



Conservation Watch - Nepal

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Human-elephant conflict spikes in Eastern districts

13 people killed in a month

Eastern Nepal is reeling under the one of the worst time in terms of human-elephant conflict. In a last one month, 13 people from adjoining Siraha, Saptari and Dhanusha districts have breathed their last from elephants attack while owing to the mounting local pressure, local administration has decided to kill the attacking elephants.

Suresh Chaudhary, 55, of Dhodhana VDC-6 was killed in an attack by wild elephant at Birnagar of Siraha district on 1st September. The wild tusker knocked him down while he was going to Birnagar from Dhodhana at around 8 pm and died soon after. On 4th September, two persons were killed when wild elephants attacked them in two different places in Dhanusha district. Six-year-old Nisha Pokhrel, the daughter of Nanda Kishor Pokhrel, of Sakhuwa, MahendraChowk, died on the spot after the tusker attacked her. Similarly, Ramasish Mahato, 60, of Nakjhikitiya VDC was also trampled to death by another elephant.

On 12th and 13th September, five persons were killed in elephant attacks in Siraha and Saptari districts. Three persons died and one was injured when the elephants from the Chure forest attacked them at Madhupatti VDC ward-3 of Saptari early morning. The deceased were Lukhiyadevi Ram, 55, Biltundevi Yadav, 30, and 10-year-old Nilam Kumari Ram. A seriously injured Biltu Ram, 40, is receiving treatment at Lahan Hospital in Siraha. Locals said wild elephants also damaged paddy crops in a stretch of about 20 bighas in the village. In another incident in the night, two persons -- Ramdev Saphi, 36, and Ramwati Thakur, 50 -- residents of Govindapur VDC ward-9 of Siraha district, died after wild elephants trampled them in their own house.



In the night of 21st September, a 42-year-old Devnarayan Chaudhary of Dhodhana VDC-8, Siraha was killed in an attack by a wild elephant. He died while undergoing treatment at Lahan Hospital. Locals said the wild tusker attacked him at around 7 p.m. while he was in his cowshed.

Similarly, two people were killed when a wild elephant went on a rampage inside a house in Siraha district on 26th September morning. Fhulkumari BK, 35, was killed on the spot near her home at Jamdah-6 while her three year old daughter Rina who was attacked during the same incident died on her way to hospital. Fifty families of Govindapur and Dhodhana VDCs in Siraha district have been displaced in the wake of incidents unleashed by wild elephants here recently. Several wild tuskers, have damaged 100 houses and destroyed more than 100 bighas of paddy plantation .

Meanwhile, local administration of Siraha has directed the district forest office to kill a wild elephant that has killed many people and destroyed property of locals in Siraha and Saptari. According to forest officer Jeeban Kumar Thakur, the local administration issued the direction during a meeting held at the forest office by using the authority under the Local Administration Act 2028.

The administration asked the forest officials to try to chase the elephant at first and kill it if posed threat to public security. The locals have also been keeping a night vigil in the area to chase away the pachyderms following the attacks. A six-member team led by Dr Thakur Prasad Gaire from Chitwan National Park, at the direction of Ministry for Forest and Soil Conservation, has been deployed in Siraha to kill the beast.

Women in Siraha district have also started offering prayer to their indigenous gods to get protected from wild elephant rampage. Locals residing in northern belt of Siraha district started offering worship to local god 'Dehavar' so as to get away from the elephant rampage following 13 people died from elephant attack for the last one month, said Yogendra Chaudhari of Madariya.

Stating that elephant is the incarnation of god Ganesh, local women, Dadhana, Taregana Govindapur, Bastipur, Bishnupur, Madariya, Bramhan Gorhati, Gatha including dozens of villages in Siraha started going to local Dihawarthan for prayer.

It has been assumed that the landuse practices could be one of the key factor to induce human-elephant conflict. Human-elephant conflict has more intensity in Eastern Nepal than in Western. In Eastern Nepal, there is no forest areas big enough for elephants to live inside thus forcing huge conflict. In contrast, Western Nepal has quite a few large forest blocks.

Locals affected from vulture restaurant

A vulture restaurant at Nawalparasi which has been providing safe food for the declining vultures draws flak from the local community. Local folk says they have to strive with environmental and health risk from the scattered carcasses subjected for the vulture.



Vulture restaurant was established two years ago by Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) at Namuna Bufferzone Community Forest, Nawalparasi where sick and old cattle not treated with diclofenac are available. After the cattles' death, they are offered as drug-free appetite for the scavenger. The use of anti-inflammatory drug diclofenac has been ascribed as a major cause for the vulture decimation. Vultures that ingest diclofenac intoxicated carcass die within 24 hours from the kidney failure.

Locals people from Pithauli and Kawasoti VDCs complain that they have to face with overpowering stench of the carcass. "The stray dogs, wolfs, jackals and even crows compete for the flesh and they scatter it everywhere in the open village areas", says Kaliya Musahar, a local resident. Around 60 households from indigenous and ethnic groups predominantly Musahar, Gurung, Magar, Dalit are mostly affected.

Jit Bahadur Musahar says there is a high risk of epidemic outbreak generated from the reeked carcasses, if go unchecked. 'Due to the environmental pollution, we have been facing difficulties for the survival', Jit Bahadur lamented.

Along with the establishment, restaurant has been able to attract increasing number of vultures. The number of vulture has reached 170 now while it was only 72 at the time of inception. But the locals are worried as the restaurant has also attracted tigers of near by Chitwan National Park. 'The tigers from the park come here to eat the flesh of animals provided for the vulture. As a consequent, we are horrified from the routinely entry of the tiger in human settlements", a local Basu Kafle said. He suggests to shift the restaurant far from the existing area.

Nonetheless, local people are not against the vulture conservation. They are happy with the increasing number of vultures in their area which have evident potentialities for the tourist area but they also seek urgent attention towards their problems.

The management committee of the vulture restaurant is also wary about these circumstances. According to the Dhan Bahadur Chaudhari, co-ordinator, plans are afoot for collecting and burying the bones of the carcasses.

Conservationists to intensify bilateral rhino campaign

Wildlife conservationists of Nepal and India have decided to join hands to save the endangered one-horned rhinos. A three-day long seminar on 'Conservation of Indian rhino in South Asia' concluded at Sauraha, Chitwan on 17th September, made public an 18-point pledge aimed at conserving and nurturing the species of one-horned rhino in South Asia.

Seminar was conducted with an objective of finding out present challenges and measures to be taken in the days ahead for the conservation of rhino. The conservationists from the two countries have also decided to take a coordinated approach in controlling rhino poaching.

"The conservationists from the two countries will lobby their respective governments to support the bilateral campaign," said Shyam Bajimaya, Director General of National Forest and Wildlife Conservation Department. He said rhino numbers could not be increased because of encroachment of their natural habitat and poaching.

Inaugurating the meeting, Minister for Forest and Soil Conservation Kiran Gurung said the government has been running various programmes with special concern for the protection of rhino. Poaching was increased because of political instability and conflict; he said and hoped to improve the situation.

The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests in Assam, M. C. Malakar, said a network of poachers is actively involved in the increased poaching activities in both countries.

Nepal saw a drastic decline in the number of rhinos from 2005 to 2007 due to poaching in its major national parks while at the same time the Kaziranga National Park (KNP) and other wildlife reserves in India boasted robust rhino numbers, he said. "However, the situation is the reverse now. Rhino conservation is on a positive track in Nepal whereas the situation is worse in India," Malakar added.

According to him, the rhino conservation in KNP was successful between the years 1998-2006 as poaching was in single digits. But in 2007, more than 18 rhinos in KNP perished at the hands of poachers.

WWF Nepal Representative Ghanashyam Gurung said the national commitment on rhino protection should be fully enforced. He said now is the time to work for potential habitats for rehabilitation and relocation of the rhinos. "We should work for the restoration of best habitats and strong patrolling mechanisms for rhino conservation in the long term," he said.

Member Secretary of National Trust For Nature Conservation (NTNC) Bimal Kumar Baniya stressed on the need of increasing community participation in rhino protection.

Rhino experts from both India and Nepal have attended the meeting organized jointly by DNPWC and the Asia Rhino Specialists Group (South Asia).

Poachers killed a rhino in CNP

14 suspected rhino poachers arrested

Coinciding with the day when the expert level seminar kicked off to map out bilateral rhino strategy between Nepal and India, poachers have killed adult male rhino in Chitwan National Park. In the morning of 15th September, a body of de-horned rhino was found near the Ghadgai security post. Rhino was shot to death. The incident site is nearly 2 kilometer far from the Kasara, headquarter of Chitwan National Park.

Now, the rhino numbers in Chitwan National Park is reduced to 404, four less than the rhino count of March, 2008. Out of them three rhinos were brutally poached.

Some good news do appear in Chitwan. Chitwan National Park has arrested three suspected poachers on 14th September from Simreni, Kumroj VDC. CNP team led by Ananath Baral, Assistant Warden, has arrested them following a tip off from local informers. The arrested are identified as Wakil Bhagat, Thag Bajhaiya and Thagdutta Chaudhari of Parsa district. Some wildlife parts have been also confiscated from them. CNP has claimed on finding out evidence for their involvement in poaching.

In Bardia also, 11 suspected poachers are arrested with the joint initiation of Anti-poaching Youth Groups and security forces. Most recently, on 11th September, police arrested Puskar Shah of Badalpur VDC. Shah has been accused of killing two rhinos in Bardia. Few weeks earlier 10 more suspected persons were apprehended.

According to Chief Warden of Bardia, Fadindra Kharel, park had issued arrest warrants against 29 in rhino poaching suspects.

'Encroachment of forests will be controlled'

Newly appointed Minister for Forest and Soil Conservation (MoFSC) Kiran Gurung has pledged to end forest encroachment especially in the Terai region and corruption under his ministry.

At a time when the forest activists and community forest consumers have been pointing their fingers towards the ministry and political parties saying that they were protecting the corrupt employees instead of forest, Minister Gurung spoke in line with the past ministers Sunday.

"I will do my best to give a new message to the people by preventing the past mistakes like safeguarding corruption and delaying the act of handing over community forests to the consumers against peoples' aspirations," Gurung said addressing an interaction programme organised by the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal (FECOFUN).

He, however, did not clearly state whether the Ministry would hand over the community forests in the Terai to the consumers. He said the task necessitated extensive discussions among stakeholders.

"I will try to forge a consensus among the consumers about handing over the community forests in the Terai region," he added. The forest activists have been raising their voice against the government saying the officials were hesitating to hand over the community forests to the consumers.

FECOFUN general secretary Bhola Bhattarai said that the hand over of more than 5,000 community forests was pending while

forest encroachment in Dhading, Nawalparasi, Palpa, Banke, Bardiya, Kailali, Kanchanpur, Udayapur and Rautahat districts was widespread as the mainstream political parties were protecting the forestland encroachers.

In Udayapur, three employees at the District Forestry Office, Udayapur, including the Assistant District Forest Officer Ramakanta Yadav, have been suspended for misappropriating the timber belonging to a local forest users' group.

A patrolling team of the Armed Police Force last week seized the timber being taken towards Janakpur. The timber was seized in Lahan. The police then handed over the timber to the District Forestry Office, Siraha. The timber picked up from Ghatgaddi and belonging to the Janashakti Community Forest Users' Group, Udayapur was found to exceed in quantity than that was mentioned in the invoice.

Habitat loss put Red panda in peril

The clash between humans and nature is putting the existence of red pandas in peril, according to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Habitat loss or fragmentation due mainly to overgrazing and lack of awareness and scientific information on red panda ecology are to be blamed for the situation.

Dr Rinjan Shrestha, conservation biologist at WWF Nepal, said, "Human encroachment is contributing to loss and fragmentation of the habitats of red pandas". He also held overgrazing and excessive extraction of natural resources from red pandas' prime habitats responsible for the habitat loss.

It is estimated that there are 314 red pandas in Nepal. At present, red pandas can be seen in some of the protected areas like Langtang National Park, Sagarmatha National Park, Kanchanjunga Conservation Area Khangchenjunga and Annapurna Conservation Area. However, 70 per cent of the habitats are outside the protected areas.

Dr Pralad Yonzon, head of Resources Himalaya Foundation, said red pandas have their habitat up in the treetops at an altitude of 2,400m-4,000m, where bamboo grows. Bamboo is their major food.

During the rainy season, farmers take their cattle to the mountains for grazing and this is the same period red pandas beget cubs.

According to local, people kill if they see a red panda because of lack of awareness.

Studies say mortality rate of red pandas is 44 percent among adults and 86 per cent among cubs. It is said that this is due to the disturbance caused by livestock grazing in Langtang National Park.

Lack of public awareness regarding the status of the red panda as a protected animal is hindering conservation attempts. In order to ensure their existence, local people should be made aware of the significance of red pandas' conservation. Also, a proper policy and legal framework for their conservation should be introduced.

Brief News

Chirping Sapkota in Guinness Book

After three years of meticulous practice at producing sounds of different birds, Gautam Prasad Sapkota of Makawanpurgadhi ward-9 of Makawanpur district, obtained registration certificate from Guinness Book of World Records. He said he received the registration certificate after producing sounds of 151 species of birds.

