

Wildlife conservation

Reintroduction and rehabilitation of rhinoceros in the sub Himalayan Terai Grasslands, India

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As all the extant five species of rhinos are endangered, they require high conservation inputs for their continued existence. Presently the great Indian one-horned rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis* is the only species found in the states of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Assam in India. The conservation of this species and the protection of its natural habitat has become a major cause of concern. In India, the rhinoceros is threatened due to loss of habitat and poaching. So, the IUCN after considering the gravity of the problem and on detailed study of different areas assessed the suitability of translocation of the rhino to some of its former range. Initially in 1984, five rhinos were translocated from Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary (Assam), to Dudhwa National Park (Uttar Pradesh). In order to improve reproductive potential, four young females were obtained from Nepal in 1985. After few casualties, in 1989 the breeding was started with five females and one male. By 2002, the rhino population has risen to 17 animals in a fenced area of 27 km² of Dudhwa, which is now an insufficient area for this growing population. Three rhinos have escaped the fence area and now live in semi-cultivated areas. From January to December 2002, studies were carried out between Dudhwa National Park and Katerniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary (sub Himalayan Terai Grasslands) to assess rhino movement between Dudhwa and Katerniaghat, and to study the socio-economic status of people living on the fringes of these protected areas. In this paper, information on the status of Indian rhino with the emphasis on Dudhwa as an important habitat is described. Information was collected from literature, by distributing questionnaires to the villagers and from random transects to record faunal and floral diversity. The successfully growing population has to be further rehabilitated to other habitat in Dudhwa, Katerniaghat and other areas. Bhadital area (17 km²) in Dudhwa was considered appropriate habitat for translocation, so fencing commenced around the area. But due to lack of funds the fencing was stopped and subsequently all constructed fence got destroyed. There is an urgent need to reconstruct the fence in Bhadital area, and the encroached land between Dudhwa and Katerniaghat should be recovered to develop a corridor for rhino movement.