

Vulture deaths in Assam in 2001

At least 60 vultures died in Rongjuli, Goalpara district in April after feeding on a dog, which died due to poisoning. Earlier, 23 died at Mukalmua, Kamrup district after taking poisoned meat on 30 March. Most of the dead vultures were Long-billed *Gyps indicus* with a few White-backed *G. bengalensis*. At a time when both these species are listed as 'Critically Endangered', such deaths were unfortunate.

New Tiger Reserves in NE India

Nameri in Assam and Pakhui in Arunachal Pradesh have been included under Project Tiger in 1999. With this, the total number of tiger reserves in the country rose to 28. Other tiger reserves in NE India are Manas in Assam, Namdapha in Arunachal Pradesh and Dampa in Mizoram.

Rhino census

In March 1999, census of the Indian rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis* was conducted by the Forest Department with participation from NGOs, conservationists, etc., in Kaziranga, Orang and Pabitora. The methodology followed was direct count from elephant-back. The areas were divided into smaller blocks for convenience of census. The population in different protected areas was as follows:

Kaziranga National Park . . . 1552
Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary . . . 74
Orang National Park 46

Rhino poaching in Manas

A rhino was killed by poachers in the eastern edge of Manas National Park in March 2001. Its horn was taken away by the poachers while the villagers took the meat for their pot! When the Forest staff reached the site, only the skeleton was left indicating that every bit of meat was taken away. This incident indicated that a few rhinos still survive in the park but complete lack of armed guard in the entire park has made their survival doubtful.

Decline of Swamp Francolin in Pabitora Sanctuary

The Swamp Francolin or Swamp Partridge *Franco-linus gularis* is a globally threatened (vulnerable) bird. A healthy population of 150-300 survived in the sanctuary till 1998 when prolonged flood

degraded the grassland. Subsequently, the grassland could not recover to its best due to heavy grazing by domestic stock, both cattle and buffalo. Today, the population could be less than 50. Heavy grazing has also forced the rhinos to remain within the woodland during the daytime. Putting up of electric fence along the northern and eastern boundary seems to be the only solution.

Wild elephant extinct in Cachar

The Asian elephant *Elephas maximus* has become locally extinct in Cachar district of Barak Valley in southern Assam in 1998. The last group of four was not seen since late 1998. In the other districts of the valley, Karimganj and Hailakandi also the species is on the verge of extinction with less than 10 and two respectively left. Unreported poaching for meat, mostly by the Mizos, Kukis (including Hmars) and Nagas since time immemorial was the main reason for such a precarious situation.

Tiger killed

A full grown tiger *Panthera tigris* was shot dead by a party of 15 policemen of Moirabari Police Station, Morigaon district in central Assam on 6 March 2000. The big cat reportedly came from Laokhowa-Burhachapori area and had killed a person besides injuring seven. The tendency to kill a globally threatened species without making any effort to capture has been condemned by wildlife activists. It may be noted here that the tiger was virtually forced to attack as curious villagers and policemen had surrounded it.

To avoid such killing of endangered species, awareness and motivation programme among the police and paramilitary forces need to be taken up seriously. In early 1990s, a tiger was shot dead in Dhemaji district by BSF personnel posted there although it did not attack anybody. In 1995, CRPF personnel shot dead a leopard *P. pardus* in Guwahati city when it was already confined in a house and could have been easily captured. Similarly, a leopard was shot by policemen in Abhayapuri sub-division, Bongaigaon District in western Assam in January 2001.

Wildlife Rescue Centre

A wildlife rescue centre is being established at Panbari near Kaziranga National Park by Wildlife Trust of India, a Delhi-based NGO with financial support from Ministry of Social Justice. It will be a