



PABITORA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Summary of Report submitted by the Forest Dept. of Assam

Report submitted by Assam Forest Dept. for Rhino PHVA Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary is located 50 km east of Guwahati on Southern bank of river Brahmaputra, Distt. Morigaon, Assam. It covers an area of approximately 16 sq. km.

Before 1971 Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary was a grazing reserve (P.G.R.) for surrounding villages. During that time a rhino was sighted in the area of Orang and became resident. During 1971 two P.G.R.s covering an area of 1,584.62 ha were constituted into a Reserved Forest. As rhino population increased over the years, five additional areas of about 3,883.78 ha. or about 38.84 sq.km. were made part of the Reserve and declared Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary in 1987. Final constitution of extended areas into a well-defined p.a. is under process. There are twenty villages surrounding the Proposed WL Sanctuary.

Climate is subtropical moist climate with four seasonal variations, e.g. winter, pre-monsoon, monsoon and post-monsoon. Rainfall is distributed almost throughout the year with heaviest rain in July and August and least in January.

Garang and Maduk lakes provide perennial sources of water. There is no water scarcity due to small deep nullahs and beels throughout the area.

Pabitora WL Sanctuary is situated in a lowlying area which becomes entirely flooded as water from Brahmaputra and Ualong rivers passes through northern and southern boundaries and from a small river Pakaria. Anti-poaching camps get submerged during high flood and every year temporary anti-poaching camps suffer major damage. Except for the Tupling Huduik Road which passes through the east of the area and two artificial high lands, all areas remain submerged during the very high floods. During this time the rhinos go outside the sanctuary in search of dry ground.

Fire: Fire damage is not a threat. On the contrary, not being able to burn as management tool due to dampness of the area is problematical.

Terrain: The entire area is a basin-like structure in midst of Mayang Hill, Kamarpur Hill, Monoha Hill surrounding the basin. Soil is mostly alluvial deposits of the rivers and higher percentage of clay in some places. Proper soil survey is to be done.

Flora: Grazing has been so intensive that grasses inside the Sanctuary are stunted. An area of 1 sq.km was fenced during 1990 in anticipation of an introduction project (Sangai) which resulted in profused regeneration of *Albeggia procera* and better growth of grasses. A thin tree belt covers southern corner along the banks of Garanga beel which is a bit higher than rest of the area.

Proper survey of flora has not been done. Land use is as follows. Tree land - 2%, Thatch with *Albizia* regeneration - 6%, Thatch - 40%; Thatch with Nal and Ekra - 20%; Perennial water logged area - 5%; swampy area - 25%.

Fauna: Barking deer, hog deer sighted previously but now only wild boar, lesser cat species, and civets along with rhino are inhabiting area with an occasional transient leopard.

Census was conducted for the first time in March 1987 with a result of 54 rhinos of 17.19 adults, 5.8 subadults and 5 calves. In 1993 a census was conducted including adjacent rhino habitat outside the sanctuary with a result of 56 rhinos, 10.21.1 adults; 1.2.2. subadults; 6 calves above 2 years and 5 of one year and below. Wild boar (29) and buffalo (7) were also sighted.

Poaching is a serious problem as the Sanctuary is surrounded by villages from all sides and the rhinos stray out of the p.a. for foraging. About 20 rhinos stray out of the core notified area to raid crops in surrounding villages and up to 30-49 km away from the Sanctuary limit. From 1987 to 1993, 18 of the 29 rhino deaths were due to poaching. To cope with the problem the management set up 14 camps outside the Sanctuary as opposed to 13 inside. Nine percent of total poaching occurs outside despite constant vigil. Four of the poaching cases were by electrocution.

Though the area is flood prone, only 18% of the total deaths are due to flood. There were six deaths due to illness and two due to fighting.

Major thrust of future protection efforts is anti-poaching. Measures include: 1. Consolidation of proposed areas for extended habitat, improvement and strengthening in establishment and infrastructure with adequate logistic support, building up intelligence system with adequate rewards, eco-development programmes in the 20 surrounding villages.

