

Annual Report 2015-16



Achievements

Skill building
on conservation for

100+
youths

**K9 dog
squad**
helped nab
hardcore
wildlife
criminals

Community-based

Flood
Early Warning
System
implemented
in Lakhimpur

3000
people &

100

organisations
join the river side

cleaning
programme

Multiple trainings
for Forest officials
across north-east
and Bhutan on
species and habitat
conservation and
genetic population
estimation

Winter jackets,

shoes,
torches &
raincoats
provided to
frontline
forest staff

Elephant

conservation
awareness campaign

reaches

16000 students
& 34 schools,
200 teachers

Multiple

Remote

Sensing,

GIS & GPS

trainings

“Coolest
North easterner
2014”

award

Report of New

Primate

Species

for India

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 Organization (SIRO) by the Government of India.

Know more about us at www.aaranyak.org you can also follow us on Facebook and Twitter

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.

Aaranyak

ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16

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From the Desk of Secretary General and CEO, Aaranyak



Aaranyak has grown with yet another year's of new experience towards leading and assisting conservation actions in North East India during 2015-16. Our researchers and conservation workers have been active in the field trying to contribute further towards overall conservation of biodiversity in the region. We have witnessed that the climate and overall environment of our region is changing fast. Winters are becoming shorter and summer and hot and humid days are increasing in past one decade. Restoration of degraded forest areas and plantations in all vacant land areas are crucial to counter the adverse effect of climate change on humankind and wildlife.

To cater the need of strengthening our overall biodiversity conservation approach keeping human well being in mind we have been updating our strategy and priorities to better leverage Aaranyak's unique strengths and assets in having diverse human resources, allowing us to more effectively address the challenges the North Eastern India are facing. We work with like minded conservation organisations in the region to compliment each other's efforts to achieve our common conservation goals. Forest departments of the region are always part of our conservation planning and field level activities.

During 2015-16, Aaranyak along with its local partner received the ' Sansad Adarsha Gram Yojana- Good Practices Award', from the Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India during an event in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, on 24th September 2015. The award was conferred for the 'Traditional Community Managed Irrigation System in Subankhata, Baksa District, Assam, jointly to Aaranyak and the Uttar Ancholik Dong Bundh Committee, Subankhata. This is indeed a great example of working in partnership with local grassroots level organisations.

Aaranyak is fortunate to have a colossal band of young, energetic conservation workers, all from the North Eastern region of India, dedicated to shoulder hard field condition in diverse challenging terrain to contribute towards the need of biodiversity conservation to ensure ecosystem good and services are used in sustainable means. Whatever efforts we are part of in diverse conservation actions, is not for ourselves, but for humanity and all life forms. To continue our efforts in days to come, we seek support, cooperation and partnership from all stakeholders, specially from local communities as we need to make better environment a movement of common people to ensure that we live in green and clean environment.

(Dr. Bibhab Kumar Talukdar)

**RHINO
RESEARCH AND
CONSERVATION
DIVISION
(RRCD)**





Dr. Bibhab Kr. Talukdar assisting a Rhino Capture in North Bengal



RHINO RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION DIVISION (RRCD)

The Division has been actively assisting rhino research and conservation activities in Eastern India since 1998. It also regularly provides provision towards key field equipment needed for rhino conservation and protection to rhino bearing areas of Assam. The salient support to rhino protection in Kaziranga National Park included 10 years wireless communication support to the national park during 2003-2012, two floating boat camps, over 80 solar panels, raincoats etc. It also provided wireless equipment in Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary and Orang National Park along with solar panels. This division works closely with Wildlife Genetics Division of Aaranyak for rhino monitoring in Assam, West Bengal and in Indonesia.

Major Achievements

During 2015-16 this division contributed in the following fields to enhance rhino conservation in Assam.

- Supported Village Defense Party members under Jakhlabundha Police Station working around western part of Kaziranga NP with over 150 raincoats and field shoes in a function organized at the Jakhlabundha Police Station on 30th July 2015.
- Provided about 150 winter jackets in Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary in December 2015 for use by frontline forest staffs and forest protection forces.
- Assisted West Bengal Forest Department in planning and re-locating of a stray rhino in Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary in December 2015.
- Assisted Indian Rhino Vision 2020 to capture two rhinos in Kaziranga NP on 29th March 2016 and shift them to Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuary as a member of Rhino Task Force and Translocation Core Committee, Assam.

Strategic Activities

- Conducted more than 30 Rhino Goes to School educational activities around rhino bearing areas in Assam, along with Environment Education and Capacity Building Division of Aaranyak.
- Assisted rhino bearing areas with field gears based on the need shared by respective rhino bearing area's officials.
- Assisted West Bengal Forest Department with technical inputs to re-locate one stray rhino in North Bengal. As part of a committee constituted by West Bengal Forest Department, Aaranyak made strategic suggestions with regards to possible additional alternate areas in North Bengal for rhino range expansion.
- Conducted a number of rhino conservation awareness around Laokhowa and Burhachapori WLS and around Manas National Park in association with local NGOs and forest officials and journalists.

Impact

The field equipment provided to rhino bearing areas assisted the management to effectively enhance their patrol to safeguard the rhinos and habitats. The wireless equipment helped in speedy communication among forest camps and solar chargers helped charge the wireless batteries in the interior camps. The floating boat camps enabled forest guards in covering river fronts from intrusion. The 'Rhino goes to school' campaign imparted much needed rhino conservation awareness among students. Support to VDP members helped them enhance their efforts to assist forest and police officials to check rhino poaching and other illegal activities.



Winter Jackets given to forest staffs of Pabitora WLS



Raincoat and Field Shoes given to VDPs working under Jakhlabunda PS to assist road side patrol in western part of Kaziranga

Road Ahead

- Continue equipment assistance to rhino bearing areas in Assam and West Bengal based on requirement.
- Undertake gap analysis on applied research needs in Asian Rhinos in South and South East Asia to assist proactive management.
- Assist other rhino bearing states in India with regards to range extension with technical inputs.
- Work closely with rhino conservation agencies in national and international level to address the challenges faced by rhinos.

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TIGER RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION DIVISION (TRCD)





Deploying a camera traps in Manas NP

TIGER RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION DIVISION (TRCD)

Since its inception in 2005, TRCD has been meticulously engaged in the research and conservation of tigers, co-predators and their prey animal through multiple approaches. These include applied research, supplement professional paradigm to protection, conservation education and alternative livelihood support to reduce the dependency of the forest in different tiger habitats of north-east India.

The salient objectives of the TRCD are- (a) ecological research on tigers, co-predators and their prey animals, (b) create a database on habitat connectivity corridors along the tiger bearing forests in GIS domain, (c) promote conservation education, awareness and capacity building among the fringe people for the tiger habitat, (d) foster local researchers, conservation volunteers and forest staff.

The division assists the Forest Departments particularly the Protected Area Management in generating a population

data of tigers, co-predators and prey animals through the long term population monitoring in the three key tiger habitats of Assam, viz. Orang (since 2007), Kaziranga (since 2009) and Manas National Park (since 2010). During the year 2015, the division focused on Research and conservation of Manas National Park and Transboundary Manas Tiger Conservation Area in India and Bhutan. In addition, the division also carried out first ever status survey of Fishing Cat in Assam.

Major Achievements

1. Carried out a joint monitoring of tigers in the Transboundary Manas Conservation Area (TraMCA) in the Manas National Park of India and Royal Manas National Park of Bhutan. A comprehensive report for the joint monitoring in the session 2014-15 has been published in collaboration with Forest Department (BTC), WWF India and Royal Manas Park Authority (Bhutan)
2. Creating baseline on distribution pattern prey and predator species in relation to anthropogenic threats in the Manas National Park.
3. Inception of monitoring tigers, co-predators and prey animals in Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, Assam through a short snapshot study using camera traps in 2015-16.
4. Carried out a survey of Fishing Cat in few districts of Central Assam districts to understand its status and distribution in relation to anthropogenic threats.
5. Creating baseline on distribution pattern on different prey and predator species in relation to anthropogenic threats in the the Manas National Park.

Strategic Activities

- Population estimation of tigers, co-predators and their prey animals in Manas National Park.
- Technical and logistics support to Royal Manas National Park authority to estimate the population of tigers and co-predator population by providing camera traps and other necessary supplies. This leading to joint monitoring of tigers and co-predators in the Transboundary Manas Conservation Area (TraMCA) in India and Bhutan.
- Conducted a Basic Patrol Training from 29th February to 12th March 2016 for 20 forest personnel of the Bhuyapara Range of Manas National Park to improve protection of tigers and habitats.
- Handed over 10 motorbikes to Manas National Park to initiate motorbike patrol to increase efficiency of frontline forest staff.
- Assisted the Manas National Park with supply of batteries for walkie talkies and solar charging systems for the forest camps in the park.
- A mass awareness campaign was conducted covering six districts of Assam viz. Nagaon, Marigaon, Biswanath, Sonitpur, Golaghat and Jorhat, targeting school students on the conservation of Fishing cat. Under this initiative around 3000 target audiences were reached.
- Celebrated International Tiger Day on 29th July 2015 at JDSG college, Bokakhat. Around 100 students from the local schools and colleges participated. Wildlife Quiz and extempore speech competition were also held on the occasion.
- A successful phone in programme at All India Radio was organized with AIR Guwahati



Animal sign survey in Manas NP



A moment of field data recording in Manas NP

on 28th July 2015 on the occasion of International Tiger Day.

- As part of the Manas Tiger Conservation Programme (MTCP) a series of livelihood activities has taken place in the fringe villages of Manas that shall be reported in the Conservation Livelihood Program section of this report.

Impact

1. Considering the fact realized through the continued research on tiger population, habitats and connectivity carried out in Orang National Park, Assam by the TRCD since 2007, the Assam Government has declared Orang and its adjoining areas including the riverine Islands as Orang Tiger reserve in February 2016. Our study dated 2008 and 2011 on the use of river islands by tigers and other animals in the Brahmaputra Floodplains between Orang and Kaziranga had recommended strict protection of the riverine area between Kaziranga and Orang and that is realized now by declaration of Orang Tiger Reserve and proposed 1st addition to Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuary (the western buffer of Kaziranga Tiger reserve).
2. Population estimation of tigers in Manas National Park has helped the park management in keeping regular track of the tigers in the park over the years. This also helped in restoring the status of the park in the country as the park is witnessing an increasing trend of tiger population since the population was down to few individuals immediately after the socio-political turmoil in the landscape. An increase in number of tigers has attracted the national and global attention and the National Tiger Conservation Authority is likely to increase its grant support to the Tiger Reserve soon.
3. As the concept of TraMCA (Transboundary Manas Tiger Conservation Area) has gained popularity through sustained coordination among the stakeholders (park management and NGOs across the boundary), the NTCA has stressed more in formalizing this initiative during a meeting of delegations of India and Bhutan in Delhi in February 2016.
4. Considering the potential of recovery of tigers in the Manas Landscape and long term engagement of Aaranyak team there, IUCN and KfW, has supported a three year long

Manas Tiger Conservation Program to a partnership of Aaranyak, Panthera, Wildlife Conservation Trust, Awely and Forest Department (BTC).

Road Ahead

The TRCD would focus on the following during the next year-

Understand the tiger conservation landscape of eastern Assam and bordering Arunachal Pradesh by identifying key potential source population and/or habitats and its connectivity to eastern forest complexes in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

Extensive monitoring of tigers, co-predators, their prey animal and habitat in the buffer areas of the Manas Tiger Reserve to understand the status of tigers and habitat connectivity among the protected areas of India and Bhutan across international boundary.

Continuous monitoring of tigers, co-predators their prey animal in key tiger habitats in the northeast India to understand their population dynamics

Joint tiger monitoring in the Transboundary Manas Conservation Area (TraMCA) covering around 1400 sq km covering both Indian part of Manas National Park and Royal Manas National Park of Bhutan.

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