



Conservation Watch - Nepal

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Vulture breeding centre in CNP

50 pairs to be bred in five years

In a bid to maintain a viable population of endangered vulture population, a breeding centre has been established at Kasara in Chitwan National Park, for the first time in Nepal. This initiative is the combined effort of Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), National Trust For Nature Conservation (NTNC) and Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) with the technical and financial assistance of Zoological Society of London and Royal Society For Protection of Bird (RSPB), U.K.

14 pairs of white-backed vulture, a rare species, were brought from Pokhara on 30th March and have been kept in about one hectare area of the aviary. March is considered as the breeding season of vulture when it is easy to trap.

During the capture period, their age ranged from 6 to 8 weeks. The foreign experts have been called to identify the sex. It takes around three years time for a vulture to reach breeding age. Two aviaries are slated to build where the second one is under construction now.

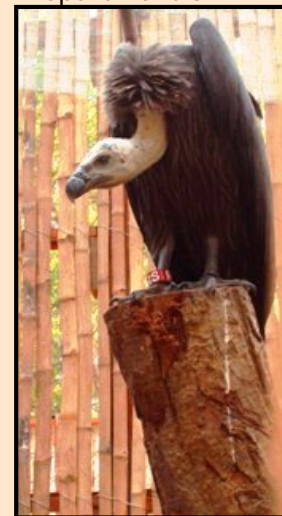
According to the plan, the breeding centre would increase vulture population to 50 pairs in five years and aftermath they would be released in a wild. Ramchandra Nepal, co-ordinator of NTNC said the project should be continued for 15 to 20 years to achieve satisfactory numbers.

A 2004 conservation plan calls for the creation of six breeding centers in South Asia, each producing 25 pairs from each of the three critically endangered species.

IUCN, the World Conservation Union, has placed half of Nepal's vultures in the endangered list. The latest red list of threatened species published by the IUCN has listed the Red-headed vulture (*Sarcogyps calvus*) and the Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) as endangered. Two other Nepalese vultures, White-backed and Slender-billed vultures are already in IUCN's critically endangered list. A total of eight vulture species are found in Nepal.

The total number of endangered Asian vulture species has reached five. Another South Asian species, the Long-billed vulture, which is not found in Nepal, is also already categorized as critically endangered.

Conservationists estimate the number of vultures in Nepal have dropped to about 500 nesting pairs from 50,000 in 1990, primarily due to the veterinary use of diclofenac, the Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drug (NSAID), which causes renal failure in vultures that feed on the carcasses of treated cattle. Government of Nepal has banned veterinary use of diclofenac in 2006. Other factors like loss of habitat and nesting grounds to urbanization have also caused for vulture decimation.



Bardia National Park wails

Afflicted from poaching to forest fire

Bardia National Park is struggling with one of its worst times ever. Cessation in poaching incidents does not seem likely. In addition, forest fire has taken a toll in the park areas for more than two weeks.

About two dozen wild animals, including two elephants, a male rhino was found dead with horn and tail missing in water at Korean Bagar at Sisniaghat area of Karnali flood plains near BNP premises. It was hit with half a dozen bullets.

Similarly, poachers using modern SLR guns had killed another rhino and a security guard. The smugglers also killed Nepali Army personnel Deepak Chaudhari who was deputed in the national park for the security purpose at Manaughat, near BNP, on April 3.

According to locals, poachers are actively involved in killing swamp deer that comes out of the park area for grassland. Similarly, the poachers are targeting other animals including blackbuck, gaur and wild boar.

Concerned over the increased poaching activities, Govinda Pandey, chairperson of civil society Bardiya has urged the authorities and general public to protect the wild animals from being poached.

The Kathmandu Post, a national daily, has published a report that the authorities employed for security of animals are not working for it. The report cited three French nationals namely, Patrice Correio, Tristan and Sundari who regularly visit BNP for nature walks and have been living in Bardiya for more than eight months as part of their nature adventure.

"Just a few days after the second rhino was poached, we had seen a man with a dog roaming around the site where the rhino was later poached and informed the police but there was no positive response," said The Kathmandu Post, quoting Tristan.

BNP covers 938 square kilometers and has more than 800 security personnel mobilized for security. Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) has to spend nearly 75% of its budget on staff salaries, out of a total budget of Rs 270 million and not much left for conservation movement.

Fire has gripped Bardiya National Park during the last two weeks of April. The fire has engulfed Babai valley, banks of Karnali River, Hattisar and many other places in the national park. The fire has destroyed the young saplings of trees as well as the valuable Sal, Sisau and Khayar trees. Apart from endangering the life of animals, the fire has polluted the environment.

The fire has also engulfed national and community forests of Banke district.

Water crunch hits faunas of Parsa Wildlife Reserve

Wild animals living in Parsa Wildlife Reserve (PWR) are facing serious drinking water shortages due to scorching heat. The wildlife reserve is facing water shortages after water of Kamini Reservoir, the major source of drinking water inside the reserve was used to extinguish a wild fire that spread inside the reserve.

"Wild animals are facing drinking water shortages as most small ponds inside the reserve are drying up due to increased temperature," Baburam Yadav, chief conservation officer at PWR said.

Animals inside the reserve lick dewdrops attached to green leaves in the morning to satisfy their water needs. According to officials, due to water shortages, saving 81 deer rehabilitated from Godavari Deer Research Center in Kathmandu to PWR two months ago, has become problematic.

Similarly, hundreds of other animal species including leopard, gaur and wild elephants are also facing problems due to acute shortages of drinking water.

Owing to the water scarcity animals are moving out of the reserve to the areas of human settlements in search of drinking water.

Officials had urged Hetauda Municipality to store water at Kamini Reservoir but the municipality has not heeded their request. "Most animals would either die or change their habitat if drinking water is not provided at the earliest at PWR", chief conservation officer Yadav warned.

Meanwhile, the government is shifting away two villages inside Parsa Wildlife Reserve (PWR) as proximity with human habitation has been posing risk to protected animals. The government has decided to release Rs 3.7 million for the resettlement of 64 households of Rambhori and Bhata. The conservation of animals inside the reserve was hindered due to encroachment, overgrazing of domestic animals, risk of disease contagion and wildfire due to human habitation inside the reserve.

People kill leopard, rhino hurt women in CNP

On 27th April, a middle aged woman was injured seriously in a rhino attack at Beltandi Chaur in Namuna Buffer Zone Community Forest of Chitwan National Park.

Sumitra BK, 35, sustained serious injury in the attack when she had gone to the forest to cut grass. According to eyewitnesses, Sumitra was chased away by four rhinos from Narayani River while she was cutting grass. One of the rhinos had thrown her after moving up from backside. Community forest had allowed grass cutting a day before.

In another incident in bufferzone area of Chitwan National Park (CNP), six persons including a foreign national, were injured when a leopard from CNP attacked them at Sauraha on May 1st. The leopard attacked hotel employees, Dilip Chaudhari and Pratap Pariyar, and a Dutch national at the premise of Holiday Safari Hotel. Three commoners were also injured in the leopard attack. The victims have received minor injuries in different parts of the body. The leopard had entered into the settlement in the afternoon.

Villagers of Manamainju VDC, Kathmandu had also killed a leopard after it mauled three people on 24th March.

Four held with cheetah hide

The Kanchanpur District Police Office arrested four persons with six pieces of cheetah hide from Kasaraul Jungle of Jhalari VDC-7 on 4th May. The four were trying to smuggle the contraband into India.

The arrested were identified as Pratap Singh Thagunna, 60, and Ram Bahadur Dhama, 50, of Jhalari VDC-6 of Kanchanpur and Ramdin Rana, 40, and Dharendra Rana, 24, of Jhalari VDC-3.

Thagunna has been smuggling cheetah hide from Nepal to India for the last 15 years, police informed. The arrested poachers have confessed to killing five cheetahs in the jungles of Kanchanpur district, assistant conservation officer at the Suklaphanta Wildlife Conservation Park Nilamber Mishra informed.

The seized hide can fetch Rs 3 million in the international market. The arrested could be imprisoned for 10 years or fined Rs 1 lakh or sentenced both as per Wildlife Conservation Act.

Similarly, a joint patrol team of Bardiyaa National Park staffers and Nepal Army arrested five persons while felling down Saal (*Shorea robusta*) trees for smuggling from the Bethani Post area on the eastern part of the park on 26th April. The arrested are Dasram Tharu, Bhim Bahadur Tharu, Moti Bahadur Tharu, Kamindra Tharu and Lautan Tharu of Motiopur-4 of the district.

The team also seized a wheel cart loaded with timber from the site.

'Nature conservation efforts to escalate'

Rebel turned political leader and chairman of CPN (Maoist) Pushpa Kamal Dahal alias Prachanda said nature conservation in Nepal will now reach a new dimension, as it has been freed from the clutches of the royal family.

CPN (Maoist) has established itself as a largest political party in recently held election of constituent assembly and is likely to lead the government very soon.

"In the past, the royal family considered the nature conservation sector a matter of luxury and misused the foreign assistance in the sector for their own benefit. Now, the assistance for nature conservation would be transparent and reach the targeted group," he asserted. He said that the new government would thoroughly investigate into the expenses incurred in the name of nature conservation by different organisations.

He said this while addressing the foundation stone-laying programme for construction of research and office building of National Trust for Nature Conservation at Khumaltar, Lalitpur on 4th May. The proposed building is being built in Khumaltar with financial support of Rs 320 million from the government of China. The Beijing Real Estate Group Company will construct it in 17 months. Chinese ambassador to Nepal Zheng Xianglin said the Chinese government would be happy to support Nepal's nature conservation.

Meanwhile, Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR) through National Planning Commission has released more than Rs 10 million to Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) for reconstruction of infrastructure destroyed during the insurgency. A decade of armed-conflict led by CPN (Maoist) wreaked havoc on government conservation efforts, especially in protected areas. According to a DNPWC data, infrastructure worth more than Rs 50 million was destroyed during the decade long conflict in the country. Now, with the emergence of political consensus and determination, concerned stakeholders are strengthening conservation efforts.

Money released recently for this fiscal year 2007/2008 will be used for re- construction of two-security posts each in Shukhlaphanta Wildlife Reserve and Bardiya National Park respectively. Similarly, one security post will be set up at Chitwan National Park (CNP). A custody home at Kasara, headquarter of CNP will also be renovated. DNPWC is planning to develop some development infrastructure in protected areas in mountain regions including Langtang, Dolpa, Mustang and Makalu.

First phase of EPRC completed

Empowering People For Rhino Conservation (EPRC)/ MCN has successfully completed its project activities entitled for it's first phase. EPRC started from August 2007 in five Village Development Committee of Chitwan National Park with the support of Asian Rhino Project, Australia. EPRC activities have intervened various levels of community and at the level through which existing policies and practices can be leveraged for the best conservation outcomes.

Community based activities were targeted to the most poaching vulnerable communities of core bufferzone areas which bear grudges and grievances towards park authority, bufferzone committees and to the entire rhino conservation initiatives. They were sensitized and positively motivated to the conservation through focus group discussions, interactions, cultural programs, public hearing programs, truth sharing programs etc.

These activities have at one hand drawn their views, aspirations, problems and had been relayed to the concerned authorities. At other hand, community people were informed and educated on how conservation efforts are important for biodiversity, how they can get direct benefit from successful conservation and how the contentious issues should be resolved.

EPRC has capacitated and mobilised bufferzone CBOs for the rhino conservation. Previously, they used to shy away from the conservation related activities fearing negative response from people and also because they had less knowledge on various aspects of conservation. It has conducted workshops, interactions, seminar on various issues of conservation to leverage concerted and co-ordinated efforts ultimately to bolster the conservation practice and avoid backlogs of conservation.

The preparation is underway for the next phase of EPRC with additional and follow up components.

