

Project Update: Rapid Action Initiatives to Strengthen Anti-Poaching Measures in and Around Rhino Bearing Areas in Assam

The successful conservation and management of rhino in Assam needs rapid threat mitigation measures in order to ensure long term survival of rhinos in Assam, India. Poaching of rhinos both within and outside the rhino bearing areas in Assam has remained a challenge for frontline forest staff and needed better support and coordination. This project fully funded by the Taronga Conservation Society Australia and ARP was aimed at strengthening anti-poaching activities and the monitoring of stray rhino around Kaziranga National Park.

Due to an increase in rhino population in Kaziranga (currently 2048 rhinos as estimated in April 2009 compared to 1855 estimated in 2006), the incidence of rhino straying out of the NP has increased significantly. This has led to the poaching of approximately 6 rhinos outside the Kaziranga NP during the year 2007. In the year 2008 the incidence of rhino straying out of Kaziranga increased again. This proved a challenge for park rangers to adequately manage and protect them once outside the park boundaries.

The anti-poaching project supported by Taronga Zoos began in January 2009. The project focuses on local community involvement in monitoring areas outside the National Park. Equipments like binoculars, motorbikes to track the stray rhinos, camping

materials such as small 4-6 men tents, rucksacks with torch lights, rain coats and jackets and the necessary equipment needed to bring the stray rhinos safely back into Kaziranga NP has been purchased. A set of three groups of forest squad comprising about 4-6 persons in each group will be specifically trained to chase the strayed rhino back into the park. One Speed Boat engine will also be sponsored through this project to further strengthen the river front monitoring in northern boundary of Kaziranga both with regards to stray rhino and movement of poachers.

Activities carried out until November 2009:

The project is working on strengthening the mobility of the forest staff to monitor these stray rhino outside the national park and to ensure that they are returned back to the park safely with active involvement of the community.

This year poaching incidences have decreased by approximately 50% outside KNP compared to the 2008 figures. In 2007 about 10 rhinos were poached outside the KNP of which 6 are within 10KM from park boundary. The rest were beyond 10KM of the park boundary, and officials do not claim them as Kaziranga rhino as may have come from elsewhere. In 2008, 6 rhino were killed outside the park. However in 2009 so far only 3 poached outside the park. During this period of our project implementation, two primary rhino poachers were arrested outside the KNP. These two poachers have been involved in more than 40% of rhino poaching incidences outside KNP in south east area. In Feb-March 2009 at least four rhinos strayed out in this area and all of them three were returned safe. However there was one poaching case during that period Feb-Mar 2009.

The forest staff are not part of Kaziranga Administration, but are employees within the greater Assam Forest Department. The Numaligarh Forest Beat Office (which is about 30 KM east of Kaziranga NP) have been playing major role in monitoring stray rhino and our program has assisted fulfilling their basic needs in performing their additional duties on monitoring the strayed rhino and also monitoring the poachers outside the KNP.



Three community meetings have been organized around key villages and three teams have been formed to assist in our program. Professional training has been imparted to forest staff and community intelligence gatherers to enhance monitoring and protection of rhino.

Items purchased so far:

- Two motor motorbikes have been handed over to the field sites to assist the forest staff to enhance the protection of rhinos outside the Kaziranga NP. A focus has been made mainly towards eastern side of the park.
- Ten binoculars were put into service to monitor the rhino straying outside the Kaziranga NP
- Field gears such as small 4-6 men tents, rucksacks with torch lights, rain coats and jackets were also handed over to make the effort to protect and monitor the stray rhinos outside the Kaziranga NP more effective.

In the proposal we were supposed to provide an OBM engine for a Speed Boat. However the Kaziranga Authorities got extra fund from Central Government

and they have purchased that component from their extra funds. Hence at this stage we have US\$ 3000 unutilized, which subject to approval from Taronga Foundation, we would like to utilize for community awareness during the winter months (November 2009 until March 2010) to further strengthen the second line of defense to ensure better protection to strayed rhinos.

We have achieved the planned activities. The key threatening process to rhino in poaching and increase and decrease in poaching, no of attempts to poach rhinos, are the basic criteria we have incorporated to assess the success of the project.

This project is not looking after habitat component as we have seen the immediate threats to rhino which is basically poaching. The population of rhino in Kaziranga is on increasing trend with current rhino population stands at 2048 as estimated in the year 2009 compared to 1855 estimated in 2006.

Article: Aaranyak and Asian Rhino Project.

Photo: Pranjit Kumar Sarma



The Asian Rhino Project, Silvery Gibbon Project and Australian Orangutan Project present the



Walk for Endangered Asian Animals

This joint walkathon will aim to raise funds and awareness for the critically endangered Orangutan, Silvery Gibbon and Asian Rhinos.

9am, Sunday 14 March 2010 at Lake Monger, WA

To help us in ensuring the day is a success, help is sought in the following areas:

- Advertising
- Manning stalls on the day
- BBQ skills
- Face painting skills
- Education/interpretive signage throughout the walk, fact sheets etc
- Dressing up as NGO mascots
- Sourcing donations for prizes
- Sourcing donations for children's bouncy castle, food and drink on the day
- Encouraging participants!

If you or someone you know can assist in any of the above ways, please contact Sophie Lourandos on sophie.lourandos@asianrhinos.org.au or Bill Waterer on wwaterer@eftel.net.au.