



ORANG NATIONAL PARK - FROM LOSERS TO WINNERS

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Name, Location, Constitution & Extent :

The Orang National Park is located in the districts of Darrang and Sonitpur and lies between the geographical limits of 92° 15' E and 92° 27' E longitudes and 26° 29' N and 26° 40' N latitudes. The total area of Park is 78.80 km². About 70% of the area lies in Darrang district while 30% of the area lies in Sonitpur. The State Government declared its intention to constitute the area into a Wildlife Sanctuary vide the notification no. FRS 133/85/5 dated 20.09.1985 published in the official gazette. Upon settlements of rights, privileges and concessions, the area was finally declared a sanctuary vide notification no. FRW. 28-98-116 dated 17.03.1998 published in the official gazette. The sanctuary was further upgraded into a National Park vide notification no. FRW 28/90/154 dated 8.4.99.

Statement of significance:

Conservation Values:

- * Last refuge of Rhino population on the northern bank of Brahmaputra.
- * Representative area of Brahmaputra valley floodplain grassland, forest & wetland.
- * Research, recreation and educational values.

The Orang National Park area is a shallow depression located on the northern bank of River Brahmaputra floodplains. The area comprises of grasslands dotted by woodlands and water bodies. The vegetational succession is arrested at the grassland seral stage by annual controlled burning and uprooting of trees, which colonize the grasslands. The fertile soil deposited by the floods every year also promotes the growth of grasses.

But for the management intervention, tree would invade the area ultimately, thus rendering the area unsuitable for the Rhinos, which feed upon the grasses. Secondly to protect the Rhinos from being



killed by the poachers due to harboring of false beliefs, the management intervention needs to be in place.

The Orang National Park is the third Rhino bearing in Assam after Kaziranga National Park and Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary. Some critically endangered species like Bengal Florican (*Houbaropsis bengalensis*) Greater Adjutant Stork (*Leptoptilos dubius*), Lesser Adjutant Stork (*L. javanicus*), Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelecanus phillippensis*), Baer's Pochard (*Aythya baeri*), Blyth's Kingfisher (*Alcedo hercules*), Yellow Weaver (*Ploceus megarrhynchus*) find a home here. The place also has a sizeable Tiger population (21 as per 1999 Census). The Gangetic Dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*) and seven species of turtles are found here. The list of mammals and amphibia found in the Park is given in the Annexure.

Habitat Management :

The National Park has a unique habitat comprising of grasslands dotted by woddlands and water bodies. The relative proportions of these three eco-systems are as follows:

| Sl .No. | Type | % of area |
|---------|--------------|-----------|
| 1. | Grassland | 67 |
| 2. | Water bodies | 14 |
| 3. | Woodlands | 19 |

The forest type occurring in Park may be described as **Eastern Wet Alluvial Grassland (4D/2S2)** as per the **Champion and Seth classification**. The simultaneous co-existence of the three eco-systems makes the area very rich in diversity and productivity. The area support a variety of rare, threatened and endangered faunal species. The grasslands may be further divided into two categories depending upon the height attained as follows:

1. Tall grasses consisting of Ekora (*Erianthus ravannae*), Nal (*Arundo donax*), Saccharum spp. Themeda arundinacea, Phragmites karka Etc.
2. Short grass consisting of Ulukher (*Imperata cylindrica*), Dubori(*Cynodon dactylon*), Locusa (*Hemerthia*



compressa) etc.

The woodlands may be further subdivided into two categories :

1. Natural forest consisting of Simal (*Bombax ceiba*), Khair (*Acacia catechu*), Udal (*Sterculia villosa*), Bogori (*Ziziphus jujuba*), Sygizium. Cuminii, Lagerstroemia speciosa, Bauhinia retusa, Tamarix dioica etc.

2. Plantation forest consisting of Dalbergia Sisoo, Acacia catechu, Anthrocephalus cadamba, Albizzia procera, Tectona grandis, Toona ciliata and Trewia nudiflora etc.

The grassland are naturally maintained as a Climax community by annually occurring floods and high moisture regime resulting from rainfall. Controlled annual burning of grasses is an alternative management tool for grassland management. The control burning has the following effects on the grasslands:

1. It helps in arresting the succession of vegetation at the grassland seral stage.
2. It prevents invasion of grasslands by woody trees.
3. It promotes the development of grasses.
4. It increases the food availability of Rhinos, as they prefer relatable tender new grasses. The tall grasses are not preferred by the Rhinos for their coarseness.
5. It helps in checking the growth of weeds.

SUMMARY OF THREATS TO WILDLIFE

The following factors pose a serious threat, in varying degrees, to the existence of Wildlife of the National Park.

1. **Siltation of wetlands** : This creates a situation of artificial scarcity of water for the Rhinos and other mammals.
2. **High floods** : Absence of sufficient highlands in the Park lead to death of Rhino caives and deer in the times of high floods.
3. **Biotic interference in fringe areas** : This leads to degradation of the habitat and makes the Wild animals prone to



the various diseases of the domesticated animals.

4. **Choking of water bodies by aquatic weeds** : This makes wallowing difficult for the Rhinos.

5. **Invasion of land areas by weeds** : This leads to degradation of the habitat.

6. **Poaching** : This makes the Rhinos vulnerable to the bullets/pits of unscrupulous elements owing to false beliefs associated with the horn properties.

7. **Invasion of grasslands by trees** : This leads to shrinkage of the habitat of Rhinoceros.

POACHING -TREND REVERSED

The area has been through the worst times in terms of poaching of Rhinos for their horn. Over 57 Rhinos have been killed over a period of five years from 1995 to 2000. However, this trend has been reversed by the efforts of the new management in the year 2001 in which only one Rhino could be killed by the poachers. This is a positive news for the surviving population of Rhinos of the Park. In the last six months, four poachers have been arrested and two have been killed in an encounter. The arms recovered include 2 nos. of .303 rifle, one .405 rifle and 50 nos. of bullets. This has given a moral boost to the staff who had been at the receiving end for the last six years.

RHINO CENSUS DATA

| YEAR | ADULTS | | | SUB-ADULTS | | CALF | | Total | GRAND TOTAL |
|------|--------|----|---------|------------|---|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| | M | F | Unsexed | M | F | <1Yr. | >1Yr. | | |
| 1985 | 23 | 23 | 0 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 10 | 65 |
| 1991 | 28 | 41 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 14 | 8 | 22 | 97 |
| 1999 | 17 | 17 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 6 | | 12 | 46 |



RHINO MORTALITY OVER THE LAST DECADE

| YEAR | MODE OF POACHING | | NATURAL DEATH | TOTAL |
|------|------------------|--------------|---------------|-------|
| | Bullet Poaching | Pit Poaching | | |
| 1991 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| 1992 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 |
| 1993 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 3 |
| 1994 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 10 |
| 1995 | 10 | 1 | 6 | 17 |
| 1996 | 8 | 1 | 4 | 13 |
| 1997 | 10 | 1 | 3 | 14 |
| 1998 | 11 | 0 | 4 | 15 |
| 1999 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| 2000 | 8 | 0 | 5 | 13 |
| 2001 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 2001 | | | 1 | 1 |

Problems afflicting the tourism:

Although the Park is located at a distance of 140 Kms. From Guwahati, yet it is not able to attract adequate visitors commensurate with its faunal and floral richness for the following reasons :

- (i) The approach road from Dhansirighat to the Park is in poor condition. As a result the visitors are not attracted to the Park.
- (ii) No trekker vehicles are available on hire basis for visiting the Park.
- (iii) The Park is lacking in lodging facilities. The Park has a dormitory that can accommodate 35 persons of a group. The Tourist lodge constructed by Tourism department is yet to start functioning.
- (iv) People's participation is virtually non-existent in this sector. As a result the local people do not derive any economic benefits from tourism.
- (v) No interpretive facilities exist in the Park.
- (vi) No trained local guides are available with the Park. No

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GRAND
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interface exists between Forest department and Tourism department.

ANNEXURE

LIST OF PROTECTED AREA VALUES

| Sl. No. | CATEGORY | VALUE |
|---------|----------|--|
| 1. | Global | *Biodiversity Conservation *Rhino Conservation |
| 2. | National | *Grassland Ecosystem Conservation * Rhino * Bengal Florican * Blyth's Kingfisher * Swamp Francolin * Lesser/Greater Adjutant Stork * Baer's Pochard * Yellow Weaver |
| 3. | Regional | * Grassland Ecosystem |
| 4. | State | * Rhino Conservation * Ecosystem Conservation * Ecotourism & Wilderness Experience |
| 5. | Local | * Ecotourism & Related activities * Wild Animal-Human interface value. |

LIST OF MAMMALS

Schedule I

Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*)

Gangetic Dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*)

Indian One Horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*)

Indian Pangolin (*Mains crassicaudata*)

Indian Rock python (*Python molurus*)

Tiger (*Panthera tigris*)

Schedule II

Bengal Porcupine (*Atherurus macrourus assamensis*)

Common Fox (*Vulpes bengalensis*)

Small Indian Civet (*viverricula indica*)

Jungle Cat (*Felix chaus*)



King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*)
Otter (*Lutra perspicillata*)
Rhesus macaque (*Macaca mulatta*)

Schedule III

Hog deer (*Axis porcinus*)
Wild boar (*Sus scrofa*)

Schedule IV

Blacknapped Hare (*Lepus nigricollis nigricollis*)
Rufousnecked Hare (*Lepus nigricollis*)
Small Indian Mongoose (*Herpestes edwardsi*)

LIST OF AMPHIBIANS

Emydidæ

Malayan Box Turtle (*Cuora amboinensis*)
Eastern Hill Terrapin / tricarinate Hill Turtle (*Melanochelys tricarinata*)
Spotted Black Terrapin (*Geoclemys namiltoni*)
Brown Roofed Turtle (*Kachuga smithi*)
Indian Roofed Turtle (*Kachuga tecta*)
Indian Tent Turtle (*Kachuga tecta tecta*)

Trionychidae

Indian Soft Shelled Turtle (*Trionyx gangeticus*)