

# Editorial



## Rhino is back in Laokhowa and Burhachapori WLS !

It is great news that two greater one-horned rhinoceros have been sighted in central Assam's Laokhowa and Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuary (L&BWLS) during the past few weeks.

A part of the Greater Kaziranga landscape, the 309.2 sq. km these two wildlife sanctuaries (WLS) in the Nagaon district of Assam used to be home to at least 45 rhinos until 1983 before large-scale encroachment and poaching which were on a rampage taking advantage of social unrest in Assam valley during that period, wiped them out during late 1980s. Although stray rhinos from Orang National across the River Brahmaputra and the Kaziranga

National Park to the east were known to enter the WLS very briefly, including one rhino which stayed in Laokhowa WLS during 2018 for about a year before it was killed by criminals.

The tough eviction drive carried out last year to root out encroachers from the formerly rhino abode has apparently done wonders with the rhino showing signs of its return to what once used to be its one of the favourite thriving grounds. Thanks to proactive vision of the present Chief Minister of Assam for upholding the sanctity of protected areas, specially the Laokhowa and Burhachapori WLS which has the potential to house over 100 rhinos once re-introduction initiatives under Indian Rhino Vision further progresses.

According to reports two rhinos are believed to have entered through Arimari, where 1,282 hectares of forest land and 817 hectares of un-surveyed government land were cleared of encroachers from February 13-15, 2023.

"Rhinos have been sighted in Laokhowa-Burachapori, an excellent habitat of freshwater mangroves, since November 2023. The WLS also has a record of 10 tigers indicating a good prey base of herbivores," Sonali Ghosh, Field Director of Kaziranga Tiger Reserve reportedly said.

The security and conservation efforts in the WLS have received a shot in the arm following the recent recruitment of 75 frontline forest staff recently.

Enthused by the hearty development, Aaranyak in collaboration with office of the Nagaon Wildlife Division of Assam Forest Department and in tune with Rhino Vision 2.0 have initiated a campaign to raise awareness among the population in the fringes of L&BWLS for conservation of the precious rhino.

Focusing on the women population to elicit their cooperation to rhino conservation efforts Aaranyak recently organised training on water hyacinth crafts for village women from Laokhowa Burhachapori WLS fringe areas at Borunguri-Bongaon. A five-day workshop on water hyacinth crafts was conducted with overwhelming participation in December 2023. It was conducted in collaboration with Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve authority, Nagaon Wildlife Division, Nagaon Girls' College and Laokhowa Burhachapori Conservation Society (LBCS).

US-based conservation agency, International Rhino Foundation partnered with Aaranyak to support the noble initiative that trained 25 women so as to provide them with an alternative livelihood opportunity that will reduce their dependence on forest resources thereby bolstering rhino conservation efforts.

"Empowering communities! @aaranyak, in collaboration with LBCS and Forest Dept, hosts a Water Hyacinth Product Skill Training for EDCs of Laokhowa Bongaon and Barunguri Bongaon. Building skills, fostering sustainability!", Posted Kaziranga National Park & Tiger reserve on microblogging platform X on December 26.

Empowering women with water hyacinth craft skills not only improves their livelihood but also contributes to conservation by transforming an invasive plant into marketable products. This sustainable approach fosters economic independence while addressing environmental challenges through creative utilisation of resources.

The Laokhowa and Burhachapori Wildlife Sanctuary is known for its diverse flora and fauna. This protected area encompasses grasslands, wetlands and the Brahmaputra River, providing a habitat for greater one-horned rhinoceros, Royal Bengal Tiger, and various bird species.

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# BIO LINK

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## ABOUT AARANYAK

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.

## 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.

### Know more about us at

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**Indian Peafowl** (*Pavo cristatus*)

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