
Anthropogenic impact risking Red Panda survival: Researcher

By A Staff Reporter
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A Ph. D. student as well as a lecturer at the Central Department of Zoology, Tribhuvan University, Hari Prasad Sharma, found two cubs of red pandas in Mabu VDC's forest of Ilam district in this week.

He said that pandas are facing survival pressure from direct and associated anthropogenic impacts like livestock grazing, and possible disease transmission.

After conducting a research in the eastern mid-western parts of red panda habitats in Nepal, he concluded that most of the red panda habitats are in peril due to anthropogenic impacts.

Red panda's suitable habitat qualities in Rara and Langtang National Park and Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve's are decreasing rapidly in the last three year.

In these areas livestock are trampling nigalo, a major food of red pandas and the area seems to be a grazing land rather than protected.

Similarly, their presence in the breeding season from

June to September is another major threat for red panda survival especially for cubs.

"Mother can't follow their cubs when there is a disturbance and cub's eye will not be working until nearly one month. Therefore, cubs are highly vulnerable for their survival," he said.

Sharma visited these areas and found rare sign of



red panda's due to presence of many livestock, guarding dogs and herders from red panda habitat than last year.

He found two dead bodies of red pandas, at Bhulbhule, a buffer zone area of Rara National Park.

In contrast, red panda presence seems good in the eastern Nepal's community forest where Red Panda Network is working on conservation awareness program for this species.

However, many foreigners especially from India are regularly visiting red panda's habitat without government permission.

Sharma said they are visiting there because Singhalila National Park of India prohibited any activities in red panda habitat during breeding season.

He added that the government must control their visiting immediately in the red

panda habitat in eastern Nepal mainly in Ilam and Panchthar districts.

"The government needs to formulate policy to prohibit livestock grazing and human presence during breeding season in red panda habitat in all protected areas," he said.

If it is not initiated immediately, we will definitely lose red panda from Nepal. In addition he added people's positive attitude is another major factor for red panda's conservation, he added.

Sharma interacted with local people and found 99 per cent of them are positive to save red panda in Ilam, Panchthar, Taplejung and Langtang National Park because of income sources from tourism and awareness program of NGO, however, this percentage is low in Jajarkot, Jumla, Dhorpatan and Rara National Park.

He is working on red panda since 2007 and now he is focusing on conservation biology on this species throughout Nepal, which is supported by Rufford Small Grant Foundation and TIGP, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.