

## **Aaranyak's MISSION**

Our mission is to foster conservation of biodiversity in Northeast India through research, environmental education, capacity building and advocacy for legal and policy reform to usher a new era of ecological security.

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**Aaranyak** is a registered society working towards nature conservation in North East India, since 1989. Our strength lies in applied research in biological and social fields and our thrust area of work is the North Eastern India and Eastern Himalayas. Aaranyak is steered ahead by young professionals dedicated and committed to the cause of conservation. Aaranyak is recognized as a Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (SIRO) by the Government of India.

Know more about us at [www.aaranyak.org](http://www.aaranyak.org)

You can also Follow us on Facebook and Twitter

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*Aaranyak Society Registration No. – 3096 of 1989-90*

*Donations made to Aaranyak in India carry tax exemption under section 80G of the Income Tax Act 1961. Registration under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act 1976 entitles Aaranyak to receive foreign contribution to work in the field of biodiversity research and conservation.*

# Annual Report 2014-15



Nourishing nature to secure our future

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## Message from Secretary General and Chief Executive Officer

In 2014-15, the organisation excelled with confidence and greater understanding to address conservation challenges in its area of operation. The organisation has been able to run various projects as planned, to assist research and conservation covering species like Tiger, Rhino, Elephant, Gangetic Dolphin, Hoolock Gibbons, Greater Adjutant Stork, Bengal Florican, Herpetofauna. We also took initiatives towards building the capacity of young students and professionals in the field of research and education. The strength of Aaranyak lies with its proactive and dedicated conservation workers, who work almost 24X7 in different challenging territories and climatic condition to promote conservation.

During 2014-15, Aaranyak received two laurels that included the prestigious Indira Gandhi Paryavaran Purashkar 2012 which was handed over to the SG and CEO of Aaranyak on 2nd February 2015 at the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change in New Delhi. The Community Based Flood Early Warning System (CBFEWS) being implemented jointly by ICIMOD and Aaranyak in the Lakhimpur and Dhemaji Districts of Assam has won the '2014 Lighthouse Activity Award' by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) at Bonn, Germany. The 'Lighthouse Activities' selected by the United Nations Climate Change Secretariat under its 'Momentum for Change' Initiative from all over the world, are inspiring and transformational mitigation and adaptation activities. The award was handed over in Lima, Peru on 11th December 2014 during the COP-20 (United National Climate Change Conference).

We are committed to contribute further towards wildlife research and conservation and look forward to receiving support, suggestions and cooperation from all concerned to nourish nature to secure our future.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Bibhab Kumar Talukdar'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light-colored background.

Dr. Bibhab Kumar Talukdar



Livelihood support around Kaziranga NP to promote rhino conservation

## Rhino Research and Conservation Division

The Rhino Research and Conservation Division (RRCD) has been proactively supporting rhino conservation in Assam since 1998, by offering field equipment to rhino bearing areas of Assam that included wireless communication equipment, motorbikes, solar panels, floating boat camps, vehicles, rain coats, winter cloths and field shoes for use by forest staffs of rhino bearing areas. During 2014-15, RRCD worked closely with the EE and Capacity Building Division of Aaranyak to conduct 'Rhino Goes to School' conservation awareness around schools of rhino bearing areas in Assam. This division also worked with Wildlife Genetics Division of Aaranyak, in regard to genetics aspect of rhino research. RRCD provided technical inputs to rhino areas in India on capture and translocation of rhinos, for either range expansion or stray rhino management planning.



Based on Dog squad's clue, Kaziranga NP authorities recovered arms and ammunitions

## Major Achievements:

- In association with EE and Capacity Building Division of Aaranyak, RRCD conducted more than 40 Rhino Goes to School conservation awareness activities around fringe village schools of Kaziranga NP, Pabitora WLS and Orang NP.
- The Head of RRCD visited Kruger NP, Addo Elephant Park and Mountain Zebra National Park in South Africa in June 2014 to build capacity on advance technologies and tools used by SAN Parks Wildlife Veterinary Service to capture Black rhinos and mass capture of herbivores.
- Provided field shoes to 150 frontline staffs in Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary engaged in protection of rhinos in and around the WLS.

## Strategic Activities:

- Along with International Rhino Foundation (IRF) with support received from Save the Rhino International, Aaranyak-IRF small grants was launched in February 2015, to support local conservation workers and groups in securing public support towards rhino conservation in Manas NP and Laokhowa-Burhachapori WLS.
- To secure support from fringe villagers of Kaziranga NP and Pabitora WLS, RRCD offers livelihood generation supports to selected beneficiaries. Livelihood support has been offered through capacity building, followed by in-kind assistance to carry out piggeries, goateries, weaving, for agricultural crops etc.



K-9 dog unit assisted in recovering arms and ammunition at KNP



RRCD campaign in collaboration with local NGOs to enhance rhino conservation awareness in North Bengal



Shoes being distributed among forest staff at Pobitora

- A rhino brochure having information on various conservation aspects of greater one horned rhino has been published for dissemination among students and teachers.
- As Rhino poaching is taking tolls in rhino bearing areas in North Bengal, RRCD supported Mr. Animesh Bose, Honorary Wildlife Warden of West Bengal, to carry out rhino conservation awareness around rhino bearing areas in North Bengal, to garner public support towards rhino conservation during August-December 2014.

## Impact:

The equipment support being offered to rhino bearing areas has boosted up the morale of the frontline staff. The Rhino Goes to school activities has covered more than 7000 students in past one year to inculcate in them the love for the state animal of Assam.

## Road Ahead:

- The RRCD shall continue its joint research with Wildlife Genetics Division on all the three species of Asian Rhinos to build a Rhino Informatics in coming years.
- This division shall also assist relevant government agencies in India to capture and translocate rhinos with technical inputs from the planning to execution stage, as growing rhino population in India shall give rise to the need to manage the rhino population scientifically.
- Preparing a handbook on monitoring rhinos in India including body conditioning.
- The needs in rhino bearing areas and priority identification for support in India shall be re-assessed, and accordingly necessary resources shall be generated to support rhino bearing areas in Assam and West Bengal with needed field equipment to strengthen rhino protection efforts of rhino bearing areas.

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Line transect sampling in Manas National Park

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## Tiger Research and Conservation Division

The Tiger Research and Conservation Division (TRCD) is one of the flagship divisions of Aaranyak that started in 2005. Since inception, TRCD has been actively engaged in monitoring tigers, co-predators, their prey animals and habitats, through the formation of a multi-disciplinary approach, merging pioneering applied research, conservation education and community participation.

The major objectives of the division are - (a) ecological research on tigers, co-predators and their prey animals, (b) creating a GIS based database, habitat connectivity corridors along the tiger bearing forests, (c) capacity building of local biologists, conservationists and forest staff, (d) promoting community-led tiger and habitat conservation through awareness and capacity building.

TRCD has been engaged in continuous population monitoring of tigers, co-predators and their prey animals in Kaziranga (since 2009), Manas (since 2010), and Orang National Park (since 2007). In 2012, TRCD carried out a systematic study of tigers in the Namdapha Tiger Reserve and for the first time, camera trapped a tiger in the reserve.



Team installing a camera trap

## Major Achievements:

- Estimation of tigers, co-predators and prey animals as part of the All India Tiger Monitoring, in collaboration with Wildlife Institute of India and National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Govt of India. Aaranyak contributed to the National Report from Kaziranga, Manas and Orang National Park, Assam.
- Carried out a joint monitoring of tigers in the Transboundary Manas Conservation Area (TraMCA) in the Manas National Park, India and Royal Manas National Park, Bhutan. A team from India and Bhutan carried out the joint exercise across the international boundary and jointly analysed the data to understand population of tigers and also the number of trans boundary tigers.
- For the first time carried out a questionnaire-based occupancy study of Fishing Cat in central Assam region.





Project Investigator with the tiger monitoring team at Manas NP



Night Patrolling with local VDP groups during flood period at Kaziranga

## Strategic Activities:

- Monitoring of the tigers, co-predators, their prey and habitat in Manas and Orang National Park using photographic capture-recapture sampling.
- Estimation of abundance and density of ungulates in Manas National Park by using Distance sampling.
- Carrying out ecological investigation and evaluating the threats of Fishing cat in the protected and non-protected areas of Assam.
- Nature Orientation Initiative (NOI): The 8<sup>th</sup> NOI event was held from 31<sup>st</sup> January to 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2015 at Bagori Range, Kaziranga National Park.
- Focused conservation campaign on wildlife around Kaziranga National Park:
  - On 19 August, 2014, TRCD, collaborating with APE, celebrated the World Photography Day in Bokakhat. On this occasion, around 50 participants from different parts of the state took part in the event. The basic aim of the event was to sensitize people on wildlife and its habitat conservation.
  - On 9 September, 2014, TRCD celebrated the

establishment day of Aaranyak at Bokakhat Press Club. Around 150 participants including members of the local media, forest department officials, NOI alumni, volunteers and member of Aaranyak took part in the event. Bird-watching, wildlife quiz and extempore speech competition were also held on the occasion.

- On 7 October 2014, Wildlife week was celebrated in the Japoripathar, fringe village of the Kaziranga National Park. An audio-visual talk show, quiz, extempore speech, drawing competition were organised with about 120 participating students and villagers.

### Community Conservation:

- Alternative Income: A day long consultation workshop and training was organised at Rangalu near Bhurapahar range on animal husbandry. Scientist from Veterinary College, Guwahati was invited to provide training to the beneficiaries.

### Other activities:

- Aaranyak is actively participating and coordinating with the Indo-Bhutan trans-boundary coordination meeting, in collaboration with the authority, Manas National Park and WWF India.

- Our team participated in two trans-boundary coordination meetings held in Gelephu, Bhutan that resulted in joint monitoring of tigers in the TraMCA in 2015.
- We also supported the Royal Manas park authority with 94 camera traps and batteries for estimation of tiger population.

## Impact:

In 2015, in Manas National Park, a total effort of 5747 camera trap nights covering an area of 300 Km<sup>2</sup>, yielded 13 adult individual tigers- 6 males and 7 females. Apart from that, 2 male sub-adults and one cub were photo-captured. Manas National Park and WWF were partners in this exercise. The abundance and density of ungulates in Manas National Park was also estimated. In 2014, camera trap study in Orang National Park was held jointly with the Wildlife Institute of India that yielded 17 adult individual tigers including 14 females and 3 males.

A 1445 Km<sup>2</sup> survey in five districts viz Nagaon, Marigaon, Sunitpur, Golaghat and Jorhat, covering 205 respondents in 240 grids was conducted. We detected highest percent presence of Fishing cat in Nagaon district (93.93%) followed by Golaghat (93.67%), Majuli under Jorhat district (82.05%), Morigaon (76%) and Sonitpur (67.34%). A 40 km sign survey across these areas was also completed.

## Road Ahead:

- TRCD Aaranyak has planned to carry out a comprehensive tiger and habitat conservation project in the Manas Landscape in collaboration with Forest Department of BTC, Panthera, Awely and Wildlife Conservation Trust. The proposal is being prepared for the Integrated Tiger and Habitat Conservation Programme (ITHCP) of the IUCN.
- Continuous monitoring of the tiger, co-predators and their prey in Kaziranga, Manas and Orang National Park, to understand population dynamics.
- Study on the carrying capacity of tigers and co-predators in Kaziranga, Manas and Orang National Park.



Marbled Cat (*Pardofelis marmorata*), camera trap photograph captured in Manas National Park in 2015

- Joint tiger monitoring in the Trans-boundary Manas Conservation Area (TraMCA) covering 500 Km<sup>2</sup> of the Indian part of the Manas National Park and 900 Km<sup>2</sup> by Bhutan counterpart of Royal Manas National Park.
- To understand tiger ecology, home range, territories and dispersal, using radio telemetry techniques.
- Understand the distribution pattern, population status and relative threats to the Fishing cat across different habitats both in Protected areas and non-protected areas in Assam.
- Estimate abundance and distribution of tigers and co-predators and their prey animals and to understand related threats and connectivity within Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and surrounding areas.

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