



# Conservation Watch - Nepal

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## Forest Minister relents : 'Ministry has been defamed'

Minister for Forest and Soil Conservation, Matrika Prasad Yadav has said the Ministry has been defamed because of continuous deforestation, forest area encroachment and under utilization of forest products.

"Smugglers are exploiting forest products and they get huge amount of logs but people would not get wood for plough," Minister Yadav Said, "the culture of getting enriched by encroaching forest should be ended."

Minister Yadav was speaking in the Annual Plan Formulation Seminar' organized in Pokhara on February 14 by Western Regional Forest Directorate in which heads of District Forest and Soil Conservation Offices and stakeholders were taking part. "In the past, not only the employees were responsible for defaming the Ministry but also then ministers for forest, home and defence were responsible for the encroachment," he said.

Secretary at the Ministry, Tirtharaj Sharma said image of the Ministry stained because of deforestation, forest encroachment, and lack of commercialization of forest and urged the officers under the ministry to formulate plans for commercialization of forest products and herbs and make people benefited. Director General of Department of Forest, Keshav Raj Kandel stressed the need to formulate and implement plans that can brighten the image of the ministry.

On the same day, a meeting of the Legislature-Parliament, Natural Means and Resources Committee discussed the preliminary report prepared after making an on-site study visit regarding the problem of forest encroachment, causes of inundation, export of stones, pebbles and sand and the problems of the people living in areas surrounding the national parks, among others.

## Three rhinos die in 10 days

Three dead rhinos were recovered from the Chitwan National Park (CNP) and adjacent areas between the ten days.

CNP officers said the three rhinos have died of natural causes being old and their tusks and hooves were intact. "The tusks and hooves of the dead rhinos have been removed and kept safe," said Ananath Baral, assistant conservation officer of CNP.

Patrolling team from CNP had recovered bodies of two male rhinos from Devital area inside the park and Barandabhar Jungle near Khorsor of Sauraha on 4th and 5th of February respectively. On 28th January, body of one female rhino was also recovered from Chitrasen Community Forest, a buffer zone in the national park area.

In the Rhino Count of 2005, 70% of the total rhino population i.e. 262 were found adult, 42 sub adults and 68 calves. In the year 2007, three old aged rhinos from CNP died from natural cause whereas this year the numbers equal just in one and half month.

## Barahaiya lake to be demarcated

The largest natural lake of Bardiya, the Barahaiya lake, is to be demarcated. A meeting held on 2nd February for the demarcation has formed a 17-member committee with Bardiya DDC Chairman as Convener.

The committee has representation from conservation sector, government and NGOs, local concerned people as well as political parties.

The meeting stressed that as the Barahaiya lake is the heritage of the country economically, socially, culturally and in tourism and environment point of view, a master plan for its conservation and development should be prepared.

The lake, some 20 kms east of district headquarter Gulariya, is spread over some 70 hectares of land. The Survey Branch Bardiya has agreed to start works to demarcate the burying lake within mid-march. Survey Branch Bardiya Chief Til Prasad Kafle said technicians will be soon assigned.

The locals have been engaged in its protection with the financial cooperation of UNDP, World Environment Fund, Small Grants Programme.

## New bird species found in Nepal

Nepali scientists have recorded a new subspecies of bird in the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve located in the east of Nepal. The bird is named "Rufous-vented Prinia" which is called "Ghanse Fisto" in Nepali and the scientific name is *Prinia burnesii nipalensis*.

It took nearly two years for ornithologist and Chairperson of Nepal Rare Birds Committee (NRBC) Suchit Basnet and Badri Chaudhari to study this bird. Though the bird was first spotted in 2005 in a wetland area, it is only now that taxonomists have decided it is distinctive enough to be described as a separate sub-species.

According to them, the adult of this new subspecies of bird has overall olive-grey to light brown plume. The head and nape are greyer compared to the browner back, wings and tail. In most individuals, there is faint whitish supercilium which reaches behind the eye. The head is densely streaked compared to back. On the back, the streaking are bolder compared to the ones in head. The juveniles are similar to adults but slightly less marked on the head and body.

It is a resident breeding species and highly threatened in the country because of habitat loss and degradation, the scientists added. The ornithologists have said it is a ground breaking research work and most significant on the taxonomy of Nepal's birds.

Scientists say the bird provides an important geographical link between previously-known varieties in Pakistan (*Prinia burnesii burnesii*) and India (*Prinia burnesii cinerascens*). This subspecies can be found only in Nepal and tiny population puts it as endangered.



The number of subspecies of birds has reached 862 in Nepal.

## SAWTI to combat illegal wildlife trade in South Asia

A framework South Asian Wildlife Trade Initiative (SAWTI) was prepared in Kathmandu after a two-day workshop that took place on 1st and 2nd February. Secretaries of Environment Ministries from South Asian countries took part in the workshop.

This initiative is expected to bring an all-out solution for all cross-border problems related to smuggling of wild animals and their parts in the South Asian region.

"The framework was formed. A ministry-level meeting to be held in the near future will give it a formal shape," said Dr Narayan MB Pradhan, a planning officer at the Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation. He said since the SAWTI is being formed with support from South-Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP), the ministry of Environment, Science and Technology is going to be the focal point.

SAWTI will develop regional work programmes for human resource development, need-based research, creation of database on a common format, ensure periodical trade monitoring and exchange of views and expertise through regular regional workshops, intra-country meetings and exchange visits, states a concept paper of the SAWTI .

"Cooperation among neighbouring states is always a welcome step. A joint commitment will make a difference to curb the cross-border poaching and trading in wildlife, which is increasing at an alarming rate in the region", Roland Melisch chairman of Traffic International said.

Dr Arvind Boaz director general of South Asian Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) said that the SAARC member countries would explore joint efforts to curb smuggling of wildlife from the area.

Representatives of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka briefed the participants on the present status of wildlife, illegal trade and the efforts by their respective governments to control them.

Tigers, rhinos, musk deer, leopards and bears are currently under attack of the poachers in Nepal. Almost all major entry points between India and Nepal and China and Nepal are being used as wildlife trade routes.

### **81 Deers translocated**

Thirty-three deer brought from the Deer Research Centre at Godavari under the Shivpuri National Park were released in the Parsa Wildlife Reserve on 6th February .

Ranger at Shivpuri National Park Saroj Mani Poudyal said 81 deer have been released in the Parsa Wildlife Reserve within the last 15 days. He said 48 deer were released at Adhamar area during the first and second phase while 33 were released in Kamina Daha area in the third phase.



Among the 81 deer released in Parsa Wildlife Reserve, 15 are males, 37 females and 29 fawns. The reserve will provide feed to the deer for nearly a week and gradually reduce the artificial food supply and let them adopt with the natural food available in the reserve.

Poudyal said this is the first time in Nepal when deer were translocated from one place to another place without making them unconscious, which is expensive.

In Nepal, Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve, in the westernmost part of Terai, is home to the world's largest herd of swamp deer. This protected area is estimated to have approximately 2,500 swamp deer,

and sometimes a lucky visitor can see almost all of them at the same time, grazing as a vast mass of light-brown bodies over the plains.

### **Elephants displace village**

Residents of Thanphena of Dhadhwar VDC-7 of Bardia have been displaced after elephants of the Bardiya National Park pulled down most of the houses in the village.

The residents have now shifted to the south from the north side of Thanphena after 27 houses were pulled down by the park elephants. Only three houses remain of the 30 houses in the village.

Elephants used to come to the village since two weeks ago at night time and eat grains. The elephants also destroyed crops in 185 bighas of land causing a loss of Rs. three million.

No security was available from the park and administration, said one Liladhar Dhakal. Dhakal says if the concerned would not pay attention, the villagers have warned they will kill the elephants.

## 16 smugglers arrested, Chinese nationals in custody

Nepali Army personnel deployed for the security of Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve have arrested 16 smugglers who had entered the reserve area from Titrigachhi point along with arms.

The army men arrested Masurjin Mansuri, Pratik Mansuri, Mohammad Alam, and Noor Mohammad Miya of Sripur-8, according to Mahesh Thapa, company commander of the Sribaks Company of the Nepali Army. Also arrested are Mantaj Mansuri, Kalauddin Mansuri, Mohammad Sudin Mansuri, among others. Various arms including Katuwa pistol and locally-made weapons were seized from them. The arrested are said to have involvement in poaching activities. Army men had to open fire in the air to take the smugglers in control.

In Makwanpur district, district court has sent four persons including two Chinese nationals to police custody for further investigation into their involvement in illegal trade in local high-value herbs and smuggling. A single bench of judge Uday Prakash Chapagain sent Yu Wang Warwa and Chang Sya Fei of Yaewa district of China, Purna Thapa of Dhimi-5 of Ramechhap and Dhan Syangtan of Gogane of Makwanpur to police custody.

Nim Bahadur Magar of Ramechhap, who was arrested along with them, has however been freed on ordinary date. They were arrested from Palung along with 21.21 quintals of rare Sungava, which is sold for up to Rs 500 per kg in black market.

## Commitment to improve political attention

The political parties have collectively made commitment to improve 'overlooked attention' towards the conservation. They confessed political parties have been paying scant attention on the conservation issue though it has several intractable problems to be doused.

Empowering People For Rhino Conservation Program (EPRC)/Media Consultancy Nepal organized the interaction program on "role of political parties on conservation issues" with district leaders of seven major political parties. The participating leaders have also promised to urge their central committee to include rhino conservation issues in their party manifesto.

District president of Nepali Congress, Tek Prasad Gurung said political leaders are principally committed to resolve park-people conflict but the state of political fluidity has diluted political strength. Bijaya Subedi, secretary of Communist Party of Nepal (UML) put stress to form conservation network comprising all party representatives so that they could be informed, empowered and mobilized for needed political interventions. Anak Magar, from rebel- turned mainstream party, Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) opined reformation on park structure and act should be the primary concern of the parties. Ramhari Kandel, district president of National Democratic Party, gave his views that parties should have determination to voice on the wrong practices on conservation beyond the political adherence.



During the program the political leaders have drawn flak from the representatives from civil society organizations for not abiding by the previous commitments. Mr. Janak Aryal, a senior journalist, in his subject-paper, has pointed out the inaction of political parties on "Rhino Declaration 2007", prepared jointly by political parties and civil society members in Chitwan. Political parties paid less interest to implement the declaration which could be the turning point for rhino conservation in Chitwan National Park', his paper underscored. Program co-ordinator of EPRC, Deepak Acharya, in his ending note said it is the share responsibility to help political parties for their increasing role towards the conservation.