



Jungle Express

Tiger tales...

Voice of the tiger – Global Tiger Forum (GTF)

The 8th meeting of the Executive Committee of Global Tiger Forum (GTF) was held on 25th and 26th May 2006 at WWF India 's Secretariat, New Delhi. The meeting was attended by representatives from the member countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan., Cambodia, India, Nepal and Vietnam. It was also attended by representatives from UK, IFAW and WWF International. Ms Judy Mills, Head- CATT; Ms Debbie Banks, Senior Campaigner EIA, Mr. Ravi Singh SG& CEO, WWF India and Mr. P.K. Sen, Director, Tiger and Wildlife Conservation programme, WWF India were the special invitees.

The Global Tiger Forum is an inter-governmental and international body established with members from the tiger range countries and also other countries who are sensitive towards the tiger. The forum aims to address issues directly and indirectly related to tiger conservation as well as to gain support from all across the globe.

The need to form the GTF arose from the need to protect the tiger from being extinct. It was clear that tiger has a special status, but this status was being diluted by countries who wanted to use tiger parts and its derivatives for commercial purposes. Even though CITES has listed tiger as an endangered species it was not enough. Many nations were trying to influence the global communities by justifying the trade of captive bred tigers. It was then that the need was felt to form a forum which would protect the interest of the tiger in the wild and bring together nations that support this cause. Therefore it is not surprising that of the 14 tiger range countries only 7 have joined GTF.

Global Tiger Forum had long derived and validated that if no protective measures are undertaken to secure the tiger population in various countries the tiger will disappear soon. Even though the tiger as a species may not be extinct, the wild populations will shrink or rather disappear in many places to the point of ecological extinction.

Prior to the onset of the second tiger crisis after the year 1993, the protection measures were mainly directed towards protecting those forests where the tiger existed. No efforts were undertaken to protect the surrounding forest in which the tigers moved. This conservation strategy was not successful. It was clear that to protect the tiger we have to protect the entire habitat (forests and surrounding forests). Furthermore for the effective gene flow there is a need to protect the entire landscape where the core areas are linked with habitat corridor.

The eighth executive committee meeting held at WWF India Secretariat, New Delhi again provided a platform to exchange ideas, experiences and also address the main tiger conservation issues. The agenda of the meeting is as given below-

1. To collect information related to the tiger habitat, local communities, anti poaching, illegal trade and other tiger related issues from both member and non member countries.
2. To facilitate transboundary dialogue between countries to deal with the immediate tiger crisis.
3. Facilitate training on tiger matters related to management, anti poaching and illegal trade
4. Training and awareness to such invitees who are not members but are some way or the other related to the tiger crisis. For example, training and sensitization of judiciary administration service employees, revenue service employees and police from the tiger range countries.
5. Co-ordination between the SAARC countries on similar issues
6. Facilitate generation of funds to bridge gaps where ever possible and to support specific initiative in a particular country. For example, the GTF had established the tiger trade monitoring cell in the Ministry of Environment and Forest in India.
7. Facilitate infrastructural support to the government agencies.
8. It was stressed again that only 7% of the original tiger habitat is left today as stated in the GTF report. This is demeaning for us as a nation and for all the tiger

range countries. A need was felt to upscale tiger conservation initiatives in all tiger range countries.

9. To increase the membership of Global Tiger Forum in order to gain support
10. Stress on the need to encourage transboundary conservation

All the participants gave their inputs and comments on the on going tiger crisis with focus on trade control/anti poaching initiatives, research and monitoring, awareness drive, Man-Tiger conflict, capacity building, support to Tiger Action plan, analysis of the landscape approach and various other related issues.

Though the highlight of the discussion was poaching that has threatened the existence of the tigers today in wild. Data was exchanged by the participants on the cases of poaching in the last few years. For example in India since the year 1999, 21 tiger deaths were reported in the field and 229 seizures of tiger skins was recorded. But out of the 221 tiger deaths that took place on field, 82 tiger deaths were due to natural mortality while the rest was due to poaching. In October 2003, Chinese authorities seized 31 tiger skins, 581 leopard skins and 778 otter skins. These skins were said to have originated in India and were directly smuggled out. Perhaps this was one of the biggest seizures in our history.

A presentation was also made by Dr. Mahendra Bisht, Secretary, Save the Tiger Fund regarding the tiger crisis and the mapping of the tiger population and their habitat in tiger range countries. The copy of the maps and derivations was presented to each member. This document itself had invited a lot of discussion.

Mr. P.K. Sen, Director, Species Conservation programme, WWF India who was a special invitee did not agree with the information given on the tiger status in India by Dr. Mahendra Bisht. Questions were raised regarding the basis on which information related to mapping of the tiger population and habitats was done for India. It has been requested by Mr. Sen and also Government of India to remove the inference related to tigers in India from the report before it is made public due to the hypothetical data and facts about Indian wildlife.

Overall the meeting was extremely informative and served its purpose. Besides exchanging ideas and opinions it also helped to develop special working relations between various participants who are at the apex of tiger conservation initiatives in their country.

Furthermore it was decided to meet again next year in the mid April/May in Nepal for General Body meeting of GTF preceded by the Executive Committee meeting.

Contact: P.K. Sen at psen@wwfindia.net

Tiger Tales: Tattle from the field

1. Update on Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary- A herd of 15 elephants have taken permanent residence in Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary situated in the Nanpara Tehsil of district Bahraich on the Indo-Nepal border in Uttar Pradesh. It shares its border with the Royal Bardia National Park in Nepal.

Two rhinos have given birth to two calves here and three other rhinos have also started to live permanently in this Sanctuary. Swamp Deer that were not visible for the last five years has finally being sighted in herds of 12, 8 and 5 by the local forest staff and the WWF team stationed in this area. Katarniaghat is again flourishing with prolific flora and fauna. This boost to this Wildlife Sanctuary is mainly due to the strengthened protection measures undertaken by the Forest Department in this area with support from WWF India in terms of jeeps, radios, motor boat etc. On the other hand the continuing forest of Katarniaghat, which extends its border into Nepal's Royal Bardia National Park, seem to be facing some problems. Due to insurgency and lack of monitoring the forests have depleted forcing the animals to move into the Indian territory, which is comparatively more secured for their survival.

In retrospect, 72 Rhinos had been released in Royal Bardia National Park few years back, but only three are visible today. The report on this was released by the WWF staff in Nepal in the month of May 2006. But an evaluation report of Tal Nepal in March 2006 gives a very different picture of the entire landscape and talks about the conservation success in this area.

Contact: P.K. Sen at psen@wwfindia.net

2. World Environment Day celebrations in TAL: June 5, 2006 was celebrated extensively in the Lagga Bagga-Kishanpur Linkage. Various sensitization and awareness programme were organized in partnership with the Forest Department and other local NGOs. Each initiative successfully managed to pull a crowd of around 300-400 people. Painting competitions were jointly organized with the Turquoise Wildlife Conservation Society where 110 students of the different schools of the nearby villages

participated in the event. In certain activities there was participation of local political leaders as well. These activities were organized by the WWF India team at the Pilibhit office.

Contact: Harish Guleria at hguleria@wwfindia.net

3. *Children's participation in conservation endeavors:*

For conservation of natural resources we not only need firm political and institutional leadership but also sound scientific advice and involvement of sensitive minds of the youth and the children. Children learn these values faster and they are the future of our nation.

Keeping this notion in mind and to accelerate conservation endeavors it was decided to initiate dialogue with children both at the school and the village level. Occasions like Wildlife Week, Environment Day etc were selected to conduct special sensitization programme. Activities undertaken in this regard are poster making, essay writing competition debate and quiz competition, folk dance and skits, interactive activities, games, meetings etc.

All these activities have helped students to learn about significance of wildlife in our ecosystem. This had helped to mould children's interest towards wildlife and hence involve them in conservation related activities. More on our conservation initiatives with children in different tiger landscapes in our next issue of Jungle Express.

Contact: Badrish Mehra at bmehra@wwfindia.net



Dolamara, in KarbiAnglong district of Assam acts as a significant passage for movement of wildlife from the world famous Kaziranga National Park to the hilly areas of KarbiAnglong in North East India. In October 2004 when the WWF India team first planned to go to Dolamara to initiate conservation work, it was almost impossible due to the socio-cultural conflict persisting in this area. No vehicles or local guide wanted to go inside these villages. Slowly WWF India managed to gain their trust and built a sound rapport with these tribes. This was a significant breakthrough since the local tribal people of Dolamara area have their own identity in terms of wildlife conservation ethics.

The need to direct conservation effort in such unstable areas arose from the fact that the elephants use Dolamara as a passage to move from Kaziranga National Park towards KarbiAnglong. WWF India besides conducting sensitization programme in these villages has been involved in tracking and monitoring the elephant movement pattern. This initiative is part of the AREAS Kaziranga KarbiAnglong Landscape Programme (KKL) that has been involved in monitoring of wildlife, especially elephants, in the central part of Assam, south of River Brahmaputra. Working in KKL is a big challenge not only owing to the geographical factors but also because of many socio-cultural factors. Having covered almost 60% of the landscape in last one and a half years, KKL team is in the process of initiating some wildlife monitoring groups involving local communities in other critical corridors.

The efforts of the villagers of ManPhangso village are surely commendable. They have respected their commitment towards conserving the rich biodiversity of the area. The rescue of Jungle cats is a clear sign of success of the sensitization programme and a beginning of a relationship which brings harmony between local communities and wildlife.

Contact: Arunav Borthakur at arunavborthakur@rediffmail.com

The AREAS (Asian Rhino and Elephant Action Strategy) Update

Jungle Cats rescued by residents of ManPhangso village

On 13th April 2006, Mr. Kensingh Phangcho of ManPhangso village in Dolamara fought with poachers trying to cross their village with three Jungle cat cubs. For a few days Mr. Phangcho and other villagers were under the impression that they had rescued tiger cubs and enthusiastically continued to nurse them. On the other hand they were also trying to reach for help and in the process called the WWF India staff who reached there immediately with their local guide Mr. Rajen Signar. It was then that the WWF staff informed the villagers that the cubs were not of the tiger but of the lesser cat. Soon after the cubs were taken and handed over to the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center at Kaziranga for adequate care and rehabilitation. Kudos, for such a great effort!

Legally Wrong

WWF India felicitates Forest Department for retrieving tiger skeleton



The Divisional Forest Officer of Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh and his staff recovered a tiger skeleton on June 7th. 2006. Four people from a nearby Chaurakhera village, Pilibhit were arrested at Nurea railway station while trying to sell the tiger

bones. After interrogation it was found out that the villagers had recovered a highly decomposed body of a tiger from the neighboring forests a few weeks ago. Knowing its commercial value, they thought of selling the bones to make some quick money.

The tip off about the tiger skeleton was provided by WWF India to Mr. Neeraj Yadav, Deputy Forest Officer, Pilibhit Forest Division. Mr. Yadav and his staff acted immediately and laid a trap to nab the traders.



Mr. Ravi Singh, SG & CEO, WWF India and Mr. P.K. Sen, Director, Tiger and Wildlife Conservation programme, WWF India visited the area on 25th June 2006 to congratulate the Divisional Forest Officer and his staff for the promptness shown to recover the tiger skeleton. An honorary reward was also given to the Forest staff as a token of adulation by Mr. Ravi Singh.

Cheers:

This is 'Banke' reporting from field Dudhwa National Park

Dear Readers,

I am "Banke", one of the oldest rhinos in Dudhwa National Park. In the local language 'Banke' means 'handsome and stud like'; therefore I don't mind the name. Maybe say, *well, I couldn't agree more!*

Layers and layers of folded skin, rugged yet still appealing; I am an Asian Rhinoceros, who guards his territory with life. Many a times I have been accused of driving other male rhinos out of my territory. With no choice left these rhinos now graze in the outskirts of the forests, closer to the villages that surround our home mainly due to lack of habitat. Many a times they get driven away by sticks and stones pelleted at them by the angry villagers.

I usually like to graze on the aquatic plants. I pretend to be unperturbed when someone is looking and continue with my chores. Only now and then I raise my dignified one-horned head, twitch my ears to sense the air, look around and then get back to my important task of grazing. Being the senior most and dominant one, I am called the epitome of Rhino Conservation in this area.

In the mid 1980's, along with a few others, we were translocated from North-East India and Nepal. Thank you for giving us an ideal habitat and a large area protected by an electric fence on all the sides. May be that is why I have managed to survive till today. Breeding was successful and currently we are 21 in number, despite all my efforts to terrorize my male rivals.

Dudhwa National Park covers an area of about 500 sq km and is situated along the Indo-Nepal border in Kheri district of Uttar Pradesh. Located amid the warm, tropical forests of the Terai, in the foothills of the Himalayas, it also lies north of the Suheli River. The significance of this National Park lies in its diverse flora and fauna. Besides supporting a healthy population of tigers, the Hispid Hare also resides here. Hispid Hare is a highly cryptic species, which is rare and found mainly in the Terai grasslands. Though Dudhwa is more popularly known for its vast population of Barasingha, the main prey species of tiger. The park's thick sal forests, extensive grasslands and wet marshes harbors a wide range of other wildlife

A brief over view of WWF India's Conservation programme in Dudhwa Tiger Reserve

1. WWF India has been working in Dudhwa since 1997. Our role initially was to provide direct support to augment the Forest Department's initiatives to control poaching and for better protection of the habitat. Direct support in the form of jeeps, motorcycles, radios and winter jackets have been given to them. WWF has also strengthened the check posts and conducted staff training.
2. WWF worked closely with the Forest Department to prepare a detailed report on Grassland Management. We were originally supporting their grassland management initiatives since the Forest Department had no funds for this. But over a period of time these initiatives have been included in their annual operation plan and they have managed to get sufficient funds to replicate efforts in other parts of the National Park. WWF India has also done a detailed mapping of this area.
3. Cattle Compensation scheme has been effective in curbing retaliatory killing.
4. WWF India along with TRAFFIC had commissioned an under cover investigation into poaching and illegal wildlife trade. An information network has already been established in this area. This has resulted in numerous seizures of tiger parts and other illegal wildlife items.
5. WWF India has also conducted numerous education and awareness programmes in 15 surrounding villages to reduce the pressure on the forests reserves and also to curb the Human-Wildlife Conflict. Activities such as celebrating wildlife week and environment day, conducting painting competition and other programme with children such as nature camps are done on a regular basis. The response to these activities is overwhelming. One such event attracts around 1500 to 2000 villagers at a time. Efforts have also been undertaken to reduce the cattle pressure by organizing cattle vaccination camps from time to time and also through awareness programme.

Contact: Dilpreet B. Chhabra at dchhabra@wwfindia.net

such as the elephant, jackal, sloth bear, leopard cat, jungle cat, civet, fishing cat and a vast number of birds such as painted storks, sarus cranes, owls, barbets, woodpeckers, minivets and many more including the endangered Bengal Florican. Much of the park's avian fauna is aquatic in nature, and is found around Dudhwa's lakes.

Dudhwa has suffered a large biodiversity loss and is still continuing to face the threat like any other forest in India. Being surrounded by migratory settlement in the form of villages, and farms, Dudhwa has been reduced to an island forest with no connecting corridors. There is a railway line that passes through and has taken a large toll of wild animals such as the tigers, elephants and many others. Due to human presence in the surrounding area, the Human-Wildlife conflict is severe. There have been numerous cases of poaching. Located right on the border it is also threatened by the influx of people coming from across the border. Through undisclosed sources, it is known that it falls on the international illegal trade route that passes through India.

Few years' back Dudhwa was dying. Sighting of the tigers and other wild animals was rare, an indicator of large scale poaching and other human intervention. The protection efforts were almost negligible. Today, Dudhwa National Park cherishes the status of a Tiger Reserve and therefore the protection measures have been strengthened.



Most importantly I want to report that there is a nice man that comes from WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature), the largest wildlife conservation organization in India. Earlier I have seen him doing research work in my area for his college and now he represents WWF India. He likes to come visit me and of course I chose to ignore his presence. Well, visitors cannot see us since we are in a

protected enclosure but I guess he has his clout. I once overheard his friends call him Harish. There is hustle bustle going on in our area about him and his organization's role in saving our home. They come to do good for us.

Many people settled on the other side of my fence have killed a significant number of my friends from the jungle. Harish and of course WWF come as peace messengers. He speaks to the villagers through what he calls 'workshops' in order to sensitize them. The change is evident. These people do not kill us now or trouble us and more importantly they do not steal as much from our homes. May be that is why my striped friend, the tiger is out of its hiding and has been seen roaming the jungle more freely. The bad men who poach us are now alarmed due to the efficient Forest Officer who has taken up the task of strengthening protection measures and guess what, it seems to be working.

I am not writing to you without a purpose. There is an issue I would like to highlight. We experience a high death toll of wild animals due to the railway line passing through. Can you please ask the Government (I heard the Government takes all the decisions related to our future) to do something about this? We cannot afford to lose more jungle residents due to train accidents.

And yes another thing, I am growing old now and I want some one to take my place to continue reporting directly from Dudhwa. This means that there is a need to strengthen efforts on Rhino conservation by securing our habitat for long term survival of my species and of course the forests.

Cheers, Banke the Rhino - Dudhwa National Park

Wild Cry Emerging Issues

Nature's fury-floods in Kaziranga

A flood in Kaziranga is not an unusual phenomenon. It occurs every year but the intensity of the floods may vary. The irony is that despite the irreplaceable loss to the flora and fauna caused by the floods, it is also necessary for the existence of this eco region.

The 860 square kilometer Kaziranga National Park (KNP) situated in the flood plains of River Brahmaputra is a World Heritage Site and home to over 1800 Rhinos. This grassland thrives on the silt left behind by the receding

flood waters and a large number of lakes and ponds that act as a lifeline of this region.

Floods cast a devastating effect when they are really high in intensity. Such a situation arose in the year 2004. Kaziranga plains had become full of flood water and the animals were moving to higher areas such as the neighboring Karbi Hills, south of the park. Many such animals could not reach safer grounds and drowned, while many others died in road accidents while crossing over the National Highway to climb the Karbi hills. Only the fortunate ones managed to reach the hills on time and then safely made their way back to Kaziranga National Park when the water receded.

According to Government of Assam, the data on the deaths occurred during the floods in the year 2004 is - 11 Rhinos (including calf) (drowned), 1 Tiger; 1 Elephant; 58 Hog Deer (13 run over in road accidents, 28 drowned and 3 poached); 4 Pythons (3 died in road accidents); 12 Wild Boar (11 drowned and 1 poached); 1 Water Monitor lizard; 2 Sambar (drowned); 1 Wild Buffalo; 1 Porcupine (drowned).

WWF India steps in to assist the Forest Department almost every year during the floods in Kaziranga. Like in the year 1998, when one of the worst floods hit Kaziranga, WWF provided financial assistance to the Forest Department from its Tiger Emergency Fund for rescue and recovery work.

In the last few years WWF India has rushed essential equipment to the site including wireless sets, mobile and hand held phones, night vision binoculars, a mini truck and funds for the purchase of boats - practically the only means of transport in the park during the rainy season. WWF India has also provided a tranquilizer gun to sedate and transport marooned animals. Special medicated



Photo credit: Christy Williams

mosquito nets and florescence jackets were given to the field staff of the Kaziranga Park during the floods in year 2004. This year the Forest Department has hired special motor boats for patrolling during the floods and the cost of fuel and other operations is being funded by WWF India.

Every year once the flood water recedes, an active network of non-governmental organizations, including WWF India, works closely with the park and Government authorities to provide assistance to the local population living in and around the park and to care for strayed and wounded animals.

Road accident during the flood takes the maximum toll irrespective of special provisions made in this regard. The Forest Department generally set up check post on NH 37 in some animal corridor to control the vehicular speed.

WWF India staff also extends help for the same by creating awareness among the motorist and patrols the highway along with the forest staff.

There are floods in Kaziranga every year and they can turn into a calamity depending on their intensity. Its occurrence is natural and unavoidable. Therefore to give the wildlife of Kaziranga a fair chance of survival the Forest Department with support from other conservation organizations like WWF India work proactively to reduce the traffic speed on this highway so that animals can reach higher grounds safely. Increasingly it is seen that Kaziranga's long term survival depends greatly on the entire landscape that includes Karbi hills. WWF India has initiated a programme of conservation of the Kaziranga-KarbiAnglong landscape as a single unit and will upscale its level of work from time to time.

Contact: Pranab J Bora at pranabjora@rediffmail.com

WWF India extends support for mass nesting of Olive Ridley Turtle

Rookery Rushikulya, Orissa: WWF ensured the first successful mass nesting of the Olive Ridley turtles in Rookery Rushikulya. Efforts were taken to safeguard the turtles and their hatchlings during the nesting period. Volunteers were stationed at the coast to guard off predators such as feral dogs, jackals, birds and of course humans. The beach was fenced with nets to prevent disoriented hatchlings from heading landward instead of the sea. A Turtle Interpretation Centre has also been built for sensitization and awareness programme. All these efforts are undertaken in cognizance with the Forest Department.

WWF India's initiative to help successful mass nesting of the Olive Ridley Turtle is in response to the severe threat faced by the species especially during breeding and nesting. With the onset of winters, hundreds and thousands of Olive Ridley Sea Turtles migrate from the Indian Ocean, south of Sri Lanka and arrive on this coast for breeding. Firstly Olive Ridley turtles

congregate off the coasts within a distance of about five to ten km to mate. The females then come to the shore to lay eggs. This makes them extremely vulnerable to both human exploitation and natural disasters. Due to rampant fishing these turtles use to get entrapped in the nets of the trawlers and eventually die due to drowning (a turtle needs to come up to the surface to breathe every 20-30 minutes) or due to injuries. The turtle toll in the past has been alarmingly high posing a severe threat to their long term survival. WWF India has been successful in winning support of many local fishermen who have made a conscious decision to stop all fishing activities during the breeding period. In return WWF has helped them by providing them alternative livelihood. These fishermen are employed as volunteers to patrol and guard the coasts. With continued support from the Forest Department, WWF aims to accelerate their work to protect the Olive Ridley Turtle. Meanwhile we hope that our initiatives are adopted and replicated at various other mass nesting sites of this endangered species.

For more details and pictures
Contact: Michael Peters at wwf_i_oso@rediffmail.com

Written, collated and edited by: Dilpreet B. Chhabra, Species Communication Officer, Tiger and Wildlife Division, WWF India,
Contact: dchhabra@wwfindia.net , Tel: +91-11-41504783 Fax: +91-11-41504782

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