western Nepal, Chitwan National Park, Bardia National Park and Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve. These are the only habitats of rhinos of Nepal too.

According to latest tiger census, Nepal's tiger population is between 350 and 370. Out of them 123 are adult or bear the capacity of reproduction. Chitwan National Park has been estimated to boast around 40% of the total tiger population. Rise in smuggling of tiger bones and hide was responsible for the decline in tiger's population.

Along with the poaching of rhinos, tigers in and around CNP are also striving with poaching threats. Dead body of a tiger and two tiger cubs were recovered in March. Two dead cubs were found at Chaturmukhi Community Forest, Jutpani on 30th March. They were poisoned to death. A dead body of matured tiger was also found at the community forest near the Amaltari post of CNP. Poachers had fed poisoned ox to the tiger.

The tigers would be counted in CNP by 'camera trapping' system, which is considered scientific and expensive.

License permitted in only hunting reserve

After remaining dormant for more than a decade due to the insurgency, a hunter's paradise is once again gaining popularity after the government permitted hunting licenses this year. Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve (DHR), the only hunting reserve in the country, was opened for licensed hunting in fiscal year 2007/2008.

Along with the issuing of hunting licenses, interested parties are very keen to come to Nepal for hunting at DHR. Most of the licenses sought are from the hunters of Austria and America. Government gave permission for licensed hunting after finding a healthy population of game including the blue sheep, also known as jharal. The government has issued a hunting quota of 24 for this fiscal year.

A survey done between May 25 and June 12, 2007 found a total of 852 blue sheep in six specified hunting blocks at DHR. The six hunting blocks in the reserve include Sundaha, Seng, Dogadi, Phagune, Barse and Gustang.

Out of the 852 blue sheep counted, 126 were termed trophy rams, 92 medium rams and 45 young rams. The trophy rams are ideal for hunting but the government can permit the hunting of all rams above 10 years of age.

Hunting is allowed in the reserve under strict monitoring by officials and licensed guides who accompany the hunters. Hunting licenses are provided during periods from February to April and August to October.

Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve lies in Rukum, Myagdi and Baglung Districts in the Dhaulagiri Himal range in West Nepal. Putha, Churen and Gurja Himal extend over the northern boundary of the reserve. Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve was established in 1983 and was gazetted in 1987. The reserve extends over an area of 1325 square km. The reserve is surrounded by villages on all sides except the north.

Other animals found in this reserve are Leopard, Ghoral, Serow, Himalayan tahr, Himalayan black bear, Barking deer, Wild boar, Rhesus macaque, Langur and Mouse hare.

Pheasants and partridge are common and have viable population. Endangered animals in the reserve include Musk deer, Wolf, Red panda, Cheer pheasant and Impeyan pheasant (Danphe).



Rare Salak found in Kaski

A rare wildlife Salak (Chinese pangolin) has been found at Gagangauda of Lekhnath Ward No. 12 in the morning of 25th July. The mammal, which has small wound on the neck while escaping has been kept at the District Forest Office after treatment at the District Livestock Hospital.



A local Purna Thapa had found it, caught, and brought home and informed the Shishuwa Police Post, Dadakonak. The creature to be found at 200 metres to 1,000 metres above sea level is thought to have come from the Maldi Lake of the wetlands of Lekhnath.

It looks like a tortoise in the first glance, weighs 10 kgs and is one metre long. It is a mammal and its male and female move around together, District Forest Office Kaski said, and suspected that it might have escaped to save life leaving behind the female. The female Salak is also being searched.

It is about five years old and can live upto 15- 20 years. It will be sent to national park as the poachers can kill it if they know its importance, said District Forest Office Officer Kiran Nath Shrestha. Its meat is regarded useful for heart patients and post delivery period women. Although its number in Nepal is not known, it is regarded rare in the world.