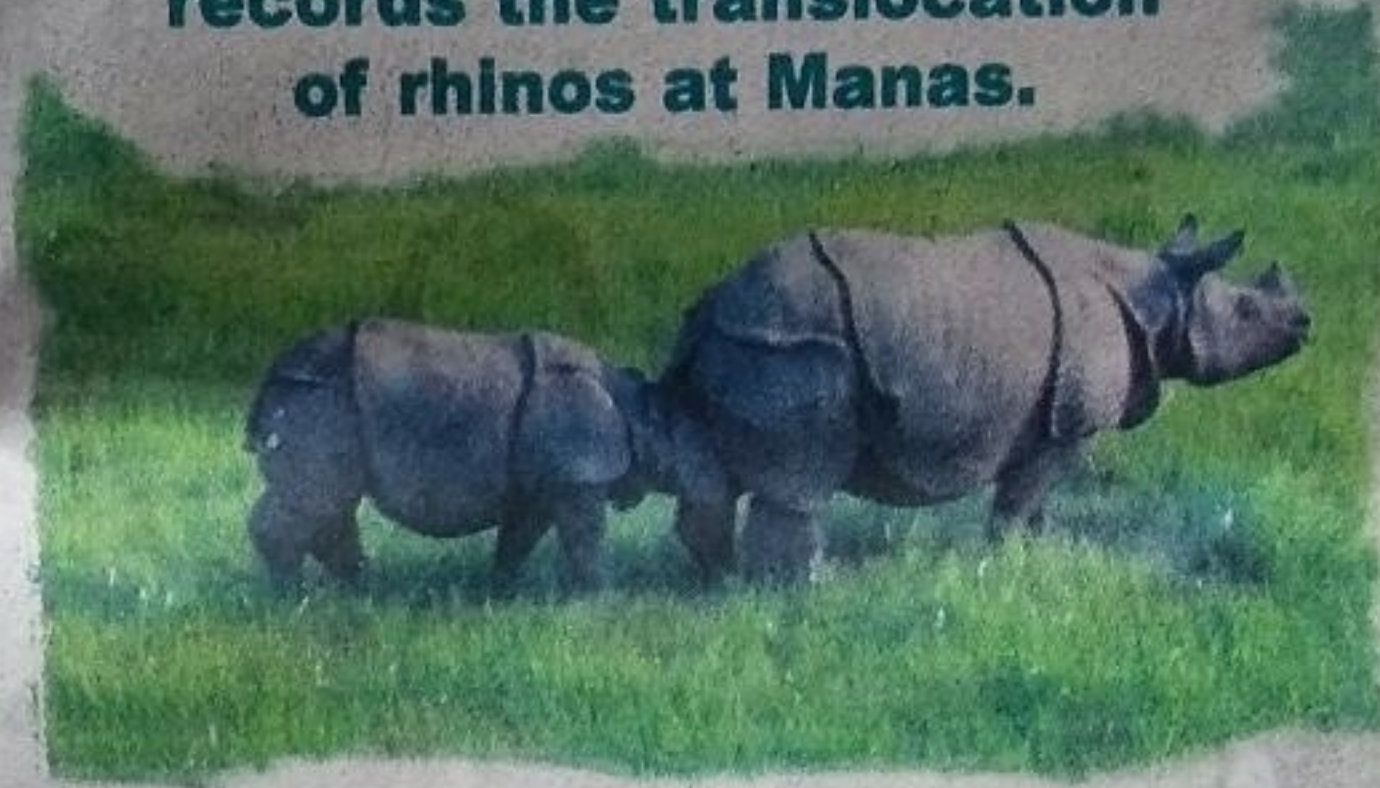


# Manas milestone

**DEBA KUMAR DUTTA**  
**records the translocation**  
**of rhinos at Manas.**



**M**any great things are never accomplished by a single person but by a dedicated team of people who are not afraid to take up leadership. Wild-to-wild rhino translocation to Manas is such an effort which was achieved through the involvement of multiple sections of skilled people from the different institutions of Assam. It has now been a decade since we translocated two male rhinos to Manas from the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary. The rhino translocation team has overcome thousands of obstacles to re-establish the rhinos during the last decade.

The Manas National Park had a good rhino habitat and prior to 1989, more than 100 rhinos were estimated there. But the entire rhino population of Manas was wiped out due to poaching in the early Nineties. With a motive to increase the rhino population in Assam, the Government of Assam, with support from the International Rhino Foundation (IRF), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Bodoland Territorial Council, launched the Indian Rhino Vision 2020 (IRV2020) in 2005 to help the existing rhino population and to reintroduce rhinos into protected areas from which they were exterminated in the recent past.

Perhaps, each team member of the rhino translocation project still remembers the delightful moments when the first two odd male rhinos were released at the rhino release site of Buraburijhar under the Bansbari range

of the Manas NP. These two rhinos were captured at the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary on April 11, 2008, and the same evening, they were transported to the Manas NP with VVIP security. The two rhinos were released during the wee hours on April 12, 2008.

Translocation is the intentional release of the animal to the wild in an attempt to establish, re-establish or augment the population. Translocation of a rhino is not an easy process and it has to follow strict international and national protocols.

The logistics team constructed crates and sledges and other equipment. They even gave training to novice truck drivers about how much speed the trucks should drive in to carry the rhinos on the road. The capture team included the most experienced veterinarian of Assam. Similarly, the release and post-release monitoring teams were formed and were

given orientation by experienced personnel from other states.

The initial days were full of challenges for the post-release monitoring team at Manas to keep track of the rhinos. There were limited anti-poaching camps, few fair-weather roads, and hardly any recurring costs to bear the day-to-day patrolling activities.

The success was due to the dynamic leadership of Kampha Borgowary, Deputy Chief of the Bodoland Territorial Council, then field director Anindya Swargowary and deputy field director C. R. Bhobora. They carried out this herculean task with the support of the local and international well-wishers. Above all, the local community and conservation volunteers from the Manas Maozigrendi Ecotourism Society (MMES), Manas Agrang Conservation Society (MAS), Manas Bhuyanpara Conservation and Ecotourism Society (MBCES), Swankar Mithinga

Onsai Afat (SMOA), Panbari Manas Conservation and Ecotourism Society (PMCES), United Social Welfare Society (USWS), Manas Ever Welfare Society (MEWS) are actively supporting the conservation and protection of rhinos at Manas.

The establishment of the new rhino population at Manas through the wild-to-wild translocation programme under the Indian Rhino Vision 2020 opened up a new dimension in conservation efforts for this magnificent pachyderm. It can be expected that the rhino translocation programme at Manas will also contribute to the mixing of genes among these creatures from Pobitora and Kaziranga populations as the two sites are the source populations for the Manas population. Manas now has a population of 35 rhinos, including few rescued and rehabilitated rhinoceros.

The establishment of the rhino population is one of the key factors that has helped Manas get back its UNESCO (Natural) World Heritage Site tag in 2011. The reviving National Park, during the last one decade, has also boosted the tiny tourism industry near the Park, offering alternative livelihood to the fringe community. The transboundary Manas conservation initiatives parley is also in progress on both sides of the Indo-Bhutan border.

When I look back on this ten long years, I feel proud to be an active part of this silent initiative to revive the rhino population at the Manas National Park. But the rhino population and the fragile habitat of Manas need much attention from all the stakeholders of the society.

(debakumerdutta@gmail.com)