

Progress in Manas National Park

Manas National Park was once home to more than 100 rhinos, but the entire population was wiped out during the ethnic unrest that occurred between 1988 and 2001. The rhino population was rendered locally extinct. After the restoration of peace in the area and formation of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) as a means of local governance, conservation efforts in Manas have been gaining ground.

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The Indian Rhino Vision 2020 (IRV 2020) is a multi-partner programme addressing the long-term conservation of rhino in Assam. As a part of the programme, Manas National Park was selected as the first area for the re-introduction of rhino through wild-to-wild translocations. To date, eight rhinos have been released in Manas and they are monitored on a regular basis.

Translocation and monitoring is carried out under the guidance of the Translocation Core Committee (TCC) with day-to-day monitoring carried out by the Manas monitoring team. The

observation is attempted at early morning, afternoon, evening and night. Staff and some locals are being given further training to improve their skills and local NGOs and the fringe community are quite supportive and extend help as and when requested.

The rhinos seem to prefer areas in the southern periphery of the Park, where the habitat is primarily short grassland and small bodies of water. All major activities such as feeding, wallowing, walking and resting have been found to be quite normal based on the continuous observations that have been conducted since translocation. We have also observed male-female association, courtship behaviour and fighting for dominance among the male rhinos.

The rhinos, at times, move short distances (less than 1km) out of the Park to the adjoining tea and paddy fields as the southern boundary of the Park is open. To date, about six cases of major straying (over 3km) have occurred and on one occasion a rhino strayed for 14 days, covering a distance of about 100 km. To manage such incidents, an electric fence has been erected in the stretch where breakouts occurred most frequently. Straying rhinos have only broken this fence once but elephants often manage to damage the fence. Regular maintenance, with a little help from the local community, is ensuring the fence keeps working. However, 'escapes' are now occurring in other areas, with rhinos utilising land beyond the fence, therefore requiring further management interventions to be implemented.

The reintroduction of wild rhinos in Manas under IRV2020 is marked as a great conservation success. The rhinos have adapted well, and tourists and conservationists alike are pleased to see rhinos back in Manas. The plan is to have a founder population of 20 rhinos: hopefully 12 more rhinos will be translocated to the Park during the coming year. Rhino conservation efforts in Manas under IRV2020 are helping Manas revive its glory and guide it to a better future.

Daily monitoring of Manas' rhinos is essential



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released rhinos are fitted with VHF radio collars so that they can be tracked using radio-telemetry equipment in addition to sign surveys. The rhinos translocated during 2010-11 have also been ear notched for easy physical identification. Monitoring is done regularly and physical



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