



# RAJIV GANDHI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Summary of Report submitted by the Forest Dept. of Assam

The Rajiv Gandhi WL Sanctuary straddles the two civil districts of Darrang and Sonitpur of Assam on the north bank and abuts the Brahmaputra River. It is 70 kms from Guwahati. A good network of jeepable roads exist inside.

**History:** The area was formerly an abandoned village with two distinct layers of alluvial deposits. Due to secondary succession, thatch and other grass species covered the area inviting wildlife. It was declared Orang Game Reserve in 1915, an area covering 8054 ha.

In 1931 an area of 1729 ha was reserved on the Northern side for settling immigrants from Bangladesh, but an area of 873 ha was added in 1969. Total area of the Game Reserve is 71,980 sq. kms. It was notified as a Wildlife Sanctuary during 1985 covering an area of 75.60 sq. km.

As part of afforestation programme during 1960 - 62, an area of 328 ha was planted with fast growing species but was not a success. Additional staff was given for executing works and additional protection improved the wildlife prospects and the number of animals increased.

Now, the entire area is covered by villages on all sides, even the islands of the river Brahmaputra. There is constant biotic pressure — grazing, fishing, collection of thatch, firewood.

The climate is typical subtropical monsoon with major precipitation between May and September. Average rainfall is about 300mm with temperature from 7° C to 35°C and a relative humidity of 66 - 80 percent.

Dhansiri and Panchnoi rivers originate from Bhutan Himalaya and flow through the Sanctuary. The area is dotted by a number of canals and artificial ponds.

Annual flooding takes place with higher terrace remaining above flood which accounts for there being no rhino death due to flood. However the rivers are eroding the southern and western parts of the area which is a threat to the sanctuary.

The area is covered about 70% by grassland which provides good forage to herbivores. The waterbodies support a variety of aquatic vegetation. Woodlands are mostly confined to highland with five natural patches of miscellaneous formation in addition to the plantation.

The Indian rhino is dominant species in the sanctuary, sharing the habitat with elephant, hog deer, wild boar, tiger and small mammals such as smooth Indian otter, large Indian civet, small Indian civet, leopard cat, etc.

The first detailed census was conducted in 1985 over an area of about 62 hectares and a total of 23,231 adult and 7,210 sub-adults were spotted. In 1991 an area of 80 sq.km. was subjected to detailed census reporting adults 28,41.5 and subadults of 0.1.14 and 0.0.8 calves. Bengal floricans were also sighted during this census.

Poaching presents the greatest threat to the survival of rhino population in this sanctuary with 43 rhinos killed since 1980 as opposed to 47 deaths by natural causes.

There are a total of 70 permanent staff distributed through 23 camps in the sanctuary. Staff is equipped with 2 SBBL guns and 6 DBBL guns and 21 rifles. There is one jeep and one van, 15 country boats and one fiberglass boat. There is a fixed station wireless with 9 mobile sets for the camps. Of the 14 departmental elephants only five can be utilised.

Future thrust plans are aimed at combating poaching. Increasing number of guards, guard posts equipped with better arms and improved communication are some of the measures. Extension of area is not possible except southern parts which are strategically important as poachers enter from south. Combating poaching activities which originate from these areas is essential but present infrastructure and logistic support does not provide scope for effective steps.

